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*The Mensheviks' Political Comeback:
The Elections to the Provincial City Soviets
in Spring 1918*

VLADIMIR BROVKIN

The period between March and June 1918 is generally known in Soviet history as a breathing spell (*peredyshka*), a short intermission between the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the eruption of the full-scale civil war. It was a unique period of multi-party election politics to the soviets. Dozens of Menshevik and SR dailies openly discussed every step the Bolshevik government took. Elections to the city soviets, despite the Cheka attacks and disbandments, continued to take place, bringing victories to the Menshevik-SR bloc. Independent workers' organizations openly challenged the Bolshevik claim to represent the workers. Were these manifestations of multi-party politics attributes of a normally-functioning system or were they merely leftovers from the pre-October period? Should the elections to the soviets in spring 1918 be regarded as a natural continuation of practices established in 1917 or should they be seen as something the Bolsheviks simply had not yet destroyed? Obviously, the key question is, why did the period of multi-party election politics in the soviets have to end?

The Mensheviks' role in the soviets during this period has also remained obscure. Did the Mensheviks withdraw voluntarily from the soviets, or did they withdraw only from the Executive Committees (ExComs) while remaining in the soviet Assemblies? Did the Mensheviks want to destroy the soviets from within, or did they support the soviets? There cannot be a general answer to these questions, simply because, as we shall see, different Menshevik factions, at different times in different places, pursued different political goals.

The predominant view in the scholarly literature is that the Bolsheviks quickly consolidated their hold on the soviets.¹ This view resembles the interpretation that now prevails in the Soviet Union, which holds that after the Bolsheviks' seizure of power in Petrograd, there

¹See for example: Jerry E. Hough and Merle Fainsod, *How the Soviet Union is Governed*, Cambridge, MA, 1979, pp. 81-83.

followed the "triumphal march of Soviet power" across Russia. Keep asserts that "By January 1918, the dictatorship had consolidated its grip upon the country to such a degree, that it could only have been overthrown by external force." The Mensheviks, according to Keep, inadvertently helped the Bolsheviks by creating "quasi-governmental authority with immense political prestige, a machine which in other hands could serve as the infrastructure of a dictatorship strong enough to sweep them from the political scene. They had sown the wind and were to reap the whirlwind." As a result, the Bolsheviks turned the soviets into "sounding boards" as an element in their manipulation of the masses through the "command structure."²

There has been much discussion as to whether the "triumphal march" of Soviet power can be attributed to a large degree of public support for the Bolsheviks at the end of 1917. Haimson writes in this connection:

however "blindly" or "passively," the vast majority of the Russian workers had supported and probably still supported the Bolsheviks. And this sense, more than any other, held the Menshevik party in a paralyzing grip.³

Leonard Schapiro, on the other hand, speaks of a Menshevik political comeback in the spring of 1918.

By the middle of 1918 the Mensheviks could claim with some justification that large numbers of the industrial working class were now behind them, and that but for systematic dispersal and packing of the soviets, and the mass arrests at workers' meetings and congresses, their party could eventually have won power by its policy of constitutional opposition.⁴

The thesis that the Bolsheviks had mobilized, won over, mastered, or controlled the workers' and soldiers' movements at the end of 1917 becomes increasingly hard to defend when one considers not only the October euphoria, but also the development of these movements in the

²John Keep, *The Russian Revolution. A Study in Mass Mobilization*, New York, 1976, pp. 337, 152, 471.

³Leopold Haimson, "The Mensheviks after the October Revolution: The Extraordinary Party Congress," *The Russian Review*, vol. 39, 1980, p. 205.

⁴Leonard Schapiro, *The Origins of the Communist Autocracy: Political Opposition in the Soviet State, First Phase 1917-1922*, London, 1956, p. 191; Compare Oskar Anweiler, *The Soviets: The Russian Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers Councils 1905-1921*, New York, 1974, p. 229; and George Denicke, "From the Dissolution of the Constituent Assembly to the Outbreak of the Civil War," in Leopold Haimson, ed., *The Mensheviks from the Revolution of 1917 to the Second World War*, Chicago, 1974, p. 123.

following few months. Certain questions remain unanswered: If the masses had been successfully mobilized by the Bolsheviks by the end of 1917, and if the Soviet regime had been consolidated by the spring of 1918, what then accounted for the wave of electoral victories of the Mensheviks and SRs in the soviets, for workers' strikes, protests, demonstrations, and uprisings?

The truth of the matter is that social upheavals did not end in October 1917, which represents only one stage. Moreover, the anti-Bolshevik mass movements in the spring and summer of 1918 were propelled by the same kind of protest sentiment that in October took the shape of a pro-Bolshevik mood. These two radicalisms should be seen as a single phenomenon of popular psychology. Spontaneous anti-Bolshevik movements, which the Mensheviks and SRs attempted to lead, continued their zigzags throughout the civil war years.

In order to distinguish among regional differences and yet to discern overall pattern of local politics, the structure of the soviets, and the attitudes of the electorate, I will survey the election campaigns to the city soviets of those provincial capitals of European Russia where soviet power actually existed in the spring of 1918. Only by compiling data on the inter-party struggles, key issues, and of course, the election returns, is it possible to measure the extent of socio-political change after October 1917. Unfortunately, such study cannot be completed without access to central and local Soviet archives. This article is an attempt to bring together the shreds of evidence available in the West. It is largely based upon reports by the Menshevik, SR, and Bolshevik leaders to their respective Central Committees (CC's) and reports in the opposition press and in the Bolshevik regional papers, which at that time were still very outspoken. In many instances, this evidence is corroborated by some local Soviet histories, memoirs, documentary collections, and other sources. In this survey of the Menshevik experience in the provinces, I shall focus on the events surrounding elections to the soviets, outline the causes of the Menshevik political comeback, and assess the political consequences of this struggle for the Menshevik party and for the Bolshevik regime.

After the Bolsheviks disbanded the Constituent Assembly, the Menshevik opposition abandoned its attempts to create a united socialist coalition government. The new Menshevik strategy was to oust the Bolsheviks from power by regaining majorities in the city soviets. In the following five months the Bolsheviks suffered resounding defeats in the elections to the city soviets in most provincial capitals of European Russia. The chain of events set in motion in the course of this struggle culminated in the crisis of June-July 1918, when the Bolsheviks expelled the socialist opposition parties from the soviets. Then election

politics ended, and the SRs and the right Mensheviks attempted to overthrow the Bolshevik regime by force. Armed clashes flowed into a full-scale civil war, which was to alter the Soviet political system profoundly.

Local Menshevik party organizations faced such a diversity of circumstances in various parts of the country in the spring and summer of 1918 that only a few generalizations can be made. The structure of local government, economic conditions, food supplies, and the tactics of local leaders varied from province to province. Labor relations, the Brest treaty, food shortages, and the arbitrariness of local Bolshevik authorities were, to one or another degree, at the top of the political agenda in all cities. Yet the prominence that some issues received, the significance of the electoral victories that the Mensheviks and SRs scored, and the power settlement that they had to face were remarkably varied. Since these differences reflected socio-economic peculiarities of the diverse regions, it is convenient to group the Menshevik experience by region: the Central Industrial, the Black Earth, the Upper Volga-Urals and the lower Volga-Don areas.

The Central Industrial Region:

In the course of the spring of 1918, the Mensheviks made an impressive comeback as a political force in the region. Excluding Moscow (which as a capital should be treated separately), the Mensheviks won the elections to the city soviets of all provincial capitals of the region where elections were held. Electoral norms varied from city to city. The propertied classes had no voting rights. Even among those eligible to take part in elections—workers, soldiers and peasants—the one-man, one-vote principle was not always practiced. The Bolshevik-controlled Executive Committees (ExComs) packed the soviet assemblies with representatives of “revolutionary organizations,” changed electoral norms, and even refused to hold elections. The fact that the Mensheviks and SRs managed to win elections even in those conditions can be explained partly by the feuding among the Bolshevik-controlled centers of power. City soviets disputed the authority of the provincial soviets, the Military Revolutionary Committees (MRC) fought over power with the local Councils of People’s Commissars. This was particularly true in a number of smaller provincial capitals of the region.

Unlike larger cities, where tens of thousands of workers were concentrated in huge plants, Kaluga, Vladimir, Riazan’ and Tver’ were dominated by merchants, *kustar*’ shops, and trading peasantry. Unlike in larger cities, where the issues of industrial relations and foreign policy predominated, the key issues in these smaller provincial capitals were the corruption of local officials, arbitrary use of authority, the

breakdown of local government, and requisitions and indemnities on the bourgeoisie (*kontributsii*).

The pattern of party politics in Kaluga did not differ much from that in other smaller provincial capitals of the Central Industrial Region. After the Bolshevik seizure of power on November 28, the Mensheviks walked out of the city soviet in protest. On December 19, following the example of the capitals, the Bolsheviks in Kaluga disbanded the *duma* and the "triumph" of Soviet power in Kaluga seemed secure.⁵ However, as early as January 1918, the decrees of the Kaluga Bolsheviks speak of the "catastrophic economic situation and mass closure of factories and plants." The Kaluga Bolsheviks wrote that the Menshevik paper *Kaluzhskii rabochii* was urging the workers to "overthrow the Soviet power."⁶ In fact, the reports of the Kaluga Mensheviks to their Central Committee suggest that they demanded an account of monetary expenditures by the Bolshevik commissars be made in the soviet. The Mensheviks based their motion on the fact that three of the commissars had already been tried for embezzlement.⁷ The sharp Menshevik criticism of the Bolshevik administration provoked the arrest of the entire Menshevik soviet faction in the Palace of Labor, but they had to be released the next day. On March 9, the Kaluga Mensheviks appealed to their CC for help because the editorial board of *Kaluzhskii rabochii* had been brought to trial.⁸ The local Menshevik organization reported on the workers' attitudes:

This whole policy of suppressing dissent led to the workers' (railway workers' particularly) completely turning away [*otshatnulis'*] from the soviet. The sessions are attended less and less often. Their desire to have nothing to do with the authorities is obvious.⁹

Politics in a city like Kaluga was confined to a rather narrow circle of people. According to a report of the local Bolshevik organizers to their CC, by the end of May, 1918, there were only 139 Bolsheviks in the city, competing, as the source states, with approximately 100

⁵P. A. Polenkov, ed., *Ustanovlenie sovetskoi vlasti v Kaluzhskoi gubernii. Dokumenty i materialy, mart 1917—iul' 1918 gg.*, Kaluga, 1957, p. 231.

⁶*Ustanovlenie sovetskoi vlasti v Kaluzhskoi gubernii*, p. 252.

⁷"Kaluzhskie rabochie i soviet rabochikh deputatov. Pis'mo iz Kalugi," *Novaya zaria* [a journal of the Menshevik CC], Moscow, no. 2, May 1, 1918, p. 40.

⁸"Kaluga. Sudiat partiiu Men'shevikov," Nikolaevsky Collection [hereafter Nik. Col.] no. 6, box 1, file 12, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

⁹"Kaluzhskie rabochie i soviet rabochikh deputatov. Pis'mo iz Kalugi," *Novaya zaria*, Moscow, no. 2, May 1, 1918, p. 40; for the names of provincial Menshevik leaders see "Iz materialov partiinogo soveshchaniia," *Partiinye izvestiia* [a journal of the Menshevik CC], Moscow, no. 8, June, 1918, p. 13.

Mensheviks.¹⁰ Another Bolshevik report confessed:

Party membership shrank ... the Red Army is disintegrating ... and some Bolsheviks are ready to accept the Menshevik-SR slogan of [reconvocation of] the Constituent Assembly.¹¹

With the disintegration of the soldiers' section of the soviet as a result of demobilization, the balance of support shifted in favor of the opposition, since the 3500 workers overwhelmingly supported the Mensheviks. In a report to the Second International, the Menshevik CC listed Kaluga as a city where they had won the soviet elections.¹² Nothing is said about it in the Soviet volume on the strengthening of Soviet power in Kaluga, except that on June 8, the Bolsheviks found it necessary to expel the Mensheviks and SRs from the soviet.¹³

The reports of the opposition correspondents from Vladimir province highlight the change in workers' attitudes there. What is particularly noteworthy is that, unlike in large industrial centers, in a factory town like Orekhovo-Zuevo, the workers did not go through a stage of pro-Bolshevik radicalism. To be sure, after October the Bolsheviks had a majority in the city soviet. However, the workers were reluctant to go ahead with the nationalization of plants; the old administration remained at the Morozov factory and at others. Nevertheless, numerous Bolshevik committees constantly interfered in production matters, and this little by little fueled workers' discontent. An opposition correspondent quoted one worker as saying:

It's turned out to be pretty bad. We have so many masters now, that the Devil himself would not be able to count them all. Earlier they [the Bolsheviks] were shouting that the expenses for administration were too high, and now the expenses in all those damned committees have increased fivefold. So many masters you can't feed them all!

