A Socialist Army Officer Confronts War and Nationalist Politics: Konstantin Oberuchev in Revolutionary Kyiv

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The career of Konstantin Oberuchev (1864–1929) offers a case study of a self-consciously revolutionary and socialist thinker and social activist confronting the dilemmas of wartime and revolutionary politics. This essay focuses on the period in Oberuchev's life when he seemingly had the greatest opportunity to achieve his political ideals for Russia, in particular the time between March and November 1917, when he held positions of considerable political influence in Kyiv, first as army commissar and then as commander of the Kyiv Military District (hereafter KMD).[1] During those months Oberuchev's fate reflected the dramatic transformations in the Russian Empire itself. At the beginning of 1917 he was still in America, living the final year of his several years abroad in political exile for revolutionary activities undertaken while in the service of the Russian imperial army as a relatively high-ranking (staff) officer. He had first been arrested in 1889, shortly after graduating from the Mikhailov Artillery Academy, for taking part in an illegal military-revolutionary organization.[2] Initially held for seven months in the Peter and Paul For-

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[1] For surveys of this period in the English-language literature, see John S. Reshetar, Jr., *The Ukrainian Revolution, 1917–1920: A Study in Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952); and Taras Hunczak, ed., *The Ukraine, 1917–1921: A Study in Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1977), chaps. 1 and 2.

[2] Oberuchev traced his oppositionist career to the military Gymnasium in Kyiv, where he enrolled in 1881. In the spirit of the counter-reforms that began even before Alexander II's assassination, the Ministry of Education conducted a purge of schools under its auspices to rid them of teachers with liberal ideas; in Kyiv this purge also applied to those with Ukrainophile views. The military Gymnasium, however, was in the school network of the Army Ministry; as a sign of solidarity, the director took in many of those dismissed elsewhere in Kyiv. The students saw these teachers as martyrs in a despotic state and encouraged them to persevere in their political criticisms. See Konstantin Oberuchev, *Vospominaniia* (New York: Izd. Gruppy pochitatelei pamiati K. M. Oberucheva, 1930), 14.

tress prison in St. Petersburg, he was then deported to Turkestan, to serve in detention there until his retirement from the military in 1906. Subsequently he lived in Kyiv, writing for military and socialist newspapers and taking part in the co-operative movement and Russian Socialist Revolutionary (SR) organizations, including ones with the goal of penetrating the imperial army. He was certain of having narrowly escaped arrest in 1909, when the police uncovered revolutionary plots throughout the army. In 1913 he was about to take part in a congress of the Moscow Union of Consumer Associations when he was arrested a second time for ties to revolutionary comrades. Oberuchev was sentenced to exile in Olonets province but the sentence was later changed to exile abroad, with permission to return no sooner than January of 1917. He then left Russia for Switzerland.

In February 1917, at the age of fifty-one, Oberuchev returned home from exile to his native Kyiv wholly ready to resume his political activities. There he found employment in the Union of Towns' Committees for the Southwestern Front (Komitet Yugo-zapadnogo fronta Soiuza gorodov). In short order Oberuchev was rearrested by the KMD's commander even though the ban on his return had expired. While he was still under arrest, the new provisional authority, the Executive Committee of the Council of Public Organizations (Ispolnitelnyi komitet Soveta obshchestvennykh organizatsii; hereafter ECCPO), named him army commissar for the large and frontline KMD to the ongoing war on the Eastern Front. In that post Oberuchev functioned as a mediator between the newly proclaimed Kyiv civilian authority, which was recognized by the Provisional Government in Petrograd and actually was a regional version of that proto-state, and the KMD's military authorities. He had served in that post only a short time when General Aleksei Brusilov, the war hero who was commander-in-chief of the Southwestern Front, promoted him to commander of the KMD—that is, to replace the man who had only recently arrested him. Oberuchev's appointment was delayed by the crisis of the Provisional Government in Petrograd when the minister of war, Aleksandr Guchkov, who belonged to the conservative Octobrist Party, resigned and was replaced by Aleksandr Kerensky, an erstwhile SR. (Guchkov had just recently conducted a purge of the Army to rid it of officers who did suit the new political situation after the tsar's abdication.)

As commissar, Oberuchev was responsible for explaining difficulties to the troops and officers and trying to keep the peace between the two groups, but as commander of the KMD he was more responsible for delivering results, such as getting replacement troops to the front and keeping those troops armed and otherwise supplied. Very soon he felt his au-

thority undermined by the rise of Ukrainian nationalism and the success of Bolshevik propaganda in the ranks. Concluding that his position had become untenable owing to the conflicts over Ukrainianization of the army, Oberuchev requested permission to resign from his post. In September 1917 he came to revolutionary Petrograd with the new assignment of negotiating with the Central Powers about the exchange of prisoners of war. He was taking part in talks in Copenhagen and about to return when the Bolsheviks seized power in the Russian capital. The Bolshevik delegates at the talks invited Oberuchev to serve the new Lenin government and continue his work with prisoners of war, but he refused. He had come to detest the Bolsheviks and saw no common principles on he could work with them. The old soldier died as an émigré, in New York in 1929.[3]

Oberuchev wrote the first version of his memoirs after deciding not to return to now-Bolshevik Russia and having found refuge in Sweden.[4] His efforts to understand the defeat of moderate socialism and the Bolsheviks' usurpation of the revolution provide a broad frame for study of particular cases in which democratization in the army went wrong and why the Ukrainian socialists split from their Russian comrades-in-arms, thereby exacerbating the fragmentation of the initially united opposition forces in early 1917. The army's morale and fighting condition quickly became crucial determinants for the new revolutionary authorities, who were committed to continuing the war in the name of freedom and to the survival of the Russian Empire as a unitary state. Army politics became inextricably bound to the rise of national rivalries and conflicts as newly assertive non-Russians challenged the socialist credentials of their Russian counterparts and the authority to decide military matters that they claimed. Because Oberuchev was in the maelstrom of Kyiv as it was becoming the capital of an increasingly autonomous Ukraine, and because his responsibilities were tied to the decisive Southwestern Front, his account of these months stresses these linkages better than many memoirs

[3] Oberuchev learned that several of his SR comrades, including P. Rutenberg, the deputy commander of the Petrograd military district, were arrested in the first days after the Bolsheviks' coup, a fate Oberuchev himself might have shared, given his record of conflict with them (ibid., 433).

[4] My essay relies primarily on Oberuchev's own accounts of these turbulent months in *V dni revoliutsii: Vospominaniia uchastnika Velikoi Russkoi revoliutsii 1917–go goda* (New York: Izd. "Narodnopravstva," 1919), hereafter *VD*. He dated completion of the memoirs to 5 December 1917 in Stockholm, where he decided to remain after the Bolshevik coup in Petrograd. This period is treated from a later perspective in his much longer *Vospominaniia*, which also contains some additional details. This second publication was prepared posthumously by a group of former comrades-in-arms, most of whom were fellow émigrés in New York.

do (he attended nearly all important congresses during 1917 in Kyiv, as well as several outside the city, mostly in garrison towns).[5] Within the framework of his own revolutionary politics, he faced conflicts between his identities as a socialist, a military officer, and a patriotic Russian. His decisions, choices, and evaluations were not those of all Russians, or officers, or socialists during this period. But they were also not unique, for many citizens of the new Russia were coming to similar conclusions. However representative he was, or was not, Oberuchev's perspective on the events of 1917 in Kyiv helps us understand that year in a way different from not only Petrograd-centered views but also those of the Ukrainian movement in Kyiv itself.

