

## THE LOST EPOCH

*Ukrainians under the Muscovite Tsardom: 1654-1876*

To weep over the past and wish for its return is always useless, especially for us, the servants of the Ukrainian people. We know that what we ultimately want has never yet been achieved, and will only come about at some distant future when the human race is far wiser than it is now. On the other hand, we must look back to find out why our lot is as bitter as it is, in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of our predecessors. The Ukrainians must take a good look backward and review the two hundred and twenty years that have passed since 1654 when, under the leadership of Bohdan Khmelnytsky, the Ukrainians came under the protective arm of the "Eastern Tsar of Muscovy". . . .

The first thing that strikes one in comparing the Ukraine of today with the Ukraine in the days of Khmelnytsky is that then there was a Cossack State, today there is none. Learned folk who write history, foreigners as well as some Ukrainians, usually say that this change was necessary. A Cossack way of life is not for civilized man. The Cossack State appeared when the lot of the Ruthenian people was bitter indeed, when they were enslaved by both the Tatars and the Poles. The Cossack organization served its purpose; it defended the Ukraine from invaders as long as it was able, until the time when the powerful brotherly Muscovite Tsardom entrenched itself in the north. Then the Cossacks united with the Russian Empire, which took over their historic mission of protecting the Ukraine, and transferred them to the Kuban, where they were still needed to wage war against the infidels. Another type of government had to be organized in the Ukraine, say these learned folk, one that would suit the country in times of peace when industrial, commercial, and scholarly pursuits take precedence over warlike ones. They say that only the stubborn fighters, enamored of chivalrous exploits, the shiftless, adventurers, or traitors goaded on by foreign agents were really against the Moscow government and its administration in the Ukraine.

Discussing the "fine" way of life that was created in the steppes of the lower Dnieper by the Empress Catherine, who gave away lands to the aristocrats and to German colonists, Professor Solovyov of Moscow states that the Zaporozhian Cossacks pleaded to be allowed to retain their lands, but that to permit this would have amounted to turning "New Russia into a desert." In other words, the Empress had no choice but to destroy the Zaporozhe by force of arms. These are the ideas our children are taught in the schools, and they retain them, unable to find out whether they are true or not, whether these mad Cossacks really were determined to turn the land into a desert. Is it true that all good things were brought by the tsars who had to exterminate these brigands, and that we really live in the happiest of conditions? . . .

Long ago intelligent Ukrainians ceased to weep over the old Cossack ways

and the Hetmanate. Somehow Ukrainians are not in the habit of boasting about their own ancestral traditions, probably because their independence and their aristocracy disappeared so long ago, and there has been no one to teach them to take pride in their glorious past. For one brief moment, in the thirties and forties of this century, when enlightened Ukrainians began finding out about their heritage, a handful of people bragged loudly about the glories of the Cossack Ukraine, but they were quick to discover the stains on the escutcheon. . . .

We are ready to agree with this critical attitude. It is proper that peaceable pursuits replace warlike exploits in the steppes. But let us consider whether we have made much progress in these peaceable pursuits, and whether we have obtained even half of that for which we fought the Poles and the Tatars. Although, as is the case with all peoples, some of our forefathers loved fighting for its own sake, or fought the "unbelievers" because they were "unbelievers," these were not the main reasons for the eternal warfare on the steppes. Our ancestors were forced to gallop over the steppes to defend their land from Turk and Tatar invasions, which, after all, were the principal obstacle to the development of peaceful pursuits in the Ukraine. And these Cossack exploits did not prevent the Ukraine from being the land from which Muscovy, in the times of Peter the Great's grandfather, his father, and of Peter himself, drew its teachers and clergy. Russian scholars admit this, but they fail to draw the logical conclusions. They are not so hostile to military exploits, either, when they are the exploits of tsarist armies, even for instance in Prussia and Switzerland where, God knows why and for whom, but certainly not for the defense of the homeland, Peter's successors sent soldiers, Ukrainians among them.

Let us look at the conditions in the Ukraine after the Cossack way of life was abolished and see what we obtained in its place. If the Ukraine did not entirely waste these last two hundred years, was it because the old order was abolished and a new introduced from Moscow and St. Petersburg? We shall leave aside the pertinent question of why, if the Cossack way of life was a menace to peaceful life in our land and in the Russian State, the Cossack organization was suppressed only in the Ukraine, and not in the Don region also. Aren't the steppes of the Don just as essential to "peace and enlightenment" as those of the Dnieper and the Dniester? The answer is not difficult: the Don is more closely related to the Muscovite Empire, and more loyal, though if the truth be told, the Don was also deprived of some of its freedom, for it also rose in rebellion on occasion. We are not jealous of the "quiet Don." May it prosper, may it nurture the grain of freedom that still remains until the day when the seed grows into a flourishing tree. It will then recall that once upon a time when both the Don and the Dnieper were self-governing, they knew more about each other than when both were ruled by offices in St. Petersburg, and not by their own Cossack councils. They will recall that there was a time when the Ukrainian *kozars* (min-

strels) sang "glory to the Zaporozhian and to the Don hosts with all the folk, for many years, till the end of time," (from the epic about Ataman Kishka and his escape from a Turkish prison).

