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## **Bolshevik Administration in the Ukraine — 1918**

*by Arthur E. Adams*

**T**HROUGH 1918 Russia's new Bolshevik rulers, amateurs at the business of governing, were exposed to bureaucratic lessons much faster than they could assimilate them. Administrative techniques and organizational models essential for the direction of an empire had to be hurriedly invented or borrowed and rushed into operation; numerous special arrangements had to be devised for those areas where military crises or nationalist and separatist movements demanded immediate attention. During the process of simultaneously ruling and learning, the Moscow center sometimes received sharp lessons from the peripheries of the empire. Leading figures of the Russian Communist Party were often compelled by circumstances and by the hot tempers and loud voices of their colleagues out in the hustings to listen and learn and adapt themselves to the pressures of facts as others saw them. Passionate theoretical debates gave way to quarrels about the most expedient, most efficient method of getting the work accomplished; and the reciprocal adjustments resulting from this conflict between the center and the men working in the peripheral areas established patterns of thought and habits of action that were to become permanent features of the Soviet administrative system.

It is the purpose of this article to explore but one series of events in the vast and intricate process that created the Soviet system; namely, the struggle in November 1918 for the establishment of the second Ukrainian Provisional Soviet Government. In the differences that arose between Lenin's central apparatus and his Ukrainian assistants during the last weeks of November 1918, and in the solutions arrived at, were concentrated many of the issues and interests that fomented the subsequent long struggle between Bolshevism in Russia and Bolshevism in the Ukraine. Particularly important during this controversy was the impact men on the spot had upon the center, the degree to which they taught the men at

Moscow and thus contributed to the decisions finally accepted. The courageous expression of the "Left" Ukrainian point of view not only helped form the policies of 1918 but also sharpened the theoretical weapons later employed by Ukrainian communists, whose opposition harassed the Russian center through the purges of 1938 until the present.

## I

To understand the complicated situation that had developed among Bolshevik factions in the Ukraine by November 1918, it is necessary to look backward from that date. Historically, Ukrainian communism sprang from socialist parties that flourished in the Ukraine during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. To a considerable extent the ideas of the Ukrainian parties were imported from Great Russia and accepted without change; but also, numerous indigenous groups eclectically borrowed from Russian theories, changing them freely to better satisfy Ukrainian needs. It might be said that the Ukrainian communism of 1917-1918 was bred from an arrogant Marxist Russian father and a patriotic Ukrainian mother. There were several offsprings and one of the first questions that had to be settled was whether the children were Russian or Ukrainian. Upon the answer to this question depended the relations these children would have with both parents, as well as with each other.<sup>1</sup>

Through 1917 and the first months of 1918, Ukrainian Bolsheviks were thoroughly disorganized. Some factions were prepared to follow policies that led them away from the Muscovite center or that put them in opposition to its policies; others, loyal to the idea of a united party and a central government for all Russia, nonetheless believed that tactics and organizational procedures should be tailored to the unique Ukrainian situation. Finally, some Ukrainian communists supported a program of complete submission to the Russian party.

When German troops drove the Bolsheviks from the Ukraine early in 1918, representatives of the several Ukrainian communist

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<sup>1</sup> See M. Ravich-Cherkasskii, *Istoriia kommunisticheskoi partii (b-ov) Ukrainy* (Kharkov, 1923), pp. 5-6, 9-40; N. N. Popov, *Ocherk istorii kommunisticheskoi partii (bol'shevikov) Ukrainy* (2nd ed., Kharkov, 1929), pp. 5-11; Iwan Majstrenko, *Borot'bism, A Chapter in the History of Ukrainian Communism* (New York, 1954), pp. 141-42.

factions found themselves fortuitously gathered at the city of Taganrog, on the Azov Sea. In mid-April they met formally to discuss policies for the immediate future. Although a wide variety of interests and interpretations were represented, two communist groups were most important.<sup>2</sup> The first of these came from the eastern regions and had as its leaders Immanuel Kvirring and Iakov Iakovlev (Epshtein).<sup>3</sup> Representing the industrial cities Kharkov and Yekaterinoslav, and the moderately well-organized workers of those cities, this group believed that communist victory in the Ukraine would come through patient organizational work concentrated upon the industrial laborers, who were either Russians from the north or Ukrainians considerably Russified by their urban experience. For these Ukrainians of the Dnieper's east bank the struggle through 1917 had been against Kerensky's Provisional Government rather than against the Ukrainian Rada. In 1918 the enemies they most feared were the White armies of Generals Krasnov and Denikin, which operated in the Don Basin and the Kuban region. Since these were also Lenin's chief antagonists, it was logical for the Eastern Ukrainians to identify themselves with Lenin's party and to feel that there were no vital differences between north and south.<sup>4</sup>

But on the other side at the Taganrog assembly were the men from Kiev and Poltava, known as the "Kievians." This faction was led by two Ukrainian-born Bolsheviks, the brilliant Iuri Piatakov and Vladimir Zatonskii, a ferocious communist and a former docent in physics at the Kiev Polytechnical Institute. These men had dueled for power with the Ukrainian Rada government at Kiev, only to be driven eastward by the German occupation forces that took over the Ukraine in February and March. For them the essential task was liberation of the Ukraine from the rule of the Germans and their Ukrainian puppet government. More-

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<sup>2</sup> Ravich-Cherkasskii, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-54, 60; Popov, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-58; Leonard Schapiro, *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy. Political Opposition in the Soviet State, First Phase, 1917-1922* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), pp. 133-38.

