



Ivan Maistrenko

# BOROT'BISM

*A Chapter in the History of the Ukrainian Revolution*

Edited by Peter Dornan and Chris Ford

*ibidem*

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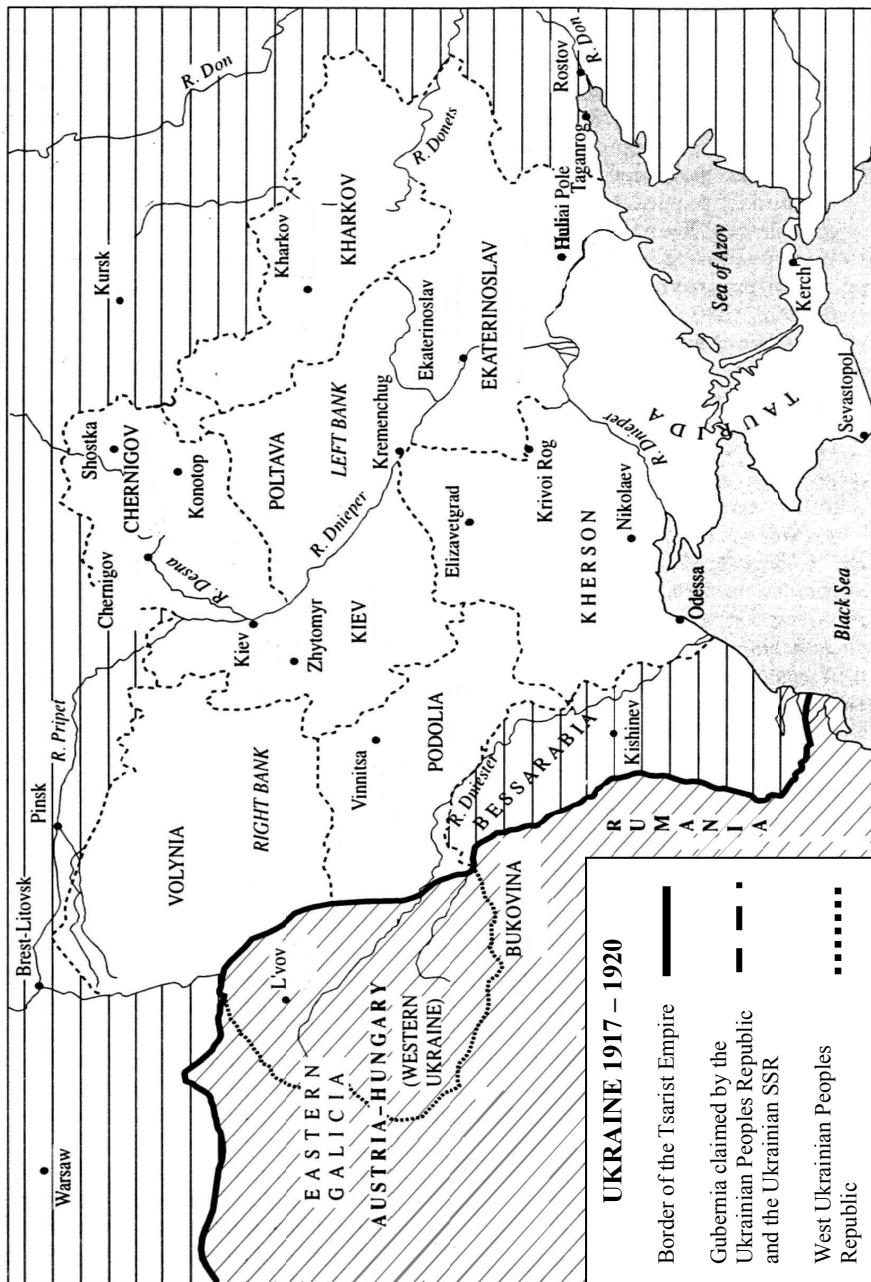
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The original edition of *Borotbism* was published in 1954 by the Russian Research Program, the translation of the text being made by Dr. George S.N. Luckyj and editing by Ivan L. Rudnytsky and Peter Dornan.

The book is republished in its original format with the addition of a new extended introductory essay. This means that transliteration is not in keeping with the official Ukrainian-English transliteration introduced in April 1996 i.e. Kyiv is transliterated as Kiev in the following text. The title has also been slightly amended from being *Borotbism a Chapter in the History of Ukrainian Communism* to *Borotbism a Chapter in the History of Ukrainian Revolution*; this was considered more reflective of the breadth of Maistrenko's study.



