

CHAPTER 2: “THE *GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG* OF UKRAÏNOPHILIA”:  
DMYTRO DONTSOV AND THE ENTANGLED EASTERN FRONT, 1914-1918  
Trevor Erlacher

This chapter examines Dontsov’s political activities and writings from the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, to the defeat of the Central Powers in the winter of 1918-19. The intervening storm of steel put his prewar notions of geopolitics, international conflict, and revolution to the test. From émigré propagandist, researcher, and journalist in the secret employ of the German Foreign Office, to ambassador and head of the press bureau and telegraph agency of the German-backed Ukrainian State (or Hetmanate), Dontsov participated in the various efforts to build and govern a Ukrainian nation-state known collectively as the Ukrainian Revolution.<sup>1</sup> Initially, he placed his trust in the peace process, the rule of international law, historic treaties, and the strength and beneficence of Berlin, Vienna, and the German-speaking public of Central Europe toward Ukrainians’ aspirations to self-government, but the defeat of the Central Powers and the slow death of Ukrainian independence in its infancy convinced him of the need for a new strategy and worldview. The First World War and its catastrophic aftermath on the Eastern Front left Dontsov more warlike, authoritarian, and statist, setting him on the path to becoming the “spiritual father” of Ukrainian integral nationalism and preparing the ground for the widespread acceptance of this and similarly militant ideas in Ukrainian politics and society.

Three interrelated aspects of World War I transformed the Ukrainian national movement and the ethnos that it sought to mobilize, decisively shaping Dontsov’s thought in the process:

1) It was a “total” war, or at least the first attempt to sustain one. The common objective of the belligerent states and their generals, secondary to victory, was the perfection of a new kind

---

<sup>1</sup> One of the best overviews of the subject remains John S. Reshetar, *The Ukrainian Revolution, 1917-1920: A Study in Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952).

of warfare, mechanized and all-encompassing, capable of harnessing and directing the energy of entire nations for the purpose of war and its corollary—the survival, empowerment, and expansion of the state. Ideally, total war makes no distinction between combatants and noncombatants, regarding everyone it encounters as an acceptable target.<sup>2</sup> On the Eastern Front, total war subjected civilian populations to previously unthinkable levels of violence and dislocation. The clash of the Central Powers and imperial Russia meant mass mobilization, food rationing, grain requisitions, famine, forced labor, martial law, pogroms, refugee migrations, ethnic cleansing, surveillance, propaganda, espionage, and the militarization of societies and ethnic relations in Eastern Europe. The practices and consequences of total war unwittingly furnished the seeds of the belligerents' own destruction, offering their internal enemies—nationalists and socialists alike—the weaponry, technical knowledge, and hardened, megalomaniacal mentalities necessary to carry out revolutions against the once formidable empires.<sup>3</sup> Just as the old regimes vainly hoped to marshal the “furies of revolution” for the business of war, so veterans of the conflict applied their transformative combat experiences to the business of revolution, forging modern national and supranational identities and political

---

<sup>2</sup> The first theorist of total war was General Erich Ludendorff—leader of the German war effort from August 1916 to October 1918. A radical nationalist and proponent of the “stab-in-the-back” legend attributing Germany’s defeat to leftist treachery on the home front, Ludendorff advocated the mobilization of the nation’s entire physical and moral force. During the First World War he was one of the chief advocates of a German civilizing mission in the East to include state building in Lithuania, Kurland, much of present-day Belarus, and Poland (together comprising military-government under Ludendorff’s direction known as “Ober Ost”), as well as Ukraine, at Russia’s expense. Erich Ludendorff, *Der totale Krieg* (Munich: Ludendorffs Verlag, 1937).

<sup>3</sup> Numerous recent works have explored the complicated interplay of the mobilizing and disintegrating experience of the First World War, imperial collapses, social revolutions, civil wars, and nation building along the Eastern Front. See Avieli Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia and the Middle East, 1914-1923* (London: Routledge, 2001). On the “Russian” case, see Jon Smele, *The “Russian” Civil Wars, 1916-1926: Ten Years That Shook the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Joshua Sanborn, *Imperial Collapse: The Great War and the Destruction of the Russian Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Mark von Hagen, “The Great War and the Mobilization of Ethnicity in the Russian Empire,” in Barnett R. Rubin and Jack Snyder, eds., *Post-Soviet Political Order: Conflict and State Building* (London: Routledge, 1998), 34-57; and Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign Against Enemy Aliens During World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

communities through conscription and collective violence.<sup>4</sup> The war paved the way for grandiose ideologies of state power and militarism throughout Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>5</sup> It also created national audiences traumatized, brutalized, and radicalized enough to embrace this new, more visceral, emotive, and violent mode of politics in large numbers.<sup>6</sup> This includes Ukraine, a country made “modern” in the image of the first total war, and Dontsov’s doctrine of Ukrainian integral nationalism, whose tutelage was the conflict and the chaos it engendered.<sup>7</sup>

2) The Great War on the Eastern Front was a cataclysmic event in the already “entangled” histories of Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the lands between them.<sup>8</sup> Mutually interdependent and interconnected at every level, this reciprocal influence only grew with the intensification of the Russo-Germanic rivalry that culminated in the First World War.

The borderlands between Russia and Germany paid the heftiest price because they served both as

---

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Joshua Sanborn, *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905-1925* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> The Bolsheviks infamously created “War Communism” out of a synthesis of ideology and pragmatism in high-stress wartime circumstances, but the East European nationalists who opposed them changed in an analogous way, developing what Erich Lohr has termed “war nationalism.” The radically intolerant ideologies propounded by the Dontsovs and Dmowskis of this period can be thought of as crisis-driven “events,” immanent and experiential, rather than the results of a long-term evolution. Erich Lohr, “War Nationalism,” in *The Empire and Nationalism at War*, ed. Eric Lohr, Alexander Semyonov, and Mark von Hagen (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2014), 91-108. On the importance of contingency to the theory nationalism, especially as it relates to the experience of the First World War in Eastern Europe, see Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chap. 1: “Nation as Form, Category, Event.”

<sup>6</sup> As Myroslav Shkandrij remarks, the macabre content and aggressively affective style of Dontsov’s postwar writing is a good example of what Dominick LaCapra calls “traumatic writing or post-traumatic writing in closest proximity to trauma.” Myroslav Shkandrij, *Ukrainian Nationalism: Politics, Ideology, and Literature, 1929-1956* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 83; Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 23.

<sup>7</sup> George O. Liber, *Total Wars and the Making of Modern Ukraine, 1914-1954* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), chaps. 2-3.

<sup>8</sup> I refer here to a method in comparative history that attempts to go beyond the binary opposition of two traditionally “national” narratives or perspectives. On *histoire croisée* (entangled histories) see Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity,” *History and Theory* 45, 1 (February 2006): 30-50. For an introduction to the entangled histories of Russia, Germany, and Eastern Europe during this period, see Mark von Hagen, “The Entangled Eastern Front in the First World War,” in *The Empire and Nationalism at War*, 9-48; Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist and Alexander M. Martin, eds., *Fascination and Enmity: Russia and Germany as Entangled Histories, 1914-1945* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012); Phillip Ther, “The Transnational Paradigm of Historiography and Its Potential for Ukrainian History,” in *A Laboratory of Transnational History: Ukraine and Recent Ukrainian Historiography*, eds. Georgiy Kasianov and Phillip Ther (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009), 81-114.

a battleground for the encounter and as a (perceived) *tabula rasa* for unsparing utopia-builders. Russians and Germans competed for supremacy over the patchwork of largely agrarian ethnonational communities of Poles, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Jews, Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians between them, learning from one another's blunders and successes, exchanging methods of colonization, nation-building, and nation-dismantling.<sup>9</sup> Although the smaller nationalities caught in the middle were sometimes the hapless pawns of this confrontation, they also played an active role within it, taking one side, opposing both sides, or playing each off the other, all the while developing under the influence of the same interimperial transfers.<sup>10</sup> Dontsov was both a product and an agent of this Russian-German entanglement, as were the organizations and fledgling Ukrainian nation-states that he served. As we have seen, before 1914 he had begun to attribute Ukraine's agonizing "hermaphroditism" to an oppositional binary—Asiatic Muscovy vs. (Romano-) Germanic Europe, barbarism vs. civilization. In course of the First World War, he found practical, well-funded opportunities to rid Ukraine of the former and fortify it with the latter, proposing that Ukraine join *Mitteleuropa*—the goal of an autarkic political and economic union of Central and Eastern European nations under German hegemony.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, Ukrainization entailed Germanization as well as de-Russification. The same logic applied to Bolshevism, which Dontsov came to regard as an insidious reincarnation of Russian imperialism, distilled to its demonic essence. Nevertheless, Russian ideas, practices, political culture, and literature continued to define him at least as much as German ones did. Ukrainian political

---

<sup>9</sup> Alexander V. Prusin, *The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 1870-1992* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> "Historical destiny placed Eastern Europe between Russia and Germany. Hence, the most popular form of East European traveling is to escape either from the Russians to the Germans, or from the Germans to the Russians." Andrzej Stasiuk and Iurii Andrukhovych, *Moia Evropa: dva eseji pro naidyvnyshu shastynu svitu* (L'viv: Klasyka, 2001), 100-1.

<sup>11</sup> Tomasz Stryjek regards Dontsov's notion of Ukraine as a part of *Mitteleuropa* as one of the central features of this period (1914-1918) of his ideological evolution. Tomasz Stryjek, *Ukraińska idea narodowa okresu międzywojennego: Analiza wybranych koncepcji* (Wrocław: Fundacja na Rzecz Nauki Polski, 2000), 123-59.

culture, by contrast, repulsed Dontsov because it was too servile toward “Muscovy.” Unlike the Russians and the Germans, Ukraine’s would-be leaders were too meek, moderate, and decadent for the business of making war and revolution.

3) World War I was bound up with the national and social revolutions that racked Central and Eastern Europe, offering political exiles new “arenas of action” as propagandists, spies, saboteurs, diplomats, warlords, and statesmen.<sup>12</sup> It also disrupted and militarized the previously peaceful, though by no means idyllic, relations among the diverse and intermixed ethnic and confessional groups of the borderlands between Russia and the Central Powers—a process that encouraged and enabled nationalists to rally support behind more radical, even genocidal, programs for independent statehood.<sup>13</sup> Fatally weakened by the strains of war and the very national and social movements that they had promoted in hopes of destroying their enemies from within, the old monarchies disintegrated one by one amid the chaos of 1914-1918, leaving in their wake a “shatterzone of empires.”<sup>14</sup> The principle of national self-determination, in either its Wilsonian or Leninist formulation, triumphed by default, catapulting radicalized East Central European nationalists, whose demands had previously been limited to cultural autonomy, into positions of power.

During the First World War, Dontsov briefly headed the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (*Soiuz vyzvolennia Ukraine*, or SVU) at the conflict’s outset, and then worked for the League of Russia’s Foreign Peoples (*die Liga der Fremdvölker Russlands*, or LFR). Both organizations were think tanks comprised of non-Russian nationalist émigrés from the Russian Empire that operated with the resources and under the aegis of the German and Austro-

---

<sup>12</sup> Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism*, chap. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Prusin, *The Lands Between*, chaps. 2-3.

<sup>14</sup> Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz, *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013).

Hungarian Foreign Offices. Increasingly antisocialist, anti-Russian, and pro-German, Dontsov wrecked his reputation among the leftwing federalist old guard of the Ukrainian national movement—the “Ukrainophiles”—who remained loyal to the Russian Empire. They declared themselves the leaders of an independent Ukrainian People’s Republic (UNR) in late 1917, but soon faced a losing war with the Bolsheviks and turned to the Central Powers for assistance. In exchange for the UNR’s promises of food, the German and Austro-Hungarian Imperial Armies marched into the Ukrainian heartland and occupied the country, from Galicia in the west to the Donbas in the east. In late April 1918, the German authorities moved to install a more compliant, authoritarian, and efficient vassal regime in Kyiv, assisting in the orchestration of a coup d’état by Hetman Pavlo Skoropads’kyi (1873-1945) and his supporters, the “Hetmanites”—a radicalized group of conservative Ukrainian nationalist monarchists that had recently accepted Dontsov into the ranks of its leadership. Subordinated to the military governorship of the Imperial German Army, the Hetmanate’s purpose was to assist the exploitation of Ukraine for the Central Powers’ ongoing war effort, but it was also expected to at least appear sovereign, independent, and popular among its subjects. Having already cultivated alliances with sympathizers of the Ukrainian national movement in Central Europe during the war, Dontsov assumed responsibility over the Hetmanate’s press and telegraph agency, half-hearted Ukrainization efforts (intended to give the regime a broad base of support), public relations, and international diplomacy. Dontsov was tasked with managing the Hetmanate’s strained relationship with the Ukrainian intelligentsia and peasantry, the Germans and Austrians, and the nascent Russian Soviet state to the north. Skoropads’kyi’s declaration of Ukraine’s federation with a restored “White” Russia, shortly after the defeat of the Central Powers in November 1918,

precipitated Dontsov's break with the Hetman and the Hetmanites. He returned to life as an émigré activist in Central Europe in early 1919, as civil war again engulfed Ukraine.



Figure 2.1. Dmytro Dontsov in middle age. *Source: Internet Encyclopedia of Ukraine.*

### **The Ukrainian National Movement at the Outset of the First World War**

War arrived in August 1914, a year after Dontsov had predicted its approaching inevitability. The conflict presented an opportunity for the realization of the geopolitical strategy outlined in his speech, *The Political Situation of the Nation and Our Tasks*—the creation of a self-governing Ukrainian crownland under the aegis of the Habsburg dynasty that would permanently repel the Russian imperialist menace to Central Europe and restore to Ukrainians the blessings of freedom and progress unique to European (as opposed to Russian) civilization. Such ideas did not find a receptive audience among the leaders of the Ukrainian movement in the Russian Empire during the first weeks of the First World War. Even as the Russian authorities

revived pre-1905 bans on publications in Ukrainian, the editors of *Ukrainskaia zhizn'* (Ukrainian Life)<sup>15</sup> assured its readers of the unwavering loyalty of the Ukrainian population to the Russian state and army, dismissing fears of “the so-called ‘Austrian orientation’,” championed by Dontsov, as a “myth.”<sup>16</sup> The leaders of the Ukrainian national movement in imperial Russia remained loyal subjects of Petrograd until the revolutions of 1917. Even then they remained, by and large, proponents of an East Slavic federation comprised of autonomous, democratically governed Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian republics. This included the Ukrainian populist historian Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi (1866-1934)—one of the future presidents of the UNR. Hrushevs'kyi left his professorship at Lwów University and returned to Kyiv in November 1914, breaking with his colleagues in Galicia who had taken pro-Austrian, anti-Russian positions. The Russian authorities repaid the professor's loyalty by promptly exiling him to Siberia for the duration of the war. Dontsov's former mentor Symon Petliura and the Ukrainian Social Democrat, writer, and activist Volodymyr Vynnychenko (1880-1951)—both of whom later occupied leading positions in the UNR—also avoided taking pro-independence positions until 1918, when the Soviet-Ukrainian War forced the Central Rada to declare Ukraine's independence outright.<sup>17</sup>

Dontsov disparaged Hrushevs'kyi, Petliura, and Vynnychenko as the high priests of “Ukrainophilia” (*ukrainofil'stvo*)—a purportedly stifling blend of pacifism, federalism, socialist internationalism, excessive focus on cultural (as opposed to political) matters, and, most damaging of all, trust in the good intentions of Russian liberals and leftists. Ukrainophilia, Dontsov felt, had crippled the Ukrainian national movement for decades, but the new conflict

---

<sup>15</sup>The Russian-language, Moscow-based periodical for which Dontsov wrote before the war.

<sup>16</sup>“Voina i ukrainsti,” *Ukrainskaia zhizn'* 7 (August 12, 1914): 3-7.

<sup>17</sup>Wiktor Sukiennicki, *East Central Europe during World War I: From Foreign Domination to National Independence* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1984), 111-15, 485-97.

portended its *Götterdämmerung* (“twilight of the gods”)<sup>18</sup>—i.e. the end of the illusion that Russian liberals or socialists had any sympathy for the national aspirations of Ukrainians, or that Ukraine’s salvation would come in the form of democracy. Despite the Ukrainophiles’ loyalty to the Russian state, Pavel Miliukov and the other Kadets of the Duma attacked even modest demands for Ukrainian cultural autonomy as a “dangerous and damaging affair for Russia.” As Dontsov saw it, this proved the need for a new approach that would place Russian liberals in the same camp as Russian rightwing nationalist Anatoly Savenko (1874-1922) and his followers.<sup>19</sup> A love of Ukraine was not sufficient alone; a hatred of the “Great” and “Little” Russians who opposed its independence was also needed.

