

Solzhenitsyn and the 'Russian Question', Part 23 WHO ARE THE UKRAINIANS? - Part Five.
1917-18

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THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

So at the point which we've now reached the Provisional Government in Petrograd recognised the Ukrainian Rada as legitimately wielding limited power over five Russian provinces mostly on the West ('right') bank of the Dnieper. The Rada itself claimed authority over more or less the whole present day Ukraine - Ekaterinoslav included, as well as present day Zaporozhia, the Donbass area. Even that fell short of a maximal demand that would have included the Kuban area and therefore virtually the whole of the Russian Black Sea coast. The Rada, however, was unable to exercise anything like even the limited authority it had been given by Petrograd. Pipes (Formation of the Soviet Union, pp.66-7) quotes Dmytro Doroshenko¹, at the time a member of the small Rada and governor of the Chernihiv gubernia, as saying:

'None of the General Secretaries ever appeared outside Kiev, despite resolutions of the General Secretariat to the contrary. To the provinces were sent neither orders, not instructions, nor information, but only proclamations. Kiev would not even answer questions. Provincial governors [such as himself - PB], coming to Kiev, could not without much trouble, obtain personal interviews on urgent matters with the head of the secretariat.'

The real 'action' was occurring outside the remit of the Rada - in the army, with Ukrainians refusing to accept orders not given in the Ukrainian language or by Ukrainian officers, and by the peasantry, dispossessing landlords, killing or other wise persecuting Jews, and organising into spontaneous bands of 'free cossacks' which might or might not team up with the political projects of the Bolsheviks, the White Russians or the Ukrainian nationalists.

This wildness seems to distinguish Ukraine from the rest of Russia. According to Pipes, talking about the later period of the Civil War:²

'In the winter of 1918-19, when the Civil War got underway in earnest, the Bolsheviks ruled all of Great Russia, with a population of some 70 million. The territories controlled by Kolchak and Denikin had only 8 or 9 million inhabitants each. This immense preponderance in population - 4:1 and even 5:1 in the Bolsheviks' favour - gave the Red Army a much larger mobilisation base. The Communists had within their borders all the manpower they needed: when in the critical engagements of 1919 they suffered heavy losses from casualties and desertions, they had only to call up more peasants, put them in uniforms, hand them rifles, and ship them to the front ... Nor was the more-than-tenfold preponderance in numbers the Red Army's only manpower advantage. By controlling Great Russia, the Communists ruled an ethnically homogeneous population. The Whites, by contrast, operated from territories inhabited largely by non-Russians who either took little interest in the outcome of the Civil War, or else, for their own national reasons, preferred a Red victory. A high proportion of White forces consisted of Cossacks more eager to gain independence for their own homelands than to build a Russian Empire ...'

¹ Doroshenko had been a member of the Society of Ukrainian Progressives and subsequently became, in 1918, minister of Foreign Affairs in the German-supported hetmanate of Pavel Skoropadsky. He went into exile in 1919 but continued writing extensively on Ukrainian history, taking academic posts in Vienna, Prague, Munich, Berlin, Warsaw, and finally in Winnipeg. During the Second World War he was based in German occupied Prague. Politically he remained faithful to Skoropadsky's monarchist tradition

² Richard Pipes: *Russia under the Bolshevik Régime*, London, Harvill/HarperCollins, 1994, pp.11-12.

The 'Cossacks' he's referring to are of course the Don, Kuban and Terek Cossacks, much better structured than the 'Free Cossacks' of the Ukraine who evoked the Cossack-Haidamaki tradition of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but had no real continuity with it.

Doubtless Pipes's vision of a homogenous Russian peasantry easily accessible to mobilisation would have to be modified if examined in detail but the mere fact that that could be said marks a clear distinction from the Ukraine where it would be completely unthinkable.

According to the Russian language Wikipedia the first Free Cossacks came into existence soon after the February revolution (machine translation):

'In mid-March 1917, the peasant Nikodim Smoktiy from the village of Gusakovo in the Zvenigorod region organized the Gusakov Hundred. Later, the peasants decided to convene a Cossack congress in Zvenigorodka , Kiev province [now in Cherkassy oblast, south of Kyiv province, on the West bank of the Dnieper - PB], and develop a statute of organization for it. In early April, all the elected hundred commanders arrived at the congress and adopted the statute of the organization " Free Cossacks " (Ukrainian "Vilne Kozatsvo") (according to other sources, the district congress of the Zvenigorod region took place only at the end of July 1917) ...

'Initially, the goals of the Free Cossacks were "protection of the freedom of the Ukrainian people" and the maintenance of public order, which was threatened by bands of deserters promoted by the Bolsheviks. The formation of subdivisions took place according to the territorial principle: volosts formed hundreds, volost hundreds (companies) of counties made up a kuren (battalion); kurens of counties (districts) - a regiment, regiments of provinces - a kosh (division). The officers were elected. Weapons were acquired through tax collection.

'In 1917, the Free Cossack movement spread to Kiev, Volyn, Kherson, Poltava, Chernihiv provinces. The paramilitaries consisted mainly of peasants (as a rule, former soldiers and non-commissioned officers of the Russian Imperial Army), as well as workers, in particular in Kiev. About 60,000 organized descendants of Ukrainian Cossacks were represented at the All-Ukrainian Congress of the Free Cossacks in Chyhyryn on October 16-20, 1917. Russian General Pavel Skoropadsky ... took over the leadership of the Free Cossacks by October 1917.'

According to the English language wikipedia account of Skoropadsky this took place on October 3rd (it rather curiously isn't mentioned in the Russian language Wikipedia account of Skoropadsky). So, whichever calendar is being used it precedes the Bolshevik seizure of power (October 25/November 7). Skoropadsky was a highly decorated general in the Russian army descended from the brother of Ivan Skoropadsky, hetman of the Zaporozhian Cossacks in the eighteenth century. According to Xenia Eudin: 'After the death of Hetman Ivan Ilich Skoropadsky in 1722, no hetmanship was recognised by the Russian Tsars.'³

Pavlo Skoropadsky was the commander of the 34th Army Corps of the Russian army. In August 1917, on the orders of General L.G.Kornilov, appointed Supreme Commander-in-Chief in July, following the failure of Kerensky's June/July offensive, the 34th Army Corps was 'ukrainised.' Russian soldiers and officers were transferred to other parts of the army and the corps was renamed the First Ukrainian Corps of the Russian Republican Army, still under Skoropadsky's command (Russian Wikipedia account). It is likely that his hetmanship of the Free Cossacks was a very nominal affair. Skoropadsky's importance is that he was to become 'Hetman' of Ukraine during the German occupation in 1918 and thus come closer than the Rada ever did to presiding over the whole territory. The importance of the Free Cossacks is that from early 1917 the Ukrainian peasantry was organising itself independently both of what we might call the official nationalism of the Rada in Kiev and of the different Russian political parties that were contending for power, and

³ Xenia Joukoff Eudin: 'The German occupation of the Ukraine in 1918', *The Russian Review*, Vol 1, No 1, Nov 1941, p.96. Following the Wikipedia account, Ivan Skoropadsky was the loyalist successor of Ivan Mazepa who had gone into rebellion against Peter I.

that in doing so they were evoking the Cossack/haidamaki tradition. All tendencies recognised that the peasantry was where the substance of the society lay and that they had to be won over.