Unlike in larger industrial centers, there was no sharp confrontation here between the Menshevik workers and the Bolsheviks. The first post-October elections to the soviet were set for February 1918, but had to be delayed until March because of a workers' boycott. The correspondent continued:

¹⁰ *Ustanovlenie sovetskoi vlasti v Kaluzhskoi gubernii*, p. 341.

¹¹ *Ustanovlenie sovetskoi vlasti v Kaluzhskoi gubernii*, p. 339.

¹² M. Gurewitsch, "O polozenii v Rossii i o RSDRP. Oktiabr' 12, 1918" [a report of the Menshevik Central Committee to the Second International], *Nik. Col. no. 6, box 1, file 13, p. 2*. Although the title of this document is in Russian, the text is in German. The author's name appears here as in the original.

¹³ *Ustanovlenie sovetskoi vlasti v Kaluzhskoi gubernii*, p. 334.

The mood in the broad working masses is anti-Bolshevik. This was revealed particularly clearly during the new elections to the soviet ... The results for the ruling party turned out to be pitiful: the majority of those elected were SRs, Mensheviks, and non-party delegates.¹⁴

At first, concluded the reporter, the Bolsheviks wanted to declare the returns null and void, but as they feared new elections would bring even worse results, "the matter was somehow settled." Apparently, the Menshevik-SR majority in the soviet was tolerated by the Bolsheviks for some time.

It appears that workers' dissatisfaction with the Bolshevik "committees" manifested itself first in voter absenteeism and then in support at the polls for the Menshevik-SR bloc. Unfortunately, the reports of opposition correspondents leave many important questions unclear, both because they omitted certain information, assuming that their readers were familiar with the events of the day, and because only a few of these reports are available in the West. Without access to local archives, it is impossible to determine whether it was the Mensheviks or the SRs who played the predominant role in Orekhovo-Zuevo. It also remains unknown whether the non-party candidates voted with the Menshevik and SRs simply out of solidarity against the Bolsheviks or because they actively supported the Menshevik or SR programs.

In Kostroma, the power struggle is of particular interest, since here we have an example of the Bolsheviks' bewilderment over the election results and attempts on the part of some Bolsheviks to reach an accommodation with the Mensheviks and SRs. In early 1918, the Kostroma Bolsheviks did not worry much about the Menshevik-SR opposition. They had a comfortable majority in the city soviet, and as late as March 1918, at the provincial Congress of Soviets, the small Menshevik-SR fraction did not represent a formidable force. The Bolshevik commissars reported proudly at the congress on the achievements of socialist construction, particularly in the field of struggle with the bourgeoisie: three million rubles had been raised by imposing tributes and indemnities.¹⁵ On March 28, the city дума was liquidated and the supremacy of the soviet assured.¹⁶ However, drastic deterioration of the economic situation and a threat of famine in April and May sharpened the inter-party struggle.

On May 23, at a mass rally, a Menshevik speaker blamed the

¹⁴A. Orlov, "V rabochem kotle. Orekhovo-Zuevo. Ot nashego spetsial'nogo korrespondenta," *Zaria Rossii*, Moscow, no. 28, May 11, 1918, p. 1.

¹⁵M. P. Svintsova, ed., *Ustanovlenie sovetской vlasti v Kostrome i Kostromskoi gubernii. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov. Mart 1917—sentiabr' 1918 gg.*, Kostroma, 1957, p. 263.

¹⁶*Ustanovlenie sovetской vlasti v Kostrome i Kostromskoi gubernii.* p. 266.

Bolshevik ExCom for the breakdown of the provisionment and supply mechanism.¹⁷ Famine was no longer a threat, it was a reality. Bread riots flared up in the neighboring towns. The Mensheviks called for a relaxation of state control over bread prices, in order to induce peasants to sell, and for lifting the ban on workers' traveling out of town to purchase food. These measures would temporarily improve the situation. The long-term solution, insisted the Mensheviks, lay in restoring the trust of the peasants, restoring the market, banking, credit, duma provisioning agencies—in a word, restoring what the Bolsheviks had been destroying in the course of the last seven months.¹⁸ The supply crisis was, perhaps, the key issue in the elections to the city soviet. On May 25, the Kostroma Bolsheviks announced:

Comrades! The elections to the Soviet of Workers' Deputies have just ended. Workers of all enterprises have expressed their will and elected the soviet, to which they have given all power in the city. The elections gave the majority to the Mensheviks and right SRs!¹⁹

A peculiarity of the power struggle in Kostroma was that the Bolshevik ExCom and the Menshevik soviet settled on a short-lived compromise of sorts. In a letter to a Menshevik journal in Moscow, the local leader reported that the Mensheviks had doubled their fraction in the soviet in the recent elections.²⁰ The Bolsheviks, however, refused to relinquish seats on the ExCom, which was supposed to be controlled by the soviet. In protest, the Mensheviks declined to share the ExCom and withdrew their delegates from it. A kind of dual power arrangement prevailed for a short time; the Bolsheviks controlled the ExCom, the Mensheviks the soviet assembly. Understandably, the orders of the ExCom contradicted those of the soviet. It is quite obvious that the Bolsheviks were embarrassed by the election returns and did not quite know at first how to justify their refusal to step down. In the announcement to the workers, quoted above, they wrote:

We, the Bolsheviks and the left SRs, have composed the city ExCom and have taken power without relying on the majority in the soviet. ... Since the events of May 23, we have stopped talking to the Mensheviks and

¹⁷P. Soboleva, *Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia i krakh sotsial-soglashatelei*, Moscow, 1968, p. 290.

¹⁸The Menshevik policy on the supply crisis was summarized in "Postanovlenie Moskovskogo biuro Moskovskoi oblasti RSDRP ot 29 maia 1918 goda. 'O golodnom dvizhenii'," *Novaia zaria*, Moscow, no. 5/6, June 10, 1918, pp. 42-44.

¹⁹*Ustanovlenie sovetской vlasti v Kostrome i Kostromskoi gubernii*. p. 305.

²⁰Nemov, "Pis'mo iz Kostromy," *Novaia zaria*, Moscow, No. 5/6, June 10, 1918, pp. 57-58.

right SRs as to comrades and we have started talking to them with the language of power.²¹

Apparently, the Kostroma Bolsheviks were divided on how to react to the Menshevik-SR electoral victory. At the meeting of the Kostroma ExCom, closed to the press, some Bolsheviks said that since the majority had voted for the Mensheviks and SRs, the Bolsheviks had to relinquish power without provoking armed struggle. Other speakers suggested that a compromise with the opposition parties could be worked out by offering them 50% of the seats on the ExCom.²² This information, leaked to the Menshevik leaders and subsequently transmitted to Moscow and published there on May 26, is not contradicted by the available Bolshevik documents. In the published resolution of the Kostroma ExCom session of May 25, the contradictory views of the Bolshevik leaders were reflected. On the one hand, the resolution suggested that the Mensheviks should take over the ExCom, if they considered that the working masses were behind them; on the other, this same resolution declared martial law in Kostroma and urged the Cheka to undertake measures against "counterrevolution."²³ It was stated that: "all actions against Soviet power would be suppressed by force of arms." The Bolsheviks considered themselves to be the embodiment of Soviet power, and it apparently did not bother them that the actions of the Menshevik-SR majority in the soviet against the Bolshevik ExCom could hardly be considered actions against the power of the soviets. Street processions were banned, and violators were threatened with execution on the spot.²⁴

The initial confusion among the Kostroma Bolsheviks should not pass unnoticed. The Bolsheviks were obviously surprised that the election returns had brought their defeat. It was hard for some of the idealistic Bolsheviks to come to terms with the necessity of relying on naked force to preserve power. In June, the signs of hesitation were gone. As in other cities, the Cheka began to play the key role in local politics.

Naturally, the Menshevik and SR leaders attempted to organize resistance to the imposition of martial law. Following the example of Petrograd and Tula, they called on the workers to elect delegates to a workers' assembly of deputies (*upolnomochennye*) since the Bolsheviks refused to honor the results of the soviet elections. This appeal

²¹ *Ustanovlenie sovetской vlasti v Kostrome i Kostromskoi gubernii*, pp. 305-306.

²² "V Kostrome," *Nashe slovo*, Moscow, no. 33, May 26, 1918, p. 4.

²³ *Ustanovlenie sovetской vlasti v Kostrome i Kostromskoi gubernii*, pp. 301-303; See also, P. Soboleva, *Oktabr'skaia revoliutsiia*, p. 290.

²⁴ "V Kostrome," *Nashe slovo*, Moscow, no. 33, May 26, 1918, p. 4.

prompted a Cheka raid on the office of the Menshevik paper, *Nash put'*,²⁵ combined with an ambush on the editor at his apartment. The Menshevik *Iskra* in Moscow reported:

In connection with the growth of SD [Social Democratic]* influence on the local workers, the authorities have declared a campaign against the Social Democrats. Arrests were occurring on June 22-23. The members of the local SD committee—Diakonov, Vorob'ev, and others—are arrested.²⁶

Thus, in Kostroma, the peaceful competition between the Bolshevik authorities and the Menshevik-SR bloc had run its course by July 1918. The opposition's victory in the elections and the subsequent Bolshevik reprisals paved the way for more radical forms of resistance.

In Riazan', as in Kaluga, the local politics revolved around the Bolsheviks' imposition of heavy indemnities on the local bourgeoisie. Unlike in Orekhovo-Zuevo, where most of the workers were concentrated in fairly large factories, most of the 127 enterprises in Riazan' were handicraft shops.²⁷ Here the Bolsheviks' requisitions affected a fairly large stratum of the population and amounted, in the eyes of many voters, to plain robbery. The anti-Bolshevik sentiment was particularly heightened by the misuse of the "expropriated funds" and the ensuing feud between the city soviet and the MRC, which, as Lenin observed, "considers itself autonomous from the soviet and imposes taxes itself without giving account to the soviet."²⁸ The Mensheviks and SRs pointed out in their campaign that the city дума had managed the city finances much better than the "proletarian avant-garde."²⁹ Finally, the Duma was disbanded on April 1, 1918,³⁰ but the

*The terms Social Democratic and Menshevik were used interchangeably in the Menshevik literature at that time.

²⁵"Rabochii klass pod bolshevistskoi diktaturoi" [a report of the Menshevik Central Committee to the Second International], July 1918, Moscow, Nik. Col. no. 6, box 1.

²⁶"Arresty, obyski i zakrytie SD gazety v Kostrome," *Iskra* [a paper of the Menshevik CC], Moscow, no. 4, June 29, 1918, p. 3.

²⁷N. A. Elufimova, "Pervye meropriiatiia bolshevikov po sotsialisticheskomu preobrazovaniiu promyshlennosti (noiabr' 1917-1918) po materialam Riazanskoi gubernii," in *KPSS v period Fevral'skoi i Oktjabr'skoi revoliutsii i v pervye gody sovetskoi vlasti*, Riazan', 1975, pp. 108-124.

²⁸V. I. Lenin, "Rech' po finansovomu voprosu na zasedanii TsIK, 18 apreliia 1918 goda," *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, fifth edition, 55 vols., Moscow, 1958-1970, vol. 36, pp. 226-227.

²⁹"Riazan'," *Vpered* [a paper of the Menshevik CC], Moscow, no. 68, April 21, 1918, p. 4.

³⁰M. F. Kravchenko and A. M. Storozheva, eds., *Bor'ba za ustanovlenie i ukreplenie sovetskoi vlasti v Riazanskoi gubernii 1917-1920*, Riazan', 1957, p. 186.

