

# 10 Conclusions

The thesis of this book has been the notion that, as the Republican Party's (by then honorary) leader Lukianenko was prepared to admit at the party's Third Congress on 1-2 May 1992, 'the glittering victory of 92 per cent [*sic*] of the votes [in the 1 December referendum] became possible only because both nationalists and communists agitated for independence'.<sup>1</sup>

In terms of the analysis presented in Chapter 1, the initial leadership for the national movement from 1987 to the winter of 1988 had to be provided by the dissidents returning from the camps, as the coercive power of the state was still sufficient to dissuade all but the bravest from public opposition activity. Hence the politics of the period strongly resembled that of the 1970s, with tiny numbers of opposition activists pursuing a human rights agenda against a state reluctant to make any real concessions on its monopoly of public life. From the winter of 1988 onwards the dissidents were then joined by the Kyiv-based cultural elite, whilst the membership of the informal groups that sprung up in 1988-90 drew heavily on the lower ranks of the intelligentsia.

According to Krawchenko, this predominance of the intelligentsia reflected the silent social revolution that had transformed the largely leaderless and socially inarticulate Ukrainian peasant mass of 1917 into a 'modernised' and urbanised society, with the most 'mobilised' sections of such a society in the vanguard of the national movement. This is not to argue that the Ukrainian peasantry lacked national consciousness, or was incapable of political organisation. The historical record speaks otherwise. Although peasant nationalism can be mobilised if appropriate institutions and elites exist (such as village teachers or clerics), urban societies, with large working class and intelligentsia groups and modern means of social communication, are governed by a different set of stimuli and have different capacities for organisation and action.

For Krawchenko, the key difference is that modernisation produced a national intelligentsia, that was then politicised by the 'cultural division of labour' that restricted its development. Whereas we have sought to argue that socio-economic explanations alone are insufficient, and

that the key feature of the modern era, especially in the Soviet context, is the vast power of the state, which therefore ought to be the starting point in the chain of analysis rather than its conclusion.

The socio-economic approach can certainly shed light on the differences between the late 1980s national movement and that of the 1910s, 1920s, 1940s, or even the 1960s, but the timing of each upsurge of oppositional activity is more easily explained by periods of state tolerance and repression than as the by-product of subterranean processes of socio-economic change. As the state loosened its control over society, oppositional activity could increase, and vice versa. Whilst Shcherbytskyi remained in power, however, it was much more difficult to create a Ukrainian version of the Popular Fronts already established in the Baltic republics in 1988-9.

The predominance of the cultural intelligentsia was also a natural consequence of the importance to Ukrainian nationalism of the language question and the preservation of historical memory (where Church issues were more prominent, priests and religious activists played a more active role, as in Galicia). Moreover, the Ukrainian Writers' Union provided a ready made centre for opposition activity.

The game between the authorities and the intelligentsia was admittedly not entirely one-sided. The organisations established by the intelligentsia during this period, Memorial, the Ukrainian Language Society and eventually *Rukh*, helped to formulate a nationalist agenda, pressurise the state, and widen the space for available political activity, but the state still remained relatively immune from the pressure for change.

During the transitional Ivashko period from September 1989 to the Summer of 1990, *Rukh* was prevented from full participation in the crucial republican elections of March 1990, but the post-election period marked a key turning point, as opposition was legitimised, and Ukraine's embryonic civil society struggled to be born. The various elections and referenda of 1990-1 showed however that the opposition's support had more or less stagnated at the 25-33 per cent gained (as the Democratic Bloc) that March.<sup>2</sup> This limited figure reflected the inherited historical peculiarities of Ukraine described in Chapter 2, and also the inability of the intelligentsia to mobilise more than a minority of the population when faced with a still hostile state, as argued in Chapter 1. Although the state was no longer coercing the opposition, it remained difficult for the opposition to communicate its message beyond its core support.