## **Social emancipation and national liberation: the dialectics of the Ukrainian Revolution**

VOLODYMYR VYNNYCHENKO, one of the most well known Ukrainian leaders in the 20th century, coined the phrase *vsebichne vyzvolennia* – “universal liberation”.<sup>1</sup> By this he meant the “universal (social, national, political, moral, cultural, etc.) liberation” of the worker and peasant masses. This striving for “such a total and radical liberation” represented the “Ukrainian Revolution” in the broad historical sense. However the expression the “Ukrainian Revolution” may also be used in the narrower sense, of the great upheavals aimed at this object, the most noteworthy of which marked the years 1917-1920.

According to Vynnychenko, the “universal current” which strove to realize this historical tendency of the revolution comprised the most radical of the socialist parties, the Ukrainian Social Democratic Workers' party (Independentists), or Nezalezhnyky, the Ukrainian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries-Borotbisty and the oppositional currents amongst the Bolsheviks in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Revolution cannot be understood without sharing the hopes, disappointments and aspirations of its participants. One such participant in those dramatic events which form the subject of this book is its author Ivan Maistrenko. His book tells the story of the revolution through the history of one element of that “universal current” – the Borotbisty.<sup>2</sup> Long out of print, *Borotbism* is one of the most valuable studies of the revolution; its republication will fill a gap in our knowledge of this pivotal moment of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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

2. Borotbisty is the plural form of Borotbist derived from the name of their party newspaper *Borotba* meaning struggle.

## 1. THE HISTORICAL CAUSES AND SOCIAL FORCES OF THE UKRAINIAN REVOLUTION

On the eve of the revolution Ukraine was partitioned between the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires, the majority of its territory having been held in a colonial position by Tsarist Russia for over two and a half centuries. But contrary to the prognosis of a number of analysts, the development of capitalism did not render permanent its status as a so-called “non-historic” nation.<sup>3</sup> Though this was not for the want of trying; in the mind of Moscow there was no Ukraine; only the southern province known as *Malorossia* – ‘Little Russia’. To maintain it in this position Ukraine was subjected to systematic institutional discrimination through policies of Russification.

Whereas movements of the subject peoples of the Austro-Hungarian Empire such as the Czechs, and Ukrainians of Galicia developed apace, this was not so across the border. There the Ukrainian movement developed slowly in a protracted struggle with Tsarist absolutism, which responded with a hostility and severe repression qualitatively different from its attitude towards other nationalities. This can be explained by the role Ukraine played in the foundation of the Russian Empire. Its ingestion by the Muscovite state, which usurped the name of the medieval state of Kievan ‘*Rus*’, brought with it the acquisition of the black earth belt, the banks of the Black Sea and its large natural resources of Ukraine. This strengthened its ability to take part in world economic life and was the step which transformed it into the Russian Empire, a factor which is of no small importance in the mind of Russian nationalism to this day.

The social and economic geography of Ukraine was changed drastically over the centuries of Russian rule, transformed into what the economist Mykhaylo Volobuyev characterized as a colony of a “European type”.<sup>4</sup> As opposed to the more

<sup>3</sup> See: Levynsky, Volodomir, *L'internationale socialiste et les peuples opprimes*, Prague, 1920, Rosdolsky, Roman, *Engels and the 'Nonhistoric' Peoples: the National Question in the Revolution of 1848*, Glasgow, 1987.

<sup>4</sup> Volobuyev was an economist and government official heading a branch of the commissariat of education. His

underdeveloped “Asiatic type” colonies, the development of capitalism resulted in a peculiar mixture of backwardness and modernity in Ukraine. This arose from a combination of the Russian state forcing the growth of capitalism and the extensive intervention of European capital. Whilst European capital appeared to relegate Russian capital to second place, it did not diminish but compounded Ukraine’s position.<sup>5</sup> Volobuyev observed a dual process in the economy of the Russian Empire, a tendency towards its concentration on a capitalist basis and a centrifugal tendency to integrate with the global economy directly:

Hence, the question of whether there was a single Russian pre-revolutionary economy should be answered as follows: it was a single economy on an antagonistic, imperialist basis, but from the viewpoint of centrifugal forces of the colonies oppressed by her, it was a complex of national economies.... The Ukrainian economy was not an ordinary province of Czarist Russia, but a land which was placed in a colonial position.<sup>6</sup>