<sup>3</sup> Both Kvirring and Iakovlev had joined the Bolshevik party in 1913, and both had gained considerable experience in Ukrainian affairs. As is true of most of the communists named in this paper, these two men were destined to play important roles in the Ukraine and in the central government of Soviet Russia, after the events described in this paper.

<sup>4</sup> Ravich-Cherkasskii, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55, 57-58.

over, since the Kievians hailed from a predominantly agricultural area, they placed their hopes for successful revolutionary action, not solely upon the urban proletariat, but also upon the peasantry and the lower classes of towns and villages.

These differences were underlined at Taganrog by the stand of each group toward establishment of an independent Ukrainian party. The Kievians demanded it; but the men of the East, recognizing no fundamental difference between workers in Petrograd and workers at Kharkov or Yekaterinoslav, regarded themselves as one segment of the general front and saw no reason for a separate party. Directed by the iron-willed Piatakov, the Kievians succeeded in pushing through a resolution calling for the establishment of a Ukrainian Communist party with its own independent central committee. They also offered a proposal to name the new party "The Ukrainian Bolshevik Party," but the men of the East, the "Yekaterinoslavs," countered with another suggestion—"The Russian Bolshevik Party, Ukrainian Branch." The compromise finally adopted was: "The Communist Party (bolshevik) of the Ukraine" [KP (b)U].<sup>5</sup>

Adoption of a new title did not unite the party in its doctrines. After the Taganrog meeting the Yekaterinoslavs continued to defend their orthodox Marxist principles of revolution—with all emphasis upon the urban proletariat. Concerning tactics for the immediate future, they argued that the German-Austrian stay in the Ukraine might continue for some time; therefore, the new party could best achieve its objectives by quietly organizing and preparing the workers for a fairly distant struggle. Because they represented a sound Leninist approach, the Yekaterinoslavs became known also as the "Right."

On the "Left," Piatakov and Zatonskii and their colleagues continued to consider the Ukrainian proletariat too small and underdeveloped to play a lone role in the next act of Ukrainian revolution. In their judgment, the numerically overwhelming peasantry should be made the target of Bolshevik organization and should be roused to guerrilla action against the German occupation forces and their puppets. Also, because they feared peasant hostility toward Russian intervention, and because they believed that they understood the Ukrainian situation best, the Left wanted Moscow

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55-57.

to keep out. Their demand for a Ukrainian party guided by an independent central committee was in part the consequence of their evaluation of the pressures of Ukrainian chauvinism that had developed through nearly three centuries of Tsarist imperialism; it underlined the native Ukrainian's suspicion that no matter what mask Russian control of the Ukraine might choose to wear, the result would always be rule by foreigners. Present too was the desire that the Ukraine might function as an autonomous region within an all-union (or international) federation. This belief that Ukrainian communists could recognize and solve Ukrainian problems far better than Moscow was to be one cause of incessant strife both within the KP(b)U itself and between the KP(b)U and the Russian Communist Party.<sup>6</sup>

At Taganrog the Kievians had their way. The assembly resolved that the KP(b)U should be an independent party, related to the Russian party as one member of a federation of equals. Formal relations were to be worked out through "the recently formed international bureau for the organization of the Third International," which was expected to act as a sort of central coordinating bureau for all Communist parties. The Left also won a decisive majority in the Organization Bureau established by the assembly, and Piatakov, its head, quickly published a manifesto in the name of this embryo "Soviet Government of the Ukraine," summoning the Ukrainian people to rebellion.<sup>7</sup>

After the Taganrog meeting the Orgbureau moved to Moscow. From there and from the Neutral Zone to the south,<sup>8</sup> acting as an

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<sup>6</sup> The Piatakov group, however, was not made up of Ukrainian nationalists. It was concerned primarily with the *most efficient means* of establishing communist control in the Ukraine as soon as possible. Further, the Left Wing of the new Ukrainian party, although a fairly distinct group, was related by overlapping membership to the Russian party's Left Wing. On some problems the views of both groups were identical, but appear to have been held for different reasons. Thus, for example, both the Ukrainian and the Russian party's Left were hostile to Lenin's insistence upon peace with Germany and to his centralized and dictatorial administration. *Ibid.*, pp. 57-60. For the development of the views of Left and Right after Taganrog, see Popov, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-75.

