

Situating Peasant War, 1918–21

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In analytical terms, it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish the Russian Civil War from the Russian Revolution. The February Revolution and Bolshevik seizure of power did much to set the terms of the military conflict between the White armies and the Soviet state. But these principal actors in the Civil War had to contend with the broader effects of the Revolution in their respective efforts to consolidate control over territory. Local resistance to the conscription of men and the mobilization of resources was a constant feature of the Russian Civil War, and it occasionally generated political movements and armed insurgencies that sought to assert an autonomous voice in an otherwise polarized political landscape.

The present chapter examines this phenomenon of armed resistance, concentrating on the peasantry—the overwhelming majority of those in whose name the revolutions of 1917 were launched. The first year of revolutionary government in Russia saw the collapse of state authority in the countryside, both as a consequence of the turmoil in Petrograd and in provincial administration, and especially due to the war waged by the communal peasantry against private property and nonpeasant landholders. Sometimes understood as a separate strain of the revolutionary current in 1917–18, the agrarian revolution in most territories of the Russian Empire saw the brief realization of peasant self-government, localism *par excellence*.¹ As such, when the Civil

¹ On state breakdown and the assertion of peasant “self-government,” see Orlando Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution, 1917–1921* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 70–153. Recent works have explored the limits to which this development was indicative of some essential peasant mentality, much as works on late imperial Russia have questioned the extent of peasant “otherness”: see Sarah Badcock, *Politics and the People in Revolutionary Russia: A Provincial History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Aaron Retish, *Russia’s Peasants in Revolution and Civil War: Citizenship, Identity, and the Creation of the Soviet State, 1914–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and on late imperial Russia, see Corinne Gaudin, *Ruling Peasants: Village and State in Late Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007).

War began in earnest in the first months of 1918, the demands of waging war against the Soviet state and other claimants to political power entailed confronting peasant communities and the localism seemingly essential to the peasant experience of revolutionary emancipation. Mobilizing peasant support, then, was essential to victory, but nearly all major armies and governments during the Russian Civil War faced significant limitations in their capacity to achieve this. Unsurprisingly, when confronted with resistance, they all came to rely upon coercion and violence in their efforts to conscript men and procure resources to sustain their campaigns.

Resistance to the demands and incursions by claimants to political power was a constant feature of the Civil War. Frequently these episodes escalated to include whole districts, sometimes entire regions, behind the front lines of the conflict. However, in 1920, this episodic resistance gave way to sustained insurgencies directed against the Soviet state. Large-scale rebellions erupted in Central Russia and Western Siberia, joined by a number of smaller anti-Soviet rebellions in the Middle Volga and southern Russia. Some of these lasted for a number of months, rather than days or weeks. Having defeated the last of the White armies in autumn 1920, the Soviet government found itself embroiled in what seemed to be a second Civil War, challenged not by regular armies led by elite figures associated with the old regime, but by grassroots movements that were not antirevolutionary in character, but were still avowedly anti-Bolshevik.² Sometimes referred to as “peasant wars” by historians, the rebellions and insurgencies are not only recognized for their scale, but also as an expression of fundamental peasant hostility toward the state and modernization. In this telling, the conflicts of the Russian Civil War form one episode in a larger “peasant war,” concluding in the violent confrontation over collectivization in the USSR.³

Such an interpretation is convincing when one considers the broad continuities characterizing social and political conflict in Russia in the first decades of the 20th century. However, the label “peasant war” does much to obscure the tremendous diversity in character of these individual anti-Bolshevik movements in the Civil War. Each was shaped by circumstances and conditions of locality and by recent historical experience. What is more, these

² Oliver H. Radkey, *The Unknown Civil War in Soviet Russia: A Study of the Green Movement in the Tambov Region, 1920–1921* (Palo Alto, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1976).

³ Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Andrea Graziosi, *The Great Soviet Peasant War: Bolsheviks and Peasants, 1917–1933* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); V. P. Danilov, “Krest’ianskaia revoliutsiia v Rossii,” in *Politicheskie partii v rossiiskikh revoliutsiiaakh v nachale XX veka*, ed. G. N. Sevast’ianova (Moscow: Nauka, 2005).

insurgencies were distinguished from previous episodes of resistance not only by their scale, but also by their organization and efforts to engage political themes and objectives, transcending protest against Soviet policies and seeking to forge a sustainable challenge to the state. Some were more successful than others. But, ultimately, their efforts to do so were a unique attribute of this particular episode in the larger “peasant war” against the state in Russia and the Soviet Union.

The twin tasks of conscription and food procurement pursued by the Soviet state and its rivals in the summer of 1918 gave rise to the first major problems with rural violence and resistance. Mobilization riots overtook several localities in which the Red Army introduced general conscription in the summer of 1918. As with many instances of Russian anticonscription riots in 1914, part of the explanation can be found in the lack of preparation and planning by provincial officials tasked with processing tens of thousands of young men ordered to muster points from the surrounding countryside.⁴ But the overall levels of anxiety in the villages of European Russia, where the Soviet state claimed political sovereignty, were rising in those same summer months, owing to the imposition of government demands upon those communities. Conscription, which was introduced on a limited scale only in June 1918, joined the declaration of a food monopoly by the Bolshevik government in the month previous, and it was on the authority of this monopoly that large groups of factory workers and Communist Party members journeyed from larger cities such as Moscow and Petrograd to the provinces of the Central Agricultural Zone in order to procure food at set prices.

Autumn 1918 saw the first major wave of rural disorder, as the twin campaigns of conscription (this time specifically targeting former junior officers of the tsarist army) and food (at the time of the harvest) combined with the efforts of the Communist Party and other state officials to replace the rural soviets with Committees of the Poor.⁵ Hundreds of uprisings in the villages and towns of central Russia erupted in the final four months of the year, but in nearly all cases, the violence was brief in duration, and followed a familiar pattern. A confrontation with state or party officials over the collection of grain, over the designation of men due to report for mobilization to the Red Army, or over elections to the newly created Committee of the Poor led to violence. The ringing of the village church bell called members of the com-

⁴ See V. V. Kanishchev and Iu. V. Meshcheriakov, *Anatomiia odnogo miatezha: Tambovskoe vosstanie, 17–19 iunia 1918 g.* (Tambov: Izdatel'stvo Tambovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 1995), 83–101; Josh Sanborn, “The Mobilization of 1914 and the Question of the Russian Nation: A Re-examination,” *Slavic Review* 59, 2 (2000): 267–89.

⁵ T. V. Osipova, *Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo v Revoliutsii i Grazhdanskoi voine* (Moscow: Strelets, 2001), 257–93.

munity to meet and organize further action, which most frequently involved little more than choosing a few men to ride to a neighboring village to spread news of the confrontation and call them to rise up against grain procurement squads and the like. In this fashion, rebellion spread to engulf several villages, but in a way that typically preserved the parochial nature of the resistance, in which each village's participation was dependent upon its own circumstances (such as the entry of such a squad or agents of the Military Commissariat), rather than as a manifestation of fundamental solidarity. And rarely would some form of coordination or organization emerge during the course of the violence and disorders to sustain the resistance.

