On 8 August 1920, A. G. Shlikhter addressed the Tambov Provincial Food Supply Conference. A longtime party member with a reputation for increasing grain procurements without inciting uprisings, he had just been appointed chairman of the Tambov provincial executive committee. In his speech opening the conference Shlikhter said that food supply workers should “work like law-abiding revolutionaries” to erase the “bitter memories of food supply workers, especially of what they were doing two or three months ago;” so that they could in the future “safely walk in the countryside.”

This exhortation came too late. Three weeks later, an armed detachment from the Provincial Food Supply Committee entered Kamenka, a village seventy-five kilometers south of Tambov, in search of grain to requisition. The detachment was ambushed as it left the village, and annihilated. The peasants defeated several
more punitive detachments sent against them. Organized by local Socialist Revolutionaries and led by a shadowy figure named Aleksandr Antonov, this rebellion soon encompassed the richest areas of the province and took tens of thousands of Soviet troops and many of the Red Army’s finest commanders to suppress.2

This uprising was hardly unique in the civil war history of Tambov province. Tambov’s Communist government was weak throughout this period and suffered many disadvantages in its attempts to rule the province, even though “rule” actually meant only collecting grain to feed the army and the cities, obtaining recruits to reinforce the Red Army, and keeping trains running through the province. Neither the provincial government nor the Communist party organization were up to the task of governance.

Government bureaucrats were ignorant, inefficient, and corrupt. Security forces executed for malfeasance the first man appointed provincial Food Supply commissar, probably the most important official after the chairman of the provincial executive committee. Lower ranking individuals were often little better: the provincial Cheka regularly arrested provincial and uezd government officials for corruption, on occasion shooting them. The Tambov government, though, had to settle for what it could get. A. Okinsky, a Petrograd bureaucrat who settled in Podgornskiaia district, Borisoglebsk uezd, to sit out the civil war, writes that educated office workers were in such short supply that to keep himself from being requisitioned he had to bribe the head of the district office workers’ union not to mention him to the uezd center.3

Peasant uprisings were a constant factor in Tambov province during the civil war. The central government’s policies of forced food procurement and recruiting inevitably caused discontent among the rural population. Corruption and tyranny by local government officials compounded this and led to violence. The peasant commune provided an organizing principle for expressing discontent, but only on the village or district level. This local disorganization allowed small government forces to suppress large uprisings piecemeal.

The great uprising of 1920-21 presented a new challenge to the Communist government. Still poorly armed but with a much better organization, Antonov’s Insurgent Army required far greater effort to suppress, and it also forced a reassessment of the sources of peasant discontent, especially the forced grain procurement system. Military operations and cleansing of villages of “unfriendly” peasants by exile and executions ended the 1920-21 uprising, but only the abandonment of forced requisitions and the government withdrawal from confrontation with the village brought calm to the countryside. But this calm was only temporary, lasting until the new upheavals at the end of the 1920s.

3 Uezd was a political subdivision of a Russian province (Tambov province had twelve uezds). "Kazri komissara Seremiagina;” Izvestiia Tambovskogo gubernskogo soveta, 12 September 1918, 1; GATO, f. R-1236, op. 1, d. 746, 1, 10; Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiskoi Federatsii (formerly Tsentral’nyi Arkhiv Oktiabrskoi Revoliutsii; hereafter GARF), f. 393, op. 13, d. 463, 1, 338; report of Tambov Revision Commission, 14 February 1919, GATO, f R-394, op. 1, d. 392, 11. 128-128ob; Instructor Gados to Gubernskii otdel upravleniia, 6 January 1919, ibid.

the Communist government offered real reforms. This is especially true given that the peasantry risked much greater dangers in supporting the rebels after the Communist government was firmly in place in the villages. In any case, all energies had to be focused on surviving a winter that was even hungrier than those before.58

Aleksandr Antonov and his brother remained at large for several more months, hiding in forests along the Vorona river or with old friends in the Kirsanov area. The Tambov secret police continued to search for them and other remnants of the uprising, using former insurgents now desperate to pay their debt to society by hunting down their former comrades. Only in June 1922 did the Cheka find the Antonov brothers. Suffering from malaria, they were recovering in a peasant hut in the village of Nizhnii Shibriai. Cheka agents surrounded the hut, set it afire, and shot the men as they fled. Soviet authorities took measures to assure that Antonov would not become the subject of folklore. They distributed slides of photographs of the naked corpses of the brothers throughout the province, where activists used slide projectors to show them to peasant assemblies.59

The Tambov peasant uprising of 1920-21 was doomed to failure once Moscow could concentrate sufficient forces against it. Confronted with overwhelming force and swayed by the removal of many of the most galling aspects of early Soviet power, peasants weary from eight years of war returned to rebuilding their farms. But if Antonov was killed and his insurgency crushed, the Soviet government did not forget his movement. Insurgents who had surrendered to the government and redeemed themselves by fighting

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58 B. V "Partiia na prodrabotu," Kommunist (Tambov) 1921, no. 6, p. 2; Kaza-kov, Partiia s.-r. i Tambovskoe vosstanie 1920-1921 gg., 10; Vasi'tev, "Iz istorii antonovshchiny" 16.


Even when officials were not criminal or venal, they were rarely efficient. Recruits who voluntarily showed up for enlistment often found that no preparations had been made to house and feed them. Peasants who carted grain to government collection points rather than selling it to black marketeers sometimes found the collection points full and had to bring their grain home. These experiences contributed to bad feelings among the population: as one report had it, "Dark elements used this in agitation against Soviet power."4

The Communist Party was not a reliable instrument, either. Total cadres were tiny, given the size of the province. In addition, as the tables show, party ranks swelled and shrank enormously. Party organizations filled with poorly indoctrinated new members during membership drives, then shrank as inactive or inadequate members were purged and effective party members were promoted and drafted for work at the front or in other provinces.

