

Reconciling the Irreconcilable? Left-Wing Ukrainian Nationalism and the Soviet Regime

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Abstract

This article examines the attempts by left-wing Ukrainian nationalists to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable: Ukrainian nationalism and Soviet socialism. It describes how leftist Ukrainian parties active during the Revolution and Civil War in Ukraine 1917–1921 advocated a soviet form of government. Exiled members of the two major Ukrainian parties, the Social Democrats and the Socialist Revolutionaries, then took this position further, arguing in favor of reconciliation with the Bolsheviks and a return to their homeland. After the Entente recognized Polish sovereignty over Eastern Galicia and Soviet Ukraine introduced a policy of Ukrainization in 1923, many West Ukrainian intellectuals took up this call. The Great Famine of 1932–1933 and the Bolsheviks' purge of Ukrainian Communists and intellectuals all but ended the position. However, it was more the Soviet rejection of the Sovietophiles that ended Ukrainian Sovietophilism than any rejection of the Soviet Union by leftist Ukrainian nationalists. Thus, an examination of the Ukrainian Sovietophiles calls into question the accounts of the relationship between Ukrainian nationalism and the Soviet Union that have common currency in today's Ukraine.

Keywords: Revolution and Civil War 1917–1921; Soviet Union; Sovietophilism; Ukrainian emigration; Ukrainian nationalism

Introduction: The Irreconcilability of Ukrainian Nationalism and the Soviet Regime

On April 9, 2015, the Ukrainian parliament passed a package of legislation aimed at the “de-Communization” of Ukraine: the declared aim was to root out the Soviet nostalgia supposedly cultivated by the population in the country's south and east; this, the laws' authors believed, had made possible Russia's military intervention in the country in 2014. Law No. 2558 “On Condemning the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes and Prohibiting the Propagation of their Symbols” defines the Soviet regime of 1917–1991 in Ukraine as having been characterized by criminality and numerous infringements on human rights. The law declares it illegal to deny the regime's criminal nature or spread symbols associated with it.¹ Although Law No. 2558 also criminalizes support for National Socialism, the list of prohibited Communist symbols is much more extensive: as several commentators have noted, the real target of the law is the memory of the Soviet regime (Himka 2015). Law No. 2538-1 “On the Legal Status and Honoring of the Memory of the Fighters for Ukrainian Independence in the Twentieth Century” lists a set of organizations whose members it designated as “fighters for Ukrainian independence.” These bodies range from the states created during the 1917–1921 Civil War, the underground far-right groups of the interwar period, the insurgent armies created during the Second World War, Cold War diaspora groups, and Soviet dissident bodies. The law stipulates that those who “publicly adopt a disrespectful stance” toward these “fighters for Ukrainian independence” will be held accountable to Ukrainian law. Moreover, public denial of the “legitimacy of the struggle for Ukrainian independence in the twentieth century” is now illegal.

The law also calls for the dissemination of objective information about the Ukrainian struggle for independence in and outside the country.² The two laws thus contrast the good fighters for Ukrainian independence to be honored with the bad Soviet regime to be condemned. Taken together, they propagate a narrative of Ukrainian history whereby Ukrainian national consciousness always opposed the Soviet system.

This article argues against the view that “Soviet” and “Ukrainian” were always in conflict. It examines the repeated attempts by left-wing Ukrainian nationalists to come to a rapprochement with the Bolsheviks, both during the 1917–1921 Civil War and afterward in emigration, explicates their arguments for such cooperation, and discusses the reasons for their failure.

The Revolution in Ukraine, 1917–1921

The Sovietophile trend first emerged amid the 1917–1921 Civil War in Ukraine and Russia. During this period, a number of bodies appeared claiming to represent Ukrainian national aspirations. In the former Romanov Empire, there was (1) the *Centralna Rada* (Central Council), founded in 1917 by nationally minded Ukrainians with the aim of achieving Ukrainian autonomy in a federation with Russia; (2) the Ukrainian State under Pavlo Skoropads’kyi, a conservative body created by Germany during its occupation of Ukraine in 1918; and (3) the Ukrainian People’s Republic (*Ukrains’ka narodna respublika*, hereafter UNR) led by Symon Petliura, a recreation of the state created by the *Centralna Rada* which became the focus of Ukrainian nationalist aspirations from the end of 1918 onward. In the Habsburg territory of Eastern Galicia, Ukrainians proclaimed the West Ukrainian People’s Republic (*Zakhidna Ukrains’ka narodna respublika*, hereafter ZUNR). These different states fought variously the Bolsheviks, the Russian White movement, and the new Polish state, but, sometimes, also entered into uneasy alliances with them. In addition, at times, the various Ukrainian states came into conflict with one another. There were also numerous smaller groups steering their own course between those of the major warring parties. These included the bands of peasant leaders such as Nestor Makhno and Nechypyr Hryhor’iev, as well as the Ukrainian leftist parties (Kasianov 2015; Wehrhahn 2004).

The latter produced the first Ukrainian Sovietophiles. Before 1917, the Ukrainian intelligentsia in the Russian empire generally advocated a dual national and social revolution and the realization of Ukrainian national goals inside a federation with Russia. The two most important Ukrainian parties grew out of this socialist and populist heritage: the Ukrainian Social-Democratic Workers’ Party (*Ukrains’ka sotsial-demokratychna robotnycha partiia*, hereafter USDRP) and the Ukrainian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries (*Ukrains’ka partiia sotsialistiv revoliutsioneriv*, hereafter UPSR); their members staffed many of the governments of the UNR. The USDRP was a party of nationally conscious Marxists, while the UPSR were peasant populists. The two parties worked together in the Ukrainian governments: whereas the more radical UPSR had somewhat broader support, the more moderate USDRP were better organized and were, as a result, often the senior partner.

