

## 2 The Bolshevik response

Violent peasant and non-Russian resistance to Soviet power forced the Bolsheviks to recognize and to deal with the major social disparities within the largest country in the world. Although the tsarist political order collapsed in the spring of 1917, the social, economic and cultural legacy of the old order remained. Beginning in the sixteenth century, Russia annexed territories containing a wide variety of national and religious groups which were not fully developed political entities with a matching political consciousness.<sup>1</sup> Located on the periphery of the empire, these territories differed not only from the center, but also from each other.

Of the 140 million people in Soviet Russia and its allied republics in 1921, 75 million were Russians and 65 million were non-Russians. Of the latter, nearly 30 million were Ukrainians and 30 million were of Turkic background.<sup>2</sup> The population density varied from 2.4 people per square kilometer in Kirghizia to 53.0 in the Ukrainian republic, which possessed the most densely populated urban and rural populations of all the non-Russian regions.<sup>3</sup>

Although these areas possessed rich natural resources, they remained economically underdeveloped. A small number of non-Russian regions did not diverge from Russia in industrial development; the majority, however, did. Capitalism barely penetrated most of these areas. As a result, the non-Russians did not possess a native bourgeoisie or their own proletariat. The indigenous populations consisted mainly of peasants or nomads. Those in Turkestan lived a "half-patriarchal, half-feudal life style."<sup>4</sup>

Culturally, the non-Russians varied widely. Some national groups (such as the Poles, Finns, Latvians, and Ukrainians) possessed their own fully developed languages, cultures, and literatures. Other nationalities (such as the Belorussians and Tatars) were at the initial stages of creating their own languages and literatures. Finally, the

third group (which included the Mordvinians, the majority of the mountain tribes of the Caucasus, the Votiaks) did not even possess their own alphabets.<sup>5</sup> Literacy rates varied from city to countryside, from region to region, from group to group.

The communist leadership recognized that the social, economic, and cultural legacy of the tsarist order generated a greater hostility between the cities and the countryside in the non-Russian areas than in the central Russian provinces.<sup>6</sup> Cities in the former areas were Russian outposts. Local support was sparse and precarious. Most of what little support emerged came from urbanized Russians.

Bolshevik leaders realized, moreover, that the high percentage of Russians in their ranks in the non-Russian areas transformed the class struggle into a conflict among national groups and hampered the Sovietization of these areas. Local Russian Bolshevik cadres alienated the indigenous population and destabilized the political environment.<sup>7</sup> The local population viewed these cadres as beneficiaries of the old order. Non-Russians did join the Communist Party, but the percentage in regional party organizations varied from one area to another. In 1922, for example, Crimean Tatars constituted 2.5 percent of the Crimean party organization, while Armenians comprised 89.5 percent of the Armenian Communist Party.<sup>8</sup> Ukrainians constituted only 23.6 percent of the Communist Party of the Ukraine, but their large number (12,805 in 1922) made them a significant plurality among the 27,645 non-Russians in the fifteen non-Russian party organizations.<sup>9</sup>

In light of these structural divisions along national lines, how would communist power root the predominantly Russian revolution in the non-Russian areas? How would it establish a productive relationship between the Russians and the non-Russians?

Only after the final military victory over Denikin and Petliura in December 1919 and early 1920 could the Bolsheviks reevaluate their nationality policy, especially in the Ukraine. By then it had become evident even to the most doctrinaire Bolshevik that on the national question his Marxist heritage crashed into reality on the Ukrainian steppe. There the economically depressed peasants linked their social and economic frustrations with the Ukrainian identity. This transformation of peasants into Ukrainians confounded Marxist preconceptions.<sup>10</sup>

Reality was a sobering experience. Although local support for the Bolsheviks varied from area to area, the proximity of the Ukrainian provinces to the Russian industrial areas (which could mobilize

workers into makeshift armies) prevented Ukrainian nationalism's successful competition with the Bolsheviks.<sup>11</sup> Bolshevik strength in the Ukraine, moreover, was concentrated in the large industrial cities (such as Nikolaev, Kremenchuk, Kharkov, Ekaterinoslav, and Odessa) and the Donbass. Although the Bolshevik political party received only 10.5 percent of the November 1917 vote to the Constituent Assembly in the Ukrainian provinces (far less than the 25.0 percent they received throughout the rest of the territories still tied to Russia),<sup>12</sup> their support in and control of the urban centers was decisive. Possessing communications centers, railway junctions, sea-ports, warehouses, and armories, the cities became the "strategic keys" to Bolshevik victory over the Ukrainian countryside.<sup>13</sup> But in light of the explosion of Ukrainian nationalism, this fragile victory did not insure long-term stability. The tensions and hostility between the countryside and the cities had to be defused.

Despite his abhorrence of nationalism, Lenin recognized that the national question could not be ignored simply because the Bolshevik Party could not fit it neatly into its political paradigm.<sup>14</sup> If reality came into conflict with the model of the future, then a compromise between the two had to be reached. For Lenin, procrusteanism did not make good – or successful – politics.

### **Bolshevik reactions after 1917**

After the March Revolution, the Bolsheviks aggravated the tensions between the Provisional Government and the non-Russian nationalities.<sup>15</sup> After coming to power in November, they sought to reincorporate the non-Russian borderlands, which they considered integral parts of Russia. But in light of their ambivalent ideological heritage and the complexity of the situation in the non-Russian areas, the Bolsheviks, especially those in the Ukrainian provinces, were divided over which policies to follow. After much intense factional maneuvering and after being prodded by the Central Committee of the RKP(b), they slowly adapted themselves to the Ukrainian environment and began to compete with Ukrainian nationalism by creating three institutions: the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (UkrSSR), the Communist Party of the Ukraine (KP(b)U), and *korenizatsiia*.