In the early days of the October revolution, the Rada had co-operated with the Bolsheviks, for example 'using its influence with the railroad personnel in order to prevent all the reactionary military units from leaving the confines of the Ukraine, including the Rumanian and Southwestern fronts, for the suppression of the uprisings in Petrograd and Moscow.' (Pipes: Formation, p.70). But both the Bolsheviks and the Rada were very undecided as to whether or to what extent they could support each other. From the Bolshevik point of view, on the one hand Ukrainian separatism weakened the Provisional government, on the other hand it would weaken them once they got firm control of Russia. From the Ukrainian nationalist point of view, on the one hand the Bolsheviks were clearly rivals for power, on the other hand the revolution gave them the opportunity to free themselves from the restrictions imposed on them by the Provisional Government.

After initially condemning the Petrograd rising 'the Rada finally decided to throw its forces into the struggle on the side of the Bolsheviks' demanding 'the withdrawal from Kiev of all reinforcements which the government had brought into the city during the previous weeks to suppress the anticipated Bolshevik coup. At the same time, Ukrainian patrols occupied strategic points in the city and prevented pro-government units from liquidating the centres of rebel resistance ...

'While the fighting for the city was still in progress, the General Secretariat took steps to enlarge the scope of its authority. Several Secretariats, previously vetoed by the Provisional Government, were added, and an announcement was made to the effect that the jurisdiction of the Rada extended over additional provinces.' (Pipes: Formation, p.72). It was in this context that the Rada, on November 6/19, issued its 'Third Universal', proclaiming full political autonomy for Ukraine as the 'Ukrainian National Republic (UNR), albeit in a federal relationship with Russia. Though taken by surprise by this, the Bolshevik controlled soviets in Kiev, Ekaterinoslav, Odessa and Nikolaev recognised the authority of the Rada. Quoting Pipes (Formation, pp116-7):

'The Kahrkov Soviet alone refused to do so, and not only pledged allegiance to the Bolshevik government in Petrograd, but as the month went on assumed an increasingly hostile attitude toward the Ukrainian political centre. The authority of the Rada over the whole country was as ineffective after the proclamation of the Republic as it had been in the days of the Provisional Government. In most towns the Rada had at its disposal volunteer haidamak detachments, an asset of somewhat dubious value since, as future events were to show, they deserted the Rada in some very critical moments. The rural areas continued to rule themselves in isolation from the rest of the world.'

The Bolsheviks were still committed to convening a Constituent Assembly, and elections for this opened on November 12/25. The results in Ukraine revealed a sharp distinction between town and country, industrial workers and peasants but among the peasants there was overwhelming support for the Ukrainian populist parties, particularly the Ukrainian Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries Socialists running on a common ticket as 'Ukrainian Socialists' - 1,256,271 in Kiev province, 749,860 in Poltava, 656,116 in Podolia, 569,044 in Volhynia, 556,012 in Ekaterinoslav, 484,456 in Chernihiv. Only 114,000 in Kherson but there the Ukrainian Social Revolutionaries running on a common ticket with the Russian Social Revolutionaries gained 493,000 votes. In Kharkov it seems the 'Ukrainian Socialists' did not run but the joint Ukrainian and Russian Social Revolutionary ticket won 795,558. I need to stress that these are figures for the province as a whole, so mostly the rural areas, not the towns where in general the all-Russian parties - Bolsheviks, Social Revolutionaries running independently of the Ukrainian SRs, Kadets, Jewish Nationalists - did better in a numerically much smaller population.⁴

Relations between the Rada and the Bolsheviks, always strained, took a nose dive when, at the end of November (OS), the Rada, suspecting a possible coup, arrested the leading Bolsheviks and

⁴ Figures and discussion from Steven L. Guthrie: 'The Popular base of Ukrainian Nationalism in 1917', *Slavic Review*, Vol.38, No 1, March 1979, especially the chart on p.36.

expelled the military units loyal to them. According to the Russian language Wikipedia account of Simon Petliura, the Prime Minister, Vynnychenko, was to blame him for the conflict.

The re-established secretariats had included Military Affairs with Petliura as Secretary-General. Petliura, independently of the Bolsheviks and against their wishes, set about trying to construct a Ukrainian national army by encouraging Ukrainian soldiers to leave the various fronts and gather in Kiev. Which meant that Ukrainians on the front now had a 'choice' between obeying Petliura and the Rada, claiming to be the government of Ukraine, or obeying the new Bolshevik government in Petrograd, still committed to continuing the war. In addition to its problems with the Germans Petrograd was now also faced with a Don Cossack rebellion led by General Aleksei Kaledin, joined on 15th November (Old Calendar, I think) by Mikhail Alekseyev. Alekseyev had been Chief of Staff of the army under Nicholas and as such had played an important role in persuading Nicholas to resign. Subsequently he served as Chief of Staff under Kerensky and arrested General Kornilov on suspicion of wanting to organise a rebellion. Kornilov was soon to join him and Kaledin in helping to organise the Don rebellion.

On 4/17 December the government in Petrograd sent the Rada an ultimatum complaining against the disruption of the army at the front and the disarming of 'Soviet regiments and the Workers Red Guard in the Ukraine' but also demanding that they prevent the movement of troops to the Don region and 'agree to aid the revolutionary army in its fight against the counterrevolutionary Kadet-Kaledin rebellion ...

'In the event that no satisfactory answer to these questions will be forthcoming within 48 hours, the Council of People's Commissars will consider the Central Rada in a condition of open war against the Soviet government in Russia and the Ukraine.'

In reply the Rada's General Secretariat declared that it supported the right of the Don Cossacks to return to their homeland. By contrast they would not permit the Russian Communists the use of their territory to wage war against the right of the Don Cossacks to self determination. They did not recognise the Council of Peoples Commissars as the legitimate government of all Russia. (Pipes: Formation, pp.119-20).

In a further twist to the story, the Kievan Bolsheviks had placed their hopes in the summoning of a Congress of Soviets in Kiev which they naturally thought they could dominate. The Rada agreed to the holding of the Congress but in the event managed to pack it with their own supporters - 'virtually every Ukrainian co-operative and military and political organisation in the country sent at least one representative, with the result that on the appointed day the Ukrainian delegates simply flooded Kiev. When the Congress of Soviets opened, 2,500 delegates demanded admission. The handful of Bolshevik representatives - a hundred at most - was lost in a crowd of pro-Rada deputies.' A reading of the Petrograd ultimatum provoked a storm of indignation and a resolution which concluded:

'Declaring that the reply of the General Secretariat given on December 17 [NS] is the proper answer to the attempt of the Peoples Commissars to violate the rights of the Ukrainian peasants, workers and soldiers, the All-Ukrainian Congress of Peasants', Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies deems it necessary to take all measures in order to prevent the spilling of brotherly blood and appeals warmly to the peoples of Russia to stop, with all means at their disposal, the possibility of a new shameful war.' [Pipes: Formation, pp.121-2]

The Bolsheviks walked out of the meeting and went to Kharkov, where the Petrograd government was gathering its forces for a confrontation with the rebels in the Don.