Oberuchev's Understanding of the Revolution

Oberuchev was one of the many defeated socialists and revolutionaries who tried to understand how the Bolsheviks had shut them out of the political space of revolutionary Russia.[6] He attempted to understand how the initial revolutionary unity and hope for a better future of the first months after the abdication of Nicholas II descended into conflicts and hatred, and how the first generation of revolutionary leaders were supplanted by a new and, in his view, more plebeian set of representatives of Russian society who had trouble thinking for themselves in the confusing circumstances. Oberuchev considered himself a revolutionary and a democrat for most of his life, and he remained committed to those views until his death in 1929. Owing to those political convictions and his organizational activities, Oberuchev was not only sentenced to internal exile in Russia's Turkestan but also expelled from his native land. For him, revolution was a matter of deeply ingrained faith and ultimate justice. Oberuchev was proud of his career as a revolutionary in military uniform and saw himself in the noble tradition of the Decembrists of the 1820s and the later Populists of the 1870s. He lionized the officers of the imperial army who formed military-revolutionary circles, many of whom were

[5] Oberuchev, *Vospominaniia,* 373. For example, Oberuchev addressed the Executive Committee of the Kyiv Council of Workers' Deputies within a week and a half of its formation; later in the year he attended the opening of the All-Ukrainian Peasant Congress, the All-Ukrainian Military Congress, and so on.

[6] See Viktor Chernov, *Pered burei: vospominaniia* (New York: Izd. imeni Chekhova, 1953), for the perspective of the leader of the SRs; for the Mensheviks, see Pavel Akselrod, *Perezhitoe i peredumannoe* (Berlin: Grzhebin, 1923), and Yulii Martov, *Zapiski sotsial-demokrata* (Berlin, Petersburg, and Moscow: Grzhebin, 1922). For a survey of much of the agonized polemics of the Russian socialist emigration, see Jane Burbank, *Intelligentsia and Revolution: Russian Views of Bolshevism, 1917–1922* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

expelled and/or arrested. For Oberuchev, military service was in many ways yet another version of the "to the people" ethos held by earlier generations of well-intentioned intellectuals.[7]

As a moderate or perhaps right Socialist Revolutionary who stubbornly insisted on Russia's obligation to win the war against the Central Powers, albeit without annexations or indemnities, Oberuchev found himself in the camp of socialist defensists who opposed the far left of the revolutionary movement,[8] which stood against the war and sought either its immediate negotiated end or Russia's defeat. Most of his experience was with soldiers, officers, and often the workers of wartime, revolutionary Kyiv. In his analysis of the causes of the Bolsheviks' success and the moderates' failure, Oberuchev identified many factors, including the tragic and senseless fragmentation of the new political institutions and newly empowered political parties. The socialists, too, were prone to splintering over fundamental questions of war and power, as he himself acknowledged. The opposition against the autocracy that had formed a united front was replaced by a proliferation of committees and executive committees who claimed to speak with authority for the revolution and asserted the rights of particular constituencies. Oberuchev viewed the committees in a largely positive light during the first months of the revolution, seeing them as crucial in helping the revolutionary citizenry assert its voice and shed its prior timidity before authority. But as they fell sway to Bolshevik influences, he came to believe the Russian population was being misled, if not deceived, by crass appeals to their basest instincts.

Naturally enough, Oberuchev assigned a large measure of blame to the nation's exhaustion and a war incompetently waged by a reactionary

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[7] Oberuchev claimed that for his generation of military cadets, the Balkan Wars of 1876–77, which he saw as a fight to liberate the oppressed peoples of the Ottoman Empire, provided the first models of how the army could serve the people. During that conflict Populists enlisted in the army as orderlies to "help the people" and lighten the sufferings of wounded soldiers, who, after all, were the same peasants the populists had tried to reach in their largely unsuccessful "to the people" campaign. See his *Vospominaniia,* 11–12. Later, when he received his first posting as a commissioned officer, Oberuchev welcomed the assignment to teach illiterate soldiers in his brigade as "cultural-enlightenment work" (ibid, 21–22). On the Populists' ethos, see also Richard Wortman, *The Crisis of Russian Populism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

[8] Revolutionary defensism, originally defensism, was a left-wing patriotism most evident among primarily SRs and Mensheviks. The socialists deemed German militarism a threat to the cause of revolution and consequently defended the prosecution of the war in the name of "revolutionary Russia." See Ziva Galili y Garcia, "Origins of Revolutionary Defensism: I. G. Tseretelli and the 'Siberian Zimmerwaldists,'" *Slavic Review* 41, no. 3 (September 1982): 454–76; and George Katkov, *Russia 1917: The February Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 23–37.

and inflexible autocracy. He himself had experienced the pettiness and self-defeating behavior of the Russian wartime authorities even in exile in Switzerland, where together with other Russian émigrés and the help of the Swiss state and society he helped organize relief for Russian prisoners of war in the camps of the Central Powers. Not only did the tsarist officials refuse to allow money that had been raised in Russia to be transferred to the émigré groups, but they eventually stopped paying Oberuchev's pension because of his political unreliability. (Admittedly, the idea of the autocracy paying a pension to a sentenced revolutionary officer while he was in foreign exile already seems generous, but Oberuchev staunchly believed that he was entitled to the pension for his service in the Russian army.) He also acknowledged that his years away from Russia, especially in Switzerland, were critical in his repudiation of the culture of arbitrary arrests that manifested itself among the newly assertive workers and soldiers almost immediately after the overthrow of the old regime. This was one of the unfortunate legacies the old regime bequeathed to its successor.

But it was precisely this enthusiasm for arrests to avenge past wrongs that led Oberuchev to what was perhaps his most important explanation for why the Bolsheviks behaved the way they did in inciting the otherwise "soft" crowd to violent acts against the existing authorities. The strong dose of populism that formed his identity as an SR led him to insist on the fundamental goodness of the Russian people, a goodness he illustrated with several personal encounters. He resisted a revolutionary politics based on class and insisted that the "people" (*narod*) was a concept he could better understand.[9] Even the hardships of war did not exhaust that reservoir of goodness: witness the behavior of the revolutionary soldiers and workers during the first weeks of the new order. Still, Oberuchev's faith in the people was coupled to a belief that they lacked culture, rendering Russia unready for real socialism; for the moment, then, the main struggle had to be for political liberties and a democratic republic to replace the autocracy.[10] This contradictory view of the people led him to a novel theory of why 1917 went so wrong so quickly. The main "instigators," a word he used frequently in describing the organizers of the rabble in revolutionary Ukraine, were in many instances the old regime's former policemen and political agents, who had been dismissed en masse by the new Provisional Government and the revolutionary councils and were therefore disgruntled with the new authorities. It was these unemployed policemen who were among the most enthusias-

[9] Oberuchev, *Vospominaniia,* 27.

[10] Ibid, 31.

tic new volunteers to the Bolshevik party. And who but former policemen would be so ready to call for summary arrests of the new revolutionary authorities and even worse?[11]

Oberuchev had formed his hostile views of the Bolsheviks already as an émigré in Switzerland, where he recalled hearing Lenin, Trotsky, and Anatolii Lunacharsky speak to socialist circles. With the qualified exception of Lunacharsky and Aleksandra Kollontai, he found the Bolshevik leaders to be narrow-minded, inflexible, intolerant, and fanatical. In Switzerland Oberuchev met a Bolshevik named Yurii Piatakov, whose political career would intersect with his own in 1917 after Piatakov became head of the Bolsheviks in Kyiv. Oberuchev wrote that he "considered and continues to consider him an honest revolutionary."[12] During the war, when Oberuchev took up the cause of helping Russia's prisoners of war, he confronted Bolshevik agitators who opposed his efforts because they wanted Russia's defeat in the war. Part of Oberuchev's intense feelings against the Bolsheviks came from his own sense of revolutionary patriotism; also, he viewed them as traitors and demagogues well before 1917. He resented the Bolsheviks for exploiting the social and political tensions in the country and destroying the national unity that followed the revolution's initial euphoria. While in 1917 the majority view of a possible counter-revolution connected it to the officers or other imperial elites, Oberuchev, like a Cassandra, warned constantly and in vain of the danger of a counter-revolution from the left.[13]

Oberuchev and the Revolutionary Russian Army

Konstantin Mikhailovich Oberuchev was born in Turkestan, where his father was a colonel in the Russian imperial army. He first attended the Kyiv Military Gymnasium and then enrolled in the Mikhailov Artillery School in St. Petersburg; he graduated from the Mikhailov Artillery Academy in 1889, shortly before his first arrest. He became a leading specialist on problems of artillery and published widely in military journals, even while in exile and after retirement. He was also committed to

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[11] *VDR*, 104–6. A source and basis for this theory may have been the unmasking of the first chairman of the Kyiv Council of Workers' Deputies, one Ermakov, as a police provocateur just a month after his election. See Oberuchev, *Vospominaniia,* 373.