Those party members who remained in the villages developed bad reputations. Boris Shekhter, traveling in late September 1918 from Petrograd to Treskino (a village in Kirsanov uezd) was astounded at how unpopular Communists were. He blamed this unpopularity on the illegal exactions and brutal behavior of local Communists.5

These inadequacies spelled trouble when combined with a village population that was hostile and suspicious of the Communist government and well armed with weapons taken from the front when the Imperial Army collapsed. Violent insurrections punctuate the history of Tambov province during the civil war, starting

11. 90-93; A. Okninskii, Dva goda sredi krest’ian (Riga: M. Didkovska izdvnieciba, 1936), 38.

4 Izvestiia Narodnogo komissariata po prodovol’stvu, nos. 1-2 (January 1919): 57; Protocol 30 of Tambov Gubprodkollegium, 31 March 1919, Rossiiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Ekonomiki (formerly Tsentral’nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv iIarodnogo Khoziaistva; hereafter RGAE), f. 1943, op. 3, d. 293, 1. 344ob; also Protocol of 6 May 1919 instructors’ meeting, ibid., 1. 485ob.

5 Boris Shekhter to VTsIK, stamped 27 January 1919, GATO, f. R-1, op. 1, d. 138, 11. 122-122ob.
Tambov Provincial Party Organization, December 1918 ‑ December 1920

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Number of Party Organizations</th>
<th>Number of Party Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 1918</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>10049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1919</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>9923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1919</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>3997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1919</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>1676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1920</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>17528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1920</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>11521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1920</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>7087</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

before the October overturn. Attempts by the provincial government to collect grain by force and stop peasants from seizing non‑peasant lands led to uprisings in much of the province in September 1917, and ended with the government retreating. After the “establishment of Soviet power” the next year, the first attempt to draft peasants into the Red Army ended in a debacle in June 1918. Recruits in Tambov itself rioted, arrested most of the provincial government, looted armories, and dispersed to their villages with arms and ammunition.6

In November 1918 much of Tambov province exploded again in a series of rebellions. Peasant anger over the activities of the local government had been building, especially over the abuses of the

their horses and who followed them constantly. The insurgent forces melted away, especially after Antonov received a serious head wound in Chenyshevo. Guerrillas hid in the woods along the Vorona river, attempted to return home secretly, or surrendered to the Communist forces. Antonov was left with only a few dozen men. Similar tactics were successful against Bogoslavskii’s army.56 When the remnants of the larger insurgent groups fled to forests and swamps along the Vorona river, Tukhachevsky ordered preparations to use another modern weapon, poison gas, to “smoke them out:” Although Antonov‑Ovseenko announced publicly this plan to encourage insurgents to surrender, it seems not to have been carried out because of technical difficulties.57

Such extreme measures were not necessary. The rebellion was finished by September because the insurgents found no safe base in which they could recuperate and reorganize, even though Antonov remained at large. The revolutionary committees, družiny, and militia had replaced the STK committees in the villages, and the insurgents could no longer count on the support of the peasants. The government had abolished forced food requisition, removed the Food Supply detachments and allowed free trade in grain. Conscription was much less pressing as the Red Army demobilized. If even some members of the Tambov uezd STK committee thought the “Bolsheviks had gone over to the STK program” with the introduction of NEP, it is not surprising that peasant support for the uprising vanished when the rebel armies were crushed and

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6 E. A. Lutskii, “Krest’ianskoe vosstanie v Tambovskoi gubernii v sentiabre 1917 g.;” Istoriiecheskie zapiski, no. 2 (1938), 72‑75; P Kroshitskii and S. Sokolov, eds., Khroniika revolutsionnykh sobytii v Tambovskoi gubernii (1917‑1918) (Tambov: Tipografiia ‘Proletarskii svetoch,’ 1927); P Kroshitskii, “Tambovskie motivy” Izvestiia Tambovskogo gubernskogo soveta, 7 July 1918, 2; Kolosov, Put’ bor’by. 35‑37; V Vas’l’ev, “Iz istorii antonovshchiny;” in Antonovshchina (Tambov: Iздательство Tambovskogo gубкома партии ‘Kommuнист,’ 1923), 11; Provincial Commissar of Labor B. Vas’l’ev, report to Narkomtrud, 19 June 1918, GARF, f. 393, op. 3, d. 378, l. 134ob.

56 Combined Cavalry Group Combat Report, 28 May‑8 June 1921, GARF, f. 8415, op. 1, d. 122, 11. 49‑52; I. I. Trutko, Takticheskie primery iz opyta bor’by s banditizmom: Unichtozhenie bandy Boguslavskogo; Krasnaia armiia nos. 3‑4 (1921): 35‑37.

57 I. I. Trutko, “Takticheskie primery iz opyta bor’by s banditizmom: Primerenie aeroplanov kak rezervov;” Krasnaia armiia, nos. 5‑6 (1921): 41‑43; GARF, f. 8415, op. 1, d. 122, 11. 70, 80 (Order from Tukhachevsky to use poison gas dated 12 June 1921, and proclamation from Antonov‑Ovseenko dated 11 June 1921 threatening its use); Mokerov, “Kursantskii sbor po bor’be s antonovshchinoi;” 79; Fel’dman, “Krest’ianskaia voina;” 57.
After a district was purged of bandits and their families, the authorities appointed a revolutionary committee to govern the area. As regular military detachments were withdrawn from pacified areas for use elsewhere, they were replaced by mounted militiamen (recruited from other provinces) and local self-defense units called druzhiny. Drawn from the local population, these units gave the revolutionary committee armed force with which to repel insurgent incursions, spy on insurgent groups, and enforce orders on the local population. The druzhiniki were reliable, because any betrayal would result in severe reprisals against not only the druzhinite himself but all members of his immediate family.55