Initially, most Bolsheviks in the Ukraine, primarily located in the Donbass coal fields, ignored the peasants and the national question in their work. One Bolshevik remembered that in the first weeks after the March Revolution, he and his colleagues, residents of Ekaterinoslav,

“did not mention once that we worked in the Ukraine. Ekaterinoslav was for us an enormous city in and only in Southern Russia.”<sup>16</sup> They concentrated only on the class struggle, not on their environment. They considered themselves participants on just another battlefield in the war against capitalism and imperialism. For them, all battlefields were interchangeable.

After November 1917, the Bolsheviks sought to reign in the Central Rada. Abandoning previous declarations of broad provincial autonomy and the right of secession, Lenin and his fellow People’s Commissars delivered an ultimatum to the Rada on December 4, demanding that they stop disarming Soviet regiments and Red Guard detachments, halt the movement of anti-Bolshevik forces across the Ukraine, and cease disorganizing the common front.<sup>17</sup> Bolshevik troops soon invaded the Ukraine. Stalin asserted that the conflict “emerged not between the peoples of Russia and the Ukraine, but between the Council of People’s Commissars and the Rada’s General Secretariat.”<sup>18</sup>

Because the Central Rada, declaring a Ukrainian republic, had carried out “petty bourgeois politics in the interests of the Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian bourgeoisie,” the first All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets, meeting in Kharkov in December 1917, declared an independent Soviet Ukrainian republic on behalf of workers and peasants. This republic was established “in close solidarity with the working masses of all nationalities in the Ukraine and the working masses of the entire Russia.”<sup>19</sup> Mykola Skrypnyk, a Ukrainian, an old Bolshevik, and a friend of Lenin’s, became the head of the People’s Secretariat of the Ukrainian People’s Republic. Kharkov (a major city of the Left Bank Ukraine) became its capital.

But this Ukrainian People’s Republic was a hollow shell, swept away by the advancing German armies after the Rada signed the Treaty of Brest Litovsk in February 1918. The Bolsheviks “never considered the Ukrainian Soviet Republic as a national republic, but exclusively as a Soviet republic on the territory of the Ukraine . . . tied with the All-Russian Workers and Peasants Republic by means of federal ties.”<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, the creation of a Soviet Ukrainian republic triggered major conflicts among the Bolsheviks in the Ukrainian provinces. They split into two factions, the Ekaterinoslavians and the Kievans. Removed from the centers of the Ukrainian national movement, the first group ignored the national question, underestimated Ukrainian nationalism’s strength, and failed to establish a party organization

uniting the Ukrainian provinces. Not surprisingly, the Ekaterinoslavians opposed the creation of the Ukrainian SSR and the KP(b)U. The worker or miner from Ekaterinoslav or the Donbass who oriented himself in the direction of Petrograd and Moscow did not believe that the proletariat in the Ukraine had any special tasks. For him, "the Ukraine was one of the counter-revolutionary fronts on which one would fight in union with the workers from Petrograd, Moscow, and Ivanovo-Voznesensk and only in hopes of their help."<sup>21</sup>

The Ekaterinoslavians were not receptive to the idea of a single, unified Ukrainian Republic. Instead, they hoped to establish several republics from the Ukrainian provinces. After the German occupation of the Ukraine in March 1918, Bolsheviks in the Donbass tried to preempt the Germans by declaring an independent Donbass–Kryvyi Rih Republic, which included the Kharkov and Ekaterinoslav gubernias and parts of the Don oblast, including the city of Rostov. This plan was designed to remove surgically the Russified industrial areas from the rural Ukrainian areas. Another group of Bolsheviks wanted the industrial areas of the Donbass and the Left Bank to join the Russian republic. These Bolsheviks were very interested in the urban areas, and they felt that they could do without the rural areas. In line with this, they asserted that the Donbass had no relationship to the Ukraine and that it was more tightly tied economically to the Central Russian provinces than to the Ukraine.<sup>22</sup>

The second group, the Kievans, a minority within the party, recognized that the Ukraine was still a backward region and that the proletariat represented a small percentage of the population. They believed that the proletariat could not win against the Ukrainian "counter-revolution" without the help of the peasantry. Ukrainian peasants, they asserted, would look suspiciously upon all attempts to seize the Ukraine with Moscow's help. Because the Kievans, living in the center of Ukrainian nationalism in 1917, recognized the Bolshevik Party's need to come to terms with Ukrainian aspirations, many of the Ekaterinoslavians accused the Kievans of petty bourgeois attitudes and utopianism.<sup>23</sup>

Yet, despite its hostility to all manifestations of nationalism, the Russian Communist Party – reacting to an adverse situation in the Ukraine – inadvertently recognized this nationalism by supporting a unified Ukrainian republic as opposed to creating several Soviet republics in the Ukrainian provinces. The Russian Communist Party placed the national-territorial principle at the base of the USSR's political administration. By vetoing the idea of creating many

republics from the Ukrainian provinces, Lenin recognized the territorial and national integrity of the nine Ukrainian provinces and, in effect, agreed with the position espoused by the Ukrainian nationalists.<sup>24</sup> Although Lenin did so for tactical reasons, his action had serious political consequences, not only in leading to the formation of the Soviet Union in December 1922, but also in reinforcing the Ukrainian and other non-Russian national identities in the USSR for decades afterward.