<sup>7</sup> Ravich-Cherkasskii, *op. cit.*, pp. 57, 60-63.

<sup>8</sup> The "Neutral Zone" was a buffer area along the north-central boundary of the Ukraine, designed to prevent clashes between Russian Soviet troops and those of the Germans. Established by agreement between local commanders, the area varied in width from about six to twenty-five miles. In theory it was a no man's land; in reality both sides constantly trespassed. Piatakov's Org-

exiled Soviet government of the Ukraine, it attempted to direct the peasant rebellions which pestered Hetman Paul Skoropadsky and the Germans throughout the summer of 1918.<sup>9</sup>

When, early in July, the First Congress of the Communist Party of the Ukraine convened at Moscow, experience had increased the Kievians' assurance. Furthermore, Piatakov's colleague, the Kievian communist, Andrei Bubnov, a seasoned old Bolshevik and underground organizer, claimed great successes in developing partisan action in German-held territory. By July there had been many risings, some of them remarkably effective. Party organizations were reportedly springing up in many towns and villages, and Piatakov could argue that his "government" was well on its way toward making communist rule in the Ukraine a reality under the Germans' very noses.<sup>10</sup> But in Lenin's eyes these efforts of Piatakov and Bubnov were dangerous, for their aggressive partisan activities threatened to drag Moscow into a new and unwanted conflict with the Germans. Therefore, Lenin endeavored to curb the Piatakov forces. Despite his powerful opposition, however, the Kievians again won high places in the Central Committee of the KP(b)U,

bureau consistently used it as a collecting point for Ukrainian refugees and as a staging area for partisan action in German-held Ukrainian territory. See Vladimir Aussem, "K istorii povstanchestva na Ukraine," *Letopis' revoliutsii*, No. 5 [20] (1926), pp. 7-9; V. Primakov, "Bor'ba za sovetskuiu vlast' na Ukraine," in *Piat' let krasnoi armii. Sbornik statei, 1918-1923* (Moscow, 1923), p. 183; Popov, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-73.

<sup>9</sup> Ia. Shelygin, "Partizanskaia bor'ba s getmanshchinoi i avstro-germanskoii okkupatsiei," *Letopis' revoliutsii*, No. 6 [33] (1928), pp. 61-88; M. Gorky, I. Mints, and R. Eideman (eds.), *Krakh germanskoi okkupatsii na Ukraine (po dokumentam okkupantov)* (Moscow, 1936), pp. 165-71; A. S. Bubnov, S. S. Kamenev, M. N. Tukhachevskii, and R. P. Eideman (eds.), *Grazhdanskaia voina, 1918-1921* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1928-1930), I, 35-44, 46-52. Paul Skoropadsky, an extremely wealthy landowner and ex-Tsarist general, inherited his title, Hetman (Chief) of the Zaporozhian Cossacks, from an 18th-century ancestor. By means of a German-supported coup Skoropadsky overthrew the helpless Rada government late in April, 1918, and established his reactionary "hetmanate," a puppet state that served the Germans faithfully until they abandoned it (November-December, 1918).

<sup>10</sup> The members of the KP(b)U in the Neutral Zone were prone to make exaggerated claims about the degree of their influence in the Ukraine, and communists writing after the civil war do not moderate these claims. In reality, the degree of influence exercised by the KP(b)U upon partisan actions, from April through July, 1918, cannot be exactly determined, but the available evidence indicates that it was relatively small. See Shelygin, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-88, 98-101; I. Kapulovskii, "Organizatsiia vosstaniia protiv getmana," *Letopis' revoliutsii*, No. 4 (1923), pp. 95-102; Aussem, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

but they lost some of their independence, for Lenin demanded and received recognition of his right to make general policy decisions for the Ukraine.<sup>11</sup>

Undaunted by Lenin's opposition, the Kievians continued to push forward with Ukrainian rebellion. In August the saturnine and over-optimistic Bubnov sent out orders for an all-Ukrainian uprising. However, military preparations had been hasty and inadequate, the Kievians' communication system in German-held zones failed to function, and where partisans did rise, they were no match for the disciplined regular troops of the Germans. Units on which the Kievians had placed their hopes were badly cut up, destroyed, or scattered by the Germans, and their leaders counted themselves fortunate if they were able to escape into the Neutral Zone.<sup>12</sup> This fiasco, combined with Lenin's consistent refusal to share leadership of the party, led to the Ukrainian Left's temporary eclipse. The Second Congress of the KP(b)U, held at Moscow in October, and heavily influenced by the Russian party, elected a Rightist, pro-Russian, and pro-urban Central Committee. Moscow strengthened its control mechanism still further by securing the election of Stalin to the Central Committee of the Ukrainian party. Stalin's election gave formal recognition to his important work as liaison agent between the two parties, a role he had played unofficially for some time; it also underlined Lenin's determination to reserve all policy decisions to his Moscow party and government apparatus, and his refusal to recognize the principle of equality between the RKP(b) and the KP(b)U. The humiliated members of the Left did not even take part in the elections; nevertheless, the principal Left leaders were generously given places on the committee; thus Piatakov and Zatonskii were compelled to remain and watch the destruction of the policies they had practiced.<sup>13</sup> Following these events the Second Congress passed resolutions emphasizing