While most Soviet forces were thus winning over the Tambov peasantry, the elite cavalry of the Red Army, commanded by such heroes of the civil war as Uborevich and Kotovskii and reinforced with Fiat automobiles mounted with machine guns, were ordered to pursue and destroy the main insurgent armies. At this point the insurgent forces were concentrated in two armies, the First Army, with two thousand troops under Bogoslavskii, and the Second Army, with three thousand men commanded by Antonov himself. They first struck against Antonov’s army. Before, Antonov’s men had been able to outdistance Red cavalry by frequently changing horses. When they had lost touch with their pursuers, Antonov’s forces could stop, rest, and reequip. This was no longer possible. Faster, tireless automobiles followed them constantly. Red Army commanders had trouble in coordinating cavalry units with the automobile detachments, allowing most of Antonov’s forces to escape both a surprise attack on 1 June at Elan and another at Chenyshevo five days later, but the insurgents suffered serious losses both of men and especially of weapons. In addition they became intimidated by the automobiles, whose engines frightened new Committees of the Rural Poor (kombedy), but the spark that set it off was a renewed attempt to conscript peasants, an effort that coincided with the first anniversary of the October revolution. Unrest was not limited to Tambov province: peasant rebellions flared up throughout central Russia in November 1918, typically incited by recruiting. [8]

Although the previous draft in June 1918 had caused serious rebellions in Tambov province, and there had been sporadic attacks on committees of the poor and Soviet officials since then, authorities were ill prepared for the widespread resistance that the new draft brought forth.7

The course of this rebellion is worth studying in some detail, as its suppression foreshadows the tactics that the Soviet government would use unsuccessfully against the 1920-21 uprising. The uprisings started in Morshansk, where peasants had especially suffered from committees of the poor.8 Peasants ambushed and killed a group of uezd officials, including the chairman of the uezd party committee. The Morshansk uezd Cheka declared that peasants who attacked Soviet officials were outlaws, but this decree had little influence on peasants who soon afterward attacked local committees of the poor around the Berdy Iagodnoe railroad station. Insurgent peasants sent emissaries to other districts, where they successfully spread the rebellion over much of Morshansk uezd and parts of Kirsanov uezd. Army units supported by armored railroad cars with the machine guns were sent from Kaluga and Morshansk on 10 November to restore order. The peasants defeated them as well. The uezd authorities sent frantic telegrams to Tambov and Moscow

55 Leonidov, "Esero-banditizm v Tambovskoi gubernii i bor’ba s nim;" 171; Tukhachevskii, "Bor’ba s kontrrevoluisionnymi vostaniamami," no. 9, p. 10; Instructions on Re-Establishing Soviet Power, GARF, f. R-8415, op. 1, d. 116, 11. 18-19ob; Instructions on organizing district druzhiny, ibid., d. 122, II. 63-64.

7 V V Aver’ev and S. Ronin, "Kulatskie vostaniia v epokhu kombedov;" Bor’ba klassov, no. 3, d. 105 (1935): 87; Gubernskii otdel upravleniia report to NKVD otdel mestnogo upravleniia, 16 October 1918, GARF, f. 393, op. 3, d. 378, l. 146.

8 Protocol 37 of the Morshansk uispolkom, 23 October 1918, GATO, f. R-20, op. 1, d. 30, l. 204.
demanding military aid “with artillery,” to fight the thousands of armed peasants they reported were marching on Morshansk.9

The uprisings in Morshansk uezd were not unique. Tambov’s provincial government received daily reports about new peasant uprisings in November, and uprisings also occurred in Kirsanov, Usman’, and Tambov uezds.10 In Shatsk uezd mobilized men rioted in early November. Detachments sent to suppress the outbreaks met armed resistance, and an attack on the city of Shatsk by peasants was beaten off only after prolonged street fighting. The peasants then besieged the city until a large detachment of soldiers from Tambov drove them away.11

The life cycles of these uprisings were similar. A village assembly would organize an attack on the local soviet or committee of the poor, both to obtain weapons and to destroy tax records. In these attacks they usually arrested most soviet employees, but the peasants murdered hated officials in a variety of inventive ways.12 The rebels would then send emissaries to other villages or even to other districts, asking them to join the rebellion and threatening them if they did not. This level of organization seemed sufficient

The data used to compile the accompanying table are incomplete, but they give some idea of the scope of the campaign and of its results.53

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Insurgents Captured</th>
<th>Insurgents Surrendered</th>
<th>Insurgents Shot</th>
<th>Hostages Taken</th>
<th>Individuals</th>
<th>Families</th>
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<tr>
<td>June 1–7</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>209</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 19–25</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>no data</td>
<td>1847</td>
<td>308</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>June 26–2 July 2</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>183</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>July 2–9</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>161</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 10–16</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>796</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>942</td>
<td>283</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 17–23</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>642</td>
<td>98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 24–30</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results of Order 130 Campaign

The Plenipotentiary Commission publicized widely the results of the Order 130 campaign and soon added further rigor to it. A 12 June proclamation announced that families who hid weapons, insurgents, or even the families of insurgents would be arrested and sent to hard labor, except for the oldest male, who would be shot. Property would be confiscated, of course.54

