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THE INDEPENDENTIST UKRAINIAN MARXISTS AND SOVIET HUNGARY, ALLIES FOR UKRAINIAN SELF-GOVERNMENT IN 1919

Introduction Contours and cleavages in Ukrainian Marxism

The Nezalezhnyky or Independentists crystallised as a faction of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Workers Party (USDRP) in December 1918, re-organised as the Ukrainian Communist Party (UKP) they remained active until March 1925. The process which culminated in the formation of the Nezalezhnyky has traditionally been located in the clash of contending perspectives of the Ukrainian Revolution. However the Nezalezhnyky did not consider themselves a split as such but heirs to the Ukrainian Marxist tradition, with a history stretching “from the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party (1900–1905) through the USDRP (1905–1919) and finally UKP, which is its revolutionary successor”.¹

From its beginnings Ukrainian Marxism had to come to grips with the national question. Devoid of self-government and partitioned between two rival powers, on the eve of the revolution the majority of Ukraine had been held by Russia in a colonial position for two and half centuries, the perplexities of national liberation intimately connected with the emancipation of labour from both a social structure still characterised by a feudal nature and the relations of capitalism.²

¹ Lyst TsK Vikonomy Kominternu Pro Vzayemovidnostini Mizh UKP i KP(b)U, (27 August 1924), Dokumenti Trahichnoii Istorii Ukraini (1917–1927), Bachinskyi P. ed, Kyiv 1999, p. 523

² But contrary to the prognosis of some, such as Georgi Plekhanov, the development of capitalism did not render permanent its status as a so-called ‘non-historic’ nation. See: Volodymyr Levynsky, *L'internationale socialiste et les peuples opprimés*, Prague, 1920, Roman, Rosdolsky, Engels and the ‘Nonhistoric’ Peoples: the National Question in the Revolution of 1848, Glasgow, 1987.

The rapid development of capitalism in Ukraine was not organic but fashioned within the colonial nexus; Western capital holding co-responsibility with Russian imperialism in the exploitation of Ukraine, underpinning the antagonism of the European capitalist states to Ukrainian independence.³ This *capitalism from above* impacted on both the social class composition and the state-labour relations. The working class bore the stigmata of colonialism; manifested by stratification, with the predominance of an upper layer drawn from migrant Russian or Russified labour.⁴ This social differentiation posited the national question at the point of production through a division of labour which relegated the majority Ukrainians element to the low paid, flexible labour strata, over-represented in the service, unskilled and agricultural sectors. It was in the latter that the agrarian and national questions became enmeshed in a volatile combination.⁵ Correspondingly the ruling classes, were overwhelmingly non-Ukrainian.⁶

As opposed to transcending the fragmentation fostered by capital the Social Democratic movement ran along these fault lines, unable to agree on terms of unity. The Russian Social Democratic Workers Party (RSDRP) demanded the subordination of all Marxists to a single party – their own. As a corollary their leaders supported assimilation of workers into the Russian nation as historically progressive and refused to challenge the

³ Karl Kautsky summed up Ukraine's predicament: Capitalism develops in only one dimension for the Ukrainian people – it proletarianises them, while the other dimension – the flowering of the productive forces, the accumulation of surplus and wealth – is mainly for the benefit of other countries. Because of this, capitalism reveals to Ukrainians only its negative, revolutionizing dimension... it does not lead to an increase in their wealth. Cited in Bojcun, *The Working Class and the National Question*, p. 71

⁴ On this aspect of the division of labour see: Andrii Richtysky, 'Memorandum Ukrainskoi Kumunistichnoi Partii Kongresovi III Komunistychnoho Internationalu', *Nova Doba*, no.4, 1920. Marko Bojcun, 'Approaches to the Study of the Ukrainian revolution', *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* Vol. 24: 1 (summer 1999), Friedgut, *Iuzovka and Revolution*, Vol.I, p. 208-144.

⁵ See, H.R Weinstein, 'Land Hunger and Nationalism in the Ukraine 1905-1917', *The Journal of Economic History*, Vo.2, No.1, May 1942, p. 26-28.

⁶ See M. Volobuiev, *Do problemy ukrainskoyi ekonomiky*, in *Dokumenty ukrainskoho komunizmu*, Ivan Maistrenko Ed, (Prolog Publishers, New York, 1962), p. 154

integrity of the Russian Empire.⁷ In contrast the Ukrainian Marxists took up the national question as an immediate task of the labour movement, considering that the advent of communist society would promote spring-time of nations and national culture. Volodymyr Vynnychenko (1880–1951) coined the phrase *vsebichne vyzvolennia*, the ‘universal (social, national, political, moral, cultural, etc.) liberation’ of the worker and peasant masses; ‘such a total and radical liberation’ represented the objectives of ‘Ukrainian Revolution’.⁸ The question of the weight of emphasis on the social and national spheres proved to be repeated source of tension.⁹ Conversely, as a theory of liberation in a subjugated nation this stand strengthened the more emancipatory attributes of Ukrainian Marxism.¹⁰

⁷ There is no complete study of the Ukrainian question in these debates. Works which cover this period include: V. Levynsky, *L'internationale socialiste et les peuples opprimés*, Vienna, 1920, A. Karpenko, *Lenin's Theory of The National Question And Its Contradictions*, META, 2 No.3-4, 1979, M. Yurkevich, ‘A Forerunner of National Communism: Lev Yurkevych (1885–1918)’, *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*. 7:1, spring 1982. *Lenin's Struggle For Revolutionary International*, Monad, 1986, Lev Rybalka (Yurkevych) ‘Rosiiski marksysty i ukrainskyi rukh’, *Dzvin* 7-8. 1913,

⁸ V. Vynnychenko, *Rozlad i pohodzhennia*, cited in Ivan L. Rudnytsky, *Essays in Modern Ukrainian History*, Edmonton, 1987, p. 419.

⁹ Symptomatic was the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party (RUP). Mykola Mikhnovsky prioritising independence, led a split in 1902 his ideas being branded “zoological nationalism”. The RUP fractured again in 1905, with Ukrainian Social Democratic Union or Spilka led by M. Melenevsky-Basok forming an autonomous section of the RSDRP (Mensheviks). The Spilka saw the national question as an auxiliary issue. Though initially successful Spilka was relegated to the role of peasant organisers and suggested it becomes an All-Russian section. See: George Y. Boshyk, *The Rise of Ukrainian Political Parties in Russia 1900–1907. With Special Reference to Social Democracy*, PhD dissertation, Oxford University, 1981.

¹⁰ Such universalist concepts permeated the perspectives of Ukrainian Social Democracy since its genesis in the First International with the “precursor of Ukrainian Marxism” Serhii Podolynsky (1850–1891) articulated a vision of a “future socialist order of an “egalitarian association of the workers” which would “transfer land to the peasant communes and of the factories to the workers artels”. Similarly Marx had emphasised that the peasant commune could be saved by serving as a ‘point of departure’ within a communist revolution in Russia, the success of which was conditional upon a corresponding “proletarian revolution in the West”. Given such a linkage Russia could avoid going through the vicissitudes of capitalism. In contrast to Plekhanov economic determinist antagonism to the peasant commune and

It was enriched by being open to other currents; which significantly deviated, at times unacknowledged, from the constraints of the established Marxism.¹¹ They criticised the Great Russian Marxists for “limiting themselves to an ideological connection exclusively with the labour movement of Germany.”¹² The left-wing leader of the USDRP Lev Yurkevych (1884–1919) summarized their views in the following terms:

A second constitutional congress of the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party took place in 1905 and adopted the maximum Erfurt programme of the German Social-Democrats and the minimum programme of the Russian Social-Democracy. It demanded extreme democratic autonomy for the territory within the ethnographic boundaries of Ukraine, with legal guarantees for the free development for the national minorities living within its territory. The principle of national organization was based on the organizational model of the Austrian Social-Democracy. With regard to tactics, the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party took the same position as the left wing of the Russian Social-Democracy (Bolsheviks), and instead of calling itself the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party, adopted the name Ukrainian Social-Democratic Workers' Party, the name under which it still exists today, and to which the authors of this letter belong.¹³

The cleavages and class composition of Ukrainian society negated the feasibility of the bourgeoisie acting as the unifying ethico-political force

statist and authoritarian conception of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’. On Podolynsky see: ‘Socialism and the Unity of Physical Forces’, Serhii Podolynsky Translated by Angelo Di Salvo and Mark Hudson Organization Environment, March 2004, USA, , In defense of an independent Ukrainian socialist movement: Three letters from Serhii Podolynsky to Valerian Smirnov’, Roman Serbyn. Journal of Ukrainian Studies, 1982, Roman [Prokopovych, T] Rosdolsky, , ‘Fridrykh Engels pro Ukrainu’, Chervony Shlyakh, No.78, Kharkiv, (1927), p. 186. .

¹¹ Comparative studies the socialist movement in Ireland, Italy, Hungary and France. The Agrarian Program of the French Workers Party was republished as an RUP pamphlet with an introduction by D.Antonovych in 1903. Werner Sombarts Socialism and the Social Movement was republished by Moloda Ukraina in Galicia in 1899.

¹² Lev Yurkevych, *Peredmov, V Levinsky, Narys Rozvytki Ukrainskoho Rukh v Halychnyia*, Dzvin, Kyiv (1914).

¹³ Lev Rybalka [Yurkevych] *L'Ukraine Et La Guerre, Lettre Ouvre adreseee a la 2nd conference socialiste internationale tenue en Hollande en mai 1916*, Edition du journal social-democrate Ukrainyen ‘Borotba’ Lausanne 1916, p. 21.

that could reconstitute the nation.¹⁴ It followed as a ‘nation of workers and peasants’ with ‘no nationally conscious bourgeoisie’, the hegemonic role should correspond to its character, making the emancipation of labour integral to the quest for national liberation.¹⁵ The USDRP theorists attempted to develop such a perspective, reaching beyond those orthodoxies which had predetermined a bourgeois ascendancy, concurrently the founding theorist of the USDRP, Mykola Porsh (1877–1944) concluded: “Thus only the proletariat can assume the leadership in the struggle for autonomy the Ukrainian national movement will not be a bourgeois movement of triumphant capitalism as in the case of the Czechs. It will be more like the Irish case, a proletarian and semi-proletarianised peasant movement.”¹⁶ A theme echoed by Yurkevych, who wrote the “movement has connected the question of national liberation to all the problems of the emancipation of the proletariat”, which he concluded “appears as the sole revolutionary and democratic power.”¹⁷

Yet by the time of the revolution in 1917 these ideas which formed the mainstream of the USDRP had been dislodged; now forming one part of spectrum of opinion. This had obvious consequences, an explanation of how this came about can be found in the period of reaction when the entire Social Democratic movement went into decline. In their reports to the conferences of the Second International the USDRP Central Committee described a “retrogression of the Party and its organizations”, a growing influence of “bourgeois nationalist ideas” was causing a hemorrhaging, notably of the intelligentsia to cultural institutions and de-politicised nationalism.¹⁸ The leadership challenged this trend as in ‘sharp

¹⁴ For a discussion of Gramsci and the people-nation see: Luis M. Pozo, ‘The Roots of Hegemony: The Mechanisms of Class Accommodation and the Emergence of the Nation-people’, *Capital & Class*, 91, 2007.

¹⁵ Volodymyr Vynnychenko, *Vidrodzhennia natsii*, Vol.II, Kyiv-Vienna, 1920. p. 102.

¹⁶ Mykola Porsh, *Avtonomiyu Ukrainy*, Kyiv 1907.

¹⁷ Lev Rybalka *L’Ukraine Et L Guerre*, 22.

¹⁸ This was cited in the report to the conference of the Second International, in Copenhagen at which Yurkevych attended as the USDRP delegate, see: *Bericht der Ukrainischen Sozialdemokratischen Arbeiter-Partei in Russland an den Internationalen Sozialistischen Kongress in Kopenhagen*, Lemberg 1910, p. 5

contradiction to the revolutionary tradition of our party'.¹⁹ Whilst on a formal level they were successful it did not stop the corrosion, hindering efforts at regenerating the Party.²⁰ With the First World War these divergences became acute; a majority of USDRP leaders opposed the war, a minority adopted either a pro-Russian or a pro-Austrian orientation along with the Ukrainian Social Democrats in Galicia.²¹ Efforts to uphold principles that "really correspond to the USDRP traditions" were led by *Borotba* edited by Yurkevych in Geneva.²² Supporting the anti-war Zimmerwald movement, *Borotba* declared: "Above all, we should not take sides, not besmirch our revolutionary cause in showing solidarity with the war aims of any of the governments involved".²³ It called for a new International where "the liberation of Ukraine will be the watchword of the Third International, and of the proletarian socialists of Europe, in their struggle against Russian imperialism."²⁴ On the eve of the revolution there were

¹⁹ The USDRP CC reported: "A central task will be to develop our national class politics opposed to the Ukrainian bourgeois national movement and opposed to these intellectuals in the party which had sympathy for this Ukrainian bourgeois national movement." Bericht der Ukrainischen Sozialdemokratischen Arbeiter-Partei, p. 13. Dmytro Dontsov (1883–1973) himself was expelled

²⁰ Yurkevych bemoaned: "The Ukrainian Marxist intelligentsia has almost no interest in a workers' press. Our generation, carelessly and without perspectives of its own, has gotten involved in Ukrainian bourgeois affairs. Its path and that of the Ukrainian workers' movement have parted ways apparently forever." Lev Yurkevch, *Paki I paki (V spravi Ukrainskoi robotnychoi hazety)*, Dzvyn 4, 1913.