The development of capitalism in Ukraine was not organic; rather, development occurred to suit the needs of others. Within the colonial framework this impacted on the state, capital, labor relations and composition of the social classes. The capitalist class on the territory of Ukraine was overwhelmingly non-Ukrainian, prompting Ukrainian socialists to consider their nation as *bezburzhaunist'*, bourgeoisless.<sup>7</sup> In 1917 the number of wage workers stood at approximately 3.6 million, with almost half in

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articles ‘On the Problem of the Ukrainian Economy’ were published in *Bilshovyk Ukrayiny* January 30th and February 16th, 1928. Though an ethnic Russian he was a spokesman for the Ukrainian communists and defender of Ukraine’s right to control its economy. Volobuyev showed how central control and continued Russian chauvinism perpetuated the exploitation of Ukraine within the USSR. He was attacked by the Stalinist authorities and killed in the 1930’s. M. Volobuyev, ‘*Do problemy ukraïnskoyi ekonomiky*’, in *Dokumenty ukraïnskoho komunizmu*, Ivan Maistrenko Ed, New York, 1962, 132-230.

5 Volobuyev, *Ibid* p.165.

6 Volobuyev, *Ibid*, p.167

7 The national composition of the nascent capitalist class in 1832 reveals the composition of factory owners as: Russian 44.6 %, Ukrainian 28.7, Jewish 17.4 %, Foreign 3.6 %, Other 5.7 %. The Composition of merchants as: Russian, 52.6% Ukrainian, 28.7 %, Jewish, 17.4 % Foreign 1.9 %, Other 2.4 %, Volobuyev, *Ibid*, p.154.

the mining and steel enclave of the Donbas. Inclusive of their dependents, the working class generically amounted to some 6.5 million - 21 percent of the populace, with Ukrainians in the industrial centers of Katerynoslav (now Dnipropetrovsk), Odessa, Kharkov and Kiev comprising only 17 percent.

The working class also bore the stigmata of colonialism, emerging at the historic conjuncture when capitalism was shifting into the phase of imperialism. This saw the division of the globe based on the relative strength and influence of the core metropolitan states, a phase characterized by a further concentration and centralization of capital, shifting from *laissez-faire* with the rise of cartels, trusts and state monopolies. This witnessed a transformation not only in capital but within the working class itself, seeing the growth of a privileged strata, an 'aristocracy of labor'. Whilst it is rarely acknowledged, Russian imperialism was no exception. In Ukraine the working class was comprised initially of mainly Russian migrant labor inclusive of an upper layer in the higher paid, skilled posts.<sup>8</sup> Ukrainian new entrants found Russian not only the language of the state and administration but of the labor regime, the factory owner and foreman, their immediate class adversary.<sup>9</sup>

These developments posited the national question at the point of production through a division of labor which relegated Ukrainians to the low paid, flexible labor strata, under-represented in heavy industry and over-represented in service and agricultural sectors. Like the Irish emigrants in England, they served as a pool of cheap labor, with one difference; it was in their own country. It was not coincidental that Russian nationalism expressed itself in the most extreme forms in Ukraine where the notorious *Black Hundreds* were disproportionately strong. This chauvinism permeated the working class. The observations of a local blacksmith in Yuzovka (now Donetsk)

8 Friedgut, Theodore H., *Iuzovka and Revolution*, Princeton, 1989, Vol.I: 208.

9 Richtysky, Andrii 'Memorandum Ukrainskoi Kumanistichnoi Partii Kongresovi III Komunistichnoho Internationalu', *Nova Doba*, no.4, 1920 in *Dokumenty Ukrainskogo Komunizmu*, New York, 1962 p.45-66, Bojcn, 'Approaches to the Study of the Ukrainian Revolution', *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* Vol. 24: 1 (summer 1999), Friedgut, *Ibid*, p.208-144.

during the 1905 revolution provide flavor: "Whose running this? A bunch of *Khokholy* and *Zhidys*", that is Ukrainians and Jews.<sup>10</sup>

Ukraine's process of urbanization followed the pattern of being complementary of the needs of Russian and European capital, with Russians and other non-Ukrainian minorities hegemonic. Ukrainians constituted about a third of the population; nine out of ten Ukrainians lived in the rural districts, mostly classed as peasants with whom Ukrainian was synonymous.<sup>11</sup> It was here more than anywhere that the social and national questions became enmeshed in an explosive cocktail.

