MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF THE WORK AND THOUGHT OF ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE

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THE UKRAINE – A PROBLEM IN NATIONALITY

By Arnold J. Toynbee

Many neglected nationalities have won recognition through the war, but the case of the Ukrainians is surely the strangest of all. A nation of thirty millions, and we had never heard its name! To be told that Ukrainians are the same as Ruthenes hardly enlightens our ignorance. Only the equation with "Little Russians" appears to explain their obscurity. Then they are not really a nation after all, but a variety of Russian, speaking, doubtless, a dialect of the Russian language?

But this facile explanation is precisely the inference we are meant to draw from the name "Little Russian". That is why it has been invented by the "Muscovites" – we must be careful of our terms, for the true Ukrainian would never call the man of Moscow or Petrograd a "Russian", nor even a "Great Russian"; he claims the Russian name for himself. But titles may pass. The issue is more seriously joined on the philological question. Is the speech of the Ukraine an independent language? «It is», says the Ukrainian. «It differs from the speech of Moscow at least as much as the Polish language does». «No», answers the Muscovite. «It is a dialect, one peasant patois among the many that have differentiated themselves in the vast regions occupied by the Russian people one and indivisible, without prejudice to the political indivisibility of the nation or to the unity of the literary language in which all Russians find their natural medium of expression».

This is no academic debate. It is waged on the field of practical politics. Many ordinances have been launched from Petrograd against the Ukrainian dialect or language (call it which you will), culminating in the Ukase of 1876, which forbade the publication within the limits of the Empire of any printed matter in this tongue that was not of a purely antiquarian nature, and subjected even such to official censorship. «The Ukrainian language», declared Valuyef, the Minister of the Interior, a dozen years before, «never has existed, does not exist, and must not exist». But the Minister protested too much. Edicts are not framed against an hallucination.

Thus in the linguistic sphere the Imperial Government seems to have given evidence against itself in favour of Ukrainian individuality – for it is really the individuality of a nation that is in dispute. Yet language is only one factor in nationality. It cannot constitute a nation by itself without the concurrence of history; and we must ask what the Ukraine is, and how its people have developed in the past, before we can pass final judgment upon their claims at the present.

The "Ukraine" means simply the "borderland" – between North and South, forest and steppe – and it stretches from West to East in a mighty zone all the way from the Carpathians to the Volga – a zone distinguished as much by its soil as by its history; for this is the famous country of the "Black Earth", the new corn-land of the Empire, where agriculture, railways and population are growing at a rate that rivals the development of the American "Middle West".

Here was the focus of the earliest, as well as the most modern, phase of Russian life, the holy city of Kieff, placed at the point where the Dnieper gathers up all its tributaries and issues from the forest into the steppe. The state was founded in the tenth century by Swedish wanderers from the Baltic who made their way down stream; and its culture came up the river from Constantinople across the Black Sea. But the people of Kieff were Slavs like their Northern neighbours in the forest, and they developed their Scandinavian government and Byzantine religion into a Slavonic civilization with a new individuality of its own.

Yet the geographical character of the "Borderland", which opened it to cultural influences from every side, exposed it at the same time to the shock of conflicting races. In the thirteenth century Kieff was destroyed by the Tatars of the steppe, and Ukrainian nationality had to find a retreat among the Carpathian foothills in the principality of Halitch (Galicia). Galicia, again, fell within a century under the dominion of the Poles, who stamped its nobility and middle class with the impress of Western Europe, and cajoled its Orthodox Church, by tolerance of the native ritual and discipline, into acknowledging the suzerainty of Rome. As the Polish Empire decayed in the seventeenth century, the Ukraine once more shook itself free. The borderland nurtured a race of borderers, the Cossacks, who established an independent military republic on an island in the Dnieper, and championed the Ukrainian peasants against Tatar and Pole. But the renascent nation was swallowed up by a new power

from the North. The Slavs of the forest had escaped the hurricanes that devastated the Ukraine. Moscow became the nucleus of a North-Russian kingdom, and Peter the Great reorganized it into a powerful Empire. Partly by conquest and partly by voluntary compact, the Government at Petrograd obtained the lion's share of the Polish inheritance, and at the final partition of 1795 the greater part of the Ukraine found itself, after a century and a half of precarious liberty, included definitely within the Imperial frontiers. Out of the thirty million or so of Ukrainians that exist to-day, upwards of twenty-five million are subject, in virtue of that settlement, to the Tsar.

The settlement might well have been a solution. Ukrainian and Muscovite were linked by the strongest ties – common Slavdom, community in the Orthodox Faith, even an original community of political tradition, for before the Tatars came, the Ukrainian princes of Kieff had borne sway in the forest as well as on the border. Even though the two peoples were not one nation already, their union under the Romanoff Dynasty gave them the same opportunity for coalescing into one that union under the Stewarts gave to the English and the Scotch. But unfortunately Peter had adopted the political system of Europe when it was in a rather sinister phase – the phase of absolutism, centralization, uniformity under coercion. The bureaucracy at Petrograd could not let well alone. It took its new Ukrainian subjects in hand, and without regard to the conditions on which the Cossack Republic had placed itself under the Imperial sovereignty, it proceeded, as we have seen, to persecute the Ukrainians' language. Of course it only accentuated the individuality it was impatient to efface. The strongest stimulant of nationality is repression, and the tension has grown so acute between Ukrainian and Muscovite, that now to coalescence on any terms is probably out of the question. Each will assert his separate individuality till the end of history.