Throughout the revolutionary period, both parties repeatedly returned to the question of whether to organize power on the basis of soviets. While the word “soviet” has become associated with the Soviet republics created by the Bolsheviks, it originally referred to a means of governmental organization: in this article, the capitalized “Soviet” indicates the Bolsheviks’ Soviet republics, the uncapitalized “soviet” the form of government. Ukrainian supporters of the soviet principle hoped to make councils—soviets—representing the laboring classes (workers, peasants, and the so-called laboring intelligentsia) Ukraine’s basic administrative and legislative unit.³ Of course, this gave them something in common with the Bolsheviks, and many Ukrainian supporters of the soviets were in favor of peace with the Soviet republics. The discussions on soviet power reveal how both Ukrainian socialist parties were divided between those wishing to

maintain a united national front and those who believed it more important to achieve social liberation before national liberation.

Indeed, the soviet question created splits in both parties. In May 1918, moderate Socialist Revolutionaries departed from the UPSR to form the UPSR (centrist course), while the party's left became known as the *borot'bisty* after the journal they edited *Borot'ba* (The Struggle). The *borot'bisty* condemned the other Ukrainian parties as being excessively nationalist and called for peace with Soviet Russia, with whom they would form a socialist federation. Over the next two years, the *borot'bisty* increasingly presented themselves as good Marxists. They sought to cooperate with the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Ukraine (KP[b]U), finally joining it in March 1920 (Mace 1983, 53–62). Similarly, in January 1919, the left wing of the USDRP sought to pass a resolution at the party congress calling for local power to be reorganized on the basis of the dictatorship of the urban and rural proletariat and poor in the form of worker-peasant soviets, the removal of the bourgeoisie, landowners, and rich peasants from power, and the immediate introduction of socialism. The rest of the party rejected this resolution, and the left wing departed to form its own group, the *nezalezhnyky* (Independentists) (Vysots'kyi 2004, 131–135). They later renamed themselves the Ukrainian Communist Party (UKP) and were considerably more critical of the Bolsheviks than the *borot'bisty* (Velychenko 2015).

Even after these splits, the remainder of the USDRP and the UPSR centrists continued to discuss introducing the soviet principle into government in response to the shifting fortunes of the civil war and the resulting search for alliances. When war broke out with the Bolsheviks in early 1919, the two socialist parties were willing to put aside radical demands in their attempts to negotiate with the Entente, from whom they hoped to get help against Moscow. However, the failure of such efforts led to renewed calls for the creation of soviet power, especially among the Socialist Revolutionaries, who were more radical. On February 28, 1919, for example, the UPSR centrists called for a “union of sovereign soviet states for the joint struggle against counter-revolution:” this meant both an alliance with Soviet Russia and the introduction of soviet power in Ukraine, albeit on a broader social basis than the dictatorship of just the proletariat (Vysots'kyi 2004, 142–143). The USDRP agreed to reorganize the UNR according to the soviet principle, although, as they later admitted, more from the tactical consideration of trying to win over those Ukrainians attracted by the idea of soviet power (Vysots'kyi 2004, 144).

Certainly, the Ukrainian intelligentsia had good reason to believe that there was considerable support in the country for the soviet system. After war broke out in January 1919 between the UNR and Soviet Russia, many of the peasant insurgents who had served in the Ukrainian army either abandoned the UNR and went home or joined the Bolshevik forces. However, in spring that year, a new wave of uprisings took place against the Bolsheviks, often led by the same insurgents. These drew on peasant dissatisfaction with the Bolsheviks' requisitioning and conscription backed up by violence. The great majority of insurgent leaders described their aim to be an independent Ukrainian soviet, socialist state. Their propaganda leaflets criticized the Bolsheviks as Russians and Jews who held power with the support of Hungarian, Latvian, and Chinese mercenaries and had betrayed the socialist revolution through their attack on the village. While primarily an anti-Bolshevik movement, the insurgents were at pains to emphasize their opposition to the UNR. The insurgents thereby created an image of themselves as left-wing Ukrainian opponents of a supposedly Russo-Jewish, pseudo-socialist Bolshevism. On the basis of this common ground, the *nelazezhnyky* sought to work with the insurgents in Kyiv province and coordinate their activity, although they never seem to have gained much influence over the partisans (Gilley 2014). Many have doubted the sincerity of the insurgents' political views. However, the question of whether they really believed in the slogans they propagated is unimportant. More significant is the fact that they thought it necessary to adopt and project a certain political persona in order to gain support for their military activity (Gilley 2017).

In order to unite the anti-Bolshevik insurgency with the UNR forces, the USDRP and UPSR again became proponents of the soviet system. The two parties reached an agreement with the

nezalezhnyky in May 1919 to rid the country of the Russian Bolsheviks and transfer power to worker-peasant soviets. A month later, the USDRP and UPSR formed a governmental coalition on this basis, although the *nezalezhnyky* continued to operate independently. The failure of the insurgency in Kyiv province against the Bolsheviks in July signaled the end of the attempts both to unify insurgent and UNR forces and to adopt a soviet system. In the second half of 1919, the two socialist parties—the SRs more reluctantly—increasingly advocated a system of parliamentary democracy (Vysots’kyi 2004, 153, 155–156, 160).

The Ukrainian Emigration: The Early Sovietophiles, 1919–1921

The Ukrainian Social Democratic and Socialist Revolutionary groups based abroad took up this pro-soviet trend and began to call for rapprochement with the Bolsheviks. They were the first of the Sovietophile groups of the 1920s. One was led by the writer, Social Democrat and head of two Ukrainian governments Volodymyr Vynnychenko. He had left Ukraine after the Entente, which saw him as too left wing, insisted on his departure from the government as a prerequisite to receiving their help. By March 1919, he was in Vienna, where he wrote a three-volume study of the revolution in Ukraine. In it, he reassessed his views on the Bolsheviks and the future of the Ukrainian revolution. He restated the pre-revolutionary commonplace that national and social liberation of the Ukrainian people were inseparable (Vynnychenko [1920] 1990, 3:11). Consequently, he attacked the Ukrainian governments for failing to see the importance of the social revolution (Vynnychenko [1920] 1990, 2:89–97, 110, 129–130, 215–217) and the Bolsheviks for underestimating the national question (Vynnychenko [1920] 1990, 2:262–279; [1920] 1990, 3:304–314). However, he concluded that the Bolsheviks had recognized their mistakes in Ukraine, arguing that in a resolution on December 6, 1919 the Politburo of the RKP had condemned the past oppression of the Ukrainian nation, asserted the need to actively support Ukrainian culture, and proposed policies to win the peasants over to the Soviet government (Vynnychenko [1920] 1990, 3:481–487). By contrast, Symon Petliura (the former party colleague who succeeded Vynnychenko as head of the UNR) had allied with Poland and given up Ukrainian territory to them. This proved to Vynnychenko that a bourgeois state could not grant Ukraine national liberation: “the ‘more left-wing’ the socio-political regime in Ukraine is,” he wrote, “the more favorable it is for the national rebirth of our people,” meaning a Soviet republic was the most favorable of all (Vynnychenko [1920] 1990, 3:498–499). The mutual dependence of national and social liberation meant that “any consistent, active Communist of any nationality, even a former ruling one” would have to intervene in the national question in order to ensure the future of the revolution (Vynnychenko [1920] 1990, 3:500).

