2

Agrarian Unrest and the Shaping of a National Identity in Ukraine at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

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Before the revolution and for decades after, 'Ukrainian' was synonymous with 'peasant'. This was a fitting description of the Ukrainian population. According to the 1897 census, 81 per cent of the total population of the nine provinces which constituted Ukraine were classified as peasants, and 93 per cent of all Ukrainians belonged to this category. The classification of 'peasant' in tsarist Russia was a juridical one; it did not necessarily denote living in the countryside, or deriving one's living from agriculture. The 1897 census provides data on both these points. Studying the census we find that 97 per cent of all Ukrainian peasants lived in rural areas. In terms of occupation, 74 per cent of the population of the nine provinces derived their livelihood from agriculture. In the case of Ukrainians, 87 per cent supported themselves from agriculture.[1]

It is clear that the peasantry had a crushing weight in the Ukrainian population. Because of this, the 'Ukrainian question' – the national question – was inextricably bound up with the problem of the emancipation of the countryside.

For the overwhelming majority of the Ukrainian peasantry survival – the provision of enough cabbage soup and black bread to fill their stomachs – was not an easy matter. Ukraine, of course, was a territory very suitable for agriculture: 75.6 per cent of its surface could be utilized for agricultural purposes in the narrow sense (crops and animal husbandry). In European Russia, the figure was only 40 per cent.[2] However, despite the propitious agricultural conditions, or more correctely, because of them, the material existence of the Ukrainian peasant was not better and in some respects worse than that of his fellow peasant in Russia.

The Emancipation Act of 1861 'freed' the peasantry but did not provide them with the means for beginning a new independent exis-

tence. At first, the peasantry in Ukraine considered the Act to be a fraud, a trick by the landlords, and continued to 'wait for the real Act from the Tsar'.[3] Anticipation soon gave way to open rebellion as Ukraine witnessed scores of uprisings which expressed the peasantry's deep disillusionment.[4]

The Ukrainian peasantry had good cause to be unhappy with the Act. Because of the high productivity of agricultural land in Ukraine (and its consequent high price), it was profitable for the landlords to manage their own estates, using the peasantry as agricultural labour. A reflection of this was the fact that *corvée* or servile labour (*barshchina*), rather than quit-rent or the rent in lieu of labour (*obrok*), was the system of peasant payments in Ukraine: over 99 per cent of peasants in Ukraine had to perform *corvée* obligations prior to the 1861 Act. In discussing the provisions of the impending act, landlords in Ukraine strongly expressed their desire to keep as much land as possible for themselves. The landlords wanted an agricultural labour force, and agreed that the peasantry should receive enough land to be self-sufficient in the most basic of their requirements, but not self-sufficient enough to prohibit their search for work on the estates. The Emancipation Act in its separate provisions for Ukraine reflected the landlords' interests.[5]

To begin with, 220,000 former serfs (over 440,000 souls with the families included) had their land taken away as a result of the break in the personal relationship with the landlord. These former serfs, most of whom had been employed in truck farms or in the households of the landowners, swelled the ranks of a growing agricultural proletariat. The overwhelming majority of peasants – 4,470,000 male peasants – received the so-called 'allotments' or parcels of land.[6]

Following the reform, the extent of peasant holdings was considerably curtailed. Accurate statistics on the loss of land by peasants are difficult to establish because of inadequate data on land usage prior to 1861. It is generally agreed that in the left-bank (eastern provinces) and steppe regions, peasants lost over 30 per cent of the land they previously used. In the right-bank (western) provinces, following the defeat of the Polish uprising of 1863, a new law was passed modifying the provisions of the Act of 1861, which resulted in an increase of peasant holdings by 18 to 25 per cent. All in all, it appears that the average holding in Ukraine per 'revision soul' decreased from 3.2 to 2.8 dessiatines (1 dessiatine equals 1.092 hectares).[7] As a rule, the larger the estate, and the more productive the land, the greater was the peasant loss. For example, in Volyn province, on estates of less than 100 dessi-

atines, peasants kept 92 per cent of their former land, while on estates of over 10,000 dessiatines, they were deprived of 75 per cent of their former land use.[8]