²¹ The majority of USDRP leaders opposed the war, a minority adopted a pro-Russian or a pro-Austrian orientation the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine was formed by Melenevskyi and former General Secretary of the USDRP Andrii Zhuk. See: Roman Rosdolsky, 'Do istorii Soiuzu vyavolennia Ukrainy', *Ukrains'kyi samostiinyk*, May 1 (1969).

²² P. Diatliv a Central Committee of the USDRP wrote to Levynsky defending his anti-war stance being espoused by Yurkevych: Thus, your statement that the views of *Borotba* are the personal views of "Mr. Rybalka" [Yurkevych] is contrary to the fact. ... But you, comrade, as a person familiar with the programme and tactics of our party, undoubtedly know that the views of *Borotba* really correspond to the USDRP traditions." D. Doroshenko, *Z Istorii Ukrainskoi Politychnoi Dumky Za Chasiv Svitovoi Viini*, Praha, 1936, p. 62.

²³ *Borotba*, Number 4. September 1915. "War or Revolution?", pp. 3-6

²⁴ Rybalka *L'Ukraine Et L Guerre*, 54.

not only deep divergences within the Ukrainian but with the Russian Social Democracy.²⁵ The USDRP had grown closer too the Bolsheviks during 1913–1917, but on repeated occasions they could not resolve their differences on the national question.²⁶ In a comprehensive critique of the RSDRP in January 1917, Yurkevych argued that by holding to two mutually exclusive propositions, the “right of nations to self-determination” with a preference for large states and centralism, it “destroys within them the capacity to consider the national question from a genuinely internationalist point of view”.²⁷ Asserting: “In the whole course of their activity they have never come out on Ukrainian soil against national oppression”.²⁸ Yurkevych appealed that if they were sincere they should “at least refrain from hindering the Ukrainian proletariat in the struggle for its own national liberation”.²⁹

The ideas of *Borotba* did resonate in the USDRP revival, though Yurkevych was never able to participate, he was terminally ill and paralysed in Moscow until his death in 1919.³⁰ His absence certainly contributed to

²⁵ Yurkevych had secured broad support including in the RSDRP, his sympathisers included Leon Trotsky, Maniulsky, and the left group Vperyod.

²⁶ Furthermore we connect with the Bolsheviks in their decisive fight against social patriotism. The endeavors of the Mensheviks to cover up the pestilence of social patriotism, which during the war was revealed in all its shocking nakedness in the whole Socialist International, only presents an echo of world opportunism – and we have to declare war on this if we want to save socialism from a new intellectual catastrophe. Whoever claims that the Bolsheviks are the tendency of ‘splitters’ just because they stand for the curing of the International from the infection of patriotism, has either not grasped the huge significance of the current crisis of world socialism, or are themselves infected with this patriotic disease. Russian Social Democracy and us, *Borotba*, No.2, April 1915

²⁷ L. Rybalka, *Russkie Sotsialdemokrat’i i Natsional’ii Vopros*, Geneva (*Borotba*, 1917). Republished in Russian and Ukrainian, edited by Ivan Maistrenko, (Sukanist, Munich 1969). All quotations are from the English translation by Myroslav Yurkevich, L. Rybalka, *The Russian Social Democrats and the National Question*, *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*. 7:1 (spring 1982), 57-78. Rybalka, *Russian Social Democrats*, 59.

²⁸ Rybalka, *Russian Social Democrats*, 77.

²⁹ Rybalka, *Russian Social Democrats* P. 78

³⁰ In particular the Petrograd and Moscow USDRP committee, journal *Nashe zhyttia*, this committee

the changed complexion of the Party which rapidly revived. Dmytro Doroshenko (1882–1951) characterised the conflict which had surfaced in the Ukrainian movement as between “two principles: the state-national and the social-international”.³¹ To the revolutionary social democrats these were false-opposites, the former dismembering an integrated class based perspective. When the USDRP revived it embraced not only former members’ energised youth and workers, but crucially those who fragmented in the preceding years unchanged in their outlook.³²

Dialectics of the Ukrainian revolution

The first phase of the Ukrainian revolution spanned from the February Revolution up to the October Revolution of 1917, with the seizure of power by the Ukrainian Peoples Republic.³³ This first period was one of unprecedented self-organisation and mobilisation in the conflict with the Russian Provisional Government.³⁴ The movement was a bloc of the middle class, peasantry and the Ukrainian section of the working class, centred in the Ukrainian Central Rada. There was a rich diversity of self-organisation, illustrated in the Ukrainian Peasant Union, *Utsentroprof* the all-Ukrainian trade unions, councils of workers’ deputies, soldiers’ councils, factory committees, the Central Rada drew delegates from many of these and other bodies which appeared in the localities. Vynnychenko, first president of the General Secretariat, the autonomous government, considered that the revolution seemed to be following a course which “corresponded to the entire nation’s character”

³¹ D.Doroshenko, *Z Istorii Ukrainskoi Politychnoi Dumky Za Chasiv Svitovoi Viini*, Praha, 1936, p., 37

³² The USDRP grew significantly in 1917, in early May the USDRP claimed it was ‘transforming itself into a mass workers’ organisation’, by the end of 1917 it claimed 40,000 members. *Robitnycha Hazeta*, May 6, 1917, cited in Marko Bojcun, *The Working Class and the National Question in Ukraine, 1880–1920*, (Graduate Program in Political Science, York University, Toronto, 1985, p279.

³³ It is worth recording that the USDRP played a pivotal role in the February Revolution in Petrograd,

³⁴ Richtysky, *Memorandum Ukrainskoi Kumunistichnoi Partii*, p. 45-66,

The Central Rada really consisted of councils of peasants', soldiers' and workers' deputies, who were elected at the respective congresses and sent to the Central Rada. And the General Secretariat seemed to have been consisting only of socialists. And the leading parties, Social Democrats and Social-Revolutionists, seemed to have been standing firmly on the basis of social revolution.³⁵

According to Andriy Richytsky, future leader of the *Nezalezhnyky*, the "Ukrainian Social Democracy gained a large influence among the Ukrainian working masses and attracted into its ranks layers of workers who were tied to the spontaneous national and social movement of the popular masses."³⁶ During the "struggle with Russian imperialism, it held to a revolutionary national and class position" considered by Ukrainian social-democrats their 'Bolshevism' period, although this 'Bolshevism' was upheld by the national struggle more than by the class struggle."³⁷

This leading role contained a duality, on the one hand the 'Bolshevism' Richytsky describes and on the other according to Vynnychenko "all subsequent errors, was imposed on the social democratic movement."³⁸ Underlying these errors were fundamental differences over conceptions of the revolution and requisite strategy. On the burning questions, the war, agrarian revolution and workers self-management the leaders of the Central Rada prevaricated and at key moments lagged behind the pace of the movement from below, even on the national question with which it was preoccupied.³⁹ Relations strained within the Central Rada,

³⁵ Vynnychenko, *Vidrodzhennia natsii*, Vol. I.: p. 102.

³⁶ in some areas such as the Kryvyi Rih region, for example, it had the support of the majority of the proletariat.

³⁷ Richtytsky, *Memorandum Ukrainskoi Kumunistichnoi Partii*, p. 45-66,

³⁸ Vynnychenko, *Vidrodzhennia natsii*, Vol. I, p. 251-252.

³⁹ Porsh complained that: 'At first the Central Rada was a bloc of parties united around the slogan of autonomy and federation. When our party entered the Rada, it replaced its class orientation with a national one. Some of our comrades said quite plainly that until we achieve the goal of unity there can be no class struggle in the Central Rada....As far as I am concerned, Ukrainian social democrats had no right compromising on class interests in deference to general, national ones', *Robitnycha Hazeta* 4th October 1917. According to Vynnychenko this was not simply due to their sociology, or opportunism but that they acted as 'democrats, republicans and national revolutionists rather than socialists.' Vynnychenko, *Vidrodzhennia natsii*, Vol.2, p. 89-90.

between its leading circles drawn largely from the intelligentsia and the middle class, and the rank and file of the movement.⁴⁰

The prevailing opinion was that the recognition of Ukrainian autonomy was a precondition of progress, the April conference of the USDRP had seen it “as the very first and urgent present objective of the Ukrainian proletariat and the entire country.”⁴¹ This perspective corresponded with the orthodox Marxist dualist view that whilst a social revolution could be achieved in the West, only after the Russian Empire had passed into the historical phase of advanced capitalism and parliamentary democracy would the requisite conditions become available for a social revolution. In his self critical history, *Rebirth of a Nation* Vynnychenko wrote “We, the Ukrainian Social Democrats, have emasculated the Marxism”.⁴²

These opinions were strongly challenged, on the one hand by the movement from below and on the other hand from above by the antagonism of the liberal and conservative wings of Russia. Even before Lenin’s *April Theses*, voices were being raised within the USDRP that the revolution needed to move beyond such fixed the parameters to a social revolution. This can be traced from March, when *Nashe Zhyttya*, reminded readers: “We are not just democrats; we are social-democrats, socialists., ...the Great Socialist Society. That is our final aim. The Constituent Assembly, the democratic republic are but means, stages to this end. We must not stand still.”⁴³ Culminating in the success of the left of the

⁴⁰ Raya Dunayevskaya identified a similar problem in the anti-colonial revolutions after 1945: ‘The greatest obstacle to the further development of these national liberation movements comes from the intellectual bureaucracy which has emerged to ‘lead’ them. In the same manner the greatest obstacle in the way of the working class overcoming capitalism comes from the Labor bureaucracy that leads it.’ Dunayevskaya, *Nationalism, Communism, Marxist Humanism and the Afro-Asian Revolutions*, Cambridge, 1961, p. 15.

⁴¹ Robitnycha Hazeta 7, April 1917.

⁴² Vynnychenko, *Vidrodzhennia natsii*, Vol 2:91

⁴³ *Nashe Zhyttya* [Our Life], 24 March 1917. That Ukrainian Social-Democrats were outlining this perspective in late March is of historical importance, very few projected these ideas until the return of Lenin with his April theses. When he presented it he was virtually isolated within the RSDRP(b). Ironically amongst the first people he took his opinions to were the soldiers of the USDRP influenced Izmailovsky Regiment on 10th April.

USDRP at the Fourth Congress of the USDRP in September, whose theses, declared:

The present Russian revolution, bringing in its wake a transformation in socio-economic relations unheard of in the history of all previous revolutions, finding a broad echo in the great worker masses of Western Europe, awakening in them an impulse to abandon the path of capitalism, to make a social revolution and, at the same time, to stop the imperialist war, which may bring about an uprising of the proletariat in Western Europe – this revolution is a prologue to and beginning of the universal socialist revolution.⁴⁴

The Central Rada was criticised for “inclining at every turn toward petty bourgeois nationalism”, demanding instead it’s General Secretariat “must be grounded in the organized revolutionary democracy of Ukraine and do its will instead”.⁴⁵

The October Revolution brought these contradictions to a head, serving as a stimulus in the national sphere and sharply focusing the question of the nature of the revolution. When the Central Rada seized power in November and declared the Ukrainian People’s Republic (UNR), it offered the possibility for a new beginning. This coincided with a groundswell of support for the conception of a republic based on the organs of popular self-government.⁴⁶ The period of November and December brought to the fore what was the salient feature of the revolution in Ukraine, the division between the Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian section of

⁴⁴ saw a combination of the new activists and traditional leaders, Neronovych, Richytsky, Tkachenko and Porsh, the main theses *Robitnycha Hazeta*, 1, 5 and 7 October 1917.

⁴⁵ *Robitnycha Hazeta*, 1, 5 and 7 October 1917,

⁴⁶ On August 20 1917, at a conference of Factory Committees in Kyiv the delegates voted 161 to 35 for the Bolshevik resolution. Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, p. 267. On 8 September, a Katerynoslav area conference of the USDRP agreed it was necessary to strengthen the ‘achievements of the revolution for the Ukrainian workers’ and warned the USDRP faction in the Central Rada it ‘must adhere to consistent social-democratic tactics’ Similarly a general assembly of the Kyiv USDRP called for a ‘socialist General Secretariat’ and a break with coalitions, workers control and an immediate peace. *Robitnycha Hazeta*, 21 September, 1917,

the working class, the estrangement of the peasantry from the urban workers and the separation of the social and national dimensions.⁴⁷

These cleavages on the social and national questions found their resolution encapsulated in the idea of an independent Ukraine based upon the organs of workers' and peasants' self-government. A possible rapprochement between these divergent elements arose from two trends, the first the growth in support in the USDRP and the Ukrainian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries (UPSR) for the revolutionary socialist regeneration of the Central Rada.⁴⁸ The second trend was the surge of support in the soviets recognizing the Central Rada and seeking its re-election to widen its constituency.⁴⁹ This demonstrated a radical evolution in working class opinions on the Ukrainian national question, splitting opinion in the Bolsheviks in the USDRP.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ These problems of the revolution were highlighted in the writings of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks Serhii Mazlakh and Vasyl Shakhrai in *Do khvyli*, Saratov, 1919. There is also an English translation, *The Current Situation in the Ukraine*, Michigan, 1970. This became a key text of the pro-autonomy/independence currents of Ukrainian communism during the revolutionary years.

⁴⁸ The Third Congress of the UPSR stated that: 'the national side of the revolution begins to threaten the further successful development of the socio-economic class struggle' warning the Central Rada could lose the support of the peasants and workers in Ukraine which will also threaten the national gains of the revolution, Khrystiuk, Pavlo Zamitky i materiialy do istorii ukrains'koï revoliutsii 1917–1920, (Prague in 1921), New York 1969.