In aggregate, the wave of disturbances in late 1918 were significant, weakening the Soviet state's presence in the provinces at a time when the Don Army under General Petr Krasnov was threatening serious inroads into central Russia and the Volga region. But they were more a foretaste of the difficulties the Soviet state would encounter as it continued to make demands on the rural communities of Soviet Russia and attempted to impose itself on the autonomy that those same villages had secured in 1917–18.

While political slogans were few, and rebels rarely left documents or other traces of their ideas and ideals, themes regarding the defense of local autonomy and a vision of a "pure" version of "soviet power" were emerging. In March 1919, the most significant uprising to date engulfed several districts of Simbirsk and Samara provinces of the Middle Volga. The "*chapannaia voina*" (kaftan war), named after the robe (*chapan*) peasants wore as an outer garment during the cold months of the year, was brief in duration, but it involved a large territory and tens of thousands of people. Estimates of 100,000 and more participating in the *chapannaia voina* may be correct, but this must once again be appreciated in aggregate.

Nevertheless, the core groups of the rebels did develop some form of organization, and some emerged that tried to speak on behalf of those in the villages defying the Soviet state. Calls of "Down with the Communist Party, long live soviet power!" expressed a clear distinction in the minds of participants between the legitimacy of the soviets as institutions of local self-government, on the one side, and the illegitimate centralizing policies and coercive practices of the agents of the state and ruling party, on the other. The extent to which this was a challenge to the legitimacy of the Soviet state, however, must be qualified; many pronouncements of the rebels made it clear that they were violently protesting against local abuses rather than anything more profound.⁶

⁶ Retaining the soviet as an institution, the rebels in villages embroiled in the *chapannaia voina* even entered into discussion with Red Army officers tasked with suppressing the resistance. See V. P. Danilov et al., eds., *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Povolzh'e, 1919–1922: Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2002), 125–28.

But while the number of participants in this particular episode was impressive, and those core groups of rebels (who even briefly occupied the town of Stavropol', although virtually uncontested)⁷ did form a basic command structure and were involved in some furious encounters with Red Army and other Soviet armed units, the resistance of the *chapany* disintegrated almost as rapidly as it flared up. This conflict ended a little over two weeks after the first confrontation between Soviet food procurement agents and rural inhabitants of the village of Novodevich'e in Simbirsk province.⁸

The most authoritative treatment of the military history of the Russian Civil War, refers to 1919 as the "year of the Whites."⁹ But when one looks beyond the traditional scope of organized warfare during this period, 1919 was in many respects the year of the deserter. Earlier attempts to bring increasing numbers of peasants into the Red Army had been only partially successful, increasing the sheer number of soldiers available to Soviet commanders, while at the same time making a much larger number of civilians de facto outlaws for having resisted conscription. It was from this cohort of young men—often heads of household themselves—that the first real steps toward organized and sustained resistance to the state in the countryside emerged. In part, this was a consequence of Moscow's innovations in its campaign against desertion.

Setting up the Commission for the Struggle Against Desertion in December 1918, the Soviet state sought to bring a more organized pressure upon recalcitrant men who had avoided military mobilization since the start of general conscription in the second half of 1918, as well those who had managed to abscond from their Red Army units and garrisons.¹⁰ In so doing, the Soviet state brought the Civil War to the villages in a more sustained manner. The campaign against desertion framed the issue in terms that placed the stakes of the Civil War in the foreground, casting desertion as a betrayal of the agrarian revolution, and deserters as often unwittingly abetting the cause of counter-revolution, embodied by the threatened return of the private landlords and reversal of the land seizures of 1917–18. This Soviet narrative of the Civil War

⁷ Sometimes called "Stavropol'-na-Volge," the town is presently known as Togliatti. The rebels also occupied smaller towns. See Danilov et al., *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Povolzh'e*, 122.

⁸ On the *chapannaia voina* generally, see V. V. Kondrashin, *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Povolzh'e v 1918–1922 gg.* (Moscow: Ianus-K, 2001); V. K. Vorob'ev, "*Chapannaia voina*" v *Simbirskoi gubernii: Mify i real'nost'* (Ulianovsk: Vektor-S, 2008).

⁹ Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2000).

¹⁰ Erik C. Landis, "Who Were the 'Greens'? Rumor and Collective Identity in the Russian Civil War," *Russian Review* 69, 1 (2010): 33–35.

pushed to maximize solidarity with the cause of the Red Army in its fight against the Whites.¹¹

Importantly, though, the campaign against desertion involved more than just propaganda posters and leaflets. Systematic attention to individual documentation for those exempt from service or on leave of absence was carried out via regular sweeps through villages by anti-desertion patrols, also tasked with punishing those who sheltered deserters from authorities. Like the grain procurement squads, their methods became increasingly arbitrary, coercive, and violent, so minimal was the information they possessed regarding the local population, and so deep their mistrust of village soviets as protectors of the local community.¹² So, while the political message of the antidesertion campaign may have been compelling, the practices of the antidesertion squads frequently did more to antagonize and justify continued recalcitrance than they did to undermine its legitimacy.

Placing the deserter alongside the priest and the amorphous “kulak” as the embodiment of rural counterrevolution also called forth a resistance to the Soviet state that was less “of the village” than it was “of the army.”¹³ The so-called “Green Army” appeared spontaneously throughout Soviet territory in 1919 in response to the intensification of antidesertion measures, as groups of deserters took to the local forests and banded together to evade capture and resist efforts to round them up. Sometimes creating linkages with other groups of deserters from nearby villages, developing plans of collective self-defense, and even, on occasion, stockpiling food and weapons, these groups of deserters clearly drew upon the experience many had acquired with the Russian Army in the First World War.

Indeed, the contours of rural resistance during the Civil War more broadly were frequently (and increasingly, as the conflict progressed) drawn from that era of mass mobilization and modern warfare than they were from more traditional forms of rural rebellion.¹⁴ Manifestations of the “Green Army” in vari-

¹¹ For examples, see Stephen White, *The Bolshevik Poster* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 94, 97–98 (plates 5.7, 5.17).

¹² For an insightful description of the methods of antidesertion squads, see the memoirs of Anton Okninskii regarding his years as an employee of a rural soviet in the province of Tambov: A. Okninskii, *Dva goda sredi krest'ian: Vidennoe, slyshanno, perezhito v Tambovskoi gubernii s noiabria 1918 goda do noiabria 1920 goda* (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1986), 122–30.

¹³ This turn of phrase is taken from Tracy McDonald, *Face to the Village: The Riazan Countryside Under Soviet Rule, 1921–1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

¹⁴ That soldiers frequently moved seamlessly from the context of war on the Eastern Front to civil war back home has drawn speculation on the importance of the former experience for understanding the violence and “paramilitarism” that marked

ous rural locales were frequently led by former junior officers (often with wartime commissions) whose authority derived from their practical experience, rather than from their politics. The more elaborate organizations of deserters in such places as Voronezh and Iaroslavl' were reported to include thousands of men, with systems of trenches carved out of the forest floor, machine guns and light artillery secured, and occasionally lines of command leading up to a *shtab* (headquarters), where former officers made plans for their swelling army-in-waiting.¹⁵

Ultimately, however, such elaborate deserter encampments were exceptional, but like the more typical manifestations of the "Green Army" attracting a few dozen covillagers intent upon evading capture by the antidesertion squads, their attempts at organization were a defensive response to conscription that largely defied efforts by outsiders to co-opt or politicize.¹⁶ Even the larger manifestations of violence involving the "Green Army" were reactive, escalating in response to attempts by the Soviet state to crack down on tent villages that appeared in the forests and swamps outside of main provincial population centers.