The redemption price for the 'allotments' which peasants were compelled to pay was high, consuming 70 per cent of their income.[9] In right-bank provinces where peasants had received more land in their allotments, the redemption price in many districts exceeded the income from the land itself. In 1866, for example, in the more prosperous districts of Kiev province, the income from 1 dessiatine of land gave the peasant 1.12 roubles, while the redemption payment stood at 2.60 roubles.[10]

Although between 1877 and 1905 almost 1.5 million dessiatines had been added to the allotment lands, the amount of land was too limited to support the rapidly increasing peasant population. Between 1870 and 1900 the peasant population grew by 8.5 million, and the number of peasant households increased by over one million between 1877 and 1905.[11] As a result, the size of the allotments per 'revision soul' decreased even further as the parcels of land kept being subdivided. Thus in 1861, in the right-bank provinces the Emancipation Act allotment per revision soul was about 3 dessiatines, but by 1900 the average allotment was barely 1.5 dessatines per revision soul. In left-bank Ukraine, the average allotment in the same period declined from 3.3 to 1.7 dessiatines, and in the steppe region from 6.2 to 2.5 dessiatines.[12] Thus in thirty-nine years, the size of allotments had diminished by more than two times per revision soul. In examining the above data one should bear in mind that an allotment of not less than 5 dessiatines per revision soul was needed to make ends meet.[13]

The peasantry clung to the allotments and they remained the main form of peasant landholding. The great land census of 1905 shows that 78 per cent of land owned by peasants, and 67 per cent of land used by them consisted of allotments. In 1905, almost half the peasant households (44 per cent) had plots of less than 5 dessiatines; 40 per cent had plots of between 5 and 10 dessiatines, and 16 per cent of households had allotments over 10 dessiatines. Marked regional differences were to be observed: half of the allotments over 10 dessiatines were to be found in the steppe provinces. The average size of allotments in Ukraine in 1905 was 7 dessiatines, which was almost 3 dessiatines less when compared to 1877.[14]

The possibility of increasing the size of holdings through the purchase of land was open only to the richer and more enterprising peasants. The price of land had increased in a spectacular fashion. For

example, the sale price of 1 dessiatine in Poltava province in the 1860s was 20.12 roubles; at the turn of the twentieth century it reached 500 or even 600 roubles per dessiatine.[15] By 1905 'private' lands bought by those classified as peasants amounted to slightly over a quarter of the land held in allotments. Not surprisingly, half the 'private' lands (55.8 per cent) were owned as personal holdings by only a handful of peasants. Only 4 per cent of peasant households owned private land. The other half of private lands were purchased either by associations of peasants (33.5 per cent of private lands), or by the official unit of peasant organization, the commune (10.7 per cent). The size of land owned by the latter was only 12 per cent the amount of land held in allotments, and thus could not really affect the livelihood of the masses of peasants struggling on their plots.[16] At the other end of the scale in the villages were those who owned no land whatsoever. One estimate placed the number of landless households at 17 per cent of the total number of households.[17]

The reform of 1861 increased the differentiation of the peasantry. One contemporary observer was struck by the marked contrast between the 'wealth and joy' of some households and the 'poverty and misery' of others.[18] The more prosperous peasant could be considered one who held allotments of over 10 dessiatines. In Ukraine as a whole one in seven households were in this category; one in eleven in right-bank Ukraine and one in nine in the left-bank.[19] The wealthier peasant augmented his holdings not only by the purchase of land, but also by renting. The sharp increase in the price of rent: from 10 to 12 roubles per dessiatine in the period 1895–8, to 18 to 20 roubles by 1903–4, and 25 to 30 roubles for good land – meant that only the more prosperous peasant could augment his income in this fashion.[20] For the poorer peasantry, they could earn a few roubles by working on the neighbouring farms of the nobles, or travel to the steppe regions to seek work on the great modern estates. But the introduction of modern agricultural machinery and the increasing supply of agricultural labour served to stabilize farm wages. To save themselves, poor peasants from Ukraine emigrated *en masse* to the Caucasus, Siberia and the Far East. Between 1896 and 1914, some two million Ukrainian peasants migrated from Ukraine to the regions.[21]