In February 1920, Vynnychenko re-entered active political life by forming the Foreign Group of the Ukrainian Communist Party. The first issue of its organ, *Nova doba*, appeared in March 1920. The group was mainly composed of USDRP members who like Vynnychenko had left the party in protest at Petliura’s policies. *Nova doba* argued that the world stood on the brink of revolution and that Ukraine, as an oppressed nation, must take the side of revolution in order to ensure its social and national liberation. The leader of this revolution was Soviet Russia, which was, in the words of one contributor to *Nova doba*, “the Mecca and Medina to which fly the thoughts of the subjugated and oppressed and from which they await their savior” (Palamar 1920, 1).

The new group toned down their criticism of the Bolsheviks’ treatment of Ukraine. Vynnychenko admitted that the Bolsheviks had made mistakes, but claimed that they had recognized this and were correcting them (Vynnychenko 1920, 13–19). Indeed, the members of the *Nova doba* group repeatedly stated that they should avoid criticism of the Bolsheviks because this would give capitalists material with which they could denigrate the Soviet system.⁴ Moreover, the paper was keen to present itself as internationalist rather than nationalist. For example, Volodymyr Levyns’kyi (a Foreign Group member from Galicia) criticized some “petty-bourgeois”

Galicians who had expressed their support for the Red Army's invasion of Galicia to remove the Poles despite their abhorrence of socialism. Levyns'kyi (1920b, 14) told them that they must "say to themselves frankly, honestly, without lies, whether they can discard all the rags of their petty-bourgeois world view and are ready to stand strongly, firmly, without vacillation, in our ranks, in the ranks of international Communism."

The second early Sovietophile group was the Foreign Delegation of the Ukrainian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries created in February 1920. It was made up of SRs who had left Ukraine as UNR delegates to other European countries. The historian and former head of the *Centralna Rada* Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi, who had a mandate from the leadership of the UPSR to coordinate the party's activity abroad, became its head. The first issue of its organ *Boritiesia-poborete!* (Struggle—Overcome!) appeared in September 1920. Like the Foreign Group of the UKP, the Foreign Delegation of the UPSR hailed the Bolsheviks as the leaders of the world revolution. Hrushevs'kyi (1920a, 12–13), for example, discussed the ongoing Polish-Soviet war. He wrote that both Poland and the Bolsheviks had harmed Ukraine; however, in the war between the Red Army and Poland it was necessary to support the former because the Bolsheviks had "grown into the leaders of the international socialist movement, which the whole of the laboring world looks on with trust [...]. Whatever the mistakes of the Bolshevik leaders in Ukrainian politics [...] it is necessary to avoid conflict with Bolshevism in every way, respecting the universal meaning of the socialist revolution which it leads."

Unlike Vynnychenko's Foreign Group, the Foreign Delegation of the UPSR was prepared to criticize the Bolshevik's centralism: Moscow refused to recognize Ukraine's right to national self-determination; it would not allow the *borot'bisty* and the UKP to operate in Ukraine openly; it ignored the peasants' role in the revolution in Ukraine and followed policies which harmed them (Hrushevs'kyi 1920b, 48–49; Shrah 1920, 35–37). However, although they pointed to the Bolsheviks' shortcomings, they did not do this simply out of concern for the Ukrainian national cause; they also feared that the Bolsheviks were discrediting the revolution in the eyes of Ukrainian peasants (Hrushevs'kyi 1920a, 16). Moreover, as non-Marxist socialists, many members of the Foreign Delegation saw the root of the Bolsheviks' errors in their misunderstanding of socialism rather than their nationality. "The tragedy," wrote the Foreign Delegation member Mykola Shrah (1920, 38–39), "is that the Russian Bolsheviks in practice followed the national postulates of Marx." They were guilty not merely of a Russian error "but also [one] of Great Power socialists in general" (Shrah 1920, 27).

Accordingly, the two groups followed different goals. Vynnychenko's Foreign Group hoped to bring about a merger with their fellow Marxists in the KP(b)U and the UKP in order to work toward the common good of the revolution.⁵ By contrast, Hrushevs'kyi's Foreign Delegation sought to negotiate the legalization of the UPSR, which they hoped would act as the representative of Ukrainian peasant interests in a Soviet state as a separate party (Hrushevs'kyi 1920b, 2–3, 25–26). Hrushevs'kyi and the secretary of the Foreign Delegation Oleksander Zhukovs'kyi wrote to the Politburo of the KP(b)U demanding that they allow the UPSR to function openly, predicting that if it did not do so, the Soviet system would collapse and the revolution fail.⁶ Working from this conviction, the Foreign Delegation felt confident that the Bolsheviks' commitment to socialism would make them recognize this danger and legalize the UPSR. The journal stressed that criticism of the Russian Bolsheviks' national policy did not mean blindness to the party's progress on this matter. "There is no doubt about the Bolsheviks' good will," wrote Hrushevs'kyi (1920a, 11; see also Shrah 1920, 46–47).