⁴⁹ In seven out of the ten of Ukraine's largest cities the councils of workers' and soldiers' deputies supported the Central Rada as the legitimate governing organ. Evidence suggests the majority of the approximate 320 urban councils were ready to build an independent Ukraine, evidencing a clear evolution in working class opinions on the national question. This support for re-election was particularly strong in towns in the northern guberniyas and in Kyiv, Kremenchuk, Kharkiv, Luhansk, Kherson, Katerynoslav, Odessa and Mykolaiv soviets. See: Yury. M. Hamretsky, *Stavlennya Rad Robotnychkykh I Soldatskykh Deputativ Ukrainy I Period Dvovladdya do Pytan Natsionalo-Vyzvolenooho Rukh*, *Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zhurnal*, Kyiv, no.7 (1966).

⁵⁰ The Kyiv Bolshevik Yevgenia Bosh records that the Third Universal was welcomed by 'a significant number of soviets in Ukraine'. *Bojcum, Working Class and the National Question*, p. 306. Similarly Shakhrai, a Poltava Bolshevik, records the 'Proclamation of the Ukrainian Republic was met with huge demonstrations all over Ukraine. A significant part of the Soviets also welcomed it.' *Skorovstanskii, Revoliutsiia na Ukraini*, p. 74.

That such a rapprochement was a viable possibility was illustrated by the various united revolutionary committees formed to defeat the Provisional Government.⁵¹ But the forces that could bring this about did not combine and moved unevenly, the rapprochement necessary for its realization was retarded. The Bolsheviks, who had no territorial organisation in Ukraine, were not unified around such a perspective from within the UNR.⁵² The approach of their leadership in Russia was tactless, taking no account of the Ukrainian peculiarities and attempting to superimpose the Russian model.⁵³ The result compounded the divisions, hindering those wishing to give the emerging social transformation a Ukrainian character and form.

The All-Ukrainian Congress of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants Deputies on 16 December 1917 proved to be a strategic catastrophe. The urban soviets were denied a proportional representation, the decisions of the USDRP to seek an alliance with the Bolsheviks to establish a workers' and peasants' government, was overturned in a bureaucratic manoeuvre.⁵⁴ The whole event was ignited by the surprise ultimatum of the Russian Council of People's Commissars threatening war on the UNR.⁵⁵ In

⁵¹ This took organizational form in a 'National Committee for the defence of the revolution' created by the Central Rada, composed of representatives of all revolutionary organizations in Kyiv and socialist parties in Ukraine, including representatives of the Councils of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies of Kyiv, Kharkiv, Katerynoslav and Odessa. *Robitnycha Hazeta*, 27 October 1917.

⁵² In their campaign for the re-election of the Rada through a congress of soviets, the Bolsheviks did not seek unity with like minded Ukrainian socialists, nor secure support from the soviets which had already backed such a congress. Instead it was called by the RSDRP Kyiv Committee. See, Thomas M Prymak, 'The First All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets and its Antecedents', *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, No.6, Spring 1979.

⁵³ An exception to this was the Poltava Committee of the RSDRP (Bolsheviks) who were engaged in negotiations with the USDRP and sought a revolutionary socialist regroupment in Ukraine.

⁵⁴ The USDRP pre-meeting before the Congress had decided in favour of seeking agreement with the Bolsheviks. Porsh, the UNR Secretary of Labour, was actively engaged in negotiations with the Bolsheviks.

⁵⁵ An appeal to the Ukrainians on 8 December 1917 by the leading organs of soviet power in Russia, including the Central Executive Committee, demanded the 'im-

an atmosphere of recriminations the Congress endorsed the Central Rada, but it was a pyrrhic victory, and an opportunity lost.⁵⁶

The internal fragmentation produced two rival bodies claiming to be the government of the Ukrainian Peoples Republic. The General Secretariat of the Central Rada in Kyiv, which the USDRP withdrew from after the Fourth Universal, headed by the right wing of the UPSR, elected by ‘Ukrainian congresses of peasants, workers and soldiers’.⁵⁷ Challenged by the Kharkiv based Peoples Secretariat of the ‘Central Executive Committee of the All-Ukrainian Soviet of Workers’, Soldiers’, and Peasants’, which included a split from the USDRP, the small U.S.-D (Left). It would be an error to view it as founded solely to give the Russian war the appearance of an internal conflict. Vasyl Shakhrai a former USDRP organiser and Bolshevik Minister, was insistent on the need for Ukrainian independence pointing out they waged war in order to revolutionize the government of the UNR.⁵⁸

mediate re-election of the Rada’ with the proviso: ‘Let the Ukrainians predominate in these soviets’. However when the Council of Peoples Commissars declared a war on the Central Rada behind the back of the CEC it did not receive unanimous or uncritical endorsement for its action. *The Debate on Soviet Power, Minutes of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets*, Ed, John Keep, Oxford, 1979, p195-223.

⁵⁶ Those delegates disaffected with the events in Kyiv walked out and made their way to the rival Congress of Soviets of the Donbas, Kryvyi Rih area being held in Kharkiv on 9 December 1917. Subsequent Soviet historiography would recognize this event as the First All-Ukraine Congress of Soviets. Though mainly consisting of RSDRP(b) and Russian Left-SRs; it also included UPSR and USDRP delegates. A split took place in the USDRP, a tendency known as the USDRP(Left), headed by Medvedev and Neronovych. See: Butsenko, Afanasiy, ‘o raskole USDRP 1917–18’, *Letopis Revolutsii*, no.4, Kharkiv, 1923, p. 121-122.

⁵⁷ The USDRP was indignant and predicted the worse of the right-wing UPSR, *Robitnycha Hazeta* wrote: And the revolutionary situation is marked now by a transition to the stage of anarchy, after which it will pass to reaction and entirely other elements that are far from the proletariat will stand at the helm of the state. At this moment our party cannot be responsible for the devious policy of the SRs. *Robitnycha Hazeta*, 16 January, 1918.

⁵⁸ It is worth noting Shakhrai was an extreme critic of the Bolsheviks: “When open, armed struggle with the Central Rada began, Bolsheviks from all parts of Ukraine... were of one mind in proposing that a Soviet centre should be established

The hostilities, which lasted from December 1917 to early February 1918, was a marked by paradox, the war-weary and revolutionised soldiers were not prepared to fight. The Central Rada ran into trouble, its policies had sown disillusionment amongst its base it struggled to muster forces.⁵⁹ The Soviet forces were also incredibly small; Antonov often had to rely on “revolutionary detachments,” who concentrated on organising local risings.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, in January 1918 Soviet troops, including detachments from the north, quickly took Kyiv on 26 January 1918. Despite their efforts to make the war one of classes, to many it appeared as a national conflict, paralysing much of the Ukrainian left. The experience of the short-lived Peoples Secretariat revealed it was not so much the puppet, as largely ignored by Soviet Russia’s troops.⁶¹ The involve-

in Ukraine as a counterweight to the Central Rada, and not one responsible member of this party ventured to protest against the promulgation and creation of the Ukrainian People’s Republic. On the contrary, in complete agreement with the programmatic demand of the right of every nation to self-determination, they openly or at least tacitly stood on its [the Republic’s] ground. The will of the Ukrainian nation emerged, the Ukrainian people separated into a Republic in federative union with other parts of Russia. Well and good! We in this Republic will wage a war not against the Ukrainian People’s Republic, not against the Ukrainian people, not in order to strangle it. No! This will be a struggle for power within the Ukrainian People’s Republic – this will be a class struggle. ...” Vasyly Shakhrai [V. Skorovstansky], *Revoliutsiia na Ukraine*, 2nd ed. (Saratov 1918), 110-11.

⁵⁹ Holubnychy writes: ‘This reminds one of Lypynsky’s comments that the Ukrainian socialist parties ‘gave away’ the land ‘in order to be politically popular’. Unfortunately, they did not give away enough and therefore were not sufficiently popular. And this is why they failed, while Lenin succeeded ‘. Holubnychy, *Selected Writings*, p. 46-47.

⁶⁰ Yaroslav Bilinsky,, ‘The Communist Take-over of the Ukraine’, *The Ukraine, 1917–1921: A Study in Revolution*, ed. Taras Hunczak, Cambridge, 1977, p. 110-11.

⁶¹ There was a retreat from the Kharkiv Congress of Soviets’ decisions with an array of splinter Soviet republics. Real power was revealed not to be the soviet government but the military forces of Soviet Russia. Shakhrai, a minister, complained: ‘What kind of Ukrainian government is this when its members do not know and do not want to know the Ukrainian language? They have no influence in Ukrainian society. No-one has even heard their names before. What kind of ‘Ukrainian Minister of the Army’ am I when all of the Ukrainised divisions in Kharkiv will not obey me and defend Soviet power and I am compelled to disarm them? The only military support we have in our struggle against the Central Rada is the army

ment of Soviet Russia and the Central Powers deepened the malaise; through the substitution of internal elements by external forces, the revolution consumed itself. Lured by the appeal of the Germans the Central Rada entered a union with the Central Powers at Brest Litovsk on 9 February (27 January) 1918. The Germans then deposed both Ukrainian Peoples Republics; first the soviet, then like the proverbial horse of Troy, they turned on their hosts and on 29 April 1918 dispersed the Central Rada as unreliable 'left opportunists'.⁶²

The Nezalezhnyky: Revival and Retrogression in the Ukrainian Peoples Republic

The conservative coup d'état of Hetman Pavlo Skoropadskyi (1873–1945), 'only completed and crystallised in a precise form that which existed during the time of the Central Rada', on its return to Kyiv its revolutionary essence was dissipated.⁶³ The new 'Ukrainian State' proved to be a retrogressive regime of comprador capitalists and landlords 'aimed at the destruction of the revolutionary gains' in the social, then national spheres.⁶⁴ This provoked militant resistance by the labour movement, but the most intense and violent opposition was peasant resistance to food requisitioning and restoration of land to the landowners. The Hetmanate proved to be a defining moment, sharpening the process of differentiation in the Ukrainian Revolution.

The outbreak of the revolution in Germany and Austro-Hungary and its own realignment towards a unified Russian state, sealed the fate Skoropadsky. The primary organizational initiative to overthrow the Het-

Antonov brought into Ukraine from Russia, an army moreover that looks at everything Ukrainian as hostile and counterrevolutionary.' Cited in Bojcun, Working Class and the National Question, *ibid*, p. 327.

⁶² On 9 March 1918 Colonel von Stolzenberg told his High Command: 'It is very doubtful whether this government, composed as it is exclusively of left opportunists, will be able to establish a firm authority', Oleh Fedyshyn, *Germany's Drive to the East and the Ukrainian Revolution, 1917–1918*, New Brunswick, 1971 p. 96.

⁶³ Vynnychenko, *Vidrodzhennia Natsii*, Vol.III p. 24.

⁶⁴ Ivan Maistrenko, *Borotbism a Chapter in the History of Ukrainian Communism*, New York 1953, republished, by Ibidem-Verlaag, Hannover, 2007. *Borotbism*, p72.

manate and reconstitute the Ukrainian Peoples Republic came from a coalition headed by the Directory of the UNR.⁶⁵

The period Hetmanate had effectively cut Ukraine off from events occurring in the rest of the former Russian Empire. It was sheltered from the excesses of “war communism” the brutality of the occupying armies discredited both the Central Rada, and its successor Ukrainian State as representations of the national idea in the eyes of many workers and especially peasants. In contrast the idea of the direct democracy of the soviets was preserved amongst the masses. Another often overlooked change was the major shift in working class opinion on the national question. This was confirmed by the Second All-Ukrainian Workers Congress on 13 May 1918, despite a non-Ukrainian majority it agreed to a united struggle with the peasantry for an independent Ukrainian Peoples Republic, sentiments were further expressed at the All-Ukrainian Conference of Trade Unions, again largely non-Ukrainian in composition.⁶⁶ The Directory did not make an effort to involve the working class movement, nevertheless it mobilised of its own volition, with city-wide strikes in Kharkiv, Kyiv and the Donbas forcing the All-Ukrainian Central Council of Trade Unions to call a general strike on 20 November.⁶⁷

The uprising having restored the UNR and in so doing posed the question it faced in 1917, what happens after? With the hoped for socialist resurgence underway internationally the revolutionary left of the USDRP organised itself more effectively into a distinct faction, the Organising Committee of the USDRP *Nezalezhnyky*, established a in Kyiv in Early December 1918.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ The Directory members were, Vynnychenko, as Chairman, Petliura, F. Shevets of the Peasant Union, P. Andriievsky, Independent Socialists, and A.Makarenko representing the rail workers trade union.

⁶⁶ Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materialy*, III.Bojcun, Working Class and the National Question, p. 373.

⁶⁷ *Bojcun Working Class and the National Question*, p. 385.