EXCURSUS ON THE UKRAINIAN PEASANTRY

Ukraine in the nineteenth and early twentieth century has it in common with Ireland that it was a fundamentally rural society, The industrial East - Kharkiv/Donbass - was essentially alien to the Ukrainian speaking population both in terms of its economic activity and ethnically. The industrial working class was largely Russian and therefore identified with what Ukrainian Nationalists

regarded as an alien power. The analogy that can be drawn with Northern Ireland is obvious. Another parallel that can be drawn with Ireland lies in the absence of a native aristocracy, though, while the Irish aristocracy had gone down fighting (and to some extent worked from abroad to preserve the culture by supplying priests) the 'Ukrainian' or 'Ruthenian' aristocracy had adopted a foreign identity as Poles and Catholics (here a comparison might be made with Wales). But in both Ukraine and Ireland the landlord class was ethnically different - in the case of Ukraine, Polish, Russian and perhaps to some extent German, with absentee landlords often employing Jews as their agents and rent collectors. So that what could be read as class hatred was often confounded with inter-racial hatred, hence Mikhnovsky's *Ten Commandments*, which one could cite as the founding manifesto of Ukrainian nationalism, regards Poles, Russians, Jews and Germans as enemies with whom no compromise is possible not specifically for religious or ethnic reasons (the manifesto doesn't have a distinct Orthodox content) but because they are 'oppressors' of the Ukrainian people.

One element that distinguishes the Ukrainian peasantry from the Irish peasantry, however, is that in Ireland the Catholic Church formed a bridge between the life of the people and the culture of the educated class. A two way bridge it might be said. The Greek Catholic Church played a similar role in Galicia for the 'Ruthenians' living under the Austrian Empire but I can't see that the Orthodox Church, concentrated singlemindedly on the administration of the sacraments, played that role in Russian Ukraine, where the Tsarist government was anxious to prevent any popular educational initiatives in the Ukrainian language, thus leaving the peasantry to its own devices. With results we are about to see ...

THE RADA AND THE BOLSHEVIKS

Returning to the events of 1917-18, the increasing tensions between the Bolsheviks and the would-be Ukrainian government in Kiev coincided with the opening of the peace negotiations between the Bolsheviks and the Central Powers at Brest-Litovsk (in modern Belarus). The talks had begun on November 20th/December 3rd. At the time the Bolshevik government in Petrograd, following from the Provisional Government, still recognised the Ukrainian 'Rada' in Kiev as a legitimate administrative centre, while the Rada's 'Third Universal' still acknowledged a federal relation with Russia. In these circumstances the Rada sent representatives to Brest-Litovsk as part of the Russian delegation. The Ukrainians however, apparently, arrived late and the Russians began negotiations without them. The Germans saw an advantage in this and encouraged the Ukrainians to negotiate separately from the Russians.⁵

On December 12/25, the Bolsheviks, under the command of Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko (who had overseen the storming of the Winter Palace), seized power in Kharkov and Odessa, proclaiming themselves to be the legitimate government in Ukraine. Kharkov and Odessa were still outside the area that the Provisional Government had recognised as the legitimate responsibility of the Rada in Kiev so the Bolshevik declaration was not incompatible with a continued recognition of the Rada as a devolved administration. But it seems hardly a coincidence that on December 11/24, the Ukrainian representatives in Brest-Litovsk asked for full negotiating rights 'noting that Ukrainian interests cannot be represented by the Bolsheviks.'⁶ This was granted on December 26th.

As we've seen, it was on December 4/17 that the relationship between the Kiev-based Bolsheviks and the Rada finally broke down and the Kievan Bolsheviks - led by Yuri Piatakov and Vladimir Zatonski - fled to Kharkov, where they played an important role in developing a more more militant Bolshevik approach in Ukrainian affairs. But it wasn't until a month later - 4/17 January that

⁵ Review by: Jerzy Borzęcki of *Niemiecka interwencja militarna na Ukrainie w 1918 roku* by Włodzimierz Mędrzecki, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 79, No. 4 (Oct., 2001), p.762.

⁶ Włodzimierz Mędrzecki: 'Germany and Ukraine between the Start of the Brest-Litovsk Peace Talks and Hetman Skoropads'kyi's Coup', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1/2 (June 1999), p.48.

Kharkov moved against Kiev. The leading figure in promoting opposition to the Bolsheviks had been Simon Petliura. Hrushevsky and Vynnychenko had been very unhappy about Petliura's approach and deprived him of his command. He was dismissed and removed from the General secretariat on December 18/31, replaced by the more Socialist orientated Mykola Porsh. As a result Petliura formed his own private militia - The Haydamak Kosh of Sloboda Ukraine ('Sloboda Ukraine' being a term used to refer to the Kharkov region).⁷ Petliura was then called on after January 4/17 to defend Poltava against the advancing Bolshevik forces but hastily recalled to Kiev when the remaining Bolshevik elements there attempted an uprising on 16/29 January. According to Pipes (Formation, p.125) the Bolsheviks were slaughtered after surrendering. According to the Russian Wikipedia account Petliura tried to prevent this from happening.

The forces in conflict were themselves chaotic elements thrown together almost by chance. Petliura's forces in Kiev were, according to Pipes, heavily undermined by Bolshevik propaganda. They had also been only recently 'augmented by units retreating into Kiev from the front.' (Formation, p.125). but the Bolshevik forces advancing from Kharkov - the 'Red Cossacks' led by A.M. Muraviev, a former White officer with Socialist revolutionary sympathies - were also quite incoherent. In Pipes' account (p.126):

'The invading army consisted largely of Russian industrial workers - who looked upon rough and ready methods of dealing with opposition, real and imaginary, as the best way of completing the "job" they had been assigned - and of criminal elements, enlisted in the so-called Red Guard, who took advantage of the war to pillage, loot and murder at will. Discipline was extremely lax. The Red soldiers were frequently drunk, and organised pogroms against the local population which their commanders had no means of curbing. Nor did Muraviev himself help the situation. An unbalanced, sadistic megalomaniac who, according to Antonov-Ovseenko, delighted in talking without end about "the flow of blood".'

They took Kiev on January 28th/February 8th (in February the Petrograd government adopted the New Calendar and from then on Old Calendar dates become irrelevant) and according to Serhy Yekelchuk's admittedly very Ukrainian Nationalist account:

*'in January 1918 [OS - PB], the first blood was spilled in clashes with Bolshevik detachments advancing on the Ukrainian capital. The martyrdom of the young Ukrainian volunteers at Krutyin late January would later become the symbol of resistance to the Bolshevik onslaught, but at the time it was the prolonged bombardment of Kyiv by red troops and their mass terror in the occupied city that shocked contemporaries. The reds hunted down not just tsarist officers, but also members of the Central Rada and the Ukrainian army; indeed, anyone who spoke Ukrainian in public. The prominent Ukrainian Bolshevik Volodymyr Zatons'kyi nearly got shot on the street because his card, identifying him as a minister in the Soviet Ukrainian government, was in Ukrainian. Fortunately, he also served in Lenin's all-Russian cabinet and was able to produce another ID in Russian, which bore Lenin's personal signature.'*⁸

Since Zatonsky had left Kiev with Piatakov in December one assumes he must have come back with the Red Cossack army.