Mensheviks and SRs won the elections to the soviet.³¹

The outcome in Tver' was identical. The Menshevik sources describe the workers' rising discontent over unemployment, feuding, corruption, and the high-handedness of the Bolshevik commissars. A tribute was imposed on local industrialists and some of them were taken hostage. The feud among the Bolsheviks themselves further compromised the local government. The commissar of city defense, Abramov, arrested the commissar of labor. Then, on March 26, the chairman of the ExCom, Vakzhanov, was arrested on the orders of the soviet, and so was Abramov himself. The investigative committee charged Abramov with arbitrary murders and embezzlement of the soviet's funds, and Vakzhanov with a cover-up.³² On April 8, *Utro Petrograda* reported, "At the local factories and plants, elections to the soviet have taken place. The Mensheviks and SRs received the majority."³³ The escalation of political tension in Tver' followed the already familiar pattern. The victory of the opposition at the polls brought about an intensification of the Bolshevik repression. Strikes, protests, and marches in Tver' led to the imposition of martial law, as in Kostroma. The resolution of the extraordinary session of the Tver' ExCom to that effect on June 4, 1918, is a remarkable document. Its militant language reveals the intensity of the Bolsheviks' fear for the future of their power. The resolution banned all meetings and processions, established an eleven o'clock curfew, annulled all identification cards issued before the introduction of martial law, ordered all citizens to register with the local committees within twenty-four hours; possessors of fire-arms were to be executed on the spot. Perhaps the most strongly worded was Article 6: "All robbers, bandits, *pogromshchiks*, instigators, suborners and all those who are fomenting the overthrow of Soviet power will be executed on the spot."³⁴

The examples of local inter-party politics in the smaller provincial capitals of the Central Industrial Region exhibit certain similarities and yet also significant differences. In all of these cities, the Mensheviks and SRs focused their criticism of the Bolshevik authorities on specific issues that concerned their constituencies, and they won the city soviet elections. However, the Bolsheviks' response to the opposition's

³¹Gurewitsch, "O polozhenii v Rossii," p. 2.

³²"Abramovskaia epopeia," *Novaya zaria*, Moscow, no. 2, May 1, 1918, p. 36.

³³"Vyborny v Sovet," *Utro Petrograda* [a paper of the Printers' Union], Petrograd, no. 2, April 8, 1918, p. 2. See also: Gurewitsch, "O polozhenii v Rossii," p. 2; these election returns were also reported by *Novyi den'* [a paper of the Right Mensheviks], Petrograd, no. 13, April 9, 1918, p. 2.

³⁴"Postanovlenie chrezvychainogo sobranii Tverskogo gubernskogo ispolnitel'nogo komiteta, 1 iunია 1918 goda," *Izvestiia Tverskogo soveta*, no. 66, June 4, 1918, p. 1.

victories varied from reluctant acceptance of the election results, at least initially, to outright imposition of martial law and the rule of the Cheka. The repressive actions of the Bolshevik authorities have been so often referred to in scholarly literature that these new examples may hardly elicit much surprise. What is sometimes overlooked, though, is that the nature of the Bolshevik dictatorship had undergone a profound change from October 1917 to June 1918. In the eyes of the workers of Tver' and Kostroma, there was certainly a great difference between the Bolsheviks in October, who had harrassed the "bourgeoisie," the Bolsheviks in March 1918, who had postponed the elections, still more between them, and the Bolsheviks in June, who ruled by martial law. This development had been in part precipitated by the electoral victories of the Mensheviks and SRs.

The ever more repressive measures posed great dilemmas for both the local Menshevik leaders and the CC in Moscow. What should the local party organizations strive to accomplish, after the soviet, where they had won a majority, had been disbanded? Should the Mensheviks engage in armed struggle, if the Bolsheviks opened the hostilities? In June these became the most explosive issues in the party. The right Mensheviks had always been reluctant to pin their hopes on a victory in the soviet elections. Profoundly hostile to the Bolsheviks, they had warned that the Bolsheviks would not abide by the election returns. What was necessary, they argued, was to create independent workers' organizations that would be able to force the Bolsheviks to relinquish power.³⁵ Such workers' assemblies played a crucial role in local politics in Tula.

The social milieu in Tula and Iaroslavl' was very different from that of smaller provincial capitals in the Central Industrial Region. Political life in Tula centered on the two huge armament plants, which employed some 40,000 workers.³⁶ The Menshevik organization in Tula had a solid following among the local workers, even in the October days. The Bolsheviks seized power only in December 1917.³⁷ Even then, the Bolsheviks were a minority in the city soviet, with 117 deputies as opposed to 143 Mensheviks and SRs.³⁸ In the following months, when the Bolsheviks were securing their majority in the soviet, the

³⁵See for example M. Liber's resolution at the May 1918 Menshevik Party conference: "Sovety i nasha taktika," *Novaia zaria*, Moscow, no. 5/6, June 10, 1918, pp. 86-88.

³⁶P. G. Bogdanov, ed., *Uprochenie sovetskoi vlasti v Tul'skoi gubernii. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov. God 1918*, Tula, 1961, pp. 378-379.

³⁷P. G. Bogdanov, ed., *Oktiabr' v Tule. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov o bor'be za vlast' v Tule i gubernii v 1917 godu*, Tula, 1957, p. 316.

³⁸"Po tsentral'noi oblasti: v polose terrora," *Novaia zaria*, Moscow, no. 1, April 22, 1918, p. 32.

Mensheviks concentrated their efforts on organizing a workers' conference. The conference quickly became a rallying point for discontent and a counterweight to the Bolshevik soviet.

In establishing the workers' conference of *upolnomochennye*, the Menshevik worker organizers in Tula followed the initiative of their Petrograd comrades. There, the Workers' Assembly of *upolnomochennye* was to become a national center of workers' opposition to the Bolsheviks.³⁹ The right Mensheviks believed that the new organization should not be lured into pursuing the unrealizable goal of "democratizing the soviets" from within; the workers' assemblies had to struggle for the reconvoation of the Constituent Assembly. The center-left Mensheviks, on the other hand, held that the main task of the workers' assemblies was to insure fair elections to the soviets, a precondition for future reconvoation of the Constituent Assembly.⁴⁰ In this connection, the Menshevik CC wrote to the local organizations:

Agitation for elections to such conferences should be recommended everywhere where the struggle for the new elections to the soviets comes upon insurmountable obstacles and where some local events, setting in motion the broad popular masses, give us an opportunity to shape and consolidate in organizations the new tendencies that demonstrate the beginning of the masses' pulling away from the Bolshevik utopias.⁴¹

Thus, the activities of the workers' conferences were conceived as part of the Menshevik policy of exerting pressure on the Bolshevik authorities to hold new elections to the soviets.

Initially, the conference in Tula dealt with the problems of unemployment, salaries, strike funds, etc.⁴² In March, however, these issues were overshadowed by the turmoil over the Brest-Litovsk Treaty. The treaty, with its provisions for disarmament, was not popular with the workers of the armament plants. They feared that the Germans would demand that the production at the plants be stopped. The Mensheviks were quick to respond to these fears. They called on the workers to arm themselves and to be ready to repel the German offensive. It was not for the Bolsheviks, who had signed the "sell-out at Brest," to

³⁹For the proceedings of the Petrograd Assembly of *upolnomochennye*, see M. S. Bernshtam, *Nezavisimoe rabochee dvizhenie v 1918 godu. Dokumenty i materialy*, vol. 2 of A. I. Solzhenitsyn, ed., *Narodnoe soprotivlenie kommunizmu v Rossii. Issledovaniia noveishei russkoi istorii*, Paris, 1981, pp. 65-90.

⁴⁰See Iu. Denike, "Perevybory sovetov i nasha taktika," *Novaia zaria*, Moscow, no. 3/4, May 20, 1918, pp. 21-26.

⁴¹A. Troianovskii, "Sovety i rabochie konferentsii," *Partiinye izvestiia*, Moscow, no. 6/7, May 1918, pp. 4-6.

⁴²"Stroptivye mensheviki, Tula," *Vpered*, Moscow, no. 64, April 16, 1918, p. 4.

organize the defense of the country. The idea of arming the workers materialized in the creation of the People's Army, which could be armed with weapons manufactured in Tula.⁴³ Everyone was eligible to join, since universal armament of the people had always been in the program of Russian Social Democracy; the Bolsheviks had betrayed that principle by creating their separate elite units of Red Guards. This Menshevik initiative threw the local Bolsheviks into panic. Hectic correspondence with Moscow ensued. The People's Army would be a Menshevik army, they feared. In addition, the workers' conference was gaining authority and demanded new elections to the soviet, which had not assembled for two months, to take place not later than April 13.⁴⁴

Focusing on these issues of the economy, Brest, and the structure of local authority, the Mensheviks defined the tasks of the new soviet in the following platform:

1. Organization of the working class;
2. struggle for re-establishment of the democratic republic;
3. struggle for the reconvoation of the Constituent Assembly, and of all bodies of local self-government;
4. a number of planned measures against unemployment and provisionment breakdown;
5. organization for the defense of the country against the invasion of the imperialist hordes.⁴⁵

The local Menshevik leader invited F. I. Dan to come down to Tula to campaign for the party. The local Bolsheviks likewise requested help from their CC. The Bolshevik secretariat commented on April 8, 1918, "It is necessary, and that very quickly, to send an energetic comrade with a big name to Tula. We do not have any available comrades now. There is a serious Menshevik danger in Tula."⁴⁶ A Menshevik report to the Second International and other documents attest to the Menshevik victory in the elections to the city soviet.⁴⁷ The soviet was disbanded, the Menshevik newspaper *Narodnyi golos* shut down, and some Menshevik leaders were arrested.⁴⁸ The workers' conference remained,

⁴³G. Baturskii, "Sredi rabochikh," *Delo* [a journal of the Right Mensheviks], no. 2, April 7, 1918, pp. 16-17.

⁴⁴"Tula," *Novaya zaria*, Moscow, no. 1, April 22, 1918, p. 46.

⁴⁵"Tula," p. 46.

⁴⁶V. V. Anikeev, ed., *Perepiska sekretariata TsK RSDRP (b) - RKP (b) s mestnymi organizatsiiami. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, vol. 3, Moscow, 1967, p. 168.

⁴⁷M. Gurewitsch, "O polozhenii v Rossii," p. 2. See also P. Axelrod's letter (untitled) to the leaders of the European socialist parties, dated November 10, 1918, London, Nik. Col., Axelrod papers, box 1, file 13.

⁴⁸D. Gawronsky [an SR representative at the Second International], *Die Bilanz des*

however, and the Bolsheviks could not do much about it until July. Instead, they concentrated their attack on the Menshevik party committee. In mid-May, the premises were assaulted, the Menshevik-run workers' club vandalized, and new arrests made. There were casualties.⁴⁹

Tension grew in Tula with each passing week. Reviewing the situation, the local Mensheviks reported:

The shift in the mood of the public in Tula is progressing very quickly. The working class, except for a tiny minority, is inclined against the Bolsheviks. These feelings sometimes reach such a degree of intensity, especially when they cannot be vented, that our comrades have to work very hard to contain them within the bounds of the organized struggle.⁵⁰

The problem for the Menshevik worker organizers was, as the Menshevik correspondent put it, that the workers' protests could not be vented. The victory in the elections had brought only heightened Bolshevik repressions. The local labor leaders tried to contain workers' anti-Bolshevik sentiment so that the action in Tula could be coordinated with the efforts in other cities. At the end of May and in early June, delegates from the workers' assemblies of Petrograd, Tula, Nizhniĭ, and other cities were arriving in Moscow to take part in the inter-city Convention of Workers' *Upolnomochennye*. The Conference was assembled to coordinate efforts towards preparing an All-Russian Workers' Congress of *Upolnomochennye* and towards staging a nationwide general strike. On June 13, the delegates were arrested.⁵¹ The next day, the Menshevik and SR parties were expelled from the Central Executive Committee.⁵² A wave of protests, demonstrations, and strikes rolled across Russia. On June 18, after the arrest of the chairman of the Tula Workers' Conference, Tula went on a general strike.⁵³ The Bolsheviks, in panic, declared martial law. All non-Bolshevik papers were banned. Passengers at the railway station were searched

Russischen Bolschewismus, Berlin, 1919, p. 45.

⁴⁹"Razgrom men'shevikov v Tule," *Novaia zhizn'*, Petrograd, May 18, 1918, p. 3.

⁵⁰"Tula i Tul'skaia gubernia. Iz partiinogo otcheta," *Novaia zaria*, Moscow, no. 2, May 1, 1918, p. 52.

⁵¹For the CEC debate on the arrest of the Congress of *Upolnomochennye*, see "Zapros ob areste upolnomochennykh," *Molva* [non-socialist paper], Petrograd, no. 9, June 15, 1918, p. 1.

⁵²For the CEC proceedings on the expulsion of the Mensheviks and SRs from the CEC, see "Zasedanie TsIK," *Novyi vechernii chas*, Petrograd, no. 90, June 15, 1918, p. 1, and *Protokoly zasedanii VTsIK chetvertogo sozyva (stenograficheskiĭ otchet)*, Moscow, 1920, pp. 419-441.