⁶⁸ The most prominent members of the *Nezalezhnyky* included Mykhaylo Tkachenko, veteran leader of the RUP and USDRP and former Minister of Internal Affairs in the UNR, Andriy Richytsky had been one of the editors of *Robitnycha Hazeta*, he took part in the Congress of Socialist International in Stockholm in the summer of 1917, Volodymyr Chekhivsky, an old member of the USDRP and the Head of Council of Ministers in the UNR, Mykhaylo Avdiyenko, began as a

The ‘November Ukrainian Revolution’ was conducted “exclusively by the indigenous national-revolutionary forces of the Ukrainian people” and from the start it was clear the subjective forces were radically to the left of the Directory. The ‘Sovietophile’ majority of the UPSR, the Borotbisty already declared their opposition to the Directory and large sections of the army, such as the Dniprovska Division commanded by otaman Zeleny supported soviet power. At the State Conference convened by the Directory in Vynnytsia on 12–14 December, the Nezalezhnyky represented by Mykhaylo Avdiyenko argued it was necessary:

1: to recognize that a profoundly socio-economic, as well as political, revolution is taking place in Ukraine; 2. to recognize that its engine is the proletariat and the toiling peasantry, and 3. in accordance with this, to declare the principle of the dictatorship of the toiling masses in the form of councils of workers’ and peasants’ deputies.⁶⁹

This stance brought them into direct opposition with the Directory, who viewed them with suspicion.⁷⁰ The Nezalezhnyky also differentiated themselves from the Bolsheviks now reorganised as the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine (KP(b)U), had not been formed through a process of unification of the vernacular revolutionary left but was a subordinate of the Russian Communist Party, RKP(B). The disagreement of the Nezalezhnyky was not solely on the question of Ukrainian independence but the role of the soviets and the character of the dictatorship of the proletariat:

It is a party that aims not for the dictatorship of the proletariat and the revolutionary peasantry, but for the dictatorship of a section of the proletariat and of its own party. It is, therefore, profoundly violent and it will replace

soldier member of the strong Petrograd USDRP committee, Antin Drahomyretsky an old Kyiv USDRP activist, Yurko Mazurenko, as wartime officer, who blocked the passage to Petrograd of Kornilov

⁶⁹ Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materiialy*, Vol.IV, Chater III p. 52

⁷⁰ When the Dniprovska Division, entered Kyiv it on the defeat of Skoropadsky it was under red banners and slogans of ‘All power to the Soviets!’ and ‘All land to the peasants’. Fearing they would make an attempt to take power, Petlyura transferred them from the city. K.B.Petrichenko, *Malovidomi Fakty z Zhyttya ta Diyalnosti Danylo Ilkovicha Terpylo (Otoman Zeleny)*, Institute of Ukrainian studies Kyiv, December 2006, [Unpublished].

proletarian dictatorial violence against the bourgeois order with the violence of a small group.⁷¹

It had proven itself with regard to the principle of self-determination “a hypocritical party which continually violates its own principles” and in view of this “cannot be trusted until it is transformed organisationally and merges with the interests of the Ukrainian toiling people.”

With the revival of the UNR was accompanied by an extreme retrogressionist trend, the conservative elements of the Hetmanate, in particular the military circles – the *otamanschyna*, were its inherent partner, who were engaged in pogroms and indiscriminate repression of the labour and peasant movement.⁷² The middle class and moderate elements though favouring a parliamentary democracy, found themselves political prisoners of this element on whom they were reliant.⁷³

The UN was further riven by a division on its international position; it was increasingly clear that if the UNR was to survive it required an ally. Despite the renewed hostilities Vynnychenko, and the Nezalezhnyky Volodymyr Chekhivsky, Head of Council of Ministers, saw their natural ally as Soviet Russia; the alternative pole was the Entente as advocated by Petlyura. The Entente’s main concern was the Russian Volunteer Army (VA), a force fighting to restore the Empire.⁷⁴ On 18 December 1918,

⁷¹ Ukrainian People’s Socialist Republic December 1918, *Robitnycha Hazeta*, no. 430, 7 January 1919.

⁷² An illustration was Colonel Bolbochan, the former Hetmanate commander of the Zaporozhian Division, who was appointed the Directory’s commander in chief in Left-Bank Ukraine. Bolbochan instituted a reign of terror against the resurgence of the agrarian revolution and the workers councils Mark Baker, *Peasants, Power and Revolution in the Village: A Social History of Kharkiv Province* p. 167-168.

⁷³ Assessing what had arisen from the Ukrainian National Union the Nezalezhnyky, ‘Andr. Mykh’ wrote :Whatever was alive and popular in it has passed to the masses where it works. But remnants of the nationalist bourgeoisie and intelligentsia cling to the blue and yellow banner, arrange buffoonery, meetings to the sound of church bells, prayer services and other attributes of national sentimentalism, which only serve to discredit the popular movement and its leaders. Our task and the task of the Directory at the present moment is to break completely with remnants of the national front. *Robitnycha Hazeta* 25, December 1918.

⁷⁴ See: Anna Procyk, *Russian Nationalism and Ukraine The Nationality Policy of the Volunteer Army During the Civil War*, Edmonton 1995.

French and VA troops took Odessa proclaiming a 'South Russian' government. To the frustration of Ukrainian forces the Directory adopted restraint. In this situation the overall trend of the *Nezalezhnyky* was towards a breach with the Directory.

Things came to a head at the Sixth Congress of the USDRP on 10th-12 January 1919.⁷⁵ The Congress became a debate on soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat with Richytsky moving the *Nezalezhnyky* theses. The task of the proletariat of Ukraine was 'the transformation of the sovereign and independent Ukrainian People's Republic into the sovereign and independent Ukrainian Socialist Republic'.⁷⁶ Power would be organized on the 'principle of the dictatorship of the urban and rural proletariat and the poorer toiling peasantry, organized in worker-peasant councils.'⁷⁷ The government was to be reorganized on the basis of representation from revolutionary Ukrainian parties which stand for:

- a) the independence of the national Ukrainian Socialist Republic, and b) the power of the worker-peasant councils. This government is transitional until the organization of the government by the All-Ukrainian Congress of Worker-Peasant Councils.⁷⁸

On the question of international politics their resolution defended the 'independence of Ukraine demanding from the government:

- a) a rapprochement with the Russian Soviet Republic, on the basis of mutual recognition of the sovereignty of both socialist republics, complete and mutual non-interference in the internal affairs of the neighbouring republic, the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops from the territory of Ukraine (including the Crimea), their non-interference in the internal affairs of Ukraine and, in the case of refusal, an active defence of the Ukrainian Socialist Republic against imperialist attack.⁷⁹

A majority of the Central Committee spoke in favour, the opposition was a combination of the centrists and the right-wing 'Katerynoslav group'

⁷⁵ See: Chervony Prapor, 22 January 1919

⁷⁶ Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materialy*, IV.

⁷⁷ Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materialy*, IV.

⁷⁸ Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materialy*, IV.

⁷⁹ Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materialy*, IV.

of Issak Mazepa, Panas Fadenko and Ivan Romanchenko, joined surprisingly by Porsh.⁸⁰ The majority supporting a socialist revolution in the west, but considered the conditions lacking in Ukraine. It is debatable how representative the conference was in a situation where members of the Central Committee couldn't sleep in their own beds for fear of arrest.⁸¹ The divisions in the USDRP already apparent beforehand, now became an accomplished fact. After their resolution was defeated, the *Nezalezhnyky* walked out of the USDRP.

The *Nezalezhnyky* trajectory was now to split; they launched *Chervony Prapor* on the 22 January, coinciding with the unity of the UNR and the West Ukrainian Peoples Republic.⁸² It included a *Declaration* written by Tkachenko and Richytsky stating it was now time to move from a 'passive waiting state to an active and creative struggle for the reconstruction of the whole socio-political and economic order of Ukraine.' At the Sixth Congress the question was sharply posed 'either the old or the new – and the official party stood between them.'⁸³ They rejected the claim of the 'official party' to be the greater democrats asserting their democracy 'would inevitably turned into the dictatorship of the middle classes' and in 'a parliamentary order the popular masses will be excluded from creative action'. In contrast the socialist revolution would create 'a government based on the active participation of the toiling masses.'⁸⁴

Responding to the fear of the dominance of the 'non-Ukrainian urban element' they pointed out that the 'proletariat was not entirely for-

⁸⁰ The discussions that Porsh held with Mazepa on their own do not explain such a volte face by Porsh. One can only surmise that the experience of the Bolshevik rule in Ukraine had seriously disillusioned Porsh, as it had others. It was his last speech to a USDRP audience in Ukraine after which he was dispatched as UNR ambassador to Germany. In January 1921 he began to adopt a more sovietophile politics, he made a speech at a student meeting calling on the émigrés to recognise the Soviet Ukrainian government and return to the Ukraine. Porsh applied return to the Ukraine himself in 1922 and in January 1923 the Ukrainian Politburo decided to allow him to return though he never took up the offer. He started to drift away from political activity and tragic death in Germany in 1944.

⁸¹ Vynnychenko, *Vidrozhenia Natsii*, Vol.III, p. 242.

⁸² *Chervony Prapor*, 22 January 1919

⁸³ *Chervony Prapor*, 22 January 1919

⁸⁴ *Chervony Prapor*, 22 January 1919

eign' and emphasised "the proletariat in Ukraine can and must come to power together with the revolutionary peasantry."⁸⁵ In the course of the revolution the non-Ukrainian workers would be drawn more and more into all forms of internal life in Ukraine and 'rid themselves of the remnants of old Russia and will join the Ukrainian people and proletariat.'

The debate of the Sixth Congress was repeated at All-Ukrainian Labour Congress which opened on 23 January 1919. The Congress was to perform; to legitimise the UNR in a forum of the popular movement.⁸⁶ The military circles mounted a campaign of harassment of the very forces on which the republic was to be based, its elections were stifled.⁸⁷ The Directory's credibility had rapidly eroded, in the countryside peasant brigades were defecting en masse to the Borotbisty or Bolsheviks, the army of the UNR had declined from 100,000 to 21,000 by the third week of January.⁸⁸

The Nezalezhnyky participated forming a bloc with those parties supportive of soviet power, the Borotbisty, the left Bundists and those Bolsheviks who attended despite their official boycott. Zinovyev of the Nezalezhnyky outlined their opposition in a declaration which he read at the Congress on the 26 January.⁸⁹ Unsurprisingly it failed to convince

⁸⁵ Chervony Prapor, 22 January 1919

⁸⁶ According to Mazepa the decision to call the All-congress 'was an obvious concession to Bolshevik slogans. The landowners and financial and business circles, which had supported the Hetmanate were excluded.' Maistrenko, *Borotbism*, p. 100.

⁸⁷ At the time of elections to the Labour Congress, part of the Left Bank had already been taken by Soviet troops, and in part of it the peasants and workers were at war with the Directory's army. Thus elections could not be held there. On the Right bank there was a wave of pogroms. In the south the French army and the Russian Volunteer Army had captured Odessa and were advancing. Whilst the National Rada of the Western Province of the UNR were invited to participate with full voting rights, in sharp contrast at the insistence of Petlyura, Konovalts and other otamans, the soldiers of the UNR were deprived of electoral rights to participate.

⁸⁸ Bojczun, *The Working Class and the National Question*, p. 398.

⁸⁹ It stated that whilst recognising the Directory had played positive role "the absence of a clearly defined class character' resulted in 'the vacillating and indecisive character of both its internal and external policy.' The result was 'war with Socialist Russia and the possibility of an alliance with the imperialist Entente". The Nezalezhnyky demanded A 'new coalition government is formed of pro-so-

the congress, in response the pro-Soviet bloc completely abstained from the voting, made a declaration they did not recognise the competence of the congress and then walked out. The USDRP had called the congress with the desire to strengthen the authority of the Directory instead it neither failed to arrest its downward spiral nor alter its course of action.

Pavlo Khrystiuk contends that the *Nezalezhnyky* stance bound them for a long time to the Directory in their effort to transform the UNR.⁹⁰ In practice their approach of the *Nezalezhnyky* during December 1918–January 1920 involved a combination of tactics of reform and revolution, where the popular movement possessed the strength to oust the Directory they supported such a course, whilst still seeking an overall socialist transformation from within the UNR. The *Nezalezhnyky* also attempting to utilise their posts within the UNR to broker a rapprochement with Soviet Russia, there was initially vacillation on the part of the Council of Peoples Commissars towards the Directory, it was possibly without Lenin's knowledge that the Red Army advanced into Ukraine in late December 1918.⁹¹ Under pressure from the left the Directory sent a special diplomatic mission on 15 January 1920 to Moscow.⁹² Yurko Mazurenko a leading *Nezalezhnyky* took on the mission of conducting negotiations:

I declared that I would go on the condition that decrees on the transfer of local power to the Soviets and a call for a congress of Soviets (and not a Labour Congress) to be published immediately, as well as on the condition that the communist party would be legalised. For this, of course, I was ostracised by the Directorate.⁹³

Controversy surrounds the success of this mission which the left claims was sabotaged by Petlyura, their efforts resulting in the declaration of war

viet parties" and a 'Ukrainian Socialist Republic of Councils' *Chervony Prapor*, 6 February 1919

⁹⁰ Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materialy*, IV, p. 13

⁹¹ Arthur E. Adams, *The Bolsheviks In The Ukraine The Second Campaign, 1918–1919*, New Haven 1963, p. 82-85.

⁹² Chekhivsky telegramming that: 'Our government, will transfer all power to the Labour Congress and is prepared to do anything to avoid spilling proletarian blood.' Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materialy*, IV.

⁹³ Yu. Mazurenko, *Dokumenti Trahichnoi Istorii Ukrayini*, p. 248-253.

on Soviet Russia on 16 January 1919.⁹⁴ By this time Chekhivsky and Vynnychenko had resigned from the government over its Entente turn.⁹⁵

Despite public denial that Avdiyenko was preparing an uprising, the Nezalezhnyky turned to the establishment of soviet power by force.⁹⁶ At a congress of the in Hryhoriv the Dniprovska Division renamed itself the First Kyiv Soviet Division and elected Danylo Zeleny as otaman along with a Revolutionary Committee joined by the Nezalezhnyky.⁹⁷ Their previous dual approach towards the Directory did place the USDRP Nezalezhnyky at a disadvantage in comparison to the Bolsheviki who were stronger in the cities and the Borotbisty in the countryside. They could act unilaterally but not decisively without allies, the Borotbisty had established a Central Revolutionary Committee, seeking to meet the Russian Bolsheviki with an existing soviet government.⁹⁸ However, political differences between the Ukrainian Marxists and the Borotbisty with their populist origins prevented a higher level of unity being achieved.