The Rada fled from Kiev to Zhitomir but, according to an account by a German military reporter, Collin Ross (Mędrzecki: Germany and Ukraine, p.51): "The Rada, however, wasn't welcomed there and its members have since scattered around the country. Some localities remained under the control of the Ukrainian troops, but lacked contact with one another." According to the Russian Wikipedia article on Petliura the problem in Zhitomir was the presence of Czech troops who still saw themselves as at war with the Central Powers. They had played a distinguished role in Kerensky's June/July offensive and were then given the right to mobilise Czech prisoners of war, forming the 'Czech Legion' which was soon to cause such difficulties for the Red Army in Siberia.

⁷ Unless otherwise stated references to Petliura are usually based on the very informative Russian language Wikipedia account.

⁸ Serhy Yekelchuk: 'The Ukrainian Meanings of 1918 and 1919', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1/2 (2019), p.76.

The Czechs in Zhitomir presumably knew that on February 9th - the day after the Bolshevik seizure of Kiev, the Ukrainian delegates in Brest-Litovsk had signed a peace treaty with Germany.

THE GERMAN OCCUPATION

According to Mędrzecki (pp.49-50), the Germans had already decided in principle 'to give military help to the UNR' on 5th February, prior to the signing of the Peace Treaty. A final decision was made on 13th February, quite independently of the Ukrainians, though Hrushevsky rushed through a formal request prior to the formal issuing of marching orders, which reached the German forces on 17-19th February. Pipes (p.130) says: 'The Soviet forces were incapable of offering even token resistance. As soon as news of the occupation had reached Kiev, all government and party organisations began feverishly to evacuate eastward. During the twenty days the Soviet Ukrainian government had been in control of Kiev it had not had the time to establish its authority over the country. The Germans entered the city on February 18/March 3, 1918, one week after the panic-stricken Communists had departed for Poltava.' This gave Petliura the opportunity to enter Kiev ahead of the Germans with his own forces and organise a 'victory parade' including a display of Red Army prisoners, much to the displeasure of the Germans and of the Rada itself when they arrived the next day. As a result Petliura was again deprived of all his military functions.

Pipes goes on to say that the Bolsheviks in Kharkov, who had always been unhappy about the Kievan adventure were not unduly saddened by these events:

"economically our basin is connected with the Petrograd Republic," mused one of their press editorials on March 6, 1918, shortly after the Germans entered the city of Kiev, "politically it is also more convenient for us to join the Russian Federation. The conditions of national life in the provinces of Kharkov and Ekaterinoslav [modern Zaporozhia and Donbass - PB] also do not tie us to the Ukraine. The proletariat of the Donets Republic must focus all its efforts in the direction of asserting its autonomy and independence from the Ukraine.'

But the Germans did not stop their advance with Kiev. By the end of April they held 'the entire Ukrainian territory, Crimea and the territories adjacent to the Northern Caucasus'⁹ ie the Donbass. Some areas of South-Western Ukraine were taken by the Austrians. They were now entering territory that had been ceded to them when the Russians, at Lenin's insistence, finally signed the Brest-Litovsk treaty on March 3rd, the very day of the German entry in Kiev. The Kievan and Kharkov based Bolsheviks, deeply unhappy with each other, gathered at Taganrog, in the Kuban.

The Germans didn't have a totally easy time of it. They entered with large forces and they encountered opposition. According to a 'Heeresgruppe Eichhorn report of 29 July 1918 on operations' quoted by Mędrzecki:

'The enemy we were fighting against included representatives of different groups. They were mainly Bolshevik bands and the Red Guard of the Russian government sent to Ukraine. Among them were Russian ex-service men, sailors, factory workers, the unemployed, and peasantry with no farmland of their own, who had nothing to lose and were looking forward to high pay and the right to rob. This opinion is corroborated by Austrian and German captives. As a matter of fact, we were fighting against people with no military training. They can easily operate machine guns, but cannot make use of artillery. Their main striking force are armored trains ... In general, their defensive operations were unplanned and unprepared. The Bolsheviks' munitions were perfect - they were taking advantage of Russian magazines. The number of horses - about right. The Czechs were an exacting enemy - well organized, skilled.'

Looked at from a Russian point of view this was a huge loss of Russian territory but from a Ukrainian Nationalist point of view it was the liberation of the whole area of what was later to become the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, done in alliance with the Rada as legitimate government of Ukraine. The Rada's democratic credentials may have been questionable but the

⁹ Xenia Joukoff Eudin: 'The German Occupation of the Ukraine in 1918', *The Russian Review*, 1941, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Nov., 1941), p.91.

parties that made it up - most notably the Ukrainian Socialist revolutionaries - had quite convincingly won in the elections for the Constitutional Assembly (terminated by the Bolsheviks on January 6/19). Pavlo Khrystiuk, who had been one of the Ukrainian negotiators in Brest-Litovsk and who was very critical of subsequent German policy in the Ukraine, described the Brest-Litovsk accord as:

*'the only peace treaty not burdened with imperialistic zeal after the World War ... It was peace without annexation ... and enabled the principle of self-determination. Yes, Galicia was situated outside of Ukrainian boundaries, but guarantees were obtained for the national development of the Ukrainians living there. Moreover from the economic point of view, the peace treaty was advantageous. It introduced a law of reciprocity in the relations between Ukraine and the Central Powers.'*¹⁰

According to the arrangement made at Brest-Litovsk, the restored Rada was expected to supply Germany-Austria with a million tons of grain. According to Borzęcki's review of Mędrzecki's book (p.762) 'this was a moderate amount that Ukraine would normally be able to export with no difficulty.' But the situation was not normal. Both the Bolsheviks in Kharkov and the Socialist-Revolutionary dominated Rada in Kiev had a policy of dispossessing landlords and distributing the land among the peasants. Ideally this would have entailed an initial seizure of the land by the state prior to redistribution but neither the Bolsheviks nor the Rada had been in a position to do it. The peasantry were in the process of doing it for themselves. Nor was the restored Rada now in any position to establish order. They had never been regarded with any great respect and now their power was based on the bayonets of the German army that many of the peasants had only recently, as soldiers, been fighting. In a report dated 11th March 1918, members of the German delegation in Ukraine wrote (Mędrzecki, p.52):

'The people usually are not well disposed, often even hostile, specifically the peasants and workers who are afraid that the German invasion will imperil the achievements of the revolution. It is obvious that most of the peasants and workers are armed. The true authority of the Rada only goes as far as our military power . . . There certainly is excess food, but only among peasants, as the large estates were plundered, and the only chance of obtaining grain by the traders is to offer peasants goods in return.'

General Wilhelm Groener, Chief of Staff of the German Supreme Army and the dominant figure in German policy throughout the whole period of the occupation, wrote on 15th March (Mędrzecki, p.53): "The people who are at present unsuccessfully trying to rule Ukraine are like children. They believe that a government can exist without a bureaucracy. It is irritating."