[12] Ibid., 409–14. Oberuchev, trying to appeal to Piatakov's "honest revolutionary" side, challenged him about the Bolsheviks' readiness to collaborate with the worst kinds of Ukrainian chauvinists. He had a much more critical opinion of Piatakov's brother, Leonid, who agitated among the soldiers and eventually became head of a Bolshevized Kyiv Council of Workers' Deputies. He saw Leonid as an illustrative example of the most alarming features of Ukrainian Bolshevism (ibid., 413).

[13] Ibid., 395.

the Revolution and saw himself in the noble tradition of officer-revolutionaries dating from the Decembrists' uprising in 1825.[14]

As a socialist Oberuchev advocated the eventual establishment of a militia-type military service in place of the standing army, which European liberals and leftists had associated with despotism and autocracy for much of the second half of the nineteenth century. (The leading European advocate of militias was the French socialist Jean Jaurès.)[15] In the months before the outbreak of World War I, Oberuchev took advantage of his exile in Switzerland to become acquainted with the experience of a country that had successfully replaced its standing army with a citizen militia. He wrote several articles about his observations and was reaffirmed in his socialist faith that such an important reform in civil-military relations was feasible, albeit in a country far more democratic than Russia was likely to be for the foreseeable future.

In the meantime Oberuchev seemed reconciled to the need for regular armies, especially during the global conflict that became World War I. His own complicated feelings of patriotism for Russia led him to apply to the War Ministry in Petrograd for permission to return home and serve in the army's ranks, despite his opposition to the autocracy and even his revolutionary efforts to overthrow it. To no surprise, but to Oberuchev's great disappointment, the Russian authorities refused to honor his request, demonstrating to Oberuchev that even in times of national emergency, the bureaucracy remained narrow-minded and fearful of its own citizens. His feelings of thwarted patriotism became even more painful with the death of his brother on the Eastern Front in February 1915. Since he was banned from direct participation in the wartime effort, Oberuchev directed his energies to joining other Russian émigrés and Swiss officials and citizens in mobilizing support for the relief of Russian prisoners of war. In short, Oberuchev had a very strong sense of duty and readiness to join the fray to support the Russian war effort in spite of the autocracy's mismanagement and incompetence.

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[14] One of his most lyrical invocations of the Decembrists came during a visit in July 1917 to Tulchyn in Podillia gubernia, the seat of the Southern Society's activities and the place where Pavel Pestel drafted the "Russian Truth," perhaps the Decembrists' most famous document. Oberuchev lamented that in the current climate of hatred for all officers, these great revolutionaries and their sacrifices for Russia's freedom had been forgotten. Ibid., 284–85.

[15] See Jean Jaurès, *L'Armée nouvelle: L'organization socialiste de la France* (Paris: L'Humanité; 1915); and my and Sigmund Neumann's "Engels and Marx on Revolution, War, and the Army in Society," in *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age,* 262–80, ed. Peter Paret, Gordon Craig, and Felix Gilbert (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986).

These patriotic feelings, combined with his strong sense of the honor of the Russian officers who risked their careers and lives for the Revolution (including himself), rendered Oberuchev very intolerant of deserters in 1917. He considered them cowards and traitors to the revolution. As commissar and commander in Kyiv, he hoped to take advantage of the euphoria and unity of the revolution's early weeks to give shape to a new type of revolutionary, with conscious military discipline among the troops supplanting the harsh and unthinking obedience based on physical punishment under the old regime. He fulminated against Bolsheviks and Ukrainian nationalists for appealing to the basest instincts of the soldiers—self-preservation and a politics of entitlement—instead of inspiring them to defend the new revolutionary regime. (Ironically, the Bolsheviks tried to introduce a similar conscious revolutionary discipline in the early years of the Red Army.)

Although Oberuchev insisted that he opposed allowing politics into the army, his position was less straightforward than it appeared. He believed that the politicization of the army would inevitably lead to military conspiracies, coups, and a praetorian state. He insisted that "an army should be an apparatus for defense of the country from foreign enemies, and nothing more." Accordingly, Oberuchev criticized both the Petrograd military authorities for introducing "political departments" in several districts, and the soldiers' and officers' councils for claiming the right to issue unilateral orders to their constituencies on military matters and agitating among the soldiers on political issues.[16] Although he opposed allowing soldiers to vote in the local elections for the Kyiv city duma later in the year, he insisted on their right to take part in the elections to the Constituent Assembly (elections that did not occur until after the Bolshevik seizure of power in Petrograd) and to express their political views "as citizens."[17] Even on this issue Oberuchev's position was inconsistent, since he welcomed the municipal elections as an important educational experience and trial in anticipation of the balloting for the Constituent Assembly, and yet his opposition to the soldiers' participation would have denied them this critical experience.[18] So Oberuchev too, like those he criticized, favored soldiers taking their newly gained empowerment

[16] Although the councils had promised not to issue any orders or resolution to the troops without obtaining Oberuchev's authorization as commander, that promise was rarely kept, so he found himself continually surprised by decisions over which he had less and less control. See Oberuchev, *Vospominaniia,* 275.

[17] See ibid., 172, 273. Oberuchev complained that the councils had a very open mission of waging political campaigns in the army.

[18] See ibid, 395–99, for Oberuchev's discussion of these elections in the summer of 1917.

seriously, but only as long as their politics were limited to arenas he thought appropriate—another ironic appearance of the formula *postolku-poskolku*.[19] In another episode that betrayed his somewhat opportunistic approach to contemporary politics, Oberuchev described a tour he made of several garrison towns after the disastrous June offensive to learn firsthand the conditions of his troops. He invited the deputy chairman of the Kyiv Soldiers' Council, a Menshevik soldier named Okhrym Task, to help him address the now overwhelming problems of morale and desertion in the KMD.[20]

Oberuchev's observations, judgments, and behavior at that time also illustrate the contradictions of attempting military reform aimed at a general democratization of the army during wartime and revolution. While postponing the militia ideal to a less chaotic future, he initially welcomed the changes in the army that recognized the rights of soldiers and officers as citizens. In a characteristic greeting that reflected the new revolutionary status and image of soldiers, Oberuchev addressed a crowd of disgruntled and disobedient troops as "comrades, warriors [*voiny*], and citizens!"[21] This new form of address signaled the expansion of citizenship to soldiers, as it presumed their revolutionary sympathies and acceptance of the ethos of egalitarianism that "comradeship" asserted. For Oberuchev and the other moderate socialists who served the Provisional Government, such democratization went hand in hand with the expectation that the soldiers would fight for the new regime, even if it was the same old war. After Oberuchev was appointed commander, he found a new ally in his revolutionary defensism in the person of the commissar appointed to replace him in his former position, the Menshevik defensist Ivan Kirienko (Kyriienko).[22]

In the spirit of the soldiers' newly recognized rights, from the first days of the revolution soldiers began electing their own deputies to a

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[19] This formula, which translates "as long as" or "insofar as," was used to describe the terms on which the Petrograd Soviet was willing to support the work of the Provisional Government, namely, as long as it continued to pursue the aims of revolutionary Russia. So, too, Oberuchev cast his relationship with the soldiers, in parallel with the Provisional Government–Petrograd Soviet model.

[20] Ibid., 276. Task had his own history of jail terms and exile, so in him Oberuchev felt he had a genuine comrade.

[21] *VDR*, 90. This happened in mid-September, as Commander Oberuchev was trying to persuade the Poltava garrison to release several officers who had been seized by the soldiers' council.