⁹⁴ An act complimented by Red Army commander Antonov also lobbying Moscow against an agreement stating there was 'nobody in Ukraine with whom we should negotiate'. Stachiw, *Ukraine and the European Turmoil* Vol 2, New York, 1973, p 258.

⁹⁵ 'After Mazurenko finally succeeded in thrusting upon the Directory his courier, its new head S. Petlyura, with curses sent him away without having accepted the report of the head of the delegation, which was authorised to act also by the signature of the 'Commander-in-Chief'. Vynnychenko *Vidrozhennia Natsii*, Vol. III p. 279-280.

⁹⁶ Most successfully in Left-Bank Ukraine in Kharkiv, Chernihiv and Katerynoslav guberniya the Directory was overthrown. On the Right Bank attempted risings occurred in Volhynia, Zhytomyr and in the Obruch district where the Otamanshchyna responded with pogroms. In Vynnychenko's estimation in the territory under their control: 'There was neither punishment, nor justice, nor trials, nor control over these criminals and enemies of the revolution and the national movement. The whole system of military authority was constructed and consciously based, by the chief otamany, on the principle that there would be no control.' Vynnychenko, *Vidrodzheniia Natsii* Vol. III p. 188.

⁹⁷ Petrichenko, *Malovidomi Fakty z Zhyttya ta Diyalnosti Danylo Ilkovicha Terpylo* (Otaman Zeleny)

⁹⁸ Maistrenko, *Borotbism* p. 118-119.

Independent Republic of Soviets or ‘Commissar State’

The Ukrainian Bolshevik leader Yurii Lapchynsky emphasised that in 1919 the “communist movement and Soviet power in Ukraine were built in a political situation, which was totally different to the first period.”⁹⁹ The situation could not have been more favourable for a convergence between the Ukrainian and the Russian Revolutions, and reconciliation of the internal elements. The creation of a Ukrainian republic based on councils with a plurality of pro-soviet parties appeared a viable possibility. On 4 February 1919 the Directory of the UNR withdrew from Kyiv in the face of the advancing the Soviet forces, *Chervony Prapor* concluding ‘the Directory’s positive role was finished’.¹⁰⁰

The Red Army entered Kyiv on 5 February unopposed, welcomed by an announcement of the Executive of the Kyiv Soviet of Workers Deputies signed by the Nezalezhnyky, Bolsheviks and Borotbist deputies stating ‘the Directory has been driven from Kyiv and red Soviet battalions under the leadership of the Worker-Peasant Government of Ukraine are entering the city.’¹⁰¹ But the Nezalezhnyky had not abandoned their earlier criticism, greeting the new government in a leading article on 6 February *Chervony Prapor* wrote:

If the Directory stupidly repeated an outdated policy that has already been condemned by history, then the Russian Bolsheviks have come by the same outdated path... Under the slogan of the struggle for the power of the soviets arrives a government that calls itself Ukrainian, but which we do not and cannot describe as such.¹⁰²

The KP (b) U by its own volition had established a ‘Provisional Worker-Peasant Government of Ukraine’ in Moscow.¹⁰³ It was formed externally

⁹⁹ Chervonyy Prapor, Kharkiv, 11 July 1920

¹⁰⁰ Chervony Prapor, 6, February 1919.

¹⁰¹ The announcement was signed by the head of the committee Bubnov and the following members: P. Syrodenko, P. Dehtiarenko, M. Maior, V. Cherniavsky, H. Volkov, H. Myhailychenko, P. Liubchenko, I. Kachura, A. Chekhsis, I. Frenkel, and M. Avdiienko. Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materialy*, IV.

¹⁰² Chervony Prapor, 6, February 1919.

¹⁰³ Arthur E. Adams, *The Bolsheviks In The Ukraine The Second Campaign, 1918–1919*, New Haven 1963, p. 25-64.

outside of the revolutionary process; initially at its head was Georgii Pyatakov who provided its theoretical scaffolding. Pyatakov part of the left-Communist current, flushed with revolutionary romanticism they were a strong element in the KP (b) U and opposed national self-determination as a slogan invalidated by imperialism.¹⁰⁴ By decision of Moscow, Pyatakov had been replaced as unelected head of the government by Christian Rakovsky, recently arrived from the Balkans.¹⁰⁵

But, despite their opposition to the Rakovsky's government, the *Nezalezhnyky* did not reject the possibility of cooperation. The same issue of *Chervony Prapor* carried a resolution of the Organizational Committee stating they were willing:

To enter the government and to take full responsibility for it only if: 1. All official organs of the supreme government – not only Ukrainian, but also Russian – recognize the independence and autonomy of the Ukrainian Socialist republic; 2. If a firm national and social course is taken in Ukraine, and Ukrainian is the only official language.¹⁰⁶

The views of the Rakovsky were already apparent before his arrival in Kyiv; he had declared himself a specialist on the Ukrainian question, having spent a mere three months in Kyiv in 1918. In *Izvestiia*, he announced the following theses: the ethnic differences between Ukrainian and Russians are insignificant, the Ukrainian peasantry lacked national consciousness. National consciousness has been submerged in social class consciousness. The Ukrainian proletariat is purely Russian in origin.¹⁰⁷ Rakovsky concluded the Ukrainian national movement was an invention of the intelligentsia. These ideas combined with Pyatakov's 'left-Communist'

¹⁰⁴ Pyatakov's most well known work on the national question is *The Proletariat and the 'Right of Nations of self-determination' in the Era of Finance Capital*, written under the name of 'P. Kievsky' published in 1916 with Lenin's reply *A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism*.

¹⁰⁵ Key texts are, Christian Rakovsky, *Selected Writings on Opposition in the USSR 1923–30*, ed. Gus Fagan, London 1980, Pierre Broué: *Rakovsky, Cahiers Léon Trotsky*, no.17-18. L'Institut Léon Trotsky, 1984. Neither of them actually engage critically with the policy of Rakovsky in Ukraine in 1919.

¹⁰⁶ *Chervony Prapor*, 6, February 1919.

¹⁰⁷ Mazlakh and Shakh-ray, *On The Current Situation* p. 1115-1117.

nists' and the Russophile 'Katerynoslavians' in the KP(b)U laid fertile ground for conflict.

The state administration was constructed on administrators brought from Russia and largely from the local Russian petit-bourgeoisie who joined the KP(b)U to qualify for employment. Tkachenko writes that whilst the KP(b)U government was establishing itself:

All sorts of Russian nationalist elements from the Black Hundreds to the revolutionary intelligentsia in Ukraine were joining forces with the Bolsheviks to help reconstruct a 'united and indivisible Russia'. ... Unreliable elements signed up with the Bolshevik party and contributed to enhancing the nationalistic and even chauvinist coloration of the Bolshevik proletarian movement... Even the Russian communist press was writing enthusiastically about the unification of Russia and this milieu of 'specialists' as well as the nationalism of the Russian communists themselves deepened the split within the proletariat along national lines... promoting its in its midst a fierce struggle out of which the reaction raised its head.¹⁰⁸

The Nezalezhnyky viewed these developments with growing frustration, accusing the regime of failing to reverse a situation 'which came about as a result of the age-old oppression of the Ukrainian people by Muscovite imperialism'.¹⁰⁹ Instead 'the kind of insane and disgraceful Russification sweeping Ukraine right now has never been seen before even during the Hetmanate rule in its last 'federative' phase':

Not one pamphlet in Ukrainian for the Ukrainian peasant, not one brochure, not one newspaper of the soviet government in Ukrainian! The Ukrainian language has been driven out from wherever it was. A whole series of orders on using the 'generally understood language' is a sign of the times. And to the modest demands of the Ukrainian citizen that at least his national and cultural rights, like those of the 'fraternal' people here in Ukraine, be safeguarded, there is but one reply: chauvinism and the spirit of the bourgeoisie and the counter-revolution.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Tkachenko, *Borotba Vienna*, (April 1920).

¹⁰⁹ *Chervony Prapor*, 14, February 1919

¹¹⁰ *Chervony Prapor*, 9, March 1919.

When Rakovsky came to the Kyiv Soviet on of 13 February he never mentioned the national question at all. This provoked a string of criticism from Ukrainian and Jewish deputies who pointed to the mistakes of the first Soviet Government and the need for the involvement of other parties. Avdiyenko attacked this failure to address ‘the important national question in Ukraine and the question of the proletariat’s role in resolving the national question’:

In every country the struggle with the bourgeoisie is the affair of the proletariat of that country. For the success of that struggle the proletariat of every country must be organized. Moreover comrade Rakovsky said nothing about what the provisional government must do in order to organize the Ukrainian proletariat and draw it into the revolutionary struggle.¹¹¹

Rakovsky’s defence poured oil on the flames; he ridiculed calls to introduce the Ukrainian language in education and government as ‘linguistic music’ branding it a ‘reactionary and completely unnecessary measure’.¹¹² The *Chervony Prapor* wrote that that behind ‘their cosmopolitanism lies nothing other than a not very hidden Russification’ in continuity with Tsarist practices: “If we are not afraid to use social force over the bourgeoisie, then neither are we afraid of using the small social force over that same bourgeoisie and intelligentsia by forcing them to know the language of the people at whose expense they are living.”¹¹³ The *Chervony Prapor* ran a string of articles on official instructions for the use of the Russian language in the administration of the Soviet Republic; this even involved the reversal of practices introduced in the Hetmanate.¹¹⁴

The rift that grew within Soviet Ukraine stemmed not only from dissatisfaction with policy on the national question but also despite the promise of the ‘rebirth of soviet power locally’, there was an overall absence of self-government. The republic was ruled through appointed revolution-

¹¹¹ Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materially*, IV.

¹¹² Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materially*, IV.

¹¹³ *Chervony Prapor*, 15, February 1919.

¹¹⁴ For example *Chervony Prapor*, 13, February 1919 reported A letter of the Commissar of the Chief Military Administration, stating ‘In Soviet Russia only the Russian language is written, and it is not permitted to spend the people’s money for translators. Please write in Russian.’

ary committees, *revkomy*, and in the countryside, committees of poor peasants, *kombedy*.¹¹⁵ Workers councils existed only in the large towns and then only in an advisory capacity; soviet power as such did not exist.¹¹⁶ In April the Ukrainian trade union movement was purged, subordinated to the state and absorbed into All-Russian structures.¹¹⁷ Branded by Ukrainian Marxists as the ‘commissar state’ this dangerous alienation was compounded by the retarding of the agrarian revolution through excesses of grain requisitioning and the transplanting from Russia of an elitist land policy of the ‘commune’, formed not by the self-activity of the peasants but imposed from above. Whilst Soviet planners sought to centralise the Ukrainian economy with Russia, ‘in actuality the Ukraine was plundered randomly, like a vast treasure chest for food and fuel.’¹¹⁸

In late February *Chervony Prapor* pointed out that these policies were starting to produce centrifugal forces, most violently amongst the peasantry. It emphasised there is grain in Ukraine which must be given voluntarily to the ‘starving Russian worker and as much as he needs’, but instead the requisition squads ‘come and take not just grain, but everything that they can take and carry off.’ Not only were these methods provoking unrest but they questioned the sovereignty of Soviet Ukraine. It required proper transparent trade agreements, ‘this is possible only if Ukraine is sovereign not in words but in reality, only if the workers themselves are masters in their own socialist republic and not foreign pretenders.’¹¹⁹

Whilst still preserving problematic connections in some regions such as in Katerynoslav, in March 1919 the *Nezalezhnyky* abandoned their position as a faction and renamed themselves the Ukrainian Social Demo-

¹¹⁵ Adams, *The Bolsheviks In The Ukraine The Second Campaign*, p 125.

¹¹⁶ Workers councils existed only in the large towns, in Kharkiv, Kyiv, Zhytomyr, Katerynoslav, Poltava, Chernihiv, and then only in an advisory capacity.

¹¹⁷ There was major debates between *Nezalezhnyky* and supporters of ‘statisation’ in the congresses of the chemical workers union, trade and industrial office workers, the tobacco workers, the metal workers, printers, the miners union, sugar refinery workers and the All-Ukrainian Teachers Union. *Bojcun, Working Class and the National Question*, p .446-449.

¹¹⁸ Thomas, Remington, *Building Socialism in Bolshevik Russia, Ideology and Industrial Organisation 1917–1921*, Pittsburgh, 1984, p. 167

¹¹⁹ *Chervony Prapor*, February 28, 1919

cratic Workers Party Independentists. This was only a transitional name until their planned congress on 30 March, they had decided it was 'necessary to quickly devise a communist programme and organise a Ukrainian Communist Party.'¹²⁰ In this endeavour the Nezalezhnyky were engaged in discussions with some Bolsheviks no doubt to the consternation of the KP(b)U leadership.

This decision also coincided with the founding of the Communist International. At the founding congress held on March 2–6, 1919 in Moscow, Mykola Skrypnyk representing the KP(b)U gave an upbeat report on Ukraine, welcoming the spit the USDRP saying that: 'Although these Independent Socialists differ from the Communists on fundamentals, they are nevertheless working harmoniously with our party today and participate in the soviets'.¹²¹ Yet this was far from the approach being taken at the Third Congress of the KP(b)U then underway in Kharkiv.

