

Ukraine is at a turning-point in its history

by Jonathan Tennenbaum and Luba George

The authors and German farmer Walter vom Stein recently made a two-week visit to the regions of Kiev and Kharkov in Ukraine, as part of a Schiller Institute delegation which met with economists, agriculture experts, educators, scientists, and politicians to discuss the future of Ukraine in the context of Lyndon LaRouche's "Productive Triangle" proposal for the development of east Europe.

The visit came at a unique moment in the history of the region. On Dec. 1, the people of Ukraine will decide in a referendum whether Ukraine will become an independent, sovereign nation, or remain inside a reformed Soviet Union. An overwhelming "yes" to independence is expected. The establishment of a sovereign Ukraine would mark the end of centuries of enslavement to Moscow, of which the Stalinist terror and misery of 75 years inside the Soviet Union constitute only the most recent chapter. Ukraine has been "officially" a province of the Russian empire since 1709, when the greater part of Ukraine was annexed by Peter the Great following the Battle of Poltava.

Ironically, the development of a free, independent Ukraine offers today one of the principal sources of hope for economic recovery in the Russian Federation itself.

Economic prospects

Of all the republics of the former Soviet Union, Ukraine has by far the best preconditions to rapidly develop a strong national economy. Ukraine has a population of 51.4 million (comparable to Italy) and a land area of 603,700 square kilometers, or about twice the area of united Germany. The country has a fair share of major cities, including the present capital Kiev (2.5 million inhabitants); the industrial cities Kharkov (1.6 million), Dnepropetrovsk (1.2 million), Donetsk (1.1 million), Krivoi Rog (.7 million), Zaporozhe (.9 million), Nikolayev (.5 million); Lvov (.8 million), the port city Odessa (1.1 million), and many smaller cities. It has a large industrial base including the famous Donbass, often called



In Kiev, the capital of Ukraine: Equestrian monument to Bogdan Chymenitsky, the field marshal and Cossack leader who led the freedom fight against Poland here in 1648.

Anno Heinenbroich

“the Ukrainian Ruhr region.” Ukraine produces twice as much hard coal and about as much steel as west Germany, and boasts a large aircraft, aerospace, and electronic industry centered around Kharkov. A significant portion of the high-technology military industrial base of the former Soviet Union was located in Ukraine. Ukraine has rich deposits of important minerals, as well as coal and natural gas.

Ukraine is blessed with the best farmland in Europe—96% of its arable land belongs to the famous “black earth region”—and it enjoys a sunny, relatively mild climate favorable to intensive agriculture. Before 1917, Ukraine was known as the “breadbasket of Europe,” and supplied large surpluses of grain to the world market. Ukraine would today easily be able to feed itself and most of the former U.S.S.R., were it not for the devastation wrought by Stalin’s forced “collectivization” of the 1930s (more than 20 million Ukrainian peasants died), and for the monstrously inefficient socialist agriculture system imposed by Moscow’s rulers up to and including Gorbachov. If an independent Ukraine pursues agriculture reform aimed at establishing modern family farms, and backed up by improvements in infrastructure and a reorientation of industry toward the needs of capital-intensive family farming, food production will increase dramatically.

Besides its black soil, Ukraine is blessed with excellent natural water infrastructure, centering on the Black Sea with the famous port of Odessa, the great Dnieper River system, and the Dniester River. Ukraine lies at the intersection of

major economic axes in Eurasia: the north-south axis from the Baltic to the Black Sea area, and the east-west axis from central Europe through the Caucasus all the way to the Indian subcontinent. Kiev arose at the intersection of east-west/north-south trade routes, where there had been a port for Greek merchant ships in ancient times. A relatively dense railroad grid already exists. Its modernization would greatly improve the overall productivity of the economy.

Today, the Schiller Institute’s plan for an all-European/Eurasian infrastructure features among other things a “middle axis” joining Ukraine to the heartland of central Europe. This axis extends from Paris through the industrial regions centered on Metz/Nancy, Frankfurt/Mannheim/Stuttgart, Leipzig/Halle, Dresden, Wroclaw, Katowice/Krakov in Poland and into the Ukrainian cities Lvov, Kiev, and Kharkov down into the Donbass region. With the magnetic levitation train system proposed by the Schiller Institute, passengers leaving Paris in the early morning would arrive in Kiev in time for lunch, having traversed the entire “middle corridor” of Europe.

Importance of culture

Ukraine’s greatest asset on the road to becoming a prosperous nation is neither its soil nor its raw materials, but its culture. The typical cultural matrix of the Ukrainian is completely different from the Moscow-centered “Great Russian” culture. The contrast is perhaps best demonstrated in music and poetry.