[22] Oberuchev was reassured by Kirienko's revolutionary biography, which included several years of exile and hard labor. Before his arrest Kirienko (1877–?) was a deputy to the second Duma.

range of organizations that would assert the voice of those bearing arms for the nation.[23] In many units officers and soldiers elected separate councils (*sovety*) and executive committees, though these often held joint meetings. The months of March to November 1917 saw a feverish proliferation of committees to address all possible issues, which contemporaries quickly dubbed *komitetchina*. Soon the committees became the forum for articulating social discontent; soldiers complained about "reactionary" and "counter-revolutionary" officers, while workers suspected all military men of conspiring to overturn "their" revolution. To Oberuchev all these demands and charges reflected the low level of political development of the Russian population, which was demanding all sorts of rights in the name of the new regime but rarely felt any commensurate obligations to defend or otherwise support it.

For Oberuchev as an army commissar, this fissure translated into the conflicts and mutual suspicion that pitted officers against soldiers. Indeed, Oberuchev saw his role as commissar primarily as a political buffer between soldiers and their commanders.[24] Accordingly he devoted most of his career as commissar and, subsequently, commander to resolving disputes over authority in his jurisdiction. The first army elections in Kyiv began with the officers electing their representatives and forming their own executive committee to co-ordinate future political activities in the military. Next the soldiers elected their representatives and formed an executive committee. At this stage there was still enough harmony to permit the officers and soldiers to agree to form a joint Council of Military Delegates of the KMD.[25] But the soldiers' deputies felt as much, if not more, solidarity with the newly elected workers' deputies and maintained contacts with their organizations. Often the soldiers found allies among the workers in their challenges to officers' authority and in their charges of abuse. The workers likewise often found sympathy among the soldiers in their conflicts with employers and factory owners. Before long, soldiers and workers joined forces in a joint executive committee of their representatives, which notably excluded officers from participating in their deliberations.

Yet even this episode of worker-soldier solidarity proved to be fragile and brief. Oberuchev was distressed by what happened during a joint

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[23] The best studies of soldiers' politics during 1917 are Allan Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980, 1987); and Mikhail Frenkin, *Russkaia armiia i revoliutsiia, 1917–1918* (Munich: Logos, 1978). Oddly, Wildman does not cite Oberuchev's memoirs in his two volumes.

[24] Oberuchev, *Vospominaniia,* 115.

[25] On the executive committees and their relations, see *VDR*, 52–58.

meeting of workers' and soldiers' councils he attended in Kremenchuh, another garrison town in the KMD. The soldiers offended the workers by charging that the members of their council were not in fact genuine workers—that is, that they did not have long-standing ties to factories or other proletarian workplaces and the consequent revolutionary consciousness—but were just avoiding military service under the guise of being workers. The workers, in turn, accused the soldiers of reactionary and even counter-revolutionary politics. Still, the executive committees of the soldiers and workers were able to agree on resisting pressure from above, including from Oberuchev, to release or try an officer, Lt. Col. Smirnov, whom they had been holding for more than three months on merely a vague accusation of "counter-revolution." Oberuchev took this to be another example of the culture of arbitrary arrests the old regime had bequeathed to revolutionary society.[26] It was also a sign of his rapidly eroding authority in Kyiv—and, by extension, Petrograd. Even among the soldiers themselves, each month brought growing polarization; for example, soldiers at the front, at least initially, resented the soldiers in the rear, who began to fear for their lives when they were sent from Kyiv on morale and inspection tours to the front lines. The frontline soldiers, for their part, believed that those in the rear were partly to blame for their own suffering in the trenches while others lived it up.[27]

The most serious threat of the new politics to the army's integrity was the increasing insistence on electing officers and commissars and, by extension, removing unpopular officers by popular vote. This was a form of democratization Oberuchev fought against with all his energy, but largely in vain. He recounts a visit he made to a unit whose council of military deputies had just elected an army commissar, where he defended the authority of the Provisional Government and the army itself to make such appointments. But there an assertive soldier pointedly reminded him that his own appointment as commander of the KMD had come on the recommendation of the Kyiv Council. Oberuchev acknowledged this "democratic" initiative, but he insisted that Brusilov had nominated him and the Kyiv Council had merely lobbied for his appointment with the Petrograd authorities.[28] Still, the soldier had grasped and exposed the slippery slope of the transformation of civil-military relations throughout the country. And Oberuchev was willing to have it both ways himself.

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[26] Oberuchev, *Vospominaniia,* 244–45.

[27] Ibid., 379.

[28] Ibid., 201–202. Esewhere in his memoirs Oberuchev asserts his authority as an official of the revolutionary regime by virtue of having been elected by the Council of Soldiers' Deputies. See ibid., 192.

When he faced arrest by a group of angry soldiers over his insistence that they pay for transportation on city trams or not ride them, a Polish officer (serving in one of the experimental Polish regiments) tried to shame them into obeying their commander, on the grounds that he had been "elected by the soldiers themselves." Oberuchev did not correct them at this moment but managed to avoid arrest and have a heated conversation with the soldiers. It proved impossible for not only Petrograd but also Kyiv authorities to manage the fragmenting of authority through the proliferation of new committees and councils.

In the end, the soldiers' most serious threat to Oberuchev's sense of the limits of democratization was their protest against the war itself and unwillingness to fight it. He recorded the range of ways in which the soldiers expressed their opposition to the unpopular war, most tragically by self-mutilation or simulated sickness or injury.[29] Oberuchev detected what he interpreted as the war-weary soldiers' own version of the defensism that he himself shared with much of the new ruling elites: for the soldiers, defense meant "not a step forward, but no movement backward either." In reply to these attitudes, Oberuchev wrote several articles (published in *Kievskaia mysl*) on the differences between offensive and defensive warfare. The mostly negative reaction he received—"It's fine for you to think about offense when you're sitting warm in the city, but for those of us who have been here three years, it's not something we care to think about"[30]—touched a sore spot in him. For, indeed, Colonel Oberuchev appears never to have taken part in a genuine war, since his career coincided with the largely peaceful years of Alexander III's reign and Nicholas II's early years of rule.

The Ukrainian Soldiers' Movement as a Test of Socialist Federalism

As an SR and a progressive Russian with roots in Kyiv, Oberuchev was in favor of a federalist future for a democratic Russia, in which all nations would have a measure of autonomy and cultural rights.[31] He in-

[29] Cutting off or otherwise injuring one's fingers was the most widespread method of self-mutilation, lending the nickname *palechniki* (from Russian *palets*, "finger") to this group. Another alarming group of self-mutilators, according to Oberuchev, were soldiers who "consciously" contracted venereal diseases so as to avoid service at the front. See ibid., 201–22, on self-inflicted shooting wounds; and 283–84 on venereal disease.

[30] Ibid., 209.

[31] Besides his attachment to Kyiv, Oberuchev also had strong ties to Vinnytsia, one of his earliest postings as a battery commander. In 1910 he was tried together with a group of other officers who had served with him there; they were all charged with political offenses. See ibid., 279–80.

sisted that among his oldest friends and acquaintances were leaders of the Ukrainophile wing of social democracy and that they largely remained true to their democratic and socialist principles. He reminded his readers of his intervention to bring back to Kyiv the exiled historian and national leader Mykhailo Hrushevsky after his Ukrainian comrades asked for Oberuchev's help.[32] He paid homage to the Ukrainian movement's patron saint, Taras Shevchenko, during a visit as commissar to the garrison in Kaniv, the site of Shevchenko's grave; this last visit in 1917 brought to mind earlier visits to the shrine, including one with his wife, who left a cloth she had embroidered to honor "father Taras."[33] As further proof of his own Ukrainophile sympathies, Oberuchev described an encounter during his administrative exile to Turkestan in the 1870s that he had had with another officer—a Cossack, to boot—to whom he had argued that the imperial government made a serious mistake in banning the use of the Ukrainian language.[34]

Yet it was the extension of the goals of autonomy and self-determination to the Russian army in the form of the Ukrainianization of military units that provoked Oberuchev to resign his post as commander and seek new opportunities in the revolution in Petrograd, away from Kyiv. He came to see his conflicts with the chaotic and, in his view, opportunistic advocates of Ukrainianization as "the most tragic experiences" of his eight months working "for the Revolution." Ukrainianization of the army "was dangerous to the general cause of freedom," he insisted.[35] Just as he accepted the postponement of the militia model to a more peaceful future, so, too, he believed that extensive decentralization and autonomy were premature in wartime conditions: a federal Russia would have to wait. In the meantime he welcomed the removal of discriminatory ethnic and confessional criteria and the extension of civil and political rights to all citizens of Russia. Like most liberals and moderate socialists, he assumed that much of the interethnic animosity of the prewar and war

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[32] Ibid., 310

[33] Ibid., 237–38.