Austrian Ukrainian leaders, by contrast, were more likely to support the excision of the much larger territory of prewar Russian Ukraine from the Romanov Empire and the simultaneous creation of a new Ukrainian state within the Dual Monarchy (preferably including East Galicia, though the relatively powerful Polish minority living there also claimed it). They tended to be more culturally and politically conservative, and thus less likely to support socialist reforms in agriculture and industry. These differences plagued efforts to create a unified Ukrainian political force of east and west throughout the crisis. In general, the Ukrainians were less organized on their own turf and less popular on the world stage than the Poles, who benefited from the energetic international diplomatic efforts of the integral nationalist leader Roman Dmowski (1864-1939), as well as the military acumen of Józef Piłsudski (1867-1935), the future president (and eventual dictator) of the Second Polish Republic. Seeking to bridge the divide between the Western and Eastern Ukrainians, Dontsov joined fellow exiles from Russia in

---

<sup>18</sup> A reference to Richard Wagner’s famous 1876 opera of the same title, later parodied by Friedrich Nietzsche as *Götzen-Dämmerung, oder, Wie man mit dem Hammer philosophirt* (Twilight of the Idols, or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer) (1889).

<sup>19</sup> Dmytro Dontsov, “Götterdämmerung ukrainofil’stva,” *Ukrains’ka khata* 3-4 (1914) in *Vybrani tvory*, 186-89.

Austria who combined the platforms of national independence with populist land reform, insisted that tsarism was Ukraine's greater enemy, and turned to the Central Powers for help.

The German, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian empires proved to be cautiously interested in exploiting the Ukrainian question to undermine their common Russian enemy. Initially, Germany's official war aims in the east recognized the status quo antebellum as legitimate and desirable, but entered a state of flux, ambiguity, and radicalization in the course of the conflict.<sup>20</sup> Military and political successes on the Eastern Front bred hubris and a growing acceptance of ambitious schemes for eastward expansion and colonization, especially after the downfall of the Russian autocracy in March 1917. Only after the Russian war effort began collapsing under the weight of revolution and civil war, and the UNR had appeared, did Berlin begin the ad hoc formulation of plans for a Ukrainian state under German "protection."<sup>21</sup>

Prior to this point, the collaboration between Ukrainian nationalists and German and Austrian officialdom gave rise to various schemes, from the formation and indoctrination of Ukrainian military units drawn from the POWs of the Russian army, to direct military intervention in the Ukrainian heartland and the construction of a Ukrainian client state. Dontsov took part in virtually all of these plots, which were the beginnings of an asymmetrical yet mutually exploitative German-Ukrainian partnership—chiefly comprised of rightwing activists with a shared hostility toward Russians, Poles, Bolsheviks, and Jews—that would last until at least the Second World War.<sup>22</sup> Dontsov, who was by this point an experienced journalist, an aspiring ideologue and publicist, and a consummate Austrophile and Germanophile, leapt at the

---

<sup>20</sup> This was Imperial Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg's position until 1916, when he assented to the goal of annexing the Baltic countries from Russia, thus strengthening Germany, ostensibly, for the sake of European security. Oleh S. Fedyshyn, *Germany's Drive to the East and the Ukrainian Revolution, 1917-1918* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1971), 18-20.

<sup>21</sup> On the improvised, opportunistic nature of the German gambit on Ukrainian independence see, Fedyshyn, *Germany's Drive to the East*, 254-62.

<sup>22</sup> Frank Golczewski, *Deutsche und Ukrainer, 1914-1939* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2010).

chance to make his case for a Ukrainian nation-state to the circles of power in Vienna, Berlin, and the other cities, as well as the reading publics of the Entente and neutral countries. Dontsov prepared and researched his geopolitical, historical, legal, and moral arguments for Ukrainian liberation from “Russian despotism,” broadcasting them to as many politicians, academics, officers, soldiers, journalists, and students as he could reach with the resources at his disposal. He joined diplomatic networks of activists and publicists from the stateless nationalities of Central and Eastern Europe, who gathered on the neutral territory of Switzerland to petition all the belligerent powers for the best possible outcome for their respective nations at war’s end.

### **The Union for the Liberation of Ukraine**

Dontsov put his ideas into action in the first days of the war by becoming a founding member of the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine (*Soiuz vyzvolennia Ukrainy*, SVU), a nationalist organization of socialist Ukrainian exiles from the Russian Empire dedicated to using the war to create a Ukrainian nation-state. Andrii Zhuk (1880-1968),<sup>23</sup> Mykola Zalizniak (1880-1950),<sup>24</sup> Roman Smal’-Stots’kyi (1893-1969),<sup>25</sup> and Oleksandr Skoropys’-Ioltukhovs’kyi (1880-1950)<sup>26</sup> were among its leading members. Dontsov had met Zhuk and Zalizniak, along with the future leader and founder of the veterans’ Ukrainian Military Organization (UVO) and the OUN,

---

<sup>23</sup> Like Dontsov, Zhuk was a founding member of the USDRP exiled to Galicia in 1907. The party expelled him in 1912 for holding increasingly nationalistic views and acting on his own initiative to publicize the Ukrainian cause in Europe as secretary of the Ukrainian Information Committee. He cofounded the SVU in Vienna and directed its publications. He served the Hetmanate government and the UNR’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Vienna 1918-20.

<sup>24</sup> A Socialist Revolutionary activist and diplomat, Zalizniak shared Dontsov’s hometown of Melitopol’ in Tavriia. He participated in the Brest-Litovsk negotiations as a representative of the UNR, serving in its embassy in Finland, and founded a Ukrainian Information Bureau in Stockholm, Sweden, in spring 1918.

<sup>25</sup> A scholar and politician from the southwestern Ukrainian town of Chernivsti (then a part of Romania), Smal’-Stots’kyi represented the UNR’s government-in-exile after his time working for the SVU. For the latter he worked as an organizer and teacher of Ukrainian POWs in Germany.

<sup>26</sup> A political activist and historian Skoropys’-Ioltukhovs’kyi emigrated from Kyiv to L’viv before the Revolution of 1905, where he represented the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party (RUP) abroad. He returned to Russia in 1907 to participate, illegally, in the elections to the Second Duma, but was arrested and exiled to Siberia. He fled from there back to Austria, where he joined the SVU, then returned to Ukraine to serve in the UNR and the Hetmanate.

Colonel Ievhen Konovalets' (1891-1938), as law students in L'viv before the war. All four shared a faith in the Dual Monarchy's power to liberate and unite the two Ukraines at Russia's expense. The Union's opening congress took place in L'viv in August 1914, but the Russian invasion and occupation of East Galicia forced it to relocate headquarters to Vienna. Judging from its style and wording, Dontsov almost certainly drafted the first anonymous appeal of the SVU "To the Ukrainian People in Russia," which declared the Austrian military, "which our hundred thousand Galician brothers" serve, a liberator of the Ukrainian people.<sup>27</sup> Dontsov and the SVU promised a solution to the land question and the freedoms of religion and speech in the wake of the anticipated Austrian advance into Ukraine. These promises struck Russian Ukrainian critics of the SVU's collaboration with the Entente's enemies as naive. Undaunted, Dontsov argued that if Ukrainian patriots capitalized on Vienna's actions to increase Ukrainian national autonomy (on the path to full independence), then the official war aims of this new "ally" (or any other) were irrelevant. Moreover, as he had insisted in his 1913 speech, foreign intervention would be necessary to achieve Ukraine's liberation from Russia. Moral concerns should not enter the calculus—a notion that Dontsov developed into one of the axioms of Ukrainian integral nationalism: "amorality" (*amoral'nist*).<sup>28</sup>

The SVU's second statement, "To the Public Opinion of Europe" (published in German), also bore Dontsov's imprint, calling for the defense of "the old civilization [of Ukraine] from the Asiatic barbarism of the Muscovites."<sup>29</sup> Speaking on behalf of the "Ukrainians of Russia," the appeal proclaims their striving for independence and the establishment of a "bulwark against Russia on the wide steppes of Ukraine."<sup>30</sup> With the wavering support of Austria-Hungary and

<sup>27</sup> "Do ukrains'koho narodu v Rosii," *Vistnyk Soiuzu Vyzvolennia Ukrainy* 1 (2 August 1914), 8.

<sup>28</sup> Golczewski, *Deutsche und Ukrainer*, 91-93.

<sup>29</sup> "An die öffentliche Meinung Europas," *Vistnyk Soiza Vyzvolennia Ukrainy*, no. 1 (10 October 1917), 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

Germany, the SVU spent the war engaged in propaganda and enlightenment (*prosvita*) efforts among the Ukrainian POWs of the Russian Army, who numbered about 50,000 in Germany and 30,000 in Austria, shaping them into nationally conscious soldiers for the war against Petrograd.<sup>31</sup> In exchange for pledges of loyalty to the Ukrainian (as opposed to imperial Russian) cause, the SVU offered the prisoners schools, hospitals, theaters, libraries, and reading rooms, as well as courses in Ukrainian history and literature, German language, and cooperative economics. In exchange for funding and access to the POW camps, the SVU promised to support the Central Powers' war effort and to moderate relations between the German and Austrian armies and the Ukrainian people in East Galicia, as well as the ethnically Ukrainian territories of the Russian Empire. The SVU dispatched representatives to all the Central Powers and numerous neutral European countries, and carried out "Ukrainization" work in Volhynia and Podlachia during their respective Austrian and German occupations. After the February Revolution of 1917, the SVU successfully organized two armed Ukrainian divisions—the Bluecoats under the German Army, and the Graycoats under the Austro-Hungarians—which were later incorporated into the Army of the UNR. Declaring its mission accomplished after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (February 9, 1918), which constituted legal recognition of Ukrainian independence by the signing states, the SVU dissolved on May 1, 1918.

Dontsov, however, took part in almost none of these activities. Ever restive, ambitious, and cantankerous, he left the predominantly leftwing SVU in September 1914, just weeks after its formation, citing financial, personal, and ideological disputes with his older comrades. The

---

<sup>31</sup> It published dozens of books, brochures, and newspapers in multiple languages. On the SVU, see Mark von Hagen, *War in a European Borderland: Occupations and Occupation Plans in Galicia and Ukraine, 1914-1918* (Seattle: University of Washington Press 2007), 54-71; Oleh Fedyshyn, "The Germans and the Union for the Liberation of the Ukraine, 1914-1917," in Hunczak, ed., *The Ukraine, 1917-1921*, 305-22; and, I. Mikhutina, "Separatisty iz l'vovskogo kafe: O deiatel'nosti Soiuzu osvobozhdeniia Ukrainy, 1914-1915 gg.," *Rodina* 11 (1999): 75-77.

SVU had rejected Dontsov's motion to disclose the Union's finances, which were notoriously irregular,<sup>32</sup> but financial scandals appear to have been of secondary importance to interpersonal conflict. One year later Zhuk publicly denounced Dontsov as tactless, uncooperative, and "unsuited to organized political activity."<sup>33</sup> Responding to an inquiry from Viacheslav Lypyns'kyi about his memories of Dontsov's brush with the SVU, Zhuk further impugned Dontsov's character and integrity, providing insight into how the latter's erstwhile USDRP and SVU comrades perceived him:

In emigration in L'viv, Dontsov led a rather cloistered life, but belonged to our foreign Social Democratic group there, although he in no way distinguished himself. He was a very 'orthodox' Marxist [who] terribly scolded the Ukrainian 'petty-bourgeoisie.' . . . At this same time he considered himself the inventor of Ukrainian 'separatism,' imposed his invention on everyone in the century, and was awarded for this with a caricature [of him] drawn by [Volodymyr] Vynnychenko. . . . Prior to this the Ukrainian Social Democratic Group . . . removed Dontsov from their midst. When I founded the SVU in the first days of the outbreak of war . . . I also recruited Dontsov . . . though I did not personally support relations with him at this time. We even made him the head of the Union. And it went to his head that he truly was the founder of Ukrainian separatism too, and of Ukrainian independence. Moreover, he began to carry himself very 'independently,' going behind our backs with [Mykola] Vasyl'ko and company,<sup>34</sup> so we were compelled to remove him from the leadership. And then he went into the service of Vasyl'ko and [Kost'] Levyts'kyi<sup>35</sup> . . . and dishonored the Union and every one of us individually. In 1918, as is well known to you personally, Dontsov made himself a great Hetmanite, and you know his further evolution better than I. Although as I did get to know Dontsov well, never living with him closely, this is a person with unrestrained ambition—to be the first! Thus such stunning transitions occurred. He rushed to where he hoped to make a 'career,' to be the first, but since this was not successful he now gallops just as quickly away, condemning that which he served yesterday.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Sosnovs'kyi, *Dmytro Dontsov*, 204-5.

<sup>33</sup> Andrii Zhuk, "Soiuz vyzvolennia Ukrainy, *Vistnyk Soiuzu Vyzvolennia Ukrainy* 37-38 (10 October 1915), 1.

<sup>34</sup> Zhuk refers to the Ukrainian Parliamentary Club in the Austrian Reichsrat in Vienna, which included Mykola Vasyl'ko (1868-1924) and Kost' Levyts'kyi (1859-1941). All the major national minorities of the Dual Monarchy maintained "clubs" in the Austrian parliament through their national representatives.

<sup>35</sup> A prominent Galician Ukrainian politician and deputy to the Austrian Reichsrat, Kost' Levyts'kyi founded the Ukrainian National Democratic Party (UNDO) in 1885, and played a major role in the formation of both the Ukrainian People's Republic (UNR) and the Western Ukrainian People's Republic (ZUNR). During the First World War he also served as a prosecutor for the Austro-Hungarian Empire, overseeing the suppression of Russophile activists in East Galicia, and promoted the SVU as a tool for fomenting a Ukrainian national revolution in Russia.

<sup>36</sup> Zhuk to Lypyns'kyi on March 2, 19126, in Lypyns'kyi, *Lystuvannia*, vol. 1, 842-43. This correspondence took place in 1926, after Lypyns'kyi's falling out with Dontsov; the two had been on good working terms during the First World War, but in the early 1920s Dontsov polemicized with the Hetmanites and Lypyns'kyi. The latter was preparing a rebuttal to Dontsov's attacks of inclusion into his seminal ideological work—*Letters to Brother-Farmers on the Idea of Ukrainian Monarchism*. See Viacheslav Lypyns'kyi, *Lysty do brativ-khliborobiv pro ideiu i organizatsiiu ukrains'koho monarkhizmu, pysani 1919-1926* (Vienna: Carl Herrmann, 1926), xx-xxiv.

Thus, according to Zhuk, sheer arrogance and careerism explain Dontsov's changing loyalties during the war. For his part, Dontsov went public with the purported reasons for his break with SVU in June 1915 in an article, "To My Political Adherents," which also finalized and advertised his rejection of the USDRP.<sup>37</sup> Apart from denouncing the SVU as a body of comically impotent amateurs, "turncoats" who had opposed Ukrainian independence as a "dangerous utopia" before the war, and known Russophiles with no right to represent their country, Dontsov accused them of working with "Russian Social Democrats who deny the very existence of the Ukrainian nation"<sup>38</sup> and lacking any contacts with genuine separatist groups operating illegally inside the Russian Empire. He concludes with an appeal to Ukrainian nationalists to focus on "real work" and avoid the SVU altogether. But Dontsov's charge that the "whole of their activity for the 'liberation' of Ukraine is confined to press propaganda" and "work among prisoners [of war]" could just as well have been leveled at himself,<sup>39</sup> since at no point in the First World War or the struggles for Ukrainian independence that emerged from it did he take up arms and fight. He remained an influential propagandist who served and observed the unfolding Ukrainian revolution from safer vantage points.

The recriminations between Dontsov and the SVU turned on the interrogation of one another's avowed or hidden allegiances to the Central Powers, to Russia, to socialist internationalism, or to the Ukrainian people alone. Few today would doubt their commitment to the Ukrainian national cause, but both sides of the conflict also relied heavily on support from the Central Powers during the war, and they all had backgrounds in the socialist parties of the

---

<sup>37</sup> Dmytro Dontsov, "Do moikh politychnykh odnodumtsiv (z pryvodu t. zv. Soiuz vyzvolennia Ukrainy)" (L'viv, 1915).

<sup>38</sup> This accusation was at least partially true; documents in the Austrian State Archives indicate that the SVU funded Lenin. Stefan T. Possony, *Lenin: The Compulsive Revolutionary* (Chicago: Henry Regency, 1964), 169-70.

<sup>39</sup> The charge was not true in any case, given the SVU's successful efforts to organize a Ukrainian Legion made up of 12,000 volunteers, some of whom later participated in the wars for Ukrainian independence between 1918 and 1921 in various military and paramilitary formations.