<sup>11</sup> For efforts of the RKP(b) to influence the First Congress, see Popov, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-78; Ravich-Cherkasskii, *op. cit.*, pp. 195-211; cf. Basil Dmytryshyn, *Moscow and the Ukraine* (New York, 1956), pp. 40-41.

<sup>12</sup> Shelygin, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-88; *Grazhdanskaia voina*, I, 44-45.

<sup>13</sup> Ravich-Cherkasskii, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91, 96-98; Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union, Communism and Nationalism, 1917-1923* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), p. 136; Popov, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-80; John S. Reshetar, *The Ukrainian Revolution* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1952), pp. 223-24; Clarence A. Manning, *Ukraine under the Soviets* (New York, 1953), pp. 28-29; Aussem, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

the party's intention to concentrate its work among the big-city industrial workers and to revert to the Rightist tactic of patient propaganda in preparation for future German defeat. In the first days of November, however, the collapse of the German Empire abruptly reversed the political situation.

## II

Within a few days after the Kaiser's fall on November 9, German-Austrian occupation forces began fleeing homeward. Paul Skoropadsky's puppet regime tottered crazily, and the Ukrainian patriots, Vladimir Vinnichenko and Simon Petliura, earnestly summoned the peasantry to rise and fight for an autonomous republic.<sup>14</sup> To the east, in the Don Basin, General Krasnov's Cossack forces prepared to move into areas evacuated by the Germans, thus posing a threat to Voronezh and Kharkov. Denikin's Volunteer Army, its flanks extended from Tsaritsyn to the Sea of Azov, gazed hopefully at Kiev, and from the Black Sea cities came rumors that Allied intervention might begin at any hour. Without government, ravaged by war and stripped of its goods, its economy destroyed by speculators and uncompleted land reforms and marauding peasants, the Ukraine raced toward complete anarchy and seemed to offer itself to the military force that could arrive first.

On November 12 Trotsky's Revolutionary Military Committee of the RSFSR, acting on instructions from Lenin's Council of People's Commissars, called in the Ukrainian-born military troubleshooter, Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, and gave him orders to invade the Ukraine within ten days.<sup>15</sup> A Ukrainian Revolutionary

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<sup>14</sup> Vinnichenko and Petliura were members of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party and were ardent nationalists who hoped to establish an independent Ukrainian republic. Vinnichenko was a noted author and member of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, while Petliura, a journalist, was a man of action with a remarkable talent for military affairs. Both men had played leading roles in the Ukrainian Rada (nationalist) Government through 1917 and early 1918. After Skoropadsky's coup, they formed the Ukrainian National Union, a coalition group led by Vinnichenko, for opposition against the Hetman's government. On November 13 this group formed the Directory, an insurrectionary government of five men with the purpose of deposing Skoropadsky and establishing a Ukrainian democracy. In the weeks immediately following, the Directory and its "Petliurist" army enjoyed overwhelming support from the Ukrainian peasantry. See Reshetar, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-70, 192-202, 215.

<sup>15</sup> Antonov-Ovseenko, a fiery and impetuous amateur general, had led the attack and capture of the Winter Palace in Petrograd in November, 1918. He

Military Committee was formed, with Joseph Stalin, Iuri Piatakov, Vladimir Zatonskii and Antonov-Ovseenko as members. The committee's task was far from simple. It had to approach the borders of the Ukraine, put an army together, form an effective government, and advance into the chaos—before Petliura could firmly establish himself, before Denikin's officer groups could take over the cities, and before Allied armies could arrive to commandeer German arms and equipment and occupy the land.<sup>16</sup>

This committee moved to Kursk, just north of the Ukrainian border, on the night of November 19. Stalin was recalled to Moscow for other business almost at once. While Piatakov and Zatonskii took as their principal tasks the establishment of a Ukrainian government and the coordination of civil and military affairs, Antonov threw himself into the work of collecting an army.

