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Useful Brigand: 'Ataman' S.N. Bulak-Balakhovich, 1917-21

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The article examines the person and career of Stanislav N. Bulak-Balakhovich, a self-styled Ataman and 'Peasants' General' who operated in the Baltic region, Poland, and Belorussia during 1917-21. Beginning his military career in the tsarist army, following the October revolution he briefly served the Soviet regime but soon became a violent opponent of the Bolsheviks, from late 1918 to 1920, Balakhovich aligned himself with a variety of anti-Soviet movements, most notably the Northwestern Russian Army under General N.N. Iudenich and the Warsaw-based 'Russian Political Committee' of Boris V. Savinkov. In the same period he maintained liaisons with the Estonian and Polish Armies as well as Belorussian nationalists. However, above all else, Balakhovich was a self-willed warlord who usually was as much a danger to his allies as his enemies. A plunderer and a pogromist, he nevertheless evidenced authentic streaks of military genius and populist political savvy. Despite his abundant contradictions, or perhaps because of them, he proved himself a 'useful brigand' in many situations.

'In another epoch such a man might have sacked Rome or been hanged as a pirate. But today we must accept him for what he is – a phenomenon of an age of dissolution and crisis.'

Orson Welles, *Mr. Arkadin*

The above description could be applied to many persons, but never more aptly than to the subject of this article, Stanislav Nikodimovich Bulak-Balakhovich,¹ one of the more colourful self-styled 'generals' and *atamans* to emerge from the chaos of the Russian Civil War. Like his dubious brethren *Ataman* Grigorii Semenov, Baron Roman von Ungern-Shternberg and others, he shared the basic traits of independence of mind, a talent for organised violence, plus notable streaks of brutality, treachery and avarice. Balakhovich stands out in this crowd in two respects: the number of causes he served or, more accurately, causes he attached himself to, and his willingness to shift his national/ethnic identity to suit. From 1917 to 1921, he commanded armed forces in the nominal service of the Russian Imperial, Provisional and Soviet regimes, as well as Estonia, the White Northwestern Army, Poland, the anti-Soviet Russian Political Committee, Belorussia, and Poland again.

Lev Trotskii dubbed Balakhovich the 'Highwayman General'.² Soviet historian M.V. Rybakov, while characterising Balakhovich as a 'white bandit' and 'genuine sadist', none the less confessed that he was an 'extraordinary' figure among the White Guards.³ Anti-Bolshevik observers variously termed him a 'sincere brigand' or the 'White Budennyi'.⁴ Balakhovich himself rejected the 'White' label, preferring to be identified as a 'Green' or 'Peasants' General and a popular crusader in the war against tyranny, Red and White.⁵ However, another of his erstwhile partners in anti-Bolshevik struggle dubbed him a 'daring rogue' and a 'coldly practical bandit' driven by the pursuit of money and personal power as opposed to any real political agenda.⁶ To one degree or another, all of the above were correct.

As noted above, Balakhovich's ethnicity was as murky as his politics. Polish strongman Jozef Pilsudski, who called Balakhovich a 'useful brigand', saw him as a man who was 'today a Russian, tomorrow a Pole, the day after that a Belorussian and later, perhaps, a Negro'.⁷ This much does seem clear: Stanislav Bulak-Balakhovich (or Bei-Bulak-Balakhovich) was born near Braslav, in the northeast corner of Kovno *guberniia*, in February 1883. He was the eldest son of a prosperous family of horse-breeders with roots in the polonised petty gentry.⁸ The family seems to have been a mixture of Belorussian, Polish, Lithuanian and, perhaps, Tatar elements and followed the Roman Catholic faith.⁹

Belorussian seems to have been the daily language of the household, but Stanislav is said to have spoken Russian with a distinct Polish accent, while his Polish was otherwise described as halting and ungrammatical.¹⁰ He also spoke some Lithuanian, and when intoxicated (a frequent occurrence) was known to lapse into a vulgar mixture of Belorussian, Lithuanian and Polish. In any case, it can be safely said that Balakhovich's identity was a rather fluid one. In the regions and circumstances in which he later operated such flexibility was a distinct advantage.

The family was able to provide Stanislav and his younger brother Jozef with some advanced education. The elder Balakhovich attended an agricultural school in Vilnius and subsequently secured a job as an 'agricultural specialist' on the Platter-Siberg estate near Disna, a position he still held upon the outbreak of war in 1914.¹¹ Balakhovich had been exempted from peacetime conscription, possibly for medical reasons, and his age (31) and occupation also exempted him from call-up at the start of the war.

Although Stanislav later would claim to have fought in the Russo-Japanese War, there is no evidence of military experience prior to his voluntary enlistment in the Imperial Russian Army during the First World War.¹² Indeed, as a future warlord he cut a rather unimpressive figure. British agent Sidney Reilly, who provided His Majesty's Secret Service with a profile of Balakhovich in 1920, described him as 'small of build, boyish [with] sympathetic features'.¹³ The Russian émigré belletrist Zinaida Hippus summed him up as 'short... dark, puny and very nervous'.¹⁴ If nothing else, Balakhovich is an example of how turbulent times can thrust unexpected opportunities upon unlikely individuals.

Balakhovich claimed to have joined the 2nd Kurland Guards Uhlan regiment in August 1914 and to have taken part in the ill-fated Russian invasion of East Prussia. By the end of 1914, he asserted, he had been decorated for bravery and promoted to ensign, although he always was somewhat vague about just which and how many medals he had received. In 1915 he left the regular cavalry for service in the *Ataman* Punin partisan detachment which specialised in raids behind enemy lines. It was in the ranks of the Punin detachment that our Belorussian-Lithuanian subject developed a fondness for Cossack military style – black wool cap and Circassian cape – an affectation he maintained throughout his career. By the spring of 1917, he claimed to have risen to captain and to have assumed command of the Punin partisans.¹⁵

This autobiographical account is open to serious question. Contrary evidence suggests that Balakhovich did not enter the army until 1915, the result of a 'sudden patriotic outburst' or possibly to avoid prosecution for some irregularities in the finances of the Platter-Siberg estate.¹⁶ A White Russian writer, G. Kirdetsov, claims that the future Green *Ataman* did not become even a lieutenant (*poruchik*) until 1917,¹⁷ while another, Colonel K.K. Smirnov, insisted that Balakhovich never held a regular commission during the war.¹⁸ On the other hand, the Polish officer Karol Wedziagolski was able to confirm that Balakhovich had been wounded and commended for bravery – as well as reprimanded for insolence and insubordination.¹⁹ Another White officer, General A.P. Rodzianko, later a bitter opponent of Balakhovich, vividly recalled meeting the latter as a captain (*shtabs-rotmistr*) of cavalry in command of a small partisan unit during the Russian retreat from Riga in September 1917.²⁰ In any case, by the end of 1917 Balakhovich had acquired considerable military experience in irregular warfare and had come to lead a small partisan detachment which remained loyal to him in the midst of the general decay of the Russian Army.