Russian Empire, from which they fled or were exiled for political reasons. Rather hypocritically, given the SVU's German-Austrian patronage throughout its existence, Skoropys'-Ioltukhovs'kyi accused Dontsov of being under Berlin's control in 1917.<sup>40</sup> Decades later, after the Second World War had put collaboration with expansionist Germans in an entirely unsavory light, Dontsov changed his purported reasons for breaking with the SVU, recalling that it was in fact Skoropys'-Ioltukhovs'kyi who wanted to turn the SVU into a "German-Austrian agency."<sup>41</sup> In the 1960s Dontsov denied having any contacts with the Austrian or German governments as of August 1914—a claim confirmed by his wife Mariia in a 1969 interview—and he insisted that only the SVU cultivated these ties.<sup>42</sup> Elsewhere he asserted, somewhat perplexingly, that the SVU members had rejected him "because he was not a socialist anymore."<sup>43</sup> This sort of inconsistency, alas, is typical of Dontsov's autobiographical clarifications.

### **Epistles to the Germans**

In fact, Dontsov began working directly with the German government almost immediately after his break with the SVU, which was also obliged to pivot toward Berlin after the Austrians began withdrawing their support from Ukrainian nation-building projects.<sup>44</sup> Residing in Berlin (on Bayreuther Strasse 8) from 1914 to 1916 and provided with an Austrian passport "for secret political reasons," Dontsov headed the local office of the information service and press bureau of the Ukrainian Parliamentary Club in Vienna—led by Reichsrat members

<sup>40</sup> Oleksandr Skoropys'-Ioltukhovs'kyi, "Vid vydavtsiv," in *Samostijna ukrajina R.U.P.* (Wetzlar: Soiuz vyzvolennia Ukrainy, 1917), 32, 39-42; Golczewski, *Deutsche und Ukrainer*, 95.

<sup>41</sup> Dmytro Dontsov, *Rik 1918, Kyiv*, (Toronto: Homin Ukrainy, 1954), 119.

<sup>42</sup> Dmytro Dontsov, "Emigrants'ki i soviets'ki marksysty proty natsionalizmu," *Visnyk* 3 (New York, 1966), 6.

<sup>43</sup> They went on to become "Sovietophiles" after the war, according to Dontsov. He fails to explain why they had become tired of him within weeks of the war's beginning. Dmytro Dontsov, "Emigrants'ki shasheli i natsionalizm," *Visnyk* 8 (New York, 1965): 17-23, 21; Golczewski, *Deutsche und Ukrainer*, 94.

<sup>44</sup> Golczewski, *Deutsche und Ukrainer*, 106-8.

Kost' Levyts'kyi and Mykola Vasyl'ko and heavily funded by the Central Powers—which sent him 300 marks a month (about 1500 USD today) to edit its weekly press bulletin, *Ukrainische Korrespondenz*.<sup>45</sup> Dontsov's task was to extoll the advantages of Ukrainian independence for Central Europe's wellbeing to the German government and society, as well as to produce and distribute anti-Russian, pro-Central Powers, and pro-Ukrainian propaganda. While in Berlin he cultivated ties with German officials and academics, including Paul Rohrbach (1869-1956), Germany's most prominent advocate of Ukrainian independence and an agent of the German Foreign Office, who reportedly helped him get an article past the German censors.<sup>46</sup> During this time Dontsov published a series of German-language brochures on the Ukrainian and Polish questions in relation to the war and the interests of the Central Powers, making the case that the Germans and their allies should take full advantage of the multiethnic composition and discontent nationalities of the Russian Empire in order to destroy it.<sup>47</sup>

Although Dontsov, the Ukrainian Parliamentary Club, and the SVU were in conflict, their propaganda materials differed little.<sup>48</sup> German historian (and future SS-Hauptsturmführer) Hans Joachim Beyer (1908-1971) summarized the five central theses of the pro-Ukrainian texts that circulated among the German-speaking public during the First World War: 1) Ukrainians are not Russians, but a distinct nation with a distinct language; 2) the Ukrainian national movement and cultural revival began in the eighteenth century, followed European norms of development, and had grown into a formidable political force even in Ukraine's Russian-governed regions; 3)

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Dontsov, *Rik 1918, Kyiv*, 22, 120. Dontsov claims to have met with Rohrbach in Kyiv in 1918, and again during World War II. He notes Rohrbach's distance from Nazism and criticism of the Second World War as "unnecessary."

<sup>47</sup> This pro-German position was antithetical to that of the analogous Polish integral nationalist Roman Dmowski—one of Dontsov's chief role models, though he refused to admit it—who considered Germany, not Russia, to be Poland's mortal enemy, and the true threat to European (and world) stability. See Dmowski's 1908 work, *Niemcy, Rosja i kwestia polska* (Germany, Russia, and the Polish Question) in Roman Dmowski, *Wybór Pism Romana Dmowskiego*, vol. 1 (New York: Instytut Romana Dmowskiego, 1988).

<sup>48</sup> Golczewski, *Deutsche und Ukrainer*, 203.

Ukraine's national movement sympathizes with the Central Powers and favors separation from Russia; 4) the Poles are, like the Russians, inherent enemies of Ukraine (according to both émigré commentators, such as Dontsov, and to Galician Ukrainians); 5) a Ukraine made independent from Russia is the economic and strategic keystone to German victory in the east.<sup>49</sup> Dontsov would have enthusiastically concurred with historian Dominic Lieven's observation that, "as much as anything, World War I turned on the fate of Ukraine. . . . Without Ukraine's population, industry, and agriculture, early twentieth-century Russia would have ceased to be a great power. If Russia ceased to be a great power, then there was every possibility that Germany would dominate Europe."<sup>50</sup> This, precisely, was the intended outcome.

Dontsov's German-language writings hammered on all five of Beyer's points, reaching a large readership of powerful and influential people. Otto Hoetzsch (1876-1946), for example—professor of Eastern European history in Berlin, member of the ultranationalist Pan-German League (*Alldeutscher Verband*), and one of the founding fathers of German studies of Eastern Europe (*Ostforschung*)—considered Dontsov's brochure, *The Idea of a Ukrainian State and the War against Russia*, to be "the most meticulous in Ukrainian agitation literature."<sup>51</sup> The German embassy in Vienna funded the work with a 1000-crown grant.<sup>52</sup> According to a police report requested by the German Foreign Office, Dontsov spent several hours a day at the Royal Library in Berlin researching the brochure. While acknowledging that German interests in Ukraine were purely strategic and that Ukraine boasted fewer supporters in Germany than imperial Russia did, he traced German interest in his homeland; from the partially successful efforts of the anti-

<sup>49</sup> Hans Beyer, *Die Mittelmächte und die Ukraine, 1918* (Munich: Isar, 1956), 24-25. Fedyshyn, *Germany's Drive to the East*, 26.

<sup>50</sup> Dominic Lieven, *The End of Tsarist Russia: The March to World War I and Revolution* (New York: Viking, 2015), 1.

<sup>51</sup> Otto Hoetzsch, *Russische Probleme* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1917), 37.

<sup>52</sup> This is according to Kost' Levyts'kyi, who visited Dontsov in Berlin in April 1915. Kost' Levyts'kyi, *Istoriia vyzvol'nykh zmahan'* (L'viv: Nakladom vlasnym, 1930), 108-109, 131-32.

serfdom activist, Ukrainian Cossack, and playwright Vasili Kapnist (1758-1823), to build an alliance with Prussia, to the German philosopher Eduard von Hartmann's (1842-1906) idea of a "Kingdom of Kyiv" to free Europe from "the hard pressure of Tsarism."<sup>53</sup> "Now," writes Dontsov, "[the Ukrainian question] is firmly bound up with the fate of Austria-Hungary and Germany, upon whose victory we, Russian Ukrainians and our brothers in Austria-Hungary, will build our future."<sup>54</sup> Dontsov describes "Muscovy," driven to westward expansion in search of a warm-water port, as a perennial threat to European stability and an oppressor of the small nations east of Germany. Poland, Sweden, Germany, Austria, and Turkey thus find a natural ally in Ukrainian separatists, whose relevance has grown during the war. Claiming a strict adherence to "political realism" (*Realpolitik*), Dontsov underscores the historicity and feasibility of Ukrainian statehood, the economic viability of an independent Ukraine, Kyiv's traditional ties to the West, the discontent of Ukrainians living under Russian hegemony and abusive tsarist regimes, and the accelerating development of Ukrainian national consciousness. On the latter point, Dontsov emphasizes the importance, not only of the 1905 Revolution, but also of the dismemberments and occupations of the Ukrainian territories between imperial Russia and Austria-Hungary. Still more decisive is the heightened activity of the Ukrainian press, the existence of independent religious, cultural, and educational organizations for Ukrainians, and their desire for participatory government (entirely foreign to Russians), all of which makes them a tragically stateless *Kulturnation* whose liberation would permanently check Russian power and demonstrate to world opinion the Central Powers' good will in Eastern Europe.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Dmytro Dontsov (Donzow), *Die ukrainische Staatsidee und der Krieg gegen Russland* (Berlin: C. Kroll, 1915), 31-47.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 67.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-67.

Using the same financial support from Vienna and translating assistance from Paul Rohrbach,<sup>56</sup> Dontsov published another German-language brochure in 1915, *Greater Poland and the Central Powers*, in which he weighs in on the crucial Polish question as a “neutral observer.”<sup>57</sup> Rejecting “hackneyed” accounts of Poland as belonging wholly to the West or wholly to Russia, he gives an “objective” assessment of Poland’s agricultural capacity and the outlook of its minorities, who already resent Polish domination and who would likely face oppression and forced assimilation in a “Greater Poland.” Though not opposed to a “small Austro-Polish solution” that would unify Congress Poland with the Polish regions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Dontsov argues that, “thanks to [Poland’s] social and national makeup, it cannot be a bulwark against Russia.”<sup>58</sup> Such a bulwark can only be achieved, of course, only by wresting Ukraine from Russia, raising it “up to a high level of development,” and transforming it into a German or Austrian protectorate. The Central Powers’ proclamation on November 5, 1916, of support for an independent Poland, inclusive of East Galicia, annoyed Dontsov, but he preferred the Polish domination of Galicia to the Russian domination of the rest of Ukraine, conceding that “we absolutely must declare ourselves against Russia. . . . In Poland we would at least have the right of association and the possibility of a constitutional struggle. In Russia, never under any circumstances.”<sup>59</sup> Dontsov continued to prioritize the fate of Central and Eastern Ukraine over the fate of East Galicia throughout the interwar period, accusing those who took the opposite view of “sacrificing the whole for a part” and “narrow provincialism.” Yet, given the choice between the Catholicism of the Uniates (concentrated in Polish-dominated East Galicia) and the Orthodoxy adhered to by most Ukrainians, Dontsov insisted that “we should declare

---

<sup>56</sup> Dontsov, *Rik 1918*, Kyiv, 22.

<sup>57</sup> Dmytro Dontsov (Donzow), *Groß-Polen und die Zentralmächte* (Berlin: C. Kroll, 1915).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 62-63

<sup>59</sup> From a letter to the editor of *Shliakhy*, Fedir Fedortsiv. Quoted in Golczewski, *Deutsche und Ukrainer*, 216.

ourselves in favor of the former, since we are behind aristocratic-clerical Austria in its struggle with tsarism.”<sup>60</sup> He felt that questions of religion, morality, and the proper relationship between church and state must be subordinated to the national principle and international politics.

He approved of any alliance or compromise, no matter how unpalatable, so long as it undermined Russia’s foothold in Ukraine. It is thus no surprise that Dontsov began forging ties with the German far right during the First World War. In 1916 he contributed to an anthology of anti-Russian essays, *The Colossus on Clay Feet*, compiled by Axel Ripke (1880-1937)—German journalist, publisher of the prowar annexationist paper *Der Panther*, early leader of the Nazi Party, and mentor to Joseph Goebbels.<sup>61</sup> In his contribution to the volume, “The Changing Russia,” Dontsov describes Russia as the prime untapped market of German industry and the average Russian as “a natural opponent of the German Reich.” If Russia modernized, he warns, then Germany could face military defeat and end up a playing the “role of a second-rate state.”<sup>62</sup>

For the keys to victory in the present conflict, Dontsov again turned to history, writing a pamphlet on the Swedish-Ukrainian alliance against the Tsardom of Muscovy in the Great Northern War (1700-1721), which he considered to be analogous to the Eastern Front of the First World War.<sup>63</sup> Extracting the strategic and geopolitical lessons of this ill-fated crusade, Dontsov calls for a reevaluation of the campaign of King Charles XII of Sweden (1682-1718) and Ukrainian Hetman Ivan Mazepa (1639-1709), not as a foolhardy adventure, but as a geopolitically necessary act of self-defense against Muscovite barbarism. The failure of their collective attempt to stop Russian expansion into the lands between the Baltic and Black Seas was not preordained, but an unfortunate accident of history attributable to the error of

---

<sup>60</sup> Dmytro Dontsov, “Sprava Unii” *Shliakhy* no. 5 (1916) in *Tvory*, 132-39.

<sup>61</sup> Axel Ripke, ed., *Der Koloß auf tönernen Füßen* (Munich: Lehmanns Verlag, 1916).

<sup>62</sup> Dmytro Dontsov (Donzow), “Das veränderte Rußland,” in Ripke, *Der Koloß*, 55-69.

<sup>63</sup> Dmytro Dontsov (Donzow), *Karl XII: Feldzug nach der Ukraine* (Vienna: Gerold, 1916).

underestimating the importance of the Ukrainian factor. Charles XII had every reason to believe that he could defeat Muscovy, which was an obscure and uncivilized country so far as enlightened Europe was concerned. Sweden, by contrast, had enjoyed supremacy in the north for over a century and was simply protecting its “vital interests” in the Baltic.

Two tendencies prevailed in early eighteenth-century Eastern Europe: the pro-Russian orientation, taken by the Kingdom of Poland (portending its doom later in the century), and the anti-Russian orientation, taken by the Ukrainian Cossack Hetmanate as a matter of self-preservation. The latter, Dontsov maintains, had entered into a military alliance with the Tsardom of Muscovy as a sovereign state, but also had a tradition of fighting Moscow (even alongside the Muslim Turks). Moreover, Ukrainian-Russian relations had been deteriorating since the reign of Hetman Bohdan Khmel’nytskyi in the mid seventeenth century. According to Dontsov, Ukrainians were the original source of whatever was European in the “half-Asiatic” Muscovite culture. They already possessed constitutional, monarchic, and republican institutions and values, whereas Peter I sought only the merciless centralization of the Russian state. Dontsov also describes the decisive advantages Ukraine’s fertile land and pro-Swedish, anti-Russian population would have offered to Charles XII’s armies—had they campaigned south and joined Mazepa in 1708 instead of waiting in vain for the arrival of his Turkish and Polish allies. The Swedish-Ukrainian defeat at the Battle of Poltava in 1709 sealed the fate of the whole campaign; Russia triumphed, bringing two centuries of chaos and ruin to Eastern Europe in its wake. Nevertheless, Dontsov concludes, what was not accomplished in the eighteenth century—namely, a satisfactory solution to the “Eastern question”—might be accomplished in the twentieth if modern Germans learn from Charles XII’s blunders. Only by taking full advantage of Ukrainian agriculture, national aspirations, and resentment for Russian domination can the

Central Powers win on the Eastern Front. Dontsov's pamphlet on the Great Northern War was republished for Ukrainian audiences during the 1918 occupation of Ukraine by the Central Powers, which followed the propagandist's advice by exploiting the country's vast supply food for the war effort, inciting its people against their erstwhile Russian masters, and cultivating Ukrainian national consciousness and pro-German sentiment among the peasantry.<sup>64</sup>

Dontsov's German-language brochures evidently hit their mark, circulating widely among diplomats, activists, and academics concerned with the Ukrainian question. Karl Heinz, the German Reich's consul in L'viv/Lemberg, for example, wrote Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg about his admiration for Dontsov's "superbly written" brochures. The latter, Heinz remarks, "demonstrate the historical and political knowledge of their author," and deserve "the broadest recognition and dissemination among the educated layers of our people."<sup>65</sup> Others were less enthusiastic, including Leon Wasilewski (1870-1936)—a prominent activist in the Polish Socialist Party, close collaborator of Piłsudski's, and, after the war, one of the main architects of "Prometheism."<sup>66</sup> Wasilewski opposed the Polonization of Galician Ukrainians and supported Piłsudski's wartime vision of an "Intermarium" alliance (a democratic federation that would include, at a minimum, the independent states of Poland and Ukraine), but in 1916 he wrote that the Ukrainians of Russia had "degenerated into a crude ethnographic mass" whose separatism "exists [only] in the fantasies of Russian informers," naming Dontsov, "whose theses are beginning to be found in certain youth circles."<sup>67</sup> But the appearance of the UNR the next year refuted Wasilewski's dismissive remarks on the Ukrainian national movement in Russia, while

---

<sup>64</sup> Dmytro Dontsov, *Pokhid Karla XII na Ukrainu* (Kyiv: Tovarystvo shyrennia narodnoi kul'tury, 1918).