[34] Ibid, 72–73. Oberuchev was quite surprised by the reaction of this Russian officer in Turkestan, who had "gone native" (*otuzemilsia*) to the point that his wife wore a *parandzha*, a Muslim headdress. Instead of the solidarity Oberuchev had expected, the former officer (now an inspector of native schools) countered with a theory of nations—including the Ukrainian—that were dying out and whose demise should not be obstructed by "artificially" encouraging the use of their language.

[35] *VDR*, 93. See also my article "The Russian Imperial Army and the Ukrainian National Movement in 1917," in *The Period of the Ukrainian Central Rada*, vol. 54, nos. 3–4 (Fall–Winter 1998) of *The Ukrainian Quarterly,* 220–56.

years would disappear with expanded access to these rights.[36] He was particularly proud of his efforts as commissar to win permission for Jews to enter military schools, from which they had largely been banned in tsarist times.[37]

From his earliest days as commissar in Kyiv, Oberuchev was confronted with the prospect of "nationalization" of the army, a movement among many non-Russian nationalities to form army units from predominantly one nation. Because Kyiv and the KMD were on the front lines of the war, it was at the center of many, if not most, of these experiments in reorganizing the army. Kyiv was host to Polish units formed earlier during the war and designated as the site for forming Czechoslovak units from prisoners of war, an innovation Oberuchev opposed on grounds of international and military law forbidding the use of foreign prisoners for combat against their native state. He also argued to Gen. Chervinka, a representative of the Army Ministry from Petrograd, that the formation of Czechoslovak units violated the Provisional Government's promise not to annex any territories without approval by popular referenda. Clearly the troops were being used to achieve a military "liberation" of the Czech and Slovak lands from Austria-Hungary.[38] Indeed, Oberuchev deliberately ignored requests to find accommodation for the Czechoslovak units authorized by the Petrograd Army official; he also took pride in his determination to forbid the formation of Czechoslovak units in the KMD during his tenure and in his successful removal of the Polish regiments stationed in Kyiv.[39] His attitude toward the Polish regiments was actually somewhat ambiguous, partly because the Polish regiments were formed of Russian subjects of Polish nationality. Progressive, including socialist, public opinion in Russia had long been accepted the cause of Polish autonomy and independence, so socialists like Oberuchev had a more posi-

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[36] On the new authorities' "blindness" to the national question, see the memoirs of the Georgian Menshevik leader (and member of the Petrograd Soviet and Provisional Government) I. G. Tsereteli, *Vospominaniia o Fevralskoi revoliutsii*, vol. 2 (Paris: Mouton, 1963), chap. 5, esp. pp. 82–87.

[37] Oberuchev, *Vospominaniia*, 215–16.

[38] Ibid., 216. Oberuchev recounts the objections of Germany and Austria-Hungary at the Copenhagen negotiations on POWs held in the fall of 1917 to the Russian practice of recruiting POWs from their states to fight in the Russian army against the Central Powers. Oberuchev refers to a resolution of the Military Council in Petrograd, dated 26 March 1917, authorizing the formation of a division from Czechoslovak prisoners of war (Ibid., 245–49). On the Czechoslovak units, see Joseph Bradley, *The Czechoslovak Legion in Russia, 1914–1920* (New York and Boulder, Colo.: East European Monographs and Columbia University Press, 1991); and V. S. Dragomiretsky, *Chekhoslovaki v Rossii, 1914–1920* (Paris and Prague, 1928).

[39] Oberuchev, *Vospominaniia,* 246.

tive attitude toward Polish nationalism than toward similar sentiments among the empire's other nationalities.[40]

Many of Oberuchev's colleagues and superiors did not share his concerns and objections. Nationalist and pan-Slavic sentiments in the High Command, together with a desperate hope that nationalism—even non-Russian nationalism—would be an effective antidote to the even more threatening Bolshevization of the troops, won out over cooler heads advising caution with these experiments. Oberuchev's counterpart in the Moscow Military District, Gen. Aleksandr Verkhovsky, was typical of the pro-Ukrainianization officers. When Oberuchev visited Moscow on the way home from a trip to Petrograd and army headquarters, Verkhovsky assured him that the "most reliable units in his district were the Ukrainian ones."[41] In Petrograd Oberuchev had been unable to get any serious response to his complaints about the chaos of Ukrainianization. Kerensky, who was now serving as prime minister (minister-president) and army minister, was too busy to hear Oberuchev's report about his problems in the KMD. National formations were only one of the military authorities' responses to the crisis in morale and escalating numbers of desertions: the High Command authorized the organization of all sorts of "shock battalions," including a famous women's battalion. Oberuchev objected to all of these on the grounds that they declared a lack of confidence in regular units and disorganized them, since the "volunteers" for the new shock troops were soldiers from existing units or little-experienced Junkers and military cadets.[42]

In Kyiv, of course, the largest such experiment concerned Ukrainian soldiers. The argument for formation of their own units pointed to examples of other national regiments and divisions, especially those of the Poles, who, after all, had a history of anti-imperial uprisings in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During Oberuchev's first days as commissar, Second Lieutenant Mykola Mikhnovsky approached him with an invitation to serve as honorary member of an organizing committee for the "formation of a Ukrainian army." An army lawyer, Mikhnovsky was also a Ukrainian revolutionary and nationalist who would eventually become a political nuisance not only for Oberuchev, but also

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[40] Oberuchev was impressed by a celebration of Polish unity that he witnessed in late March or early April at a POW camp in Darnytsia on the outskirts of Kyiv: there members of the Polish regiment serving in the Russian army joined Polish prisoners from Austria-Hungary and Germany in a joint Roman Catholic mass. See ibid., 249.

[41] Ibid., 322. Verkhovsky would soon become minister of the army.

[42] Oberuchev devotes an entire chapter of his memoirs to these unfortunate—in his view—experiments. See ibid., 245–60.

for the Ukrainian Central Rada's General Secretariat and even subsequent Ukrainian governments. Oberuchev declined the invitation on the grounds that the revolution had done away with the meaningless tradition of honorary titles, but added that he would be honored to serve as an actual working member of the committee.[43] He set some conditions on agreeing to help the committee advance its goals: above all, that the new Ukrainian units be formed of volunteers otherwise ineligible to serve. When and if there was apparent consensus about this, he pledged his support. Little did Oberuchev realize how far these efforts would soon escalate and how fierce his opposition to them would become.

Oberuchev faced the first test of his conditions upon returning from a trip to the front in early May. While at home with his family, he received an urgent phone call from the Executive Committee of the Council of Soldiers' Deputies asking that he immediately come to the Mariinskyi (Empress Maria) Palace in Kyiv, where the committee was meeting to resolve a serious question of political and military authority. Earlier that day a group of nearly four thousand "deserters" awaiting reassignment, led by a staff captain named D. M. Putnyk-Hrebeniuk, had marched out into the street and headed in the direction of the palace to demand recognition as the First Ukrainian Regiment, named in honor and memory of Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky. The Executive Committee had refused their demands, whereupon the "regiment" had appealed to the Kyiv commander, Nikolai Khodorovich, who in characteristically dilatory fashion referred them back to the committee, at which point Oberuchev was called. When Oberuchev got to the meeting hall, he was alarmed by the hostile faces and the fact that many of them had no "Ukrainian national features." He noted that "*bogdanovtsy"* (Ukrainian: *bohdanivtsi,* i.e., soldiers of the Bohdan Khmelnytsky Regiment) had donned yellow-and-blue ribbons in assertion of their Ukrainian loyalties. Oberuchev became convinced that many soldiers who wanted to desert had simply "discovered" a Ukrainian identity as a political cover for their cowardice. (As evidence for his theory, Oberuchev recalled that after Putnyk-Hrebeniuk was eventually arrested by officers of the newly forming regiments and was being sent to the front, he had confessed to Oberuchev that he, too, believed Ukrainian formations were unnecessary!)[44]

The Central Rada was drawn into the conflict. It took the principled position that the formation of a Ukrainian army was premature, but it was nevertheless prepared to acknowledge the Khmelnytsky Regiment as a fait accompli. Oberuchev continued to oppose recognizing the "desert-

[43] *VDR*, 92–93.

