

Vasyl Kuchabsky, *Western Ukraine in Conflict with Poland and Bolshevism, 1918–1923*, translated by Gus Fagan, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press: Toronto, 2009; xxix + 361 pp.; 9781894865135, CA\$59.95 (hbk); 9781894865128, CA\$34.95 (pbk)

This book is a translation of the original German edition published in 1934 under the title, *Die Westukraine im Kampfe mit Polen und dem Bolschewismus in den Jahren*

1918–1923. Vasyl Kuchabsky was a volunteer in the Legion of the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen who fought in World War I on the Austrian side. He was captured by the Russians and in 1918–1919 fought as a member of another volunteer formation – Sich Riflemen – formed from the Galician POWs as part of the armed forces of the governments of the ‘Dnipro’ or ‘Eastern’ Ukraine. In the interwar period, Kuchabsky became associated with the conservative, ‘Hetmanite’ wing of the Ukrainian emigration, which blamed the ‘immature’ social and political radicalism of the politicians of the Ukrainian People’s Republic for its failure to secure Ukrainian statehood. In sum, this book was his answer to the question that haunted the majority of non-Communist Ukrainian intellectuals in the 1920–1930s: why had the Ukrainian struggle of 1918–1923 for independence failed?

Kuchabsky starts with the structural weaknesses of the Ukrainian nation, chief among them the lack of a political elite. The upper strata in the Dnipro Ukraine were lost to the national movement and the Galician Ukrainians did not have a real elite, their leaders being recruited from small-town lawyers and bureaucrats. As a consequence, Kuchabsky maintains, the political leadership during the revolution was not up to the task that befell it, failing to appreciate the significance of the moment and basing their decision-making on pre-war patterns of small-scale politicking. In Kuchabsky’s explanation, the conservative emphasis on the importance of a social elite for the nation is coupled with an emphasis on will as opposed to reason, which was common to many interwar fascist ideologies. According to this interpretation, the Ukrainian leadership lacked political will and the nation as a whole lacked determination to wage a truly national war.

While critical of Western Ukraine’s political leadership and sceptical about the abilities and determination of its predominantly peasant population, he praises ‘western’ values and discipline, to which Western Ukraine was exposed through its belonging to the Habsburg Monarchy. Even the Russian system of training troops, according to this interpretation, was inferior to the German model, and therefore Western Ukrainian troops trained according to the latter were superior to the East Ukrainian ones.

The author is at his best when analysing historical conjunctures and exploring the possibilities and missed opportunities connected with them. He claims that, during the first period of the Ukrainian-Polish war, from November 1918 to January 1919, the Western Ukrainian People’s Republic was in a much better position than much larger Poland and could dedicate greater resources to the struggle in Galicia. The new republic lost because of the ineffective political and military leadership, but not only was the war lost, the state itself was too. This loss determined the fate of the Ukrainian national struggle. Kuchabsky also draws attention to events and battles that are overlooked in the general accounts of the Russian Revolution and Civil War, like the battle of Motovylyvka. In his analysis of these events, the author frequently discusses various ‘what if’ scenarios, which could have changed the history not only of Ukraine and neighbouring countries, but also of the world in general. Another of Kuchabsky’s achievements is to consider developments in both Western and in Eastern Ukraine as complementing and influencing each other, something still lacking in the more recent histories of the Revolution and Civil War in Ukraine.

According to Kuchabsky, it was not just Ukrainian politicians who were short-sighted. The leaders of the Entente failed to realize the importance of Ukraine for any successful struggle with the Bolsheviks. This oversight was rooted in the lack of knowledge about Ukraine and Ukrainian affairs. The stance of Polish politicians and Russian counter-revolutionaries was also a factor, for they too were also short of long-term strategic thinking. Despite his conservative views, Kuchabsky does not demonize the Bolsheviks. He seriously considers the option of the Ukrainian movement embracing Bolshevism to create and secure the Ukrainian state, and to become a key national player in the global Bolshevik revolution. Not the Bolsheviks, but the Ukrainian 'pedocratic revolutionary democracy' is blamed for the chaos and anarchy that engulfed Ukraine after the revolution.

Some of the book's theses have long been used as common knowledge in Ukrainian historiography, but are now being challenged by contemporary research. These include Western Ukrainians' alleged immunity to Bolshevism and radical social agitation, the strength and universal acceptance of Ukrainian identity among the local peasantry in Habsburg Galicia before 1914, and the inability of the Ukrainian People's Republic to organize a proper state bureaucracy.

The English edition of Kuchabsky's book starts with an introduction by Oleksandr Pavlyuk, which provides a short biography of the still enigmatic Kuchabsky and comments on his book in the light of recent historiography. However, the introduction is slightly apologetic and does not dare to challenge the underlying tenets of Kuchabsky's argument. Even as a factual history of the military conflicts and international politics that decided the fate of Ukrainian statehood, the book is outdated. Originally, the book was published in German in order to draw attention to the importance of Ukraine for any geopolitical changes and the balance of power in the region. Perhaps, this was also the chief motivation behind this English translation.