The Bolshevik Party's identification of regionalism with a particular national group was strengthened by the creation of the Communist Party of the Ukraine. Shortly after the Germans occupied the area, the April 1918 Taganrog Conference created the KP(b)U, a communist party with an independent Central Committee in the Ukrainian provinces.<sup>25</sup> The ties between the KP(b)U and the RKP(b) were established only through the International Bureau of the Third International. Skrypyuk openly identified himself with this position, which the Kievans supported.<sup>26</sup> But delegates to the KP(b)U's First Congress, which met in Moscow in July, overturned Skrypyuk's resolution. They defined their organization as "an autonomous (in local matters) Communist Party of the Ukraine with its own Central Committee and its congresses, which enters into the unified Russian Communist Party" and would be supervised by it.<sup>27</sup> The Ekaterinoslavians, supported by powerful patrons among the members of the Central Committee of the RKP(b), demoted the KP(b)U from an independent actor to a minor supporting role in the world revolution.

At its First Congress, the KP(b)U claimed to represent party organizations in the Ukraine having a total of 4,364 members.<sup>28</sup> Although it grew to nearly 36,000 by May 1919, the KP(b)U's small membership was its major weakness. In 1917, 67.0 percent of the Bolsheviks in the Ukrainian provinces were concentrated in the Donbass and the Kryvyi Rih areas, the industrialized and Russified Left Bank.<sup>29</sup> The party's influence waned in the Right Bank. And, not surprisingly, because the overwhelming majority of the members of the party were non-Ukrainians,<sup>30</sup> they were indifferent, if not hostile, to Ukrainian aspirations. Despite its occasional claims to the contrary, the KP(b)U was a regional organization of the Russian Communist Party.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to creating the KP(b)U, the Taganrog Conference chose its name. Each of the choices before the delegates contained different political connotations. Some of the Kievans, who emphasized the importance of the peasantry and the national question, suggested "the Ukrainian Communist Party." The Ekaterinoslavians, who

represented the Russian or Russified workers, suggested "the Russian Communist Party in the Ukraine." Skrypnyk's suggestion, "Communist Party of the Ukraine," stressed social, territorial, and national factors; the majority of delegates voted for his compromise.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to the Ukrainian SSR, a separate Communist Party of the Ukraine emerged during the revolution and civil war. Both institutions were regional components of the larger and more powerful RSFSR and RKP(b), and only nominally independent. Nevertheless, in these institutions the Bolsheviks recognized "the Ukraine" as a separate region with distinct problems. The central and the local Bolshevik organizations reluctantly recognized the Ukrainian reality: the national split between the cities and the countryside, the non-Ukrainian working class which alienated the Ukrainian peasants, and the differences between the Ukrainian provinces. But the creation of the Ukrainian SSR and the KP(b)U remained an inadequate response to the consolidation of Soviet power in the Ukraine.

It was not realistic to expect the Communist Party – which saw victory over the Whites as its first priority (feeding the starving cities was the second) – to re-evaluate completely its Russocentric perceptions during the civil war. Nevertheless, the party – now near the end of the conflict in the Ukrainian provinces – had to analyze the roots of their problems with the Ukrainians and other non-Russians.

This serious re-evaluation of its policies toward the non-Russians began two years after the end of the civil war. By 1923 the political situation improved. The Bolsheviks won the civil war, expelled Allied interventionists, and consolidated their power. The Allied economic blockade and boycott of Soviet Russia came to an end. Introduction of the New Economic Policy in March 1921 created a link (*smychka*) between the cities and the countryside and revived the depressed Soviet economy.

Pressing foreign policy considerations also contributed to this re-evaluation. Just as Turkestan was to be a model of Soviet development for the western colonies in the East, the Ukraine was to be a model for Eastern Europe.<sup>33</sup> By compromising with the Ukrainians, the Bolsheviks also sought to attract their 7 million compatriots who lived in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Rumania to the Soviet order. This magnet became urgent after the Allied Council of Ambassadors legitimized the Polish annexation of Eastern Galicia, a region with 5 million Ukrainians, on March 5, 1923. The Soviet Ukraine, then, became a Piedmont not only for Ukrainian aspirations, but for all who were nationally oppressed in Eastern Europe and Asia. And of all the

solutions to the complex nationality problems which emerged in the 1920s in the newly independent states of Eastern Europe, the Soviet policy of *korenizatsiia* (along with Estonia's 1926 law on national-cultural autonomy) promised to be the most tolerant of minority rights.

### Establishing *korenizatsiia*

As the national question was also a peasant question, a successful reworking of Russian/non-Russian relations would strengthen this *smychka*. In the fall of 1922, a major disagreement emerged between two groups supporting differing visions of the future union of the Soviet republics. Stalin and his allies wanted to include all Soviet republics *in* the RSFSR, with the right of autonomy.<sup>34</sup> Skrypnyk and his colleagues demanded the creation of a confederation of independent Soviet republics. From his deathbed Lenin proposed a compromise – a federation.<sup>35</sup> On December 30, 1922, the RSFSR, the Ukrainian SSR, the Belorussian SSR, and the Transcaucasian Federation established the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This agreement replaced the bilateral treaties the RSFSR had signed with the other republics.<sup>36</sup>

As it emerged in the spring of 1923, the USSR would be a federal state consisting of four sovereign states. The Russian nation would no longer be the ruling nation, but an equal (although the most populous) partner in the new state. A division of labor emerged between the central Soviet organs and the republics. The center would control the major commissariats; the Commissariats of Agriculture, Interior, Justice, Education, Health and Social Security would remain within the competence of the republics. But these concessions were only trappings of sovereignty. Because the RKP(b) was a highly centralized party and because the party actually controlled the Soviet state, the USSR from its inception was a unitary, not a federal state. Russians, moreover, constituted a majority of the population of the USSR and of the Communist Party membership. As part of the compromise to establish the new Soviet state, the RKP(b) guaranteed – in contrast to previous attitudes – broad cultural autonomy for the non-Russians. This “national contract” evolved between 1919 and 1923.<sup>37</sup>