On 26th March 1918, the German Foreign Office wrote to Baron Mumm (Philip Alfons Mumm von Schwarzenstein, the German ambassador in Kiev):

'Our military intervention in the Ukraine is justified by the request of the Rada for help. We have recognized the Rada as the legal government of the Ukrainian Republic and have concluded peace with its representatives. The above facts must determine our further relations with the Ukraine if we wish to be consistent in our policy. Moreover, the main purpose of our occupation is to secure the export of grain from the Ukraine to countries of the Central Powers. Our representatives in Kiev must cooperate in every way possible to realize this aim. There must be no vacillation on our part. The government of the Rada must be continuously reminded that we are fulfilling its request and are strengthening its position, but that we demand that all measures possible be taken to secure the export of grain. We must stress the fact that the prospect of grain supplies alone can redress the balance in our peace agreement with the Ukraine. Consequently, we must insist that the Ukrainian government carry out its peace obligations ... The Rada should issue an order forcing every actual possessor of land to cultivate that land fully. Such an order need not interfere with future regulations concerning the principle of land ownership.' (Eudin: German occupation, pp.93-4).

¹⁰ Quoted in Mędrzecki: Germany and Ukraine, p.65, fn 15. Lacunae as in Mędrzecki.

But in April the Germans took matters into their own hands. On 5th April, Field Marshall Hermann von Eichorn, appointed on March 31st as head of 'Army Group Eichorn-Kiev', issued an order that:

'The harvest shall belong to those individuals who sow the seeds... Any peasant who takes more land than he can cultivate, is doing irreparable harm to the Ukrainian state and the Ukrainian people, and, therefore, must be punished. Whenever the peasants are unable to sow seed, the landlords must do this sowing if they have remained on their estates. . . Half of the harvest from such planting shall belong to those who sowed the seed, and half to the peasants. Anyone who attempts to plunder or destroy [crops] shall be severely punished.' (Eudin, p.94)

And on 25th April, without consulting the Rada, he established German Courts Martial with jurisdiction over the Ukrainians:

'Irresponsible individuals and unions are attempting to terrorize the population. In violation of good order and of every right, they are making arrests to intimidate those who, in the interests of their native land and the new government, are ready to work in cooperation with the Germans. I shall allow no lawless action where German troops are stationed. I am, therefore, establishing special courts to serve as a protection for Kiev and to bring to trial all individuals whose actions are illegal. My instructions are as follows:

'1. All persons found guilty of violating public order and all criminal offenders against German troops and their allies, or persons connected with these criminal offenders, shall be tried by German court-martial.

'2. Any violation of public order, especially as a result of street meetings, is forbidden.

'3. Any attempt against public tranquillity or safety through agitation in the press, or by any other means, is also forbidden. Newspapers guilty of such attempts shall be immediately suppressed.

'4. The existing Ukrainian courts shall continue their activity but shall not concern themselves with criminal offences which, according to Article I of this order, are now under German jurisdiction.

'This regulation shall go into effect immediately after its publication and after it is made known by posting in the streets and public places....' (Eudin, pp.94-5)

Three days later, on April 28th, 'a German lieutenant with a detachment of heavily armed soldiers' (Eudin) entered the Rada building where Eichorn's order was under discussion, put an end to the session and obliged members to surrender their weapons. Leading ministers were arrested and imprisoned. The way was open for the assumption of power the following day, 29th April, by the 'Hetman', Pavel Skoropadsky.

THE HETMANATE

At the end of 1918, it was Petliura who overthrew Skoropadsky - or at least walked into Kiev after the Germans had left taking Skoropadsky with them. But at the end of 1917 it would have looked as if Petliura and Skoropadsky were allies. In the wake of the Bolshevik seizure of power in Petrograd, Skoropadsky had placed his First Ukrainian Regiment under the Rada, despite his own dislike of the Rada's Socialist policies. He backed Petliura's policy of trying to develop a Ukrainian regular army, against Vynnychenko's policy of a people's militia, and of obstructing the movement of Bolshevik forces through Ukraine to combat the Don Cossacks - though his motives were probably less Ukrainian nationalist and more anti-Bolshevik. Like Petliura he was regarded with suspicion by Hrushevsky and Vynnychenko. According to the Russian language Wikipedia entry for 'Skoropadsky, Pavil Petrovich' (machine translation):

'After the removal of Semyon Petliura from the post of General Secretary of Military Affairs and the appointment of Nikolai Porsh in his place , Skoropadsky's relations with the leaders of the UCR deteriorated completely. The combat general, who was awarded the highest military awards, could not understand why the actual problems of organizing the army were being solved by a person who had never had anything to do with it.

*'All the efforts of Skoropadsky to prove the necessity of the existence of the Ukrainian regular army were in vain. Corps Skoropadsky on the eve of winter was without food, winter clothes and shoes. This attitude demoralized the fighters, and they began to go home. Experiencing constant pressure from the leadership of the Central Rada, on the eve of 1918, General Skoropadsky was forced to resign from the post of ataman - commander-in-chief of the troops of the Central Rada. At the same time, he also left the post of commander of the 1st Ukrainian Corps [18] . With the departure of Skoropadsky from the post of commander in chief, the Ukrainian army practically collapsed.'*¹¹

Skoropadsky was thus more than simply a creation of the Germans. He could be said to represent that section of Ukrainian political opinion that supported independence or autonomy but opposed the radical economic reforms of the Socialist revolutionaries and Social Democrats. In particular he had, initially at least, the support of the 'Ukrainian Democratic Grain Party'. This was formed - as the Ukrainian Democratic Party - in Lubny, Poltava region, at a constituent assembly in June 1917 attended by some 1,500 peasants and twenty landlords. Its basic principle was respect for private property. Its programme was worked out by Vyacheslav Lipinsky. According to the account in the Encyclopedia of Ukraine Dmytro Dontsov was a prominent member. Lipinsky and Dontsov were the leading theorists of the two most prominent factions in post war Ukrainian politics in Poland - Lipinsky as theorist of 'Ukrainian hetman nationalism', arguing for a constitutional monarchy with Skoropadsky as first monarch, Dontsov for 'integral nationalism', which was the founding doctrine of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists.

Another prominent member of the Grain Party was Mykola Mikhnovsky. Mikhnovsky had been implicated in an attempted coup against the Rada after the Second Universal which he judged too soft with regard to the Provisional government. As a result he was so to speak exiled to the Romanian front but with the October Revolution he returned, settling in the Poltava region which was the stronghold of the Grain Growers Party. According to his Russian language Wikipedia entry: 'Mykola Mikhnovsky began to lean towards the monarchical principle of organizing power in Ukraine, and now, having cast aside socialist illusions, he linked the future of Ukraine with the implementation of a democratic grain-growing program.'

The Wikipedia account continues:

'In his Memoirs, Pavel Skoropadsky mentioned that everyone he asked to evaluate Mikhnovsky was warned not to invite Mikhnovsky to any position in power in any situation. Skoropadsky himself could not understand why there was such a unanimous negative attitude towards Mikhnovsky. He himself "did not see anything bad in Mikhnovsky, except for his extreme chauvinistic Ukrainian line of thought." Despite this, the hetman seriously considered Mikhnovsky as a candidate for the post of prime minister of the Ukrainian state. He was impressed by his anti-socialist views and his recognition of the right of peasants to private ownership of land. Pavel Skoropadsky did not forget that the Ukrainian Democratic Grain Grower Party played a big role in the overthrow of the Central Rada .