But let us pass on to our own affairs to find out what we gained during these two hundred years, after the "disastrous" old ways perished, and the new, supposedly European, but really Muscovite ones, were introduced.

In our time no European is to be found who thinks that a country can prosper under an arbitrary government, and without the cooperation of those governed, or that it can be governed well by bureaucratic officials appointed from above by an absolute monarch. Almost everyone agrees that a large country cannot be governed by decrees coming from a far-away capital, where the opinions of those governed are not known. Even in the Russian Empire, *zemstvo* and city self-government have been introduced, so that at least minor matters can be regulated by the inhabitants rather than by officials who are one place today and another tomorrow.

If these ideas are correct, what advantages has the Ukraine obtained from two hundred years of rule by Moscow? Shall we find it in the cruelties of Peter I, in the greed of Menshikov and Biron's Germans, in the madness of Paul I, or is it in the bestialities of Arakcheyev and the cool, calculating despotism of Nicholas I? The Ukrainians cannot even say that these were "our own dogs," fed and raised by us. In our annals there is no Ivan IV. These despots from St. Petersburg, these perverters of human nature, did not even consider the Ukrainians as their kin. At every occasion they oppressed us with even more venom, and less pity for the "stubborn Khakhols"\* than they did their own people. Or shall we say that because the "Little Russian brethren" suffered, the Russians profited, they whose forefathers had promised to aid them, even at the expense of life itself, when Khmelnytsky gave his allegiance to the "Eastern Tsar"? Why destroy those local laws, the old elective offices which once existed in the Ukraine, when all civilized people are of the opinion that self-government and elective offices are essential? Thus two hundred years of history were lost, and of these more than a hundred were years of intolerable suffering until the tsars succeeded in putting an end to the traditional Ukrainian ways.

Everything the Russian government did in the Ukraine from the days of Khmelnytsky until the destruction of the Zaporozhian Sich in 1775 was aimed at the dissolution of the Ukrainian order. What cunning on the part of the *boyars* from Moscow and the officials from St. Petersburg, what suffering on the part of the Ukrainian peasant, how much pressure on the Ukrainian nobility until it learned to kow-tow — all this to discover at last that these "new" ways are worse than useless! . . .

[In the original, the text of the Articles of Pereyaslav, 1654, under which the Cossacks accepted the suzerainty of the Tsar of Moscow, follows here.]

\* Russian derogatory word for Ukrainians. [ed.]

We do not consider the Articles of Pereyaslav as the ultimate in statesmanship. Today we seek more than simply to reestablish what our ancestors have lost since then. The treaty was drawn up by the Cossacks and was concerned with the Cossacks' welfare. To them, the Ukraine was not all the territory inhabited by the Ukrainians (Ruthenians or Little Russians, as they were then called), but only that where, according to agreements with Poland, the Cossacks lived. The Ukraine did not extend to the San River in Galicia in the west, and to the Dunajec River and the Tisa in the Carpathians, but only to the Sluch River, i.e. it comprised the provinces of Chernihiv, Kiev, and Bratslav. . . .

The nobles in Khmelnytsky's chancellery and "the Father of the Cossacks" himself, also a nobleman, did not forget to include in the Articles of Pereyaslav provisions that the nobility should "preserve its possessions as they were under the Polish kings, and that noblemen should continue to be elected to the country and city courts, as it was under Poland."

As was the case with the Cossacks and the nobility, rights and freedoms were granted to the clergy and the monks, who were allowed to retain the privileges they had obtained under the Polish kings, including their lands and the peasants thereon. The burghers were allowed to choose their mayors and city councillors. Thus, according to the Pereyaslav treaty, the old inequalities were perpetuated. Little thought was given to the well-being of those poor devils, the peasants. The thirteenth article of the treaty is the only one that might be interpreted as having them in mind, for it reads that "the rights accorded to clergy and lay persons by the kings and princes must not be touched" — only nobody had ever granted any rights to the peasants. They remained provisionally free only on the lands from which the Polish nobles fled. Since these lands were not recognized as their property, gradually they were once again brought into a state of "obedience". . . . The development was toward a new serfdom, and the Moscow government not only did nothing to stop it, but actually nurtured the evil seeds in the Cossack order and destroyed the seeds of good latent there.