Recognizing the need to overcome the non-Russian animosity toward Russians, the party leadership first began to attack Russian chauvinism vociferously. This chauvinism, Stalin asserted, was very dangerous because it engendered non-Russian nationalism in the

borderlands. If the party were to destroy Russian chauvinism, then it "will destroy nine-tenths of that nationalism which remains and which is developing in the various republics."<sup>38</sup> But attacking Russian chauvinists, Russifiers, and tactless colleagues in the non-Russian areas was not enough. Deep-rooted problems demanded deep-rooted solutions.

Between the Eighth RKP(b) Congress in 1919 and the Fourth Conference of the RKP(b) Central Committee with officials from the non-Russian regions in 1923, the party developed a set of responses to its structural and political problems in the non-Russian areas. The goal would be to abolish these regional social inequities by raising these areas' economic and cultural standards to those of Central Russia,<sup>39</sup> by developing cultural institutions operating in the native languages to bring the Communist Party closer to the masses, and by industrializing the non-Russian areas, thereby creating indigenous workers who would bridge the gap between the Russian or Russified city and the non-Russian countryside.<sup>40</sup> In time, the party would also augment its ranks with non-Russians in the non-Russian regions. The party, in short, aspired to equalize the inequalities produced by four centuries of tsarism.

The Eighth Congress of the RKP(b), held in March 1919, adopted a new program, the first to define its goals after coming to power in November 1917. By abolishing all privileges for any national group and recognizing the complete equality of all nationalities, the party hoped to establish better relations between the proletarians and semi-proletarians of different nationalities.

The party program also recognized the rights of colonies and oppressed nations to political separation. But not all oppressed nations should secede. Only after analyzing the historical development of class relations within each nation (such as whether the nation was evolving from the feudal period toward bourgeois democracy or from bourgeois democracy to Soviet or proletarian democracy) would the RKP(b) decide whether secession was a progressive step.

Whether or not an oppressed nation separated from Russia, the Russian proletariat had to exercise special sensitivity toward the prevailing national feelings of the working masses of the oppressed nations. Only such a policy would create a voluntary and real unity of different national groups of the international proletariat.<sup>41</sup>

Ending the privileged status of Russians in the non-Russian areas and the codification of the equality of nations and of opportunities guaranteed the formal equality of nations in the new revolutionary

state. But real equality could be achieved only by adopting measures which would overcome the economic, political, and cultural backwardness of the non-Russians.

The Tenth RKP(b) Congress, meeting in March 1921, began this process of equalization. In order to help the non-Russian working masses conquer their structural underdevelopment, the party resolved to:

- 1 develop and strengthen the Soviet state system in forms which correspond to the national conditions of these non-Russians;
- 2 develop and strengthen the use of the native languages in the courts, administration, economic organs, organs of power, which would be staffed by local people who know the way of life and psychology of the local population;
- 3 develop the press, schools, theaters, clubs and all cultural-educational institutions in the native languages; and
- 4 create a wide net of courses and schools, general education as well as professional-technical schools in the native languages, in order to quickly prepare skilled workers and soviet and party workers from the local population in all spheres, especially in the sphere of education.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, there was a need to organize and to recruit the indigenous members of the working class and the poor peasantry into the party and into the soviets.<sup>43</sup>

The final resolution concerning the national question adopted at the Twelfth Party Congress of the RKP(b) in April 1923 discussed the social foundations of Soviet nationality policy in far greater detail than did earlier party resolutions. It emphasized the importance of social conditions and their influence on Soviet nationality policy:

The legal equality of nations, won by the October Revolution, is a great accomplishment for all nations, but it does not in itself solve the entire national question. The number of republics and nations which did not or almost did not experience capitalism, which do not have or almost do not have their own proletariat, and which, as a result, are less developed in state and cultural relations, cannot fully take advantage of the laws and opportunities, that national equality offers them. Without real and constant external help, they cannot raise themselves to a higher level of development and catch up with those more developed nationalities.<sup>44</sup>

This help would consist of establishing industrial centers in the non-Russian republics, with maximum participation of the local population.<sup>45</sup> Undoubtedly, the Bolsheviks felt that with the development

of the economy, the local population would be modernized, would be proletarianized, would acquire a working-class consciousness, and would be less resistant to the Soviet order. To encourage the natural evolution of this process, special laws were passed which guaranteed the use of native languages in all state organs and in all institutions that served the non-Russian population.<sup>46</sup> These laws would "prosecute and punish all violations of national rights, especially the rights of the national minorities, with full revolutionary severity."<sup>47</sup>

The Congress resolved that the governmental organs of the national republics and oblasts should include people from the local area; those who knew the languages, ways of life, and customs of the non-Russians. The Central Committee should be very careful in selecting responsible workers in the autonomous and independent republics.<sup>48</sup>

The Fourth Conference of the RKP(b) Central Committee with officials from the non-Russian regions in June 1923 reaffirmed the decisions of the Twelfth RKP(b) Congress. Here Stalin asserted that it was "inadmissible mechanically to transplant Petrograd and Moscow standards into the provinces and republics."<sup>49</sup> The party must tolerate peculiarities in the non-Russian areas. The party's goal was to bring the apparatus of the party and the soviets, closely identified with the Russians, to the non-Russians. The best way to achieve this goal was to induce the bureaucracy to work in a "language intelligible to the population."<sup>50</sup>

By June 1923 the party created a set of policies promoting the non-Russian languages and cultures, on the one hand, and non-Russian cadres, on the other. These policies overturned previous Bolshevik positions on the national question. These ambivalent positions never advocated maintaining national identities or "preserving the cultural heterogeneity of the world."<sup>51</sup> Inasmuch as social democracy's mission was "to strengthen the international culture of the world proletariat,"<sup>52</sup> Bolsheviks envisaged their support for non-Russian cultures to be sparing. But after a bitter three-and-a-half year struggle between cities and rural areas, between workers and peasants, and between Russians and non-Russians, the Bolsheviks needed to renegotiate the relationship between the Russian cities and the non-Russian countryside. Due to economic, cultural, and political factors, the peasant question and the national question were intimately connected.