Both groups failed. Vynnychenko spent June to September 1920 in Moscow and Kharkiv trying to negotiate with the Russian and Ukrainian governments. Both the Russian Communist Party and KP(b)U offered him positions in the Ukrainian Politburo, but he refused saying that the posts did not possess any real responsibility (Gilley 2006b). Similarly, though the Ukrainian Soviet government in Kharkiv was prepared to allow individual members of the UPSR's Foreign Delegation to return to Ukraine, it would not countenance the legalization of the Socialist

Revolutionary party.⁷ Following his return from the Soviet republics in September 1920, Vynnychenko undertook an angry campaign against the Bolsheviks. This split the Foreign Group of the UKP as many members of the party maintained a Sovietophile position. Some of these, for example the economist Vasyl' Mazurenko, returned to Ukraine.⁸ Hrushevs'kyi's disappointment caused him to withdraw from active political life at the end of 1921. His Foreign Delegation had already split when the SRs based in Prague, led by Mykyta Shapoval, condemned the group's Sovietophile position.

Thus, the two groups were unsuccessful because the Bolsheviks refused to cooperate in the manner in which the Foreign Group of the UKP and the Foreign Delegation of the UPSR had hoped. The greatest limit on the development of the pro-Soviet tendency was the Soviet system itself: its actions often varied from the claims made by its supporters in emigration, severely undermining the position they adopted. The Bolsheviks were highly suspicious of their advocates in the emigration, and though they were willing to use Sovietophilism for propaganda, they did not want to allow pro-Soviet groups to act independently.

Despite these disappointments, the former members of the two groups did not completely abandon their desire to come to terms with the Soviet regime. Vynnychenko repeatedly considered new attempts at reconciliation (Gilley 2009, 150–158). Hrushevs'kyi's colleagues in the Foreign Delegation all returned to Ukraine. The historian himself went back in 1924 (Gilley 2006a, 366–374; Plokyh 2005, 215–280). Nevertheless, as a political grouping these early Sovietophiles had lost their importance.

The Ukrainian Emigration, 1921–1924: Soviet-Sponsored Sovietophilism

The disintegration of the two early Sovietophile groups did not end Ukrainian émigré Sovietophilism. The representatives of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic in Prague, Berlin, Warsaw, and Vienna started observing a growth in pro-Soviet sentiment among Ukrainian émigrés from the end of 1921. The Soviet officials discussed the creation of a Ukrainian journal to be the equivalent of the Russian *Nakanune*, the newspaper of pro-Soviet Russian émigrés secretly funded by Moscow advocating reconciliation with the Soviet regime and the return of the emigration to help rebuild the country (Hardeman 1994). Similarly, the Ukrainian *Nakanune* should contribute to the dissolution of the Ukrainian emigration, in particular the camps of interned UNR soldiers which the Bolsheviks thought fueled the insurgent movement still active in Ukraine. For about half a year, Soviet Ukraine's foreign representatives negotiated with a group of émigrés led by the Ukrainian general Oleksander Hrekov. They failed to agree on a platform for the proposed publication: the Hrekov group wanted to state the eventual independence of Ukraine as their aim; the Soviets opposed this. The plan for a Ukrainian *Nakanune* only came to fruition in July 1923 after the Bolsheviks had managed to acquire the East Galician Social Democrat Semen Vityk as its editor. The choice of Vityk was typical of the future journal, whose staff included many Western Ukrainians and which devoted a considerable amount of space to West Ukrainian issues (Bruski 2000, 508–510; Gilley 2009, 221–226, 246–268). Indeed, two events in 1923 had been conducive to the re-emergence of a Sovietophile trend: in March, the Entente recognized Polish sovereignty over Galicia, ending the hopes of many that the Western powers would grant the province independence; at the same time, the Bolsheviks introduced a policy of Ukrainization that sought to increase the number of Ukrainian speakers in party and state positions, promote the Ukrainian language, and support Ukrainian culture.

The new publication was called *Nova hromada*. The Bolsheviks had not only set it up but they supported it financially throughout its existence. Consequently, unlike *Boritiesia-poborete!*, it unreservedly described the Bolshevik revolution and the Soviet system as the path to Ukraine's social and national liberation. However, like *Nova doba* and *Boritiesia-poborete!*, it contended that one had to choose between the side of revolution or reaction: support for the former entailed support for Soviet Russia; anything else would mean helping world capitalism (Kharchenko

1923a, 18; Kharchenko 1924, 29; Vityk 1923b, 13). In this way, it reflected the Bolsheviks' self-image as the embodiment of the revolution. This entailed seeing all who opposed it as expressions of reaction, regardless of their actual position on socialism and revolution.

At the same time, the journal also heralded the Ukrainian Soviet Republic as a genuinely Ukrainian state (Vityk 1923b, 8). It defended the close relationship between Russia and Ukraine, saying this protected Ukraine from the capitalist world and increased the country's international importance (Vityk 1923b, 10–11; Kharchenko 1923a, 20). *Nova hromada* described how the Bolsheviks promoted Ukrainian culture: they had created a genuinely Ukrainian system of education (Krushelnyts'kyi 1923, 71–72) and had enabled Soviet Ukraine to replace Galicia as the Ukrainian cultural Piedmont (Vityk 1923a, 16). The journal contrasted this with the disadvantages faced by Ukrainians in Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia. Poland, with its large Ukrainian population and bogeyman status in Moscow, received the most criticism (Vysochans'kyi 1923, 22–33).

Nova hromada both expressed and capitalized on the disenchantment inspired by the Entente's recent decision on Eastern Galicia. As the contributor A. Kharchenko wrote, in response to this fateful moment, "our old national ideals, old worldviews, former methods of struggle, ancient and recent, became bankrupt:" by this, he meant the aims of national-cultural autonomy within a bourgeois state and the willingness of Ukrainian socialists to seek help from bourgeois powers. Kharchenko accused all the leaders of the Ukrainian revolution, 1917–1922, of being antithetical to the idea of revolution and the movement of the Ukrainian masses (Kharchenko 1923b, 42, 44).