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Golczewski, *Deutsche und Ukrainer*, 204.

<sup>66</sup> Prometheism was the Second Polish Republic's flagship policy in the east. It aimed at the succor and coordination of the non-Russian national independence movements of the (former) Russian Empire and Soviet Union.

<sup>67</sup> Anonymous [Leon Wasilewski], *Die Ukrainer in Russland und die politischen Bestrebungen derselben* (Krakow: [publisher unidentified], 1916). Quoted in Golczewski, *Deutsche und Ukrainer*, 214.

Dontsov's "theses" reached audiences well beyond the Galician Ukrainian students who constituted his home base of support.

Nevertheless, the pro-Ukrainian independence propaganda efforts of Dontsov and others met with little success in the first year and a half of the war. Of the Central Powers, only the Turks were eager to take this course of action at first.<sup>68</sup> Austrian officialdom generally thought of the Ukrainian question as an internal (Galician) problem, and did not wish to offend its Polish subjects, who regarded Lwów/L'viv/Lemberg and the surrounding region as rightfully Polish territory.<sup>69</sup> The Dual Monarchy thus began withdrawing its support from the SVU as early as January 1915, demanding that it cease its work among Austria's Ukrainians ("Ruthenians") and relocate to Constantinople. Hereafter the Germans took a greater role in the SVU's activities, allowing it set up an office in Berlin and encouraging it to cultivate contacts with Lenin, the Bolsheviks, and the Turks. However, certain Habsburg circles began toying with the notion, in the event of a catastrophic defeat for Russia, of setting up a Ukrainian crownland with the ardent Ukrainophile, Archduke Wilhelm von Habsburg (1895-1948), as monarch.<sup>70</sup> While Berlin's strategists were considerably more adventurous when it came to nation-engineering in the east,

---

<sup>68</sup> Two pashas of Ottoman Turkey's dictatorial triumvirate, Ismail Enver and Mehmed Talaat, expressed their support for an independent Ukraine as an ally and bulwark against Russia. Sukiennicki, *East Central Europe during World War I*, vol. 1, 230.

<sup>69</sup> Von Hagen, *War in a European Borderland*, 57-59.

<sup>70</sup> Perhaps the most colorful character of Austria's Ukrainian adventure, Archduke Wilhelm assumed the nom du guerre Vasyl' Vyshyvannyi ("Basil the Embroidered"—a reference to his traditional Ukrainian attire) and fought at the head of the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen, which clashed with Bolshevik forces in southern Ukraine in 1918, successfully (albeit temporarily) driving the latter out of the country. Wilhelm became the focal point of a German-Austrian conflict over Ukraine's fate during the two allies' joint occupation of the country; Germany supported a dependent Hetmanate, not an independent monarchy. After the First World War, Wilhelm continued his efforts to form a Ukrainian army—the Free Cossacks (numbering 40,000 at its peak)—capable of invading Soviet Ukraine and placing him on the throne of new kingdom. The German pioneers of "total warfare," Erich Ludendorff and Max Bauer, as well as Pavlo Skoropads'kyi (Wilhelm's former rival), supported the endeavor, which nevertheless failed. Wilhelm corresponded with Dontsov, and was later falsely rumored to be organizing a rebellion of Ukrainians against Soviet power with him in the mid 1920s. In any event, Wilhelm gave up on his ill-fated Ukrainian ambitions for a stint as a hedonistic poet in Paris, but resumed collaborating with Ukrainian nationalists from the 1930s to World War II, siding with the Nazis until it became clear that they would not support Ukrainian independence. See Timothy Snyder, *The Red Prince: The Secret Lives of Habsburg Archduke* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

they did not develop specific plans for a future Ukrainian state until January 1916, when an up-and-coming generation of German politicians, academics, and diplomats finally met with success in their push for a more aggressive wartime *Ostpolitik* that would exploit Russia's alien nationalities politically as well as militarily. They had hopes of appealing to liberal opinion in the (still neutral) United States under President Woodrow Wilson by representing Germany as a true champion of the right to national self-determination in Europe and a guardian of Russia's oppressed non-Russians.<sup>71</sup> German agents famously smuggled a disguised Lenin from Central Europe into Petrograd in the wake of Tsar Nicholas II's abdication, but imperial Germany also aided and encouraged nationalist movements on Russian territory, ultimately including the attempted co-optation of the Ukrainian Revolution—the Reich's final and most ambitious *Drang nach Osten* (“drive to the East”) of the war. With the more reluctant collaboration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, whose tenuous dominion over the nations of the Slavic majority within its borders had been one of the primary causes of the war, imperial Germany represented itself as the liberator of smaller, weaker nations (called *Randvölker*, or “borderland peoples”) from Russian oppression.

In practice, however, Germany's ambitions in the East were colonial in nature, amounting to a quest for German *Lebensraum* at the expense of the “barbaric” Russian Empire.<sup>72</sup> Many German officers, diplomats, politicians, and soldiers generally regarded the indigenous peoples of Eastern Europe as inherently backward.<sup>73</sup> Some, such as Heinrich Class (1868-1953),

---

<sup>71</sup> Sukiennicki, *East Central Europe during World War I*, 230-31.

<sup>72</sup> Von Hagen, *War in A European Borderland*, 61. Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: Norton, 1967), 162-63.

<sup>73</sup> The Germans' experience on the Eastern Front reified longstanding Romantic notions of the East as a wild frontier of boundless, untapped opportunities for civilizing conquerors such as themselves. But the chaos, filth, disease, and human suffering that they encountered in countries that most of them were seeing for the first time were more a result of the war and the retreating Russian army's “scorched-earth policy” than an endemic primitiveness. These attitudes toward and visions of “the East” took an even more extreme form in the Third Reich and World War II. See Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity, and the German*

president of the ultranationalist Pan-German League, coveted the land, preferably with its mostly Slavic inhabitants Germanized or removed, for the development of Teutonic agrarian utopias.<sup>74</sup> Class had called for the creation of an independent Ukraine closely aligned with Germany as early as September 1914 in a memorandum to Bethmann Hollweg that the chancellor rejected. This was a major point of contention between the wartime chancellors (Hollweg, Georg von Hertling, and Max Prince von Baden) and the Pan-German League, which unsuccessfully attempted to induce General Erich Ludendorff, who sympathized with the Pan-Germanists' on many points, to engineer a coup and carry out their annexationist plans as dictator.<sup>75</sup> Others, above all the Baltic German specialist on the "Eastern question" in Russia and the Middle East Paul Rohrbach, counseled against imperious attitudes toward the *Randvölker*, and advocated Ukraine's removal from "Muscovy" and incorporation (alongside Poland) as an independent state into a German-dominated economic union—the "*Mitteleuropa* project."<sup>76</sup> An ally of Dontsov's, Rohrbach led the "*Osteuropa* school," which helped to popularize the Ukrainian question as the key to a permanent victory against Russia in wartime Germany. Rohrbach's influence was limited, but he did win support for his idea of collaborating with the Ukrainians to make Ukraine independent from Russia. The German economists Max Sering, Friedrich Ernst von Schwerin, and Dr. Eric Keup—leaders of the Society for the Advancement of Inner Colonization (*Gesellschaft zur Förderung der inneren Kolonisation*), whose mission was to promote the settlement of Eastern Europe by Germans—also took a special interest in the

---

*Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *The German Myth of the East, 1800 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>74</sup> This idea eventually won adherents among Germany's governing circles, military class, and industrial magnates. Sukiennicki, *East Central Europe during World War I*, 142-46.

<sup>75</sup> Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht; Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland, 1914-1918* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1961), 114-15, 351.

<sup>76</sup> Paul Rohrbach, *Russland und wir* (Stuttgart: J. Engelhorn, 1915). For the most influential contemporary statement of the geopolitics of *Mitteleuropa*, see Friedrich Naumann, *Mitteleuropa* (Berlin: Reimer, 1915).

Ukrainian question. Executive officials in the German Foreign Office and Imperial Chancellery, such as Foreign Minister Gottlieb von Jagow, his successor as Secretary of State, Arthur Zimmerman, and even Emperor Wilhelm II were at least open to the idea.<sup>77</sup>

### **The League of Russia's Foreign Peoples**

Ultimately, arguments in favor of using Ukrainian nation building in the Reich's war against Russia proved irresistible. In spring 1916 the German Foreign Office, acting with the reluctant consent of the military (especially of General Erich Ludendorff), approved the idea of the "League of Russia's Foreign Peoples" (*die Liga der Fremdvölker Russlands*, LFR), which claimed to represent the Lithuanians, Belarusians, Poles, Finns, Ukrainians, Georgians, Muslims, and Jews of Russia.<sup>78</sup> Coordinated from Berlin, the League worked through the German embassy in Bern, Switzerland, utilizing the private apartment of Dr. Hermann Gummerus (a prominent Finnish nationalist) as a headquarters—a location chosen because it was safe for political exiles and ideal for conspiratorial activity.<sup>79</sup> Like the Bolsheviks, including Lenin and Dontsov's older brother Ivan, both of whom made Switzerland their home base during the war, the various nationalists and German agents of the LFR set up shop in the neutral country. In addition to sharing a sponsor—the German Foreign Office—the Bolsheviks in exile and the LFR collaborated against their common enemy, the tsarist state.

The LFR's first move was to issue an appeal to President Woodrow Wilson, "the most ardent defender of humanity and justice" and, by extension, to "the nations that are today the

---

<sup>77</sup> On Germany's war aims with regard to Ukraine and Rohrbach's influence thereupon, see Fedyshyn, *Germany's Drive to the East*, chap. 2; Fischer, *Germany's War Aims*, 120-26, 132-54.

<sup>78</sup> The only monograph on the League of Russia's Foreign Peoples is Seppo Zetterberg, *Die Liga der Fremdvölker Russlands, 1916-1918: Ein Beitrag zu Deutschlands antirussischen Propagandakrieg unter den Fremdvölkern im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Helsinki: Finska Historiska Samfundet, 1978). Also see, Alfred Erich Senn, *The Russian Revolution in Switzerland, 1914-1917* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971), chap. 14.

<sup>79</sup> Zetterberg, *Die Liga*, 157.

allies of Russia.”<sup>80</sup> Using the language of national self-determination championed by Wilson (prior to the US entry into the war), the appeal describes the plight of Russia’s ethnic minorities and ends with a cry of desperation to the civilized world: “Help us! Save us from extermination!” Dontsov was among the appeal’s nineteen signatories, all of whom relocated to Lausanne, Switzerland, to participate in a formal “Congress of the League” on June 25, 1916, the day after which they took part in the so-called Third Conference of the Nationalities.<sup>81</sup> Enjoying the financial support and interest of the German government, the resultant Congress of Nationalities brought together 400 representatives from 23 nationalities, serving as a tool of anti-Russian German politics throughout Dontsov’s tenure there, with the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the German Empire until his resignation in August 1917, Arthur Zimmerman, personally participating in the deliberations of the congress.<sup>82</sup> Advertised by its sponsors as a spontaneous gathering of delegates of the oppressed nationalities of Russia rather than a meeting directed in secret from Berlin via the LFR, the Third Congress of Nationalities presented itself as pro-Entente, disguising the anti-Russian orientation and German patronage of its membership, which included the German-Lithuanian Baron Friedrich von der Ropp, the Estonian socialist Aleksandr Kesküla, the Polish monarchist Michał Łempicki, the Ukrainian nationalist Volodymyr

---

<sup>80</sup> The appeal was published in the pro-German, Berlin-based newspaper for Americans, *The Continental Times*, May 15, 1916.

<sup>81</sup> Sukiennicki, *East Central Europe during World War I*, 232. The first two Conferences of Nationalities—which were organized in 1912 by the *Union des Nationalités* (another international lobby for the independence of the non-Russian nationalities of imperial Russia) on the initiative of the Lithuanian nationalist and diplomat Juozas Gabrys (1880-1951)—had taken place in Paris under the auspices of the French government in 1912 and 1915, but the infiltration of pro-German elements into the *Union des Nationalités*, which pressed for the Lithuanian and Ukrainian causes against both imperial Russian and Polish nationalist claims, convinced the French to withdraw their support from it during the war. See Juozas Gabrys, *La nation lithuanienne; son état sous la domination russe et allemande* (Paris: Imprimerie de la Cour d’Appel, 1911).

<sup>82</sup> Arthur Zimmerman (1864-1940) is best known for his involvement in fomenting the Irish, Indian, and Russian Communist rebellions, and for writing the “Zimmerman Telegram,” which called for the creation of German-Mexican alliance in the event of the USA’s entry into the conflict. Abba Stazhas, *Deutsche Ostpolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg: Der Fall Ober Ost 1915-1917* (Harrassowity, 1993), 129-30.

Stepankivs'kyi (1885-1957), and Dontsov.<sup>83</sup> The demands of the latter two at the “pro-Entente” conference were accordingly modest, referring to Ukrainian national independence as a maximal ideal not an immediate demand.<sup>84</sup> Gabrys considered the conference a success, with the world press reporting extensively and favorably on the documents declaring the “Rights of Nationalities” and the necessity of a “union of the weak.”<sup>85</sup>

That September the German Foreign Office recruited Dontsov as a secret agent and dispatched him to Bern with instructions to assist Stepankivs'kyi, chief of the LFR's office there. Once in Bern, Dontsov was charged with heading the League's publishing activities and promised a salary of 500 francs.<sup>86</sup> He also formed and directed the “Bureau of the Nationalities of Russia” (*das Büro der Nationalitäten Russlands*), coordinating propaganda with the *Union des nationalités* and the LFR.<sup>87</sup> Disagreements over his role materialized shortly after his arrival. The LFR was willing to give him a free hand in his propaganda work, provided that he secure Stepankivs'kyi's approval in advance of publication. But the Foreign Office insisted on having final say over everything and in secret, without Dontsov knowing its editorial and financial role. Necessary funds from the Foreign Office were to be transferred to Dontsov through Stepankivs'kyi, who would receive them from the German diplomat in Bern, Carl von Schubert.

---

<sup>83</sup> Stepankivs'kyi came from the central Ukrainian province of Podillia and was a member of the USDRP. He headed of the Ukrainian information bureau in Stockholm—where he also later founded the UNR's embassy to Sweden. During the war he edited the weekly *L'Ukraine* (published in Lausanne), and was one of the most influential members of the LFR. Stepankivs'kyi emigrated to the USA in the 1920s. See J. H. Hoffman, “V. Stepankovsky, Ukrainian Nationalist and German Agent,” *Slavonic and East European Review* (London) 50, no. 121 (October, 1972): 595-602.

<sup>84</sup> Dontsov and Stepankivs'kyi demanded that “Galicia not lose its constitutional rights, and the entire Ukrainian people have the right—if not to form an independent state, at least to develop their national individuality, and that they would profit by religious tolerance, the freedom of language in the schools and at the University, and all political rights that are guaranteed in the Austrian part [of Ukraine] and have been guaranteed by Russia in the Pereiaslav' Treaty.” From no. 16 of the official publication of the *Union des Nationalités: Les Annales des Nationalités*. Quoted in Sukiennicki, *East Central Europe during the First World War*, 235.

<sup>85</sup> These were drafted by the Belgian scholar and self-proclaimed theorist of a “new international law,” Paul Otlet. Sukiennicki, *East Central Europe during World War I*, 232.

<sup>86</sup> Zetterberg, *Die Liga*, 157-58.

<sup>87</sup> Stazhas, *Deutsche Ostpolitik*, 128-30.

Schubert insisted that Dontsov not become aware of the origins of this money—an untenable condition that Golczewski regards as an insult to Dontsov’s intelligence, arguing that the notion that he would have been unaware of such assistance is “laughable.”<sup>88</sup> The League’s presidium did not wish to comply with it, proposing instead that Dontsov be placed in charge of financial matters and made aware of the money’s source. Himself no stranger to the Germans, Dontsov questioned Stepankivs’kyi about the origins of these funds. Although Dontsov corresponded with German diplomat Gisbert von Romberg about conspiratorial matters sensitive enough to be hidden even from Germany’s Austrian allies, Romberg evidently distrusted him, fearing that he might blow the League’s cover and make its German sponsorship known to the world.<sup>89</sup> Romberg wrote Bethmann Hollweg about the matter, expressing concern that Dontsov might become aware that the LFR was a project of the German government. According to the instructions of Arthur Zimmermann, only Stepankivs’kyi was to handle the money. He should lead Dontsov to think that the funds came from private and anonymous individuals and organizations.<sup>90</sup> Romberg believed, probably erroneously, that Dontsov never learned the truth about the money.<sup>91</sup> Ultimately, Dontsov was limited to the role of editor of the League’s official publication, *Korrespondenz der Nationalitäten Russlands*, which (funded via Stepankivs’kyi at 2000 franks per month)<sup>92</sup> also appeared in French as *Bulletin des Nationalités de Russie* and in English as *Bulletin of the Nationalities of Russia*. The first edition of the biweekly went out to readers on September 23, 1916. Each issue consisted of four columns and short editorials dealing with Poland, Finland, Lithuania, and Ukraine, as well as an ethnographic map of Russia showing

---

<sup>88</sup> Golczewski, *Deutsche und Ukrainer*, 149-50. For the opposing view, see Senn, *The Russian Revolution in Switzerland*, 198-99.