Following the cessation of hostilities on the Eastern front (5 Dec. 1917), Balakhovich and his men lived a precarious existence by raiding German stores and those of the disintegrating Russian forces. He claimed to have led his small force in a successful attack against an entire German regiment, but this story almost certainly is exaggerated.²¹ What is certain is that in early February 1918 his detachment, now no more than 30 strong, appeared near Pskov and offered its services to the new Soviet government. Balakhovich seems to have been intent on continuing the fight against the Germans, and in light of the impasse at the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations, the Soviets accepted his offer and designated his unit a Red Partisan detachment.²² As such, Balakhovich and his men briefly resisted the renewed German advance initiated in late February, but soon retreated to Luga. There, in April, Balakhovich received a commission (Balakhovich claimed from Trotskii himself) to form the 1st Luga Red Cavalry Regiment, a unit that eventually numbered 300–400 sabres.²³

Balakhovich remained in Soviet service, more or less, through the fall of 1918. He was displeased by the fact that the signing of the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty prevented further combat with the Germans. As he put it, 'the Bolsheviks allowed my unit to form, but did not allow it to fight'.²⁴ Nor, of course, did they permit it to raid and loot, an activity that Balakhovich and his partisans looked upon as the mainstay of their livelihood. Moreover, Balakhovich stubbornly resisted all efforts to bring his unit under any sort of centralised control, including the institution of a resident political commissar. This dogged insistence on autonomy would be a source of discord in all his subsequent allegiances.

According to Soviet writer Rybakov, Balakhovich's regiment operated in the Luga-Gdov region east of Lake Peipus/Chudskoe where in late 1918 it took part in the suppression of a local *kulak* rebellion.²⁵ This action seems to have precipitated the final split between Balakhovich and the Reds. Sometime in September–October 1918, he led most of his unit in a mutiny against the Soviets and took to the forests where they eked out a living by raiding Red stores and local villages. On 2 November Balakhovich and some 120 men wandered into German-held Pskov in search of food and employment. The partisans were described as dirty and dishevelled, but wearing new Red Army uniforms and riding newly-shod horses, which does not sound as if they had been roughing it in the woods too long.²⁶

Balakhovich's time in Soviet service left him with an abiding hatred of the Bolsheviks, another one of the few constants in the rest of his career. Balakhovich condemned Bolshevik commissars as 'scoundrels' and was particularly incensed by their policies of forced conscription and requisitioning. Soviet sources are more than willing to acknowledge him as a 'vicious enemy' of the Socialist Revolution.²⁷

By the time of his arrival in Pskov, Balakhovich had begun to style himself a champion of the peasantry, a sort of Robin Hood fighting to avenge and protect them against both commissar and *pomeshchik*. The likes of Rybakov denounce this as a cynical pose, but his later collaborator N.N. Ivanov credited Balakhovich with an authentic 'common touch' and ability to address peasant concerns in their own idiom, factors that seem to have won him some sincere support in their ranks.²⁸

The *Ataman's* relationship with urban populations was quite different. Under his domination townspeople were subjected to arbitrary regulations and routinely required to render up 'contributions' (*kontributsii*) to his war chest with beatings, torture or death awaiting those that refused.²⁹ Jews were a particular focus of such abuses.³⁰ Balakhovich's anti-Semitism seems not have been especially virulent. He was more than willing to make exceptions when circumstances or his feelings dictated, but on the whole he regarded Jews as inherently suspect. Another peasant partisan leader, LA. Lokhvitskii, regarded Balakhovich's acceptance of pogroms as but another manifestation of this 'practical bandit's' operational ethics, and the *Ataman's* entire career as a blot on the reputation of the anti-Bolshevik struggle.³¹

When Balakhovich reached Pskov it was under German occupation, but it also was the headquarters of the small White Russian Northern Volunteer Corps which was forming under the protection of the German Army. As a newly-professed enemy of the Reds, it was logical that Balakhovich would throw in his lot with the Whites, but this was to be a relationship fraught with mistrust and hostility from the outset. Anti-Bolshevik politico Boris Savinkov later observed that 'Balakhovich hates the Bolsheviks because he fears them and because he also envies them ... Towards the [Whites], on the other hand, [he] feels only contempt'.³² Balakhovich indeed displayed a profound disrespect, even hatred, for the traditional officer class whom he derided as 'gold epaulette-wearers'.³³ As evidence of this contempt, he personally eschewed all such symbols of rank and demanded that all serving under him do the same.

Needless to say, the above attitude did not augur well for his relationship with the traditional, mostly monarchist, officers in charge of the Northern Corps and subsequent Northwestern Army. In his negotiations with the former, he demanded, and received, complete autonomy in the internal affairs of his unit, including the right to appoint and promote officers as he saw fit. He would be subordinate to the Northern Corps command only in terms of general strategic operations which, among other things, allowed his troops to raid and plunder as they pleased.³⁴

This arrangement did not go down well with many of the White officers who feared that Balakhovich's unruly partisans would corrupt other troops and bring discredit on the anti-Bolshevik movement. Among these critics was General Rodzianko, who none the less admitted that Balakhovich was a popular and resourceful leader who might have some military utility if he could be kept under control.³⁵ The acting commander of the Northern Corps, General A. Vandam, justified his compromise with the partisan leader on the simple grounds that the Corps, barely 2,000 strong, needed all the help it could get. Besides, he argued, given that the Bolsheviks were nothing but bandits themselves, there was no dishonour in using bandits against them.³⁶