The Kyiv 'left-Communists' led by Pyatakov reasserted their influence securing the majority of votes and positions on the Central Committee. The congress endorsed the policy of War Communism and that Ukraine enters the RSFSR as an autonomous republic. More ominously by a narrow margin of 101 to 96 a resolution was carried against co-operation with other pro-soviet parties, stating 'agreements with such parties as the Right SR's, Independent Ukrainian Social Democrats and others are admissible'.¹²² These parties were to be denied '*any responsible posts in the soviets*' and excluded from the government of Ukraine, 'which should consist *solely of the representatives of the Communist Party of Ukraine*'.¹²³ Approaches for fusion with the KP(b)U by the Borotbisty-Communists and left Bund were also rejected.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Yu.Mazurenko, *Dokymenti Trahichnoi Istorii Ukrayini*, p. 248-253.

¹²¹ John Riddell Ed. *Founding the Communist International, Proceedings and Documents of the First Congress*, New York, 1987, p. 98.

¹²² KP(b)U Third Congress was held between March 1–6, 1919, Adams, *The Bolsheviks In The Ukraine*, p. 218-219.

¹²³ Maistrenko, *Borotbism*, p. 124-125.

¹²⁴ This flew in the face of earlier instructions of Lenin to Rakovsky that the non-Bolsheviks parties be involved in the government Adams, *The Bolsheviks In The Ukraine*, p. 120.

This decision came on the eve of the Third All-Ukrainian Congress of Workers' Peasants' and Red Army Deputies' to which the government had previously assured it would 'hand over power in the country'.¹²⁵ The congress was held in Kyiv from 6-10 March, of the 1,719 delegates about 80 percent were Bolsheviks, and out of the minority the *Nezalezhnyky* mustered forty-two deputies.¹²⁶ Formal elections had been held only the parts of four provinces and the majority of delegates were from *revkomy* not soviets.¹²⁷

Far-reaching socialist policies were outlined in the resolutions of the congress, and by the new Constitution of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.¹²⁸ The problem was that the Constitution was not implemented; furthermore Ukraine remained, and was considered by the government, a regional unit of Russia.¹²⁹ The Borotbisty were "elected" to the Central Executive Committee, which comprised 90 KP(b)U and 10 Borotbisty.¹³⁰ They were allowed into the government 'only in order to show a bit of Ukrainian colour,' declared the *Nezalezhnyky*, the 'commissar state'.¹³¹

Drahomyretsky wrote from Kyiv that 'notwithstanding the disillusionment with the present regime, the masses continue to raise soviet slogans'.¹³² Indicative of this was the subsequent Kyiv District Congress of the Councils of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies held on 24-25 March. The congress called for the inadequate representation of the peasantry in organs of power to be remedied, but went further stating that 'Soviet power must not be undermined by a bureaucratic apparatus' resolving

¹²⁵ Manifest Vremennogo Raboche Krestianskogo Pravitel'stva Ukrainy, December 1, 1918, cited in Mazlakh and Shakhrai, *On The Current Situation*, p. 27.

¹²⁶ Jujij Borys, *The Sovietization of Ukraine 1917-1923*, Edmonton 1980, p. 419,

¹²⁷ Bojcun, *The Working Class and the National Question* p. 465.

¹²⁸ Borys, *Sovietization of Ukraine*, p. 218

¹²⁹ According to Balabanoff, first Secretary of the Communist International and a friend of Rakovsky's sent to assist him in Kyiv, 'the Bolsheviks had set up an independent republic in the Ukraine. In actuality that section of it in which Soviet rule was established was completely dominated by the Moscow regime'. Angelica Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel*, London 1938, p. 234.

¹³⁰ Adams, *Bolsheviks in Ukraine*, p. 125.

¹³¹ Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materialy*, IV.

¹³² cited in Bojcun, *The Working Class and the National Question*, p. 464,

to ensure that ‘the election of organs of power must be convened and held with the full consent of the electors, without any pressure from the administration.’ On the national question it declared the ‘Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic must be sovereign and not dependent on anyone, but in a strong alliance with other socialist republics’.¹³³

In the spring of 1919, the government engaged in a bitter struggle against the newly created USDRP *Nezalezhnyky*. They were ‘deluged on all sides with accusation of nationalist chauvinism, of being counter-revolutionary and petty-bourgeois.’¹³⁴ How the KP(b)U defined these “counter-revolutionary” politics of the *Nezalezhnyky* was outlined by Cheskis a member of the Executive Committee of the Kyiv Soviet:

The most difficult thing is this question with the independent Ukrainian social democrats, who have not yet given up their national demands and autonomist view of the political system of Ukraine. If, of course, the *Nezalezhnyky* renounce the last point of their programme and come closer to a true soviet platform, the participation in the government will certainly be possible.¹³⁵

On the night of the 25th March, after the above Congress had finished Richytsky, Mazurenko and other *Nezalezhnyky* were arrested on the orders of the Cheka and *Chervony Prapor* temporarily closed down.¹³⁶ This had disastrous results, the planned party congress did not place or the new Ukrainian Communist Party launched.¹³⁷ After several days those arrested were released and *Chervony Prapor* reappeared, with an open letter from the editors demanding an end to the repression, in an article by Kachinivsky on the way ahead he summarised: “It is now two months since the soviet authorities occupied Kyiv, but we have yet to see real so-

¹³³ Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materialy*, IV.

¹³⁴ ‘The Ukrainian *Nezalezhnyky* do not recognize the government; the Ukrainian *Nezalezhnyky* incite the workers and peasants against the government; the Ukrainian *Nezalezhnyky* agitate against helping starving Soviet Russia with grain from Ukraine; the Ukrainian *Nezalezhnyky* inflame national hatred; the Ukrainian *Nezalezhnyky* insist on drawing the rural proletariat into revolutionary construction and oppose the proletariat,’ Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materialy*, IV.

¹³⁵ *Chervony Prapor*, 9 February 1919.

¹³⁶ *Chervony Prapor*, 3, April 1919

¹³⁷ Yu.Mazurenko, *Dokymenti Trahichnoi Istorii Ukrayini*, p. 248-253.

viet power or the dictatorship of the proletariat. All we have is the dictatorship of the communist party.”¹³⁸

The intervention of the Hungarian Soviet Republic

The policies of the Rakovsky regime began to produce powerful centrifugal forces; engulfed by worker and peasant unrest, the Ukrainian SSR started to fragment and disintegrate into internecine conflict. This crisis saw two tendencies which have complicated historical analysis ever since: on the one hand the attempted revolutionary mobilization of society and on the other its antithesis – fragmentation and class decomposition.¹³⁹ The decomposition of industry became catastrophic with ‘shortages of electricity, food, materials, and skilled workers’.¹⁴⁰ Indicative of this decomposition were pogroms, brigandage and otaman adventurers. No sides in the conflict escaped being tainted by the effects of this vortex.

This crisis became increasingly acute just as the communist revolution in Europe unfolded, with proclamation of the Hungarian Republic of Councils on 21 March followed by the proclamation on 6 April of the Bavarian Soviet Republic. The Ukrainian question became integral to deciding their fate; for it was from here that any direct connection could be made between the soviet republics.¹⁴¹ However from the start its achievement was impeded by the events in Ukraine,

Historian Rudolf L. Tokés asserts that “Béla Kun was lacking in detailed information on the Ukrainian situation”, and as such he did not ap-

¹³⁸ Chervony Prapor, 3, April 1919

¹³⁹ The working class had reached the point of exhaustion by the third year of the revolution in Ukraine. Industrial production plummeted to between 15-20 percent of its pre-war level by 1920. Many unemployed workers volunteered or were drafted into the armies, 50,000 Donbas workers were in the Red Army by October 1918, 40,000 were conscripted in May 1919. Many in local areas joined their local militia or irregulars. In the urban areas there was food shortages and a typhus epidemic in 1919–20. For many it was better to escape to the countryside.

¹⁴⁰ Vladimir, Brovkin, ‘Workers Unrest and Bolshevik Responses in 1919’, *Slavic Review*, Vol.49, No.3, 1990, p. 353.

¹⁴¹ This had been long recognised, Karl Radek had said in 20 October 1918 at the KP(b)U congress that the “our road to aid the workers of the Central Powers lies precisely over Ukraine, over Rumania, Over Eastern Galicia and over Hungary”. *Sovietization of Ukraine*, p. 205.

preciate the selfishness of Russian Bolshevik polices as regards Soviet Hungary.¹⁴² L.Tokés saw this in terms of their failure to deploy Hungarian units of the Red Army in a drive towards Hungary, and putting their own survival before world revolution. In fact the opposite is the case; the government in Budapest had a very good understanding of the Ukrainian situation and sought to assist in bringing about a change in a manner which stood in stark contrast to the practices of the Russian Communists.

A Ukrainian Diplomatic Mission had been established in Hungary since February 1919, headed by Mykola Halahan, a veteran Ukrainian Marxism. Halahan had already received a sympathetic response in the socialist daily *Nepszava* toward coverage of the Ukrainian question. The interest of the left reached a new level with formation of the Soviet government.¹⁴³ The Soviet government recognised the West Ukrainian Peoples Republic, establishing trade links and negotiations on aid in its war with Poland. The Deputy Peoples Commissar for Foreign Affairs Erno Pór promptly initiated discussions with Halahan, who advised him that the destiny of soviet power in Hungary was dependent on the plight of Ukraine, as long as the conflict with the UNR continued “assistance from Moscow will not come, because between Moscow and Budapest lies Ukraine.”¹⁴⁴ The Hungarian government, proposed Halahan, should not simply consult but *demand* from Moscow an end to the war with Ukraine.

Bela Kun followed up these talks emphasising the necessity of a Soviet Ukraine and seeing no need for peace with the “bourgeois Directory”. Halahan in turn sought to convince Kun it was not possible to impose the Russian model, that the Ukrainians did support a form of state which corresponding to the interests of the working masses, the “labour councils”.¹⁴⁵ In this regard Kun’s disdain of Rakovsky became apparent, describing him repeatedly as an “idiot”. In Hungary he said communists were able to work with the social-democrats, because the national ques-

¹⁴² Rudolf Tokes, *Bela Kun and the Hungarian Soviet Republic*, Stanford 1967, *Revolution in Perspective*, Essay on the Hungarian Revolution, Ed. Andrew C Janos, Berkley, 1971. Rudolf L.Tokés, p. 201.

¹⁴³ Mykola Halahan, *Z Moïkh spomyniv, 1880 ti 1920 r*, *Tempora*, Kyiv, 2005, p. 419.

¹⁴⁴ Halahan, *Z Moïkh spomyniv*, p. 442

¹⁴⁵ Halahan, *Z Moïkh spomyniv* 443

tion did not divide them into warring camps. Kun's solution was an "independent Soviet Ukraine" and proposed establishing contact with those adhering to that viewpoint – Vynnychenko the former premier of the UNR was the figure they identified to take this forward.¹⁴⁶ Confident Lenin now supported an independent Ukraine Kun agreed to take on the role as mediator in achieving this outcome in all their interests.

By the middle of March 1919, Vynnychenko was in Vienna having broken with Directory and the rightist leaders of the USDRP. Whilst he had begun to advocate the creation of a state based on workers and peasants soviets, he continued to have misgivings about the Bolsheviks. In his diary he asked whether their victory and the creation of the socialist order, 'the birth of which I welcome with ecstasy in my soul', would also mean defeat for the Ukrainians, enthused by events in Hungary he placed his hope on the success of international revolution.¹⁴⁷ On 28 March, mere week after the Soviet Republic was formed; Vynnychenko received a telegram asking him to go to the Budapest, Kun even provided the transport.

On 30 March Vynnychenko arrived in Budapest with another Social Democrat, Yury Tyshchenko, and he met Kun on the same day. The ensuing discussion between the émigrés Ukrainians and the Hungarian officials resulted in a programme drawn up by Vynnychenko and Tyshchenko which was presented by Kun to Moscow, the were:

1. Fully independent and sovereign Ukrainian Soviet Republic within the ethnographic borders including Galicia with Lviv as per the line of the Syan and the Kuban region.
2. until its establishment on a All-European scale, the establishment of a military alliance between the existing socialist republics on the grounds of equal rights of each member of the alliance.
3. The military of another member of the alliance should remain on the territory of a member of the alliance only with the consent of that Soviet republic.
4. The Government of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic to consist of the Independentist Ukrainian Social Democrats, the left Ukrainian Social-Revolu-

¹⁴⁶ Halahan, *Z Moïkh spomyniv* 444

¹⁴⁷ Shchodennyk. Tom 1, 1911–1920, ed. Hryhorii Kostiuk, Edmonton and New York, 1980, *Ibid.*, pp. 323–28. The quotation is on p. 328.

tionaries, and Ukrainian communists as well as those Ukrainian socialist parties who accept the platform of soviet power.

5 All allied socialist republics are obliged to if necessary provide render all material aid to another member-republic in defence of its territory in the fight against imperialist encroachments on behalf of neighbouring bourgeois countries and in the first place against the Entente, Poland and Romania, as well as the fight against internal counter revolutionaries which endanger the existence of Soviet republics.¹⁴⁸

Kun assured Vynnychenko that he had been in contact with to Lenin by radio and he accepted the points: ‘But concerning the government, then it would depend on who is chosen by the councils of workers and peasant deputies of Ukraine.’¹⁴⁹ The full text of this radio telegram was intercepted by a Paris radio station and was published in full in the French newspapers; the “Triple alliance of Russian, Ukrainian and Hungarian soviet republics” caused uproar as a new red plot. But from Moscow there was silence.