9 Glavnyi Komissar s.v. dorogi Kudriavtsev to Gubispolkom, 10 November 1918, GATO, f. R-1, op. 1, d. 31, l. 218; Deputy Chairman of Gubispolkom Mon-aenkov [sic] to Sovnarkom, VeCheKa, etc., 10 November 1918, GARF, f. 130, op. 2, d. 631, l. 39.
10 Krotshitskii and Sokolov, Khronika revoliutsionnyklz sobytii v Tambovskoi gubernii, 70.
11 A. Komarov and P Kroshitskii, Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie: Khronika 1918 goda (Voronezh: Izdatel’stvo “Kommuna”), 150; N. P Zybko, Tambovskia partiiaa organizatsii v gody grazhdanskoi voiny i inostrannoi interventsii (1918-1920 gg.), (Tambov: Tambovskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1991), 16; “Doklad o vazhneishikh sobytiiakh v Kirsanovskom uezde za god sotsialisticheskoi revoliutii,” GATO, f. R-1, op. 1, d. 138, l. 21ob; Gubinstruktor V Zheladnov report to Gubprodkom, 23 November 1918, GATO, f. 81236, op. 1, d. 94, l. 105; Tambov Voenkomat to the Commander of the Southern Front, 12 November 1918, GATO, f. R-1, op. 1, d. 31, l. 239.
12 Zybko, Tambovskia partiiaa organizatsii, 16; Aver’ev and Ronin, “Kul’tskie vostaniia v epokhu kombedov,” 87.
53 Reports by the Plenipotentiary Commission, GARF, R-8415, op. 1, d. 121, 11. 30-33ob, ibid., d. 122, 11. 82-83, TsDNITO, op. 1, d. 1048, 11. 9-16ob (my thanks to S. A. Esikov for this reference and that from TsDNITO in previous note).
54 “Krest’ianstvu Tambovskoi gubernii,” 12 June 1921, GARF, f. R-8415, op. 1, d. 122, l. 79.
who could not be transferred to forced labor camps. Also, peasants soon found a way to hinder the commissions’ work: they refused to give their names. This problem was surmounted by Order 171: all those who refused to give their names to a commission carrying out Order 130 were to be summarily shot.

Some detachments found two weeks too long a period to wait for bandits to surrender to free their families, and in Kirsanov uyezd they pioneered a new method that the Plenipotentiary Commission soon recommended to all its detachments. A detailed report survives of how this technique worked. A detachment sealed off Osinovka, a hamlet that insurgents frequented. The peasants there claimed to know nothing of the insurgents even after Orders 130 and 171 were read, along with the list of suspected bandits. The detachment then took forty hostages and gave the villagers two hours to deliver both bandits and weapons, or the hostages would be shot. The village assembly wavered on what to do, so after two hours the detachment executed twenty-one hostages in front of the assembly “with all formalities.” The horrified peasants soon came up with three rifles and five bandits. “With the goal of rendering the settlement more healthy, families of those who were shot and of bandits who were hiding were sent to a concentration camp.” The detachment then moved on to the next village, where the peasants were much more forthcoming.

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50 GARF, f. 8415, op. 1, d. 122, 1. 125.
51 D. Fel’dman, “Krest’ianskaia voina,” Rodina, no. 10 (1989): 57; Tsentral’nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sovetskoi Armii f. 235, op. 3, d. 13, 1. 14 (my thanks to D. A Nalitov for this citation).
52 Report by Shchekoldin, chairman of a Polnomochnaia Piaterka, dated 8 July 1921, GARF, f. 8415, op. 1, d. 122, 11. 103-103ob; Telegram to Predupolitkomissii of all military districts from Antonov-Ovseenko, Tukhachevsky Lavrov, dated 23 June 1921, ibid., 1. 94. See also Tsentr dokumentatsii noveishei istorii Tambovskoi oblasti (formerly Partiinyi Arkhiv Tambovskoi Oblasti; hereafter TsD-NITO), f. 840, op. 1, d. 1048, ll. 9-100b.

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13 Aver’ev and Ronin, “Kulatskie vostaniia v epokhu kombedov;” 94.
14 Quoted in ibid., 94.
15 Gubinstruktor V Zheladnov, report to Gubprodkom, 23 November 1918, GATO, f. R-1236, op. 1, d. 94, ll. 105; Bor’ba rabochikh i krest’ian pod rukovodstvom bol’shevistskoi parti (Tambovskoi gubernii) (1917-1918 gody) (Tambov: n.p., 1957), 90.
The approach of Kasnov’s Cossacks from the South in late November 1918 also hastened the end of the uprising. While Tambov peasants hated the Soviet government, they feared the Whites more, since the latter presaged the return of the hated gentry who would demand back their land. Also, the depredations of the Food Supply detachments lessened as many of those detachments were transferred to the front to stem the advance of the White Cossacks.\(^{16}\)

While peasant disorganization made it easy for the Soviet government to suppress the November 1918 uprisings, the unrest did force the authorities to make concessions. On 10 November they temporarily abolished all taxes, requisitions, and conscription. Investigations into the causes of these rebellions exposed widespread corruption and abuse among government officials. In the weeks that followed, some officials were fired and a few were tried. The committees of the poor, a major subject of peasant complaints, were abolished, though only after they supervised new elections to local soviets.\(^ {17}\)

In July 1919 a new danger threatened Communist control of the province as General Anton Denikin’s army began to advance north. As Red Army forces fell back, Tambov sent several drafts of party members and Food Supply soldiers to help stiffen resistance, but the Communist forces continued to retreat. Borisoglebsk fell to the Whites on 8 July 1919, and on 10 August a White cavalry corps pacification will immediately create many supports of Soviet power, since banditry is wearisome and destructive for the peasant masses.

6. Soviet-minded peasants must be drawn into Soviet work by all means, into the organization of spying on bandits, etc. This will create an insurmountable barrier between those peasants and the bandits.\(^ {48}\)

On 12 May the Plenipotentiary Commission issued Order 130, which put into law Tukhachevsky’s third point. As codified in operational instructions, a detachment would enter a village equipped with lists prepared by the Cheka. They would arrest those men present who were on the list of suspected bandits (these included insurgents and especially STK committee members). The families of those not present who were on the list of bandits, or those who were not on the list but had no good reason for being absent, were also arrested and their property confiscated. The detachment then posted signs warning that the suspect had two weeks to surrender with his weapons. He was guaranteed his life if he did this, and his family would be freed and his property surrendered. Otherwise the family was deported to forced labor in another province, the house burned, and the property divided among “honorable peasants, especially those who suffered from the bandits.” The suspect was to be shot on sight.\(^ {49}\)

Difficulties soon emerged when this plan was carried out. The Plenipotentary Commission ordered uezd political commissions not to arrest as hostages people who could not work: the Tambov concentration camps were clogged with old people and children.