⁵³"Die Bolschewiki und die Arbeiterbewegung," *Stimmen aus Russland*, Stockholm, no. 4/5, August 15, 1918, p. 15.

and Menshevik papers from other cities were confiscated. The Menshevik leaders of the workers' assembly, those still free, formed a strike committee and published a declaration that demanded the abolition of martial law, immediate gathering of the All-Russian Congress of Workers' Assemblies of *Upolnomochennye*, reconvoation of the Constituent Assembly, abolition of the Bolshevik provisionment dictatorship, and freeing of the arrested workers, not only in Tula, but also in Moscow.⁵⁴

Were the demands of the Workers' Assembly anti-soviet or anti-socialist? anti-communist or pro-Menshevik? In a recently published collection of documents on the movement of *upolnomochennye* in 1918, editor Michael Bernshtam has suggested that this movement had little if anything to do with the Mensheviks and SRs and was a manifestation of popular resistance to communism:

Russian Social Democracy was faced with a choice: either the anti-Bolshevik movement of *upolnomochennye* or the Bolshevik soviets. The socialists chose the soviets. This position was prescribed [*zakonomernai*] and was in accord with the course of accommodation to the Bolsheviks which the Mensheviks and SRs adopted after October and developed in the following months.⁵⁵

It is misleading to counterpose the Mensheviks' working within the soviets and the workers' assemblies working against them. As we have seen, the Mensheviks' activity in the soviets can in no way be seen as evidence of an accommodation to Bolshevism. On the contrary, the Mensheviks and SRs challenged the Bolsheviks, winning elections to the soviets. Furthermore, their electoral platform explicitly stated that the task of the Menshevik-SR-controlled soviets was to facilitate the reconvoation of the Constituent Assembly. Similarly, the anti-Bolshevik activity of the workers' assemblies was directed not against the soviets as such but rather against the local Bolshevik autocrats who refused to abide by the election returns. The record of the Tula Assembly shows that it was a socialist organization, led by the Mensheviks Akhmatov and Alexandrov. The Menshevik acceptance of the soviets went hand in hand with organizing independent workers' assemblies, which could exert pressure on the Bolshevik authorities. The general strike in Tula demonstrated that opposition to the Bolshevik dictatorship was on the verge of turning into an open armed struggle. As mentioned earlier, the Menshevik party was divided over what to

⁵⁴"Zabastovka v Tule," *Vozrozhdenie* [an SR paper], Moscow, no. 15, June 20, 1918, p. 3.

⁵⁵*Nezavisimoe rabochee dvizhenie v 1918 godu*, p. 60.

do. The pattern of power struggle in Iaroslavl' provides a vivid illustration of these divisions.

In Iaroslavl' as in Tula, the SD organization had solid support among the workers even during the October wave of radicalism. The repressive Bolshevik measures against the Menshevik leaders had started somewhat earlier here than in other cities.⁵⁶ As early as December 1917, the MRC had attempted to arrest B. V. Diushen and M. M. Ravich, the secretary of the local Menshevik organization and editor of *Trud i Bor'ba*.⁵⁷ Both were Menshevik candidates to the Constituent Assembly, as well as being members of the city duma and of the city soviet. The key issue in a city like Iaroslavl' was certainly the Bolsheviks' industrial policy.

The Mensheviks believed in October 1917 and after that Russia was not ready for socialism. The premature introduction of workers' control, they argued, was not socialism but anarcho-syndicalism; the factory committees would not be able to handle marketing, supplies, and financing of enterprises.⁵⁸ In countless resolutions on the subject, they predicted that the "reckless Bolshevik policy" would lead not to the destruction of the bourgeoisie, but rather to the destruction of industry.⁵⁹

Rising unemployment, rampant inflation, and approaching famine gave the Mensheviks the opportunity to reiterate that the Bolsheviks' hectic nationalizations and confiscations were at the root of the economic catastrophe. The Mensheviks and the SRs argued that only through cooperation, labor-business partnership, and political democracy could the problems be resolved. The thrust of this campaign was directed against what they perceived as a Bolshevik-inspired *pugachevshchina* masquerading as "socialist construction." Little by little in the course of the debate on issues, a Menshevik alternative program was shaped.

Iaroslavl' Mensheviks reported to the CC that the number of Menshevik-sponsored resolutions adopted by workers at the local plants had drastically increased.⁶⁰ Inspired by this success, the Menshevik

⁵⁶"V provintsii. Pod bol'shevikami. Ot nashego korrespondenta," *Novyi luch* [a paper of the Menshevik CC], Petrograd, no. 17, December 22, 1917, p. 4.

⁵⁷For short biographies of the leaders of the Menshevik organization in Iaroslavl', see a brochure (with photos) *Nasha platforma i nashi kandidaty v Uchreditel'noe sobranie*, Moscow, izdanie Iaroslavskogo komiteta RSDRP, 1917, Nik. Col. no. 200, file 5. For data on the Iaroslavl' Menshevik organization, see M. Ravich papers, Nik. Col. no. 200, file 5: "Iaroslavskii komitet RSDRP."

⁵⁸S. Shvarts, "Kapitalizm i Sotsializm," *Delo*, Moscow, no. 2, April 7, 1918, p. 4.

⁵⁹L. Martov, "Rabochie i gosudarstvennaia vlast'," *Novaia zaria*, Moscow, no. 1, April 22, 1918, p. 12.

⁶⁰I. Rybal'skii, "Iaroslavskii proletariat na skam'e podsudimyykh," *Vpered*, Moscow,

fraction in the soviet three times introduced a motion to hold new elections. Each time, however, the Bolshevik October majority blocked the proposal. The Menshevik leader Shleifer was arrested three times and each time had to be released. On March 29, the commander of the Red Guards published an announcement: "Those who are spreading Menshevik counterrevolutionary literature will be shot on the spot."⁶¹ The Menshevik newspaper was closed. Threats and repression, however, not only failed to silence the Mensheviks, but added vigor to their campaign. Immediately, a Central Bureau for New Elections to the soviet was set up. The Mensheviks emphasized that the Red Guards were not in practice accountable to the soviet, which in theory was supposed to hold all power. The soviets were being turned into bureaucratic state agencies, argued the Mensheviks, whereas they should continue to be independent proletarian organizations, defending workers' rights. The Mensheviks pledged to restore accountability, to put an end to requisitions and indemnities, and to hand over the management of municipal affairs to the city дума, which was better equipped to run the city services. The long-term solution to the country's problems could lie only in the reconconvocation of the Constituent Assembly.⁶²

The more the Bolsheviks tried to postpone the elections, the more the idea of holding new elections became an issue in itself. Finally, the Bolsheviks agreed, apparently realizing that delay was only playing into the hands of the Mensheviks. The elections were held on April 9, and in a 98-member soviet, the Mensheviks received 47 seats, the Bolsheviks 38, and the SRs 13.⁶³ The Bolsheviks were taken aback by their defeat, not knowing, at first, what to do. The new soviet opened in a tense atmosphere. The roll call for a new chairman of the soviet produced 60 votes for Shleifer.⁶⁴ After some unsuccessful bargaining over the seats on the ExCom, the Bolshevik chairman of the provincial soviet declared the elections null and void and the present soviet illegal.⁶⁵ The Mensheviks and SRs refused to leave the building. The Red Guards were called in. Holding hands, the Mensheviks and SRs tried to resist being dragged out one by one. In the end, the soviet was

no. 70, April 24, 1918, p. 2.

⁶¹Rybal'skii, "Iaroslavskii proletariat," p. 2.

⁶²This commitment was reiterated by Martov in "Rabochie i gosudarstvennaia vlast," *Novaia zaria*, Moscow, no. 1, April 22, 1918, p. 14.

⁶³"Dans le royaume des commissaires, 1) Qu'est-ce passe à Iaroslavl?" *Les Echos de Russie*, Stockholm, no. 20/21, September 1, 1918, p. 18.

⁶⁴N. Rostov, "Poslednie razgromy, razgony, rassstrely," *Novaia zaria*, Moscow, no. 1, April 22, 1918, p. 39.

⁶⁵"V Moskovskoi oblasti: Iaroslavl'," *Vpered*, Moscow, no. 62, April 13, 1918, p. 4.

disbanded, the building locked up, and Shleifer arrested again.⁶⁶ At first, it looked as though the Bolsheviks had managed to disband the Menshevik-SR-dominated soviet, as they had the Constituent Assembly, without much trouble, but more trouble was to come.

The expulsion of the Menshevik and SR delegates aroused the whole town. Overnight, a conference of workers' *upolnomochennye* in defense of the soviet was formed, and several strikes were declared.⁶⁷ At this point, the Bolsheviks made another mistake. Instead of trying to find some accommodation with the striking workers, the MRC published Order No. 12, which threatened to fire the strikers.⁶⁸ Three hundred printers were fired. On April 15, the city was paralyzed by a general strike.⁶⁹ Even those workers who had voted for the Bolsheviks protested the dismissals. The strike spread to other cities. Railway workers in Rybinsk demonstrated their solidarity by joining in the strike.⁷⁰

In this situation, the Bolsheviks decided to back down. New elections were scheduled to take place from the 20th to the 30th of April. Apparently in order to counter the impression that they were on the defensive, the Bolsheviks staged a trial of Shleifer, and some other Menshevik leaders on April 18. The Mensheviks were quick again to turn the Bolshevik offensive to their own advantage. A large demonstration was held and workers marched through the city to the tribunal, where admission could not be denied them. As a result, the Bolsheviks lost the day. Before that audience they could scarcely maintain that the Mensheviks were counterrevolutionaries. All those arrested were released on the spot, to the cheers of the spectators.⁷¹

As expected, the new elections ended in an impressive victory for the Menshevik-SR bloc. The Mensheviks received 4786 votes, the SRs 1014, and the Bolsheviks 2688.⁷² Most of the non-party (*bespartii nye*) delegates joined the Menshevik-SR fraction, which controlled the assembly. This soviet was also disbanded, however. Martial law was declared and all protests ruthlessly suppressed.⁷³ The cycle of strikes and lockouts continued, culminating in the famous Iaroslavl' uprising in July.

⁶⁶"Iaroslavl'," *Partiinye izvestiia*, Moscow, no. 6/7, May, 1918, p. 29.

⁶⁷Rostov, "Poslednie razgromy," p. 39.

⁶⁸"Sovetskaia 'vlast' protiv rabochikh, Iaroslavl'," *Vpered*, no. 68, April 21, 1918, p. 4.

⁶⁹G. Kuchin, "Zadachi i puti proletarskogo dvizheniia," *Novaia zaria*, Moscow, no. 1, April 22, 1918, p. 24.

⁷⁰"Iaroslavl'," *Partiinye izvestiia*, Moscow, no. 6/7, May, 1918, pp. 29-30.

⁷¹Rybal'skii, "Iaroslavskii proletariat," part 2, *Vpered*, no. 71, April 25, 1918, p. 2.

⁷²"Iaroslavl'," *Vpered*, Moscow, no. 80, May 10, 1918, p. 2. The Menshevik victory in elections is also mentioned in *Sovety v pervyi god proletarskoi diktatury*, p. 308.

⁷³"Dans le royaume des commissaires," p. 18.

Was the participation of some Mensheviks an example of their complicity with the Whites, as the Bolsheviks claimed? Was the reluctance of certain Mensheviks to take part an example of their accommodation to the Bolshevik dictatorship? What was the connection between Boris Savinkov's underground organization of officers⁷⁴ —the main force of the uprising—and the Menshevik workers? The dramatic events in Iaroslavl'—the seizure of power and the shooting of Bolsheviks, the subsequent siege of the city, the Bolshevik artillery shelling, the bloody fighting in the streets, and the mass executions of the insurgents—merit a full-scale study.⁷⁵ Here it is necessary only to elucidate the Mensheviks' role. After the disbanding of the soviet, the patience of many Menshevik workers ran out.⁷⁶ There were Mensheviks, known in the party as "activists", who felt that the Bolshevik dictatorship could and should be fought with arms, if necessary. That is why Ivan Savinov⁷⁷ and Abramov, heading large detachments of workers, joined the insurgents once the uprising broke out. Somewhat different was the role of Diushen (in 1917 a commissar of the Provisional Government), who had established contact with Savinkov's officers' underground. Diushen (and, as we shall see, many SRs in other cities) considered the Bolsheviks to be the main enemy of socialism and democracy, and that this justified an alliance with other forces opposed to Bolshevism. Shleifer, on the other hand, urged the workers to stay neutral in the fighting between the Whites and the Reds. The White officers' thinly-veiled hatred of all socialists and their shootings of the Bolsheviks were the chief reasons for this position. While the uprising was still going on, the Menshevik CC, in a special resolution, stated that the insurgents' leaders were only using the workers' protest movement against the Bolshevik dictatorship for their own political ends.