The only news was of continuing unrest, Vynnychenko felt the Rakovsky government was turning the ‘Ukrainian peasantry and all national Ukrainian layers’ against itself, posing a serious danger ‘especially bearing in mind the necessity as soon as possible to constitute a direct connection with Hungary’.¹⁵⁰ It was a week before Budapest received a response. – It was not from Lenin but Rakovsky. Vynnychenko was not named but sarcastically described as that “poet” who was a “typical representative of petit bourgeois ideology” who belongs to the left-wing of the “Directory band”.¹⁵¹ With whom there was no sense in discussing any kind of alliances. It was not what Por and Kun had expected, they were said Halahan “baffled” in light of the plight of Soviet Hungary.

Vynnychenko met again with Kun and Por, but they made no progress with Rakovsky.¹⁵² They vehemently believed that Moscow and Kyiv would

¹⁴⁸ Halahan, *Z Moïkh spomyniv*, 445- 446

¹⁴⁹ Volodomyr Vynnychenko, *Schodennyk 1911–1920*, Edmonton, 1980, p. 331-332.

¹⁵⁰ Vynnychenko, *Schodennyk*, p. 331-332.

¹⁵¹ Halahan *Z Moïkh spomyniv* p. 446.

¹⁵² Vynnychenko, *Schodennyk*, p. 331.

agree, when Vynnychenko expressed his doubts they protested: “Never in the world, Russian communists cannot be imperialists and nationalists.” Vynnychenko said to them: “Mark my words: They will lose you, us and themselves on the Ukrainian question.”¹⁵³ Exasperated, Vynnychenko returned to Vienna, leaving Halahan to represent him.

Vynnychenko and Kun were not the only people that April calling for reconciliation with the Ukrainian parties to overcome the Rakovsky governments ‘complete isolation from the masses.’¹⁵⁴ As On 17 April Red Army commander on the Ukrainian front Antonov-Ovseenko under orders on 25 March to go on the offensive towards southeastern Galicia and establish ties with Soviet Hungary, raised his concerns with the Bolshevik leadership that he was hindered because “land and national policy in Ukraine cuts at the roots of the military leadership to overcome these disintegrating influences”. His proposals including a coalition government with the “*Nezalezhnik* SD’s and Ukrainian SR’s”, “to compel foreigners ‘Great Russians’ to adjust themselves with greatest tact towards the local population” and “to halt the plundering of Ukraine’s bread and coal”.¹⁵⁵

All these demands brought no change in the policy in Ukraine, Kun became convinced that Rakovsky was engaged in outright sabotage, despite Lenin repeated reassurances this was not the case he was not convinced otherwise. This failure did not cease the interest of the Hungarian government in the Ukrainian question, indeed whilst dissident Ukrainian Marxists were being branded “counter-revolutionary” in Kyiv, in Budapest they had freedom to organise. A Ukrainian Communist Group was organised and began publishing a weekly *Chervona Ukraina* on from 24 May.¹⁵⁶ Its critical articles on the great disagreement in the international communist family caused some consternation with the authorities; as a result one Russian and one Pole were imposed on the editorial staff.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Vynnychenko, *Schodennyk*, 335.

¹⁵⁴ *Outline History of the Communist Party of Ukraine, Selected Works of Vsevolod Holubnychy*, Soviet Regional Economics, 1982, p. 75.

¹⁵⁵ Adams, *Bolsheviks in Ukraine*, 266.

¹⁵⁶ Halahan, *Z Moïkh spomyniv*, p 454

¹⁵⁷ Halahan, *Z Moïkh spomyniv*, p 455

The Ukrainian Kronstadt – The Nezalezhnyky rebellion

From the time the USDRP (Nezalezhnyky) leaders were released by the Cheka in early April their own situation and that of the country as a whole went from bad to worse. The harassment of their party continued unabated.¹⁵⁸

But this situation was changing rapidly; there had been a rash of strikes in March by impoverished workers who perceived the Bolsheviks had departed from their principles of self-management, whilst the number of peasant revolt soared to a total of 328 between 1 April – 15 June 1919.¹⁵⁹ As Kopanivsky reported in *Chervony Prapor*: “The food detachments have made the peasants discontented, just as those of the Hetman and the Germans did. These detachments have not only shot people and forcibly taken bread, but villages have revolted and killed detachments.”¹⁶⁰

The decision of the Nezalezhnyky to start ‘fighting between the Russian Bolsheviks and Ukrainian Bolsheviks’ appears closely related to the mutiny of the First Kyiv Soviet Division.¹⁶¹ The cause of the breach between their comrade Zeleny and the KP(b)U authorities was their decision to refuse the redistribution of the land of large sugar factories sought by the peasants. This fed into disagreements over their status as a regiment of the Red Army; *Chervony Prapor*, reporting that: ‘Zeleny stood and stands on the Soviet platform. The reason for the misunderstanding is Zeleny’s unwillingness to meld into one with the Red Army, and Antonov knows why he is unwilling.’¹⁶² It was one of numerous such ‘misunderstandings’ amongst Ukrainian units arising from Rakovsky’s renegeing on assurances they would maintain their autonomy as part of a Ukrainian Red Army within an independent Republic.¹⁶³ An official press

¹⁵⁸ Yu. Mazurneko whilst under arrest by the Cheka read he had been arrested in connection to the uprising led by Sokolovskii and others. After being released he was faced with the reality that some members of his party were participated in the uprising. *Dokymenti Trahichnoi Istorii Ukrayini*, p. 248-253.

¹⁵⁹ S. Ripetsky, *Encyclopaedia of Ukraine*, Brovkin, *Workers Unrest*, *Slavic Review*, p. 358.

¹⁶⁰ *Chervony Prapor*, 16, April 1919

¹⁶¹ Elias Tcherikover, *The Pogroms in the Ukraine in 1919*, New York, 1965, p. 373.

¹⁶² Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materially*, IV.

¹⁶³ Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materially*, IV.

campaign began against Zeleny, whilst on 8 March the *Kyivskyi Komunist* wrote with satisfaction that ‘Otaman Zeleny and his army, deployed in the region of Obukhiv, Hermanivka and Trypillia, maintains soviet power’, a week later the same paper was boasting ‘Zeleny is finally being liquidated.’¹⁶⁴

On 10 April the *Nezalezhnyky* concluded a draft agreement in Kyiv with the Ukrainian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries and representatives of the ‘official USDRP’ for the ‘organization of the uprising of the toiling masses of Ukraine against the occupiers’.¹⁶⁵ The aim was to establish a new Council of the Republic composed of representatives from each party, to lead a struggle to organize a people’s government based on workers and peasants soviets.

The policy of the parties signing this agreement, both in the Council of the Republic and in other organs of state power, must be built on the following principles: 1. Strengthening and defence of the independence and autonomy of the national Ukrainian Republic; 2. Establishment of the government of the Toiling People (excluding elements which exploit the work of others); 3. Organization of the national economy in the interests of the toiling masses and a planned transition from the capitalist order to the socialist, with the immediate expropriation of non-working landed property.¹⁶⁶

According to this ambitious plan, the struggle was to begin simultaneously throughout Ukraine; on the territory of the Ukrainian SSR by a Central Revolutionary Committee, on the territory of the UNR by the Council of the Republic, which would replace the Directory.¹⁶⁷

The *Nezalezhnyky* ran into problems from the start. The *Borotbistsy* was not prepared to break with Rakovsky government and condemned

¹⁶⁴ It is worth noting that Antonov complained of the manner the press wrote of insurgents describing articles as works of ‘fiction’. M. Malet, *Makhno and his Enemies*, META,

¹⁶⁵ After the UPSR Left changed its name to the ‘Ukrainian Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries (Communist) Borotbist’ at its Congress in March, the UPSR Central Current in April 1919 abandoned the addition ‘Central Current’ and called itself simply the Ukrainian Party of Socialist-Revolutionaries.

¹⁶⁶ Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materialy*, IV.

¹⁶⁷ *Dokumenti Trahichnoi Istorii Ukrayini*, p. 248-253.

the 'reckless escapades' of the *Nezalezhnyky*.¹⁶⁸ The idea did not rest easy with all *Nezalezhnyky* either, at a party conference in Kyiv on 22 April, a small group led by Hukovych and Pankiv opposed a rebellion.¹⁶⁹ They split forming the 'USDRP(*Nezalezhnyky*) Left' and began publishing the legal daily *Chervonyi Styah*.¹⁷⁰ Along with the *Borotbisty* and the KPU(b)U they later signed a joint statement charging Otaman Hryhoriiv's rebellion in the South as 'betraying the revolution'.¹⁷¹

Having played their hand events escalated when on 30 April the Central Committee of the KP(b)U decided to 'arrest and bring to trial for counter revolutionary activities all members of the *Nezalezhnyky* party, regardless of their point of view'.¹⁷² Not waiting for other parties the *Nezalezhnyky* established an All-Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee led by Yu. Mazurenko, Richtytsky, Avdiyenko and Antin Drahomyretsky, with a Supreme Insurgent Council of Mazurenko and Richtytsky, their principle armed force was the First Kyiv Soviet Division under Otaman Zeleny.

Basing itself in the town of Skvyr the *Nezalezhnyky Revkom* began to issue a series of proclamations the most famous being 'Order no.48' calling for a 'struggle against the betrayers of the toiling masses', the 'occupation government of Rakovsky,' and for the arrest of the 'traitorous Directory, which is negotiating with the French and other imperialists'.¹⁷³ In their armed struggle the *Nezalezhnyky* openly stood on the ground of the Bolsheviks, it was not so much a struggle against Soviet Ukraine but a struggle for power within the Ukrainian SSR. Explaining the rising to the Comintern the *Nezalezhnyky* wrote:

The All-Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee's task was to seize power quickly in the main centres of Ukraine and to proclaim an independent Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, expecting in this way to forestall the seizure of the Ukraine by Petlyura, demoralise his army, and thereby attract to their side

¹⁶⁸ Blakitny used precisely these words in telegram to Hryhoriiv, Adams, Bolsheviks in Ukraine, p. 234.

¹⁶⁹ Maistrenko, *Borotbism*, p. 139.

¹⁷⁰ *Chervonyi Styah* [The Red Standard], Lawryenko, An Annotated Bibliography, 133

¹⁷¹ Bilshovyk, 13, May 1919, *Dokymenti Trahichnoi Istorii Ukrayini*, p 137-139

¹⁷² *Dokymenti Trahichnoi Istorii Ukrayini*, p 130-132.

¹⁷³ Signed by Drahomyretsky, Dybichenko, Selyanskyi, Vlasivskyi, Syrotenko, Secretary: Didych. *Dokymenti Trahichnoi Istorii Ukrayini*, p 125-126.

his revolutionary but nationally oriented units. On the other hand, the All-Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee aimed at forcing the Russian communists to change their attitude on the Ukrainian question, and to come to an agreement with it by the very fact of establishing a really Ukrainian Soviet government.¹⁷⁴

The Nezalezhnyky uprising though larger than the Kronstadt insurrection of 1921 has remained undistinguished from the wider Ukrainian '*jacquerie*'.¹⁷⁵ Yet it was indeed historically unique in that the Bolsheviks were challenged not only by the demand for freely elected soviets, but by a Marxist party committed to social revolution.

The uprising spread rapidly within three or four weeks the *Revkom* ruled more or less constantly several districts of the Right Bank, whilst the insurgent otaman's Sokolovsky, Anhel and Yuri Tiutiunnyk were also associated with the Nezalezhnyky. The All-Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee formed a Central Rebel Committee after the addition to it of representatives of the UPSR and the Peasant Union from the end of June. According to Bolshevik descriptions the rebel camp numbered 25,000, though others put it at between 5,000-10,000.¹⁷⁶ Buoyed by their initial success Yurko Mazurenko, commander of the insurgents sent an ultimatum to Rakovsky, which began:

In the name of the insurgent Ukrainian toiling people I announce to you that the workers and peasants of Ukraine have risen up against you, as the government of the Russian conquerors, which, having draped itself in slogans that are sacred to us: 1. a government of soviets of workers and peasants, 2. the self-determination of peoples, including secession, and 3. the struggle against imperialist conquerors and plunderers of the toiling masses, desecrates not only these sacred slogans and destroys the real government of the workers and independent peasants of a neighbouring state, but accuses them for aims that are far from any socialist system.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Richtysky, 'Memorandum Ukrainskoi Kumunistichnoi, Dokumenty Ukrainskoho Komunizmu, p. 45-66

¹⁷⁵ Indeed many of the Kronstadt rebels were Ukrainian recruits enrolled in autumn 1920 influenced by the very ideas of the insurgency of 1919.

¹⁷⁶ Elias Tcherikover, *The Pogroms in the Ukraine in 1919*, New York, 1965, p. 250,

¹⁷⁷ Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materialy*, IV.

Rakovsky was given 24 hours to transfer power to the All-Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee and withdraw Russian troops from Ukraine. It was in Mazurenko's own words their 'swan song'. Having at first believed that they had taken the leadership of the spontaneous movement, events started to prove otherwise.

The Nezalezhnyky had been led to believe that there had been a change in the composition of the Directory of the UNR, 'that the reactionary wing had left, and that a new cabinet composed of socialists was nominated, which supports Soviet authority'. But this was not the case. A new government had been formed in Rivne on 9 April, it was dominated by the right-wing of the USDRP, headed by Borys Martos and with Petlyura still head of the Directory.¹⁷⁸ In a joint letter of the CC of the USDRP and UPSR to the rebel groups on 20 May they repeated many of their previous arguments characterising the 'intention of some parties (Left SRs and SD Nezalezhnyky) to establish some sort of Ukrainian communism is a complete fantasy.'¹⁷⁹

The official USDRP refused to accept that the CC members who remained in Kyiv could make such an agreement.¹⁸⁰ With the Army of the UNR starting to make advances, an 'additional agreement' was made in Chorny Ostriv on 9 June. The Nezalezhnyky were sidelined with an assurance of legal existence, on the condition of loyalty to a USDRP-UPSR government.¹⁸¹ The entrance of the UPSR's into the government caused significant disorientation in the insurgent movement, agitators were dispatched into rebel areas to undermine the Nezalezhnyky led *Revkom* and to subordinate rebel units to Petlyura. The lack of definite information

¹⁷⁸ There is confusion as to whether the socialists in the Directory's government even knew about the agreement made in Kyiv, Mazepa states the CC of the USDRP refused to recognise the right of those members who were in Kyiv to make such an agreement on their behalf.