A glance at Antonov's problems helps to picture some of the complexity of the situation Piatakov and Zatonskii had to work with. In his effort to build an army, Antonov collided head-on with the stubborn fact that, despite its directive for invasion, Moscow was not prepared to support a powerful military force in the Ukraine. For although the hard-bitten former Tsarist Colonel I. I. Vatsetis, then Commander in Chief of all Red armies, had promised troops, weapons, armored trains, staff officers, and other necessary war material, almost nothing arrived at Kursk. Neither Trotsky nor Vatsetis was willing to pull troops from the threatening Urals Front, nor to divert supplies from the Southern (Don and Tsaritsyn) Front, for action in the Ukraine. On the contrary, Vatsetis persisted in acting as though Antonov's force were intended for use on the Southern Front rather than in the Ukraine. A further contradiction in Bolshevik policy arose from the fact that in October the Russian Bolsheviks had entered an agreement with Vinnichenko. In return for a promise to support the independ-

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had also commanded Red armies in the Ukraine in the early months of 1918 until the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and German occupation troops compelled his withdrawal. Assigned to the Urals (Eastern) Front until November, he spent considerable time there studying Ukrainian political and military developments and publishing his opinions on them. In temperament, knowledge of the Ukraine, and in his ideas about the proper administrative organization for the Ukraine, he was virtually blood-brother to Piatakov and Zatonskii.

<sup>16</sup> Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, *Zapiski o grazhdanskoi voine* (Moscow, 1924-33), III (1932), 11-15; N. E. Kakurin, *Kak srazhalos' revoliutsiia* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1926), II, 38-39, 73-75.

ence movement of Vinnichenko and Petliura, the Russian Communist Party had received an assurance that it would enjoy legal status in the new Ukrainian government the nationalist leaders hoped to establish. In effect this was a treaty of alliance with the very movement Antonov and Piatakov were soon to attack.<sup>17</sup>

Faced with Vatsetis' refusal to cooperate, Trotsky's contempt, and the contradictions of Moscow's policy, Antonov begged, cajoled and intrigued in every direction for troops and supplies. Repeatedly, he summoned Vatsetis to carry out the orders that had been issued by the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Republic, and at least once, completely out of patience, he stormed into the Kremlin, growled through the offices of party and government near-greats, and bearded the lion himself. Lenin heard him out, questioned him carefully, and sent him packing with instructions to obey orders. In desperation and defiance, Antonov turned to Piatakov and Zatonkii, demanded their support for the military operations he planned, and literally forced them to carry his fight to the central government.

To return to the political struggle, when the new Revolutionary Military Committee moved to Kursk, Ukrainian Left and Right communists came along, bringing with them the Neutral Zone organizations and the old feuds. But for the moment it was clear to everyone that the Rights' wait-and-see tactics were now out of order, and that the Moscow center was incapable of keeping up with the swift flow of events and providing effective directives for action, despite its will to do so. Therefore, the Kievians, with their desire to run things their own way and their faith in the power of the Ukrainian peasant, stepped forward and seized the reins. It was a time when any solution was better than none, and, according to Zatonkii, through those first hectic days, Left and Right worked as one.<sup>18</sup>

On November 20, a Provisional Ukrainian Soviet Government was established, headed by Piatakov. But an impossible situation developed immediately: Moscow insisted upon dictating every Ukrainian decision and refused to allow Piatakov to proclaim publicly the existence of his new government. The center, remain-

<sup>17</sup> Pipes, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-41.

<sup>18</sup> Vladimir Zatonkii, "K voprosu ob organizatsii vremenogo rabochekrest'ianskogo pravitel'stva Ukrainy," *Letopis' revoliutsii*, No. 1[10] (1925), pp. 140-41.

ing hostile toward the willful Ukrainian Left, hesitated to be catapulted into the Ukrainian morass it so poorly understood. Meanwhile, Simon Petliura seized the initiative. His army of Ukrainian peasants grew swiftly and it soon became apparent that a communist invasion would meet, not a feckless Skoropadsky, but Petliura's burgeoning nationalist forces. Meanwhile, Trotsky and Vatsetis, along with Lenin, continued to believe that a Ukrainian campaign should be aggressively prosecuted only if it served Russian interests. While Moscow closely studied the situation, G. V. Chicherin, Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, continued cautious negotiations with the Vinnichenko-Petliura Directory, as if the center were considering a new truce in the Ukraine.<sup>19</sup>

Given these indications of Russian vacillation, the Left Ukrainians launched a struggle to correct the Moscow line and to win for themselves the right to make their own decisions. Through a frenzied ten days, the leaders of the Ukrainian Provisional Government, hamstrung by the center's uninformed interference, screamed hourly for intelligent assistance or for independence, and from the first days tempers threatened to explode. On November 23, Piatakov showed the effects of the strain when he wired to Stalin that it was absolutely necessary for Lenin to be made to understand "all the unbearableness" of the situation caused by the center. "You know that I never despair," Piatakov reminded Stalin; nevertheless, he prophesied swift catastrophe if intelligent action did not take place.<sup>20</sup>

Four days later Piatakov and Zatonskii, together, begged the influential old Bolshevik Karl Radek to intercede for them and "explain the question about our political-military situation." As they set forth the situation for Radek, the confusion of instructions from Moscow was beyond belief. If Kursk headquarters was to function effectively it needed a united Ukrainian Front under one commander and one civil authority. Moscow, they insisted, should permit the Ukrainian government to function openly and independently; and the question "about the mutual relationship of military and civil authority" had to be resolved. "I beg you to

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*; Popov, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-91.