Public demonstrations became increasingly common after 1989, and the opposition was able to air its views first through *samizdat* and then through such newspapers as *Za vil' nu Ukraïnu* and *Vechirniï Kyïv* but they could not promote the national message as effectively as the mass media. Hence Ukraine lagged behind the Baltic republics in 1988-90, but caught up very quickly once the national communists turned the mass media over to the national cause after mid-1991.

In 1990-1 the effects of imperial decline were being felt in Ukraine just as in the rest of the Union. As the centre lost its grip, the logic of national communism increasingly took hold of the republican communist parties in the periphery. Its late arrival in Ukraine could largely be explained by the hangover from the Shcherbytskyi period (see Chapter 3), but not by anything more fundamental. Hence, the final emergence of Kravchuk as the leading spokesman for the national communists in spring 1991 was only to be expected. With the collapse of the Soviet Empire, its material resources, coercive capabilities and legitimacy system, the national communists quickly realised that the manipulation of popular nationalism was their best hope of retaining power.<sup>3</sup>

By then, the opposing forces, that of the imperial centre and their allies in Ukraine, led by Hurenko, were perhaps still strong enough to brake developments in Ukraine. But the Baltic events in January 1991 and the failure of August's attempted coup demonstrated that it was too late to save the empire as a whole.

Krawchenko would argue that without socio-economic analysis, there is nothing to explain why the fault-lines of imperial collapse should necessarily be national. That would have to be explained by the long term processes of social change prior to the 1980s that had 'nationalised' the state from within.

Given alternative evidence about the relative weakness of Ukrainian national consciousness before 1991, our hypothesis has been instead that it is the *post-perestroika* period that was crucial. It was the collapse of central institutions and the survival strategies of republican elites that created national communism, and that it was the national communists' jumping onto the opposition bandwagon that finally created sufficient momentum towards independence. There would certainly have been a Ukrainian national movement without the national communists, but it would have been much weaker.

Once Kravchuk's wing of the party added its weight to the independence struggle, its control of the resources of the state transformed *Rukh's* 25-33 per cent popular support into the 90.3 per cent

vote on 1 December 1991. This decisive transformation reflected the fact that the local state, although nowhere near as hegemonic as in its near-totalitarian heyday, was still the decisive political force in Ukraine, given that the rival institutions of civil society were so weak and embryonic. In any case, the state and those independent voices that had by then developed were for the moment pulling in the same direction.

Although it is impossible to speculate how far Ukraine might have moved towards independence without the national communists, the top-down campaign by the state from 1991 onwards to rehabilitate and revive Ukrainian cultural nationality had more rapid effect than the cultural intelligentsia could have hoped to have achieved through their own efforts from below. Ukrainian independence was achieved by an alliance between oppositional and state elites, described by Tilly as a common precondition for revolution, but the latter were ultimately decisive.

The long-term future of the national communist group is another question. As of early 1992, their great strength lay in their near-complete control of the resources of the state, material, coercive and institutional. Their great weakness was that they operated in an ideological vacuum, parasitic on the nationalists' ideology and agenda. Having achieved power, the national communists still had to build a strong modern Ukrainian nation-state and overcome the problems listed in Chapter 2. The question of privatisation and the move to a market economy still had to be faced. Both issues would severely test the unity of the national communist camp, and test how far it had transcended its past.

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1. *Samostiina Ukraina*, no. 20, May 1992.
2. See the voting analysis in *Narodna hazeta*, no. 12, April 1992, and in Filenko's article summarised in *Ukrains'kyi ohliadach* No. 2 (February 1992).
3. A Soviet perspective arguing that the primary factor generating nationalism was republican political institutions and the self-interests of the

elites they produced can be found in V. A. Tishkov, 'O novykh podkhodakh v teorii i praktike mezhnatsionalnykh otnoshenii', *Sovetskaia etnografiia*, no. 5 (September-October 1989) pp. 3-14 and 'Etnichnost' i vlast' v SSSR (etnopoliticheskii analiz respublikanskikh organov vlasti)' *Sovetskaia etnografiia*, no. 3 (May-June 1991) pp. 3-12.