Capitalist growth required an end to serfdom but the 'Emancipation' of 1861 did not solve the agrarian problem; by 1905 it was acute with a growing a wave of discontent across the Empire. In 1917, there were 4,011,000 peasant households in Russian-ruled Ukraine. Of them, 15.8 percent had no land under cultivation, 20 percent owned between 0.1 to 3.0 *desyatinas* per farm and 55.6 percent owned 3.1 to 10.0 *desyatinas* per farm.<sup>12</sup> These sections lived in relative scales of poverty, whilst the remaining 8.6 percent owned more than 10.0 *desyatinas* each and were wealthy peasants - *kukuls* [kulaks].

Half of the poorer farms rented their land and made a living as sharecroppers or hired labor. The situation was exacerbated by the growth of the rural populace which outpaced the peasants' ability to purchase land. The rate of impoverishment grew apace. In the 'bread basket of Europe' the *kukuls* and landlords exported 24 percent of grain harvests whilst the majority lived at subsistence level or hunger. The health of Ukrainian peasants was on a scale markedly worse than European Russia.<sup>13</sup>

The intimate relationship between the agrarian and national questions flowed not only from the class composition of the

<sup>11</sup> Verstiuk, Vladyslav, 'Conceptual Issues in Studying the History of the Ukrainian Revolution', *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, Vol. 24, no. 1, 1999, p.14. Weinstein, H.R, 'Land Hunger and Nationalism in the Ukraine 1905-1917', *The Journal of Economic History*, Vo.2, No.1, May 1942, p.24.

<sup>12</sup> A system of weights and measures that was used in Imperial Russia. A *desyatina* = 2.7 acres.

<sup>13</sup> This was reflected in the higher level of rejection of peasant conscripts to the Russian Army, Weinstein, *Land Hunger*

Ukrainian nation, but directly from the nature of the landowners. Alongside the Russian state, church and monasteries, a third of arable land was held by a class of which three out of four were Russians or Poles.<sup>14</sup> The alienation of the peasants was captured by the Ukrainian Bolshevik Vasyl Shakhray who, looking through the eyes of a peasant, wrote:

The city rules the village and the city is 'alien'. The city draws to itself all the wealth and gives the village nothing in return. The city extracts taxes, which never return to the village in the Ukraine. In the city one must pay bribes to be freed from scorn and red tape. In the city are warm fires, schools, theatres, and music plays. The city is expensively dressed as for a holiday, it eats and drinks well, many people promenade. In the village there is, besides hard work, impenetrable darkness and misery, almost nothing. The city is aristocratic it is alien. It is not ours, not Ukrainian. It is Great-Russian, Jewish, Polish, but not ours, not Ukrainian.<sup>15</sup>

This position as a colony of Russia and semi-colony of European capital was further evident in the economic inequality which prevailed. In 1882 to 1906, less than half of the revenue raised in Ukraine remained for reinvestment in Ukraine; a trend that continued year after year.<sup>16</sup> Karl Kautsky observed that for Ukraine:

Capitalism develops in only one dimension for the Ukrainian people – it proletarianizes 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.<sup>17</sup>

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and *Nationalism*, p.26-28.

14 Weinstein, *Ibid*, p.31.

15 Skorovstanskii, V. [Vasyl Shakhray] *Revolutsiia na Ukrainsi*, Saratov, 1918, p.7-8.

16 Porsh, Mykola, *Pro Avtonomiyu Ukrainskoy*, Prosvita, Kiev, 1908, 76.

17 Cited in Bojcn, *The Working Class and the National Question in Ukraine, 1880-1920*, (Graduate Program in Political Science, York University, Toronto Ontario 1985, p.71

In this historical context we may delineate the problems that faced the rebirth of Ukraine. Which of the social classes could attain hegemony and transcend the deep social cleavages, establishing a cohesive and viable system? To adopt a Gramscian approach, only a fundamental class which occupies one of the poles in society could become hegemonic, securing the national-popular elements, and appear as the representative of the general interest. Whilst the emergence of national states had previously coincided with the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie, the nature of the capitalist system in Ukraine negated such a role for the bourgeoisie as the unifying ethico-political element.