⁷⁴Boris Savinkov (before 1917 an SR terrorist, in 1917 a commissar of the Provisional Government) played an important role in the Kornilov putsch in 1917, and in the preparation of the July 1918 Iaroslavl' uprising. Expelled from the SR party in the fall of 1917. After October 1917, became a well known anti-Bolshevik plotter. There is extensive literature on his activities, for example D. L. Golinkov, *Krushenie antisovetskogo podpol'ia v SSSR*, Moscow, 1978, p. 175.

⁷⁵For a soviet collection of documents on the Iaroslavl' uprising, see N. G. Polgunov and A. I. Rozanova, eds., *Shestnadsat' dnei. Materialy po istorii Iaroslavskogo belogvardeiskogo miatezha (6-21 iulia 1918 goda)*, Iaroslavl', 1924.

⁷⁶B. Nikolaevsky, "Mikhail Markovich Ravich (1881-1962)," *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, New York, no. 5/6, 1962, p. 87.

⁷⁷Ivan Savinov (not to be confused with Boris Savinkov), leader of the Iaroslavl' Menshevik party organization in 1918, party member since 1904, a worker; in 1917 member of the Iaroslavl' дума and soviet; for a short biography see "Iaroslavskii komitet RSDRP," *Nik. Col.* no. 200, file 5.

In view of this, whatever the outcome of this confrontation [in Iaroslavl'] may be, it does not provide a guarantee to the proletariat and to the democracy that the shameful Bolshevik dictatorship will not be replaced by the regime of counterrevolution, initially disguised [to be democratic]. Therefore ... the CC once again points out that the party comrades must not in any way take part in such uprisings or be used by groups organizing uprisings. The task of the party in such circumstances is to organize the workers into an independent third force.⁷⁸

To enforce the party policy, Diushen and Savinov were expelled from the Menshevik party. Martov and Dan feared that Menshevik participation in anti-Bolshevik uprisings would provide the Bolsheviks with the excuse they were looking for to justify executions and disbandments. They believed that only by winning over popular support and thus isolating the Bolsheviks and by avoiding armed struggle could the party's goals be achieved. The right Mensheviks, or "activists," took part in the uprising certainly not out of sympathy towards the Whites, but rather because they had experienced arrests and persecution after their party had won the elections in Iaroslavl'. Therefore, any generalization about the Mensheviks' role in the Iaroslavl' uprising runs the risk of distortion, simply because the Mensheviks split over this issue.

The trajectory of political struggle in Iaroslavl' accentuates the fragile nature of the Menshevik political comeback. On the one hand, the Mensheviks and SRs had won elections to the soviet two times in a row and enjoyed the overwhelming support of the workers. On the other, when opposition to Bolshevism escalated into armed struggle, their party split and was pushed into the background. In a political process based on elections, the Mensheviks could pose a challenge to Bolshevism, but when political differences were being settled by guns, they had little chance. The Iaroslavl' tragedy was an important factor determining the Menshevik policy towards the Bolsheviks and the Whites during later stages of the Civil War.

The Black Earth Region:

In the provinces to the south of Moscow, the Mensheviks likewise played a key role in local politics. There are four factors, however, that

⁷⁸"Rezoliutsii TsKa RSDRP o Iaroslavskikh sobytiakh," dated July 16, 1918, in *Rabochii internatsional*, Moscow, no. 10, August 7, 1918, p. 1. For subsequent discussion of the Menshevik participation in the Iaroslavl' uprising, see M. Vasil'ev-Iuzhin, "Uchastie men'shevikov v Iaroslavskom vosstanii," *Pravda*, Moscow, no. 165, July 26, 1922, and L. Martov, "Sobiraiut materialy," *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, Berlin, no. 16, August 16, 1922, p. 7; see also: B. Nikolaevsky, "RSDRP (menshevikov) za vremia s dekabria 1917 po iul' 1918 goda," unpublished manuscript, Nik. Col., p. 40.

distinguished the political atmosphere in this region of the country.

1) In contrast to the Central Industrial Region where, in the aftermath of October, the Bolsheviks for several months enjoyed a certain measure of public support, the southerly provinces remained the stronghold of the SRs and Mensheviks. According to Professor Keep's data, in Kursk the Bolsheviks could not seize power until February 1918; in Voronezh the Bolsheviks had only 24 out of 120 seats in the soviet; and in Tambov they had only 3 seats at the end of 1917.⁷⁹

2) The southerly provinces, unlike the northern and central ones, did not suffer from grain shortage. Indeed, the grain surplus in these provinces became a bone of contention between local Bolsheviks and the emissaries from Moscow. The former did much to prevent or slow down shipments to the North. Thus the struggle of the Mensheviks with local Bolsheviks paralleled the region's friction with Moscow.

3) The proximity of the front line had a significant impact and contributed to much of the instability in the region. The issue of the Brest Treaty certainly enhanced the Menshevik-SR appeal to the electorate, since these provinces were threatened by a continuing German offensive.

4) The socio-political profile of the local Menshevik leaders differed significantly from that of their party comrades in the industrial region. While in Tula, the Mensheviks were closely attuned to the political life at huge plants and used to dealing with tens of thousands of workers, the Menshevik leaders in Orel, for example, operated where there were no large plants. Politics centered in the city duma and in a number of affiliated economic, cultural, and administrative organizations. Most of the local Mensheviks belonged to provincial socialist intelligentsia; they were teachers, physicians, statisticians, and such.

Perusal of reports of local Mensheviks to the CC in Moscow reveals that they were simply shocked to see the results of their long labors at improving local education, medicine, and agriculture being ruined, as they believed, by the Bolsheviks. By the very nature of their experience and life-long commitments, they felt that the Bolshevik zealots would only mismanage and wreck local economy. Thus, the Brest treaty, local economy, the breakdown of administration, and, in May, the increasingly hot issue of grain requisitioning dominated local politics. A Menshevik reporter wrote:

All over Orel province [*gubernia*], we see the same picture: financial breakdown, only the remnants of economic agencies; those in power

⁷⁹J. Keep, "October in the Provinces," in Richard Pipes, ed., *Revolutionary Russia*, Cambridge, MA, 1968, pp. 200-201.

have no credit, no authority with wide masses of the populace; a socio-economic crisis is imminent.⁸⁰

The Bolsheviks, naturally, had disbanded the Menshevik-SR dominated duma, continued the report, but had quickly run out of money. Shortly thereafter, the city went bankrupt. The Bolshevik soviet decided to raise funds by imposing a tribute on the bourgeoisie. Six million rubles were raised in this fashion, but that did not solve the economic problems. The local Menshevik organization started to campaign for new elections to the soviet. Whereas in Tula the Mensheviks had relied on a powerful workers' conference, in Orel they relied on the disbanded city duma. Economic normality could be achieved, argued the Mensheviks, if all management of city affairs were returned to it. The new city soviet should work in accord with the duma, as it had done before October.

The elections to the Orel soviet took place from May 10 to May 15. The 62 Menshevik-SR delegates were joined by the 100 non-party delegates at the first session. The Bolsheviks and their sympathizers got 62 seats and the Left SRs 20.⁸¹

A familiar ending to the election campaign followed. The soviet was disbanded, Menshevik leaders were arrested,⁸² and, as in other cities, the cycle of violence continued. In May, *Delo naroda* informed its readers that:

Riots [*besporiadki*] took place in Orel. The soviet asked Trotsky to send in troops. In soviet circles here it is said that the movement in Orel is directed by the city duma, which was disbanded after October.⁸³

In May, disbandment of the duma, elections to the soviet, and social unrest were also rocking the political scene in the neighboring Voronezh. In Kursk, according to a Menshevik source, the SR-led Duma as well as the soviet were disbanded in April by the militant Bolshevik groups.⁸⁴

The most prominent difference between inter-party struggle in this

⁸⁰"Orlovskaia gubernia," *Novaia zaria*, Moscow, no. 1, April 22, 1918, p. 62.

⁸¹A. Malashko, *K voprosu ob oformlenii odnopartinoi diktatury v SSSR*, Minsk, 1969, pp. 144-145; see also *Sovety v pervyi god proletarskoi diktatury*, p. 300; and D. Gawronsky, *Die Bilanz des Russischen Bolschewismus*, Berlin, 1919, p. 45.

⁸²"Die Bolschewiki und die Arbeiterbewegung," *Stimmen aus Russland*, Stockholm, no. 4/5, August 15, 1918, p. 15, citing *Iskra*, Petrograd, June 13, 1918.

⁸³"Besporiadki v Orle," *Delo naroda* [a paper of the SR central committee], no. 42, May 15, 1918, p. 2.

⁸⁴"Razgon trekh sovetov i gorodskoi dumy Kursk," *Vpered*, Moscow, no. 62, April 13, 1918, p. 4.

region and that in the industrial center was that in the Black Earth Region, the city dumas, in some cities intact until May, rather than the assemblies of *upolnomochennye*, played the crucial role of offering rallying centers for popular discontent. The chain of events in Orel, Voronezh, and Kursk suggests that in the aftermath of October, the Bolsheviks' priority was to oust the Mensheviks and SRs from the organs of local government. The dumas were assaulted and power was seized from the Menshevik-SR intelligentsia. The heart of the matter was, however, that the Bolsheviks did not have the manpower to run the local governments. They relied on the radical soldier soviets, which took "all power," incorporating the smaller workers' soviets. By spring 1918, most of these soldier soviets disintegrated, as the soldiers went home. A skeleton crew of Bolshevik zealots remained. The policy of "stifling the bourgeoisie" with indemnities set the majority of these trade-oriented cities against the Bolsheviks, who found themselves embattled and isolated. Continual feuds among the Bolshevik organizations further undermined their authority. A vivid instance of this pattern can be seen in Tambov.

In Tambov, in contrast to other cities, the Bolsheviks could not seize power for several months. At the time, the Bolsheviks themselves were quite outspoken about their problems. Of course, one does not find these revelations in Soviet histories. At a regional conference of Bolshevik commissars in Saratov, the Tambov delegates enlightened their colleagues on the difficulties of seizing power in Tambov:

Of course, we wanted to shake up the old soviet, but we had to reckon with the hostile attitude of the Tambov population to the Bolsheviks As a result, we decided not to rise In view of the great imbalance of forces, the struggle would not have led to anything. All this made us tolerate the old soviet of the Mensheviks and SRs. We had no forces; no help came from Moscow. Then we decided to try another way: to isolate the city soviet Petrograd did not send any funds to the Tambov soviet, which finally forced it [the old soviet, controlled by the Mensheviks and SRs] to recognize the power of the People's Commissars by a vote of 73 to 72.⁸⁵

This frank description of the establishment of "soviet power," given by the Bolshevik commissar at a Bolshevik conference and published in a provincial Bolshevik paper, is a rare and extraordinarily valuable document on the so-called "triumphal march of Soviet power." The Bolsheviks were openly debating their scheming and plotting, not only

⁸⁵"Zasedanie oblastnogo s'ezda kommissarov finansov," *Izvestiia Saratovskogo Soveta* [hereafter *ISS*], Saratov, no. 60, March 31, 1918, p. 1.

against the dumas or the "bourgeoisie," but also against the soviet, which they knew very well had been supported by its Tambov constituency. The problems of the Tambov Bolsheviks did not end, however, with the seizure of power. A feud between the provincial soviet and the city soviet enabled the Mensheviks and SRs to press for the new elections to the latter.

As early as February, we learn from a report by special emissaries from the Commissariat of Internal Affairs, dispatched by Latsys, the Mensheviks and the SRs had a majority in the city soviet, but the provincial soviet was controlled by the Bolsheviks.⁸⁶ On March 1, the provincial soviet decided to disband the Menshevik-SR city soviet, which not only did not submit to force, but called on the Red Guards to defend it. The provincial soviet opened hostilities on March 8; the city soviet was shelled. The Bolshevik minority in the city soviet, apparently fearful of the provincial soviet's greed for power, joined in the Menshevik-SR effort to repel the attack. Finally, an agreement was reached whereby power in the city would belong to a newly-elected city soviet.

The leaders of the local Menshevik organization opened the election campaign.⁸⁷ In March, the key issue was certainly the Brest Treaty. The local Mensheviks reiterated the position of the party that the treaty would not stop the German advance. The Germans were constantly moving eastward in the supposedly independent Ukraine. "Where are the guarantees," Martov demanded in his speech at the Fourth Congress of soviets, "that the Germans will not march to the North?"⁸⁸ This was a very embarrassing question for the Bolsheviks. In their pamphlets, the Mensheviks pointed out, not without sarcasm, that the Bolsheviks were only brave enough to fight against political opponents, not against the Germans.