The holdings of Ukrainian peasants were actually larger than average peasant holdings in countries such as France. In France in 1884 the average peasant had less than 9 acres. The comparable figure in Ukraine for 1905 (all holdings, including allotment and purchased land) was 18 acres.[22] The French peasant, stimulated by a large urban

market, made much more productive use of his land. The Ukrainian peasant suffered from primitive agriculture technique. For the mass of Ukrainian peasants, agricultural methods and implements had remained substantially unchanged from medieval times: the wooden plough, the scythe, the three-field system. However, a large proportion of Ukrainian peasants did not possess even medieval implements. In the relatively prosperous province of Katerynoslav, for example, 38 per cent of peasants did not own a wooden plough at the turn of the twentieth century.[23] As for draught animals, in 1891, 43 per cent of households in Ukraine were without a horse; in Kiev province the figure reached 62 per cent.[24] Lack of intelligent state policies promoting infrastructures in agriculture (credit facilities, grain elevators, agricultural schools and the like) compounded the difficulties. As a consequence the yields on peasant lands were low, and the threat of starvation ever present. The per acre yield of wheat in Ukraine was half that of Denmark, Belgium or Germany.[25] In the nineteenth century, under Ukraine's climatic conditions, the peasant could expect to experience pangs of hunger every two or three years when the harvest was poor.[26]

For the peasants who clung to the households of their fathers, real incomes were small. In 1903 the government found a grave discrepancy between the food yielded by allotment lands, and the needs of the people living on them. Using the sum of 640 lb of grain and potatoes as the average amount annually required by each individual, government statisticians found that this average was exceeded by the average income in only two provinces of Ukraine – in the other seven average income fell short of the average requirement by amounts ranging from 35 lb in Kharkiv to 178 lb in Volyn. Although these figures ignored income derived from non-allotment and rented land, from livestock, handicraft production, and from wages for outside labour, they assume considerable significance when set alongside figures on the health of youths called to military service. The proportion of draftees who were rejected or had their service deferred because of unsatisfactory physical conditions ranged from one-seventh to one-quarter of those called. The physical fitness of draftees in five of the Ukrainian provinces was somewhat less than average for European Russia.[27]

The Stolypin reform, which abolished obligatory forms of land communities and redemption payments, alleviated the lot of Ukrainian peasants to some extent. By allowing the consolidation of holdings the reform permitted peasants to show some initiative and improve their farming methods. With technical aid from agricultural cooperatives

and zemstvo institutions something was accomplished in this direction. But what the reform did not do was solve the burning problem of land shortage. In the first years of the Stolypin reform, many poor peasants were attracted to the Peasant Bank, hoping to increase their land holdings through the purchase of land from the Bank. However, high land prices and high interest rates on loans for small parcels of land soon brought economic ruin to the small producer.[28] It was only the better-off peasants, who had the means to increase their landholding and to purchase modern implements, who benefited from the reform. On the eve of the 1917 revolution the problem of land hunger remained.