For a “nation of workers and peasants” with “no nationally conscious bourgeoisie” it logically followed that the hegemonic role should correspond to the nation’s character, making the emancipation of labor integral to the quest for national liberation.<sup>18</sup> Concurrently the leading theorist of the Ukrainian Social Democrats, Mykola Porsh, concluded in 1907 that 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-proletarianized peasant movement.<sup>19</sup>

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18 Vynnychenko, *Vidrodzhennia natsii*, Vol.II, Kiev-Vienna, 1920, p. 102.

19 Porsh, *ibid*, p.193.

## 2. PROBLEMS OF THE UKRAINIAN NATIONAL-DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

These contours of the Ukrainian movement were already apparent in 1905, having produced its own organic intellectuals and organized in political parties, unions, co-operatives, cultural and *Prosvita* educational associations. The movement which emerged at the start of the 20th century contained an energetic current which was strongly influenced by socialist thought and the struggles of the worker-peasant masses. It was the starting point of a new period for the Ukrainian movement.

With the fall of the autocracy in 1917 the Ukrainian Revolution soon differentiated itself from the wider Russian Revolution, setting as its task the achievement of national liberation through the creation of a self-governing Ukrainian state. The period between February and October 1917 was one of unprecedented “national enthusiasm among the masses of Ukrainian peasants, soldiers and worker masses” in the conflict with the Russian Provisional Government.<sup>20</sup>

The movement was a bloc of the petty bourgeoisie, peasantry and the Ukrainian section of the working class, centered in the Ukrainian Central Rada. At its head was Mykhaylo Hrushevsky, Ukraine’s greatest historian, elected chairman on behalf of the Ukrainian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries (UPSR), and the Marxist Volodymyr Vynnychenko, popular writer and leader of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Workers Party (USDRP), elected vice-president and then first president of the General Secretariat, the autonomous government of Ukraine. For all its imperfections arising from its improvised character, lack of experience and political culture, it was the most democratic parliament in Ukraine’s history. The Central Rada was a mass assembly consisting of councils of peasants’, soldiers’ and workers’ deputies elected at their respective congresses; it later expanded

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20 Richtysky ibid, p.45-66,

its constituency, drawing in the national minorities.<sup>21</sup> This included the pioneering organization of Jewish national autonomy in Ukraine.<sup>22</sup>

The Ukrainian word '*rada*' and Russian '*sovet*', meaning council, are direct transliterations, and such a political translation was made on many occasions with Ukrainians declaring support for soviet power and the Central Rada because it was a soviet. The revolution in Ukraine contrasted with the 'dual power' situation in Russia between the soviets and the Provisional Government. This was due to the national peculiarities of the revolution which gave rise to a rich diversity of popular organs of self-government, such as the Ukrainian Peasant Union, councils of workers' deputies, soldiers' councils, factory committees and the Ukrainian Central Rada which drew delegates from many of these and other bodies which appeared in the localities of Ukraine.

The Central Rada did not exist in a vacuum; it faced the burning questions of the world war, agrarian revolution, spiralling economic crisis and demands for workers' control. If the project of national liberation was to succeed, it needed to provide solutions. In this regard all parties were tested by the movement from below which gave little room for prevarication for those at the helm. But whilst all the leading parties in the Central Rada identified themselves as socialists, there were fundamental differences in their conceptions of the revolution and requisite political strategy. On the burning questions they prevaricated and at key moments lagged behind the pace of the popular movement, even on the national question with which it was preoccupied.<sup>23</sup> As a result, relations strained within the

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21 Vynnychenko, *ibid*, Vol. I: p.102.

22 Goldelman, Solomon, *Jewish National Autonomy in Ukraine 1917-1920*, Chicago 1968, Silberfarb, Moses, *The Jewish Ministry and Jewish National Autonomy in Ukraine 1918/19*, New York, 1993.

23 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

Central Rada, between its ruling circles drawn largely from the intelligentsia and the middle class, and the rank and file of the Ukrainian movement. The emergence of this milieu, which increasingly diverged from the radicalism of the rank and file, pointed to the danger of bureaucracy even within a body as democratic as the Central Rada.<sup>24</sup>

This divergence was, as Vynnychenko explained, not about personalities but politics. The prevailing opinion was that the creation of a sovereign state was the “precondition of the success of its struggle for political and social liberation”.<sup>25</sup> This perspective corresponded with the predominant view held by most socialists that the revolution in the backward Russian Empire could only be bourgeois democratic in its nature. There were differences over who comprised the camp of the ‘revolutionary democracy’, and whether it should be an alliance of the working class with the liberal bourgeoisie or an independent bloc of the workers and peasantry, excluding the latter. Either way, few believed that the requisite material and social conditions were available for a socialist revolution. In Ukraine the national question brought an additional dimension to this debate. As the urban working class was largely Russian, critics of a socialist revolution considered that the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ would exclude the Ukrainian peasantry, negating national liberation.