[44] *VDR*, 93–94.

ers" as a regiment, but he also wanted to appeal to a higher authority. He proposed a visit to General Brusilov to resolve the issue, still insisting on his conditions that such a regiment be commanded by serving officers but its recruits be volunteers. He invited representatives of both Mikhnovsky's organizing committee and the disputed "regiment" to meet and discuss matters. The following day, when no one showed up at the train station to accompany him, he proceeded to Brusilov's headquarters alone. The front commander agreed to Oberuchev's proposal and conditions and even consented to the formation of a second, reserve regiment.[45] But once again, despite seeming consensus, Oberuchev's conditions were ignored: officers for the regiments were found, but genuine volunteers were not. Instead the troops were recruited from among deserters from the front and rear units. Not surprisingly, several months later, when Oberuchev, now himself commander of the KMD, tried to fulfill his obligation to send good replacements to the front during the June offensive, he failed. A major reason for that failure, he insisted, was the chaotic and demoralizing components of unauthorized and unregulated Ukrainianization. Any time he sent out an order for a reserve unit to mobilize for the front, the soldiers would call a meeting, elect several representatives, and declare that they would go there only "under the Ukrainian flag."[46]

Oberuchev as an Enemy of the Ukrainian Cause

The process of Ukrainianization in the army took a new direction in early May 1917, when the militant second lieutenant Mikhnovsky and the Central Rada decided to convene the First All-Ukrainian Military Congress to resolve some important issues. That congress took place from 5 to 8 May in Kyiv at the Pedagogical Museum, which now normally housed the Central Rada. As army commissar and a representative of the ECCPO, Oberuchev attended its pre-opening organizational sessions. The experience confirmed some of his fears, especially his conviction that Ukrainian activists were using the cover of "volunteer" Ukrainian military units to promote the creation of a full-fledged Ukrainian army. As a first step the reformers sought to transfer all Ukrainian soldiers and officers serving across the empire back to Ukraine, in accord with the imperial army's policy of extraterritorial recruitment and stationing. Oberuchev recognized that the Ukrainians were split among themselves into two rival camps: the militant—and, in his evaluation, nationally chauvinist—group around Mikhnovsky, and what he referred

[45] *VDR*, 94–95.

[46] Ibid., 96–97.

to as the democratic tendency, represented by Volodymyr Vynnychenko and Symon Petliura. Oberuchev thought it his duty to remind the congress organizers that war was still being fought and that Russia and Ukraine shared common interests in defending themselves from a powerful enemy. But even he could not resist playing to Ukrainian patriotic feelings at the congress when he called on the delegates to stand in the defense of "mother-Ukraine."

Oberuchev was disturbed by several aspects of the congress, including the fact that several of its sessions were closed to outsiders. While acknowledging that some technical military matters under discussion might threaten army security, he nonetheless felt that the secrecy contributed to a rise in distrust between the Central Rada and its counterparts in Kyiv and Petrograd. He was also struck by the sense of empowerment of many delegates, especially those surrounding Mikhnovsky, which he considered inappropriate and dangerous. These delegates openly proclaimed their intent to build a Ukrainian army and expel from Ukraine all *katsapy*, a Ukrainian pejorative term for Russians. When Oberuchev spotted a delegate dressed in a Cossack uniform of the old Zaporozhian Sich era but sporting the insignia of a lieutenant in the Russian army, he asked the colorful officer, named Pavlenko, about his unit. When Pavlenko replied that he was an officer of the "Ukrainian army (*voisko*)," Oberuchev answered, "But there is no Ukrainian army at this time." Lieutenant Pavlenko shot back with a challenge: "You'll see how it will rise and cover all of Ukraine. It exists already, but you just don't see it."[47]

In the end the organizing committee elected a presidium that represented both rival factions; subsequently the "democratic faction" emerged as the victor. Still, the congress's resolutions raised the stakes higher in relations between Kyiv and Petrograd. Claiming to speak in the name of 900,000 "organized [and] armed Ukrainian people," the congress demanded an act from the Petrograd government recognizing the "principle of Ukraine's national and territorial autonomy as the best guarantee" of the rights of Ukrainians and the entire region. The most contentious resolutions bore on "the Ukrainian army." Insisting on the importance of "maintaining conscious discipline, which now is only possible in a people's army" and that the requisite high military morale "can only be raised by some great common, uniting idea," they proclaimed that for Ukrainians it was "the idea of national rebirth." Following that faith, the congress therefore "believes in the immediate consolidation of all Ukrainians [now serving] in the armies into one national army." The congress condemned the army of "the old despotic regime" as "antidemocratic" and wasteful of

[47] Oberuchev, *Vospominaniia,* 225–27.

national funds; moreover, that kind of army contributed to the "disintegration of the nationalities' moral strength." The congress's resolutions used the language of revolutionary defensism to argue that "nationalization of the army" and, in particular, a Ukrainian national army would restore the soldiers' spirit of resistance and raise morale. They predicted that with the restoration of morale, desertions would recede as a problem, but they also acknowledged that more effort was needed to combat desertion, including engaging the village itself and urging soldiers from the front to write home. They called upon regimental councils and soldiers' congresses to issue appropriate appeals to bring to trial all deserters and those who concealed them. On the issue of the future Ukrainian army, the congress adopted the long-term socialist goal of a people's militia as the only form of military organization appropriate for a free people.

To realize the goal of forming a national army, the congress proposed immediate measures, including separating Ukrainian soldiers and officers serving in military units in the rear areas into separate units, while acknowledging that these measures had to proceed without causing disorganization at the front. They also proposed a similar Ukrainianization of the Black Sea Fleet as the portion of the imperial navy composed overwhelmingly of Ukrainians. They "recognized" the regiment that had been formed a month earlier as the "Bohdan Khmelnytsky First Ukrainian Cossack Regiment" and urged the military authorities to implement the "Instruction on the Ukrainian Unit" that had been approved by the commander in chief (April 4) and the minister of the army (April 6). The Ukrainian language was to be introduced in the newly formed units and in military education and publications. Finally, the delegates authorized the museums of Petrograd, Moscow, and other cities holding ancient Ukrainian military banners to transfer them to a Ukrainian National Museum in Kyiv so that the newly formed units would be able to use these relics as they reformulated their national identities.[48] The congress's final decision was to elect a provisional Ukrainian General Military Commit-

[48] Excerpts from the resolutions appear in English in Robert Paul Browder and Alexander F. Kerensky, eds., *The Russian Provisional Government 1917*, vol. 1 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 373–74. For the full text in Ukrainian, see V[ladyslav] Verstiuk et al., eds., *Ukrainskyi natsionalno-vyzvolnyi rukh, berezen–lystopad 1917 roku: Dokumenty i materialy* (Kyiv: Vydavnytstvo Oleny Telihy, 2000), doc. 117 (pp. 279–84). (This volume also contains numerous documents bearing on the Ukrainian soldiers' movement, many previously unavailable.) The resolutions were given authoritative sanction by their publication in *Visty z Ukrainskoi Tsentralnoi Rady*. The congress also addressed the land question, insisting that a Ukrainian Diet be summoned to consider the specific conditions of landholding in Ukraine and the Ukrainianization of primary, secondary, and higher education.

tee (UGMC) attached to the Central Rada, which would co-ordinate "Ukrainian military affairs" with the Russian General Staff.