Focusing on the issues of the Brest treaty and local economy, the election campaign in Tambov brought an overwhelming victory for the Menshevik-SR bloc, which received three-fourths of the delegates in the soviet assembly.⁸⁹ Soon it became apparent that the Bolshevik minority in the city soviet had made a secret deal with the provincial soviet at the expense of the Mensheviks and the SRs. Changing sides,

⁸⁶Shanukhin, Shirokov, Butugin, "Doklad emissarov Kommissariata vnutrennikh del," *Vestnik Kommissariata vnutrennikh del*, Moscow, no. 9, April, 1918, pp. 12-13.

⁸⁷"Iz materialov partiinogo soveshchaniia," *Partiinye izvestiia*, Moscow, no. 8, June, 1918, p. 13.

⁸⁸L. Martov, "Rech na chetvertom s"ezde sovetov," *Vecherniia zvezda* [left of center socialist paper], Petrograd, no. 34, March 16, 1918, p. 4.

⁸⁹I. Lazarev, "Razgon Tambovskogo soveta," *Vpered*, Moscow, no. 62, April 13, 1918, p. 2.

the local Bolsheviks agreed to expel the Mensheviks and SRs from the city soviet and take "all power."⁹⁰ At the first session of the newly-elected soviet, the Bolshevik fraction, this time backed by the provincial soviet, demanded 7 out of 12 seats on the ExCom. Naturally, the Menshevik-SR bloc refused, and the Bolsheviks walked out. The session continued, however, because the remaining delegates still numbered more than the required quorum. An all-Menshevik-SR ExCom was elected, and a debate on the soviet's policy began, but the building was surrounded by the forces of the provincial soviet. Armed men burst inside. One of the Menshevik leaders asked the commander: "Where is your mandate? This must be a mistake! This is the session of the city soviet!" The commander of the detachment pulled out his gun and snarled: "This is my mandate!"⁹¹ The agents of Latsys telegraphed concerning this development: "The atmosphere in the city is tense. The rightist soviet is disbanded."⁹² When the next morning the soviet attempted to meet again, it was faced with a proclamation: "The soviet is disbanded forever! The time has come to establish not the power of the soviets, but the dictatorship of the revolutionary parties."⁹³ The Menshevik and SR deputies retreated to the railway depot and held its sessions under the protection of armed workers.⁹⁴

The significance of the Menshevik-SR victories in soviet elections for the institutional development of the Bolshevik regime is clear from the case of Tambov. The reports of Latsys's agents reveal what was at stake. Had the Mensheviks and SRs continued to control the local soviets, in addition to controlling the local dumas, the Moscow Bolsheviks would hardly have been able to extend the domain of the Commissariat of Internal Affairs [NKVD] to local government. By the Tambov Bolsheviks' own assertion, soviet power was no longer necessary. Instead, these Bolsheviks, throwing aside the masquerade, wanted a party dictatorship.

It is essential to emphasize, however, that the militant "local autocrats" like the Tambov Bolsheviks, while fighting the Mensheviks and SRs, also resisted pressure from the Moscow Bolsheviks. In May 1918, at a time when the supply situation in the central provinces was critical, the Tambov Bolsheviks proclaimed that theirs was a "consuming" province, despite common knowledge that large stocks of provisions

⁹⁰Shanukhin, Shirokov, Butiugin, "Doklad emissarov," p. 13.

⁹¹I. Lazarev, "Razgon Tambovskogo soveta," *Vpered*, Moscow, no. 62, April 13, 1918, p. 2.

⁹²Shanukhin, Shirokov, Butiugin, "Doklad emissarov," p. 13.

⁹³"Po tsentral'noi oblasti: v polose terrora," *Novaia zaria*, Moscow, no. 1, April 22, 1918, p. 34.

⁹⁴Lazarev, "Razgon Tambovskogo soveta," p. 2.

were there.⁹⁵ It seems that what the Tambov Bolsheviks were concerned with most was not "constructing socialism," whatever that might mean, not with putting into effect, like transmission belts, the orders of the Moscow Bolsheviks, but rather with securing their own dictatorship. However, the political strength of the Mensheviks and SRs left the unruly Bolsheviks dependent on financial and military help from Moscow. As a result, the Moscow commissars were able, little by little, to assert their control. As in Iaroslavl', the Mensheviks in Tambov found themselves in a complex situation. On the one hand, they won overwhelming majorities in the election to the soviet and in June to the provincial Congress of Trade Unions.⁹⁶ On the other hand, it was increasingly obvious that it was hard to translate electoral support into real political power. The Bolsheviks did not balk at disbanding the soviet and the trade union congress.

On June 14, the Bolsheviks declared martial law and on June 17, an uprising broke out. The decree on obligatory enlistment in the Red Army provoked mass outrage and the overthrow of the Bolsheviks. The disbanded city дума was assembled, and some socialists were already celebrating an easy victory.⁹⁷ However, real power in the city during these three days belonged not to the дума, but rather to the White general Bogdanov and his detachment of officers. According to a Menshevik report, the enthusiasm of many socialists subsided. Fear of the Whites and a monarchist restoration caused some Mensheviks and workers to turn against the officers. The local correspondent emphasized that the defeat of the officers was "assured not by the Red detachments, still outside the city, but by the forces of the insurgents themselves."⁹⁸

Thus, in Tambov as in Iaroslavl', popular discontent led to an anti-Bolshevik uprising, which posed a great dilemma for the socialists: how to fight the Bolsheviks without aiding the Whites?

The Upper Volga-Urals Region:

The Menshevik-SR bloc did very well in the city soviet elections in this region as well. Like the South, the Volga basin was a traditional stronghold of the SRs. In the grain-producing provinces—Samara,

⁹⁵"Kto sabotiruet?" *Delo naroda*, Petrograd, no. 44, May 17, 1918, p. 4.

⁹⁶"Razgon konferentsii professional'nykh soiuзов," *Iskra*, Moscow, no. 4, June 29, 1918, p. 3.

⁹⁷"Po Rossii. Tambovskii perevorot," *Novyi vechernii chas*, Petrograd, no. 101, June 29, 1918, p. 4.

⁹⁸"Po Rossii. Tambovskii perevorot," p. 4, and "Podrobnosti Tambovskikh sobytii," *Izvestiia*, Moscow, no. 127, June 20, 1918, p. 3.

Saratov, Penza, Simbirsk—the SRs were clearly the leading partner in the coalition; in the industrial centers—Nizhnii Novgorod, Viatka, and some cities in the Urals—the Mensheviks were. In the course of spring and early summer, the bloc received a majority in Nizhnii Novgorod, Saratov, and Kazan', and parity with the Bolsheviks in Simbirsk.⁹⁹ In Kazan', the Menshevik-SR bloc received 180 seats, and the Bolsheviks only 27.¹⁰⁰ In Penza, the Left SRs actually abandoned their Bolshevik partners and joined the opposition bloc.¹⁰¹ Farther north, the Bolsheviks did not do any better. In Vologda, the Mensheviks and SRs also won the city soviet elections;¹⁰² and in Arkhangel'sk, they were the masters of both the city and the provincial soviets.¹⁰³ Obviously, the Bolsheviks were extremely worried by these trends. For example, the Arkhangel'sk Bolsheviks reported to their Central Committee, "A new election of the local soviet has been fixed for June 15, due to strong agitation by the Right SRs and the Mensheviks. All indications are that they would have a majority." To save or at least improve the situation, the comrade from Arkhangel'sk proposed more Bolshevik agitation and sending Red Army units composed of reliable Letts.¹⁰⁴

Only sketchy evidence is available on local politics in most provincial capitals. Fortunately, an almost complete run of the Saratov *Izvestiia* for 1918 in western libraries offers a unique opportunity to follow in detail the development of local post-October politics in a provincial capital in the Volga region. Bolshevik nationalizations and requisitions, Menshevik criticism, elections to the soviet, and an anti-Bolshevik uprising—all these familiar elements of local politics we encounter also in Saratov. However, the case of Saratov illustrates, better than others, the process of interaction between the ruling and the opposition parties during that brief period of multi-party soviets in the first half of 1918. Moreover, the actions of the Mensheviks and the SRs during the May uprising point up the differences between the two allies. During the first three months of Soviet power, the leaders of the Menshevik faction hardly encountered any major obstacles to their criticism of Bolshevik socialism in the soviet. The Bolshevik leaders seemed to be more

⁹⁹ *Sovety v pervyi god proletarskoi diktatury*, p. 300.

¹⁰⁰ On elections to the soviet in Kazan' before the city was taken by the Komuch forces, see "Kazan'," *Rabochii internatsional*, no. 11, August 14, 1918. On the takeover of Kazan' by the forces of the Komuch government see V. Arkhangel'skii, "Kazan' vo vremia bor'by s bol'shevikami," *Volia Rossii*, Prague, 1928, no. 8/9, pp. 267-285 and no. 10, pp. 135-155.

¹⁰¹ "Peints par eux-mêmes," *Les Echos de Russie*, Stockholm, September 1, 1918, no. 20/21, p. 22.

¹⁰² Gurewitsch, "O polozhenii v Rossii," p. 2.

¹⁰³ *Sovety v pervyi god proletarskoi diktatury*, p. 300.

¹⁰⁴ *Perepiska Sekretariata TsKa RSDRP(b) s mestnymi organizatsiiami*, vol. 3, p. 274.

preoccupied with world revolution than with the Saratov Mensheviks. This was a time of declarations, denunciations of world imperialism, and speeches full of pathos. Several hundred workers' representatives, assembled in the soviet, enthusiastically applauded the Bolshevik speakers talking about the victory of the Socialist Revolution in Russia, or their Menshevik opponents calling for unity among all socialists. Indeed, an observer might have noted elements of theatricality in the sessions of the soviet assembly. This theatrical atmosphere started to change in March 1918, when the real issues of unemployment, financial breakdown, and the Brest Treaty forced the soviet to come down from the clouds and from dreams about world revolution to the mundane business of governing Saratov.

As in other cities, the Menshevik and SR fraction in the soviet focused its critique on the Bolshevik economic policy, pointing out that the nationalization of housing had turned out to be a financial burden for the city, and that the nationalization of the banks was destroying monetary circulation. The causes of the catastrophic economic situation in a grain-rich province were the Bolsheviks' "quasi-socialist" experiments.¹⁰⁵ Many of the Bolshevik speakers described their problems quite frankly in similar terms. For example, at the regional conference of Bolshevik finance commissars, the Saratov speaker complained that nationalizations had resulted in an unbearable financial burden for the city.

Now we have to finance the railroad, city maintenance, and the detachments struggling with counterrevolution. ... We have to provide loans for the army units and factories. We had to pay a million rubles to the garrison in order to save [garrison] property from plunder and theft!¹⁰⁶

In order to be able to finance all these projects, the Bolsheviks imposed a 10 million ruble tribute on the bourgeoisie, but the economic situation continued to deteriorate.¹⁰⁷

Against this background, the election campaign opened in early April. An editorial in the Saratov soviet's *Izvestiia* explained:

Like any constitutional power, and even more so as a socialist power, the soviet must be re-elected from time to time so that it reflects the will of the toiling masses. Such elections, for the first time since October, are

¹⁰⁵This and all other proceedings of the Saratov soviet appeared under the title: "Sovet rabochikh i krestianskikh deputatov," *ISS*, no. 71, April 13, 1918, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶"Zasedanie Oblastnogo s'ezda komissarov finansov," *ISS*, no. 60, March 31, 1918, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷"Sovet rabochikh," *ISS*, no. 71, April 13, 1918, p. 1.

scheduled here in Saratov. At the factories and plants, two trends of our social life will be competing with each other: the Bolshevik and the Menshevik ones. By the will of the masses, the Bolsheviks have power. However, recently, the Mensheviks have been trying to regain their strength, exploiting some failures of the soviet power. They want to challenge the Bolsheviks at the coming elections!¹⁰⁸

At this point the Bolsheviks did not dispute the right of the opposition party to challenge them at elections. Only with successes of the opposition would the Bolshevik reasoning change.