\(^{16}\) A. Morozov, "Doklad-Otchet o prodarmii," n.d., RGAE, f. 1943, op. 11, d. 204, 11, 62, 69.

\(^{17}\) Margolin to the Provincial Requisition Department, 15 November 1918, GATO, f. R-1236, op. 1, d. 155, 1. 160; Protocol of Gubcheka Collegium, 28 April 1919, GATO, f. R-1, op. 1, d. 120, 1. Gob; Report to Gubprodkom from Gubinstruktor V Zheladnov, 23 November 1918, GATO, f. R-1236, op. 1, d. 94, 1. 105; Telegram from Tambov Voenkomat to the Commander of the Southern Front, 12 November 1918, GATO, f. R-1, op. 1, d. 31, 1. 239.

\(^{48}\) Quoted in Leonidov, "Esero-banditizm v Tambovskoi gubernii i bor’ba s nim," 171.

\(^{49}\) Sovety Tambovskoi gubernii, 319–320 (Prikaz 130); Prikaz 14, GARF, f. 8415, op. 1, d. 122, 1. 55; Tukhachevskii, "Bor’ba s kontrevoliutsionnymi vosstaniyami” no. 8, p. 8.
served their interests and that those things they wanted most—an end to recruitment and forced requisitions—were already a reality.46

After several weeks of preparation, Tukhachevsky launched a new offensive against the main insurgent forces on 1 June 1921. When he left the province forty days later the rebellion was broken, the guerrillas reduced to small groups hiding in swamps, and Soviet power had been reestablished. Tukhachevsky’s success was based on his enormous reserves of manpower, which strangled the rebellion by cutting off its life-source, the local communes. His forces occupied the entire area under rebel control, depriving the rebels of popular support while crack cavalry brigades hunted down and destroyed the two main insurgent detachments, now deprived of new recruits and supplies.47

In his instructions issued on taking up command, Tukhachevsky listed the basic measures to be taken.

1. Never make a threat that cannot be carried out.
2. Once given, threats must be carried through to the end.
3. Resettle families that do not surrender bandits in distant regions of the R.S.F.S.R.
4. Confiscate these families’ property and divide it among Soviet-minded peasants. This will cause the division of the peasantry into layers, and on this Soviet power can lean.
5. Soviet-minded peasants must be firmly and reliably protected by our forces against bandit attacks. In general,

commanded by General Kontantin Mamontov broke through the Red Army lines and headed straight for Tambov.18

Most of the provincial government fled from Tambov to Morschansk, leaving the defense of the city to a motley, poorly armed force of recaptured deserters, officer candidates, and mobilized Communists. D. E Sokolov, the commander of this brigade, went over to the Cossacks with some of his troops during the White assault on the city, and the rest of his command retreated in great disorder to the north. The Cossacks occupied Tambov for several days, destroying government offices and looting warehouses and homes. They then turned northwest toward Kozlov, captured and looted that town, and finally broke through the Red Army lines again near Voronezh.19

The raid was especially destructive to government in the countryside. Most reports show that peasants took advantage of the Cossacks to eliminate irritants like Food Supply requisitioning agents and detachments. Even village and district soviets often arrested, disarmed, and robbed Food Supply officials and then turned them over to the Cossacks to be beaten or killed. Those Soviet officials who attempted to act differently usually became targets for attack themselves, especially if they were Communist Party members. Cossacks or peasants alone or in combined groups attacked and looted collective and state farms, warehouses of goods set aside to barter for grain, and destroyed railroad tracks and telegraph lines. Cossack bands trampled crops and requisitioned horses as remounts. Soviet troops in pursuit of Mamontov added to the destruction, trampling crops themselves and requisitioning grain on their own. As pro-Communist authority evaporated in

46 “Otchet Tambovskago Gubernskogo Komiteta R. K. P za mai 1921 g.;” Kommunist (Tambov) 1921, no. 5, p. 9; “Otchet Gubkomu XII Gupartkonferentsii,” Kommunist (Tambov) 1921, no. 7, p. 4; Trotsky Papers, 2: 520; Radkey, Unknown Civil War, 244-245.
18 N. E. Kakurin, Kak srazhalas’ revoliutsiia (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel’stvo, 1926; reprint, Moscow: Politizdat, 1990), 2: 261; Ocherki istorii Tambovskoi, 110.
the countryside in Mamontov’s wake, moonshining and illegal grain smuggling reached new heights.20

Furious that local peasants had contributed to this destruction, the provincial government decided to make them pay for it. Just as the Food Supply Committee announced new, larger procurement quotas for the new harvest, the provincial government announced that peasants would also be assessed a 10 million ruble fine to rebuild Soviet property destroyed in the raid.21 After Mamontov’s raid, the provincial food supply organization had to be reorganized almost from scratch, but Moscow immediately demanded enormous amounts of grain and fodder. Iakov Gol’din, newly appointed Food Supply Commissar, began to exert enormous pressure to ensure that grain was collected. He ordered the heads of grain collection points shot if they allowed grain to rot. In the 1918-19 procurement campaign, the government had threatened chairmen of local soviets with fines or imprisonment if their villages did not meet procurement norms. Now, entire village soviets were arrested for this reason, soviet members were threatened with execution, and all of their grain and livestock was confiscated.