By late November, Balakhovich's force numbered some 300 men. Most of these *balakhovtsy* were young peasants, and most of these deserters from the Red Army. But partisan ranks also contained a sizeable cadre of 'criminal types' and 'adventurers', including men fleeing charges or punishment in other White formations.³⁷ For example, Balakhovich's 'chief of staff' was a Captain Stoiakin, a man with a long criminal record including robbery and murder.³⁸ Overall the partisan soldiers were undisciplined and insolent and refused to acknowledge the commands of anyone but their leader, whom they addressed fondly as *Bat'ka* (father) or *Ataman*.³⁹ The partisans usually appeared to have plenty of money, the fruit of their frequent raiding, but when funds ran short, they resorted to the simple expedient of mugging the local inhabitants or pillaging their homes – all with utter impunity.⁴⁰ Ivanov believed that Balakhovich himself was not devoid of a sense of personal honour, but was an indifferent disciplinarian who permitted his charges quite literally to run riot.⁴¹

This is not to say that there were no rules under Balakhovich's command. The *Bat'ka* was an indulgent parent to his 'sons', but his temper was short and his word, when he chose to enforce it, was law; wilful disobedience was most often punished with summary execution. Violence against fellow partisans, cowardice, desertion and rape were all technically punishable by death. Such executions often were administered by Balakhovich himself. During a two month period in 1920, for instance, he boasted that he had shot no less than 40 of his own men for one reason or another.⁴² The self-styled *Ataman* was as fond of spontaneous acts of mercy as brutality. In one case, a Red prisoner, an admitted Bolshevik, was about to be hanged and asked Balakhovich to tell his mother that her son had died bravely. Moved by this act of gallows bravado, Balakhovich ordered the man released and made him a personal orderly.⁴³

The White officers at Pskov were worried less by Balakhovich's men than by the *Ataman* himself. He openly confessed that 'I am an adventurer ... but the struggle against the Bolsheviks is essentially an adventure. I have my own methods'.⁴⁴ He galloped about the town in his Cossack uniform escorted by a brace of hand-picked cut-throats and acting as if he owned the place, which, in fact, seems to have been his plan. Ensnared in one of the better hotels, Balakhovich conspired with a clique of dissident White officers that included Captain Boris Permykin, described as 'an adventurer of the first water'.⁴⁵ In the waning days of November, as the Germans prepared to evacuate Pskov and Red forces advanced to occupy it, Balakhovich and his cronies plotted a coup against the Northern Corps' command.⁴⁶

The plotters' chance came on 22 November when the last German echelons departed the town. General Vandam, claiming illness, joined the exodus and this gave Balakhovich and his allies the opportunity to take control of Corps headquarters. Here the *Ataman's* men hailed him as the new commander, but it was to be a brief triumph. A half-baked effort to throw back the advancing Reds failed with the partisans devoting most of their energies to looting the remaining stores.⁴⁷

With a force of some 800 men, perhaps half partisans and the rest White stragglers, Balakhovich withdrew to the north where he made contact with Estonian nationalist forces under General Jan Laidoner. This was the beginning of a relatively long and harmonious relationship between the 'Peasants' Partisan General' and the Estonian Army. Laidoner is said to have offered Balakhovich a regular commission, but the *Bat'ka*, ever the independent, preferred the position of a mercenary. In February 1919, for instance, Balakhovich 'loaned' 300 partisans to the Estonian Army to aid in the suppression of an uprising on the island of Saaremaa.⁴⁸ The Estonians were satisfied to allow him his freedom, so long as its excesses were not visited on them. Balakhovich, for his part, had no problem in recognising and abetting Estonian sovereignty.⁴⁹ The latter was long a sticking point in Estonian-White relations, and the binding element

between Laidoner and Balakhovich was their mutual distrust of Rodzianko and his ilk at the head of the Northern Corps, soon to become the White Northwestern Army.

During January 1919, the *balakhovtsy* fought in the defence of Tartu and later took part in the successful Estonian counter-offensive against the Red Army. During the following month, the partisans captured Porka/Perrisar Island, between Lakes Peipus and Pskov.⁵⁰ There they constructed a forward base for further raids into Red territory. These forays were conducted in classic guerrilla hit-and-run style, the type of warfare in which Balakhovich and his men showed real skill. The most successful of these was the capture of Gdov in late February. The partisans held it for three days, thoroughly looting the town in the process and coming away with a large haul of weapons and several hundred prisoners, many of whom the *Ataman* enlisted in his ranks.⁵¹

Given that opposition to Bolshevik conscription was one of the main planks in Balakhovich's appeals to the peasantry, he did not make a practice of forcing prisoners into his ranks, which is not to say that intimidation was not employed. Most often, Red troops who declined to enlist were issued 'demobilization certificates' and released on the promise that they would not again serve the Soviet regime.⁵² Communist Party members, especially commissars and chekists, did not fare so lightly. Their fate, if they were lucky, was to be killed on the spot, while the less fortunate might be flayed alive or thrown into a locomotive's fire box.⁵³ In a later raid on Strugi Belye, Balakhovich publicly executed 34 Communists along with the heads of the local peasant collectives.⁵⁴

In Narva (still within Estonia), where the White Northwestern Army had established its new headquarters, General Rodzianko kept a careful watch on Balakhovich and determined to bring the partisans, if not their leader himself, under White control. By April Rodzianko had secured the backing of Allied representatives in the Baltic, particularly the British. Given that the Estonians were dependent on the same support, they could not object when Rodzianko, with British backing, demanded that Balakhovich recognise his authority. Rodzianko's better-armed troops outnumbered his own by at least three to one, so Balakhovich had little choice but to compromise. He turned over nominal control of his main forces to his brother Jozef (who had joined his elder sibling in late 1918), retaining direct control only of a 'personal escort' of some 200 men. He also expelled 30 men whom Rodzianko deemed 'unacceptable' and promised not to expand his force without the express permission of the White command.⁵⁵

These concessions were purely cosmetic, of course, and Balakhovich had no intention of honouring them. He also was busy hatching counter-plots of his own. First, he joined forces with an émigré political adventurer, N.N. Ivanov. A former fringe member of the Rasputin clique, during 1918 Ivanov had organised a liberal, anti-Bolshevik political party among Russian exiles in Tallinn. However, his policies, which included the recognition of Estonian independence, clashed with the monarchist sentiments of Rodzianko and the White command. The result was that Ivanov fled Tallinn to Tartu where he cast his lot with Balakhovich whom he publicly hailed as a 'democratic patriot'.⁵⁶ In private, Ivanov was less enthusiastic, dubbing his partner a 'pseudo-liberal sadist'.⁵⁷ At the same time, Ivanov saw in Balakhovich a true 'man of action' whose soldiers would follow him anywhere and a bitter enemy of the White 'reactionaries'.⁵⁸ Under the *Ataman's* protection, Ivanov churned out a steady stream of propaganda attacking their mutual enemies.⁵⁹ Ivanov's efforts offered Balakhovich a veneer of political legitimacy. In these tracts, the '*Ataman of Peasants*' and *Partisan Forces*' declared that the 'people's banner' was held in his hands and that he fought 'against the Bolsheviks, but not for tsarism ...[and] for the 'constituent assembly and popular sovereignty''.⁶⁰ To what degree Ivanov was putting words in Balakhovich's mouth is difficult to say.