Statistics on peasant landholdings on the eve of the 1917 revolution are somewhat contradictory. The most exhaustive study published to date concluded that peasants with land of up to 3 dessiatines comprised 57 per cent of the total number of rural households (peasant and non-peasant) but owned only 12 per cent of the land; peasants with between 3 and 10 dessiatines represented 30 per cent of households and owned 22 per cent of the land; peasants with 10 dessiatines and over formed 12 per cent of the total rural households and owned 30 per cent of the land, while landlords representing 0.8 per cent of rural households owned 30 per cent of the land. The remaining 6 per cent of land was in the possession of the state and monasteries.[29]

The average peasant farm was approximately 8 dessiatines. A progressive Danish or French farmer could earn a comfortable living on such a farm, but not a Ukrainian peasant. As C. S. Smith, Britain's Consul-General in Odessa, noted in a confidential dispatch to the Foreign Office filed in 1905, 'the peasant class … as a whole seems to live very near starvation. The peasantry are sure that more land is the cure for their hard lot, and it is on this that their hearts are set.'[30] It is, of course, arguable whether an instant egalitarian redistribution of all of the available 41 million dessiatines of arable land among four million peasant households would have improved the lot of the Ukrainian peasant. Such a redistribution would have increased the size of the average peasant holding by 1.5 dessiatines, with an additional half a horse and half a cow. Under agricultural conditions in Ukraine, this would still be a subsistence farm. However, whatever calculations one could have produced to show the peasantry the economic inadvisability of the solution of the agrarian question by the means of land seizure, there is no doubt that they wanted the upper classes' land. This desire was reinforced by the alien nature of the peasants' immediate economic antagonists, the nobility and merchants.

The nobility owned about a third of all arable land (1905). The average holding of the nobility in the steppe provinces was 733 dessiatines; in right-bank Ukraine, 609 dessiatines, and in the left-bank provinces 136 dessiatines. Merchants owned 16 per cent of the land. The average holding of merchants for the respective regions was 794, 443 and 144 dessiatines. Most of the land held by these upper classes was concentrated in large private estates: 52 per cent of all land privately owned was held by 1.6 per cent of private owners in estates of over 1,000 dessiatines.[31] Although the holding of the nobility slowly decreased because they were not always able to adjust to modern farming, in 1914 there were still 5,000 massive estates with about 1,600 dessiatines.[32]

For the Ukrainian peasant, national antagonism could be added to the problem of land hunger. The nobility, the class owning most of the large estates, were largely non-Ukrainian: 50 per cent were Russian, 20 per cent Polish, and 26 per cent Ukrainian. Almost half the Ukrainian nobility was concentrated in two provinces of the left-bank – Poltava and Chernihiv – where these descendants of the former Cossack officer class formed a layer of small landowners.[33]

The merchants and tradesmen epitomized for the peasant all that was wrong with the economic order. It was they who purchased the peasants' produce at the lowest possible figure, and who sold him manufactured goods at the highest possible prices. In Ukraine, only 13 per cent of all those engaged in trade and commerce were Ukrainian; 62 per cent were Jewish, and 17 per cent Russian. In the impoverished right-bank, only 7 per cent were Ukrainian, 82 per cent Jewish.[34]

Fiscal exploitation by the government was also a source of rural discontent. As Mykola Porsch noted, every year millions of roubles were paid into the Imperial treasury by Ukrainian peasants. These roubles were spent not to raise the economic and cultural level of these lowly taxpayers, but chiefly to maintain the Imperial administrative apparatus and the army, and to subsidize railways and other industries.[35] From these expenditures the Ukrainian peasant could discern no obvious advantage: rather they were personalized for him by corrupt bureaucrats, recruiting officers who dragged off sons into the army and insatiable tax collectors. Russian peasants also poured out taxes and also resented their government, but to the Ukrainian the matter presented another angle: most of officialdom were Russians filled with contempt for the Ukrainian peasant whom they called, derogatorily, *khokhol*. For example, two-thirds of all members of the armed forces

garrisoned in Ukraine to maintain order, and whom the peasantry very often had to feed, were non-Ukrainian.[36]

For the Ukrainian peasant masses the existing system of economic and administrative subjugation was symbolized by the city. Only 30 per cent of the population of Ukraine's cities and towns was Ukrainian, and in the case of cities with a population of over 50,000 this figure declined to 18 per cent.[37] The Bolshevik V. Skotovstanskii [V. Shakhrai], looking at the ctiy through the eyes of the Ukrainian peasant, wrote:

> The city rules the village, and 'foreigners' the city. The city drew all the wealth to itself and gave almost nothing to the village in return. The city drew taxes, which almost never returned to the village in Ukraine … in the city one had to pay bribes to officials to avoid mockery and red tape. In the city the landowner squandered all the weath gathered in the village. In the city the merchant cheated you when he bought and sold. In the city there are lights, there are schools, theatres and music plays. The city is clean … dressed as for a holiday, it eats and drinks well, many people promenade. But in the village, apart from poverty, impenetrable darkness and hard work – there is almost nothing. The city is aristocratic, foreign, not ours, not Ukrainian. Russian, Jewish, Polish – only not ours, not Ukrainian.[38]

There was no shortage of grievances for the Ukrainian peasantry. The social conditions were such that on the surface their protest could easily be articulated within the framework of a national demand. However, peasant responsiveness on this score presupposed a certain self-awareness of belonging to a unique cultural community, and this awareness never arises spontaneously. It is the product of social learning which occurs over a long period of time. Neither was there any guarantee that peasant actions would follow an organized purposeful direction. Studies of social movements have shown that infrastructures of pre-existing voluntary associations and resources necessary to sustain organized activity are essential if movements are not to dissipate through lack of focus.[39] We will now examine how much progress had been made prior to the 1917 revolution on both scores.

As Imperial Russia stood on the eve of the twentieth century circumstances were such that it would not be long before the Ukrainian peasantry would rise against its predicament. Behind the Ukrainian peasants stretched a long tradition of direct action. As early as 1902, in

the provinces of Poltava and Kharkiv, peasants sacked eighty-two large estates. Piotr Stolypin called these disturbances the worst since the rebellion of Pugachev.[40] Suppressed by the tsarist police and Cossacks, peasant discontent smouldered quietly in 1904, only to erupt still more furiously in 1905 and 1906. Peasant soldiers were dragging themselves home from the Russo-Japanese War with the demand for payment in something besides tarnished glory. Crop failures in the summer and autumn of 1905 sharpened the already chronic pangs of hunger. Then came rumours of rebellion in the streets of Kiev, Kharkiv and Odessa. Rural Ukraine again burst into flames.

At the peak of the agrarian movement, from the autumn of 1905 through the following summer, outbreaks appeared in all of the provinces and most of the districts of Ukraine. Refusing to work or pay rent, peasants demanded higher wages for labour on the large estates, a shorter working day, better living conditions, and the right to rent more land at lower rates. Violent direct action became widespread. The peasants chopped down the landlord's trees, appropriated his crops, pastured their cattle in his meadows, and even attempted to plough his fields. They plundered manor houses. Sometimes they assaulted or even killed resisting landlords. They also turned on the government, refusing to pay taxes and assailing local officials. Troops sent to quell the outbreaks were met with pitchforks, scythes and whatever firearms the peasants could gather.[41]

The 1905 revolution in Ukraine has been characterized as 'unplanned and leaderless'.[42] This was not entirely the case. Parallel to thousands of incidents of direct action, efforts were made to establish organizational structures in the form of peasant unions, popular enlightenment societies and the like. The Ukrainian rural intelligentsia – doctors, apothecaries, school teachers, clerks, veterinarians and zemstvo officials – were groups which played a key role in fostering the growth of peasant-based rural organizations.[43] Isolated village unions grew into *volost* and provincial organizations and finally into an All-Russian Peasant Union, the first congress of which met in Moscow in July 1905. The Russian Social Revolutionaries dominated both the all-Russian organization and the units in Ukraine. Ukrainian Social Revolutionaries had not yet founded their own organization. Social Revolutionary economic and political demands invariably appeared in petitions which the village assemblies addressed to the 'Little Father' in St Petersburg, demanding reforms such as the transfer of land, without compensation, to those who cultivated it, the pardoning of political prisoners and of peasants arrested during the agrarian disturbances, the

calling of a constituent assembly to form a government based on universal suffrage, popular education at government expense, and the abolition of the death penalty.[44]

Initially, the national factor did not play a significant role in the peasant upheaval. This was because the peasantry had a poorly developed sense of national awareness, and because the channels transmitting the national message were in their infancy. Tsarist policies towards Ukraine were particularly devastating in this respect.