All claims that the quotas were too high because of crop failures or damage by passing troops were ignored.22 As Gol’din himself reported to the Sixth Provincial Congress of Soviets, “The tactics

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20 Lipetsk Zarekviotdel to Gubrekviotdel, 21 September 1919, GATO, f. R-1236, op. 1, d. 578, l. 33ob; Zhurnal no. 69 of the meeting of heads of state farms of Kozlov uezd, 16 September 1919, GARF, f. 4390, op. 7, d. 44, l. 9; Shmidt to Gol’man, report, September(?) 1919, RGAE, f. 1943, op. 1, d. 439, l. 7; Gol’man to Tsirupa, August 1919, ibid., l. 16; Tambov Gubotdelupravleniia to Militia chiefs, 12 November 1919; GARF, f. 393, op. 13, d. 463, l. 140; Head of Kirsanov uezd administration department, Report on 1919, ibid., d. 472, l. 5.

21 Minutes of the 28 October 1920 meeting of the Collegium of the Tambov Provincial Finance Department, GATO, f. R-1, op. 1, d. 137, l. 962. This tax was abandoned in December; see ibid., l. 963.

22 Telegram from Gol’din to all Uprodkomy, 17 February 1920, GATO, f. R-1, op. 157, l. 129; Telegram from Shpunt to Smirnov, December 1919 and note from Gol’din to all heads of collection points, RGAE, f. 1943, op. 1, d. 576, 11, 2, 20.
of the person who, losing his head when he sees his house on fire, pours kerosene on it. 43

Government reports from late 1920 and early 1921 are stereotyped. Government forces pursued guerrilla bands everywhere. They reported high body counts but low numbers of captured weapons, and in spite of their supposed successes and constant reinforcements, Antonov’s forces continued to control the countryside while Communist power held only uezd capitals and other heavily garrisoned towns. Even these outposts were not always safe. Antonov’s forces sacked the important market town of Uvarovo on the main Moscow–Saratov railroad after its thousand-man garrison fled, while Rasskazovo, a factory village just outside Tambov, fell to Antonov’s forces both in October 1920 and in April 1921, the first time shortly after Antonov’s main detachment had been reported destroyed. 44

The crucial change came in February 1921. To eliminate the principal source of peasant discontent, on 8 February the central government also officially suspended forced grain requisitioning in twelve provinces, including Tambov. While this act did garner a certain amount of support, many peasants were suspicious, thinking that the suspension of forced procurements was temporary or that the tax-in-kind would just turn out to be forced requisitions under a new name. With the end of the war with Poland, the central government had the forces available to combat the rebellion, and Moscow sent to the province a plenipotentiary commission headed by V. A. Antonov-Ovseenko; he had full powers to suppress the uprising. As winter ended, major forces were moved into...
[with food supply organs]. You will develop food supply work to the maximum. You will answer for any decrease in procurements:”

The provincial party organization mobilized hundreds of its members to procure grain and to serve at the front, but it attempted to protect its image by carefully forbidding local party cells to participate directly in food procurement.25

Gol’din reached the logical extreme of his policy in a 10 June 1920 telegram he wrote to send to all uezd Food Supply Committees. Referring to Lenin’s recent telegram demanding increased grain deliveries, he ordered all armed forces in the province to form two or three large detachments. Each detachment would descend on one village at a time, demanding immediate complete fulfillment of that village’s delivery norm. If this was not forthcoming, the detachment would be ordered to arrest the entire village and confiscate all of its property. Shlikhter, the head of the Provincial Executive Committee, refused to allow this order to be carried out, writing, “Being of sound mind and body I cannot sign this order, or allow you to do so.” He then wrote to the Commissariat of Food Supply explaining that Gol’din’s complaints about the Provincial Party and Executive Committees were “partly the deliriums of a sick man and partly irresponsible petty tyranny” He wrote that he had replaced Gol’din with his assistant and asked Moscow to send Gol’din’s replacement immediately.26

Gol’din’s tactics had been successful in some respects: they allowed the authorities to extract 12 million poods of grain from Tambov province in 1919-20. This achievement caused much bad feeling toward the party and government among peasants and dam-

26 Telegram to all Uprodkomy, 11 June 1920, GATO, f. R-1, op. 1, d. 234, l. 501; Telegram to People’s Commissar Tsiurupa from Shlikhter, 15 June 1920, RGAE, f. 1943, op. 1, d. 576, l. 112.

who received internal-security duties because they were physically unfit to serve in the regular army. Morale was low, and entire companies of local soldiers deserted or went over to the insurgents rather than fight them. The other major support for the government, the Communist party, declined drastically. Provincial party rolls plunged from 17,500 members in July 1920 to 7,000 by the end of the year.41

Even as the uprising took on a larger and larger aspect, the central authorities in Moscow did not take it seriously. While sending few reinforcements they continued to demand that equal attention be paid to forced grain procurement. These commands, when not ignored, only aggravated the situation.42

A. S. Kazakov described the results of these policies: Our forces ... concentrated more on cleaning the countryside out of all property than on clearing out and destroying bands [of insurgents]. It was not decided who was innocent and who was guilty. The entire peasantry fell into one heap and was called “bandit.” The part of the peasantry that was loyal to us was in a hopeless position after it lost all its property and housing from a full furazhirovka [their homesteads were looted and burned]. For them there was no solution except to join a [guerrilla] band to get revenge for the destruction of their goods, obtained at such effort. Entire villages, fearing our “Red Terror,” took their livestock, women and children and hid in the forests. Because of such “liquidations” the bands popped up like mushrooms, and the total number of rebels reached tens of thousands. The actions of the commanders remind us of the deeds

42 Vnutrennye voiska Sovetskoi respubliki (1917-1922 gg.) (Moscow: Iuridicheskaia Literatura, 1972), 524-525.
ernment when detachments arrived looking for grain or recruits.39 Throughout 1920 and early 1921, though, they could find no way to exert such influence in the villages. Instead, the Soviet strategy to suppress the uprising was based on intermittent insurgent terror. Government forces shot on the spot all captured insurgents and burned and looted villages seen as supporting the uprising. They arrested all men capable of bearing arms and sent them to concentration camps around Tambov. This strategy was both too harsh and not severe enough. It was too harsh because the government did not attempt to differentiate between peasants who supported the rebels and those who opposed them or were neutral: collective responsibility made all peasants guilty for the actions of their neighbors. This solidified commune unity against the Communist government, since waverers knew that the government would have no mercy. In addition, the Communist practice of shooting all captured guerrillas helped insurgent discipline, since the rebels were more likely to fight with desperation rather than surrender to be “chopped up like sheep.” The minor attempts to reward villages (never individuals) for loyalty to the Soviet government never amounted to anything, because they also required the villages to first fulfill impossible procurement targets as well as fight the insurgents.40