<sup>20</sup> M. Rubach, "K istorii grazhdanskoi bor'by na Ukraine," *Letopis' revoliutsii*, No. 4 [9] (1924), p. 151. (All documents presented by Rubach were taken from the Arkhiv Oktiabr'skoi Revoliutsii, Vol V.)

assist me to prevail upon Moscow not to snarl up our work," Piatakov wrote.<sup>21</sup>

The difficulties were spelled out in far greater detail for Stalin in a report addressed to him (with a copy for Lenin) about the 27th, signed by both Piatakov and Zatonskii. The Ukrainian leaders underlined an earlier warning that if "precise and clear mutual relationships between the center and various organs carrying on military or political work in the Ukraine were not worked out, there would inevitably arise a whole series of frictions that would delay, if not completely halt, revolutionary work." And they pointed out that what they had predicted had now come true. Despite the fact that Left and Right members of the Ukrainian party were working together in perfect union, Moscow's interference was creating "unbelievable chaos and confusion, which completely disorganize all work. . . ." <sup>22</sup> Piatakov and Zatonskii declared it was their "first duty to point out that all the control organizations working on the Ukrainian Front, separately and together, are striving to disentangle the chaos produced by the center and to create some possibility of positive work." But, they insisted, "despite all good intentions, thanks to the vagueness on the one hand and to the contradictory orders from the center on the other, not one of these organizations can function naturally." As a result, "in place of the centralization of effort which we proposed should be under the general direction of the Executive Committee of the Russian Communist Party, we have uninterrupted chaos." <sup>23</sup> Illustrating the sort of difficulty they met everywhere, they explained how multiple agencies for mobilization trampled on one another's toes.

In some areas our representatives carry out mobilization, in others the work is done by the military commissariat of the Orlov Okrug, and in still other areas the local military commanders carry out mobilization on their own responsibility. We are not in a position either to publish obligatory decrees concerning mobiliza-

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Zatonskii, *op. cit.*, p. 142 (the documents presented by Zatonskii were found in the files of ISPART, the Institution for the Study of Party History); cf. Rubach, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-61.

<sup>23</sup> Zatonskii, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

tion or to oppose the Orlov Military Commissariat. You must understand the consequences of this.<sup>24</sup>

But Piatakov and Zatonskii were not at all certain that the consequences of the confused lines of authority would be obvious to the center, and taking no pains to hide their exasperation, they presented a brutally detailed analysis of the center's failures.

We will not speak further about the fact that the Supreme Commander, considering military action from a purely strategic point of view and not taking into account all the complexity of the political situation in the Ukraine, neither wants to understand nor can understand that the operations in the Ukraine at the present moment cannot be defined by purely military considerations. From the military point of view, for example, the occupation of one or another town by a company or battalion of infantry seems stupid. However, in the present situation, this is not only possible but it is being done.

The Military Committee of the Kursk Direction,<sup>25</sup> being *au courant* with the course of all political events in the Ukraine, and also taking into account all of the circumstances of a purely military nature, can and must direct military operations in the Ukraine. But all its plans and operations knock against the contradictory, continually changing arrangements of the Supreme Commander in Chief. From the other side, the indefiniteness of the situation of the Military Committee of the Kursk Group makes it impossible either to organize an army or to supply it properly. If, today, the Military Committee says that all of the Orlov Okrug is at its disposal, then tomorrow this okrug will be taken away from it; if today the Military Committee controls all the military forces of the Ukrainian Front, then tomorrow it will receive an order to operate on the right flank of the Southern Army, executing a completely different mission. The continuous oscillations and hesitations, the continuously vague arrangements of the center, the continuous changes of these arrangements, disorganize the Military Committee and make it impossible to establish correct mutual relations between the Military Committee and the future government.

The confusions are increased still more by the fact that even in the sphere of purely operational orders, a unified center has

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144. The Orlov Okrug was a political-administrative regional unit around Kursk, from which Antonov was to draw his food supplies.

<sup>25</sup> The name assigned to the Revolutionary Military Committee of the Ukraine for the purpose of concealing its mission.

not yet been established; and it is impossible to understand . . . which group of troops has been designated for the establishment and support of Soviet power in the Ukraine. On one side we have the Military Committee of the Kursk Direction; on the other, the Reserve Army. At the head of the Reserve Army stands a man who is not one of us [i.e., a non-Bolshevik, former imperialist officer], and nevertheless, such a delicate thing as the attack on the Ukrainian Front is transferred now to Antonov, now to Glagolev.<sup>26</sup> It is not known who has control over a whole series of military units. Other units, having just adopted their numbers, are taken from the control of one organization and transferred to the control of another. Mutual relations between the Provisional Ukrainian Government and the Commander of the Reserve Army have not been established at all. All of this has not only disorganized the work, but has also had a harmful effect upon the military units, weakening their combat fitness.