In addition to the critique of Bolshevik requisitions, the Menshevik campaign focused on two specific issues. The first was the familiar workers' complaint that they could not purchase food except from the Bolshevik-run agencies. The second issue revolved around the so-called "Red-Guards obligation" (*povinnost'*),¹⁰⁹ as the Mensheviks sarcastically called it. Workers did not want to be drafted into the Red Guards. The city Council of Trade Unions, moreover, protested against turning its members into the auxiliaries of police agencies. Menshevik pressure succeeded in bringing to a halt the conscription of reluctant workers into the Red Guards. Meanwhile, the Bolsheviks, fearing that they would lose the elections, changed the electoral rules. The new procedures allowed either secret or open balloting.¹¹⁰ Open balloting certainly made it more difficult to cast a protest vote. Furthermore, in addition to the delegates elected directly at the factories, the trade unions—but only those in favor of soviet power, in other words supporters of the Bolsheviks and Left SRs—were given representation. Similarly, the political parties supporting Soviet power automatically received twenty-five seats in the soviet. Needless to say, these rules heavily favored the ruling parties. It should be recalled that the Mensheviks and SRs supported the reconconvocation of the Constituent Assembly and in this sense they were regarded by the Bolsheviks as being against Soviet power.

Nevertheless, the campaign went on without such scenes of violence as there were in other cities. The Saratov Mensheviks invited M. I. Liber, a member of the Menshevik Central Committee, to come from Moscow and campaign for the party. At numerous workers' rallies, Liber and other Mensheviks vied for the workers' support with

¹⁰⁸"K predstoiashchim vyboram v sovet," *ISS*, no. 73, April 16, 1918, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹"Po Rossii: Saratov," *Vpered*, Moscow, no. 71, April 25, 1918, p. 4.

¹¹⁰For the election rules, see "K vyboram v mestnyi Sovet, instruktsiia," *ISS*, no. 73, April 16, 1918, p. 1. See also: "Normy predstavitel'stva v Sovet," *ISS*, no. 72, April 14, 1918, p. 1.

prominent Bolshevik speakers.¹¹¹ On April 30, the new soviet assembled. No data on its exact composition are available; however, the absence of jubilant articles in the Bolshevik press, their wrath at the voting of the non-party fraction, and the statements of the Mensheviks at the end of May suggest that the opposition, aided by the non-party delegates, had a majority. As we have seen in many other cities, the non-party delegates often joined the Mensheviks and SRs. Apparently in Saratov, their support was crucial. We read the following explanation in the Bolshevik press:

At the recent elections to the soviet, a large group of non-party delegates was elected. Who are they? ... In reality, the non-party delegates in fact, by voting, break down into certain party fractions. ... A rather considerable part of the non-party delegates at the recent sessions of the soviet turned out to have a very party-like attitude to the soviet parties [i.e., Bolsheviks and Left SRs]. Hiding under their non-party status, these citizens wholeheartedly voted with the Right SRs and the Mensheviks and turned out to be "non-party" Mensheviks and SRs. ... We must put an end to this!¹¹²

Unfortunately, I have been unable to reconstruct the process of inter-party struggle immediately after the elections. It is certain only that the Bolsheviks undertook a number of reprisals against their opponents. On May 13, a wave of strikes broke out and on May 17, there was an uprising of Red Army soldiers. Like other uprisings in that turbulent time, it generated speculation by the various political parties about its nature. For the conservatives, the insurgents' shelling of the city soviet was a sign that the uprising was directed against all socialists. For the Bolsheviks in Moscow, the uprising was another plot of the Mensheviks and SRs.¹¹³ For the Moscow Mensheviks, it was a rebellion of the anarchists.¹¹⁴ To clear up the controversy, let us examine documents published in Saratov by all sides involved.

The uprising in Saratov started over the soldiers' refusal to suppress anti-Bolshevik disturbances elsewhere. Many soldiers had already been angered by the Bolshevik disbandment of the Union of Veterans of the Front (*Soiuz Frontovikov*), an SR-led patriotic organization. Litnov, an SR and the union's chairman, played an important role in the uprising.

¹¹¹For a report on these rallies, see "V Saratovskikh masterskikh," *ISS*, no. 68, April 8, 1918, p. 4.

¹¹²"O bespartinykh," *ISS*, no. 99, May 25, 1918, p. 1.

¹¹³B. Nikolaevsky, "RSDRP (men'shevikov) za vremia s dekabria 1917 po iul' 1918," *Nik. Col.* p. 35, discusses the history of these allegations.

¹¹⁴"Beschestnye i prezrennye," *Partiinye izvestia*, Petrograd, no. 3, May 29, 1918, pp. 8-10.

After a heavy artillery shelling of the soviet on the evening of May 17, the insurgents published an appeal to the citizens of Saratov. They accused the Bolsheviks of tampering with the elections, wasting huge sums of money without giving an account to the soviet, disbanding the Union of Veterans of the Front, and so on. They defined their political goals as follows:

Comrades and Citizens! We want to destroy the predatory power of the Bolsheviks, which is based on violence and hated by all of you. We are not leading our struggle against them to seize power for ourselves. Instead of the Bolshevik violence, we want to restore rights and freedom for all! Enough of violence and seizures! In a free country, political authority must derive from a direct, equal, and secret ballot! There cannot be any other authority.¹¹⁵

On May 18, the SR party committee openly took the side of the insurgents. The Mensheviks published their own declaration, which supported the political slogans of the insurgents but criticized their use of violence. The Mensheviks offered to mediate so that the conflict could be resolved peacefully. Their caution might be partly explained by the fact that the insurgents were joined by all kinds of disaffected elements, including the anarchists. Moreover, instances of drunken looting were reported. It seems that neither the Menshevik nor the SR party committee knew about the uprising until it actually broke out; Members of the SR party, like Litnov, did not necessarily turn for instructions to their party committee. The local Bolsheviks appealed for help, and 600 Red soldiers arrived in Saratov. The leaders of the insurgents made a number of strategic mistakes, and one of them led to their quick defeat, as described in the Saratov *Izvestia*:

Because of its small numbers, the detachment did not risk entering into open combat with the insurgents. ... Pretending to be their friends, they joined the insurgents, gained control of their weapons unnoticed, and then suggested that the latter surrender.¹¹⁶

The exact number of casualties during the armed struggle that followed is not indicated; it was said, at the soviet session on May 26, that: "Unfortunately, it was very high."¹¹⁷ At least 600 soldiers were arrested.¹¹⁸ A paper in the capital reported: "Trains with troops are

¹¹⁵"Listovka krasnoarmeitsev i frontovikov," *ISS*, no. 95, May 20, 1918, p. 2.

¹¹⁶"Pomoshch iz vne," *ISS*, no. 95, p. 2.

¹¹⁷"Zasedanie Soveta," *ISS*, no. 100, May 26, 1918, p. 1.

¹¹⁸"Soedinennoe zasedanie soveta," *ISS*, no. 106, June 2, 1918, p. 1.

arriving from Moscow. Soviet power is busy liquidating the uprising. Searches and arrests are being made on a mass scale."¹¹⁹

In the first few days after the uprising, the Bolsheviks did not accuse the Mensheviks of taking part. The Bolshevik wrath at that time was directed at the SRs. The *Izvestiia* of the Saratov soviet wrote, "Concerning the Mensheviks, comrade Rudakov pointed out that they could not decide themselves to take part in the events, even though their sympathies were fully on the side of the SRs."¹²⁰ However, another Bolshevik speaker objected: "How to explain the fact that the counterrevolutionary insurgents ... proclaimed purely Menshevik political slogans? ... The participation of the Mensheviks is proven by this fact."¹²¹ The Bolsheviks in Saratov, as in Kostroma, were initially divided in their views on policy towards the Mensheviks. The hardliners prevailed, however. The Bolsheviks passed a resolution urging the workers to recall the "social traitors" from the soviet within a week.¹²²

The front pages of the local *Izvestiia* for the next few weeks were full of headlines such as "Merciless Revenge against the Traitors"¹²³ and "A Stab in the Back." The Mensheviks and SRs were referred to as "bandits," "conspirators," "traitors," etc. On June 12, fifteen members of the Menshevik party committee were put on trial.¹²⁴ Why only Mensheviks? A possible explanation could be that on June 8, the SRs seized power in neighboring Samara. The Saratov Bolsheviks were in panic; not a word about it was said in the *Izvestiia* of the Saratov soviet until June 16. They might have feared that a trial of the SRs in Saratov might trigger an offensive from Samara. Whatever the causes, now the Bolsheviks' wrath was directed solely against the Mensheviks.

What is most remarkable in the proceedings of the trial of the Saratov Mensheviks is the naiveté and inexperience of the Bolshevik prosecutors in those early days of Soviet power. They had a hard time proving the guilt of the accused. The Mensheviks were accused of counterrevolutionary agitation, which manifested itself in an appeal for the resignation of the Council of People's Commissars and the recon- vocation of the Constituent Assembly. The Commissar of the Press, Venatovskii, testified that walking by the premises of the Menshevik

¹¹⁹"Likvidatsiia vosstaniia v Saratove," *Petrogradskoe ekho* [a non-socialist paper], Petrograd, no. 71, May 29, 1918, p. 1.

¹²⁰"Sovet rabochikh deputatov," *ISS*, no. 100, May 26, 1918, p. 1.

¹²¹"Nekotorye itogi," *ISS*, no. 100, May 26, 1918, p. 1.

¹²²"Sovet rabochich," *ISS*, no. 100, May 26, 1918, p. 1.

¹²³"Besposhchadnaia mest' predateliam," *ISS*, no. 112, June 9, 1918, p. 1.

¹²⁴For the proceedings of the trial see "V revoliutsionnom tribunale," *ISS*, no. 114, June 12, 1918, p. 1.

party committee, he had seen in the window a declaration of the Petrograd Assembly of *Upolnomochennnye*, the content of which seemed to him to be counterrevolutionary. The defense attorney asked: "But what is the substance of the crime?"¹²⁵ Venatovskii responded: "In that the present power is referred to in the declaration as the power of the usurpers, which has not given anything to the people." The defense attorney suggested that the Saratov Mensheviks could not be held accountable for a declaration by the Petrograd proletariat: "Then you should bring the Petrograd proletariat to trial."

Generally, the prosecutor did not try to incriminate the Mensheviks for participation in the uprising, apparently fearing that it would be difficult to document. Instead, he focused on the Mensheviks' political stand: "The Menshevik tactics are very adroit. They point out the absence of freedom.... They want to ruin Bolshevism!" This gave the defense the opportunity to suggest that the Menshevik allegations were true, even by the tacit admission of the prosecution itself. What a contrast this exchange brings out between the Bolsheviks' definition of Soviet power during the election campaign and at the trial! No longer were the soviets conceived of as multi-party institutions. Now, the prosecutor, Pashchenko, urged the workers and peasants "to drive out [of the soviet] those who had sold them out to the bourgeoisie, just as Jesus Christ drove the moneychangers out of the Temple."¹²⁶

By the end of summer, the purge was complete and the one-party dictatorship finally secured.¹²⁷ The Saratov Mensheviks had been lukewarm about taking part in the uprising. They had hung on for dear life to the framework of peaceful competition within the soviets, even though by the beginning of June, the Bolsheviks made no secret of their intention to expel rival socialists from the soviet. The differences in the response towards anti-Bolshevik uprisings among the local socialist organizations should not be overlooked. In Iaroslavl', the split was between the center-left and the right Mensheviks; in Saratov, between the local Menshevik and SR organizations.

An example of a workers' movement much more radical than in Saratov, a movement that the Mensheviks led against the Bolshevik dictatorship, can be seen in Nizhnii Novgorod. There, a huge complex of plants, employing some twenty thousand workers in Sormovo, a suburb of Nizhnii, dominated local politics. A Soviet historian and Menshevik reporters in 1918 provide an identical account of the general direction of politics in Nizhnii. According to Spirin, in March 1918,

¹²⁵"V revoliutsionnom tribunale," *ISS*, no. 114, June 12, 1918, p. 1.

¹²⁶"V revoliutsionnom tribunale," *ISS*, no. 115, June 13, 1918, p. 3.

¹²⁷*Sovety v pervyi god proletarskoi diktatury*, p. 301.

there were 6128 Bolsheviks in Nizhnii; by mid-June there remained only 2771. "Everywhere," writes Spirin, "the number of Communists was diminishing."¹²⁸ On the other hand, the provincial congress of local Menshevik organizations noted in March that "There is a noticeable increase in our influence."¹²⁹ Some of the workers' grievances in Sormovo were reminiscent of complaints in other cities about the heavy-handed habits of local commissars, food shortages, etc. However, there was one other issue to which the opposition drew the attention of the workers.