Nevertheless, the disorders generated by the ongoing struggle between the state's agents and groups in the countryside, such as deserters, had brought significant ramifications for the Red Army and its efforts to fight its main enemies, the Volunteer and White armies of Denikin and Kolchak. Not only were regular Red Army troops diverted to the "internal front" when clashes be-

the latter. There is a common-sense appeal to this line of interpretation, although it is difficult to imagine compelling evidence for this thesis. See, for example, Joshua Sarnborn, "Unsettling the Empire: Violent Migrations and Social Disaster in Russia during World War I," *Journal of Modern History* 77, 2 (2005): 290–324. The extent to which more organized activities led by war veterans represented a significant and durable, rather than temporary, transformation in popular resistance is similarly questionable, especially in light of the fragmented and localized (yet extensive) period of popular resistance to collectivization from 1929 to 1933. For an argument that the Civil War does represent such a substantive transformation in the phenomenon of *povstanchestvo*, or insurgency, see A. A. Kurenyshev, *Krest'ianskie voenno-politicheskie organizatsii Rossii: Povstanchestvo, 1918–1922 gg.* (Moscow: Sputnik, 2010), especially 32.

¹⁵ P. A. Aptekar', "Zelenyi val'—antibol'shevitskie krest'ianskie vystupleniia v mae-sentiabre 1919 g.," *Belaia gvardiia*, no. 6 (2002): 93–96. For a thorough survey of this phenomenon, see A. V. Posadskii, *Zelenoe dvizhenie v Grazhdanskoi voine v Rossii: Krest'ianskii front mezhdu krasnymi i belymi, 1918–1922 gg.* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2018).

¹⁶ This includes the attempts by the Whites to co-opt the resistance of deserters in contested territory in 1919. See A. Posadskii, "Kazaki i krest'iane – nesostoiavshchiisia soiuz 1919 g.," *Belaia gvardiia*, no. 6 (2002): 155–56.

tween deserters and antidesertion forces escalated, but the army also became increasingly involved in policing the countryside as 1919 progressed.¹⁷

The White armies of Kolchak and Denikin faced similar problems. Kolchak's advance westward toward Moscow in spring 1919 was hampered by rural uprisings that erupted in response to conscription drives and food procurement efforts by his military. While nominally a "supreme commander" and "dictator," Kolchak's military administration in Siberia was plagued by challenges to its control over territory and resources, with autonomous warlords along the Trans-Siberian Railroad and guerrilla "partisans" wreaking havoc on the Whites' campaign to defeat Bolshevism. Relying almost exclusively upon armed force to compel compliance in the villages of Western Siberia, any semblance of temporary collaboration enjoyed by Kolchak's government was won at tremendous cost in human life.¹⁸

Later in 1919, the White movement in southern Russia was similarly plagued by disruptions in its rearguard during its own advance toward Moscow, with violent resistance to conscription and other burdens imposed by the White administration erupting in the South Kuban' and Terek regions, as well as further south, closer to the tense border shared with the Republic of Georgia. While not necessarily decisive for the fate of Denikin's campaign in the second half of 1919, the movement that developed in the "no man's land" near the Georgian border did prove durable, as it sought to establish itself as an autonomous force in the Russian Civil War.¹⁹ In this manner, the rural resistance

¹⁷ See, for example, the description of the disruption caused by armed deserters in June 1919 to the Southern Front command of the Red Army provided in L. G. Protasov et al., eds., *"Antonovshchina": Krest'ianskoe vosstanie v Tambovskoi oblasti v 1920–1921 gg.: Dokumenty, materialy, vospominaniia* (Tambov: Upravlenie kul'tury i arkhivnogo dela Tambovskoi oblasti, 2007), 99.

¹⁸ Jonathan Smele, *Civil War in Siberia: The Anti-Bolshevik Government of Admiral Kolchak, 1918–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 386–87; Gayle Lonergan, "Resistance, Support, and the Changing Dynamics of the Village in Kolchakia during the Russian Civil War," *Revolutionary Russia* 21, 1 (2008): 57–72.

¹⁹ A. A. Cherkasov, *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Chernomor'e v periode revoliutsii i Grazhdanskoi voiny* (Krasnodar: Kubanskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2003); A. A. Cherkasov, *Grazhdanskaia voina na Kubani i Chernomor'e (1917–1922 gody): "Tret'ia sila" v sotsial'no-politicheskom protivostoianii* (Sochi: Sochinskii gosudarstvennyi universitet turizma i kurortnogo dela, 2007); A. A. Cherkasov, ed., *Narodnoe opolchenie na Chernomor'e: Armia tretei sily v Grazhdanskoi voine. Sbornik dokumentov* (Sochi: Sochinskii gosudarstvennyi universitet turizma i kurortnogo dela, 2003). On the politics of this region during the Civil War, see Peter Kenez, "The Relations between the Volunteer Army and Georgia, 1918–1920: A Case Study in Disunity," *Slavonic and East European Review* 48, 112 (1970): 403–23.

behind the front lines of both Denikin's and Kolchak's armies became nurseries for more serious organized rebellions against Soviet rule in 1920 and 1921.

Fought over such a vast canvas, the Russian Civil War was also distinguished by gaps and zones of limited control. While the struggle between Reds and Whites represented the main political axis that influenced and informed individual and collective loyalties, polarization was far from complete, and it was a continual struggle for the leaders of the Soviet government and the commanders of the White armies to convince people to view ongoing developments through the Red/White lens. In Ukraine, for instance, there were assorted groups involved in the armed struggle for power that cast the stakes in terms of national independence, rather than socialism and workers' revolution. However, the most storied armed force to emerge in Ukraine, the insurgent army led by Nestor Makhno, was not truly nationalist in orientation, but agrarian and anarchist. Makhno's forces matured in one of those "gaps" of the Russian Civil War in southeastern Ukraine, a space created by the retreat of the Central Powers in the second half of 1918. It forged a political platform that provided the clearest articulation of the kind of revolutionary parochialism that animated rural resistance in other parts of the former Russian Empire. Makhno's movement called for "free soviets," the local institutional embodiment of revolutionary emancipation, and resisted any force that stood for reassertion of central state control and a compromise of village authority.²⁰ As the main armies of the Civil War closed in, however, Makhno's understanding of the wider strategic context for his avowed anarchism led him to prioritize the fight against the Volunteer Army advancing from South Russia. Collaborating with the Red Army on three separate occasions between 1918 and 1920, Makhno's compromise nevertheless did nothing to diminish his growing reputation as a rural insurgent leader charting a path independent from the main belligerents.²¹ Each spell of collaboration, though, was short-lived, yet even after the Soviet government declared Makhno an enemy of their revolution (most notably in the summer of 1919), Makhno continued to view the Whites as the overriding threat.