Counting on the concrete and full support promised, military units have undertaken one or another step and have advanced toward the ordered organizational objectives in agreement with the plans they possess. But suddenly that which was promised them is taken away; no support is given; on the contrary, certain units are taken away and sent off to another front. With such a state of affairs it is impossible either to reckon with anything or to summon up the necessary energy and resolution. The continuous ignorance about what will probably be the completely unexpected decisions of the center, which result from the absence of a firm line in the center, utterly disorganizes our work and forces everyone to wonder if this comedy shouldn't be cut short.<sup>27</sup>

To bring order out of chaos, the Left Ukrainians presented concrete recommendations, backing them with bold threats and issuing them in uncompromisingly blunt terms:

In the first place it is necessary for us to issue decisions in the name of the Provisional Workers-Peasants' Government of the Ukraine, to publish manifestoes and to act in the capacity of a real Ukrainian government.

Second, all of the political part of the work in the cleared districts must be concentrated in the hands of the Provisional Government.

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<sup>26</sup> Glagolev commanded the so-called Reserve Army, subordinated to the Southern Front. Although his forces were stationed around Kursk, his mission was support of the Southern Front at Voronezh, east of Kursk. According to Antonov, Vatssetis gave Glagolev specific instructions not to become entangled in the adventures of the Ukrainians. See Antonov-Ovseenko, *op. cit.*, III, 15-16.

<sup>27</sup> Zatonskii, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

Third . . . establish unity of command, transferring power into the hands of the Military Committee of the Kursk Direction. No form of power over the Ukrainian Front should be given to a man foreign to us.

Fourth, subordinate all military forces operating on the Ukrainian Front to the Military Committee of the Kursk Direction.

Fifth . . . propose to Vatsetis that he leave the military forces of our front alone, not taking them away from us. If he cannot adjust himself to political affairs in the Ukraine with sufficient perception, then he must deal . . . with those organizations which, both by their obligations and by their situation, are alone able to unite correctly military and political work in the Ukraine. Such an organ, in our opinion, is the Provisional Government of the Ukraine.

Sixth, in line with the above, it is necessary to unite all the military units operating on our front as an independent army, which should be named the Army of the Soviet Ukraine, and which should be subject only to the general supervision of the Supreme Commander in Chief.

Seventh, it is necessary to order the Orlov Military Okrug not to sabotage the Ukrainian Front but to serve the needs of our army. . . .

Eighth, it is necessary to subordinate Glagolev to the Military Committee. . . .

Finally, if all this is not done, then we, on the basis of our ten days of experience, must divest ourselves of all further responsibility for work on this front.<sup>28</sup>

Through November 27 and 28, many messages flew back and forth between Kursk and Moscow. In each new wire from Kursk, Ukrainian demands became more peremptory, the language used more critical. In one telegram to Stalin, Zatonskii categorically demanded a reply and requested that Stalin come and visit Kursk to see for himself "the indescribable confusion created by the contradictory policies." Reflecting Antonov's suspicion of Vatsetis' motives, Zatonskii declared that further division of the Ukrainian command by Vatsetis was "positively criminal," and he sourly added: "If you were here, probably the expression used would be shorter." After signing this message, he added a postscript, saying among other things: "The military command completely fails to consider . . . [the swiftly-developing crisis in the Ukraine], and even You [sic] in Moscow do not see this." And he added, "Each day new facts burst out, which are utterly impossible to foresee

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 145-46.

from Moscow and Serpukhov [Vatsetis' headquarters]." As Zatonskii viewed the situation, the center was so far away, both in time and in its comprehension of Ukrainian affairs, that its orders were "in the majority of cases either impossible to execute or such that their execution would lead to complete destruction of the work."<sup>29</sup>

Another telegram, sent probably on the 28th, repeated the old complaints and piled up new ones. "About one more change of course," Zatonskii warned, "and the units will be torn asunder. Remember that such a degree of discipline as Trotsky dreams about does not exist in a single company, and to hurl units formed with difficulty from partisan sections into the fight against [Krasnov's] Cossacks, would mean to destroy them completely." Later in this telegram addressed to both Stalin and Lenin, he begged: "Save us from many authorities. Permit us to create a unified center at once." Outlining the inevitable consequences of the center's failure to give authority to the Ukrainians, he again explained the impossibility of giving intelligent orders without knowing what Moscow was about to do next. "If you don't believe this," he concluded, "come down, do what you wish, but don't just confuse things."<sup>30</sup>

Stalin answered briefly that since he was busy organizing the All-Russian Council of Defense, he could not come to Kursk. But he announced that he had arranged for the transfer of several commanders from the Tsaritsyn Front, and he claimed credit for having originally sent Antonov to Kursk. Also he implied that the Ukrainians' problems were caused by dissension between the Right and Left Wings of the party. Regarding the legal question of the Provisional Ukrainian Government's right to make independent decisions, he indicated that this was a technical matter, to be ignored by bold administrators. The man who never hesitated to seize every ounce of power that he could grasp frankly counselled Zatonskii and Piatakov to do likewise. "If you have disagreements," he told them, "you and Antonov can resolve them. You have all the power in your hands."<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*; Stalin's claim that he had sent Antonov is not supported by Antonov, who states definitely that Trotsky assigned him to the Ukraine. Antonov-Ovseenko, *op. cit.*, III, 12.