<sup>89</sup> Golczewski, *Deutsche und Ukrainer*, 150-51.

<sup>90</sup> Zetterberg, *Die Liga*, 163.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

the claimed territories of these nationalities. A paraphrased Victor Hugo quote, “There is civilization among the peoples, and barbarism among the rulers” (“*Die Kultur ist unter den Völkern, die Barbarei ist unter den Herrschenden*”) served as the paper’s motto.<sup>93</sup> The LFR dispatched *Korrespondenz* in runs of 1000 copies per language to major newspapers, politicians, and private persons across Western and Central Europe.

But problems stifled the LFR’s efforts to shape world opinion from the inception of *Korrespondenz*, which carried some of these internal controversies on its pages. Perhaps most damaging were the personal and professional quarrels between Dontsov and his collaborators in the League. Two Baltic German members of the LFR, Barons Friedrich von der Ropp and Bernard von Uexküll, criticized the League’s organ for being “uninteresting and incomplete,” and for exhibiting too obvious an anti-Russian bias. Ropp threatened to cut off the League’s funding of the publication altogether. Romberg echoed their concerns in a letter to Bethmann Hollweg, remarking that *Korrespondenz* failed to disguise its anti-Russian prerogative.<sup>94</sup> Other critics decried the paper’s excessive focus on Ukrainian and Polish matters, at the expense of the other nationalities. The Estonian Bolshevik-turned-nationalist Aleksandr Kesküla refused to cooperate with Dontsov outright, claiming that he was guilty of “betraying his countrymen” (in all likelihood because of the total breakdown in his relations with the SVU and USDRP).<sup>95</sup> Kesküla resented the lack of coverage on the Estonian question in *Korrespondenz*, and seconded Ropp’s criticisms, complaining to Stepankivs’kyi that the publication’s propagandistic intent was too obvious. Dontsov responded to these charges by blaming the paper’s shortness and emphasizing the corresponding need for brief synopses of only the most importance news.

Longer, more in-depth articles occasionally appeared in *Korrespondenz*, but Dontsov usually

---

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 170-71.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 81.

wrote them himself.<sup>96</sup> He explained that even anti-Russian contributions “of course” needed to take a “respectable tone”:

It would already mean a lot if we brought an Entente audience (and we write for it, after all, when we edit *Korrespondenz* here [in Bern] and not in Berlin) to the belief that we are foreign peoples there [in Russia], that it is bad for us in Russia, and that our fate—of course to the detriment of Russia—must be determined anew. If you wish to inform the Entente public that this fate should of course be changed in the German spirit, then it would appear to be only a hopeless task.

Dontsov insisted that he had kept the pro-Central Powers’ orientation and patronage of the LFR under wraps, outwardly following the conventions of neutral journalism. The other complaint voiced by certain members and sponsors of the LFR concerning *Korrespondenz* was its perceived lack of provocativeness and verve. Ropp felt that Dontsov had “no sense for the sensational. To him the study of sources is more important than the stimulation of attention, though we have founded not an historical, but an active bureau.”<sup>97</sup> Dontsov—rather ironically given his later penchant for anti-intellectualism, inflammatory propaganda, and demagoguery—wanted the style of the league’s bulletin to at least appear “objective,” “neutral,” and “scholarly.” He spent much of his time in libraries and archives gathering materials for use in the anticipated peace talks, hoping to secure Ukraine’s independence through the mechanisms of international law and historical precedents. Dontsov did not heed Ropp’s instructions to change the paper’s style and content, causing the latter to write *Stepankivs’kyi* and insist that the editor of *Korrespondenz* is “not an historical researcher, but a sensation-journalist.”<sup>98</sup> Ropp went so far as to suggest outsourcing the paper’s editing to an American journalist, relegating Dontsov’s role to the physical setting and printing of the bulletin in Bern. In his defense, Dontsov pointed to the large number of letters he received expressing appreciation for *Korrespondenz*. Although he

---

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Zetterberg, *Die Liga*, 172.

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in Zetterberg, *Die Liga*, 173.

recognized the propagandistic aim of his task, Dontsov took the journalistic prerogatives of his work for the LFR seriously. He accused Stepankivs'kyi of doing nothing to help the Bern office, requested more staff, and expressed his readiness to resign as editor. Self-conscious about addressing sophisticated Western audiences and thus committed to an even-handed tone, investigative research, and fact checking, Dontsov rejected sensationalism, at least in this case, as ineffective. He argued that making preparations for the peace by gathering historical documents in support of the autonomy (at minimum) of Russia's national minorities was of the utmost importance, and thus placed his hopes in a rational, juridical assessment of the facts by responsible international actors. "One of the most essential tasks in this regard would be the compilation of all treaties of a legal importance to the nationalities, which were made in their time between Russia on the one hand and its various foreign peoples on the other, which should justify our claims for a special status in Russia." He had in mind the 1654 Treaty and Constitution of Pereiaslav (renewed in 1728), the Georgian Constitution of 1783, the Finnish Constitution of 1809, and the Polish Constitution of 1815. Dontsov proposed the composition of a memorandum detailing the situation of Russia's foreign peoples and the violations of their rights and treaties, to be dispatched to the diplomats of all nations. The memorandum, which he offered to prepare himself, would take the "proper" tone, avoiding unnecessary agitation and sticking to the facts. Despite everything, Uexküll and Ropp agreed to support Dontsov's project in December 1916, and he began working on it at the outset of 1917, but Ropp withheld the funds for the project without explanation and, wishing to further reduce Dontsov's role in the LFR, considered delegating the task instead to Stepankivs'kyi. Ultimately the memorandum never materialized. Irritated, Dontsov again threatened to quit the League in January 1917. He finally left for Geneva in March without notifying the German Foreign Office, abandoned the

Bern headquarters of the LFR to be closed in his absence, and made plans to return to Ukraine alone and take part in the revolutionary situation just beginning there.

Dontsov's confidence in the power and beneficence of international law and prospective peace treaties did not survive the Great War and the failed Ukrainian Revolution. As of the mid 1920s he had become quite the opposite of a dull "historical researcher," embracing a warlike, action-focused ethos, and an editorial style that was proudly anti-intellectual, nonacademic, hyperbolic, provocative, and sensationalist. His time with the LFR, which ended rather embarrassingly for him, likely contributed to his drift toward the much more visceral style of propaganda writing for which he is best known. The experience did nothing to mitigate Dontsov's Germanophilia, however, but seems rather to have convinced him that Germany was the only great power in the world with an abiding interest in Ukrainian independence. Nevertheless, it would be simplistic to interpret German sponsorship of the LFR as evidence that Dontsov was merely an agent of Berlin masquerading as a patriot of Ukraine. He, not unlike Stepankivs'kyi (who was quick to appeal to the Entente once its victory seemed immanent), and other members of the LFR, harbored suspicions about the German government's true and ultimate intentions in Eastern Europe, but believed that Ukraine had nowhere else to turn. Sympathy for the long-partitioned Polish nation was relatively common in the USA, France, and Britain, but most Westerners knew little to nothing about Ukraine, or thought of it in vague terms as an integral component of their ally Russia.

Germany was a problematic sponsor for different reasons. Although the League's sponsors in Berlin favored the creation of a chain of at least nominally independent buffer states (*Pufferstaaten*) in Russia's western borderlands—a strategy termed "*Dekompositionspolitik*"—they were at odds with the considerably more powerful Ludendorff, who did not trust the League

and intended to annex only parts of Poland and the Baltic lands to the German Empire, leaving the bulk of Ukraine at Russia's mercy. (The German Foreign Office remained cautious about exploiting stateless nationalisms in general, refusing to back a worldwide league of nationalities that would have included the anti-British Irish, Egyptians, and others, yet posed the risk of inadvertently undermining Austria-Hungary.) Still, high-placed advocates of Ukrainian independence existed in Germany, and resources badly needed for revolution making were available there. Dontsov, for his part, considered Germany not only a means to an end—Ukrainian statehood—but also the paragon of European civilization and culture.

Sincere though their patriotism doubtless was, the extent to which Dontsov and the other members of the League and its affiliate organizations in Switzerland actually represented their respective nationalities proved to be low. In March 1917, when revolution broke out in the Russian Empire, the League's leaders—acting as émigré double agents, individual eccentrics, and free-lance diplomats—proved out of touch with their countrymen in Russia, and thus unable to locate, let alone coordinate with, the nationalist cells and networks allegedly in existence there.<sup>99</sup> (This is exactly what Dontsov had accused the SVU of in 1915.) As of mid 1917, the Central and Eastern Ukrainians to whom Dontsov or Stepankivs'kyi might have appealed remained overwhelmingly in favor of national autonomy and federation with Russia, as opposed to the outright secession advocated by the League. But the prevailing opinion in Kyiv changed rapidly in favor of Ukrainian independence in the course of the following year, which brought the replacement of the Provisional Government by Bolshevik-Soviet power in Russia (both regimes were openly hostile to Ukrainian federalists and separatists), the birth of the first modern

---

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 257-61.

Ukrainian nation-state (albeit short-lived), and the Central Powers' victory on the Eastern Front, soon to be overshadowed and nullified by their defeat on the Western Front.

**Dontsov and the Hetmanate, 1918-1919:  
From the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk to the Defeat of the Central Powers**

The February Revolution of 1917 set off a chain of events that led to the appearance of the Ukrainian People's Republic (UNR) and its governing body, the Central Rada—a parliamentary council of Ukrainian intellectuals and activists in Kyiv. They were the liberal socialist Ukrainophiles—Hrushevs'kyi, Vynnychenko, Petliura, and others—whom Dontsov had begun denouncing at the war's outset for what he regarded as their self-defeating and servile fealty to Russia. Facing the hostility of the Russian Provisional Government, the Bolshevik-dominated Soviet regime that ousted it in November 1917, and the Russian imperialist White movement that emerged in opposition to the Communist takeover, this fledgling Ukrainian nation-state evolved from its original calls for a free and equal socialist federation of the Russian empire's nationalities on June 7, 1917, toward a declaration of full independence on January 25, 1918 (the so-called Fourth Universal). The latter came in response to the escalating Ukrainian-Soviet War (1917-1921), conventionally regarded as one of many theaters in the broader Russian Civil War. Scrambling to reassemble whatever it could of the old Russian Empire, yet simultaneously withdrawing from the war with the Central Powers, the new Soviet regime decried the Central Rada as bourgeois, counterrevolutionary, and illegitimate, proffering its own Leninist version of national self-determination and inciting the largely Russian working class of Ukraine's cities to revolt. The Bolsheviks first attempted to declare a Ukrainian Soviet Republic unsuccessfully in Kyiv, and then, successfully, in the eastern city of Kharkiv (the capital of Soviet Ukraine until 1934) on December 26, 1917. From Kharkiv paramilitary "Red Guard"

formations launched a campaign against the UNR, which failed to raise an army capable of resisting the attack and soon began hemorrhaging territory to the Bolsheviks. Besieged in the Ukrainian capital by early February, the leaders of the UNR were compelled to turn to the Central Powers, which they had by and large dutifully opposed (as loyalists to Petrograd) since the beginning of the war.<sup>100</sup> Meanwhile, the German Foreign Office intensified its pro-Ukrainian propaganda efforts, hoping to further destabilize what remained of the Russian Empire.<sup>101</sup>

The peace negotiations between Germany, Austria-Hungary, the UNR, and Soviet Russia took place against this backdrop and culminated in the first (Ukrainian-German) Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on February 9, 1918, and the second (Russian-German) Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918. Taken together, the agreements formalized the German annexation of the Baltic countries, the end of (Soviet) Russia's involvement in the First World War, and the recognition of Ukraine's independence as a German-Austrian protectorate by the Central Powers and Petrograd.<sup>102</sup> The delegates of the UNR (Mykola Liubyns'kyi, Mykola Levyts'kyi, Oleksandr Sevriuk, and Vsevolod Holubovych) immediately established a good rapport with the Germans—represented at the peace talks by General Max Hoffmann (one of the few German commanders fluent in Russian and sympathetic to the Ukrainian cause) and Richard Kühlmann (Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs since Arthur Zimmermann's resignation in June 1917). Outmaneuvered by their Ukrainian counterparts, the Soviet delegates Lev Trotsky and Lev Kamenev were forced into recognizing the UNR despite the unfolding Ukrainian-Soviet War.

---

<sup>100</sup> Fedyshyn, *Germany's Drive to the East*, 43.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>102</sup> Up to this point, the German Supreme Army Command and the Imperial Chancellery were not terribly interested in Ukraine, but chiefly concerned with retaining the Reich's acquisitions in Poland, Kurland, and Lithuania, the immediate conclusion of a peace with Russia that would (probably) leave the latter in possession of Ukraine, and the redirection of all resources to victory in the west. Despite the efforts of Dontsov and his collaborators, the German leadership had drafted no concrete plans for Ukraine or a separate agreement with the Central Rada—little trusted by German or Austrian officialdom—until peace negotiations with Soviet Russia and the UNR were already well underway. The decision to recognize Ukraine's independence was, at this highest level of command, “merely a hastily contrived improvisation.” *Ibid.*, 50.

Enjoying final say in such matters, Erich Ludendorff agreed to a “peace for bread” (*Brotfrieden*), which promised military assistance to the UNR, should the Central Rada publicly request it, in exchange for large tributes of food from Ukrainian agriculture and coal from the Donbas region (supplies desperately needed by the Germans). The even weaker Austrian government, represented by Foreign Minister Count Ottokar Czernin (1872-1932), reluctantly consented to the deal despite misgivings about Ukrainian claims to East Galicia and related fears of upsetting the Poles.<sup>103</sup> Thanks to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Central Powers could now call themselves the “liberators” of Ukraine from Russian and Bolshevik tyranny, and Ukrainian separatists could now claim political independence from Petrograd and the support of powerful European friends. The German-Austrian occupation of Ukraine ended the Red Guards’ incursions into the country, but forced the UNR into a reluctant military alliance with Vienna and Berlin, whose conservative leadership generally regarded Ukrainian statehood only as a means to their ends and distrusted the Central Rada almost as much as they did the Russian Bolsheviks (whom they had also bankrolled). Still, the Germans’ decision to help build an independent Ukraine as a bulwark against Russia confirmed Dontsov’s convictions that such a state could be born with the help of the Central Powers, and that the recognition of Ukraine’s independence by the international community might be secured through the peace process.

---

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 85.



Figure 2.2. Ukraine during World War I. Source: Paul Magosci, *Ukraine: A Historical Atlas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

But Dontsov did not make it to Russian Ukraine until March 1918, after the beginning of the German-Austrian occupation. Thus, he did not participate in the peace talks that led to the recognition of Ukraine's independence by Soviet Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire. It is not clear why he postponed his return for the negotiations, for which he had spent the preceding three years preparing. (In any event, his historical arguments for Ukrainian statehood ended up being quite irrelevant to the proceedings.) Dontsov apparently had planned to travel to Kyiv via Stockholm to gather Ukrainian constituents and launch a propaganda campaign for an immediate peace treaty in the spring of 1917.<sup>104</sup> He allegedly had

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 200.

high hopes of heading the new Ukrainian government's press agency.<sup>105</sup> But despite the Austrian authorities' reported willingness to support this venture he remained in Bern, Switzerland, and Austrian-controlled L'viv. Dontsov later claimed to have unsuccessfully sought Archduke Wilhelm's assistance to return to Kyiv sooner,<sup>106</sup> but it seems likely that he avoided embroiling himself in Ukrainian politics sooner for reasons other than a lack of means. He had, after all, burned whatever bridges there were between himself and the Ukrainian Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries in power in the Central Rada. His connection to life in the Ukrainian capital had weakened during his decade abroad, and the situation there had changed dramatically in his absence. Instead of joining the Ukrainian Revolution, Dontsov resumed his publicistic work in L'viv, completing his law degree there in August 1917. His absence during the birth pangs of the UNR prompted accusations of cowardice, betrayal, and irresponsibility from his former USDRP comrade, Volodymyr Vynnychenko (then prime minister of the Central Rada).<sup>107</sup>

Whatever his motives for avoiding the UNR in its troubled infancy, Dontsov revised his ideology to match the swiftly changing times. Following the comparative-historical method—the idea that laws of human development can be discerned and extrapolated from the comparison of phenomena in neighboring and otherwise analogous regions (a relic of nineteenth-century positivist thinking that Dontsov nevertheless returned to throughout his career)<sup>108</sup>—he developed an increasingly nationalistic set of values and predictions in the course of the First World War. The string of successes enjoyed by national liberation movements in the Balkans and East

---

<sup>105</sup> Ievhen Bachyns'kyi (Ievhen Bachyns'kyi, "Rik 1917. Pochatok druhoi revoliutsii v Rosii, iak vona vidbulasia sered ukrainsiv u Shvaitarii (Za tohochasnymy notatkamy)," *Vyzvol'nyi shliakh*, no. 1 (1959), 38.