This mistaken policy of Petrograd has given peculiar importance to the small minority of the Ukrainian nation (less than 4.000.000 at the present day) which the Partitions brought under the sovereignty of Austria. If Petrograd had succeeded in welding its Russian and Ukrainian subjects into one, the Austrian Ukraine would have become a Russian "Irredenta". Under Austrian rule the Ukrainians were still brigaded with their hereditary enemies the Poles in the composite province of Galicia, and though the Viennese government was willing enough to play off the Ukrainian peasant against the Polish noble, it was compelled to

purchase the support of the Polish group in the *Reichsrath* by abandoning the Ukrainians politically to Polish exploitation. In fact the problem of running Pole and Ukrainian in double harness seemed *a priori* insoluble, and would naturally have ended in the embitterment of both. Vienna had far poorer cards than Petrograd in its hands. Yet the general standard of political liberty is so essentially higher in Austria than in the Russian Empire, that in spite of the domineering Pole, the Ukrainian under Austrian government found himself infinitely better off than his fellow-countryman across the frontier. Here as a matter of course he might print and read what he liked in his national language – daily newspapers as well as peasant ballads; he would find official documents triplicated in his own tongue in addition to the versions in Polish and German; and if he went to law, he had the right to have his case conducted in his native speech, even if it travelled all the way up to the supreme court at Vienna. In fact, his national individuality was here respected in all essentials; and thus it is that so far from becoming a Russian "Irredenta", Eastern Galicia has been turned by Austrian statesmanship into an Ukrainian "Piedmont". The "Uniate" ecclesiastical system, originally imposed by Catholic craving for uniformity, has transformed itself into a national church, and these Uniate Ukrainians under Austrian auspices have found the distinctive name of "Ruthenes" for their distinctive nationality. For however much the Government at Petrograd may contest the particularism of its own Ukrainians, it is unquestionable that these Ukrainians across the Austrian frontier are in no sense Russians, either in concrete fact or in inward allegiance. The "Moskalophil" party in Galicia was never a vital force, and it has sunk to a dwindling, conservative remnant. The majority of Austrian Ukrainians see eye to eye with the Pan-Germans, hope for the redemption of their nationality through the dismemberment of the Russian Empire, and contemplate an independent Ukrainian state, extended, under the patronage of the Central Powers, as far as Kieff and Odessa.

Kieff and Odessa divorced from Russia! Russia excluded from the Black Sea! Of course the scheme is impracticable. Such an assertion of their national individuality would bring anything but advantage to the Ukrainians themselves. The Ukraine and the rest of Russia are geographically inseparable, economically interdependent, racially and culturally interlaced. To part them is impossible, and would remain so even if the Allies were beaten to the earth. This is no solution; and yet the policy of Petrograd leaves the problem insoluble too. There

is the same fantastic impracticality about the regime of "Russification", which Petrograd has applied to the Ukrainian "Piedmont" with reckless rigour during her occupation of Eastern Galicia in the course of the present war. Neither programme is practicable in its entirety. The Ukraine can never obtain entire political independence from Muscovy, and the Muscovite can never entirely stamp out Ukrainian nationality or assimilate entirely the whole Ukrainian race. A settlement can only be reached through a compromise under which each party shall secure its real needs at the price of waiving its extremer claims. Russia must have her geographical unity, the Ukraine her national rights; and to compass these essentials the fantasies of Russification on the one hand, and of independence on the other, are no exorbitant sacrifice.

Let the Ukraine be reunited at last by the transfer of Eastern Galicia from Austria to Russia after the war; but let the condition be that all the national rights, which the Ukrainians of Galicia enjoy under Austrian rule, shall not only be perpetuated to themselves, but extended equally to their fellow-countrymen in all the Ukrainian provinces already incorporated in the Russian Empire.

If this is accomplished it will profit the cause for which the Allies are at war. It will deflect a nation of thirty millions from its present orientation towards the Teutonic Powers – an asset which the latter have known how to exploit in their bid for European ascendency; it will cure one of the worst disharmonies that retard the organic development of our partner Russia; and it will fulfil the principles of Liberty and Nationality to which we have jointly pledged our allegiance. If, on the other hand, a solution fails, we (and the rest of Europe with us) shall all in like measure suffer. We shall do well, therefore, to ponder the question of the Ukraine, in view of the coming European settlement; and this is only one question taken at random out of the legion that will confront us at that fateful moment. If the settlement is to be wisely and justly achieved (and if it is not, the future is unthinkable), it will need the fervent thought and unwearying goodwill, not only of the statesmen in council, but of every citizen of every country in Europe. It will need them without respite until the situation is saved.