This theme of the Ukrainian elite's betrayal of the Ukrainian nation ran throughout *Nova hromada*. The journal continually attacked the pre-war generation of Ukrainian politicians, accusing the Galician intelligentsia, for example, of opposing the national and social desires of the masses and accommodating themselves to Austrian rule. Consequently, both the West and East Ukrainian intelligentsia had opposed the Russian revolution, despite the popular masses' yearning to join with it; they had turned to foreign powers and again brought Ukraine under a foreign yoke (Kharchenko 1923a, 19–20; Melnyts'kyi 1923, 35–38; Vityk 1923b, 5–6; Vityk 1923c, 7–9; Vityk 1924, 12–13). By contrast, claimed *Nova hromada*, the Ukrainian working masses had fought for the statehood of Ukraine ever since the times of the Zaporozhian Cossacks (Pruts'kyi 1924, 2–3).

This juxtaposition of the treacherous elites with the betrayed masses was common to the populist school of historiography dominant among Ukrainian historians in the second half of the nineteenth century, for example, Volodymyr Antonovych. *Nova hromada's* belief that the national and social liberation of Ukraine were intertwined can also be traced back to the populists such as Mykhailo Drahomanov. Therefore despite *Nova hromada's* renunciation of the pre-war generation, many of the contributors to the journal still shared some of the most important commonplaces of that period. They had made the significant innovation, however, of identifying these traditional goals with the international revolution led by the Bolsheviks.

During the debate on creating a Sovietophile journal within the emigration, the Soviet authorities had stressed that the new organ should not be Bolshevik: it must at least outwardly seem independent. Moreover, when drawing up a policy toward the West Ukrainian lands, the Bolsheviks stressed the need to work with all anti-Polish parties, including those representing the petty bourgeoisie, to destabilize the Polish state.⁹ However, the contributors to *Nova hromada* increasingly began to present themselves as Soviet, albeit in an understanding which gave a very high place to national liberation; indeed, they began to attack the appearance of Sovietophilism in West Ukrainian society. Contempt for Sovietophilism can be seen clearly in an article written by the contributor Ivan Horodys'kyi:

The bankruptcy of the orientation towards the Entente, a certain decadence in the politico-social life in our region and the Polish state's intolerable policy of extermination—these are the main causes of that hangover which under the name of "Sovietophilism" has taken hold

of the heads of the Galician patriots. Not a change in worldview under the influence of the whole series of events of historical importance in the last decade, but rather hopelessness, despair, deficiency in strength of character and an education in the old St. George schools compel the contemporary Ukrainian petty bourgeois intelligentsia to cast their gaze towards red Kyiv. (Horodnyts'kyi 1924, 55)

By contrast, the Ukrainian laboring masses did not turn to the East out of a tactical maneuver, but rather because they saw the Soviet Union as the means of their liberation (Horodnyts'kyi 1924, 55). The journal's message was clear: only those who believed in a international socialist revolution should ask Soviet Ukraine for help; the country did not need the support of those only looking to it for nationalist reasons. This ran against the KP(b)U's policy and may indeed be why the journal closed after only six issues.

East Galician Sovietophilism, 1923–1933

Despite *Nova hromada's* closure, Sovietophilism flourished among East Galician émigrés in the mid-1920s. Before 1914, East Galician Ukrainians, schooled in Habsburg parliamentarianism, had had cultural goals, such as the foundation of a Ukrainian university in L'viv, and sought the creation of a Ukrainian crownland within the monarchy. After the Polish-Ukrainian war in Eastern Galicia, many Eastern Galicians saw the Russian and Ukrainian Soviet republics as potential allies in their struggle against the Poles, who had defeated the West Ukrainian People's Republic and attached the Ukrainian-dominated province of Eastern Galicia to their newly restored state. In particular, following the Council of Ambassador's recognition in March 1923 of Poland's annexation of the province, many Eastern Galicians began to view a Polish-Soviet war, leading to the absorption of the province into the Ukrainian SSR, as the only way of escaping Polish rule and creating a united Ukraine. The introduction of Ukrainization by the KP(b)U in the same year made Soviet Ukraine far more attractive to many Ukrainians than Poland, where the government pursued a policy of Polonization.

Thus, many Eastern Galicians became Sovietophiles out of geopolitical concerns. Ievhen Petrushevych, dictator of the West Ukrainian People's Republic (ZUNR), considered negotiations with the Bolsheviks as early as March 1919 in his desire for an ally against the Poles. The question of reconciliation with the Bolsheviks arose repeatedly during the ZUNR's shaky alliance with the UNR and after its exile to Vienna. Until 1923, however, the ZUNR maintained its outward orientation toward the Entente. Following the March decision, the émigré ZUNR government adopted an openly pro-Soviet position. The Russian and Ukrainian Soviet governments funded Petrushevych and his government from 1925 until the end of the decade (Gilley 2009, 292–310).

However, many East Galicians were also attracted by what they believed to be positive developments in Soviet Ukraine. The publicist Mykhailo Lozyns'kyi stressed its apparent national achievements. Lozyns'kyi had worked on the L'viv paper *Dilo* before the war, served as the ZUNR's deputy minister of foreign affairs and, after splitting with Petrushevych, became a professor of international law at the Ukrainian Free University in Prague (Rublov 1997; Slukhyi 1995). Following the March decision, he again started working with Petrushevych, adopting the latter's dictum that the system of government created in Eastern Galicia was unimportant; even a Soviet regime was acceptable if it meant liberation from Poland. Through his work with Petrushevych, Lozyns'kyi came into contact with the Soviet Ukrainian representative in Prague (Rublov 1997, 126–127). At the end of 1924, he broke again with Petrushevych, but continued to become more pro-Soviet, even applying to travel to Ukraine (Rublov 1997, 128).¹⁰

In 1927, Lozyns'kyi wrote a pamphlet praising the “extraordinary development of Ukrainian intellectual culture, of literature, science and art” alongside the “general consolidation of the state and social life of Ukraine” which he predicted would enable Soviet Ukraine to “become the national and state center of all the Ukrainian lands, the basis for the realization of a United Ukrainian statehood” (Lozyns'kyi 1927, 4–5). At the same time, Lozyns'kyi claimed that “the West Ukrainian

lands cannot free themselves from Poland only with their own forces;" their liberation was only possible with the support of Soviet Ukraine and the other Soviet republics (Lozyns'kyi 1927, 44).