The path followed by Makhno's Insurgent Army served as a marker for peasant politics more broadly during the Civil War era. Solidarity with the Communist Party and Soviet state was demonstrated at the moments of its greatest weakness in the fight against the Whites: just as Makhno was willing

²⁰ V. P. Danilov et al., eds., *Nestor Makhno: Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na Ukraine, 1919–1921: Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2006), 288.

²¹ On the role of Makhno's personal charisma and the minimal significance of political ideology to the rebellion in southeastern Ukraine, see Felix Schnell, "'Tear Them Apart ... and Be Done with It!': The Ataman-Leadership of Nestor Makhno as a Culture of Violence," *Ab Imperio*, no. 3 (2008): 195–221.

to cooperate on the battlefield with the Red Army, so, too, were hundreds of thousands of peasant men who, in the autumn of 1919, surrendered to military commissariat officials and enlisted in the Red Army at the height of General Denikin's offensive.²² Whatever reasonable doubts can be cast upon the extent to which this wave of re-enlistment represented a *perelom* (or "transformation") in the relationship between the Communist regime and the peasantry, there is a logic to the conclusion that most rural communities had a stronger and more lasting antipathy for the Whites, even in cases in which communities had no experience of White rule. Struggle as the White military leaders might—however belatedly—to dissociate their movement from the old agrarian order, White victory from the perspective of the villages promised a return of private landowners and an end to the revolutionary dream.

The narrative of Civil War that cast the Soviet government as the champion of the 1917 revolution and, by implication, of land to the peasantry, worked in the Communists' favor only at particular moments in the course of the conflict. It certainly was in tension with the experience of many agricultural provinces that remained under Soviet control for the duration of that conflict. The reality of Soviet rule for these provinces, and for others that were "liberated" from White control in Siberia and elsewhere, entailed continual pressure from the state's agents to supply the army and cities with grain, money, and other resources.

For those provinces that endured Soviet rule from the start of the Civil War, the disruptions of the conflict combined with repeated campaigns to requisition grain to bring many areas to the brink of famine by 1920. Agricultural production dropped precipitously owing to a number of factors, and despite the reluctant efforts of policy makers in Moscow to introduce incentives under the *prodrazverstka* grain procurement campaign in 1920, by the late summer of that year the level of anxiety in grain-producing provinces was palpable as the state prepared another round of requisitioning with the imminent harvest.²³ By this time, the fronts of the Civil War had largely retreated, and if the threat of the Whites had failed to resonate consistently in the villages over the course of 1919 and early 1920, then the call for continued sacrifice and for solidarity during the Soviet Republic's war with Poland failed to connect with popular sympathies of the beleaguered rural population. Instead, absent the appeal to the threat of a White-led counterrevolution, and with many regular Red Army troops engaged in hostilities with Polish forces to the West, the

²² See Orlando Figes, "The Red Army and Mass Mobilization during the Russian Civil War, 1918–1920," *Past and Present* 129, 1 (1990): 168–211.

²³ On Soviet management of the food supply during the Civil War, see Lars Lih, *Bread and Authority in Russia, 1914–1921* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

political and military context for rural resistance had changed substantially by the second half of 1920.

The most important front of internal resistance to erupt under these new conditions occurred in the central agricultural province of Tambov.²⁴ There, the violence and disorders that arose with the commencement of food requisitions in August 1920 were joined and sustained by more organized violence perpetrated by armed gangs led by Aleksandr Antonov, a young man who had served briefly in the provincial police organization following the 1917 revolution, a position he had secured largely owing to his long-standing association with the Socialist-Revolutionary Party.

When Antonov left the Bolshevik-dominated administration in Kirsanov *uezd* (county <<district? that's the translation we normally use>>) under a cloud, he disappeared for a number of weeks before resurfacing in the same area to live as an outlaw during the subsequent two years. Having spent much of those years moving from village to village and forest to swamp, he was joined by an assortment of former militia colleagues, disaffected socialists, and deserters in a sporadic campaign of terror targeting Communist Party and state personnel in southeastern Tambov province. While such activities were labelled "banditry" by Soviet state officials, it was clear that this was not mere criminality: their attacks were calculated and politically motivated.

Importantly, though, they made no real attempts to expand their campaign. While they courted popular sympathy and support in the villages of Kirsanov and the surrounding counties <<districts>> (*uezdy*) of Tambov, their activities were both created and limited by the circumstances of the Civil War. The end of the Red Army's campaign against the Whites, and the apparent end of the Civil War itself, left Antonov's group (or *druzhina*, to use their own phrase) facing either reconciliation with the state, or escalation of their activities. Their situation mirrored that of other organized political groups in Soviet Russia that tried to walk the fine line between maintaining revolutionary credentials and remaining anticommunist.²⁵ Reconciliation, however, was a possibility no side took seriously, and the demise of the White counterrevolution implicitly liberated the field of political action for socialist opponents of the Bolsheviks.

While the provincial administration in Tambov was unsurprised by the hostility encountered by food requisition squads in the autumn of 1920,

²⁴ This section is largely derived from Erik C. Landis, *Bandits and Partisans: The Antonov Movement in the Russian Civil War* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008).

²⁵ Scott B. Smith, *Captives of Revolution: The Socialist Revolutionaries and the Bolshevik Dictatorship, 1918–1923* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), 192–98, 216–19.

they were unprepared for the manner in which those confrontations were sustained and escalated by Antonov and his supporters. Initial attempts by armed patrols of Communist Party members, Red Army officer cadets, and the Tambov Cheka to suppress individual uprisings and to threaten and punish villages that participated in resistance, did not discourage further defiance as they had in previous episodes of rural violence. Yet there remained an uncertainty at the heart of the provincial leadership's approach to the situation, caught between the conviction that this was a typical wave of village uprisings that would dissipate with time and selective application of repressions, and the fear that the participation of organized rebels led by Antonov made this situation distinctly more serious.

When the main rebel forces—whose numbers had grown to number in the thousands by October 1920, although broken into several groups, and lacking anything more than ad hoc organization—were chased out of Tambov by Red Army cavalry and Internal Security (VOKhR) troops, attention quickly returned to the campaign to procure grain. The available armed forces were tasked with supporting the food requisition squads whose work had been so significantly delayed. But this proved to be a short period of remission, for the rebels roamed the countryside of neighboring Saratov province for less than a fortnight, during which time the village communities of southern Tambov were once more beset by the demands of the Soviet state for scarce grain and other foodstuffs. While shifting attention to the requisition campaign did not necessarily transform the situation in Tambov, laying the groundwork for a revival of the insurgency in November 1920, it is indicative of the priorities set for the provincial leadership, and of their hope that the events of the previous weeks were just a particularly bad spell of rural violence, rather than anything more profound.