As part of his struggle against Rodzianko, Balakhovich lent his support to the aspirations of a Colonel Dzerozhinskii to supplant Rodzianko as chief of the White forces in Estonia. But in May, realising that Rodzianko had the firm backing of the majority of the officers – and the British – Balakhovich made a sudden about-face and threw his support behind his foe. Rodzianko responded with a peace offering of his own: he promoted Balakhovich to full colonel (although Balakhovich already had given himself the title of 'general') and named him inspector of cavalry.⁶¹ But the *Ataman's* co-operation stopped short of obeying Rodzianko's order to shoot Ivanov.

In May, Balakhovich and his little army, now perhaps 1,500 strong, played an important role in a general White offensive aimed at securing a base on Russian soil. The partisans again captured Gdov where Balakhovich promptly installed Ivanov at the head of a local 'citizen's council'. Enraged, Rodzianko threatened to use force unless Balakhovich and Ivanov immediately handed control to White authorities, and he ordered Balakhovich and his partisans south to assist the Estonians in taking Pskov.⁶² This proved a serious miscalculation for Rodzianko.

Balakhovich and his men arrived in Pskov on 27 May after it had been taken by the Estonians. The latter promptly named him military governor of the town and its environs. Protected by the Estonian Army, Balakhovich was now beyond the direct reach of Rodzianko and, again with Ivanov at his side, proceeded to rule the city as his private domain. Simply put, Balakhovich 'hanged everyone who didn't agree with him and collected a fortune' in forced contributions.⁶³ Again, local Jews were conspicuous targets of these tactics.⁶⁴ The Estonians were kept happy by allowing them to requisition food from the locals and by once again 'loaning' soldiers to assist their operations in northern Livonia.⁶⁵

For the time being, Rodzianko could do little more than chronicle the *Ataman's* offences and send other White units to Pskov in an effort to undermine Balakhovich's control.⁶⁶ Rodzianko's opportunity to settle the matter seemed to come in July when General N.N. Iudenich arrived from Finland to assume overall command of the Northwestern Army. Iudenich had the backing of the British, who in turn controlled the supply of war material and food to both the Estonians and the Whites. Rodzianko initially persuaded Iudenich to organise a new corps command in Pskov and to appoint Colonel A.D. Arsen'ev, a 'loyal' White officer, to command it. There were some 5,000 White troops in the Pskov area, over half owing allegiance to Balakhovich.⁶⁷ Outnumbered and isolated, Arsen'ev proved incapable of controlling them or their leader. Moreover Arsen'ev's outspoken pro-German sympathies aroused the concerns of British representatives, particularly with German *Freikorps* units pressing their northward advance into Livonia.⁶⁸ Whatever Balakhovich's other faults, he seemed safely antagonistic to German aims. As a result, the Allied military mission in Helsinki headed by British General Sir Hubert Gough persuaded Iudenich to appease him by making Balakhovich a major-general and acknowledging his autonomy.⁶⁹ This trend was pushed further by Gough's chief-of-staff, General F.G. Marsh, who arrived in Tallinn in early August. Marsh interviewed Balakhovich and came away convinced that the *Ataman*, despite his rough edges, was the 'only genuinely popular leader' in the Northwestern Army.⁷⁰

Rodzianko suspected that Balakhovich was scheming to usurp control of the entire army with British support, a notion probably not far off the mark. In the meantime, Rodzianko had collected more evidence of Balakhovich's abuses in Pskov, including the widespread robbery of the population and even counterfeiting. The latter activity threatened the precarious financial position of the White forces in Estonia.⁷¹ Despite such evidence, Rodzianko was unable to stir Iudenich (who himself may have mistrusted Rodzianko's ambitions) to action.

Rodzianko had better luck with the Estonians. At last alarmed by the partisan's excesses in Pskov, Gen. Laidoner agreed that his forces would not shield Balakhovich from efforts to bring him to heel.⁷² However on 16 August, Iudenich, at the insistence of Marsh, named Balakhovich to replace Arsen'ev as corps commander in Pskov. An incensed Rodzianko, backed by most White officers, demanded that Iudenich rescind his decision and order the immediate arrest of the *Ataman* and his staff. Bowing to this near mutiny, Iudenich gave Rodzianko *carte blanche* to settle with the obstreperous partisan leader.⁷³

Balakhovich protested his innocence and issued a statement in which he admitted to 'hanging only 122 men' while 'killing or capturing 10,000 Reds'.⁷⁴ In any case, he insisted, he was a fighting general, while those in Narva were not. He also appealed to General Marsh and other Allied officers, but without demonstrable effect.⁷⁵

On 23 August a 2,000-strong White force backed by armoured cars and trains marched into Pskov with the aim of capturing Balakhovich and bringing him before a court-martial on an array of charges.⁷⁶ The commander of this force was Col. Boris Permykin, who may be recalled as an old co-conspirator of Balakhovich. The latter wisely offered no resistance and, having given his word of honour, was allowed to

remain with his personal staff and escort aboard a private train. However, he quickly suborned some of Permykin's officers (or Permykin himself) and made his escape.⁷⁷

Once again, the Estonians proved his guardian angels. Despite the angry protests of Rodzianko and Iudenich, Laidoner refused to hand over Balakhovich or expel him from the country. Instead, in return for his promise to 'abandon intrigue', the Estonian government granted him a small estate near Tartu and allowed him to maintain a 'personal regiment' of some 400 picked troops.⁷⁸ The most that Iudenich could do was to formally dismiss Balakhovich from the ranks of the Northwestern Army. However, most of his former partisans were permitted to remain at the front under the command of his brother Jozef. Few could doubt where Jozef's and his soldiers' true loyalties lay.