<sup>106</sup> Sosnovs'kyi, *Dmytro Dontsov*, 137.

<sup>107</sup> Volodymyr Vynnychenko, *Zapovit bortsiam za vyzvolennia* (Kyiv: Vydavnyche tovarystvo 'Krynytsia' knyoliubiv Ukrainy, 1991), 70.

<sup>108</sup> Dmytro Dontsov, *Dvi literaturni nashoi doby* (Lviv: Prosvita, 1991), 171.

Central Europe convinced him that Ukraine, too, was destined to have a successful national revolution and gain independence.<sup>109</sup>

Reflecting on the emerging European order and the intensifying Ukrainian-Russia conflict, Dontsov proclaimed the dawn of a new “national era” that would supplant the old politics of imperialism, liberalism, and socialism.<sup>110</sup> With the exception of Ukraine’s easternmost regions, he argued, the Ukrainian people instinctively opposed Russia, a destroyer of national cultures and a menace to the entire civilized world. Russia was the number-one enemy of the Polish nation as well, and the greater threat beside which the localized Ukrainian-Polish conflict over East Galicia paled. Like Poland, Ukraine would be a better state for Europe to deal with than Russia on key issues, such as the fate of Danzig and the Dardanelles, because it sought international dialog rather than constant wars of expansion. “The disintegration of Russian power, its breakdown into many centers of political thought and will, therefore lies in the most specific interests of the European world.”<sup>111</sup> An independent Ukraine would thus ensure the end of the expansionist projects that had bathed Eastern and Central Europe in blood. He used rhetoric of this sort to drum up support for Ukrainian-Teutonic cooperation, first against tsarist and then against revolutionary Petrograd, which he lambasted in a series of articles depicting Miliukov as an impotent liberal anachronism, Alexander Kerensky as the “Don Quixote of the

---

<sup>109</sup> Volodymyr Holovchenko, *Vid “Samostiinoi Ukrainy” do Soiuzu Vyzvolennya Ukrainy: narysy z istorii ukrains’koi sotsial-demokratii pochatku XX st.* (Kharkiv: Maidan, 1996), 133. Iryna Shlikhta insists, however, that methodology was not the main thing for Dontsov, citing the memoirs of Nadiia Syrovtsova, a colleague of Dontsov’s in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Ukrainian State (Hetmanate), who writes that “reading various literature, [Dontsov] took excerpts, and there was a big card file. Then, when it was time to write some work, he simple ‘pulled out’ the appropriate citations from the card file, from here came the brilliant wave of citations in various languages.” Nadiia Surovtsova, *Spohady* (Kyiv: Vydavnytsvo imeni Olena Teliha, 1996, 146). On the syncretic haphazardness of Dontsov’s “method” also see Motyl, *Turn to the Right*, 67-68.

<sup>110</sup> Von einem Ukrainer, “Die separatistische Bewegung der Ukraine,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 1467 (10 August 1917). Republished in Ukrainian as Dmytro Dontsov, “Separystychnyi rukh na Ukraine,” *Shliakhy*, no. 3-4 (1917) in *Tvory*, vol. 1, 256.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

Revolution,” and Lenin as a dangerous “Russian Torquemada” (a reference to the infamous Grand Inquisitor of fifteenth-century Spain).<sup>112</sup>

Dontsov’s views on what defined the stateless Ukrainian nation and what it might become with (or as) a state differed from the strictly ethnographic and racialist ones he later adopted. “We must be statesmen more than nationalists,” he wrote in 1918, “remembering that the Jew, the Pole, or the Moskal who stands firmly on the foundation of Ukrainian statehood is a better support for it than Ukrainians who dream about federation.”<sup>113</sup> Dontsov derided Russian politics, society, and culture as an aberration from the legal-democratic path of development exhibited by Western countries—the ideal that he expected Ukraine to follow as a matter of course at this time<sup>114</sup>—but Dontsov’s Russophobia did not disclose the ethnic and racialist overtones that it later would. Russianness was a state of mind and a mode of politics, not a nationality, but a negation of the national idea. He professed to favor a democratic form of government that “wants to raise the masses to the ideals [of the individual],” and not the Russian one, which seeks “to lower these ideals to the desires and tastes of the uncivilized masses.”<sup>115</sup> The question of whether the state preceded the nation or vice versa remained muddled in Dontsov’s thinking (one could find excerpts that suggest he held both positions between 1914 and 1918) but he praised Ukrainians for the “miracle” of having created the kind of civil society needed to follow the Western path, despite lacking a state, and thereby demonstrating their high level of civic awareness and activeness.<sup>116</sup> By contrast, the weakness of civil society and the overbearing strength of the state in Russia combined, paradoxically, to generate a tendency

<sup>112</sup> Dmytro Dontsov, “Kharakterystychni postati rosiis’koi revoliutsii,” *Shliakhy* no. 3-4 (1917), in *Tvory*, vol. 2, 281-91.

<sup>113</sup> Dmytro Dontsov, *Mizhnarodne polozhennia Ukrainy i Rosiia* (Kyiv: Robitnycha knyharnia, 1918), 20.

<sup>114</sup> Dmytro Dontsov, *Kul’tura prymityvizmu (holovni pidtsavy rosiiskoi kul’tury)* (Cherkasy: Siach, 1919), 12.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>116</sup> Dmytro Dontsov, “Ukrains’ke miraculum,” *Shliakhy* no. 11-12 (1917) in *Tvory*, vol. 1, 292-98.

toward “anarchism.”<sup>117</sup> Dontsov attributed this to the Russian “psyche,” characterized by a lack of self-discipline, self-respect, and respect for others, as well as the essence of Russian civilization—a barbaric culture that allegedly enslaved all its estates.<sup>118</sup> Dontsov blamed all these ills on Russia’s geography, the inexhaustibility of its human and natural resources, and the merger of the individual with the collective (manifest in the repartitional commune, the Russian Orthodox Church, and other collectivistic institutions).<sup>119</sup> The centuries-long repression of political dissent bred an obsequious idiocy in the Russian populace, even in their moments of revolt. Russia’s mystical conception of “the people,” its near-perfect obliteration of individualism, its messianic faith in the justness and inevitability of world domination by itself alone (“the Third Rome”); all of it forced Ukrainians to turn west. “We do not have an enemy in the system, in tsarism, in Kadetism, or in Bolshevism [but] only in that from which tsarism, Kadetism, and Bolshevism emanate.”<sup>120</sup> After the Bolsheviks had taken power, Dontsov repeated the idea that the problem was the insidious culture of despotism underlying the Russian state, not the form that it happened to take at any given moment.<sup>121</sup>

Dontsov’s understanding of nation and nationalism evolved on the basis of his analysis and comparison of the Russian and Ukrainian cases. In the former, he identified two strains: an “official” “bureaucratic” nationalism, designed to serve the imperial state but largely incapable of inspiring non-Russians to action, and a more dangerous popular or social one, based on an ambivalently ethnic conception of Russian-ness that claimed, at a minimum, all Orthodox East

---

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Dontsov, *Kul'tura prymityvizmu*, 36-38.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>121</sup> Dontsov, “Peterburz'kyi perevorot,” *Shliakhy*, no. 3-4 (April 1917), 128.

Slavs.<sup>122</sup> The greatest peril, he thought, was a synthesis of the two: “Tragedy and comedy at once. The struggle of a caste for its privilege alongside a nation that wants to struggle with all the peoples of Russia *against this caste*, but also *against all foreign peoples with the same caste*.”<sup>123</sup> Dontsov’s prewar and wartime writings generally linked nationalism with democracy, but he regarded Russian nationalism as an instrument of imperialism and tyranny, irrespective of whatever its proponents called themselves. While a surfeit of statism perverted Russian nationalism, the lack of a state and a political elite prevented Ukrainian nationalism from getting off the ground. In a particularly controversial essay from 1917, “The Bastard Nation” (*Narid-Bastard*), Dontsov formulated a Darwinian yet subjectivist definition of nationhood: “The nation is created not by ethnographic independence, not by ancientness of origin, not by forms—only by that mystical force (mystical because the reasons for it are not clear), which is called ‘the will to life,’ the will to create a single collective individuality among the races.”<sup>124</sup> By this definition, Ukraine had not yet become a nation at all—a task that would fall to a new elite of parental figures who could discipline, educate, and organize the orphaned Ukrainian ethnos.<sup>125</sup>

In search of such leaders, Dontsov found the Ukrainian Democratic-Agrarian Party (*Ukrains’ka demokratychno-khliborobs’ka partiia*, or UDKhP), embracing its nationalist, conservative, monarchist, and ostensibly propeasant yet authoritarian statist ideology. The party’s ideological leaders were Mykola Mikhnovs’kyi and Viacheslav Lypyns’kyi, both of

---

<sup>122</sup> This distinction, Shlikhta remarks, anticipated later theories of “official nationalism,” such as Benedict Anderson’s, which also points to imperial (and Soviet) Russia to as a classic instance. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the Spread and Origins of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), chap. 6. Shlikhta, *Dmytro Dontsov*, 75-78.

<sup>123</sup> Dmytro Dontsov, “Voskresinnia mertvykh (pered pohrebinniam despotychnoi Rosii),” *Shliakhy*, no. 1-2 (February 1917).

<sup>124</sup> Dmytro Dontsov, “Narid-bastard” *Shliakhy* no. 1-4 (1917) in *Tvory*, vol. 2, 139-49, 143.

<sup>125</sup> Iuryi Lypa (1900-1944), a young follower-turned-critic of Dontsov’s, returned to this concept in the late 1930s, after his break with the ideologue: “In this theory of the ‘bastard people’ the defeatism of the Ukrainian intellectuals already achieved the absolute destruction of the organicity of their own race. This was already not self-effacement, but it was self-destruction, finally the enslavement of the spirit of the race.” Iuryi Lypa, *Pryznachennya Ukrainy* (New York: Hoverlia, 1953), 211.

whom Dontsov had already known and admired for years. As a student he had read Mikhnovs'kyi's famous 1905 pamphlet, *Samostiina Ukraina* (Independent Ukraine), and claimed that it exerted a decisive influence on him.<sup>126</sup> Still, he retained a certain critical distance from Mikhnovs'kyi's ideas, writing in 1918 that *Samostiina Ukraina* is “an idealistic mistake that rests only upon historical tradition” (namely, the rights promised to the Ukrainian Cossacks in the 1654 Treaty of Pereiaslav yet subsequently violated by the Tsardom of Muscovy).<sup>127</sup> This was a charge that Dontsov could easily have leveled at himself for having devoted the preceding three years to researching the international agreements and alliances of the early-modern Ukrainian Hetmanate, as if these were pertinent to twentieth-century diplomacy. The more influential figure, for Dontsov and for the UDKhP, was Lypyns'kyi, who drafted the party's program to solve the land question through the state's purchase of Ukraine's latifundia to be leased to poor peasants and agrarian cooperatives, leaving middle-sized landholdings to remain in private hands.<sup>128</sup> The UDKhP followed Lypyns'kyi in declaring itself an advocate of private property, Ukrainian national sovereignty, and the interests of Ukraine's landowners as well as peasants—positions that put it decidedly at odds with the Ukrainian SRs and SDs. Though not always in synch politically and ideologically, Lypyns'kyi and Dontsov worked closely together in 1918, remaining on good terms until the early 1920s (after which their views, tactics, and circles diverged considerably, bringing their friendship and collaboration to an end). Like

---

<sup>126</sup> Dontsov, *Rik 1918*, Kyiv, 36, 142.

<sup>127</sup> Dmytro Dontsov, *Ukrains'ka derzhavana dumka i Ievropa* (L'viv: Vydannia “Vsesvitn'oi biblioteky,” 1918), 40. Later, in the 1920s, Dontsov again evaluated Mikhnovs'kyi's contribution to the Ukrainian national movement positively, calling it “a new worldview, nationalist and activist to the core, though still not willing to leave the shell of old slogans.” Dmytro Dontsov, *Tvory*, ed. Iaroslav Dashkevych (L'viv: Kal'variia, 2001), 347.

<sup>128</sup> For his classic statement of the “Democratic Agrarian” vision for a Ukrainian monarchist state buttressed by reinvigorated noble and peasant classes, and organized on the principle of the private ownership of land, see V'iacheslav Lypyns'kyi, *Lysty do brativ-kliborobiv pro ideiu i orhanizatsiiu ukrains'koho monarkhizmu; pysani 1919-1926* (Vienna: Carl Hermann, 1926).

Dontsov, Lypyns'kyi entrenched himself in the Germanic world, becoming the Ukrainian ambassador to Austria-Hungary in 1918 and between Vienna and Berlin for the rest of his life.<sup>129</sup>

During the First World War, Dontsov came to share many of Lypyns'kyi's ideas, including: 1) a cyclical yet nondeterministic conception of history and civilizations; 2) an emphasis on agriculture, territorial patriotism, and the reassimilation of Ukraine's native yet Polonized or Russified aristocracy as the basis for a Ukrainian national rebirth; 3) the desirability of social stratification and nondemocratic or "classocratic" forms of government, based on iron discipline and unity of purpose; 4) the primacy of the will over the intellect, and the political inefficacy of appeals to reason; and 5) the belief that the church should serve as an autonomous source of the nation's moral and cultural strength. Dontsov concurred with Lypyns'kyi's critique of the leftwing Ukrainian intelligentsia and the Central Rada in particular, but tended to prefer the populist view that nations precede and invent states, not vice versa.<sup>130</sup> Before Ukraine could become a state, Dontsov thought, it must become a nation (that is, Ukrainian people must be made to *desire* that they become a "collective individuality"). Lypyns'kyi took the opposing, "statist" perspective—the Ukrainian nation would have to be built from the top down, starting with the creation of a new ruling class, drawn from the ranks of the country's gentry, and the immediate dismissal of the current Ukrainian government.

By the time Dontsov finally returned to Kyiv in March 1918, he, Lypyns'kyi, the UDKhP, and the German military's occupation regime had reason to be dissatisfied with the Central Rada's performance. The UNR's socialist agrarian reforms, which redistributed land to the peasants (or encouraged them to seize it independently), created disorder, lowered

---

<sup>129</sup> Lypyns'kyi served as an officer in the Russian Imperial Army during the war, then worked to Ukrainize its ranks for use in the Ukrainian Revolution after the overthrow of the tsar. Prior to 1914 he had also advocated the Ukrainization of the Polish nobility living in majority Ukrainian areas (such as his own native region, Volhynia).

<sup>130</sup> Motyl, *Turn to the Right*, 83-85.

productivity, and interfered with deliveries of grain. Conversely, the military occupation and the requisitions embittered farmers, turning them against the Germans and the Central Rada, and weakening both. Despite assurances that the German intervention would not interfere in Ukraine's internal governance and operations (apart from the railroads)—that they were “friendly guests” who would leave when asked to do so, just as they were invited—Erich Ludendorff and the Supreme Army Command quickly grew impatient with the Central Rada, which they had never trusted. Frequently in conflict with the civil, political, and diplomatic authorities of the Foreign Office and the Imperial Chancellery, yet indisputably in charge on the Eastern Front, Ludendorff appointed Field Marshall Hermann von Eichhorn chief of German forces in Ukraine, but delegated most decision-making to General Wilhelm Groener, who was dispatched to relieve General Max Hoffman (one of the few high-ranking German officers with expertise in Russian and Eastern European matters). The Foreign Office nevertheless insisted on the appointment of Alfons Mumm von Schwarzenstein as the Reich's ambassador to Kyiv to act as a moderating influence on Ludendorff and the Supreme Army Command. (Mumm had served as director of the Central Propaganda Agency in Berlin since the outbreak of the war.) Further complicating matters were the conflicts between the Germans and the Austrians, who administered their own occupation zone in Southern Ukraine and had their own candidate for the Ukrainian throne, Archduke Wilhelm von Habsburg (then an officer in the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen [*Sichovi stril'tsi*]<sup>131</sup> fighting against Bolshevik forces). The Central Powers' armies and the Central Rada soon began losing control over the countryside. Responding to the mounting anti-German sentiment of the Ukrainian peasantry, Groener censured the Rada and recommended the use of force to carry out grain requisitions. Ludendorff pushed for the

---

<sup>131</sup> A volunteer legion formed under the auspices of Vienna from ethnically Ukrainian POWs of the Imperial Russian Army.

restoration of land to the former noble owners, hoping to intensify agricultural production and simplify extraction to the German home front, but the Rada refused to yield. The militarization of the seizure of Ukrainian food began in April 1918, sparking armed resistance against the occupation and the police of the UNR. Retaliation was disproportionate and indiscriminate, with Eichhorn declaring German and Austrian courts martial legitimate in cases relating to “public order.” The number of death sentences handed down in such trials rose. Fearing the growth of Ukrainian military power, Mumm and Groener forced the Rada to dissolve the German- and Austrian-sponsored volunteer divisions that had participated in the liberation of the country. With Ukrainian-German relations rapidly deteriorating, Mumm considered replacing the Rada but hesitated. Nevertheless, Mumm tentatively distanced himself from both the leftist Rada and the idea of Ukrainian independence. As of mid-April, Eichhorn, Groener, and the Supreme Army Command had embraced the idea of a bloodless coup d’état that would put a more cooperative and efficient dictatorship in charge, and begun the search for native co-conspirators.