The transformation in the rebellion occurred in that month, however. It did so largely as a result of the rebel groups' ability to agree upon a single organization and central leadership. It was at this point, the agreement of multiple rebel "commanders" leading small units composed of villagers from their respective native regions to form the "Partisan Army of the Tambov Region," that the rebellion in Tambov became something altogether different. Soon the Partisan Army developed its own political wing—the Union of the Toiling Peasantry (STK)—which began to supplant the village and *volost'* (district <<township?>>) soviets in the widening territory controlled by the rebellion. While the village soviets had on many occasions been subjected to attacks by rebels upon entering a given village, frequently joined by local community members, the growth of the network of village STKs from December 1920 onward largely depended upon targeting the individuals that had previously staffed the soviets. Communist Party members were banished or killed by

rebels in Tambov, although association with the rural soviets more generally did not make an individual an enemy of the “people,” as determined by the rebel leaders.²⁶

Within a short time, from November 1920 to January 1921, the rebellion in Tambov grew to far exceed any previous episode of violent resistance in the countryside. In terms of its organization—with the Partisan Army composed of some 16 regiments (divided into 2 main army groups) and the STK network (which would at its height incorporate hundreds of villages) providing an integrated basis for civilian support of the rebel armies—the rebellion in Tambov proved more sophisticated than any other peasant uprising of the Civil War period. A unified political program emerged in late 1920, composed of some 18 points that dwelled, particularly, on the guarantee of civil rights and the reconvoation of the Constituent Assembly, which had been abruptly closed by the Bolsheviks in January 1918. Much of the program was inspired by, if not directly drawn from, the Civil War-era program of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, with its focus particularly on the Land Law of 1918 passed by the Constituent Assembly in Petrograd.²⁷

The STK program became a centerpiece of Partisan Army overtures to village communities, as they enlisted support for their campaign to end the Bolshevik dictatorship. At its height in the first months of 1921, the severity of the rebellion in Tambov was not limited to the strength of popular grievances with the Soviet state. Soviet officials recognized that the rebellion in Tambov sought to promote ideas and ideals that were a challenge to the regime, and

²⁶ Across the border in Voronezh province, a smaller-scale rebellion led by a former Red Army officer, Grigorii Kolesnikov, emerged as a protest against Soviet policies and cultivated the sympathies of local state officials, preserving local soviets in the process. According to a particularly eloquent report by a Communist Party commissar attached to forces in Voronezh, “the rebels who protested against food policy in the central provinces in 1918 and 1919, and who clearly had kulak connections, have very little in common with the rebels today [in late 1920]. Back then, the participants were almost exclusively men, whose first act was the destruction of the local soviet and chasing away the soviet workers. Now it is completely different. Most importantly, the rebellion now involves the entire local population, beginning with the elderly and ending with women and children. The soviets are not attacked, but instead they decide to join the rebellion. By all appearances, the soviets are preserved by the rebels, even when the soviet personnel flee or put up resistance. The portraits of the Revolution’s leaders—Lenin and Trotskii—are everywhere preserved, along with the Soviet flag.” Report reproduced in A. Razinkov, “Armiia chernoii kalitvy,” *Voronezh: Russkii provintsial’nyi zhurnal*, no. 3 (2002): 43. On the Kolesnikov rebellion more generally, see D. Borisov, *Kolesnikovshchina: Anti-kommunisticheskoe vosstanie voronezhskogo krest’ianstva v 1920–1921 gg.* (Moscow: Posev, 2012).

²⁷ Radkey, *Unknown Civil War*, 70; Smith, *Captives of Revolution*, 228.

had become an underlying component of the rebellion's success in mobilizing support.

Other serious outbreaks of rural insurgency against the Soviet state erupted soon after. The most prominent enveloped a vast territory affecting large parts of Western Siberia and contemporary Kazakhstan in early 1921. This territory had been liberated by the Red Army from the control of Kolchak's White government in summer 1919, and in the following months had been administered by the transitional Siberian Revolutionary Committee and its local affiliates. Some months later, in July 1920, this region became the focus of Soviet hopes for alleviation of the food crisis that chronically afflicted the grain-poor provinces and major cities, as well as the Red Army.²⁸ When the rebellion in Tambov began only a short time later, and complicated the collection and transport of grain from that province and contiguous regions (such as the Middle Volga and Don territory), the food supply "front" shifted with particular intensity onto Western Siberia.²⁹

The circumstances that generated conflict in this region differed, however, from those in Tambov. Not only were food requisitions, labor duties, and military conscription suddenly imposed in 1920, but these territories had been recently "liberated" with the active involvement of many local partisans who had fought Kolchak and who, by implication if not design, placed their hopes for the future in the Soviet government.³⁰ The first clashes in summer 1920 heavily involved the former partisan leaders, whose sense of prestige and independence was challenged when the Soviet government sought to enlist them for basic service in the Red Army. Along with individuals who had previously fought in Kolchak's army, either voluntarily or by conscription, the former partisans constituted one component in a complex amalgam of local circumstances and social forces that coalesced in a wave of violence engulfing the region in early 1921.

The violence that spread initially throughout Tiumen' province in late January had predictable origins in food procurement, and the Soviet government's drive to collect as much grain as possible. In a manner that had become typical of the Civil War period, the campaign for grain collection was

²⁸ V. I. Shishkin, ed., *Sibirskaiia Vandeia* (Moscow: Demokratiia, 2000), 1: 40–42.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 2: 6–7, 9–11.

³⁰ Norman G. O. Pereira, "The Partisan Movement in Western Siberia, 1918–1920," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 38, 1 (1990): 87–97. Tasked with disbanding the partisans and integrating their members into the Red Army, one member of the Soviet Siberian Revolutionary Committee described the partisans as an admixture of genuine Bolsheviks, anarchists, left and right Socialist-Revolutionaries, "and every variety of adventurer." The situation, wrote V. M. Kosarev in early 1920, "has the whiff of Ukraine to it" (see Shishkin, *Sibirskaiia Vandeia*, 1: 64).

conducted in a confrontational style, driven by the assumptions that farming communities would show resistance and the hostility of farming communities was assumed, and that any grain collected would only amount to a fraction of the stockpiles held (and hidden) by village households. Mistrust of the Soviet government and its agents ran particularly high, and little progress was made in establishing a functioning relationship with the communities of rural Siberia.³¹

Local institutions such as soviets were similarly regarded as unreliable, and so the procurement of grain was akin to a centralized, military campaign that overran local civilian institutions; abuses of authority and coercion were an almost inevitable by-product.³² Once more, in a way typical of the era, but on a more pronounced scale, generalized grievances associated with the collection of grain found initial expression through local men with recent military experience. In the case of this region, it was ex-partisans, former Kolchak soldiers, and even recently demobilized Red Army soldiers who emerged as the “first actors” in the wave of violence that overran provincial administration in Tiumen’.

The violence that swept through the province was organized but disjointed. As one contemporary historian notes, it is better to think of several uprisings with a common orientation rather than a single 1921 rebellion in Western Siberia.³³ While violence initially erupted in southern Ishim uезд in late January, within a matter of days other rebel groups identifying themselves as divisions or units of the “People’s Insurgent Army” had emerged in other parts of the province and beyond, even occupying such towns as Tobol’sk, often regarded as the historical capital of Siberia, and Petropavlovsk,

³¹ This is demonstrated, in part, by the hostility that greeted official attempts to arrange for a public fund of seed grain. Launched in the first weeks of 1921, the Soviet effort to collect seed grain to ensure a public supply for future sowing campaigns was undermined by rumors that the state was requisitioning grain in all but name, and that the collected grain would be transported out of the region for consumption (see Shishkin, *Sibirskaiia Vandeiia*, 2: 607).