In any event, the meetings left the matter of who had the authority to resolve questions of Ukrainianization more unclear than before. In mid-May the new army minister, Kerensky, arrived in Kyiv to visit Brusilov's headquarters. Oberuchev joined a large and seemingly authoritative delegation, which included representatives of the Central Rada, Mikhnovsky's committee, and the UGMC just elected at the All-Ukrainian Military Congress. By this time Oberuchev's condition of only volunteers being accepted as recruits had been jettisoned as unrealistic and irrelevant, and the UGMC's representatives proposed a more active formation policy, though one limited to soldiers in the rear units. Oberuchev agreed, on the condition that the Kyiv and Minsk military districts be exempted owing to their closeness to the front and the threat of confusion that reorganization there would likely present. After this painful consensus was achieved, matters continued more or less as before. Despite the insistence of the Provisional Government in Petrograd that the Kyiv-based Central Rada and its General Secretariat were not to meddle in military affairs, the Rada faced its own political mutiny from Mikhnovsky's committee and the stubborn resistance of Oberuchev as it tried to gain control over the chaos.[49] In several garrisons the demands of Ukrainian soldiers were provoking splits with their "Russian" counterparts, replicating the hostilities the activists of the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (Soiuz vyzvolennia Ukrainy) faced not long before in German and Austrian POW camps.[50] Reporting on a visit to Uman, where a group of Ukrainian soldiers had elected their own officers, Oberuchev wrote that they were following the ideological lead of a second lieutenant Oberuchev had ordered removed for his harmful "agitation" (among the slogans Ukrainian soldiers shouted were "We will not leave Uman! Let them go back to their Muscovite land! Get out!"). The situation was complicated even more by an order that the entire regiment in Uman be transferred to the front and by another one from the UGMC authorizing the regiment to Ukrainianize.[51]

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[49] *VDR*, 96.

[50] See my article "The Great War and the Mobilization of Ethnicity in the Russian Empire," in *Post-Soviet Political Order: Conflict and State Building,* ed. Barnett Rubin and Jack Snyder (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 34–57.

[51] Oberuchev relates several episodes when he was faced with two "delegations" from units, one claiming to speak for the Ukrainians, and the second representing the non-Ukrainian troops. See his description of a confrontation in Zhytomyr in early July in his *Vospominaniia,* 277–78. On the Uman visit, see ibid., 285–87.

Oberuchev and his companion during the visit to Uman, the soldier Okhrym Task, who was also deputy chair of the Kyiv Soldiers' Council, were unable to resolve this crisis when they were summoned back to Kyiv for the next political-military crisis there: the mutiny of a regiment named after another Cossack statesman, Acting Hetman Pavlo Polubotok. Tsar Peter I had imprisoned Polubutok in the Peter and Paul Fortress in 1723 for resisting his politics and trying to preserve the Hetmanate's autonomy and the privileges of the Cossack elite, making him a martyr to the Ukrainian cause. The mutiny of the *polubotkivtsi* occurred virtually simultaneously with an uprising in July in Petrograd, a largely spontaneous militant demonstration against the war and for the transfer of power to the councils that was blamed on the Bolsheviks. Oberuchev was convinced that the timing of the Petrograd and Kyiv rebellions was not coincidental and saw them as attempted coups d'état directed by the Bolsheviks.[52] He characterized this latest self-proclaimed regiment as a ragtag mob of deserters who were trying to avoid being sent to the front by demanding that they be reorganized into Ukrainian units. He claimed that the unit had first formed in Chernihiv, where the group had called themselves the Doroshenko regiment, after yet another Cossack hetman. Rather than intervening himself, Oberuchev turned to his reluctant partner, the UGMC, which after some false starts managed to persuade the "Ukrainian" troops to relocate to Kyiv. Upon arriving in Kyiv they attracted some two thousand more troops claiming to be eager to serve under a Ukrainian flag. It was this expanded unit that refused to obey an UGMC order to leave their barracks for transfer to the front. Instead, the soldiers decided to take power into their own hands and seized several military objectives, including Oberuchev's official residence. Oberuchev was then visiting the garrison in Uman and so escaped arrest and possibly worse.[53]

The Kyiv Council authorized Oberuchev's deputy commander, General Tregubov, and his chief of staff, General Oboleshev, to organize the "defense of Kyiv" and the removal of this "motley crowd" operating under a Ukrainian flag. In addition, the UGMC also assigned Major-General Luka Kondratovich to help put down the mutiny. The fractured power relations in Kyiv meant that Oberuchev faced an effort by the Central

[52] *VDR*, 98.

[53] In support of his assertion that the Bolsheviks and Ukrainian nationalists had become allies, Oberuchev reported that Piatakov, leader of the Kyiv Bolsheviks, was one of those who entered his house at will during the mutiny (*Vospominaniia,* 292). Elsewhere he noted that one of the two workers—both named Smirnov—sent from the council to tour the front with him was "to some degree seized by Bolshevik tendencies" and sported a "long Ukrainian mustache" (ibid., 378).

Rada's General Military Secretariat to intervene through negotiations with the mutineers. The Khmelnytsky Regiment, the first Ukrainian unit to form at the initiative of its own officers, succeeded in encircling and disarming the unauthorized "regiment" after the Rada's negotiators finally quieted them. Oberuchev had to acknowledge, however, that in such situations his authority was virtually nonexistent.[54]

For Oberuchev the failed coup of the *polubotkivtsi* was a prelude to the disastrous July retreat, or rout, of the Russian army after a three-week offensive ordered by Kerensky. The rushed flight in the face of the advancing German army provoked panic in Kyiv, which was anticipating a mob of rampaging soldiers. Early reports of desperate and brutal soldiers turning on their officers, commissars, and anyone else who stood in their way reached the Ukrainian capital, which began preparing to defend itself from its own soldiers. Oberuchev looked at this July disaster as the beginning of the revolution's second stage in Kyiv, that is, months of increasingly rampant violence and social polarization that would culminate in the Bolshevik coup in Petrograd in October. General Lavr Kornilov, commander of the Southwestern Front, insisted on reintroducing the death penalty at the front, a policy Oberuchev opposed but said he understood at this desperate point. It was all the more disturbing to him that a government of socialist ministers approved such an act. Another consequence of the July rout was the crowds in Kyiv of not only fleeing soldiers but refugees, at a time when the city was already bursting at the seams. Oberuchev ordered the seizure of schools empty for the summer holidays to accommodate some of the new influx of people. Liberals and progressives accused him of "counter-revolutionary" hostility to public education and the Ukrainian cause, for schools were then in the midst of introducing the Ukrainian language. In retrospect, Oberuchev assessed the events of July as the beginning of the civil war.[55]

The Kornilov putsch in August only added to the volatile relations between officers and soldiers, as it unleashed a new wave of soldiers' revenge, with lynchings and other atrocities, across the army (for his "success" during the June offensive Kornilov had been promoted to commander in chief of the Russian army.) The distrust of authority extended to the Petrograd government and its local agents. In the midst of all this, Oberuchev now faced an impossible situation. The Kyiv Council demanded the resignation of Oberuchev's chief of staff, General Obeleshev, whom they branded a "counter-revolutionary." The Kyiv Committee for the Salvation of the Revolution, formed of all major political and civic as-

[54] Ibid., 288–93.