Of course, the crafty *Ataman* had no intention of abandoning intrigue. The fall of Pskov to a Red counter-offensive in late August saw hundreds of dispirited White troops flock to his banner. Thus strengthened, in September he plotted a bold *coup d'état* against Iudenich. The latter was to be intercepted and arrested on his way back from a council in Riga, while another force was to occupy the White base at Narva and seize Rodzianko and the rest of the White staff. Only Estonian intervention, including the timely arrival of an armoured train, prevented the plan from going forward.⁷⁹ As a potential counter to the Whites, the Estonians had a vested interest in preserving Balakhovich, but they, too, would soon find him more trouble than he was worth.

Balakhovich did not cease conspiring. In early September, Iudenich received reports that Balakhovich 'agents' were sowing discontent in the army and among the civil population around Gdov.⁸⁰ Other reports surfaced of Balakhovich's desire to decamp to Lithuania. This gambit may have had some connection to his contacts with Belorussian nationalist elements in that country. Indeed, on 25 August, Iudenich heard from Paris that certain Belorussian representatives there wished to use Balakhovich as a go-between in dealing with the Northwestern Army.⁸¹ If so, this may represent an early manifestation of Balakhovich's Belorussian sympathies. More alarming were reports that Balakhovich was considering an alliance with another anti-Bolshevik adventurer, Count EM. Bermont-Avalov.⁸² The nominal leader of the so-called Western Russian Army, Avalov was little more than a stalking-horse for the previously noted General von der Goltz and his *Freikorps* legions. However, Avalov's march on Riga was thwarted by Latvian resistance and Allied intervention which prevented any link-up with Balakhovich.

Such scheming did not prevent Balakhovich from petitioning Iudenich to return to the ranks of the Northwestern Army. The *Ataman's* entreaties increased in late September 1919 when Iudenich launched his army in an all-out attack against Red Petrograd. Balakhovich begged to be allowed to lead his partisans in battle but, despite British urging, Iudenich declined the offer.⁸³ Nevertheless, when Pskov again fell to Estonian forces on 15 October, Balakhovich galloped in behind them and once more established his control of the town.

Iudenich's drive faltered before Petrograd in late October, and during November his battered units staggered back into Estonia where most were disarmed and interned. However, some 1,500, including brother Jozef, joined Balakhovich at Pskov. By December he had gathered a force of nearly 3,000 and had initiated local counter-attacks against the Reds. Ever the opportunist, he also revived his scheme to capture Iudenich and Co. and 'sell' them to the Soviets.⁸⁴ The Estonians, however, were intent on concluding a peace treaty with the Soviets which included the disarming of anti-Bolshevik formations and the return of Pskov to Soviet control. The *Ataman* had outlived his usefulness – almost.

Forced out of Pskov, on 27 January 1920 Balakhovich and a small band of partisans appeared in Tallinn where General Iudenich and his staff had taken refuge. Bursting into the hotel where Iudenich stayed, the intruders seized the hapless General and forced him at gun point to endorse cheques turning the remainder of Northwestern Army funds over to the partisans.⁸⁵ Intervention by British and French representatives in Tallinn finally secured Iudenich's freedom. Balakhovich later claimed that he was forced to hand over most of the proceeds to the Estonians who, it seems, made no substantive attempt to stop or punish the outrage.⁸⁶ This sordid episode marked the end of Balakhovich's escapades in Estonia.

The Soviet-Estonian treaty was signed on 2 February 1920, and despite Balakhovich's last minute threat to march on Tartu and hang the negotiators, he and about 1,000 armed troops quietly slipped into Latvia.⁸⁷ The Latvians, however, did not want him, and the rag-tag band continued south until they made contact with Polish forces near his home town of Braslav. He also encountered Belorussian units fighting with the Poles. In due course, Balakhovich and his men were enrolled as an auxiliary unit in the Polish Army.⁸⁸ Desertion and typhus had reduced Balakhovich's command to a mere 300–400, and it went to the Brest-Litovsk area to rest and refit. Here the unit recruited a steady stream of Red deserters and independent bands with the result that by April *Ataman* Balakhovich's 'Partisan Brigade' counted some 1,200 effectives and by June, 2,000.⁸⁹

April 1920 also saw the eruption of open warfare between Poland and Soviet Russia, and under the nominal control of the Polish Fourth Army, the Partisan Brigade carried out several daring and destructive raids behind Red Army lines, penetrating as far as Mozyr, Gomel' and Chernigov.⁹⁰ During the Red offensive of July, Balakhovich retreated with the Polish forces, and in turn advanced with them as Pilsudski's August counter-offensive again turned the tide.⁹¹ In September, Balakhovich established his forward base east of Pinsk, deep in the Polesian marsh country.

During the summer of 1920, Balakhovich plunged into fresh political intrigue. With the personal blessing of Pilsudski,⁹² the *Ataman* entered into a short-lived but fateful alliance with the Russian anti-Bolshevik crusader, Boris V. Savinkov. A former anti-tsarist terrorist and erstwhile minister of war under the Kerenskii regime, Savinkov headed the so-called 'Russian Political Committee' in Warsaw.⁹³ Savinkov had tried and failed to gain the allegiance of other anti-Soviet formations in Poland, and his deal with Balakhovich, whom he personally regarded as a bandit, was an act of desperation. As for Balakhovich he regarded Savinkov as 'another Ivanov', a political fig leaf to be used and discarded as needed.⁹⁴ But in this instance, the *Ataman* underestimated his partner, for Savinkov was an equally ambitious and far more adroit conspirator.

On 27 August 1920, the two men signed an agreement in which Balakhovich recognised Savinkov's overall political authority while the latter acknowledged Balakhovich as the commander-in-chief of the so-called People's Volunteer Army (*Narodnaia Dobrovol'cheskaia Armiia, NDA*) to be composed of the *Ataman's* partisans, remnants of the Northwestern Army and other units organised by Savinkov.⁹⁵ The agreement committed the signatories to support the restoration of a government in Russia based on 'democratic-federalist' principles, an elected constituent assembly and peasant control of the land.⁹⁶ Another party to this alliance was Lokhvitskii ('*Ataman* Iskra'). He was convinced that Balakhovich had no genuine interest in a 'free, democratic Russia' but was merely seeking another pretext to campaign and plunder.⁹⁷

Whatever their lofty declarations, the two leaders really agreed on very little and maintained a deep, mutual mistrust. Savinkov, for instance, was embarrassed by the anti-Semitic depredations of the partisans, and demanded that Balakhovich take measures to curb them. In response, the *Ataman* issued an edict against pogroms and even agreed to the formation of a special Jewish battalion, although it seems doubtful that his heart was in either measure.⁹⁸ Savinkov also pointed a finger at the rampant corruption of Balakhovich's staff, epitomised by a Captain Elin whom he accused of embezzling 30 million Polish marks from army funds.⁹⁹ At bottom, however, was simple personal rivalry between two powerful egos.