'Skoropadsky recalled these events as follows:

"From the Poltava province , from several councils, several hundred grain growers arrived in Kiev, who belonged to the UDCP [the grain party - PB], and as far as I remember, Sergey Shemet headed them. The grain growers demanded changes to the Third Universal of the Central Rada, in which, as is known, private property was liquidated. The appearance of genuine peasants, people of the earth, people invincible ... caused a strong impression in Kyiv. On the one hand, the enemies of the Rada raised their heads, on the other hand, even greater confusion appeared in the ranks of the Central Rada ... these peasants were unconvinced [sic. Should surely be 'convinced' - PB] independentists, supporters of independence ... who went through the school of Mikhnovsky ... the creation of Ukraine and small private property was their motto, although they rejected everything."

¹¹ Unless otherwise stated the source for this section will probably be the Russian language Wikipedia accounts for Skoropadsky, Petliura, Mikhnovsky, Lipinsky, the Ukrainian Democratic Grain Party and Ukrainian Peoples Community. All quotes machine translated.

The primary aim of the Germans and Austrians was to feed their own population and army in defiance of the British-imposed blockade. The primary ambition of the peasantry was to possess land. Here we should note an important distinction to be drawn between the Ukrainians and Great Russians. The Russian peasantry had a tradition going back several centuries of organisation in communes managing their affairs by collective decision. The Ukrainians had a much more strongly established tradition, going back to Cossack days, of individual possession. The point is made by Steven Guthrie (Ukrainian Nationalism, pp.31-2):

'In 1917, Ukrainians were predominantly a peasant people. The Imperial Russian Census of 1897 indicated that 87 percent of Ukrainians gained their livelihood from farming; only 2.4 percent lived in towns with twenty thousand inhabitants or more. By 1926, 86 percent of Ukrainians were still agriculturalists, and 94 percent lived in communities with a population of less than twenty thousand. Social and economic conditions rendered the Ukrainian peasantry difficult material for political mobilization. The fact that most Ukrainians were dispersed among numerous small villages made it difficult for the small nationalist elite to reach and organize the bulk of its constituency. An inadequate school system and the prohibition of instruction in the Ukrainian language resulted in high illiteracy rates in the countryside. In 1897 only one-seventh of rural Ukrainians were literate, and by 1926 only two-fifths were. Illiteracy further limited the nationalists' accessibility to the peasantry via the popular press. Moreover, as peasants, the mass of Ukrainians had very limited resources - of money or materiel - to contribute to the support of the nationalist movement.'

'The ramifications for Ukrainian nationalism arising from its predominantly peasant base were not altogether negative. In the village, the Ukrainian peasant was not exposed to the intense Russianizing pressure which denationalized so many Ukrainians in the cities and industrial centers. The village remained the preserve of Ukrainian ethnicity; 88 percent of the region's peasants were ethnically Ukrainian, and 93 percent of all Ukrainians were krest'iane ['Christians' - the term used officially to classify peasants - PB]. The great mass of Ukrainians therefore possessed a common class identity which reinforced their linguo-cultural distinctiveness from the other nationalities which populated the region.'

Hence the economic policy of the Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionaries diverged from that of the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries:

'The essential feature of the UPSR's position on land reform was its acceptance of individual farming. Neither Ukrainian S.R.'s nor Ukrainian peasants shared their Russian counterparts' attachment to communalism. The prevalence of hereditary plots and the weakness of the commune in the Ukraine fostered a strong proprietary attitude among the peasantry. Moreover, the proportion of middle and prosperous peasants in the village population was one of the highest in European Russia. Any serious attempt to enforce communal ownership or equalization of holdings was bound to generate stiff resistance among the Ukrainian peasantry.'

Mędrzecki (Germany and Ukraine, p.58) outlines the problem as it was experienced by the Rada prior to Skoropadsky's coup:

'as early as December 1917 and January 1918, the provisional committees (in the gubernias, districts, volosts, and cities) that were engaged in the purchase and distribution of agricultural products started signaling greater difficulties in carrying out their tasks. A wave of raids on land properties across the country made it impossible to purchase further deliveries of grain from landowners. Moreover, peasants seized and divided among themselves the grain that was earlier bought and stored in warehouses (at properties, train stations, etc.). The requisitioned grain was either divided among the poorest families, which until then did not consume much of it, processed into alcohol in a countless number of primitive distilleries, which were common in village houses, kept in the most astute hiding places for "a rainy day," or given out to the soldiers who helped with the restoration of order in the properties. The remaining, usually small, part of the spoils was intended to be sold at much higher prices than the official ones. The lords of the manor sold their own grain only when necessary and at exorbitant prices. In large towns and cities provisioning difficulties were rising and were accompanied by a burgeoning black market.'

'The German invasion did not contribute to an amelioration of the situation. Most of the warehouses and properties were looted. In practice, the only dispenser of the grain were the peasants for whom the reserves of grain were a kind of insurance in case of catastrophe. The UNR authorities were in a very difficult position. Grain was indispensable for supplying cities and meeting export obligations. On the other hand, it was out of the question to forcibly take away grain from farmers, who constituted the fundamental social group creating the base of Ukrainian statehood. There were only two options left - appeals and reliance on the actions of the provisional committees. Both of them, once tried out, proved to be completely ineffective. Besides, in some major cities there appeared problems with the distribution of even the most limited rations of bread. To solve the problems, a new plan was invented. In the middle of April the State Grain Office was established. That institution was to be composed of representatives of the state administration, local governments, the Central Powers, intermediaries, grain traders, and agricultural producers. It meant an abandonment of the principle of the state's monopoly over the trade in grain products and an attempt to draw the Russian, Ukrainian, and Jewish bourgeoisie into cooperation with the UNR. Before Skoropadskyi's coup it was not possible for the State Grain Office to start its operations as the future hetman adopted it for his own purposes.'

This population, refractory as it was to 'its own' government, was hardly likely to put up with German efforts to seize its production. In May a Ukrainian Peasant Congress resolved (Eudin: German Occupation, p.98):

'To reject with contempt the Hetman's self-styled authority, which was created by the nobles, large estate owners, village kulaks, and capitalists, and which [has? - PB] no support or recognition from the democratic groups of the Ukraine, and call the peasants to a decisive, uncompromising armed struggle against Hetman's regime

'To insist that the Central Powers refrain from interference in the economic and political affairs of the Ukrainian People's Republic and to protest against and to condemn strongly: the active interference, by means of military superiority of representatives of foreign powers, in the class struggle in the Ukraine; the dispersion of the Ukrainian parliament; and the establishment of a Hetmanship in the Ukraine, which can only appeal to a small group of landowners and capitalists hostile to the Ukrainian People's Republic and to all the achievements of the revolution.'

Although the Germans regarded this as a result of Bolshevik agitation - and though undoubtedly there was Bolshevik agitation at work - it would be more accurate to regard it as a distinctly peasant strand of Ukrainian nationalism that had developed spontaneously but was given a language by the Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionaries. Steven Guthier (p.33) quotes the leader of the UPSR, Mykola Kovalesky, as saying:

'The Russians want to foist upon you, I said to the peasants, the socialization of land, that is, to transfer ownership of land to individual village communities and to abolish in this way your farms; you will no longer be masters of your own land, but will be workers on community land. The argument that Russian socialists "want to boil peasants in the capitalist cauldron," that is, to deprive them of independent status as proprietors and to transform them into proletarians, had special strength. Along with this I cited Karl Marx, Plekhanov, and even Lenin. With this "capitalist cauldron" I created a terrifying image of the future regime of the Ukraine, when Russian socialists would have succeeded in realizing their program not only in Russia but also in the Ukraine.'