Mass illiteracy was one of the obstacles standing in the way of the efforts of the Ukrainian national movement. It is true that in the post-reform period, thanks to the efforts of the zemstvo institutions and the intelligentsia's popular enlightenment campaigns, some rudimentary improvement in the level of literacy had been registered.[45] But overall, prior to 1917, the mobilizing potential of literacy was hardly developed. The social and national policies of tsarism had led to a situation, probably unique in European history, where Ukrainians had higher rates of literacy in the mid-eighteenth century than at the turn of the twentieth.[46] In the light of the 1897 census only 13 per cent of Ukrainians were literate – the average for European Russia was 23 per cent. In the village, literacy rates ranged from 9 to 4 per cent depending on the province. Among Ukrainian women only 4 per cent could read. In France, for the sake of comparison, the literacy rate for women in 1848 was 80 per cent.[47]

The literacy rate in Ukraine reflected the state of popular education in the country. The school system throughout Russia was a travesty, but in Ukraine things were worse because national discrimination amplified the debilitating effects of general social and educational policies. From Alexander I's educational reform of 1804 until the time of the 1917 revolution, Ukrainian was banned from schools as a language of instruction and as a subject. The school question, as Otto Bauer noted, is one of the most important of all national questions, for a common national education is one of the strongest bonds of the nation. It is essential for the transmission of the great overarching traditions which give nations unity.[48] This instrument was denied the national movement. Neither could the printed word serve as a means to create a national social opinion. Throughout most of the nineteenth century the printing of newspapers, books and journals in Ukrainian was banned.[49]

The consequence of this situation was that the overwhelming mass of Ukrainian peasants had a poorly developed sense of their national identity. The village, of course, preserved its ethnos, because it was left

outside the tide of modernity. The peasant 'stubbornly looked at the world through his ancestors' eyeglasses; he wore his ancestors' clothes, spoke his ancestors' tongue'.[50] S. Goldelman tells us that the national self-identification of the peasants was so low that they were 'hardly aware that the language which they used in their daily life was "Ukrainian"'.[51] An article published at the time of the 1905 revolution entitled 'A voice from the village' characterized the state of national consciousness as follows: 'In our country peasants are only very little conscious when it comes to nationality. They know they are not Muscovites, but Little Russians as they call themselves. But what is a Little Russian? What are his needs and how does he differ from a Muscovite? This they cannot say.'[52]

But this situation would not remain that way forever. The peasant may not have had much of a national instinct, but his sense of economic grievance was acute. Pursuing his economic inclination he had little choice other than to reflect on the political order. When the peasant movement reached the stage of considering wider political issues, the national question emerged. When the agrarian movement evolved from spontaneous action to assume more organized forms, this offered opportunities for the Ukrainian rural intelligentsia to communicate its message. The revolution of 1905 provided the social mobilization essential to the development of national identity and national political demands.

V. H. Bosanquet, the British Vice-Consul in Mykolaiv who toured the southern provinces of Ukraine in September 1905, noted that many had come to understand that 'the peasant question cannot be settled independently of the whole national question with which it is intimately connected'.[53] As Leon Trotsky wrote, the 'political awakening of the peasantry, could not have taken place otherwise … than through their native language – with all the consequences ensuring to regard to schools, courts and self-administration'.[54] The agrarian revolt roused the peasant masses from their age-old slumber.