These traditional opinions were challenged, on the one hand by the popular movement from below and on the other hand from above by the antagonism towards the Ukrainian national democratic movement by the liberal and conservative wings of

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but that they acted as “democrats, republicans and national revolutionists rather than socialists.” Vynnychenko, *ibid*, Vol.2, p.89-90.

24 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.

25 This was the view expressed by The “Provisional Organizing Committee” in 1918 which consisted of most of the leaders of 1917 of the centre and right tendencies of the UPSR.

Russia. The opinion steadily grew in the socialist parties that they were in a transitional phase; the task being to “carry the bourgeois democratic revolution to its conclusion” and “carry out a social revolution.”<sup>26</sup> The historical orthodoxies have largely neglected this tendency within the Ukrainian Revolution, considering its location of origin as Bolshevik influence in the soviets, or even in Russia itself. This view holds but a partial truth, for to grasp fully this conjuncture it is necessary to recognize that this tendency also grew organically out of the development of the Ukrainian Revolution itself; a fact illustrated by the increased levels of class consciousness of workers and peasants, confirmed in the evolution experienced by the Ukrainian socialist parties.<sup>27</sup> One criticism levelled at Maistrenko’s *Borotbism* was that he adopted a “somewhat doctrinaire approach” and “party history in the Bolshevik sense.”<sup>28</sup> Yet it was precisely such organs through which the subjective forces articulated their aspirations and solutions during the revolutionary process.

In Russia this radical turn saw the different strands of the popular movement brought into unity by the Bolshevik-Left SRs leadership in the soviets, which caught up with the changed mood. The key feature of the revolution in Ukraine was not of such harmony but of the divergence between the subjective forces.

The Russian or Russified population in the cities was cut off from Ukrainian towns and villages and linked instead economically and psychologically with Russia. They saw themselves as part of a wider Russian Revolution. The result was that the leading role of large sections of the urban labor movement was assumed by leaders who stood apart from the Ukrainian Revolution. Whilst the Russian Social Democratic

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26 Richtysky, *ibid.*

27 The USDRP Congress in October 1917 declared that the Central Rada: “because of its class composition is incapable of maintaining a proper and resolute revolutionary-democratic tactic, inclining at every turn toward petty bourgeois nationalism.” All the resolutions were published in *Robitnycha Hazeta* issues of, 1st, 5th, 7th October 1917

28 Carson, George Barr, *The American Slavic and East European Review*, Vol.15, No.3, Oct, 1956, p.426

Workers Party (RSDRP) Mensheviks participated in the Central Rada, except for a brief period, the RSDRP (Bolsheviks) in the majority remained aloof from the national revolution, shaking the ground around them, and considered it “chauvinist”.

What rapidly emerged as the salient feature of the revolution in Ukraine was a split between the Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian section of the working class, the alienation of the peasantry from the urban workers and the separation of the social and national dimensions.<sup>29</sup>

The question which could make or break the Ukrainian Revolution was the agrarian question. The engines of the movement were both spontaneous and organized through the All-Ukrainian Peasants Union, and its founder the Ukrainian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries; between them they represented millions of peasants. The agrarian revolution grew apace outstripping the Central Rada.<sup>30</sup> Peasants and returning soldiers proceeded to expropriate estates and redistribute the land; whilst the Central Rada repeatedly made radical declarations it delayed taking decisive action until the convening of a Constituent Assembly.<sup>31</sup>

In its popular base there was increasing feeling that the inactivity of the Central Rada in the social sphere could not be justified by the obstacle of the Provisional Government. 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

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29 These problems of the revolution were highlighted in the writings of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks Serhii Mazlakh and Vasyl Shakhray in *Do khvyl: Shcho diyetsia na Ukrainsi i z Ukrainoyu*, in 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.

30 The USDRP policy was concurrent with the prevailing views of the Second International on the agrarian question. Favoring highly developed large farms, they considered it necessary to keep them from division, destruction and partition. This however gave an appearance, sometimes realized, of pushing against the tide of the agrarian revolution.