³² In a tactic that would become familiar in 1921, the Soviet government sought to quell popular anger in insurgent regions and elsewhere by publicly naming and investigating abusive Food Commissariat officials and agents, and in certain cases trying them publicly before Revolutionary Tribunals. This sought to divert attention away from systematic over-requisitioning, which left communities facing grain shortfalls and hunger, onto “exceptional” examples of abusive practices by rogue agents. From Tiumen’ province, for example, see V. I. Shishkin, ed., *Za sovety bez kommunistov: Krest’ianskoe vosstanie v Tiimenskoi gubernii 1921* (Novosibirsk: Sibirskii khronograf, 2000), 244–52; Shishkin, *Sibirskaiia Vandeiia*, 2: 188–89.

³³ D. A. Safonov, *Velikaia krest’ianskaia voina 1920–1921 i iuzhnyi Ural* (Orenburg: Izdatel’stvo “Orenburgskaia guberniia,” 1999), 189.

a station town on the Trans-Siberian Railroad. The speed with which such organization emerged strongly suggests advanced planning and conspiracy at a local level at least, and the mobilization of men and the collection of firearms from the villages further indicates the significant role played by men with military experience.³⁴

Political organization and the communication of a positive program for the rebellion was less in evidence, although there are clear indications that some insurgent groups were active in trying to carry out political change in the villages. Prompting a village community to select its own representatives to the local soviet, for instance, offered a basic way of realizing the fundamental principles behind the most common rebel slogans, and (as in Tambov) it was not unusual for employees of the local soviet (almost never Communist Party members) to remain in place even after a village joined the rebels.³⁵

This type of transition was not without exceptions, however. In the far north of Tiumen' province, rebels in some cases replaced soviets with village *upravy* <<provide translation>>, recalling the prerevolutionary zemstvo administration.³⁶ Such variations, however, did not compromise the principle of local self-government that animated the struggle against communist dictatorship. But compromises were made. Just as the Soviet government cited the Civil War to justify its most coercive policies, rebel leaders in Siberia, as in other rural rebellions, found it difficult to tolerate noncooperation and a village's refusal to join the insurgency. One order issued on 22 February 1921 by the "Southern People's Army of Ishim Uezd" stated unequivocally: "[N]o quarter is permitted – one is either with the people, or against them."³⁷ Civilians in the villages were frequently trapped by the developing conflict between insurgents and state forces. Collaboration with one side left a village vulnerable to violent reprisals by the other; with armed forces thinly dispersed and almost

³⁴ According to one Red Army infantry brigade commander: "it is clear that the rebel leaders are trained military men, as they seek to make every village house into a fortress. In addition, each road and village in the area [of Petropavlovsk] is barricaded and camouflaged. The enemy sits in trenches cut out of the snow and ice. Our troops have come to expect hostile fire from each and every house..." (Shishkin, *Za sovety bez kommunistov*, 229).

³⁵ The members of the Orlov soviet executive committee in Tiumen' province even appealed to the local rebel commanders expressing their wish to continue to serve the "people" under the new authorities who now enjoyed the people's trust. See Shishkin, *Za sovety bez kommunistov*, 180.

³⁶ Safonov, *Velikaia krest'ianskaia voina*, 188.

³⁷ Shishkin, *Za sovety bez kommunistov*, 258.

constantly on the move, this dilemma lay at the root of much of the violence during the course of the conflict.³⁸

Unlike the Partisan Army in Tambov, however, the rebels in Tiumen' and the wider region failed to form a unified organization. Individual armed groups possessed a headquarters and command, but there was never a point at which a single "People's Insurgent Army" integrated these different groups. As one commentator noted, the rebel rearguard—its organization of the villages as a support for the rebellion—was far greater than its organization at the front lines.³⁹

This failure was not for a lack of trying. Rebel commanders had made multiple attempts to meet and arrive at a unified command to facilitate the growth of the rebellion, but all these attempts failed. In part, the problem was political, with no common set of objectives or principles that satisfied the respective rebel commanders in the villages and *uezdy* of Tiumen' and beyond. One could legitimately speculate that it was a shortcoming of leadership, even personality, with Western Siberia lacking an Antonov to provide a focal point for the movement.⁴⁰ As such, the rebellion in Western Siberia remained disjointed, and its political content was limited to general principles regarding the responsibility of government to respect the will of the people, and to hold regular and legitimate elections.⁴¹ While opposition to the Communist Party was intense, there was a much clearer focus on the perceived lawlessness of state and party officials operating in Siberia. Whereas rebels in Tambov worked particularly hard at transforming grievances with local conditions into a maximalist program of ending the Soviet dictatorship, rebels in Siberia made relatively little effort in this regard, and Moscow remained a distant and obscure source of their discontent.⁴²

³⁸ Ibid., 231–32

³⁹ Shishkin, *Sibirskaia Vandeia*, 2: 700–1.

⁴⁰ It may be worth acknowledging that the importance of Aleksandr Antonov to the movement in Tambov in 1920–21 is disputed in some publications. The evidence and arguments, however, are far from compelling: see B. Sennikov, *Tambovskoe vosstanie 1918–1921 gg. i raskrest'ianivanie Rossii 1929–1933 gg.* (Moscow: Posev, 2004).

⁴¹ For instance, see the March 1921 statement published in the rebel newspaper from occupied Tobol'sk, *Golos Narodnoi armii* (Voice of the People's Army), reproduced in an April 1912 <<1921?>> Cheka review of the rebel movement, in Shishkin, *Sibirskaia Vandeia*, 2: 701–02.

⁴² On the importance of considering organizational issues, as well as motivations or grievances, in understanding such rebellions, see Jeremy Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 34–39.

As a consequence of growing violence in Western Siberia, grain shipments westward temporarily ceased at a time of mounting discontent in the major cities of European Russia. Despite the fact that Soviet officials were aware that legitimate grievances animated the violence, the priority of relieving the provisions crisis in European Russia shaped their approach to the ongoing situation. The unifying slogans of “soviets without Communists” and “down with the Communists, all power to the soviets” protested the practices of the Soviet government, but these political grievances were dismissed in the face of what was regarded as an actual crisis of food supply. The chairman of the Siberian Revolutionary Committee, I. N. Smirnov, dwelled on the overriding task of restoring grain shipments in his updates to Lenin and the Soviet government during the rebellion. He expressed his belief that the most effective way of suppressing the resistance would entail the deployment of state armed forces that were “hungry,” meant in the literal sense.⁴³

Smirnov was also central to early efforts by state officials and Red Army commanders to mobilize civilians to protect railroad lines against sabotage. Making villages collectively responsible for a local stretch of railroad, with certain individuals designated as “hostages,” who would pay for sabotage with their lives, was not without precedent, but nowhere else in Soviet Russia was this tactic pursued to the same extent.⁴⁴ Hostage-taking by Soviet authorities was also pronounced in the region’s towns, which were increasingly surrounded by an insurgent countryside and had become vulnerable outposts for refugee Communists from the villages. With several towns overrun by rebel groups in the course of the conflict, in any one instance the first victims would be civilian hostages executed by panicked government and party officials.⁴⁵

Lacking any firm intelligence on the rebels, the Soviet authorities in the region dismissed them as “whiteguardists,” kulaks, and stooges of the Socialist-Revolutionaries and its <<their?>> “Siberian Peasant Union,” an underground political organization that the Cheka had, in fact, liquidated at the end of 1920.⁴⁶ For their part, the rebels issued propaganda denying their association with Kolchak and the White counterrevolution.⁴⁷ Most prominent in their public relations campaign were claims regarding the strength of the rebellion itself, its spread to other regions, and the number of towns occupied by rebel

⁴³ Shishkin, *Sibirskaiia Vandeia*, 2: 198, 241.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2: 177, 182.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2: 450. Rebels in Ishim *uezd* similarly threatened to punish hostages if villages failed to meet the demands of the rebels. See *ibid.*, 2: 256.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 2: 128–29 (see especially n. 1); Safonov, *Krest’ianskaia voina*, 189.