Lozyns'kyi also argued that the Bolsheviks' social policies promoted the Ukrainian national cause: "those classes against which the Soviet regime turned are foreign to the West Ukrainian lands," he claimed. By removing the foreign ruling class in Galicia, the Soviet regime would free the Ukrainian nation from both social and national oppression (Lozyns'kyi 1927, 59). The Ukrainians in the West Ukrainian lands were peasants, workers, and members of the laboring intelligentsia—the classes which could only gain if Western Ukraine came under Soviet rule. This, he predicted, would lead to Ukrainization replacing Polonization, the Ukrainian language becoming the state language, and Ukrainian culture acquiring the ability to develop freely. "Whatever one's position towards Ukrainian Soviet statehood," claimed Lozyns'kyi, "if the unification of the West Ukrainian lands were to bring about these national achievements, which parties such as the UNDO [East Galicia's conservative nationalists] also wanted, then one should do all in one's power to bring this about (Lozyns'kyi 1927, 59–60).

Another East Galician Sovietophile was Iuliiian Bachyns'kyi, a founder of the Ukrainian Social-Democratic Party in Eastern Galicia and later UNR representative to the USA. By summer 1925, Bachyns'kyi had adopted a Sovietophile position. Bachyns'kyi praised the Bolsheviks for fighting against Russia while other parties had only struggled against the tsarist regime: the Bolsheviks had removed the word Russia from the map and replaced it with the USSR. Moreover, they had swept away the non-Ukrainian bourgeoisie and aristocracy in Ukraine, the opponents of Ukrainian national goals (Bachyns'kyi 1928, 64–65). Only the Bolsheviks could have done this as no other group was in a position to do so: the Ukrainian-speaking rural population was interested in acquiring land rather than state-building; the urban population that could create a state did not speak Ukrainian (Bachyns'kyi 1928, 50, 81, 130). By establishing a Soviet Ukrainian state and introducing Ukrainization at all levels, the Bolsheviks were now inculcating a feeling of Ukrainianness among Ukrainians. "What does it mean when all laws in Ukraine are adopted and proclaimed by the All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviet Deputies in the name of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, and in all schools, beginning with the lowest, the young learn that they study in the schools of the Ukrainian Republic and live in the Ukrainian Republic?" he asked. "Does not such an education of the young, growing Ukrainian generation in an atmosphere of Ukrainian statehood and the continuation of Ukrainization in all administrative-state institutions strengthen the Ukrainian nation politically?" (Bachyns'kyi 1928, 21–22, 38–40).

Both Lozyns'kyi and Bachyns'kyi immigrated to Soviet Ukraine: Lozyns'kyi successfully applied to move there in autumn 1926, at the height of Ukrainization, while Bachyns'kyi travelled to the Soviet Union as the policy was coming to an end in November 1933 (Rublov 1997, 108; Behei 2001, 49, 51).

The major East Galician Sovietophile group was the Union of Ukrainian Citizens in France (SUHUF), created in France in 1925. Its leader was Il'ko Borshchak, who also edited the SUHUF's organ *Ukrainski visty*. Borshchak was a historian from Kherson province in the former Russian Empire who had been secretary of the UNR delegation to the Paris peace conference in 1919. Here, he devoted himself to the study of Ukraine in the eighteenth century and Franco-Ukrainian relations. Borshchak's conversion to Sovietophilism may have come following the March decision; certainly, he wrote an article on Polish plans against Ukraine at the time of Napoleon attacking "Polish imperialism" for *Nova hromada* (Borshchak 1923, 45–50). While Borshchak himself was an intellectual from the former Romanov empire, the majority of the members of the SUHUF were, at least according to *Ukrainski visty*, workers from Eastern Galicia. The paper contended that most had left their homeland to flee Polish rule (*Ukrains'ki visty*, May 1, 1926, 1, 4; May 17, 1926, 4); however, many may have simply been economic migrants forced to find work abroad due to the difficult conditions at home.

Above all, *Ukrains'ki visty*, when discussing the October Revolution's benefits for Ukraine, stressed the national achievements of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic: the Soviet regime had saved

the Ukrainian state “and the Ukrainian cause in general;” the Ukrainian Soviet Republic freely joined the USSR, as an equal among equals, to become a free and independent state; it had its own government and worker-peasant parliament and was conducting Ukrainization in order to remove the legacy of Russification (*Ukrains’ki visty*, November 15, 1926, 1). Therefore, Soviet Ukraine had become “the present Piedmont for all the suppressed Ukrainian lands, to which the eyes of all those subjugated beyond the Zbruch and the Styr are turned and from which Western Ukrainians expect help and liberation (*Ukrains’ki visty*, June 1, 1926, 1).

Indeed, *Ukrains’ki visty* was keen to avoid the impression that it was a Communist organ. Following a split in the group in 1928, a number of former SUHUF members attacked the organization as Bolshevik agents. *Ukrains’ki visty* refuted these allegations by claiming that it was a paper for Ukrainians “who care for their national cause, an organ for Ukrainians who struggle for the national independence of all Ukrainian lands, for the rebirth and reconstruction of a United Ukraine” and believed that “only under the flag of Soviet Ukraine, which is conducting national-cultural, economic [and] political-state construction, can the idea of a United Ukraine be achieved” (*Ukrains’ki visty*, September 1, 1926, 1).

However, Bolshevik policies within Soviet Ukraine limited the republic’s appeal as a bearer of Ukrainian national values. Between 1926 and 1927, a debate raged within Soviet Ukraine about the extent and speed of Ukrainization that led to the dismissal of the commissar for education Oleksander Shums’kyi, a former *borot’bist* and prominent advocate of Ukrainization, and the public disgrace of the Ukrainian writer Mykola Khvylovyi, who wanted to separate Ukrainian literature from the Russian (Shkandrij 1992). Under Skrypnyk, Shums’kyi’s successor, the Ukrainization of a number of areas of public life, including schools and publishing, reached its highpoint. However, the late 1920s also saw the introduction of the First Five Year Plan and a command economy led from Moscow; NEP was abandoned in favor of collectivization; there was a campaign against the Ukrainian intelligentsia, culminating in the show trial of the “Union for the Liberation of Ukraine” in 1930, and the Bolsheviks decided to eliminate the “village bourgeoisie,” the so-called *kulaks*. Collectivization, dekulakization and requisitioning created a murderous famine, which between 1932 and 1933 claimed about four million lives. A purge was conducted against the leaders of the KP(b)U. Skrypnyk committed suicide. In November 1933, the Ukrainian Politburo ended its policy of Ukrainization.