From the very earliest times, Ukrainian folk music has emphasized polyphonic choral singing of poetry; whereas the Russian tradition, particularly as embodied in the musical policy of the Russian Orthodox Church, emphasizes the so-called *znameny* or monophonic, Gregorian chant style of singing. In fact, the Russian Orthodox Church explicitly banned polyphony for 600 years.

Keeping in mind the fact that polyphony is the chief means of *development* in music, the overall cultural implications of favoring either monophonic or polyphonic directions in music should be clear. Monophony would suggest a relatively stagnant, collectivist-feudalist mentality whereas the use of polyphony a more "individualistic," dynamic frame of mind favoring new ideas and frequent changes in the ways of doing things. The implied distinctions between Ukrainian and typical "Great Russian" cultural matrices are real and can be readily observed.

Related to the strong musical tradition is the fact that the Ukrainian language is, of all Slavic languages, the closest in sound structure to Italian. Ukrainian has preserved by and large an emphasis on pure-sounding vowels, whereas in Russian it is the consonants which predominate at the expense of the vowels. In particular, in Russian the non-accented vowels are typically collapsed to relatively "dead" uh, ih, and aw sounds. These differences add up to a much greater ability to sing in Ukrainian compared to Russian. Like Italian, Ukrainian is a language of song and opera *par excellence*. The typical Ukrainian loves to sing, and Ukraine has produced many great singers.

The lively, jovial personality of many of the people we encountered in Ukraine reminded us of southern Italy; nothing of the dark, brooding quality of Dostoevsky's "Russian collective soul"! This difference in cultural matrices is closely interwoven with different economic tendencies. For example, the traditional collectivist form of village organization in Russia, called the *mir*, in which land belonged to the village as a whole, but not to its individual members, did not exist in Ukraine. The Ukrainians are traditionally individualistic in their political and economic activity.

The historical role of religion

Ukrainian independence would have important implications for institutionalized religion in the country. Kiev, of course, was historically a center of the Eastern Church. Tradition has it that Apostle St. Andrew came to the site of Kiev and called for a Christian city to be built there. Following the conversion of Vladimir in 988, Kiev was not only the commercial capital, but also the religious center of the country, the Kiev Rus. In the 11th century, Yaroslav the Wise built up the city into a flourishing European metropolis—at a time when, as the Ukrainians love to say, the Moscow Russians were still living in trees! Following the Moscow Church's rejection of the Council of Florence, part of that Church split off to form the Uniate Church, which continued

to recognize Rome and the Pope. Under Moscow's domination the Uniates were brutally suppressed, and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was dissolved into the Russian Orthodox Church. On top of this oppression came the persecution under the Bolsheviks, who attempted to wipe out religion altogether.

With Ukrainian independence, we were told, the Uniate Church will be recognized and restored. An autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church will be established, independent of Moscow. Otherwise, freedom of worship will be granted to all churches and religions, including to the ethnic Russians and others who might wish to remain in the Russian Orthodox Church.

While in Kharkov, we had the opportunity to visit a Jewish synagogue which is being refurbished with the help of local authorities and contributions from around the world. We were told at the synagogue that there is no anti-Semitism to speak of in Ukraine. In fact, we repeatedly encountered what one might call "pro-Semitic" feeling: Many people expressed to us that they hoped that Jews who had emigrated to Israel and elsewhere would be interested in coming back to assist in rebuilding the country! Ukraine has suffered greatly from a continuing "brain drain" of scientists, doctors, musicians, teachers and other professionals to the West.

Ukraine's Russian citizens

The issue is often raised, and came up also during our trip, of what will happen to the large Russian minority in Ukraine. We found that all kinds of provocative rumors were circulating, to the effect that "rabid Ukrainian nationalists" intended to outlaw the Russian language, force Russian children in school to learn in Ukrainian, or even launch anti-Russian pogroms! We found no evidence for such intentions at all; in fact, it appears that the majority of Russians support Ukrainian independence and understand themselves as future citizens of Ukraine. Moreover, the "nationalists" we met did not think of the future nation as a pure ethnic entity, but rather as a home for many different peoples—Ukrainians, Russians, Jews, Greeks, Turks, Tatars, and so forth. These nationalists do oppose the policy of "Russification" under Moscow's rule, which aimed at gradually eliminating the Ukrainian language and culture, and favor a renaissance of both.

Interestingly, we often encountered among Russians living in Ukraine the attitude that they feel more at home in the cultural atmosphere of Ukraine than in Russia. Typically, they think that Ukraine would be a much more viable economic proposition than the Russian Federation. The tragic irony of centuries of "successful" imperial domination is that Russia is much less able to develop into a healthy nation-state than the captive nations of its late empire. The building of a strong and prosperous Ukraine, closely connected to Germany and western Europe, can be the key to freeing Russia from the cultural and economic dead-end in which it

finds itself today.