The conflict between the various elements trying to build a state and develop an economically rational - profitable - agriculture, and a peasantry at last feeling able to free itself of Russian and Polish landlords and Jewish middlemen, had been developing since 1917 and, with the tough methods employed by the Germans, was reaching the stage of a civil war that was going to continue for several years (and arguably flared up again with the final defeat of the property owning peasantry in the collectivisation drive of 1929-33).

MEANWHILE IN TAGANROG ...¹²

The Bolsheviks in Taganrog were divided into two main, mutually very hostile, tendencies - the Kievans, led by Piatakov and Zatonsky, for whom the task was to liberate the whole Ukraine from the Germans and Skoropadsky, and the Easterners, representing Kharkov and Ekaterinoslav, for whom the main enemies were the Whites in the Don Basin and Kuban. The controversy went back to January 1918 when the Kharkov Communists had summoned a Congress of Soviets of the Left [Eastern] Bank [of the Dnieper] and proclaimed a separate Donetsk-Krivoy Rog Soviet Republic, independent of Kiev. Now they too had been expelled from their territory. The Easterners believed that German occupation would last a long time and be very difficult to dislodge. The priority then was to keep the party and party agitation alive among the industrial working class, mainly concentrated in the eastern regions. The Kievans wanted to try to take the lead in the mounting peasant agitation throughout the whole area. The controversy also took in party organisation. The Kievans argued for a separate Ukrainian party in a federal relationship with the Russian party, having its own representation in the recently declared Third International. They wanted a 'Ukrainian Bolshevik Party' in opposition to the Easterners who wanted simply a Ukrainian branch of the Russian Bolshevik party. The Kievans predominated. The end result was the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Ukraine - KP(b)U.

The Kievan demand for a separate Ukrainian party was not the product of any great nationalist fervour. Piatakov had indeed, prior to 1917, opposed Lenin's attempts to convert the party to the principle of self-determination. It was more a matter of practical politics. They were quite conscious of Ukrainian peasant hostility to Russia and they were also conscious of Lenin's reluctance to support an agitation in Ukraine that would bring the Bolsheviks into conflict with the Germans. Nonetheless there was an influx of Ukrainian nationalists into - or into alliance with - the KP(b)U. According to Pipes (p.134): 'In June 1918 there was a further break within the USD and USR parties; the left wing elements of both passed over to the Bolsheviks and participated in the Second all-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets. The Left SR's even formed a separate party under the name Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionary Fighters (USR Borobisty, or simply Borobisty, as they were henceforth called) ...'

The process, already underway prior to June, greatly strengthened the hand of the Kievan 'left wing' at the First Congress of the KP(b)U in Moscow in July (according to Adams. Pipes says June but July seems to make more sense) when the Kievans narrowly secured agreement for an alliance with the peasantry. However, on Lenin's insistence, they lost the right to act as a Communist Party separate from the Russian Communist Party, with a right to join the Third International on a par with foreign parties: 'Such independence in party matters Lenin would not tolerate. Homogeneity of the Communist movement and strict unity of its command had been cardinal tenets of his long before he had come to power, and perhaps the only principles to which he remained loyal all his life. The summer of 1918 was a period when Moscow undertook to bring into line the numerous provincial Communist party organisations which had grown up in the course of the Revolution and early Civil War, and which had taken advantage of the lack of contact between the centre and the borderlands to attain local autonomy.' (Pipes, p.135).

The Bolsheviks sent out their call for an uprising in August but it proved to be a total failure. Both Pipes and Arthur Adams use the word 'fiasco'. Essentially they were irrelevant to the peasant uprisings that were already taking place and which aimed to secure self government over local areas, large or small. What the Bolsheviks were offering was a new national government which was precisely what the peasants didn't want, especially a national government formed by Socialists hostile to the principle of private property, the very basis of the peasant movement. Eudin's account quotes German authorities who saw the whole anarchy of the countryside as Bolshevik inspired and quotes a call to rebellion by the 'Military Revolutionary Committee of the Kiev Guberniya' issued in June, announcing the creation of a nine member 'Committee of Revolt', outlining tactics for partisan warfare. But despite the Bolshevik-sounding rhetoric this could have been the work of

¹² This account is based mainly on Pipes; Formation and Arthur E.Adams: 'Bolshevik administration in the Ukraine: 1918', *Review of Politics*, Vol.20, No.3, July 1958.

the dissident left wing of the Ukrainian Socialist revolutionaries, soon to become the 'Borobisty', uninhibited by the doubts and hesitations of Moscow. At the end of July they succeeded in assassinating the German Field Marshall von Eichorn, and nearly succeeded with the same bomb in killing Skoropadsky.

THE GERMANS AND SKOROPADSKY

Eudin quotes the German general Hermann von Kuhl on the success or otherwise of the German occupation of Ukraine:

'Now, it cannot be denied that the hopes we had set upon the Ukraine were disappointed to a certain extent.... It seems that the organization which was adopted with the object of exploiting the country did not answer the purpose. It has been pointed out that in place of the numerous official bodies, which consisted of men from the weak Government of the Ukraine, German and Austro-Hungarian delegates, and the commanding officers of the German and Austrian army-groups, a strict military authority would have undoubtedly accomplished more. It has been shown how much harm was done by reckless interference by the Austrians. The transport difficulties were also hard to overcome. It was constantly pointed out to the Supreme Command that the military forces occupying the Ukraine were too small and must be strengthened if we were to obtain from the country the expected benefits.... [Nevertheless], Austria was saved from starvation. The deliveries of meat for us were considerable, and, above all, the horses supplies were of great importance. Finally, it must be remembered that the organizations of exports was just beginning to work and to take full effect when we had to evacuate the Ukraine in the autumn of 1918...' (p.103, lacunae in Eudin's original).

Skoropadsky was Germany's choice for hetman of Ukraine. There was actually a rather interesting Austrian alternative - the Archduke Wilhelm von Habsburg, nephew of the Emperor, Karl. He adopted a Ukrainian persona under the name Vasyl Vyshyvany, he spoke Ukrainian like a native and had joined and fought with the Galician-Ukrainian Sich Rifleman. He had the support of the Uniate Church.¹³ The Sich Rifleman were present with the Austrians in South-Western Ukraine and they embodied the possibility of uniting Russian and Austrian Ukraine, albeit under Austrian hegemony.

Although food and raw materials were an immediate motive for the German/Austrian intervention, there was the wider geopolitical intention of separating Ukraine from Russia. To quote Eudin (p.105): 'Soviet Russia was officially at peace with Germany, yet underneath the facade of diplomacy, Imperial Germany endeavoured to establish her power on a firm basis by creating a series of states stretching from Finland to the Caucasus, with the intention of isolating Soviet Russia from Europe.'