These developments determined the fates of those Sovietophiles who had travelled to Ukraine and become the cadres responsible for carrying out Ukrainization. When the Bolsheviks turned against the policy, they began to repress the Sovietophiles. Following his return in 1924, Mykhailo Hrushevs’kyi had worked in the All-Ukrainian Academy of Sciences and continued writing his monumental *History of Ukraine-Rus’*. By the end of December 1927, official support for Hrushevs’kyi had disappeared and, by the summer of 1930, he was subjected to continuous attacks from the authorities. In 1931, he was exiled to Moscow, where he became ill. In 1934, he died while at a resort in the Caucasus. Lozyns’kyi, who had settled in Kharkiv, chaired the law department at the Institute of National Economy and worked at the Ukrainian Institute of Marxism-Leninism, was deported to the Northern Urals in 1930 and shot in 1937 for his alleged participation in a “conspiracy” against the Soviet Union. Bachyns’kyi briefly worked on the editorial board of the Ukrainian Soviet Encyclopedia, but in 1934 he was arrested and imprisoned on the Solovets Islands.

As the 1920s drew to a close, it became increasingly difficult to defend Soviet Ukraine on national grounds alone. This can be seen in the response by *Ukrains’ki visty* to the dismissal of Shums’kyi as commissar for education. At first, the paper downplayed the incident. In April 1927, it denied that Shums’kyi’s transfer indicated disagreement between members of the Soviet Ukrainian government, or that a change in ministers signaled a change in policy. Rather, Shums’kyi had left because he had done his job to introduce party directives on Ukrainization. Now the matter required good organization, not political work. Shums’kyi did not feel inclined to undertake organizational work and was ill after all the efforts he had made. Therefore, Skrypnyk, a conscious Ukrainian, party member, and successful organizer, had taken on Shums’kyi’s job in the commissariat of education to build on the work started by Shums’kyi (*Ukrains’ki visty*, March 15, 1927, 2; April 1, 1927, 2). Yet this interpretation by

Ukraïns'ki visty became untenable following the Bolsheviks' condemnations of Shums'kyi, including those by his successor, the "conscious Ukrainian" Skrypnyk. In July, the paper wrote that the growth of capitalism in Soviet Ukraine had allowed anti-Soviet feelings to develop among the bourgeoisie, which in turn had influenced certain parts of the Bolshevik party: above all, Khvył'ovyi in the realm of literature and Shums'kyi in that of politics. Shums'kyi, the paper claimed, had deviated from the party line by calling for "forced Ukrainization," which would increase suspicion toward Ukrainization among workers and threaten the policy's success (*Ukraïns'ki visty* July 23, 1927, 1).

The incident shows how the Bolshevik attempts to limit the extent of Ukrainization compelled the émigré supporters of Soviet Ukraine to make uncomfortable about-turns. Not only did *Ukraïns'ki visty* have to disown Shums'kyi, whom it had initially sought to defend; it also began to attack "forced Ukrainization," a measure which in the past it had called for, describing it as the essence of "de-Russification" (*Ukraïns'ki visty*, July 18, 1927, 1). Such intellectual contortionism clearly put a strain on the membership of the SUHUF. By September 1927, a split had already taken place in the organization. Those who had left accused the SUHUF of being "Bolshevik agitators" and "agents of Comintern" (*Ukraïns'ki visty*, September 1, 1928, 1).

The onset of the First Five Year Plan again forced a change in the nature of Sovietophilism. This is evident in the case of the East Galician writer Antin Krushelnyts'kyi, who had also taken part in the Soviet-funded journal *Nova hromada*. In 1925, Krushelnyts'kyi returned to East Galicia. From 1929, he edited the journal *Novi shliakhy*, which received financial support from Kharkiv. He defended Soviet Ukraine by arguing that Kharkiv fostered the development of "state nationalism" in Ukraine. This actually set out to build a Ukrainian state, unlike the romantic nationalism of the old intelligentsia, which was obsessed with folk songs and costumes. He certainly pointed to the establishment of Ukrainian universities and technical schools, and the thriving state of Ukrainian culture (Krushelnyts'kyi 1930b, 283–284). However, more important for him was the industrialization of Ukraine. By encouraging the growth of the chemical, metallurgical, and other industries in Ukraine, the Bolsheviks had freed the country from foreign capital and ended its status as an economic colony. He also praised the construction of the foundations for a socialist organization of the rural economy (Krushelnyts'kyi 1930a, 219; Krushelnyts'kyi 1930b, 284–285). Because such economic achievements, not the historical and cultural symbols valued by the Ukrainian intelligentsia, provided the real foundation of statehood, the Bolsheviks were liberating Ukraine where the nationalists had failed. By emphasizing Soviet Ukraine's supposed economic successes, Krushelnyts'ky's Sovietophilism chimed well with the Ukraine of the Five Year Plan.

By the beginning of the 1930s, Sovietophiles required a certain blind faith in the claims made by the Bolsheviks. This may be seen in the Sovietophile response to the show trial of the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine. This was a fictive organization invented by the Bolsheviks for the purposes of prosecuting 45 Ukrainian clergymen and intellectuals, some of whom had been Sovietophile émigrés who had returned to Ukraine in order to take part in the reconstruction of the country. Krushelnyts'kyi reiterated the official Soviet account whereby those under trial belonged to a secret underground organization that had aimed to overthrow the Soviet Union and place Ukraine under the imperialist yoke of foreign capital (Krushelnyts'kyi 1930b, 286–291, 297). This uncritical acceptance of the Soviet accusations against the accused shows how by the 1930s it was only possible for Ukrainian Sovietophiles to maintain their position if they followed the official Soviet line without question. Those Sovietophiles who had supported Soviet Ukraine because of its apparent national achievements found it increasingly difficult to continue to do so after the attacks on the Ukrainians responsible for putting Ukrainization into practice. It was now impossible for Ukrainians to express critical support for the Bolsheviks. Only those willing to believe unconditionally remained.