Zinaida Hippus, who was involved on the periphery of the Balakhovich-Savinkov duet, was convinced from the start that it would never last. She admitted that Balakhovich was a general 'with a zest about him', combining a 'spark of genius' with 'a certain intuition', but she also pegged him as a wilful 'child of nature' incapable of subordinating himself to any person or idea.TM True to form, behind Savinkov's back, the *Ataman* secretly sought better deals from the Ukrainian nationalists under Semen Petliura and even Baron P.N. Vrangeli's White regime in the Crimea.¹⁰¹ Most importantly, he established – or renewed – secret contact with a group of anti-Soviet and anti-Polish Belorussian nationalists led by Vatslau Lastouskii. With them he plotted the creation of an independent Belorussian state in direct violation of his agreement with Savinkov.¹⁰²

Following the Polish-Soviet armistice of 12 October, the NDA was obliged to disarm or leave Polish-controlled territory. Balakhovich and Savinkov concocted an ambitious plan by which the NDA, a motley force of some 12,000, would invade Soviet Belorussia and proclaim an independent regime under Polish

protection. Any hope of success depended on mass defections from the Red Army and a general uprising of the local population.

To make a brief tale of a bad venture, on 7 November the NDA forces moved east from their base near Turov with Balakhovich's Partisan Division in the lead. The high point of the campaign was reached on 10 November, when the *Ataman's* unit occupied Mozyr.¹⁰³ There Balakhovich promptly declared Belorussian independence – and himself as head of state. Savinkov angrily denounced this move and threatened to invoke Polish intervention against his upstart ally. Balakhovich backed down, and on 16 November, he, Savinkov and Belorussian representatives signed a new agreement acknowledging the existence of an autonomous 'Belorussian Government' as opposed to an independent state.¹⁰⁴ Privately, Balakhovich vowed he would hang Savinkov at the first opportunity.

The agreement, in any case, was meaningless in the face of military collapse. An NDA attack on Rezhitsa failed and mass uprisings did not materialise. In the latter half of November, superior Red forces drove back the exhausted and overextended NDA.¹⁰⁵ By early December the typhus-ridden remnants were forced to seek refuge on Polish territory, Balakhovich and his partisans being the last to give up the fight.¹⁰⁶

Savinkov wasted no time in exacting his revenge and securing unquestioned control of the disarmed and interned NDA. At his instigation, Polish military police arrested the ailing *Ataman* and threw him in Brest prison to face charges stemming from murders and pogroms allegedly committed by his troops and the embezzlement of Captain Elin.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, Savinkov still sought to exploit Balakhovich's populist image. In late December 1920, Savinkov issued an 'open letter' to foreign governments in which he extolled Balakhovich as a 'true democrat' and vowed that the *Ataman* would 'raise again the Russian [!] flag ... in the name of peace, liberty and democracy'.¹⁰⁸ Savinkov's victory was an empty and temporary one however. In late 1921 his presence became an unbearable diplomatic burden, and he and his chief lieutenants were expelled by the Polish government.

Balakhovich was soon released from gaol and was never tried for any offences. But his days as an independent warlord were over. Polish authorities permitted him to take charge of some 'unarmed' Russian/Belorussian labour units along the Soviet frontier, but the *Ataman* was never again to lead his partisans in battle. After some years of such service, he received a small pension, and even became a Polish citizen. At the outbreak of the Second World War he offered his services to the Polish Army, but his subsequent fate is obscure. One version says he fell in defence of his adopted homeland during the invasion of 1939, while another claims he died by an unknown hand sometime in 1940.¹⁰⁹

As noted at the beginning of this article, the *Ataman* Stanislav Bulak-Balakhovich was a creature of violent and confused times. As his picaresque career was initiated by war, so was it doomed by peace. He is also a reminder that the Russian Civil War was not a simple matter of 'Red' and 'White.' Despite his rampant opportunism and criminality, Balakhovich's claim to have represented a populist peasant sentiment opposed to both reactionary and communist principles was not without some validity. However, the real secret of Balakhovich's 'success' was that he was useful, albeit temporarily, to larger forces around him. He was a passing phenomenon, but the type he represents does and will live on so long as there are times and places of 'dissolution and crisis'.

NOTES The following abbreviations are used in the notes:

AS:	Archief Sawinkow (Savinkov Archive, HSG)
FO:	Foreign Office (Great Britain)
GARF:	Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv rossiiskoi federatsii (State Archive of the Russian Federation) Moscow, Russia
FfIA:	Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, California, USA
nSG:	International Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (International Institute for Social History) Amsterdam, Netherlands

PRO: Public Record Office, Kew, London, UK
RTsKhTONI:RT Rossiiskii tsentr khraneniia i izucheniia dokumentov noveishei istorii (Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Documents of Contemporary History) Moscow, Russia