*Korenizatsiia* sought to overcome the structural problems experienced by the non-Russians in early Soviet society: the high illiteracy rates, economic underdevelopment, cultural backwardness, and the

tense relationship between the Russified cities and the non-Russian countrysides. This indigenization policy was especially conciliatory in the Moslem regions.<sup>53</sup> *Korenizatsiia* would be the political solution and industrialization the socio-economic response of the Soviet government to the nationalities problem. These programs were intertwined.

In the long run, the Bolsheviks expected that industrialization would equalize the long-standing disparities between the Russian and non-Russian areas, and that equal opportunities would integrate the nationally diverse peoples of the Soviet Union into the socialist order. But the Communist Party and the Soviet government could not wait until this equalization would take place naturally. Ending inequalities would take a long time.<sup>54</sup> Measures such as *korenizatsiia* had to be implemented immediately in order to defuse the non-Russian hostility toward the alien cities.<sup>55</sup> In conformity with this goal, the RKP(b) introduced measures which would outwardly placate the aroused national feelings of the non-Russians, but limit their true political content.

By the summer of 1923 the central party established an implicit "national contract" with the non-Russians.<sup>56</sup> The non-Russians were "promised 'sovereign' statehood and equality within the federal structure" of the USSR. Specifically, "they were guaranteed the right to develop their cultures and make full use of their native languages, as well as to train and rely on native cadres in their republics; in short, to complete the process of building their nation states within the Soviet federal framework. Furthermore, the imperial Russian legacy was to be disowned, Russian chauvinism kept in check and Russification prohibited."<sup>57</sup>

### Towards Ukrainization

Despite formal Soviet recognition of the right of the non-Russian nationalities to use their languages in the party and the government, the exact position of the Ukrainian language in the Ukrainian SSR remained uncertain. During the period of war communism, most Bolshevik government and party officials in the Ukraine refused to recognize the cultural aspirations of the Ukrainian people.<sup>58</sup>

Some members of the KP(b)U, moreover, were Russian chauvinists, who insulted Ukrainian sensitivities. For example, at the Fourth Conference of the KP(b)U, held in Moscow in March 1920, one of the delegates, Dashkovskii, asserted that in the Ukraine "there is no

national question" and that peasant uprisings were "the work of kulaks."<sup>59</sup> He demanded the liquidation of the Soviet Ukrainian Republic and proposed "to abandon all games concerning a Ukrainian government and to discuss openly, clearly, and decisively the question about the fusion of both republics [the Ukrainian and Russian – GL] into one Soviet Republic."<sup>60</sup> Dashkovskii's colleague, Zalutskii asserted that the Russian workers should closely supervise the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship in the Ukraine because the Ukrainian proletariat "is dependent upon the petty bourgeoisie. He is unable to organize a firm dictatorship or a solid government."<sup>61</sup>

Already by 1918 many Ukrainians interpreted the hostility of the Bolsheviks to the Ukrainian movement as an attack on all things Ukrainian. Many members of the trade unions in the Ukraine in 1918 identified the Ukrainian nationality with counter-revolutionary politics and were afraid of being identified as Ukrainians. During a registration of trade unionists some pleaded, "Register me as a non-Ukrainian."<sup>62</sup>

Even the leadership of the KP(b)U poisoned the atmosphere. In January 1919, Khristian Rakovsky, the Bulgarian-born chairman of the Ukrainian Council of People's Commissars, asserted that the "ethnographic differences between Ukrainians and Russians appear to be in themselves insignificant."<sup>63</sup> Later he claimed that the idea of decreeing the Ukrainian language as a state language was reactionary because it violated the equality of the Russian and the Ukrainian languages.<sup>64</sup> If equality between the languages was to be maintained, he asserted, neither language should become the state language.

Although Soviet laws recognized the equality of the Russian and Ukrainian languages, many Bolsheviks resisted the spread of the Ukrainian language to the cities and to Soviet institutions. Opponents of this equality emphasized the "theory of the struggle of two cultures" in some circles of the Communist Party. Recognizing the sharp national division between the Ukrainian urban and rural areas, this theory favored the Russified, proletarian urban areas over the largely Ukrainian rural areas, by, in effect, describing the Russian culture in the Ukraine as urban, advanced, and revolutionary and the Ukrainian culture as rural, backward, and counter-revolutionary. Not surprisingly, it predicted the victory of the former over the latter. Despite Lenin's warnings against Russian chauvinism by party members in the Ukraine,<sup>65</sup> this theory gathered many adherents.