The Poltava peasantry, which rebelled as early as 1902, began to incorporate in its petitions to authorities demands for the 'Ukrainian language school, and the granting of political autonomy for Ukraine' only towards the end of 1905.[55] A study of peasant activity throughout the entire 1905 agrarian upheaval shows similar trends.[56] Plans were made for an all-Ukrainian peasant congress that would strive for 'civil and national equality and autonomy for Ukraine'.[57] The Ukrainian rural intelligentsia which had been active among the Russian Social Revolutionaries gradually broke away and formed their own national

organization. The Ukrainian Party of Social Revolutionaries was founded in 1906.[58] Disillusionment which followed the collapse of the all-Russian agrarian movement strengthened the claim for autonomy.

All the petitions, peasant unions and congresses had resulted only in the cancellation of the 'redemption dues' for the allotments, a step which brought but little more bread to the peasant's table. Nor was the Stolypin Reform, which the government inaugurated after the 1905 revolution, more helpful, since it aimed to consolidate the landholdings of the more prosperous peasants. The entire sequence of events had made the Ukrainian peasant more receptive to the idea of escaping from the imperial yoke through the establishment of some system of Ukrainian autonomy. All-Russian peasant socialism gave way to a Ukrainian variant.[59]

In 1917, events in the Ukrainian countryside moved at 'fast forward' speed. An analysis of peasant actions from March 1917 to March 1918 shows that out of 500 cases reported, 41 per cent involved the seizure and free distribution of land. A comparable analysis for the rest of the Russian Empire (1,400 cases) shows that only 28 per cent of peasant action was directed at the seizure of land in this period. In the case of Ukraine, 90 per cent of land seized belonged to landlords, the Church or the state, and only 10 per cent involved taking land from homesteaders who established separate farms under the Stolypin reforms. By the end of September 1917 the peasantry, organized into local committees (*hromady*) had already redistributed about one-third of all non-peasant lands.[60] The point is that the agrarian revolution was well on the way to being settled before the Red Army established the Bolshevik regime in Kharkiv the end of December 1917.

The extent of the self-organization of village society in 1917 took even seasoned political observers by surprise. By the end of that year, the Ukrainian Peasants' Union (*Selianska spilka*), allied to the Ukrainian Party of Social Revolutionaries, had branches in the villages of most provinces and a membership that ran into the millions. It is estimated that in 1917 one in four Ukrainian rural adult males belonged either to the Union or to the Ukrainian Social Revolutionaries. (The Bolsheviks, for the sake of comparison, had 8,000 members in Ukraine.) The Union's newspaper, *Narodnia volia*, by May 1917 reached an astonishing circulation of 200,000. Scores of new cooperatives were founded.[61] The development of these infrastructures of national life permitted the national idea to penetrate the masses. The speed with which this happened was to be measured not in months, but in weeks and days. In peasant conferences and meetings the outlines of a national consensus

were emerging: land to the peasants, a Ukrainization of the army, schools and administration, self-government for Ukraine in a loose confederation with Russia.[62]

The rise of national consciousness in the countryside was not because the human mind is malleable, but because it is conservative. The masses had always spoken the 'simple language' and sung 'the simple songs';[63] during the revolution, these age-old facts of their existence became politicized. The rural intelligentsia took the lead in this process. But in and of themselves, they would not have been able to accomplish this enormous task had they not been reinforced by tens of thousands of fresh cadres which the war and the army supplied.

Hundreds of thousands of young Ukrainian peasants – the most dynamic element in the countryside – were placed in uniform, where they learnt the effectiveness of organization. While serving the tsar they also experienced in a thousand different ways – from the taunts and insults of reactionary Russian officers to encounters with nationalistic Poles – the social contrast which is the yeast of national self-awareness. There too they met the heart and soul of the Ukrainian national movement, the village teachers, thousands of whom had been drafted as subalterns, and who became instrumental in transforming the young peasant recruits' new experiences and awareness into a national ideology. The national movement in 1917 as a mass phenomenon began in the barracks, often in urban garrisons, with discussions, concerts, clubs and congresses. The movement developed to such an extent that the 2,500 delegates attending the Second Military Congress in Kiev (July 1917) held mandates from over a million and a half troops.[64] When the soldiers returned home (or deserted), they greatly expanded the existing organizational forces of the Ukrainian movement in the countryside.