1. In his 'Pokhod Generala Bulak-Balakhovicha' (GARF, fond 5901, delo 8), Viktor Savinkov gives Stanislav's patronymic as 'Domenikovich', but this is at odds with all other references.
2. Leon Trotsky, *How the Revolution Armed*, Vol.V (New York, 1979), p.438.
3. M.V. Rybakov, *h istorii grazhdanskoi voiny na severo-zapade v 1919 g.* (Moscow, 1958), pp.84-5.
4. Zinaida Hippus [Gippius], *Between Paris and St. Petersburg: The Selected Diaries of Zinaida Hippus* (edited by Temira Pachmuss) (Urbana, IL 1975), pp.199, 229. General Semen Budennyi was a renowned commander of Red Army cavalry.
5. *Ibid.*, p.199.
6. The 'practical bandit' estimation is from I.A. Lokhvitskii, *To, chto ne bylo ...* (Berlin, 1921), p.54. See also A.E Rodzianko, *Vospominaniia o severo-zapadnoi armii* (Berlin, 1921), 27, and K.K. Smirnov, 'Nachalo severo-zapadnoi armii', *Beloe delo*, I (1926), p.130.
7. B.V. Savinkov, *Delo Borisa Savinkova: Boris Savinkov pered voennoi kollegiei verkhovnogo suda SSSR* [hereafter *Delo Savinkova*] (Moscow, 1924), pp.62-3.
8. GARF, f. 5901, d. 8, V.V. Savinkov, *ibid.*, p.6, and Vasilii Corn, *Grazhdanskaia voina na severo-zapade Rossii* (Berlin, 1923), p.137.
9. The Polish version of the name was Balachowicz which Stanislav seems to have used after 1920.
10. Hippus, pp.234-5 and Corn, p.137.
11. Karol Wedziagolski, 'Savinkov', *Novyi zhurnal*, No.72 (1963), p.172. See also Richard D. Challener (ed.), *United States Military Intelligence, Weekly Summaries*, Vol.16 (New York, 1979), p.6064.
12. Interview in *Le Matin*, 20 Aug. 1919, p.1.
13. PRO, FO 371/5438, No.413, 'Relations between General Wrangel and M. Savinkov and M. Savinkov's Scheme for the Overthrow of the Soviet Government' [1920].
14. Hippus, pp.198-9.
15. Challener, p.6064.
16. Wedziagolski, pp.172-3.
17. G. Kirdetsov, *U vorot Petrograda* (Berlin, 1921), p.256.
18. Smirnov, p.130.
19. Wedziagolski, p.172-3.
20. Rodzianko, pp.9-10.
21. *Le Matin*, 20 Aug. 1919. p.1.
22. Smirnov, p.130.
23. 25/24 and *Le Matin*, 20 Aug. 1919, p.1. In this interview Balakhovich claimed to have had several meetings with Trotskii which allowed him to size up the 'Red Napoleon' as a mere 'rascal'.
24. PRO, FO 371/5439, No.3857, "The Peoples' Volunteer Army – Secret Report on the Actions of Savinkov' [by S.G. Reilly], 14 Nov. 1920.
25. Rybakov, p.84.
26. Smirnov, p.129.
27. Rybakov, p.84.
28. N.N. Ivanov, *O sobytiakh pod Petrogradom v 1919 g.* (Berlin, 1921), p.83 and Rybakov, p.85.
29. PRO, FO 371/5439, *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*
31. Lokhvitskii, p.54.
32. HSG, AS, file No.18, *Pol'sha III*, B.V. Savinkov to V.V. Savinkov, 23 Aug. 1920.
33. PRO, FO 371/5439, *ibid.*; Rodzianko, p.28.
34. Smirnov, pp.129-30.
35. Rodzianko, p.25-7.
36. Rodzianko, p.11; Smirnov, p.130.
37. Ivanov, p.83.

38. Gorn, p.150; Rodzianko, pp.31-2.
39. Ataman is a Cossack title meaning 'chieftain'.
40. Smirnov, p.130.
41. Ivanov, p.83.
42. Ibid.
43. LeMrfin, 21 Aug. 1919, p.1.
44. Hippus, p.199.
45. Gorn, p.34 and Smirnov, p.130.
46. Gorn, p.34.
47. Smirnov, pp.138-9.
48. HIA, N.N. Iudenich Collection, ffile 96, No.46, 22 Feb. 1919; Rodzianko, p.35.
49. Ivanov, p.16.
50. HIA, P.A. Tomilov Collection, 'Severo-zapadnyi front grazhdanskoi voiny v Rossii 1919 g.' (MSS, n.d.), p.133.
51. PRO FO 371/5438, Ibid.; Rodzianko, pp.25-7.
52. PRO FO 371/5439, Ibid.
53. Wedziagolski, p.172.
54. Rybakov, p.85.
55. Rodzianko, pp.35,52-3.
56. Iudenich, ffile 93, Ttelo Ivanova'; Gorn, pp.38-40; Rodzianko, pp.18,29.
57. Rodzianko, pp.137-9: Trogramma Prakticheskoi Narodnoi Partii'; Gorn, pp.57-8; Ivanov, pp.11-15.
58. Ivanov, p.83.
59. Ibid.
60. Rodzianko, Prilozhenie No.8, 'Prizyv bafW.
61. Gorn, pp.46-7; Ivanov, p.35; Rodzianko, pp.29,35-6; Tomilov, p.248.
62. Gorn, pp.40-43,57-60; Rodzianko, pp.40,46-7.
63. PRO, FO 371/5438, Ibid.; Kirdetsov, pp.255-71, passim; Gorn, pp.5-33, passim; Rodzianko, pp.52-4. See also EN. Miliukov, *Rossia na perelome*, Vol.II (Berlin, 1927), pp.105-6.
64. Gorn, pp.62,64; Kirdetsov, pp.266-71.
65. Rodzianko, pp.35,52-4; Gorn, pp.62,64.
66. Iudenich, ffile 93, No.128, 6 June 1919.
67. The troops under Balakhovich consisted of the 'Special Combined Division' (some 2,600 rifles and sabres) which included his 250-strong 'personal' regiment and the 765 man partisan regiment under brother Jozef. Arsen'ev's 4th Rifle Division had less than 2,000 troops. See Tomilov, Prilozhenie No.7.
68. The German forces under the command of General Rudiger von der Goltz commenced operations in March with the pretext of driving Soviet forces from Lithuania and Latvia. In combination with some Latvian and White Russian units, they were successful in this effort and by May had occupied Riga where a pro-German regime at once appeared. German efforts to continue their advance north were stopped by Latvian-Estonian forces in June. See also Iudenich, ffile 61, No.1, 19 Aug. 1919.
69. PRO FO 371/5439, Ibid.
70. Iudenich, ffile 88, No.205, 11 Aug. 1919 and ffile 94, No.125, 11 Aug. 1919.
71. Tomilov, p.318.
72. Rodzianko, pp.83-4.
73. Kirdetsov, pp.264-6; Rodzianko, pp.86-8; HIA, Iudenich, ffile 61, No.1.
74. Corn, pp.136-7. On 20 August Balakhovich met with members of the 'civil administration' recently instituted by Iudenich (including Corn) in an unsuccessful attempt to gain their support against Rodzianko. Corn and the others urged the two generals to seek a compromise.
75. Iudenich, file 8, No.205, 11 Aug. 1919.
76. Corn, pp.140 and 380-81: T»elo General'-maiora Bulak-Balakhovicha', Also: Tomilov, pp.319-20 and Prilozhenie No.22, Trikaz No.246', 2 Oct. 1919; Iudenich, file 62, 'Razgovor po apparatu Rodzianko s Kondyrevym' ob arestakh ... Balakhovicha', n.d.
77. Tomilov, pp.318-21; Rodzianko, pp.88-9.
78. Corn, p.151; PRO FO 37V5438, ibid; Iudenich, ffile 14, No.1508, n.d.
79. Tomilov, 'Prikaz No.246', 2 Oct. 1919; Iudenich, ffile 14, No.1508, ffile 97, No.246; Rodzianko, p.145, Prilozhenie No.15: 'Donesenie iz kontr-razvedki No.139'; Kirdetsov, p.268.