Grigori Zinoviev, the chairman of the Comintern, was one of the first to verbalize this idea in November 1920:

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We believe that language should develop freely. After a number of years that language which has greater roots, which is more vital, which is more cultured, will triumph. Therefore, our policies are those in which action, not words, will sincerely and honestly show the Ukrainian peasant that Soviet power is not a hindrance to his conversing or teaching his children in any language he pleases.<sup>66</sup>

Despite his hands-off attitude toward Ukrainian language usage, Zinoviev's moderation was more apparent than real. Zinoviev strongly implied that a conflict existed between the Russian and Ukrainian languages, and that the first language was more cultured than the second. Subsequently, the more cultured language would become more equal than the other. Why was this the case? Was it not that the Russian language promised more social advantages to its speakers than did the Ukrainian language? If so, did this not mean a continuation of structural national inequalities? Who, after all, would determine which language had stronger roots, was more vital, or more cultured?

Most importantly, the overriding issue was not, as Zinoviev asserted, the government's prohibition of Ukrainian language usage by the peasants and their children. The real issue was how to create a better relationship between the Russified cities and the nationally aroused Ukrainian countryside. How was equality to be created between the rural and the urban areas in an environment which supported inequality? And since one either supported the policies of Russification and its fruits or supported policies attempting to reverse Russification, one could not remain neutral in this situation. By remaining neutral, Zinoviev indirectly supported Russification.

Even as late as March 1923, Dmitrii Lebed', the second secretary of the Central Committee of the KP(b)U from 1920 to 1924, actively promoted the theory of the struggle of two cultures.<sup>67</sup> He stated:

Inasmuch as the peasant sometimes demands instruction in the Ukrainian language for his children and inasmuch as it is necessary to go to the countryside and explain to the peasants the problems which interest them in a language understandable to them, then we should come to the conclusion that our party should master the Ukrainian language and conduct culture by means of it. But at the same time we should not forget that for us a language serves as a means of propagating not nationalist, but Soviet, proletarian, and communist influences . . .

Our party is obliged in the conditions prevailing in the Ukraine to examine whether or not use of the Ukrainian language provides any possibility of hastening the cultural process in the Ukrainian nation,

especially among the backward peasantry, or impedes the process, and does not help to master culture . . . Consequently, the party should not allow so-called Ukrainianization in the name of Ukrainianization . . . Setting for ourselves the task of actively Ukrainianizing the party, and necessarily also the working class . . . will serve the interests of the cultural movement of reactionary forces, since nationalization – the artificial dissemination of the Ukrainian language in the party and working class – given the present political, economic, and cultural relations between the cities and villages, means to adopt the lower culture of the village in preference to the higher culture of the city . . . We know theoretically that the struggle of two cultures is inevitable. For us in the Ukraine, as a result of historical circumstances, the culture of the city is Russian and the culture of the countryside is Ukrainian. Not one Communist or honest Marxist can say that “I support the point of view of the victory of Ukrainian culture” if this culture will only delay our progressive movement.<sup>68</sup>

Lebed', like Zinoviev, located the Ukrainian problem squarely in the countryside. It was inconceivable to him that Ukrainian culture could ever have anything to do with the cities. The Ukrainian language was only for communication with the peasants. The cities were Russian outposts, the centers of the progressive proletariat. And who during the struggle on the cultural front “would oppose the proletariat?”<sup>69</sup>

Thus, the Ukrainian language was definitely for peasants only. Although Ukrainian had been prohibited from 1876 through 1905, no amends were to be made for tsarist policy, for the Soviet order did not bear the responsibility for tsarist injustices. Russian culture was progressive, even if tsarism had not been. The Bolsheviks, according to proponents of this theory, were not responsible for developing the nationalities that had been oppressed under tsarist rule.

Due to the Russian dominance of the centers of power in the Ukraine, these views denigrating the Ukrainian language and culture were popular. Although Russians comprised only 9 percent of the population of the republic, their influence was pervasive. The urban and industrial centers were Russian cities. The working class was Russian or Russified. Seventy-nine percent of the Communist Party of the Ukraine<sup>70</sup> and 95 percent of the governmental bureaucrats were Russian or Russified.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the misgivings and hostility of the KP(b)U's rank and file, the party had to find a *modus vivendi* with the hostile Ukrainian peasantry. In an era of national equality and self-determination, the party had to overcome these social and national inequalities. It could

not do so by remaining neutral, by letting social processes "correct" themselves. The Ukraine's social problems demanded a political solution which favored Ukrainians. The Ukrainianization of the institutions which dealt with Ukrainians would win the hearts and minds of the majority of the republic's population.

The Borot'bist Party, the former left wing of the Ukrainian Party of Socialist Revolutionaries, carried over the idea of Ukrainianization from the Ukrainian nationalist camp to the Bolsheviks prior to their merger with the KP(b)U in March 1920.<sup>72</sup> They sought to encourage the development of Ukrainian culture within the Soviet order. The Borot'bists were influential in the countryside, but weak in the cities. Nevertheless, they attempted to become a party of the urban proletariat and compete with the Bolsheviks. The Borot'bists asserted that the proletarian power in the Ukraine

should categorically and clearly place as its task the decisive struggle with the inertia of Russification – this heavy vestige of the capitalistic way of life. This struggle is not an administrative one, it can be conducted only in the form of a wide and systematic help of the development of the Ukrainian form of culture . . .<sup>73</sup>

Whereas the Borot'bists were concerned with Russification and its consequences, the Russian Communist Party initially attempted to modify the behavior of its members in the Ukraine after the Soviet victory over Denikin in December 1919. Its decree, "On Soviet Power in the Ukraine," resolved to create a more moderate nationality policy in that republic. This resolution was later approved by the Eighth All-Russian Party Conference, held on December 2–4, 1919. An important passage in the decree read:

Inasmuch as nationalist tendencies are observable among the backward section of the Ukrainian masses as a result of the oppression of many centuries, members of the RKP(b) are obligated to treat them with the utmost patience and tact, countering [these tendencies] with a word of comradely explanation of the identity of interests of the toiling masses of the Ukraine and Russia. Members of the RKP(b) in the territory of the Ukraine must indeed adhere to the right of the toiling masses to study and speak in their native language in all Soviet institutions, in every way opposing attempts by artificial means to reduce the Ukrainian language to a secondary plane, striving on the contrary to transform the Ukrainian language into a weapon of communist education of the toiling masses. Steps should be taken so that all Soviet institutions have a sufficient number of employees conversant in the Ukrainian language and so that in the future all employees will be able to make themselves understood in Ukrainian.<sup>74</sup>

Thus, party members were charged with the duty of removing “all obstacles to the free development of the Ukrainian language and culture” and were reminded that those members of the “toiling masses” who were Ukrainian had the right to study and speak in their native language in all Soviet institutions. By removing these “obstacles” the Party – already in late 1919 – sought to encourage the development of the Ukrainian language and culture in the heretofore Russified cities. For the first time the party officially took into account the national characteristics of a region, and sought to overcome the legacy of the tsarist past. The decree, however, failed to reflect the realities. While all obstacles to the free development of Ukrainian were to be removed, the language would never be equal to Russian unless steps were taken to overcome the legacy of Russification.

The decree did not directly address this issue. Although it opposed attempts by “artificial means to reduce the Ukrainian language to a secondary plane,” it did little to raise the Ukrainian language to a higher plane. It demonstrated only a superficial concern with the proper political conduct of party members in the Ukraine, and neglected more profound cultural or social changes. Did the Central Committee of the RKP(b) really believe that after a bitter struggle in the Ukraine between the Bolsheviks and various Ukrainian nationalist forces, these nationalist tendencies could be countered by “a word of comradely explanation of the identity of interests of the toiling masses of the Ukraine and Russia”?<sup>75</sup>

Three years later Mikhail Frunze, a member of the Central Committee of the KP(b)U and head of the Ukrainian Military District, formally initiated the Ukrainianization drive at the Seventh Party Conference of the KP(b)U, held in Kharkov on April 4–10, 1923. Frunze attacked the vestiges of Russian imperialism and chauvinism in the Ukraine, demanding that all party members and government officials learn to speak Ukrainian, respect the Ukrainian culture, and draw as many Ukrainians as possible into the party ranks.<sup>76</sup>

The first decree on Ukrainianization was a resolution of the plenum of the Central Committee of the KP(b)U on June 22, 1923. It specified the steps to be taken to Ukrainianize the various institutions that dealt with agitation and propaganda, with special emphasis on the countryside, and ordered an increase in the production of Marxist literature in Ukrainian as well as the translation into Ukrainian of more textbooks. One of the most important tasks outlined was the publication of political education books directed at the countryside. The resolution also stipulated the creation of Ukrainian studies courses for leading

party members as well as more Ukrainian language newspapers in rural areas and ordered those members of the party who knew the Ukrainian language and culture to be transferred to the countryside. Finally, the resolution required that party centers in the countryside and at the raion level change their language of business to Ukrainian in the course of the coming year.<sup>77</sup>

Following the recent policy to promote non-Russians to top government posts, on July 16, 1923, Vlas Chubar, a Ukrainian, became the chairman of the Council of Peoples' Commissars, replacing Rakovsky, who was appointed Soviet Ambassador to Great Britain. Eleven days later, the Ukrainian Council of Peoples' Commissars issued a resolution concerning the Ukrainianization of all educational and cultural institutions, emphasizing the necessity of making the language of instruction at these institutions conform to the nationality of their students. The decree also ordered that more textbooks be published in Ukrainian and in the non-Ukrainian languages spoken in the republic. As envisaged in this decree, the Ukrainianization program would not only further the cultural development of the Ukrainians, but of the non-Ukrainian minorities as well.<sup>78</sup>

The Soviet Ukrainian government issued its most decisive decree on Ukrainianization on August 1, 1923:

The Workers'–Peasants' Government of the Ukraine declares it to be essential to center the attention of the state on the extension of the knowledge of the Ukrainian language. The formal equality, recognized until now, of the two most widely used languages in the Ukraine – Ukrainian and Russian – is not sufficient. As a result of the very weak development of Ukrainian schools and Ukrainian culture in general, the shortage of required school books and equipment, the lack of suitably-trained personnel, experience has proven that the Russian language has, in fact, become the dominant one.

In order to destroy this inequality, the Workers'–Peasants' Government hereby adopts a number of practical measures which, while affirming the equality of languages of all nationalities on the Ukrainian territory, will guarantee a place for the Ukrainian language corresponding to the numerical superiority of the Ukrainian people on the territory of the Ukrainian SSR.<sup>79</sup>

The decree obliged all public officials to learn Ukrainian; it also provided for the gradual transition of the language of all official documents and correspondence from Russian to Ukrainian, although Russian and other minority languages could be used at the local level. Subsequent resolutions ordered all state institutions, newspapers, and state-owned trade and industrial organizations to abandon

Russian as a working language and adopt Ukrainian. The Ukrainian Commissariat of Education was to organize Ukrainian-language courses and to create a cadre of translators for minority languages of the region. Within a year, all official business in the Council of Ministers, in central and local institutions, and in the commissariats was to be conducted in Ukrainian. Replies to individual requests in all central and regional organs should be in the language of the original request. The Ukrainian and Russian languages were to be employed in all central and provincial-level courts, the Ukrainian language in regional-level courts. An exception was made for the inhabitants of those regions in which the non-Ukrainian minorities spoke another language. The accused, the victims and their spouses, the witnesses, and the experts had the right to speak in their own native language. From now on, no one who could not speak both Russian and Ukrainian would be hired for any position in any state institution. Those who were already in the civil service and who did not know the two most widely used languages in the Ukraine had to learn them in the course of a year. Those who did not would be dismissed.<sup>80</sup>

There were now two official languages in the Ukrainian SSR – Ukrainian and Russian – which enjoyed equal administrative status. But due to the numerical superiority of the Ukrainians and as a result of the official promotion of that language, the Ukrainian language had the opportunity of becoming the most important language in the republic.