The national awakening of the Ukrainian peasantry was tied to the agrarian question. If the peasantry supported *en masse* the idea of Ukrainian autonomy in 1917, which they understood to mean full equality with Russia, it was because experience had taught them not to trust any agrarian reforms originating from the north. They were convinced that only a Ukrainian government 'run by "our people" … who know what "our people" in Ukraine need' would give them the agrarian order they desired.[65] When the peasantry cornered members of the Central Rada (Ukraine's Provisional Government) and 'pounded' them with the demand to 'take power' immediately, this was an expression of their socio-economic realism.[66] In the spring of 1917 seizures of land had begun. Peasants needed a guarantee that their title to this land

would be backed up by the power of a state from which they could expect a sympathetic hearing. Moreover, Ukrainian peasants were fearful of the prospect of having to share their land with Russian immigrants. It is not surprising that peasants were in the forefront of criticism of the Central Rada for its lack of resolve in obtaining autonomy from Petrograd. Delegates to the First All-Ukrainian Peasants' Congress (10–15 June 1917) could not understand why the Rada 'requested' autonomy and did not 'demand it'.[67]

If before the revolution most commentators agreed that the peasantry had a weak sense of national identity, after the revolution this evaluation changed. Speaking of the Ukrainian peasantry, Trotsky in 1923 noted, 'National ideology for peasantry is a factor of great significance. National psychology ... is an explosive force of immense proportions.'[68] When the Ukrainian peasant masses gave Ukrainian parties an impressive victory in the Russian Constituent Assembly elections (two months after the October revolution) there could be no doubt that the national movement had secured a popular base.[69]

Notes

1. *Pervia vseobshchaia perepis' naseleniia Rossiiskoi imperii 1897 goda*, 89 vols (St Petersburg, 1857–1905). Hereafter cited as *Perepis' 1897*; volumes 8, 13, 16, 32, 33, 41, 46, 47, 48 provide data for the Ukrainian provinces. Notes will refer to table numbers, which are identical in all volumes, and not to pages, which vary. See Tables XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXIV.
2. Mykola Porsh, 'Iz statystyky Ukrainy', *Ukraina*, III (1907) p. 42.
3. Mykhailo Drahomanov, *Novi ukrainski pisni pro hromadsi spravy (1764–1880)* (Geneva, 1881) p. 66.
4. See A. Z. Popelnitski, 'Pervyie shagi krestianskoi reformy', in *Velikaia reforma*, vol. 5 (Moscow, 1991) pp. 184–94.
5. M. Iavorskyi, *Ukraina v epokhu kapitalizmu: Na shliakhu kapitalistychnoi akumuliatsii* (Kharkiv, 1925) pp. 28–30.
6. Porsh, 'Iz statystyky', 42, and *Istoriia selianstva Ukrainskoi RSR*, vol. 1 (Kiev, 1967) p. 384.
7. V. P. Teplytsky, *Reform 1861 roku i ahrarni vidnosyny na Ukraini* (Kiev, 1959) pp. 106–9.
8. P. Maslov, *Razvitie zemledeleniia v Rossii* (Moscow, 1912) p. 129.
9. *Istoriia selianstva*, vol. 1, p. 387.
10. Iu. Ianson, *Opyt statisticheskogo issledovaniia o krestianskikh nadelakh i platezhakh* (St Petersburg, 1881).
11. M. Porsch, 'Statystyka zemlevolodinnia v 1905 r. i mobilizatsiia zemel'noi vlasnosty na Ukraini vid 1877 r po 1905 r.', *Ukraina*, IV (1907) pp. 166, 176.

12. *Istoriia selianstva*, vol. 1, p. 392.
13. Ianson, *Opyt*, p. 66.
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