In the Pereyaslav Articles there were, however, some sound ideas on a kind of government toward which all enlightened people aim today. The agreement stated that foreigners should not meddle in the country's affairs, that every office be elective, that nobody be punished without trial, and that Cossacks, nobles, and burghers each be judged by their peers. The nation's freedom was thus at least partly guaranteed against the abuses of tsarist despotism. . . .

When we compare the rights which were guaranteed to the Ukrainian Cossacks with the despotism that existed in the Muscovite tsardom, there is no doubt that the Cossack constitution had more in common with the free European constitutional governments of today than the Muscovite tsardom had, or even than the present Russian Empire has.

Everybody knows that the liberties of the English people grew up from

a very modest beginning. Comparing the rights which the English lords obtained from King John in 1215 in the Magna Charta, we find that they were not much more extensive than the freedoms of our Cossacks as fixed in 1654, and that at first they benefited a smaller group of people than did those of the Cossacks.

The English Charter was drawn up after an uprising against the king. That is why on some points it is much clearer with regard to the rights of subjects against the king, especially in matters of taxation: there was to be no taxation without the consent of parliament. But when it comes to personal and communal liberties, the English Charter is no more explicit than ours. . . . In the English Charter also it was principally the rights and freedoms of the barons, lords, and knights which were guaranteed. Gradually full rights were extended to the whole gentry, which corresponded to our Cossacks, and still later to the burghers; now they are the rights of the entire English people. Throughout Europe it was the nobility which first obtained rights which later were extended to most of the people. It is true that the increasing equality of the rights of all the inhabitants did not procede at the same rate as the progress of liberty itself. Those lower on the social scale, the townsmen and the peasants, were often willing to aid the king in abridging the rights of the aristocracy so as to free themselves from their masters. This in turn gave rise to a bureaucratic type of rule, for a time replacing, though not entirely, the elective. Some measure of the old representative traditions remained, here and there a diet or assembly, to be renewed and strengthened later on. Countries where such old representative traditions and institutions remained the longest were the best able to reconstruct their constitutions into modern liberal ones, where the power of kings and their officials is limited, not only in local affairs, but also nationally, being dependent on the consent of elected bodies. In these modern liberal States we find that not only the lords, but everyone, is safeguarded against arrest and punishment without trial (which is still not the case in Russia), and that every individual has the right of free speech, publication, and movement.

Two hundred years ago the Ukraine was in a rather advantageous position because, as a result of the wars against the Tatars and the uprisings against Poland, it was able to retain a free native military class and elective institutions, at a time when in most of Europe the army had ceased to be a chivalrous order and had become mercenary, owing obedience only to kings and princes, and when bureaucratic rule had replaced the elective. In addition, because of the wide open spaces and the colonization of the steppes, most of the peasants were *de facto* free. But those were also the days when Europe had already evolved republican governments in Holland and Switzerland, and for a time also in England. There, it is true, the monarchy was restored, but of such a kind that absolutism and arbitrary rule became impossible. The old English freedoms bore fruit. The king could not govern without the

consent of Parliament, nor could he in any way abrogate the rights of individual Englishmen.

When our Ukraine united with Muscovy, liberty was based not only on the ancient traditions of local self-rule, as for instance in the pre-Tatar city-republics of Pskov and Novgorod, where princes were elected and dismissed according to "old custom." No, two hundred years ago ideas concerning the rights of man were encouraged by education and the reading of books about Greece and Rome. The progress of civilization caused the diminishing of serfdom in Europe. In the Ukraine, the people had just put an end to it in a revolutionary uprising against the Polish lords.

That is why it is quite imaginable that in the Ukraine the traditional chivalrous freedoms might have been fused with the new rights of men for which so many enlightened people in Europe were then striving. It could have been expected that the freedoms which had developed organically would be reinforced by rational thought. For instance, the example of Holland was known, a country which had freed itself from the Spanish kings, just as the Ukraine had freed itself from the Polish kings.

We can say with assurance that if, after the separation from Poland, the Ukraine had become an independent principality or kingdom, or even a Cossack republic, in time the predominance of the ruling classes over the common people would have nonetheless increased, as was the case everywhere. But without foreign pressure from Moscow, the Ukrainian nobles would hardly have been able to destroy the traditional popular freedoms in the course of a hundred years, for only 130 years after the Articles, the fall of the absolute monarchy in France was universally known.

The traditional Ukrainian liberties which were reaffirmed under Khmelnytsky were destroyed by the old-fashioned oppressive regimes of the countries to which the fate of the Ukraine was linked: aristocratic Poland and autocratic tsarist Russia. In the latter, the Ukraine met not only a way of life patterned by the nobles, as was also the case in Poland, but also with an absolutist autocracy not much better than that which existed in Turkey.