⁴⁷ For example, see Shishkin, *Sibirskaiia Vandeia*, 2: 426.

forces.⁴⁸ As much as these claims were deliberately inflated in order to persuade people to support the rebels, however, they also represent the extent to which rebels themselves relied upon a wider context for their activities, as well as the paucity of hard information they possessed regarding developments outside of their immediate region.

The very same dynamic characterized the rebellion in Tambov and, to a lesser extent, southeastern Ukraine. Aleksandr Antonov's Partisan Army, which did not manage to occupy any of the major towns of Tambov, consistently emphasized the progress of anti-Soviet movements outside of the province. While sometimes accurate, this information was frequently based only on rumor and hope. The prominence of this theme increased as the Tambov rebels came under rising pressure from the Red Army in 1921, and it became the primary basis for their continued calls to the peasantry for solidarity and sacrifice.⁴⁹ Makhno's Insurgent Army did not rely upon such propaganda, but when it were forced out of its native region in early 1921 by the Red Army, Makhno and his supporters acted upon received information regarding other rebellions and insurgencies, travelling to Kursk, Voronezh, and the Don region, as well as other parts of Ukraine, in a desperate effort to revive their struggle by combining forces with others.⁵⁰

Commitment to an end of communist dictatorship entailed more than a defense of the native village. Yet the claim that these rebellions were a defense of a more fundamental peasant anarchism is more difficult to sustain, given the reliance upon a wider frame of reference for their activities. Not all of these movements in 1920–21 shared the same commitment to such a maximalist objective, but all of them possessed a sense of a wider context for local events, whether or not their understanding of that context was accurate. All struggled, with varying degrees of commitment and success, with shaping popular understandings of their fight against the Soviet state. Yet, while stories of anti-Soviet rebellions in other parts of the former empire, and of uprisings in the major cities of European Russia in 1921, may have been effective in shaping people's understandings of the current opportunity for toppling the Soviet government, they did so in a manner that abdicated responsibility, or agency, to unknown, "other" forces. As such, any success rebel leaders had in

⁴⁸ Shishkin, *Za sovety bez kommunistov*, 227–28, 233–34; Shishkin, *Sibirskaiia Vandeia*, 2: 196–97.

⁴⁹ Erik C. Landis, "Waiting for Makhno: Context and Legitimacy in a Russian Peasant War," *Past and Present* 183, 1 (2004): 199–236.

⁵⁰ Danilov, *Nestor Makhno*, 667–69. In ending their exploration of the opportunities of linking up with other rebel armies, Makhno's commanders explained their decision in humanitarian terms, citing the depth of the food crisis in rural areas that made it impossible to sustain an insurgency.

extending the frame of reference for everyday participants and civilians did not necessarily produce a greater willingness to assume risk, or extend the field of action beyond the native region.

Indeed, while it is clear from the available evidence that rebel leaders struggled to maintain control over the contextualization of their rebellions, countering Soviet claims that minimized their significance, extent, and legitimacy, it is less clear how much they struggled to extend the field of action for their rebellions, and to take the anti-Soviet struggle beyond their native territories and closer to the heart of Soviet power. For instance, despite perfunctory attempts to implant local STKs in neighboring Saratov and Penza provinces during their forays outside of Tambov province, the Partisan Army's experiences beyond its native territory were typically born of desperation and flight from Red Army cavalry rather than design, and these actions rapidly degenerated into raids upon the local population.⁵¹ While varying in strength across different episodes of rural insurgency and resistance, localism remained a common, and overriding, quality of these "peasant wars."

As long as the Soviet government was able to control public discontent and resistance in the major cities, and especially the capital Moscow, suppression of these rural insurgencies was practically inevitable. With the brutal "liquidation" of the mutiny at the Baltic naval base of Kronshtadt in March 1921, and the earlier crackdown on worker protests in Moscow, the Soviet government had survived its most perilous moment since the height of the Whites' military offensive in the summer of 1919. This consolidation of control over the urban centers of Soviet power occurred alongside the Communist Party's controversial adoption of basic principles promising an end to the most coercive and unpopular policies of the Civil War. The replacement of the *razverstka* <<prodrazverstka?>> and forced requisitioning of "surplus" food by a so-called "tax in kind" became the cornerstone of the New Economic Policy (NEP) developed over the course of 1921. Consigning the *razverstka* to the past was, in large part, an admission that the Soviet state, intent upon reconstruction following several years of international and civil conflict, could not sustain policies that antagonized the majority of civilians, and that essentially relied upon armed force and coercion.

The twin Soviet promises of an end to forced requisitioning, and a partial decriminalization of open trade in grain, remained vague at the time of their announcement in March and April 1921, and village communities were justified in their skepticism upon receiving the news. However, in the context of rural violence and ongoing anti-Soviet insurgencies, the Soviet government's apparent retreat in the face of popular resistance had a substantial effect upon

⁵¹ See G. V. Vedeniapin, "Antonovshchina," *Volga*, nos. 5–6 (1997): 218–46.

the morale of a weary and anxious rural population. While the Soviet government had revised policies on numerous occasions in the previous three years—as in the brief experiment with the *kombedy* (local “committees of the poor”) in 1918–19—the end of the *razverstka* marked the first time that the Soviet government explicitly sought to speak to and address grievances of rural communities. This was particularly the case in provinces such as Tambov, in which the Soviet state and Communist Party sought to exploit whatever issues they could as a wedge to break up the support rebels enjoyed among the local population. Such considerations had, in fact, prompted the authorities in Tambov already in February 1921 to announce the end of requisitioning in the province, several weeks before officials in Moscow were convinced to extend such a policy throughout the Soviet Republic.⁵² Particularly within the context of an ongoing counterinsurgency effort in 1921, the policies that would become known as the NEP proved especially effective in recasting armed resistance as protest rather than revolution, and reasserting the authority of the Soviet government.⁵³

However, it was equally appreciated that political concessions could only form one component of any counterinsurgency strategy, and that their effectiveness was ultimately contingent upon the willingness and capacity of the Red Army and other government forces to exert pressure on rebel groups and, particularly, civilians. In Tambov, efforts to create lists of all individuals in villages embroiled in the insurgency met with mistrust and passive resistance, with villagers refusing to speak with state officials or providing false names, fearful that any connection to a known rebel would result in punishment, or that providing information would be viewed by local rebel groups as collaboration with the enemy. Authorities regularly resorted to taking hostages as a means of overcoming local resistance to collaboration. In Tambov a network of internment camps grew rapidly as the Red Army made greater use of

⁵² Landis, *Bandits and Partisans*, 163–65, 175–80.