The case is developed by Peter Borowsky, a German historian closely associated with Fritz Fischer and his 'Revisionist' account of Germany's war aims.¹⁴ Borowsky (p.87) quotes a statement from the German Foreign Office soon after Skoropadsky's installation, explaining why the Germans shouldn't support the Russian Whites:

'In Russia we have only one interest, namely promotion of the forces of disintegration, the long-term weakening of that country. This was also Bismarck's policy toward France in 1871 when he opposed the re-establishment of the French monarchy. Our policy must be the establishment of good relations with the newly formed independent states that are in the process of breaking away from Russia, in particular, Ukraine, Finland, and the new government in the Caucasus. It is there

¹³ Jaroslaw Pelenski: 'Hetman Pavlo Skoropadsky and Germany (1917-18)' in Hans-Joachim Torke and John-Paul Himka (eds): *German-Ukrainian relations in historical perspective*, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1994, pp.69-83. Discussion of Archduke Wilhelm, p.75.

¹⁴ Peter Borowsky: 'Germany's Ukrainian policy during World War I and the revolution of 1918-19' in Torke and Himka: *German-Ukrainian relations*, pp.84-94.

*that we must anchor our influence and attempt to suppress any tendency toward federation with Russia.*¹⁵

Borowsky comments:

'Germany's support for Lenin in Moscow and Skoropadsky in Kiev were only in apparent contradiction. In reality they were two sides of one coherent policy to weaken Russia through its division into two or more independent states which, because of their different social system, would be hostile to each other, thus making the re-establishment of the Russian empire an impossibility.'

Zbigniew Brzezinski wasn't the first person to think of it!

In pursuit of this policy the Germans were genuinely concerned to improve the quality of government in the Ukraine:

'if the only point of the military presence was to guarantee grain supplies, then maintaining German troops in Ukraine, which cost 125 million marks per month, would have been economic and political nonsense, quite apart from the use to which these troops could have been put on the western front. The complex organizational work in connection with grain production and delivery, as well as attempts by German economic officials to have Skoropadsky introduce a Stolypin-type agrarian reform in Ukraine, all support the thesis that in this area the Germans were engaged in long-term planning and organization.'

There was a serious drive to improve the rail network in Ukraine:

'After long, drawn-out negotiations involving the Russian Syndicate, a German Syndicate for the Reconstruction of the Ukrainian Railway System was established on 10 July 1918. It included the Diskontogesellschaft, the Deutsche Bank, the Dresdner Bank, and the banking houses of Warburg, Mendelssohn, and Lenz. This syndicate joined with the Research Group for the Re-establishment of the Railway System in Ukraine (established the previous month by Russian-Ukrainian bankers), each contributed 50 per cent, and the new company was called the Ukrainian Railway Development Company (AG für die Entwicklung des Eisenbahnwesens in der Ukraine).'

The problem for the German government was that it did not have the means to pursue these projects and German private capital was, understandably, lukewarm:

'The situation in the Ukrainian coal industry was so desperate that Germany not only received no coal from Ukraine but was forced to deliver some of its own coal to that country. The need to get the Ukrainian coal industry on its feet again, and the necessity for private capital investment, offered German capital a unique opportunity to gain a foothold in that industry, particularly since there was no competition from other foreign investors or creditors. As in the case of the railways, the German state showed more interest than private German capital did. Although Wiedfeldt¹⁶ and the other economic experts in Kiev continued to point out the importance of German investment and German loans to Ukrainian industry to establish a foothold for Germany in both Ukraine and Greater Russia, the German banks were cautious. In view of the unclear military situation they were unwilling to take any unnecessary risks.

'The withdrawal of Ukraine from the rouble zone was one of the most important of Germany's economic and political goals in Ukraine. According to Ambassador Mumm, on 17 May 1918, "the establishment of its own currency, independent of the rouble, is an essential aspect of the maintenance of Ukraine's separation from Russia." In May 1918 German financial experts in Kiev, in co-operation with the Ukrainian government, introduced the new independent Ukrainian currency, although there were numerous financial, political, and technical difficulties involved with this decision. On 18 May 1918, the decision was made to establish a share-based issuing bank. Wiedfeldt called on German bankers to participate. Parallel to the creation of a Ukrainian currency and the founding of a Ukrainian central bank, Ukrainian branches of the big Russian banks were

¹⁵ Subsequent quotes pp.87-91.

¹⁶ Otto Wiedfeldt was a director of the Krupp steelworks, present as representative of the German Economic Ministry.

dissolved. The big German banks were offered a participatory role, but in spite of all the efforts of Wiedfeldt and the Reich's Economic Ministry, they were extremely reluctant to become involved.'

The Germans tried to maintain their presence in Ukraine even after the signing of the armistice:

'On 10 October 1918, after the German offer of armistice had been sent to Wilson, Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, Wilhelm Solf, sent the German representatives in Kiev an outline of Germany's policy in Ukraine. According to this programme: "1. Ukraine as an independent state and our preferential position within that state must be maintained as far as possible. 2. The German-Ukrainian peace treaty will not be affected by the general peace treaty"'

To this end they tried to arrange a union between Skoropadsky and what might be called the constitutional opposition (with the Grain Party at the heart of it):

'This fundamental goal of German foreign policy in the east, the weakening of Russia, was not dropped by the government of Prince Max von Baden, which assumed office in Berlin at the beginning of October 1918. A Programme for the East, drawn up by Rudolf Nadolny on 5 November 1918, which the whole cabinet, including its social democratic members, approved the same day, stated: "As far as our eastern policy is concerned, our fundamental goal remains, within the framework of the Wilson points and the demands of the Entente, to decentralize Russia with the help of the nationality principle and to create for ourselves in the entire eastern territories as much political sympathy and freedom of movement as possible." To reach this goal, diplomatic relations with Bolshevik Russia were to be broken off (which happened the next day), and German troops were to remain in the occupied eastern territories as long as possible.'

The policy became redundant with the 'German revolution', the collapse of the German army and the seizure of power by Skoropadsky's more militant opponents on 14th December 1918. This will be discussed in the next episode of this series but in the meantime a word should be said for Skoropadsky. He was of course almost entirely dependent on the Germans and he faced increasing turmoil in the rural areas but at least over the Summer, in the words of the Russian language Wikipedia account, 'Ukraine, and especially Kyiv, represented a kind of "island of stability" and became the center of attraction for all those fleeing the Bolsheviks from Petrograd, Moscow and other regions of the Russian Empire.' For all the difficulties of supplying Germany, people arriving in Ukraine from Russia marvelled at the abundance of food that was available.¹⁷ An effort was made to organise a Ukrainian regular army, mostly led by former officers of the Russian Imperial army who were present in Kiev in large numbers. Skoropadsky also established - for the first time in Russian Ukraine - a network of Ukrainian language cultural institutions, such as already existed in Galicia. The Russian language Wikipedia talks of: 'the opening of new Ukrainian gymnasiums, the introduction of the Ukrainian language, Ukrainian history and Ukrainian geography as compulsory subjects in school. Ukrainian state universities were established in Kiev and [Austrian occupied - PB] Kamenetz-Podolsky, the Faculty of History and Philology in Poltava, the State Ukrainian Archive, the National Gallery of Art, the Ukrainian Historical Museum, the National Library of the Ukrainian State, the Ukrainian Drama and Opera Theater, the Ukrainian State Capella, the Ukrainian Symphony Orchestra, Ukrainian Academy of Sciences.' A political tradition that saw him as a potential monarch of an independent state was to continue until his death in 1945.

¹⁷ At least that is the picture drawn in Irina Ratushinskaya's historical novel *The Odessans* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1996).