31 The Central Rada's indecision on the land question undoubtedly reflected the division within the Ukrainian peasantry itself. As early as the spring of 1917 the richer strata were making common cause with the landlords, fearing that the revolution of the poor and middle peasantry would not leave their holdings untouched. The Rada tried to appeal to both camps, relying increasingly on the Free Cossacks, the militia of the wealthier peasantry, while making declarations for the benefit of the poor and middle peasantry.

Rada seized power in November and declared the Ukrainian People's Republic (UNR), it offered the possibility for a new beginning. The national question was the strategic key to unifying the popular elements of the revolution; *a priori* this required that if the UNR was to be viable, it had to be the unifying means by which social and national objectives were realized.

A favorable conjuncture for a rapprochement between these divergent elements arose from two trends offering the possibility of a secure foundation for the Ukrainian People's Republic. The first was the growth in support in the USDRP and the UPSR for the regeneration of the Central Rada on a thoroughly socialist basis.<sup>32</sup> The second was the surge of support in the councils of workers' and soldiers' deputies recognizing the UNR and seeking its re-election to widen its constituency to include the soviets.<sup>33</sup> In seven out of the ten of Ukraine's largest cities the councils of workers' and soldiers' deputies supported the formation of a socialist government with the Central Rada as its supreme organ. This development found support from a significant section of the Russian and Jewish social democrats splitting the Bolsheviks in Ukraine.<sup>34</sup>

That this rapprochement was a viable possibility can be seen from the example of short-lived initiatives in two of Ukraine's major cities. In Kiev the Bolsheviks and Central Rada co-operated to defeat the forces of the Provisional Government. This united front took organizational form in a 'National Committee for the defense of the revolution' created by the Central Rada, composed

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32 This was expressed at the Fourth Congress of the USDRP and the Third Congress of the UPSR which 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, Khystyuk, *Zamitky i materialy*, II.

33 This support for re-election was particularly strong in towns in the northern gubernias and in Kiev, Kremenchuk, Kharkov, Luhansk, Kherson, Katerynoslav, Odessa and Mykolaiv.

34 The Kiev Bolshevik Yevgenia Bosh records that the Third Universal was welcomed by "a significant number of soviets in Ukraine". Similarly Shakhryay, 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." Bojcun, *Working Class and the National Question*, p.306, Skorovstanskii, *Revoliutsia na Ukraini*, p.74.

of representatives of all revolutionary organizations in Kiev and socialist parties in Ukraine, including representatives of the Councils of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies of Kiev, Kharkov, Katerynoslav and Odessa.<sup>35</sup> It sought to extend its authority throughout Ukraine, and appealed to all revolutionary organizations to join local committees. It expressed what the majority of workers, peasants and soldiers sought: a socialist coalition based upon the popular revolutionary organizations.<sup>36</sup> In Kharkov the workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils established a 'Kharkov Province Military Revolutionary Committee' combining the soviets and the Free Ukrainian Rada, trade unions, factory committees and socialist parties. It had a "left orientation and a strong Ukrainian component".<sup>37</sup>

The crisis in industry, land seizures and chaos in the military all pointed in one direction - a socialist transformation. But the forces that could bring this about did not combine and moved unevenly. The rapprochement necessary for its realization was retarded. Neither the fractious Bolsheviks in Ukraine, nor their leadership in Petrograd were unified around such a perspective from **within** the Ukrainian People's Republic.<sup>38</sup> Their approach was tactless, taking no account of the Ukrainian peculiarities and attempting to superimpose the model of the Russian Revolution.<sup>39</sup>

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35 *Robitnycha Hazeta*, no.169, 27 October 1917.

36 In effect, this new body formed what the majority of workers, peasants and soldiers had been striving for, a socialist coalition based upon the popular revolutionary organizations. It was the refusal of the Menshevik and Russian SR. leadership to meet this demand, which had persuaded the majority of Bolsheviks in organizing the overthrow of the discredited bourgeois-socialist coalition Provisional Government. The Mensheviks and right-SRs, along with the Bund, sabotaged the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution in Kiev. They pushed a motion through the Mala Rada, condemning the Bolshevik/Left SR. seizure of power in Petrograd. Ukrainian socialist parties had gone along with this, not out of support for the ousted Provisional Government, but because the Menshevik and Bund delegates on the Central Rada, happened to be Russian and Jewish minority representatives, whom the Ukrainians were anxious to keep on board. In practice, the Central Rada was prepared to acknowledge the Soviet government in Russia, but not its designs upon Ukraine.