80. Iudenich, ffile 75, No.59,13 Sept. 1919.
81. Iudenich, ffile 42, No.2037,25 Aug. 1919.
82. Challener, Vol.10,2061. See also Rene Vanlande, *Avec General Niessel en Prusse et en Lithuanie* (Paris, 1921), pp.125-34; Graf Riidiger von der Goltz, *Meine Sendung in Finnland und im Baltikum* (Leipzig, 1920), *passim*, Avalov's forces assaulted Riga, without success, on 8-9 Oct.
83. Iudenich, ffile 40, No.299,19 Sept. 1919; Tomilov, p.321.
84. Tomilov, p.321.
85. PRO FO 371/5438, *ibid.*; Iudenich, ffile 16, No.28,31 Jan. 1920; Kirdetsov, pp.268-70.
86. Gorn (p.224), estimated that Iudenich paid a personal 'ransom' of 500,000 Finnish marks and turned over the equivalent of more than £200,000 sterling. See also PRO FO 371/5438, *Ibid.*, Iudenich, ffile 47, Nos.1, 334, Jan. 1920.
87. PRO, FO 371/5439, *ibid.*; Challener, Vol.16, p.6046.
88. PRO, FO 371/5438, *ibid.*
89. Wedziagolski, p.170; PRO FO 371/5439, *ibid.*
90. Wedziagolski, p.170.
91. PRO, FO 371/5439, *ibid.* On 12 September Balakhovich's brigade captured Kovel and in early October seized Pinsk from retreating Red forces.
92. *Delo Samnkova*, pp.62-7. See also USG, AS, box No.17, *Pol'sha II*, 'Bun' 1920-noiabr' 1921', pp.5-7, and MA, B.I. Nicolaevsky Collection, box 182, file 32, 'Po Memoria'.
93. The relationship between Balakhovich and Savinkov, and Savinkov himself, are discussed in greater detail in Richard Spence, *Boris Savinkov: Renegade on the Left* (Boulder, CO, 1991),pp.280-90.
94. Hippus, p.229; Wedziagolski, pp.190-91.
95. H1A, Nicolaevsky, *ibid.*, 'Soglashenie' of 27 August 1920, 'Programme Parti Populaire Volontaire', and 'Po Memoria'. Much the same materials can be found in IISG, AS, box 18. See also Leon Grosfeld, 'Pilsudski et Savinkov', *Acta Poloniae Historica*, No.14 (1966), pp.49-73.
96. HIA, Nicolaevsky, *ibid.*, 'Programme Parti Populaire Volontaire'.
97. Lokhvitskii, p.54.
98. *Delo Savmkova*, pp.107, 114-15; PRO, FO 371/5439, No.187, 'Relations with Population'; Lokhvitskii, p.33; Kirdetsov, p.270. See also S.I. Gusev-Orenburgskii, *Bagrovaia kniga* (Harbin, 1922), p.5.
99. Lokhvitskii, pp.50-52, 65; Wedziagolski, pp.174,190-91. Lokhvitskii suggests that the Elin affair was partly instigated by Savinkov in an effort to discredit Balakhovich.
100. Hippus, pp.199,229.
101. Wedziagolski, pp.190-91.
102. *Delo Savinkova*, pp.111-12; HIA, Nicolaevsky, *ibid.*, 'Po Memoria'; PRO, FO 371/6910, No.187, 'The Activities of Boris V Savinkov, 5 May 1921; Lokhvitskii, p.49.
103. In-depth descriptions of the NDA and its campaign can be found in B.V. Savinkov *Narodnaia dobrovol'cheskaia armia v pokhode* (Warsaw, 1921), R. Simanski, *Kampanja bialoruska rosyskiej armji ludowa-ochothniczej Gen. Bulak-Balachowicza rok 1920* (Warsaw 1931), ffileA, E.K. Miller Collection, box 9, 'Narodnaia dobrovol'cheskaia armia, 1920 g'. , as well as the work by V.V. Savinkov cited in note No.1 (GARF f. 5901). For a contemporary Soviet perspective on the 'Balakhovich-Savinkov' adventure see RTsKMDNI, fond 76 (EE. Dzerzhinskii), opis 3, delo 135, Report by V.L. Gerson, 29 Nov. 1920.
104. PRO, FO 371/6910, *ibid.*; HIA, Nicolaevsky, *ibid.*. 'To Memoria', and 'Soglashenie' 16 Nov. 1920; *Delo Savinkova*, pp.111-12; Lokhvitskii, 49. See also N.R. Vakar *Belorussia: The Making of a State* (Cambridge, 1956), pp.111-17.
105. Red Army operations against the NDA are detailed in N.E. Kakurin, V.A. Melikov, *Voina s belopoliakami* (Moscow, 1925), pp.401-5.
106. PRO, FO 371/5438, No.3508, Loraine to FO, 1 Dec. 1920.
107. PRO, FO 371/6832. No.10664, Report on Soviet-Polish Relations, 17 April 1921.
108. PRO, FO 371/5438, 'Open Letter from Boris Savinkov, 22 Dec. 1920'.
109. Hippus, pp.234-5n; Norman Davies, *White Eagle/Red Star: The Polish-Soviet War, 1919-1920* (New York, 1972), pp.258-9. In a private communication to the author, a person once close to Russian émigré circles in Poland claimed that Balakhovich was murdered in 1940.