⁵³ As a consequence, the concessions of the NEP could be understood as a victory of the armed rural rebels, even if rebel leaders struggled against this reading. Other contemporaries were drawn to this understanding, as well. For instance, the sociologist Pitirim Sorokin visited Tambov briefly at the height of the rebellion in 1921, encountering Antonovist rebels more than once. In his memoirs, written in 1924, he reflects on his short experience, quoting words of an Antonovist he met in Tambov: “if the communistic program was abandoned in 1921, if foreign capitalists have been granted some concessions, and if some property rights are now secure under Bolshevism, this is not due to the sensibility of Lenin of the Communist Government, nor to the intervention of foreign politicians and capitalists. It is due, first of all, to these Antonoff [Antonov] ‘boys,’ to the thousands of Russian peasants, and to others who have died and are dying ‘to bring these mad dogs to their senses.’” See Pitirim Sorokin, *Leaves from a Russian Diary* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1924), 259–60.

this strategy. However, state authorities came to appreciate that collaboration could only be won through the exercise of further violence, for not only had the relationship between the Soviet government and rural communities been poisoned by the experience of the Civil War, the more recent experience of anti-Soviet rebellions had in many cases left villagers paralyzed by fear. One Red Army commander in Ukraine described how the reluctance of local villagers to cooperate was overcome only with the selection of a small number of kulaks or “suspicious-looking persons,” who would be hacked to death (*rubit’ shashkami*) by Red Army soldiers before a general assembly of villagers. In Tambov, government officials in the field similarly rationalized such acts of violence against civilians, stating that “without executions, nothing can be achieved.”⁵⁴

Collaboration meant more than informing on family members and neighbors with ties to anti-Soviet rebels, and violence against civilians was only a crude instrument for encouraging collaboration without additional mechanisms or channels for cultivating ties with local communities embroiled in the conflict. State authorities in Ukraine and Tambov, for example, sought to isolate armed rebel groups by cultivating avenues of civilian collaboration, such as the organization of “self-defense” units to forge cooperation with the Red Army and protect villages against rebel incursions.⁵⁵ Revolutionary committees established in villages and districts in the conflict zone provided an institutional base for state authority in the place of elected soviets. These were frequently staffed by demobilized Red Army soldiers whose loyalty and local ties were strong. While such institutions were regularly beset by corruption and chronic disorganization, they did provide locals with an outlet for collaboration with the state, ending the isolation that characterized the weeks and months during which the state authority had broken down, and armed rebel groups reigned supreme.

Central to the process of defeating armed resistance in the countryside was the commitment of large numbers of regular Red Army troops, as well as the armed formations of other state agencies, such as the Cheka. The escalation of the conflicts with anti-Soviet rebels saw greater and greater numbers of regular Red Army and other government forces deployed to hotspots of resistance, to provide the necessary firepower to pursue and destroy rebel groups, as well as to provide broader guarantees of security to towns and villages affected by the conflict. In Tambov, the number of government forces in the province more than trebled in the first half of 1921, exceeding 100,000 at its peak. Only a fraction of these were involved in active counterinsurgency;

⁵⁴ Danilov, *Nestor Makhno*, 647; Landis, *Bandits and Partisans*, 238.

⁵⁵ Danilov, *Nestor Makhno*, 639–44; Landis, *Bandits and Partisans*, 257–61.

most were garrisoned in villages and towns, providing a visible presence for the Soviet government to deter rebel attacks and to reassure civilians. Whereas speed of movement was one of the great advantages that rebels enjoyed in every one of these large-scale conflicts, this was something that depended more on the accessibility and sympathy of the village population, with whom rebels could regularly exchange horses as they fled Soviet pursuers. With greater presence and visibility, which also brought improved intelligence, the Red Army and Soviet government made it more difficult for rebels to enter villages, and were more effective in discouraging locals from cooperating with rebels. This increasingly cut the rebels off from the villages, leaving active rebels reliant on their mobility, and permitting the Red Army pursuit forces to relentlessly harass and wear down remaining rebel groups.⁵⁶

However, the high number of Soviet armed personnel in the countryside far outstripped the capacity of the Red Army and state to supply troops with food and provisions, leaving them in part dependent upon local communities. As such, the escalation of counterinsurgency operations in 1921 generated disciplinary complications among poorly fed, and frequently bored, troops. Earlier in the conflict, in Tambov and in other areas where popular insurgencies erupted, indiscipline typically took the form of defections to the rebels, as Red Army units were either overwhelmed by superior numbers, or had a broad sympathy for the rebels and the farming communities they sought to defend.⁵⁷ As Red Army numbers increased, however, and the rebellions began to fall apart rapidly, indiscipline among state forces was expressed in the victimization of civilians, who found themselves the target of Red Army soldiers' efforts at "self-provisioning." This was particularly pronounced in areas suffering extended "occupation" by Soviet forces, such as Tambov, where high force levels were maintained for much of 1921.⁵⁸ However, the phenomenon of "self-provisioning" was a central feature of the process whereby rural rebellions were defeated throughout Soviet territory, doing little to bolster state authority constructively, but doing much to exhaust an already beleaguered civilian population.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Danilov, *Nestor Makhno*, 649–50.

⁵⁷ The problem was significant enough in the case of Western Siberia that the regional military command offered a special amnesty to Red Army servicemen who had defected to the rebels. See Shishkin, *Sibirskaia vandeia*, 2: 401, 424–25, 428, 434–35.

⁵⁸ For a description of the place of "occupation" in early Soviet counterinsurgency strategy, see M. Tukhachevskii, "Bor'ba s kontrrevoliutsionnymi vosstaniiami," *Voina i revoliutsiia*, no. 7 (1926): 9–10.

⁵⁹ Shishkin, *Sibirskaia vandeia*, 2: 347–48, 396, 434, 442, 451, 453, 483, 500, 713–14; Landis, *Bandits and Partisans*, 269–70.

There is much to the contours of this story that will be familiar to students of guerrilla warfare and counterinsurgency. The Russian Civil War is a difficult conflict to package neatly, in part because it contained so many localized struggles possessing their own roots and dynamics, and also because it witnessed many different types of warfare, from the loose configurations of paramilitary militias, to the conventional fronts of the main belligerents, and finally to the stubborn armed resistance of guerrilla movements.⁶⁰ However, set in motion by the fall of the Romanov dynasty, the violent conflicts over the character and shape of Russia after 1917 can all be considered part of the Russian Civil War, the final chapter of which was characterized by guerrilla insurgencies involving the peasantry and marking its resistance to Soviet policies and the communist brand of state-building. While understandable as an episode in a longer history of rural resistance to modernization, and even as a manifestation of some fundamental peasant anarchism or parochialism, the so-called “peasant wars” of the period 1918–21 are best understood as constituent parts of the singular Russian Civil War. Each arose from particular circumstances brought about by that conflict and, to varying degrees, were consciously connected to the wider context of the Civil War. In addition, each was engaged politically with the ideas and ideals of the 1917 revolution and the related fight over its legacy.

⁶⁰ Adam Lockyer, “The Dynamics of Warfare in Civil War,” *Civil Wars* 12, 1–2 (2010): 91–116.