On the other hand, the policy was insufficiently severe because the government did not have enough forces to intimidate all the peasants through this terror. In September 1920 there were only thirty-five hundred troops in Tambov province. Most were poorly armed and equipped, and many lacked even boots. These troops were largely local peasants, new draftees, or recaptured deserters aged the peasant economy. Peasants planted less, not only because they saw no reason to work when the reward would inevitably be confiscated, but also because many peasants had neither the tools nor the horses to plow: the Food Supply detachments had either destroyed or confiscated them. A drought in the summer of 1920 that lowered yields drastically exacerbated the effects of this decline. This was no secret to the authorities. A Cheka report from July 1920 described the peasants’ plight and their hostility to the government and the Communist Party in particular and warned, “This lays the groundwork for widespread uprisings.”27

On 8 August, A. G. Shlikhter described the need for more intensive work to fulfill the new quota, since the harvest was going to be worse because of the drought and peasants would genuinely have difficulty meeting their quotas.28 He did not explain how this greater intensity was to be combined with law-abidingness, but clearly the more important task was getting the grain. Another policy article published about this time reminded party members that the provincial quota for the new food supply campaign was so high that some poor and middle-income peasants would not have enough grain to plant and eat after fulfilling their quotas, and that party cells must work out plans to redistribute within the village grain left after the quotas were filled. Local party officials were not sanguine about the prospects for collecting this grain: the Ninth Tambov Provincial Party Conference in July 1920 called for

39 N. Raivid, “O rabote v derevne,” Kommunist (Tambov) nos. 2-3 (15 October 1920), 2; see also Trotsky Papers, 2: 507.

28 Speech by A. G. Shlikhter to Gubernsko prodovol’stvennoe soveshchanie, 8 August 1920, GATO, f. R-1236, op. 1, d. 765, l. 8.
strengthening armed Food Supply detachments, since the bad harvest meant that grain could be obtained only by force.29

This was an especially dangerous situation because of the tens of thousands of deserters and draft-dodgers who hid in Tambov’s forests or in their own villages, avoiding detachments sent to find them. While many thousands reported for service when White armies approached Tambov in August and September 1919, by mid-1920 recruitment had fallen drastically and desertion was up. With the war with Poland in full swing, capturing deserters and sending them to the front was, along with extracting grain, the major task set by the provincial party committee.30

In spite of the Cheka’s warnings and obviously tense relations with peasants, it still came as a great surprise to provincial authorities when another peasant rebellion exploded in southern Tambov uyezd in August 1920. Initial attempts to quell the unrest failed, because Tambov authorities assumed that this rebellion was as unorganized as previous ones and thought that peace could be restored after a small punitive force conducted a few massacres and burned some villages. What the Tambov government did not realize was that the Communist Party now had competition in the countryside.

During 1920, hundreds of secret committees of the Union of Toiling Peasantry (Souz Trudovogo Krest’ianstva, or STK) appeared in villages throughout Tambov, Kirsanov, and Borisoglebsk uezds, and in other areas of Tambov province as well. The STK was a putatively nonparty, anticommunist organization with the goal of staging a mass organized peasant uprising against the Communists. Its origins are described in an SR Central Committee circular of 13 May 1920 that argued for a three-pronged organizational initiative. The first was the “verdict movement” (prigovornoe dvizhe-nie), in which village and district meetings would condemn the

The insurgents’ tactics were simple: they used their knowledge of the region and their superb intelligence network to avoid large forces, ambush small ones, and destroy the fabric of Communist government in the countryside. They sacked collective and state farms and destroyed grain collection points and district soviet offices, often with the help of local peasants. Recognizing the importance of communications, they destroyed railroads, bridges, and telegraph lines. They tortured and murdered Communists, food supply workers, and other representatives of the Communist authorities. If Red Army soldiers were captured, they were usually released; the insurgents tortured to death officers and Communist Party members, though. Occasionally the insurgents would organize kangaroo courts to try local Communists in the villages they occupied; those found innocent of abusing their power allegedly were freed. The number of freed Communists could not have been very high, however, as hundreds of Communists died at the hands of the insurgents in the fall of 1920.38

N. Raivid, a member of the Military Council appointed to suppress the uprising, reminded Tambov Communists in October that they were facing not a “bandit movement” but a “real peasant uprising— a movement … against the Communist Party, against the grain monopoly, the labor duty and the fight against desertion.” He maintained that the countryside was almost without Communist influence: there the STK ruled. Most peasants encountered only the gov-

38 RTsKhIDNI Rossiiskii Tsentr Khraneniia I Izucheniia Dokumentov Noveishei Istorii (formerly Tsentral’nyi Partiinyi Arkhiv; hereafter RTsKhIDNI), f. 17, op. 84, 1. 138 (I thank D. A. Nalitov for this citation); Telegram from Gubis-polkom to Lenin, 8 September 1920, GATO, f. R-1, op. 4a, d. 83, l. 702; I P Donkov, Antonovshchina: zamyslyideistvitel’nost’ (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1977), 29, 39.
and Kozlov uezds. His gang even managed to ambush and murder M. D. Chichkanov in October 1919, shortly after the latter was removed as chairman of the Provincial Executive Committee. A Cheka death squad sent after him at the time failed to find him, in part because Antonov had spies in local government, including the Kirsanov uezd Cheka. His gang was small and mobile, with no more than two hundred men, but this was sufficient to keep Kirsanov uezd under martial law when it was lifted in the rest of Tambov province and to make the head of the Tambov provincial Cheka request “secret espionage forces” to fight him.