In theory Ukrainianization combatted the conflict of two cultures. By demanding the recognition of national peculiarities and the necessity of the Russified cities respecting, if not learning, the language and culture of the majority of the population of the countryside, this program advocated an end to the *Kulturkampf* between these two areas and integrated the Ukrainian rural and urban areas. For the Bolsheviks, the creation of the Ukrainian SSR, the KP(b)U, and Ukrainianization represented a trinity of “new thinking” on nationality issues.

But in reality a good majority of the members of the Communist Party of the Ukraine still believed (even if they did not publicly admit) that the conflict between the “progressive” urban Russian culture and the “backward” rural Ukrainian culture was inevitable. These Russocentric Bolsheviks supported the former over the latter.

When confronted with peasant hostility, they saw the wisdom of supporting Ukrainianization. But their support was qualified. For them, the program would be limited only to the Ukrainian country-

side. Let the schools, bureaucrats, and local government officials be Ukrainian. Institutions operating in their native language would soothe the peasants. Let more Ukrainian-language newspapers be established. It would then be easier to get the Communist message across. These Bolsheviks were convinced that the cities and the urban working class – as parts of the “higher culture” – would not be affected at all by Ukrainianization. Thus, for people like Dmitrii Lebed’, Ukrainianization was a tactical move. Let the Ukrainians have the countryside – as long as they did not rebel or stop supplying the cities with food. We, they undoubtedly thought, will keep the cities.

Ukrainian supporters of Ukrainianization, such as the Borot’bists and a number of Ukrainian Bolsheviks, saw the policy as a means of legitimizing Ukrainian national aspirations within the socialist framework and of using the countryside as a springboard into the cities. They pressed for the Ukrainianization of the urban apparatus of the trade unions, the party, and the bureaucracy, maintaining that all governmental and party functionaries had to know the Ukrainian language, even those in the Russified urban areas. The cities, they claimed, could not remain isolated from the Ukrainian peasants.

### Conclusion

In addition to emphasizing economic development in the non-Russian areas, *korenizatsiia* also emphasized the expansion of non-Russian language use and culture and the recruitment of more non-Russian cadres into the working class, the trade unions, the state bureaucracy, and the party. This preferential policy advocated language and cadres; both were closely intertwined.<sup>81</sup>

Language policy became the cornerstone of Soviet mass-based political change in the non-Russian regions. Because the overwhelming majority of this population was uneducated, illiterate, and spoke only their own native language, the party and the Soviet government had to employ the non-Russian languages in order to expand their small urban-based constituency and to mobilize the wary rural population for socialism. There were three ways to expand the use of non-Russian languages: either (a) to encourage the Russians or the Russified to learn the non-Russian languages; (b) to attract more natives to join the political, cultural, and economic institutions; or (c) both. Skrypnyk and Iakovlev advocated the first position at the Twelfth Party Congress.<sup>82</sup> But inasmuch as the majority of the party consisted of Russians who did not speak any other language and who viewed

the non-Russian languages as less prestigious than (if not inferior to) the Russian, this position was easier decreed than accomplished.

A more feasible plan would be to attract politically reliable non-Russian cadres who could speak their own native language (and hopefully Russian as well!) into the state and party organs, which interacted with the masses. They best knew the "way of life, customs . . . , and language of the local population."<sup>83</sup> Unless Russian cadres learned the non-Russian languages, only the natives (especially in Central Asia) could bridge the cultural, economic, political, and psychological distance between the Russian center and the non-Russian periphery. Not all natives who joined the ranks of the state administration or party possessed complete command of their languages; many had assimilated to Russian. But the central party's emphasis on the expansion of the non-Russian languages would determine which groups it would recruit. This factor, together with the radical urban growth which brought millions of peasants into the cities, politicized *korenizatsiia*.

By ordering its cadres to learn the Ukrainian language, the KP(b)U hoped to create a link between the cities and the countryside and anchor itself in the Ukrainian environment. By tolerating Ukrainian "peculiarities," the KP(b)U hoped to popularize itself in the Ukraine. In the long run, the goal was to make the countryside accept, however reluctantly, the party's "right to govern" in order to mobilize the peasants to the goals of the revolution. But this could be done only very slowly, in a subtle manner, and in the peasant's language. "Can we reach the Ukrainian peasantry with the German language?" Volodymyr Zaton's'kyi, one of the KP(b)U leaders, asked in the 1920s. "Try to communicate with the peasants from Tambov and Kaluga in Chinese, even though what you would tell them would be one hundred percent Marxist and Leninist in content."<sup>84</sup> In order to integrate millions of Ukrainian peasants to the socialist order, the KP(b)U (with the blessings of the VKP(b)) would abandon the use of Russian and employ Ukrainian.

Initially the party oriented Ukrainianization toward the countryside. But the radical social changes unleashed by industrialization and urbanization shifted Ukrainianization's grounding from the countryside to the cities. This national demographic transformation in the volatile 1920s made Ukrainianization, with its emphasis on language and cadres, even more politically significant.