37 Wade, Rex A. *Red Guards and Workers Militias in the Russian Revolution*, Stanford, 1984, p.261-262.

38 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 Kiev Committee. See, Prymak, Thomas M., 'The First All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets and its Antecedents', *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, No.6, Spring 1979.

39 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.

The result compounded the divisions, hindering those wishing to give the emerging socialist transformation a Ukrainian character and form.

The All-Ukrainian Congress of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1917 was a strategic disaster. The whole event was ignited by the surprise ultimatum of the Russian Council of People's Commissars threatening war against the UNR.<sup>40</sup> The leaders of the UNR denied proportional representation to the urban soviets and some USDRP leaders ignored the mandate of their own party to seek agreement with the Bolsheviks.<sup>41</sup> In an atmosphere of recriminations the Congress endorsed the Central Rada, but it was a pyrrhic victory, and an opportunity lost.<sup>42</sup> The internal fragmentation produced two rival bodies claiming to be the government of the Ukrainian Peoples Republic. One was in Kharkov appointed by the 'Central Executive Committee of the All-Ukrainian Soviet of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies', elected by a subsequent smaller Congress of soviets. The other was formed by the Central Rada in Kiev, which also claimed to be elected by "Ukrainian congresses of peasants, workers and soldiers".<sup>43</sup> It was

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40 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 "immediate 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.

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

42 Those delegates disaffected with the events in Kiev walked out and made their way to the rival Congress of Soviets of the Donbas, Kryvyi Rih area being held in Kharkov on 9th December. 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, Kharkov, 1923, p.121-122.

43 It would be an error to view the Kharkov government as solely founded in order to give the Russian war against the UNR the appearance of an internal conflict. According to Shakhryay: "Not one responsible member of the party ventured to protest against the promulgation and creation of the Ukrainian Peoples Republic. On the contrary, in complete agreement with the programmatic demand of the right of nations to self-determination, they openly or at least tacitly stood on its ground. The will of the Ukrainian nation emerged, the Ukrainian people separated into a Republic, the federative union with other parts of Russia. Well and good! We in this Republic will wage a war not against the Ukrainian Peoples Republic, not in order to strangle it. No! This will be a struggle for power within the Ukrainian Peoples Republic - this will be a class

testament to the strength of the Ukrainian Revolution that the issue of contention had become not whether there should be a Ukrainian Peoples Republic but the class composition and political nature of its government.

The Ukrainian democracy cracked; seven left wing members of its Central Committee of the UPSR were arrested for plotting a pro-soviet uprising. This failure of the left was mirrored by the failure of the right UPSRs which headed the government of the UNR in Kiev. In this conflict the Central Rada was victim to its own policies which had sown disillusionment amongst its popular base, illustrated in the “fratricidal war” with Soviet Russia.<sup>44</sup> Many Bolshevik workers had been inclined to an accommodation with the Ukrainian movement and did not see the war as being of their making. The Soviet forces that were mustered were incredibly small, approximately 6,500 strong.<sup>45</sup> The Central Rada also ran into trouble. Despite the country being awash with arms there was no will to fight and many took a neutral position or defected.<sup>46</sup> For all the efforts of the Russian Bolsheviks to make the war one of classes it took the form of a national conflict, which paralyzed much of the Ukrainian left. The Kharkov government was not so much a puppet but stillborn and largely ignored by Soviet Russia’s troops.<sup>47</sup>

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struggle”, Skorovstanskii, *ibid*, p.110-111.

44 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, *ibid*, p.46-47.

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

46 Vynnychenko wrote later: “We exerted valiant efforts in order to stop that ‘invasion’, as we used to call it, to win over our soldier masses, which were inert towards us, to our side. But they displayed no wish to fight against the Bolsheviks even in Kiev, fraternizing with them and taking their part. The Ukrainian Government could not rely on any of the units quartered in Kiev; it had no reliable unit even for its own protection.” Vynnychenko, *ibid*, Vol.II, p. 216-217.

47 There was a retreat from the Kharkov 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. Shakhray, 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 Kharkov 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 Antonov brought into Ukraine from Russia, an army moreover that looks at everything Ukrainian as hostile and