Lypyns’kyi’s state-building (as opposed to nation-building) prescriptions carried the day on April 29, 1918, when the German occupation regime and the UDKhP conspired to remove the Central Rada from power and declare Pavlo Skoropads’kyi hetman of Ukraine. Skoropads’kyi was an aristocratic Ukrainian Cossack, aide-de-camp of Tsar Nicholas II, and decorated general in the Imperial Russian Army who had nevertheless been active in the Ukrainian national movement since the February Revolution. He returned to Kyiv at the beginning of the German occupation, later claiming in his memoirs to have organized the putsch himself, presenting the Germans with a “*fait accompli*.” Skoropads’kyi exaggerated: although he and the Central Powers did work toward the Rada’s ouster independently of one another, the Germans provided the military means of carrying out and sustaining the Hetman’s rule, and, despite initial pledges of

neutrality, heavily interfered in how he governed throughout the alliance, which lasted until the end of the war on the Western Front (November 11, 1918).<sup>132</sup> The conspirers renamed the Ukrainian People's Republic to the "Ukrainian State," or the Hetmanate.

The UDKhP supported the plot from its inception, jostling to position itself as the political and ideological foundation of the Hetman's dictatorship. These were the first "Hetmanites"—a conservative monarchist strain of Ukrainian nationalism that would survive until Skoropads'kyi's death near the end of the Second World War. Having returned to Kyiv, Dontsov worked his way into the UDKhP's leadership and embraced its ideology. Vynnychenko alleged that Dontsov personally took part in the anti-Rada conspiracy to put Skoropads'kyi in power, but his actual role in the coup, if any, is unclear.<sup>133</sup> The Hetmanites' publications after 1921 do not support Vynnychenko's claim.<sup>134</sup> In any event, Dontsov enthusiastically supported Skoropads'kyi and his government from the outset. He recorded his impressions of the general in his diary, *1918, Kyiv*—a key source for understanding Dontsov's role in the Hetmanate despite the fact that he did not publish it until 1954, with any number of omissions and revisions made to fit the times and shield the author's legacy. Given his opposition to the hetman and his followers after the war, however, we can take Dontsov at his word when he claims to have seen in Skoropads'kyi a politically courageous and ambitious individual amid a morass of "demo-socialist leadership"; a man of war who might have become Ukraine's Napoleon—the creator of a new "ruling caste" capable of bringing both the "Jacobins" and the "Monarchists" into line.<sup>135</sup>

The realities of the Hetmanate, however, quickly disillusioned Ukrainian nationalists such as Dontsov. The Hetmanate's attempts to juggle German, Ukrainian, and Russian interests

---

<sup>132</sup> Fedyshyn, *Germany's Drive to the East*, 141-42.

<sup>133</sup> Volodymyr Vynnychenko, *Vidrodzhennia natsii, U 3-kh ch.* vol. 3 (Kyiv: Politydav Ukrainy, 1990), 38, 105.

<sup>134</sup> Shlikhta, *Dmytro Dontsov*, 53-54.

<sup>135</sup> Dontsov, *Rik 1918, Kyiv*, 7-9, 36-37.

on the left and the right posed intractable problems. Skoropads'kyi was not only beholden to and dependent upon Berlin, but was also a product of the conservative officer class of the defunct Imperial Russian Army. Unmoored Russian officers—most famously the talented future White Army General Pyotr Wrangel—rallied around the hetman and the Ukrainian State, not out of sympathy for Ukrainian independence or German ambitions in the east, but in hopes of living to defeat the Bolsheviks who had exiled them from Russia's heartland and, ultimately, to reconstitute the Russian Empire and the Romanov dynasty.<sup>136</sup> Despite being agents of the Ukrainian State, the hetman's cabinet of ministers and advisors thus had a markedly Russian, Russophile, and Russophone makeup. One important exception was Dmytro Doroshenko (1882-1951), who served as foreign minister and faced the (ultimately impossible) task of reconciling the regime's contradictory pro-Ukrainian, pro-German, and pro-Russian elements and tendencies.<sup>137</sup> Of noble Ukrainian Cossack origins, Doroshenko had been a member of the liberal democratic Ukrainian Party of Socialist Federalists (UPSF), which supported federal ties between Ukraine and the Russian Republic, but resigned from the party to join the hetman's foreign ministry, betraying his comrades in the Ukrainian intelligentsia and the Central Rada. Given Skoropads'kyi's reliance on tsarist, conservative connections from the officer corps, including ultranationalist Black Hundreds, the Ukrainian State also adopted a rightwing orientation that alienated the predominantly socialist, liberal, and democratic political culture of the Ukrainian intelligentsia. The hetman tried and failed to bring representatives of the Ukrainian left (including Socialist Federalists, Socialist Revolutionaries, and Social Democrats) into his government. Patriotic, they naturally resented Skoropads'kyi as a military dictator in thrall to

---

<sup>136</sup> Quixotic Whites in the Hetman's service are the subject of Mikhail Bulgakov's 1925 novel, *The White Guard* (Belaia gvardiia), set in Kyiv during the fall and winter of 1918.

<sup>137</sup> Doroshenko went on to become one of the leading emigre Ukrainian historians of the interwar period. A member of the "Statist School," founded by Lypyns'kyi, Doroshenko's participant-observer account of the Ukrainian Revolution is an essential source. Dmytro Doroshenko. *Istoriia Ukrainy 1917-1923 rr.* (Kyiv: Tempora, 2002).

German invaders, but without their help badly needed agrarian reforms and outreach efforts among the discontented Ukrainian peasantry could not get off the ground.

Pressure on the hetman to politically and linguistically “Ukrainize” his government, its largely Russian-speaking bureaucracy, and Ukrainian society at large came from the German occupation authorities, which wanted their client state to have a broad and firm base of support. In order to overcome barriers to communication that hindered the day-to-day operations of the Hetmanate (especially food deliveries) and damaged its relations with the country’s peasant majority and nationally conscious leftwing elite, Ukrainian was to become the national language of the state and education. But most of what remained of the old regime’s local government carried on using Russian out of habit or did not know Ukrainian at all, and there was a dearth of Ukrainian speakers qualified for administrative work to replace them.<sup>138</sup> Demands for the Ukrainization of the hetman’s regime also came from the Ukrainian National-State Union (UNDS)—an umbrella organization of pro-Ukrainian political actors, many of whom supported the Central Rada—but their vision of nation-building, based on agrarian socialism, was anathema to that of the hetman, his conservative allies, and much of the German military leadership. Hoping to transcend these divisions and win over Ukrainian nationalists, the German Foreign Office organized a visit to Kyiv by Paul Rohrbach and Axel Schmidt, another well-known pro-Ukrainian academic from Berlin. The weeklong affair convinced Rohrbach that the hetman was, “at the bottom of his heart, more Russian than Ukrainian,” having “always looked with an eye to Moscow,” and that the Hetmanate was “of Great Russian orientation and is endeavoring to lead Ukraine back to Moscow. It simply cannot be trusted, since it is composed mainly of Kadets. These people have clearly shown themselves as enemies of Ukraine not only during the Tsarist

---

<sup>138</sup> Borislav Chernev, “Ukrainization and Its Contradictions in the Context of the Brest-Litovsk System,” in *The Empire and Nationalism at War*, eds. Eric Lohr, Vera Tolz, Alexander Semyonov, and Mark von Hagen, (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2014), 163-88.

regime but since the Revolution as well.”<sup>139</sup> Although Rohrbach accused Mumm of disqualifying ignorance on Ukrainian matters, the latter approved of the agrarian reform and Ukrainian national education system proposed in Rohrbach’s report to the Imperial Chancellery. Mumm even stipulated that the hetman’s compliance in this nation-building program was a requirement for continued German support. Skoropad’skyi acquiesced.



Figure 2.3. Hetman Skoropad’skyi flanked by Generals Ludendorff (right) and Hindenburg (left), September 9, 1918. *Source:* Geiser Theodore Collection, Imperial War Museum.

Precedents for the targeted, German-sponsored “nationalization” or “indigenization” of nations in wartime Eastern Europe already existed in Ober Ost—the military state overseeing the German-occupied areas of Poland and the Baltic coast. The “*Kultur* program,” which historian Vejas Liulevicius describes as a colonial-utopian “civilizing” mission, sought the creation of subordinate states and peoples that would be “German in content, ethnic in form.”<sup>140</sup> Benighted local cultures would be permitted to flourish outwardly while accepting the imposition of

<sup>139</sup> Paul Rohrbach, *Um des Teufels Handschrift: Zwei Menschenalter erlebter Weltgeschichte* (Hamburg: Hand Dulk, 1953), 220-21. Quoted in Fedysyn, *Germany’s Drive to the East*, 152-53.

<sup>140</sup> Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern front: Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), chap. 4.

purportedly superior Teutonic management, military discipline, and cultural and technological gifts. The Germans implemented this program (a predecessor to subsequent Soviet indigenization policies) later and more haphazardly in Ukraine and with even more dubious results.

In the course of the summer and fall of 1918, the hetman and the Germans charged Dontsov with carrying these Ukrainization efforts forward. Although he later decried Soviet Ukrainization as a cynical ploy, Dontsov approved of the idea of synthesizing German *Kultur* with the promotion of Ukrainian national consciousness through schools, newspapers, and government under the Hetmanate. On May 24 he became director of the Ukrainian State's Ukrainian Telegraph Agency (UTA) and press bureau, overseeing the production and dissemination of propaganda and news in support of the Hetmanate and the German-Austrian occupation. He took the position shortly after Doroshenko's dismissal, which followed demands by the UNDS for a pro-Ukrainian change of cadres at the highest level.<sup>141</sup> Skoropads'kyi regularly consulted Dontsov on matters of Ukrainization and Russification, as well as the regime's relations with the Central Powers, Russians, Bolsheviks, and peasants. Hoping to reach the latter, the Hetman ordered Dontsov to develop a publication to rally the peasantry around the Ukrainian State. The result was *Selians'ke slovo* (The Village Word), which broadcasted the prohetman ideology and activities of the UDKhP into the countryside, seeking to build a broad-based party of conservative nationalist peasants, landowners, and intellectuals. To this end Dontsov had the support and counsel of Lypyns'kyi—the hetman's newly appointed ambassador to Vienna—and Mikhnovs'kyi. In his diary, Dontsov recorded his advocacy for state censorship of the (competing) democratic press during meetings around the hetman's table.<sup>142</sup> He argued, moreover, that German outreach to the Ukrainian population should be conducted in Ukrainian,

---

<sup>141</sup> Doroshenko, *Istoriia Ukrainy*, vol. 2, 76.

<sup>142</sup> Dontsov, *Rik 1918*, Kyiv, 13-15. June 3.

not Russian, and that every effort must be made to defend the Ukrainian State from both the Whites and the Reds. Dontsov's opposition to Ukraine's federation with Russia and insistence upon the use of Ukrainian provoked attacks from Russian-language papers in Kyiv of the right and the left, including *Kievskaiia mysl'* (Kievan Thought) and *Rabochaia zhizn'* (Workers' Life).

Dontsov exhibited hostility toward Ukraine's Jews, regarding them as inherently pro-Russian, pro-Bolshevik, and anti-Ukrainian fifth columnists, yet some critics mocked his press bureau as "the all-Jewish congress of the Russian press in Ukraine."<sup>143</sup> The Ukrainian Social Democratic press charged that Dontsov secretly harbored pro-Russian sentiments, pointing to his collaboration with the hetman.<sup>144</sup> But his rapport with influential Germans and Austrians, such as Archduke Wilhelm and Paul Rohrbach, made Dontsov a valuable asset despite the controversy he courted. The hetman even regarded him as a candidate for the position of minister of foreign affairs. Still, the occupation authorities were not always pleased with Dontsov's performance. General Groener complained to Skoropads'kyi that the UTA gave too much attention to disturbances in the provinces (which were embarrassing for the regime), and not enough to drumming up support for the Hetmanate. Dontsov answered that he was between "a hammer and an anvil" at the press bureau—on the one hand was the "Jewish-Russian press," on the other were the Germans, who, he thought, were angry at the shortage of pro-German advertisements broadcasted by the UTA.<sup>145</sup> He nevertheless took great pride in his ability to communicate effectively in German, which he thought distinguished him from "amateurs," such as Doroshenko and Zhuk.<sup>146</sup> With the "Great Ukrainian Jacquerie" raging in the provinces, Dontsov felt alone in his emphasis on the peasantry living outside the capital and the need for a new party

---

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. June 4.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 17-18. June 8.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 19. June 10.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 21.

to represent and mobilize them, while his collaborators, such as Mikhnovs'kyi, regarded Kyiv as the site of the most important political work to be done.<sup>147</sup>

Dontsov weighed in on other debates, such as the future of the Crimean peninsula, which the grand strategists of the German Empire coveted and which Russian nationalists considered their sacred patrimony. Much to the annoyance of interested Germans and Russians, Dontsov gave speeches and published articles calling Crimea an “integral part of Ukraine” that, given its enormous strategic importance, should be granted neither autonomy nor democracy.<sup>148</sup> The ideal Ukrainian nation-state would take the form of a strong, centralized, authoritarian government expanding from the Kuban region (north of the Caucasus), to Kholm (Polish: Chełm) and East Galicia. (The former ultimately went to interwar Soviet Russia, while the Second Polish Republic acquired the latter two provinces.) Dontsov was steadfast in his opposition to democratic federalism, which many powerful figures within the Hetmanate continued to advocate, preferring a military dictatorship.

Another pressing and related matter was the need for a large Ukrainian army loyal to the Hetman and ready to halt the threats posed by the Whites, who enjoyed the support of the Entente powers, and the Reds, who were already making gains in the unfolding Russian Civil War. Dontsov may have resented Skoropads'kyi's other advisors, who called for “peaceful negotiations with the Bolsheviks,”<sup>149</sup> but he participated in the temporarily successful peace talks with the Petrograd Soviet between May 23 and October 7.<sup>150</sup> The German Army's refusal to permit, let alone support, the creation of an independent military for the Ukrainian State forced

---

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 19-20. June 11.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 17. June 7.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 12. May 31.

<sup>150</sup> Dontsov refused to head the commission himself but distrusted Oleksandr Shul'hyn (a leading federalist in the former Central Rada whom the Hetman appointed instead), writing: “You have reason [to think that it is] unpleasant for me to remain among shady politicians. For this reason I did not accept the position of leader of the ‘entire mission’ offered to me.” Dmytro Dontsov to Mykhailo Tyshkevych, TsDIAL, f. 681, op. 1, spr. 16, ark. 69.

Dontsov and his allies, above all Colonel Ievhen Konovalets'—leader of the Sich Riflemen disarmed by their erstwhile German and Austrian sponsors for refusing to back the hetman's coup—to plan for the imminent siege of Kyiv in secret.<sup>151</sup> Meanwhile, the domestic and international position of the Hetmanate continued to deteriorate: the Germans were losing on the Western Front, the Entente was not interested in Ukrainian independence, and internal opposition to Skoropads'kyi was gaining steam. The followers of Symon Petliura (who had risen to the rank of Chief Otaman of the UNR's Army and led the defense of Kyiv from the Red Guard only to be jailed under Skoropads'kyi) organized themselves into a variety of regular and irregular armed units to struggle against the hetman, the Germans, and the Bolsheviks, and restore the UNR to power. Further complicating the situation was the anarchist leader Nestor Makhno and his Revolutionary Insurrectionary Army, which fiercely battled the Whites, Reds, Germans, and Ukrainian nationalists alike, and soon carved out the so-called Free Territory, an experiment in stateless libertarian communism, in southeastern Ukraine (Dontsov's home region). Dontsov especially feared the latter movement, *makhnovshchyna*, regarding the black flag of anarchism as a harbinger of chaos and ruin, and the antithesis of his own worldview.