Conclusion: Reconciling the Irreconcilable

In conclusion, interwar Ukrainian Sovietophilism had two distinct phases. It first emerged in 1919 and was therefore almost as old as the post-revolutionary emigration itself. In this early period, the

Sovietophiles were mainly émigrés from the former Romanov Empire. They supported the Soviet system because they believed the Bolsheviks were the leaders of the international revolution, which they hoped would take place in the near future. However, 1923 was a decisive turning point. The Entente recognized Polish sovereignty over Galicia in March and the Bolsheviks introduced a policy of Ukrainization. This fundamentally reshaped Ukrainian Sovietophilism. Sovietophilism became a more East Galician phenomenon. These later Sovietophiles saw the Ukrainian Soviet Republic as an embryonic Ukrainian national state and hoped that the Bolsheviks would help them drive the Poles from the West Ukrainian lands. Sovietophilism remained possible while the Bolsheviks pursued the policy of Ukrainization. However, the increasing attacks on the policy from the mid-1920s made it ever more difficult for Ukrainian émigrés to maintain a pro-Soviet position that was not explicitly Communist. The purge of the Ukrainian intelligentsia and Ukrainian Communists, the return to requisitioning, collectivization and dekulakization, and finally the murderous famine of 1932–1933, all but killed off émigré Ukrainian Sovietophilism between the wars.

Recently, much of the historiography of twentieth century Ukraine has been preoccupied by two major questions: whether the famine of 1932–1933 was an act of genocide and whether, during the Second World War, Ukrainians collaborated with the Nazis and committed atrocities against Jews and Poles (Marples 2007). Recent Western works have done much to counter the nationalist version of these events (Himka 2013; Rudling 2011). Nevertheless, the overconcentration on these two aspects does, despite their intentions, reinforce one tenet of the nationalist version of history, namely the irreconcilability of Ukrainian nationalism and Soviet socialism.

This study of the interwar émigré Sovietophiles reveals that, contrary to the version of Ukrainian history propagated by the 2015 history laws, many members of the Ukrainian intelligentsia did not believe Ukrainian national concerns to be incompatible with the system being constructed by the Bolsheviks. In part, their views went back to the legacy of Ukrainian populism, which believed that the national and social liberation of the Ukrainian people should go hand in hand. At the same time, it shows that the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic met many of the desires of the left-wing Ukrainian intelligentsia. Indeed, one of the ironies of the 2015 history laws is that many of the Ukrainians identified by Law No. 2538-1 on the memory of Ukrainian independence fighters as people deserving respect actually expressed opinions that would have brought them in conflict with Law No. 2558 on condemning the Communist regime.

Certainly, the émigré Sovietophilism of the 1920s, in the end, ceased to be a viable movement. However, as this article has shown, this was a result of developments within the Soviet Union itself. The left-wing Ukrainian nationalists had tried time and again to find a way to reconcile their nationalist and socialist beliefs through support for the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. It was more the Soviet rejection of the Sovietophiles that ended Ukrainian Sovietophilism than any rejection of the Soviet Union by leftist Ukrainian nationalists. Nevertheless, by travelling to Bolshevik-ruled Ukraine to help implement Ukrainization, they gained the opportunity to take part in the first stage of constructing the hybrid Ukrainian-Soviet identity that continues to shape Ukrainian politics and society to this day (Schnell 2013, 394; Westrate 2016).

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Notes

- 1 “Zakon Ukraïny Pro zasudzhennia komunistychnoho ta natsional-sotsialistychnoho (natsystskoho) totalitarnykh rezhimiv v Ukraïni ta zaboronu propahandy ikh symboliky.” <http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc34?id=&pf3511=54670&pf35401=336722/>.

- 2 “Zakon Ukraïny Pro pravovyi status ta vshanuvannia pamiaty bortsiv za nezalezhnist Ukrainy u XX stolittii.” <http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc34?id=&pf3511=54689&pf35401=336904/>.
- 3 Ukrainian supporters of the principle generally used the Ukrainian word for council, *rada*, rather than the Russian word, *soviet*. Some employed a Ukrainianized version of the word *soviet* (*soviet*) only to refer to the regime set up by the Bolsheviks. While the Ukrainian revolutionary parliament, the *Centralna Rada*, also had the Ukrainian word for council in its title (*rada*), this simply referred to a council rather than the principle of government by class-based councils.
- 4 “Minutes of the Meetings of the Foreign Group of the UKP,” Tsentral’nyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Hromads’kykh Ob’iednan’, Kyiv (TsDAHO), f. 8, op. 1, spr. 43, ark. 8–19. See also Volodymyr Levyns’kyi (1920a, 3).
- 5 “Minutes of the Meetings of the Foreign Group of the UKP,” TsDAHO, f. 8, op. 1 spr. 43, ark. 1.
- 6 “Letter from Hrushevs’kyi and Zhukovs’kyi to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Ukrainian (Bolsheviks),” TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 20, spr. 194, ark. 33–36.
- 7 “Protocol of the Meetings of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the KP(b)U,” TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 6, spr. 13 ark.112 (reverse); “Letter from Levys’kyi to Rakovskii,” Tsentral’nyi Derzhavnyi Arkhiv Vyshchykh Orhaniv, Kyiv (TsDAVO), f. 4, op. 1, spr. 560, ark. 60–61.
- 8 “Letter from Mazurenko to Pisots’kyi,” TsDAHO, f. 8, op. 1, spr. 85, ark. 8–9 (reverse).
- 9 “Minutes of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the KP(b)U,” TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 16, spr. 1, ark. 221.
- 10 “Minutes of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the KP(b)U,” TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 16, spr. 1, ark. 222.

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