Zatonskii's frazzled temper went out of control when he read those lines, for Stalin's statement that the Provisional Ukrainian Government had "all the power" defied the facts. "Call Stalin to the apparatus," Zatonskii's next telegram demanded, and then:

Forgive me, but this is some kind of mockery. I, well, I say, for the third and last time today that there is no internal dissension at all among us here. All of the evil is in the fact that the center confuses with its contradictory arrangements, with this vagueness which is created as if purposely. In the name of the Central Executive Committee, I put the question to you directly: Do you authorize us to act?<sup>32</sup>

Specifically, he demanded the right to publish an already-written manifesto announcing the establishment of a Ukrainian Soviet Government in full authority; this government would then issue "an order . . . about the creation of a united front and a united command." Zatonskii concluded, "I beg you to reply and to reply intelligibly." And to that telegram he impatiently appended instructions that the receiving office transmit his telegram to Stalin immediately, because he was awaiting an answer.<sup>33</sup> This message was sent at 3:30 p.m. on November 28.

The sources do not tell Stalin's reply, but that reply (probably authorized and possibly even written by Lenin) cut the cords that had been tying up political action in the Ukraine. Some time after 3:30 on November 28 the new Soviet Government of the Ukraine formally held its first assembly at Kursk and resolved to publish its manifesto.<sup>34</sup> The Ukrainians finally had their government, and for the moment Moscow had learned its lesson. The men at the center had bowed to the demands of the Left Ukrainian communists.

Although Lenin had no intention of actually relinquishing central control, he had been forced into temporary compromise. According to his habit, he made the best of what he could only consider a bad situation. As he somewhat cynically explained to Vatsetis on the 29th, there was, after all, a "good side" to this Ukrainian government. Now, rather than being repelled by

<sup>32</sup> Zatonskii, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*; Rubach, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-64.

"Ukrainian chauvinists," Soviet troops could advance and be welcomed as "liberators."<sup>35</sup>

Ultimately, of course, the steam roller of the Russian party would crush the Ukrainian Left communists, but it was extremely difficult to suppress their concept of a relatively autonomous, separate party center that could make its own decisions to fit the needs of the national minority it governed. During three and a half months following the events described here, the military successes of Antonov's Ukrainian armies created a situation that demanded local decision-making, and such decisions were made despite Lenin's continued and strenuous efforts to subordinate the Ukrainian party to his rule.<sup>36</sup> These months further exacerbated tempers on both sides, but at the same time men on both sides learned, and changed their views to fit the new responsibility of governing and defending a Soviet Ukraine. Tense debates at the Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party, March 18-23, fully reflected the development of Lenin's thought over the three and a half months since November; though he meant to rule, he also offered concessions that spelled a centralism that could be extremely sensitive to local moods and needs.<sup>37</sup> In sum, neither the resolutions of the Eighth Congress, nor the temporary dissolution of the KP(b)U in October 1919, suppressed the Ukrainian Left point of view. The belief in the superior ability of a well-informed local authority to make decisions for a national minority was firmly rooted in many minds. The combination of this idea with Ukrainian nationalism in a revived KP(b)U, a development that came in the last days of 1919 and grew stronger in the 20's, created a political philosophy that was to plague the Russian Communist Party for many years.

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<sup>35</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Voennaia perepiska, 1917-1920* (Moscow, 1943), p. 47.

<sup>36</sup> Kh. Rakovskii, "Il'ich i Ukraina," *Letopis' revoliutsii*, No. 2 (1925), pp. 5-8; *Sobranie uzakonenii i rasporiashchenii raboche-krest'ianskogo pravitel'stva Ukrainy* (Kharkov-Kiev, 1919), First edition, January 15, pp. 6-10; January 16, p. 20; February 7, pp. 76-77.

<sup>37</sup> See *VIII S'ezd rossiiskoi kommunisticheskoi partii (bol'shevikov) 18-23 marta 1919 goda; Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow, 1919). For another source giving Lenin's speeches at the congress and also the resolutions and the program of the party approved by the congress, see V. I. Lenin, *Sochineniia* (Moscow, 1937), Third edition, XXIV, 109-79; 682-722.