Trepidations of disorder and collapse were well founded among supporters of the Hetmanate during the summer of 1918. On July 30 the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Boris Donskoi assassinated Field Marshal Eichhorn, commander of the German occupation of Ukraine. Demands for repression, high-profile arrests, gunfights and explosions in the streets, and general confusion followed. Dontsov watched the bedlam from his balcony in downtown Kyiv, blaming the Entente, the Reds, the Whites, and the Poles, working together or independently, for the

---

<sup>151</sup> Dontsov, *Rik 1918, Kyiv*, 36. July 12.

outburst of sabotage and unrest.<sup>152</sup> Simultaneously, Lypyns'kyi reported that Vienna, despite rumors of backing the young Archduke Wilhelm's ascension to the "throne" in Kyiv, had entirely withdrawn its support for Ukrainian nation-building—especially with regard to Kholm and East Galicia—leaving the Hetmanate with only the German Empire on which to rely.<sup>153</sup> But the position of Ukrainian independence faced new challenges in Berlin too, and from the most embarrassing sources. On August 22, Fedir Lyzohub, prime minister of the Ukrainian State, gave an interview to the liberal newspaper *Berliner Tageblatt* in which he discussed a future Ukrainian-Russian federation as a desirable possibility, invoking the 1654 Treaty of Pereiaslav. The interview outraged Dontsov. Declaring it a "*causus belli*," he demanded Lyzohub's dismissal or a public retraction, to no avail.<sup>154</sup> According to Dontsov, the German military command and the hetman's court adopted an increasingly Russophile, federalist outlook from September, while Ukraine's hedonistic would-be statesmen, seemingly incapable of serious work even in the face of ruin, danced and drank.<sup>155</sup>

By early October the defeat of the Central Powers appeared inevitable, as peace negotiations—and preparations for new wars—to determine Eastern Europe's future got underway. The German Reich accepted Wilson's *Fourteen Points* but, hoping to retain its gains on the Eastern Front, promised to withdraw its troops only on the condition that the status quo post-Brest-Litovsk be maintained there. This included preservation of Ukraine's independence from Russia and, problematically, the reign of Skoropads'kyi, who lurched toward the Russian right despite renewed pressure to Ukrainize his cabinet and implement agrarian reforms.<sup>156</sup> As rumors of an impending withdrawal of the demoralized German and Austrian troops stationed in

---

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 51. August 5.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 53-54. August 13.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 58-59. August 22.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 60-70. August 26, September 4 and 25.

<sup>156</sup> Fedysyhn, *Germany's Drive to the East*, 233-35.

Ukraine spread, the White movement (represented in Kyiv by Pavel Miliukov) grew bolder, organizing large demonstrations in Kyiv, amassing volunteers, and attacking Ukrainian nationalist groups in the provinces. In response, Dontsov claims to have added his voice to German demands for immediate land reforms and a recomposition of the hetman's cabinet. He urged representatives of five Ukrainian newspapers to launch a campaign against the Russian organization of landowners.<sup>157</sup> An emergency quorum of the UDKhP's leadership, including Mikhnovs'kyi and Dontsov, resolved to lobby the hetman and the occupation authorities for the deportation of pro-Russian agitators, the dispersal of pro-Russian forces, and the closure of pro-Russian newspapers. Skoropads'kyi was convinced, however, that the Entente desired a "single and indivisible Russia," and hence that he could not appoint Ukrainian conservatives or socialists and retain the good will of the war's imminent victors.<sup>158</sup> The rifts in Ukrainian politics deepened as nine of the fifteen ministers in the hetman's cabinet declared themselves in favor of union with a "new" anti-Bolshevik Russia on October 19. Fearing a Russian uprising in Kyiv, Dontsov again urged the hetman to raise a pro-Ukrainian army,<sup>159</sup> wishing to retain their hegemony in Ukraine, the German and Austrian authorities both opposed the creation of such an army until the last possible moment, just days before revolution toppled the Kaiserreich and the Entente claimed victory on November 11. Even then, the Hetmanate lacked the financial and political resources to raise more than an entirely insufficient 65,000 men.<sup>160</sup> Despite objections by the militantly anti-Bolshevik Ludendorff, German occupation forces began evacuating Ukraine, leaving the Hetmanate to face Petliura, the Whites, and the Reds alone. The Germans left only a small garrison behind in Kyiv, pledging neutrality in the ensuing conflict. Meanwhile, Austria-

---

<sup>157</sup> Dontsov, *Rik 1918, Kyiv*, 75-76. October 11-12.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-79. October 15.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-81. October 18-20.

<sup>160</sup> Fedyshyn, *Germany's Drive to the East*, 237-39.

Hungary's collapse left the fate of East Galicia, Kholm, and Volhynia to be determined by the Ukrainian-Polish War (1918-1919). In a move of desperation, Skoropads'kyi appealed to the Entente powers for assistance, openly pivoting toward "Russophile" positions that he expected to appease them, and on November 14 proclaimed the Hetmanate's federal union with Russia.

The hetman's declaration, an ultimately ill-advised gamble on the future success of the White movement and the Entente's beneficence, outraged Ukrainian nationalists across the political spectrum, and brought an end to Dontsov's collaboration with the hetman. Dontsov resigned from the UTA and, soon thereafter, an order for his arrest appeared, forcing him into hiding as full-scale warfare engulfed the country once again.<sup>161</sup> Simultaneously, the Ukrainian National State Union declared itself in open revolt against the Hetmanate, establishing the Directorate of the UNR under the leadership of Volodymyr Vynnychenko and Symon Petliura, pending new elections. Petliura's forces took control of Left-Bank Ukraine and laid siege to Kyiv in the following weeks. Joining the antihetman putsch, Dontsov published an article in *Nova Rada* (New Council)—the daily newspaper of the pro-UNR Socialist-Federalists—warning that Skoropads'kyi and his followers "will soon raise [Russian] tricolors over Kyiv."<sup>162</sup> (Ukraine's "Russian-Jewish" revolutionaries and reactionaries continued to make a repulsive impression on him, just as they had over a decade prior during his imprisonment in Lukianivs'ka.)<sup>163</sup> The footnotes to Dontsov's diary cite another regime-critical article ("*Pered katastrofoiu*" [Before the Catastrophe], published in *Nova Rada* on 22 October) as proof that he had begun to oppose the hetman before his fall from power.

---

<sup>161</sup> Dontsov, *Rik 1918*, Kyiv, 88-89. November 18.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 90. November 25.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 90. December 7. On this point he quotes Bulgakov (no friend to Ukrainian nationalism): "How ungifted and disgusting the Russian Revolution is! No song, no hymn, no memorial, not even a fine joke! Everything is banal, vulgar, stolen." In this context, it is worth comparing to an aphorism in *Götzen-Dämmerung*: "'Evil men have no songs.' –So why do the Russians have songs?" Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 158.

The final battle for the city occurred on December 14, at which point Skoropads'kyi resigned and fled the country with the last few remaining German troops.<sup>164</sup> Dontsov recounted observing a firefight between Russians in the buildings along Khreshchatyk and Ukrainians in the streets below. Pro-Ukrainian celebrations followed Petliura's triumphal entry to the capital. Although Dontsov received an order to take back the UTA and await the Directorate's instructions, he loathed the new regime, calling it "Bolshevik." Speaking to the first assembly of Ukrainian parties convened by the Directorate, he warned them: "You began this revolution under the blue-yellow Ukrainian flag, you carry it now under the red flag of socialism. You will end it under the black flag of anarchy."<sup>165</sup> Dontsov's gloomy predictions turned out to have some warrant. The Directorate quickly lost control over the Ukrainian-speaking territories that it claimed to govern. The ensuing three years of warfare between the Reds, Whites, Anarchists, and Polish and Ukrainian nationalists caused more deaths through combat, terror, pogroms, disease, and famine than the preceding four years of the Great War. "It seems the whole world is falling into the abyss, and us with it," Dontsov lamented.<sup>166</sup> He advised the Directorate to grant Petliura emergency dictatorial powers and use them for a crackdown on Ukraine's emboldened Bolsheviks, who soon thereafter seized Kharkiv and began moving west, but the new socialist regime was not inclined to heed the advice of a "Hetmanite," even if his friendship with Petliura meant that he retained his post at the UTA. News that White Volunteers had put a price on his head and were after him reached Dontsov, who was warned to lay low and encouraged to

---

<sup>164</sup> Skoropads'kyi settled in Wannsee, Germany, where he lived until his death on April 26, 1945, in an Allied bombing raid in Bavaria. His memoirs, published in 1925, offered an extremely harsh assessment of Dontsov. Pavlo Skoropads'kyi, *Spohady. Kinets' 1917—hruden' 1918*. Kyiv: NAN Ukrainy, 1995, 129. Nevertheless, the former Hetman softened his negative views of previous collaborators, including Dontsov. The two encountered one another in Berlin during the Second World War, and Skoropads'kyi prevented the inclusion attacks on Dontsov in the Hetmanite press. Dontsov, *Rik 1918, Kyiv*, 140.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 93. December 21.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 95. December 22.

emigrate.<sup>167</sup> In early January he resolved to do just that and, with the assistance of Konovalets' and Petliura, departed for Paris as part of the UNR's diplomatic mission to the peace talks at Versailles.

## Conclusion

“Our age is the age of the twilight of the idols (*prysmerku bozhkiv*) to which the nineteenth century prayed. The catastrophe of 1914 did not fly over our heads in vain: all the ‘unshakeable’ foundations and ‘eternal’ laws of social evolution crumbled into ash, opening up limitless vistas before the human will.”<sup>168</sup> These are the opening sentences and central thesis of Dontsov's most famous work, *Natsionalizm* (1926), the enchiridion of Ukrainian integral nationalism. In the course of one decade, Dontsov's thirties, the First World War and its revolutionary shockwaves had transformed Europe, breeding militant rightwing nationalist writer-activists like himself by the hundreds and thousands, as well as large and receptive audiences of resentful, battle-scarred listeners. The war exposed, as he saw it, the impotence and obsolescence of the old values, habits, and convictions of the Ukrainophiles and their “idols”—liberalism, pacifism, internationalism, socialism, and materialism. In their place he offered a doctrine that celebrated war and counseled all members of the nation to emulate the soldier's unflinching execution of orders in the name of unquestioned ideals. He also reproached the older generation of Ukrainian activists in Kyiv for their ingrained deference to Russian liberals and leftists, and to the imperial Russian language, literature, and political culture in which all late nineteenth-century Eastern Ukrainian intellectuals (including himself) were raised. The fathers'

---

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 96. December 25, 28.

<sup>168</sup> Dmytro Dontsov, *Natsionalizm* (L'viv: Nove zhyttia, 1926), 1.

traditions and model ancestors, from Tolstoy to Drahomanov, were losing their relevance; it was time to smash their icons and find suitable replacements in foreign lands or the more distant past.

Dontsov's postwar credo aspired to be as German as it was Spartan. Fittingly, the epigraph above the first page of *Natsionalizm* is a quotation, in German, from one of the founders of German nationalism and idealist philosophy, Johann Gottlieb Fichte: "The only thing that can help us is a complete regeneration, the beginning of an entirely new spirit."<sup>169</sup> Dontsov took the words from Fichte's 1808 work, *Addresses to the German Nation*, written on the occasion of Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion and occupation of Central Europe. In the addresses, Fichte advocates a German nationalist reaction to the French threat that would carry on the betrayed ideals of the 1789 Revolution, delivering them to the world and heralding a new era of history in which humanity's purpose, universal freedom, is achieved. Dontsov imitated Fichte's cultural-exclusivist definition of the nation, which called for the denial of German citizenship to Jews; his desire to synthesize cosmopolitan and nationalist strivings, while insisting on the latter's precedence; his authoritarianism; his penchant for mysticism; and his contempt for decadence, sensuous materialism, and the corrupting belief in determinism. Like Fichte, he placed Germany at the vanguard of history as a messianic liberator of nations. Ukraine was destined to play the supporting yet essential role of guarding the eastern steppe, Europe's natural and cultural frontier, from the encroachment of Muscovite despotism. The First World War had proven that German and Ukrainian nationalists were natural allies in the war between *Mitteleuropa* and its eastern enemies—a war that still raged in their hearts, despite the peace treaties that proclaimed it finished and the vaunted establishment of new borders on the principle of national self-determination. But the Ukrainians were to remain the junior partner, whose "new

---

<sup>169</sup> "Nur eine gänzliche Umschaffung, nur das Beginnen eines ganz neuen Geistes kann uns helfen." Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2013), 170.

spirit” and “total regeneration” would require the emulation of Teutonic-Prussian traditions of militarism, voluntarism, efficiency, and idealism. The alternative, as Dontsov understood it, was to be conquered by Russian communism, cast into the abyss, cut off from the true fount of human progress. Ukraine faced annihilation at the hands of the nascent Soviet state, but so too did the rest of the continent. A crusade uniting Europe’s anti-Bolshevik forces was needed to save the community of free nations. Dontsov began thinking in terms similar to those of another German role model—Imperial Chancellor Otto von Bismarck’s “Great Politics”—the grand, realist strategy of rallying the nations of Europe around the purportedly German core of European power and civilization. Joining a cause and a tradition such as this, Ukrainians might finally (or once again) become “good Europeans,” to borrow a concept from another one of Dontsov’s German heroes from the same era—Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>170</sup> As “good Europeans,” Ukrainians would be fervent patriots of their own homeland, to be sure, but outward-looking ones with a sense of their still-greater responsibility and birthright to imbibe and defend the ancient culture of Europe from the timeless barbarism of Muscovy; in a word, cosmopolitan ultranationalists. Dontsov claimed to loathe cosmopolitanism, but for political exiles like himself a cosmopolitan outlook was necessary in order to take advantage of the opportunities for rejuvenation and reinvention that the war had presented.

One way of thinking about Dontsov’s wartime search for German exemplars and examples of German-Ukrainian cooperation in the historical record is “retrospective ancestral constitution,” which historian Hayden White describes as a potentially revolutionary process

---

<sup>170</sup> On the connections between Bismarck’s late-nineteenth-century continental (i.e. anti-British and anti-Russian) vision for Germany’s foreign policy on the one hand and Nietzsche’s political philosophy on the other—both of which greatly influenced Dontsov—see Hugo Drochon, *Nietzsche’s Great Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

driven by a rebellious generation against the sociocultural system into which they were born.<sup>171</sup> White gives the example of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, whose chosen (ideal) ancestors were Marx and the European socialists rather than the Russian forebears whom their fathers expected them to honor. Similarly, Fichte, Bismarck, and Nietzsche were not Dontsov's *real* ancestors but they were his *ideal* ancestors, and he chose them in the hope of giving the Ukrainian national movement an entirely new lineage and a revolutionary path forward—out of the Russian Empire, Bolshevik or Romanov, and back into Europe. Dontsov's quest for worthy Ukrainian forebears led him to Hetman Ivan Mazepa, who was acceptable for this purpose because of his distance in time and his status as the traitor *par excellence* in the imperial Russian narrative. But the rest of Ukraine's more recent inheritance was tainted with "saccharine Little Russian sentiment." If he could convince a critical mass of Ukrainians to embrace this alternative ancestry of German geniuses and Zaporizhian warriors, then he would have effected a national revolution.

The First World War inspired Dontsov's doctrines and strategies of Ukrainian integral nationalism, and the fateful moment that eventually led veterans, activists, and students to embrace this ideology in the tens of thousands. The war pushed the ideologue along a geographically and intellectually circuitous (some would say opportunistic) route. It confirmed Dontsov's prewar skepticism about the morality and efficacy of international law, and the concept of a "right to national self-determination," but not before driving him to place his highest hopes for Ukrainian independence, not in the force of arms, but in the force of arguments and peace treaties buttressed by well documented historical precedents and Wilsonian rhetoric. It convinced him that nations are doomed to battle one another in a zero-sum struggle for survival, but also that alliances were crucial to any future Ukrainian state- and nation-building. The Great

---

<sup>171</sup> Hayden White, *The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature, and Theory, 1957-2007* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University press, 2010), 133.

War strengthened Dontsov's affinity and admiration for the German world, but undermined his previous conviction that it would (or could) become the guardian of an independent Ukraine. Dontsov entered the 1920s with an all-consuming hatred for the Muscovites, but he could not conceal his awe and esteem for the Bolsheviks' meteoric rise to power, their resolve, ferocity, discipline, and organization, which allegedly assured their victory over the squabbling, bumbling, out-of-touch aesthetes and leftists of the Ukrainophile camp. The maturing ideologue also honed his skills as a journalist and propagandist during the war, ultimately arriving at his signature style of emotive demagoguery—and the corollary belief that single-minded zealotry and passion drive human action and history more than facts and reason—but only after years of taking a much more subtle and academic approach to winning over an international readership to the Ukrainian cause. It would thus be simplistic to interpret Dontsov's postwar integral nationalist worldview as a direct and inevitable result of the world conflict. His opinions, methods, and loyalties were open to revision throughout 1914-1918, and remained malleable thereafter, but the Great War and the failed Ukrainian Revolution to which it gave rise became Dontsov's touchstone experience.