¹⁷⁹ Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materialy*, IV.

¹⁸⁰ Borys, *The Sovietization of Ukraine* p 46, p. 431.

¹⁸¹ implemented with the following additions: 1. Organs of local power must be organized on the labour principle; 2. All parties (in particular the USDRP Nezalezhnyky), which stand for the defense of Ukraine's independence, must be legalized on the condition that they do not oppose the government with armed force; 3. This additional agreement must be transmitted by the government of the Directory.'

created further illusions that the entry of the UPSR's into the government was on the basis of the original Kyiv agreement.

Meanwhile the forces commanded by Zeleny suffered serious defeat in a four day battle between Obukhov and Tripilii in early July. Zeleny retreated towards Uman, whilst the Supreme Insurgent Council of Mazurenko forced to abandon its operations towards Kyiv fought their way through to Kamyanets on 18 July.

The rebels were met in Kamyanets with a welcoming rally being organized, but behind the scenes the moderate and conservatives were uneasy with these 'Ukrainian Bolsheviks'. The USDRP(Rez) were also reviewing their position, an extended meeting was held on 18–19 July with a clear picture of the political complexion of the Directory's government they considered previous information had been 'a provocation by duplicitous groups aiming to destroy the influence of Nezalezhnyky', that 'SR-SD, and later Petlyuraite-Denikinite, agitation caused a split in the rebel movement and a counter-revolutionary spirit and tendency'. As opposed to reconstituting Soviet power the situation 'had worked to the benefit of counter-revolution'. Mazurenko concluded:

The party overrated its strength, misread objective conditions and the consequences that could result from its false step, and was forced to concede defeat and to withdraw with its remaining force.¹⁸²

Faced with the prospect of the Russian Volunteer Army replacing Rakovsky's government, they issued a proclamation explaining their withdrawal and condemned the tactics of the uprising in a subsequent article in *Chervony Prapor* they explained their participation:

Some Nezalezhnyky organizations assumed the task of giving the rebel movement the ideological content of a struggle against the occupation policy of the Soviet government in Ukraine. They wanted to force the Soviet government to change its tactics but, lacking the strength to master the movement, were themselves beaten out of it by the Petlyurite counter-revolution, which itself was beaten by Denikin's counter-revolutionary army.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Mazurenko Dokymenti Trahichnoi Istorii Ukrayini, p. 248-253.

¹⁸³ Chervony prapor, no. 63, 25 December 1919.

Concerned by the presence of the Nezalezhnyky and encouraged by attacks on the 'Ukrainian Bolsheviks' in the official USDRP press, Petlyura's counter-espionage surrounded the rebel units, disarmed them and arrested Mazurenko, Tkachenko, Richytsky and others.¹⁸⁴ A rebel commander, Diiachenko was secretly shot without trial and his body thrown in a field. Those arrested were also to be shot, but the UPSRs threatened to break with the government and demanded the immediate release of the arrested. After several days the arrested UPSRs were released, but the Nezalezhnyky remained captives. It was only after 38 days that Petlyura's agents agreed to release them in the hope of gaining their support in the conflict with Denikin.

The Ancien Regime and breakdown of the Ukrainian Republics

In the summer of 1919 the Ukrainian SSR went into meltdown, the refusal of the KP(b)U to cooperate with other parties, contributed to their crisis. When they engaged in unity with some of the Borotbisty in May it was too little, too late. This disintegration changed the correlation of power between the Red Army and the Russian Volunteer Army, resulting in its occupation of large areas of Ukraine.

The breakdown of the Ukrainian SSR provided for a revival of the UNR, whose army arrived at Kyiv at the same time as Denikin. The official USDRP saw it as a victory over the Russian and Ukrainian Bolsheviks "history, as we foresaw, went according to Marx and not according to Lenin"¹⁸⁵ Yet despite circumstances which appeared favourable to the parties of the UNR, they did not gain hegemony of the popular resistance to Denikin.

¹⁸⁴ The moderate USDRP declared: 'We did not believe what seemed to us absurd, that the peasants wanted to exchange strong Russian Bolsheviks for a sickly 'Ukrainian bolshevism' of those, who began ad hoc to call themselves left SRs or Nezalezhnyky... We declared to the Chief Staff and to the All-Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee that they had become the victims of self-deception. The peasants rose up not for any Ukrainian soviet power, but in their own interests, both social and national'. The Nezalezhnyky were accused of threatening to execute 'those who agitated for the people's government and Otaman Petlyura.' *Vyzvolennia*, 25, July 1919 Khrystiuk, *Zamitky i materialy*, IV.

¹⁸⁵ *Robitnycha Hazeta*, 25, August 1919.

It became the point of the final political degeneration of the UNR played out in their encounter with Denikin.

Conclusion

In revisiting the role of the Ukrainian Marxists in the Ukrainian revolution it is necessary to recognise that vernacular current' has fallen victim to the prevalent paradigms that have dominated historiography for seven decades.¹⁸⁶

On the one hand the official Soviet history which served as a source of legitimacy for the system. This considered that the revolution in Ukraine had no independent aspect and presented the Russian Bolsheviks in the leading role of the entire revolutionary process of 1917–1920. The *omega* can be found in the literature of the national paradigm developed mainly, though not exclusively, by Ukrainian émigrés. It gives the national dimension primary place to the detriment and subordination of social questions. What is often overlooked is the similarity of the two paradigms: traits considered negative in one are portrayed positively in the other. This is notable in the treatment of the socialist element of the Ukrainian Revolution. Both orthodoxies put emphasis on their more moderate tendency as if it were their overall character and demean the relative influence of the vernacular revolutionary left.¹⁸⁷ Both also share a conception of continuity in history running from Lenin, Stalin to the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of an independent Ukraine in 1991.

One criticism made of the radical Ukrainian parties by the national is that whilst the contest remained an internal affair they were defeated by their moderate socialist rivals; evidence of this is seen in the revival of the UNR in late 1918, not the soviet republic they envisaged. The balance

¹⁸⁶ John-Paul Himka,, 'The National and the Social in the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917-20: The Historiographical Agenda.' *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 34,1994: 95-110. Edward Acton,, 'The Revolution and its Historians', 1-17, in Acton, E Cherniaev V, Rosenberg, W, eds, *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution 1914–1921*, London, 1997

¹⁸⁷ An example of this is Reshetar who writes that the USDRP saw Marxism as a merely a 'means by which national independence could be achieved', *The Ukrainian Revolution 1917–1920*, p. 51

was shifted towards them by the Russian Red Army.¹⁸⁸ In fact in 1919 the Bolsheviks could not have attained power without a shift internally.

The Ukrainian peasants rapidly went into opposition to the Directory to Petlyura's evaporating forces. A string of additional partisan brigades actively supported the soviet platform of the *Borotbisty* and *Nezalezhnyky*.¹⁸⁹ The Red Army which advanced on Kyiv its ranks were swollen by Ukrainian troops who went over en masse, seeing in the revolt the means by which to realize their social aspirations so neglected by the Directory.¹⁹⁰

In spring 1919 the creation of a Ukrainian republic based workers and peasants self-government with a plurality of pro-soviet parties was a viable possibility. Why was their conception of Ukraine not realized? An explanation can be found by the unresolved contradiction between the *internal* and the *external* of elements of the revolution. The tendency of the internal forces was apparent in the struggle of the Central Rada for self-government, in the proclamation of the independent Ukrainian People's Republic; and in the striving to create an independent Soviet Republic. In contrast, the tendency of the external forces was to subordinate Ukraine to Russia and retard the internal forces.¹⁹¹ It is was a striking example of a clash between what Hal Draper later described as the, the democratic conception of '*socialism from below*' versus the elitist conception of '*socialism from above*'.¹⁹² This overarching conflict was exacerbated by the existence of a dual centre inside Ukraine which fomented instability in the social revolution.

The rift that grew within the left stemmed not only from dissatisfaction with policy on the national question but an overall absence of self-government. The resulting rebellions most popular demand was that of democratically elected soviets. Ivan Maistrenko considers that the Bolshe-

¹⁸⁸ Amongst others this is the assessment of George Luckyj in his foreword to *Borotbism* in the 1954, New York edition.

¹⁸⁹ Mazepa, *Ukraina v ohni I buri revolutsii 1917–1921*, Vol.I, p. 28, Arthur Adams, *The Bolsheviks In The Ukraine The Second Campaign, 1918–1919*, New Haven 1963, p. 120-123, Even the Sich Rifleman, considered the staunchest of the Ukrainian regiments, declared their support for the soviet platform in March.

¹⁹⁰ Adams, i *The Bolsheviks In The Ukraine* p. 93

¹⁹¹ Richtysky, *Memorandum Ukrainskoi Kumunistichnoi Partii*, p. 58-59.

¹⁹² Hal Draper, *Socialism From Below*, Centre for Socialist History, Alameda, USA, 2001, p. 1-33.

viks had ‘more chances than the Jacobins to continue the national revolution, in other words to organize the creative impetus of the masses which was directed towards the construction of a new society’.¹⁹³ One such opportunity was in the calls in 1919 for the reconstitution of Soviet Ukraine as a genuinely independent and self-governing republic echoed the Hungarian Soviet Republic. Lenin wrote that the “Hungarian proletarian revolution is helping even the blind to see.”¹⁹⁴ This enlightenment didn’t reach Rakovsky’s or Lenin.¹⁹⁵ The opportunity was lost. The Romanian and Polish Armies closed the road to Hungary. From Budapest Bela Kun wrote to Lenin telling him that: ‘Forcing Rakovsky on the Ukrainians against their wishes, in my opinion, will be an irreparable mistake’.¹⁹⁶

The experience of this and preceding episodes brings into question the long accepted explanation for the fate of the Russian Revolution: the primary role of external factors in its degeneration and rise of Stalinism. Coupled with this assessment is the contention that unfavourable circumstances restricted the choices available to the Bolsheviks. Yet the idea that the one-party state in Russia arose from a lack of potential allies cannot explain events in Ukraine. Here the *Borotbisty*, unlike the Russian Left-SRs, did not go over to open revolt; indeed many of the other socialists who did were in part pushed by a situation created by the Russian Communists themselves.¹⁹⁷ They denied Ukraine the opportunity of a multi-party democracy based on the rule of the soviets.

For the Bolsheviks, socialism could not be developed in a single, isolated, backward country such as Russia without the aid of the more developed countries of Europe. Their project was predicated on extending

¹⁹³ Babenko (Maistrenko), *Bolshevist Bonapartism*, Nasha Borotba, Geneva, 1948, p. 6.

¹⁹⁴ V. I. Lenin, *Greetings to the Hungarian Workers*, Pravda, May 29, 1919 Lenin’s Collected Works, (4th English Edition, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1972 Volume 29), 387-391.

¹⁹⁵ *Outline History of the Communist Party of Ukraine*, Soviet Regional Economics Selected Works of Vsevolod Holubnychy, 75.

¹⁹⁶ Cable sent 8, July 1919, Tokes, Bela Kun and the Hungarian Soviet Republic, p. 202.

¹⁹⁷ V. A. Chyrko, *Krakh ideolohii ta polityky natsionalistychnoi partii ukapistiv*, *Ukrainskyi istorychnyi zhurnal*, Kyiv, no.12 (1968) p. 24

the revolution westward. The entire approach of *socialism-from-above* in Ukraine contributed to undermining the very perspective on which the October Revolution was based.

What is striking about this key juncture is that despite despair with the Bolsheviks there was not a collapse or decline in support for the soviet idea. Indeed the opposite occurred. In the case of the *Borotbisty*, having re-launched as the 'Ukrainian Communist Party (*Borotbisty*)' they witnessed a surge in support enabling the Red Army to repulse Denikin's offensive into central Russia.¹⁹⁸

One explanation for this mobilization is that it was based on a choice between restoration and resistance; this however does not fully explain Ukraine. This poses again the contention discussed above that whilst the contest remained an internal affair the pro-soviet groups lost to their more moderate rivals. Yet despite circumstances which would appear most favourable to the parties of the remnant UNR, they did not gain hegemony of the popular resistance in the winter of 1920. Yet such was the scale of insurgency in the winter of 1919–1920 that Denikin committed as many troops against Ukrainian partisans as against the Russian Red Army itself. This vice broke the Volunteer Army, bringing a decisive military and political turn in the revolution. But the surge of 1920 which defeated the Russian Volunteer Army could not re-create March 1919, as Vynnychenko concluded in his *Rebirth of a Nation*, if their plan had been accepted and a common soviet front established the Hungarian Republic of Councils and government in Bavaria would have been saved.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ A Volunteer army spy reported on the mood in threatened Petrograd: 'The worker elements, at least a large section of them, are still Bolshevik inclined. Like some other democratic elements, they see the regime although bad as their own... Psychologically, they identify the present with equality and Soviet power and the Whites with the old regime and its scorn of the masses.' Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy, The Russian Revolution 1891–1924*, Pimlico, 1996, p. 675.

¹⁹⁹ Vynnychenko, *Vidrodzhenia Natsii*, III:, p321.