We cannot say that the Muscovite or Great Russian people is incapable of being free. In earlier times free cities existed in the North as they did in the Kievan Rus, later the Ukraine. It is unimportant in this connection whether the original inhabitants of Pskov and Novgorod were Ukrainian colonists or not. In any case in the 14th century, when these city-republics were at the height of their power, they were already Great Russian. The Don and Ural Cossacks, whose governments were almost the same as that of the Ukrainian Zaporozhian Cossacks, were also Great Russian.

The Great Russians have retained an old custom whereby the land is owned by the villages and re-divided periodically. This custom has probably continued because Russian territory is very extensive and there was plenty of land for everybody. Also, although the Great Russians are as old as other European nations, all of the settlements are of recent origin, for the people were

always obliged to move from one place to another in their flight from the Tatars, the Poles, or their own government. Each time it was a community which occupied the new land, cut down the forests, etc. Few peoples are as capable at organizing cooperatives with elected leaders as are the Russians. However, in Muscovy such democratic ways have remained only on the local level, in the small villages, settlements, and cooperatives. In national affairs, in matters involving the country as a whole, Russia has long been in the hands of the absolute tsars and the bureaucracy. At the lowest level, in the villages, Muscovy is still a land where the people have retained the old art of self-government. At the top, as a State, Russia is as old as France, for example. The dynasty of the dukes and tsars of Muscovy continued uninterrupted for a long period, and it was an indigenous one, not Lithuanian or Polish as in our country. The Church hierarchy was also indigenous, and it taught the people to obey the tsars, as the anointed of the Lord. Moreover, at first the Tatars supported the dukes of Moscow, and after these rebelled against the Tatars, the people's homage was only increased, and the admonishments of the popes to obey intensified. The Great Russian people continued to spread out over its immense land where each village was so far from the next that unity was only preserved by the idea of Little Mother Moscow and Little Father Tsar. The Great Russian people forgot that for all the people of Russia, including the Great Russians, Moscow was and is not a heart but a spider.

Moscow's history, like that of France from the 12th century to the 18th, is the story of the increase of the power of the monarch over the traditional communal liberties, of that of the centralized appointed bureaucracy over elected bodies. We thus have the development of a strange and not always understood aspect of government and national life in Russia: in the villages, at the local level, where tsarist bureaucrats did not dominate, we have self-rule and a community spirit similar to that of the cantons of Switzerland; above the village level we have tsarist absolutism and arbitrary bureaucracy of a type never seen in Europe, not even in the days when the kings and bureaucrats were at their mightiest, under Louis XIV of France and the Fredericks of Prussia. There is another great difference between Muscovy and France or any other West European country. In Europe the pursuit of knowledge helped keep at bay royal absolutism by encouraging people to investigate what is worthwhile in other regimes. Muscovy, far from the countries of old civilization, in the midst of forests and steppes, remained in a semi-barbarous stage, its learning limited to ecclesiastical literature. In these volumes the Russian people read not about the republics of Greece and Rome, but about the biblical kingdoms. They saw not the examples of the Italian city-republics or of England, Holland, and Switzerland, but of the khanates of the Khazan and Astrakhan Tatars.

Throughout Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries the kings got stronger and tried to destroy the old self-government in their lands, but nowhere was

there so mad a murderer as Ivan IV. While the European kings were curtailing the elective offices of the aristocracy, they were at least reducing serfdom among the common people. The tsars of Russia legalized serfdom in their country at a time when it was disappearing in Europe. . . .

It is this sort of an empire that our Ukraine joined in 1654, when it was a free and reborn land. It is true that some seeds of evil, such as the beginnings of serfdom were present, and that the idea of freedom had not been deeply rooted enough by education to show the people how to remain free.

No wonder that during the years when the Ukraine was united to Muscovy with its autocratic tsar and legal serfdom and without education, Russian despotism gradually brought about the destruction of the Ukraine's freedom. Moscow's *boyars* helped reintroduce serfdom in the Ukraine, while education and enlightenment were halted, all the more so since the few educated Ukrainians were scattered over the whole of the new empire. A wall of tsarist and bureaucratic despotism was erected to prevent the free political ideas which were then current in Europe, and which the Ukraine had always welcomed, from penetrating. Even if the Ukrainian people had been able to stage an uprising against the increasing enslavement in their own country, they would have met with opposition not only from those among their compatriots who benefited from serfdom, but also from the Russian government, its army, and even the Russian people, who considered disobedience to "our tsar" as treason on the part of the Ukrainians.

Instead of encouraging the good that was in the Ukrainian Cossack way of life, we see it trampled on by the Russian tsars from the days of Khmelnytsky to Catherine II. The evil was cunningly nourished.