[55] Ibid., 293–98.

sociations, demanded Obeleshev's arrest as one of Kornilov's co-conspirators. Oberuchev admitted that this "Great Russian-Muscovite to his bones" was even more opposed to Ukrainianization than he himself was, and that he had behaved tactlessly with the soldiers' deputies.[56] A council of Ukrainian soldiers in Kyiv passed a resolution of non-confidence in Oberuchev as an enemy of the Ukrainian cause and urged soldiers not to obey his commands. And indeed, when Oberuchev ordered a Ukrainianized battalion to transfer from Chernihiv to Kyiv, the battalion committee expressed solidarity with the Kyiv Council's resolution and refused to obey his orders unless they were countersigned by the General Military Secretariat. Within days similar resolutions were passed in nearly all regiments that had been Ukrainianized, and several demanded Oberuchev's resignation. In fact, Oberuchev had good reason to believe that the General Military Secretariat had insisted that the Provisional Government dismiss him as commander. The Kyiv Council, which he claimed was thoroughly Ukrainianized, also demanded his dismissal. Other telegrams warned him that if he did not leave Kyiv by 14 August, he would be "killed like a dog."[57]

This proved the final straw for the socialist commander: Oberuchev informed his superiors, the Southwestern Front's commander General Nikolai G. Volodchenko, the army minister General Verkhovsky, and Commander in Chief Kerensky, that he urgently desired to resign his post in Kyiv. They tried to dissuade him, but his arguments won them over. Oberuchev could no longer preside over a policy he was convinced was wrong and, in any case, was being implemented without his authority. Among considerations he included in the decision to leave Kyiv was his unwillingness to be branded an enemy of Ukraine's right to self-determination, but in fact he had already become that.[58] Oberuchev sensed that his commissar, Kirienko, attracted even greater hostility from the Ukrainian movement because he was himself an ethnic Ukrainian and once had even been a member of the Ukrainian Social Democratic "Spilka" party. Yet Kirienko, too, opposed Ukrainianization in the army and earned a reputation as an enemy of the Ukrainian cause ("*vrag ukrainstva*").[59] One of Oberuchev's last official duties was to address the Congress of Peoples of Russia, which the Central Rada convened in September in Kyiv to bring together all autonomist and national movements on a platform of federalism. He noted, in particular, two moments at the

[56] Ibid., 325–31.

[57] Ibid., 324.

[58] *VDR*, 117–19.

[59] Oberuchev, *Vospominaniia,* 335–37.

congress, one a plea by the representative of the Don Cossacks to be viewed not as "counter-revolutionary oppressors" but as freedom fighters, and the second the audience's hostile reception to him personally—the proud but exasperated socialist commander was hissed upon taking the podium. Nonetheless Oberuchev concluded his greetings with a rousing "Long live a free, young Russia! Long live a free Ukraine!"[60]

Concluding Reflections

Oberuchev's sense of military duty, especially when he began serving Russia's first revolutionary regime, increasingly became a trap from which he could not extricate himself. Despite growing evidence (indeed, from the start) of opposition and resistance to the war, despite his own experience of the new government's mismanagement, which he had to contend with in Kyiv, including at the War Ministry of his party comrade Kerensky, and despite the disastrous June offensive, Oberuchev adhered firmly to his defensist politics and insisted on seeing Bolshevik (and Ukrainian) agitation behind nearly every failure. Strangely, he also insisted that the army must remain outside of politics, in spite of his own activities as commissar to bring the army into the political life of the country. Most important, however, is that Oberuchev failed to realize that the war itself had become the number one political issue.

Another political issue that Oberuchev failed to confront personally and outright was his position on nationalism, particularly Russian nationalism. He recounted one episode that provided some insight into his dilemmas, in which a monarchist demonstration in Kyiv bearing the tricolor flag was denounced as counter-revolutionary by leftists generally and Ukrainian activists in particular. He reminded his readers that demonstrations with all sorts of national flags had become commonplace in revolutionary Kyiv, so why should anyone be offended by the appearance of a flag "identified, whether correctly or not, as national Great Russian?"[61] On the one hand, Oberuchev stood up for the freedom to express one's own opinion and a diversity of views; he also argued that having monarchists demonstrate openly was preferable to having them plot all sorts of conspiracies in secret. But he also acknowledged that the fear of "counter-revolution," which in many quarters was expected to come from the army or the former elites of the old regime, was an integral part of the political culture of 1917 and the civil war emerging within society. Still, he appeared to be much more sympathetic to these demonstrations than to those of Ukrainian soldiers, or the Central Rada's demands for auton-

[60] Ibid., 371–72.

[61] Ibid., 392–94.

omy. Oberuchev's model of Ukrainian-Bolshevik collusion fed his hostility toward the Ukrainian cause and made it difficult for him to support many of the changes in the army that went under the name of democratization.

Oberuchev's political evolution bears comparison with that of another emerging leader in Kyiv at the time, General (later Hetman) Pavlo Skoropadsky, who also found himself in the middle of the fierce struggles over Ukrainianization. (Curiously, in his memoirs, comprising more than 450 pages, Oberuchev fails to mention Skoropadsky even once.)[62] Skoropadsky, too, identified above all with the officer corps that he had been part of during his entire career. Although not by any stripe a socialist, but rather a monarchist on the way to something else, Skoropadsky, too, detested the Bolsheviks with an almost visceral energy and held them responsible for the tragic and murderous decline of the army's morale starting in mid-1917. Skoropadsky even shared Oberuchev's quasi-populist faith in the innate goodness of the Russian and Ukrainian peasant. Where he differed was in his capacity and apparent willingness to cast aside some of his military principles and reluctantly accept the desperate adoption of "the national principle" to combat the Bolshevik virus. Skoropadsky saw his own role in the first official Ukrainianization measures in the KMD as continuation of sorts of his ancestors' roles in organizing Cossack units. Also, Skoropadsky tried to put a positive spin on his efforts, though his own account indicates the host of insurmountable obstacles that worked against restoring the morale of the fragmenting Russian army.[63]

Oberuchev, for his part, remained enough of a socialist to be troubled by certain aspects of the revolution's militarization and by "democratic" institutions' ever-expanding acquisition of the old regime's trappings. He recalled his unease during a visit to a former house of the nobility that had become the address of the executive committees of the soldiers' and officers' organizations, where he found a full unit of sentries on guard duty. A sense of socialist propriety led him to complain about the guards,

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[62] Skoropadsky, in contrast, does refer to Oberuchev in his memoirs, but gives a conflicted characterization of him and fails to assign him a prominent part in his own activities. See his *Spohady: Kinets 1917–hruden 1918*, ed. Yaroslav Pelensky (Kyiv and Philadelphia: Instytut ukrainskoi arkheolohii ta dzhereloznavstva im. M. S. Hrushevskoho NAN Ukrainy, Instytut skhidnoievropeiskykh doslidzhen NAN Ukrainy, and Skhidnoievropeiskyi doslidnyi instytut im. V. K. Lypynskoho, 1995), 61–63.

[63] See my article "'I Love Russia, and/but I Want Ukraine,' or How a Russian Imperial General Became Hetman of the Ukrainian State, 1917–1918," in *Synopsis: A Collection of Essays in Honor of Zenon E. Kohut,* ed. Frank E. Sysyn and Serhii Plokhy (Edmonton and Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2005), 115–48.

elected representatives of the soldiers who were now performing duties of questionable value that kept them from actual combat at a critical time in the war. The guards were removed, but Oberuchev recalled a similar sense of socialist outrage when he visited Smolny, the headquarters of the Petrograd Soviet, and had to make his way through several levels of bureaucracy to get to where his official business could be conducted.[64] On another occasion he protested against the ECCPO's takeover of the residence of the former empress Mariia Fedorovna, and insisted that it be used instead as a military hospital. His arguments lost out before those who believed that the new organs of authority required dignified and handsome sites where they could exercise their new functions. Yet even in this matter Oberuchev's ambivalence was evident: after all, he had benefitted, too, in having a set of offices at the palace assigned to him as commissar.[65]

[64] Oberuchev, *Vospominaniia,* 268–70. He laments: "To what degree are we all inculcated with faith in the power of salvation in a soldier's bayonet!"

[65] Ibid., 271.

the Ukrainian Heraldry Society. He is the author of *Ukrainska miska heraldyka* (1998) and *Herby ta prapory mist i sil Ukrainy,* part 1 (2004); and the coauthor of *Herby mist Ukrainy (XIV–persha polovyna XX st.)* (2001) and *Herby ta prapory mist i sil Rivnenskoi oblasti* (2002).

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