After assuming command of the uprising, Antonov organized his forces much better than forces had been organized in previous uprisings. While initially he commanded mobs of poorly armed and organized peasants, as found in previous uprisings, after some defeats Antonov disbanded the large groups of vil’niki and sent them home to be the vokhry mentioned above. He focused his efforts on arming and organizing mounted regiments of three hundred to five hundred men, usually deserters or draft dodgers. Many guerrillas and all of their commanders had experience in the First World War. His army maintained discipline with stern punishment, especially flogging and shooting. The organizational structure mimicked that of the Red Army: each detachment even had a political officer to maintain morale and persuade insurgents to obey orders.

Communist government and call for a national vote of confidence. This movement would prepare the ground for the formation of the STx, a multiparty organization uniting all anticommunist forces in the countryside. The SR party organization would work simultaneously to develop itself to take the lead in the STK.31

In Tambov province, the work of organizing fell to hundreds of SRs who labored under enormous difficulties. The Tambov provincial Left SR party organizations were suppressed in July 1918, and performing any party work after that was perilous. In addition, rivalries still existed between Right and Left SRs. In 1920, membership in the official underground Tambov SR organization totaled only a few dozen members. Considering the great attention that the Cheka paid to organizations of other Socialist parties, it seems likely that the people who led STK committees could not have had direct connections to the SR party hierarchy, even if they considered themselves Socialist Revolutionaries. In fact, while hundreds of village STK committees existed, local cells of the STK had only limited communications with higher-level regional and uezd committees when the local village STK in Kamenka, Tambov uezd, fearing that the Cheka had discovered it, started the rebellion. Even after the Kamenka STK began fighting, SR activists in the regional STK did their best to keep peasants from indulging in what they saw as a futile rebellion. National leaders refused to support the uprising was well: the All-Russian Conference of the Socialist Revolutionary Party on 9 September rejected calls by Tambov delegates to support the uprising. These leaders were unsuccessful, though, in calming the peasants. Instead, they were carried along by the rush of events. Additional proof of the STK’s independence from the SR organization is the fact that the STK network remained effective even after September 1920, when most Tambov SRs were

35 Osipova, “Krest’ianskie vosstaniia v gody grazhdanskoi voiny,” 64-65; M. I. Pokaliukhin, “Razgrom kulatsko‑eserovskogo miatezha na tambovshchine,” in Krai, preobrazhennyi oktiabrem, 1: 38-39 (Tambov: Izdatel’stvo Tambovskaia Pravda, 1967); Ezhenedel’naia svodka sekretnogo otdeла VeCheKa za vremia s 1-7 fevralia 1920 г., GARF f. 130, op. 3, d. 414, l. 1ob. See also GARF, £ 1235, op. 95, d. 429,11. 502, 506, 510ob for the unsuccessful petition for amnesty of a member of the Inzhavino rairevkom, condemned to death for spying for Antonov.

36 Svedka # 170/op voisk vnutennei okhrany respubliki za 27 dek. 1919, GARF, f. 130, op. 3, d. 428, l. 129; Sovety Tambovskoi gubernii, 227 (Gubispolkom decree dated 12 January 1920).


31 Obvinitel’noe zakliuchenie po delu tsentral’nogo komiteta i otdeľ’nykh chlenov inykh organizatsii partii s.‑r. (Moscow: VTsIK, 1922), 40-41.
arrested. The remainder, kept under surveillance, never dared to contact Antonov.32

In fact, as Antonov began to unite and organize the guerrilla bands that emerged following the Kamenka uprising, he also took steps to gain control of the village STKs. A pro-Antonov, three-man provincial STK committee replaced the less-militant regional committee. This new organization, originally based in Kamenka, the birthplace of the rebellion, transmitted orders and received information from local STK committees through a small but strictly organized bureaucracy. While their members masqueraded as peaceful, unarmed peasants when Red Army detachments came through the villages, the STK committees formed a shadow government in the countryside when the detachments left. They worked through their peasant communes to organize voluntary deliveries of supplies, recruits, and especially the remounts that gave the insurgent forces much greater mobility than Soviet cavalry. Some evidence suggests that they, like village soviets, often functioned as much as executives of the peasant commune (obshchina) as their leaders. Unlike the Communist-controlled village soviets, though, which depended on whatever armed detachments might be nearby to enforce orders that were against the commune’s wishes, each STK committee usually had several armed guards (vokhry) to enforce their demands. The committees spied on large army detachments and ambushed small ones, and murdered local soviet and food supply workers and party members who did not cooperate with them. They encouraged Red Army soldiers to desert, and they apprehended deserters from the insurgent forces. The STKs also carried out more peaceful duties: keeping the peace, punishing crimes, and helping partisans’ families.33

The local committees of the STK created the higher organization that the previous peasant rebellions had lacked, and generally they were successful. A Cheka agent who infiltrated the Antonov movement wrote, “Traveling with the Antonovites I was struck by the discipline that ruled among them … and by the close bond Antonov’s forces had with the peasants.” The ideology of the STK was simple: eliminate the Communist government and end its depredations in the countryside. Various proclamations and platforms expanded this program, promising a new Constituent Assembly, personal freedom, and development of the economy through cooperation, but all of this was in the future, after the victory over the Communists. Almost all STK activities focused on the military struggle.34

Along with the new, better organization of peasants, the crucial element in the great 1920-21 uprising was the leadership of Aleksandr Antonov. Antonov had been active against the Soviet government starting in 1918. By early 1920 he had become successful at terrorizing soviets, destroying grain collection points and state farms, and killing soviet and party workers in Kirsanov, Tambov, and

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