Otherwise it should be noted that many high government officials of Ukraine including the defense minister, are Russians, as are many deputies of the Parliament, where the debates are routinely carried on in a mixture of Russian and Ukrainian. It would seem that the story of ethnic tensions between Russians and Ukrainians originates more from an attempt to destabilize the situation and influence the Dec. 1 referendum, than in real social problems.

No to the 'Polish model'

Everyone we met was acutely aware of the disastrous economic situation in Poland, and of the fact that the disaster was unleashed by the radical reform program authored by Harvard University's Prof. Jeffrey Sachs. Ironically, the Sachs program has become a model to the Ukrainians for what should *not* be done in Ukraine! As much as people are convinced that the command economy must be dismantled and well-functioning markets for goods established, they also insist that the process of transformation be an orderly one, without throwing millions of workers onto the streets.

While we were in Kiev, the Ukrainian government refused to sign the treaty of economic union proposed by Gorbachov. A key issue behind this refusal is the Ukrainian government's intention, which runs counter to the economic union treaty, to set up an independent Ukrainian national bank and a Ukrainian currency. Ukraine's insistence on this point is evidently both a matter of principle—a sovereign nation must be sovereign in monetary policy—and also a matter of urgent necessity in order to protect the country's economy from destabilizing influences from the outside. (Ukraine has, since this report was written, signed the economic union agreement, after its demands were met.)

Waves of Russians, Poles, and others have reportedly come into Ukraine, where foodstuffs and other items are relatively plentiful, and carried away enormous amounts of goods in exchange for rubles. To prevent the stores from being emptied out, Ukraine has had to introduce a system of coupons which are issued to residents only, and must be presented along with money in order to purchase many sorts of goods. This solution, however, can only work for a limited time.

Beyond this immediate concern, there is much worry about the economic future of the Russian Federation. We were repeatedly told that there will be no hunger in Ukraine this winter; not only because there is sufficient food being produced, but also because the producers are committed to the new nation. Hence, Ukraine is largely immune to the methods of sabotage and blackmail, common in Russia, where the old conservative apparatus in control of collective agriculture has in many cases deliberately held back food shipments in order to provoke a political crisis. The Ukrainians are very concerned about the possibility of famine in Russia, and they are already sending large amounts of food

into the Russian Federation in an attempt to defuse the looming winter crisis.

Whatever economic course an independent Ukraine decides upon, it is clear that extremely close economic ties to Russia will be kept into the foreseeable future. The industry and infrastructure of Ukraine and Russia are so closely interwoven, that a policy of autarky on either side is out of the question. On the other hand, Ukraine is not prepared to accept arbitrary dictates from Moscow, and in economic negotiations Ukraine holds far stronger cards than any of the other republics.

A sovereign national bank and monetary system, if set up along the lines of the so-called "American System" of Hamilton, List, Carey and today LaRouche, would be an essential instrument for developing Ukraine into a prosperous, modern industrial nation. At the same time it would provide a certain degree of protection against the monetary insanity rampant in the world today, including the case in which the government of the Russian Federation would stupidly agree to accept an International Monetary Fund-dictated "solution" along the lines of the "Polish model." Absolute protection does not exist, since the implementation of "Polish model" policies in Russia would create an uncontrollable chaos with fatal consequences not only for Ukraine, but for Europe as a whole.

And what chances would Ukraine have, if Germany and the rest of western Europe stupidly insist on IMF policies? The Ukrainians we spoke to were bewildered at the attitude of western politicians who insist on treating Ukraine as a province of Moscow, refusing to recognize that the Soviet Union no longer exists. Particularly disappointing was the performance of Hans-Dietrich Genscher, who was in Ukraine at the same time as we were, for the Ukrainian-German cultural week.

Nevertheless, Germany remains a star of hope on the horizon of Ukraine, despite the unimaginable horrors which the Nazis inflicted on it during World War II. German music, poetry, and scientific traditions were always greatly admired in Ukraine, which naturally oriented toward the West in times of oppression. The part of Ukraine under Austro-Hungarian rule enjoyed vastly greater freedom than under the Russian Empire. Then came Stalin's deliberate murder of more than 20 million people in Ukraine in the 1930s, a holocaust which ought to be remembered alongside the extermination of Jews in Nazi concentration camps. When the Wehrmacht marched into Ukraine, the people hailed them as liberators from Stalin. But what treachery! Hitler was one of a kind with Stalin, and continued the butchery of Ukraine which Stalin had started. Hence the bitter irony that the Nazis drove Ukraine back into Stalin's arms, and made the hated Red Army into an army of liberation. On the basis of this historical background, one would expect Germany to demonstrate a particular sense of responsibility and support toward Ukraine, as it does toward Israel. But this is yet to be forthcoming.