The Sormovo plants, producing steel and locomotives, were owned by a powerful group of financiers and industrialists, led by A. P. Meshcherskii.¹³⁰ In March 1918, the Bolshevik government held negotiations with Meshcherskii's group concerning their proposals for the reconstruction of Russian industry.¹³¹ The initial agreement fell through, but the fact of the negotiations did not pass unnoticed. The Menshevik press in the capitals chose the occasion to debate the Bolshevik change of heart in relation to the industrialists in the context of the New Course.¹³² The Menshevik leadership welcomed the newest Bolshevik call for an end to "Red-Guard style attack on the bourgeoisie," but rhetorically asked when the time would come for an end to attacks on the socialists as well.¹³³

The Bolshevik negotiations with Meshcherskii, naturally enough, added to the tension in Sormovo. The Menshevik and SR campaigners defined the local grievances within the broader context of the Bolshevik deals with the industrialists on the one hand and their suppression of workers' organizations on the other. As in other cities, the opposition leaders—N. Bykhovskii, and I. G. Uvalov—demanded new elections to the soviet. A member of the Menshevik CC, A. Troianovskii, came down to Nizhnii to campaign for the party. He spoke at a huge rally under the banner "All power to the Constituent Assembly!"¹³⁴ The Bolsheviks tried to postpone the elections, but continuing strikes forced

¹²⁸L. Spirin, *Klassy i partii v grazhdanskoi voine*, Moscow, 1968, p. 124.

¹²⁹"Po tsentral'noi oblasti: v polose terrora," *Novaia zaria*, Moscow, no. 1, April 22, 1918, p. 36.

¹³⁰Meshcherskii was at the time an important figure at the Moscow Provincial Economic Council (*Moskovskii oblastnoi sovet narodnogo khoziaistva*). For his contacts and negotiations with the Bolsheviks, see Kolokol'nikov [a Right Menshevik, in 1917 a high ranking official at the Ministry of Labor] "Podpol'naia koalitsiia," *Delo*, Moscow, no. 3, April 14, 1918, pp. 2-3.

¹³¹A. Martynov, "Bol'shevistskaia natsionalizatsiia promyshlennosti," *Vpered*, Moscow, no. 63, April 14, 1918, p. 1.

¹³²"Novaia orientatsiia," *Delo*, Petrograd, no. 2, April 7, 1918, p. 14.

¹³³F. Dan, "Pokhod protiv RSDRP," *Vpered*, Moscow, no. 64, April 16, 1918, p. 2.

¹³⁴*Sovety v pervyi god proletarskoi diktatury*, p. 306.

them to back down. The election returns, Bykhovskii reported to the Menshevik CC, had brought 21 seats to the Mensheviks and SRs and 17 seats to the Bolsheviks and Left SRs on the new Executive Committee of the soviet. In the Menshevik-SR bloc, the SRs, as expected, had a slight majority. In the old ExCom, elected on October 27, 1917, the Bolsheviks had 21 seats and the Menshevik-SR bloc 18.¹³⁵ Upovalov, in his reminiscences, explains that the new ExCom formed a commission, intending to take over business from the Bolsheviks. The commission soon discovered that out of the 275,000 rubles raised by the Bolsheviks through indemnities imposed on the bourgeoisie, less than half could be accounted for. The Bolsheviks refused to give an account of expenditures and refused to hand over business to the new majority.¹³⁶

The Bolshevik defeat in Nizhnii so alarmed the Kremlin that a special envoy was sent there. According to his report,

The Bolsheviks lost part of their popularity in Sormovo because of the deterioration of provisioning and good organization of anti-Bolshevik propaganda by the workers' organizations of the Right SRs and the Mensheviks.

Upon his arrival in Nizhnii, the envoy summoned the 17 member Bolshevik-Left SR minority ExCom fraction and urged them to retain "all power," promising aid from Moscow.¹³⁷ The Menshevik-SR majority was not willing to concede power without putting up a fight.

On June 10, the provincial workers' conference of *upolnomochennye* was to be opened in Sormovo. The Bolsheviks declared martial law in Nizhnii Novgorod and Sormovo and banned all public meetings. The Red Guards occupied all buildings in the city that could have been used for assembly and installed machine guns in strategic locations. The conference nevertheless opened, in the Menshevik club. A workers' demonstration on the streets was dispersed. According to an official Bolshevik report, "provocateur shots" were fired at the Red Guards from the crowd and after that "the Soviet troops shot into the air and five people turned out to be wounded."¹³⁸ According to the Menshevik

¹³⁵N. Bykhovskii, "Perevybory soveta rabochikh deputatov," *Vpered*, Moscow, no. 64, April 16, 1918, p. 4.

¹³⁶G. Upovalov, "Kak my poteriali svobodu," *Zaria*, no. 2, Berlin, 1923, here cited from Bernshtam, *Nezavisimoe rabochee dvizhenie*, p. 273.

¹³⁷"Doklad v Kremle o sobytiakh v Sormove," *Vecherniaia zvezda*, Petrograd, no. 71, May 21, 1918, p. 3.

¹³⁸"Bol'sheviki v provintsii. Nizhnii Novgorod," *Nashe slovo*, Moscow, no. 43, June 12, 1918, p. 4. The Mensheviks reprinted an official Bolshevik statement on the events in Sormovo, apparently to show how ridiculous was the assertion that five people "turned

report, one worker was killed and many were wounded and beaten up as a result of the Red Guards' assault.¹³⁹ On the next day, the conference assembled at a plant, under the protection of the workers. Protesting the shootings, Nizhnii Novgorod went on a general strike on June 17. The authorities threatened "to take merciless measures against counterrevolution."¹⁴⁰ Searches, arrests and shootings followed. On June 26, two workers were killed and ten wounded in Sormovo at the dispersal of the demonstration in defense of the Menshevik Upovalov, who had been arrested by the Bolsheviks.¹⁴¹ The chairman of the local Menshevik party committee reported to the CC that the mood of the comrades was "combative."¹⁴² Strikes at Sormovo plants continued and, as in other cities, the anti-Bolshevik movement threatened to sweep the Bolsheviks from power. After Kazan' was taken by the forces of the Komuch government on August 8, Lenin sent a telegram on August 9 to Fedorov, the chairman of the Nizhnii Novgorod provincial soviet:

Peters, the chairman of the Extraordinary,* says that they also have *reliable* [Lenin's emphasis] people in Nizhnii. It is necessary to act without restraint: mass searches, executions for keeping firearms, *mass deportation of the Mensheviks* [emphasis added—VB] and unreliaables. ... They say Raskol'nikov and Danishevskii went to you from Kazan'.¹⁴³

As in Iaroslavl', the workers' detachment and some of the local Mensheviks were ready to take part in an effort to overthrow the Bolsheviks; as in Iaroslavl', the Menshevik opposition in Nizhnii Novgorod was not willing to succumb without resistance.

The patterns of local city politics in the Upper Volga-Urals area demonstrate that in the spring of 1918, during the period of elections to the soviet, the Menshevik-SR bloc won popular majorities in all provincial capitals where elections were held. The victories in the elections

* Lenin means the Extraordinary Commission, the Cheka.

out to be wounded" after the Red Guards fired into the air. For the Mensheviks' inquiry in the CEC on the shooting in Sormovo, see "TsIK. Zapros o Sormovskikh sobytiakh," *Nashe slovo*, Moscow, no. 43, June 12, 1918, p. 2.

¹³⁹"Po Rossii. V Sormovo," *Novyi vechernii chas*, Petrograd, no. 91, June 17, 1918, p. 4, and "Sprenung einer Arbeiterkonferenz," *Stimmen aus Russland*, Stockholm, no. 4/5, August 15, 1918, p. 18.

¹⁴⁰A. I. Velikorechin and K. G. Sejeznev, eds., *Pobeda Oktiabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii v Nizhegorodskoi gubernii*, Gor'kii, 1957, p. 513.

¹⁴¹"Sormovskii rasstrel," *Iskra*, Moscow, no. 4, June 29, 1918, p. 2.

¹⁴²M. Gurevitsch, "O polozhenii v Rossii," p. 2.

¹⁴³Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 50, p. 142.

here, as in the central provinces, were followed by the Bolsheviks' refusal to step down and by repressions. This, as we have seen, generated protest movements, strikes, and uprisings. In Samara, Simbirsk, Kazan', and other cities, unlike in the central provinces, the Bolshevik regime was overthrown by the Czech-SR forces backed by local insurgents. By mid-summer 1918, political differences were no longer settled by elections in Russia. The country by now was in the stage of a full-fledged front line civil war.

It is important to note here that the term "civil war" is used in scholarly literature to denote two very different patterns of armed struggle in that turbulent time. If one defines "civil war" as armed struggle between different social groups and classes within a society, then one can conclude that the Civil War started in Russia right after October 1917, if not earlier. If, however, one defines "civil war" as the armed struggle of different social groups and classes by means of organized armies, from a certain territorial base, marked by a front line, then one could say that that kind of civil war started in Russia on a national rather than regional scale on June 8, 1918, with the Czech-SR uprising on the Volga.

In Samara, the Bolshevik power was overthrown on June 8, 1918, by the forces of the Czech legion and the SRs, and a government of the Committee of the Constituent Assembly (Komuch) was established.¹⁴⁴ The history of the Komuch government's efforts to fight the Bolsheviks in the name of the Constituent Assembly goes far beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it to say that universal suffrage was restored; city administration was passed back to the dumas; and revolutionary tribunals, the Cheka, and the MRC were abolished.¹⁴⁵ The soviets became independent political organizations, in accordance with the Menshevik-SR electoral program. In many other cities of the area, too, the Mensheviks and SRs came to power. After an overwhelming Menshevik-SR victory (170 seats vs. 22) in Izhevsk (Viatka province), the Bolsheviks walked out of the assembly. A similar Menshevik-SR

¹⁴⁴For the SR sources on the preparation of the uprising in Samara, see I. D. Klimushkin [one of the leaders of Komuch], "Pered Volzhskim vosstaniem," *Volia Rossii*, Prague, 1928, no. 8/9; and I. Brushvit [one of the leaders of Komuch], "Kak podgotovialos' Volzhskoe vystuplenie," *Volia Rossii*, Prague, 1928, no. 10.

¹⁴⁵For the SR account of the Komuch government policies, see I. D. Klimushkin, ed., *Revolutsiia 1917-1918 goda v Samarской gubernii. Sbornik pod redaktsiei chlenov uchreditel'nogo sobraniia*, Samara, 1918. It is remarkable that the first decrees of the Komuch government, after the Bolsheviks had been overthrown in Samara, were published by *Delo naroda* in Moscow, see *Delo naroda*, June 14, 1918, p. 1. For the Soviet collection of documents on Komuch policies, see G. Lelevich (L. Mogilevskii) *V dni Samarской uchredilki*, Moscow, 1921.

success was reported from Zlatous, in Ufa province,¹⁴⁶ and in many other towns in the Urals. By summer, the whole Volga-Urals region was up in arms against the Bolsheviks. According to a Soviet historian, in Ufa "railway workers, under the influence of anti-Soviet agitation, disarmed the Bolsheviks and came out to greet the Czechoslovaks."¹⁴⁷ The workers' militia in Izhevsk and Votkinsk joined the Komuch government People's Army and fought against the Bolsheviks. Throughout the summer of 1918, the territory under Komuch control was constantly widening, until it abutted on that controlled by the Siberian government.¹⁴⁸

The creation of the Komuch government turned what had been a strain in the Menshevik-SR relations into an open split. Ivan Maiskii, a member of the Menshevik CC who became Minister of Labor in the Komuch government, was expelled from the party.¹⁴⁹ The SR party had to go underground in the Bolshevik-controlled territory and shifted its chief efforts to behind the front line. The Menshevik leadership did not want to follow suit. In key articles on the subject,¹⁵⁰ Iu. O. Martov and I. I. Dan explained that the SR-right Menshevik military alliance with the Czech troops gave the Bolsheviks an opportunity to discredit the idea of a Constituent Assembly, since the government acting in its name was relying on foreign troops. Furthermore, Martov and Dan feared that the Komuch leaders' cooperation with other forces opposed to Bolshevism was risky at best, believing that the former would soon become prisoners of their new allies on the right. It was small consolation to them that their prediction had come true, when, in November 1918, Admiral Kolchak staged his *coup d'état*.¹⁵¹

To understand the motives of the Menshevik center-left leaders of the party and their right Menshevik opponents, it is necessary to consider the pattern of politics in the Lower Volga, Kuban', and Don areas—the South of Russia—where the Menshevik opposition was

¹⁴⁶Sovety v pervyi god proletarskoi diktatury, pp. 308, 301-302; "Boevoe nastroyenie na Urale," *Vecherniaia zvezda*, Petrograd, no. 32, March 14, 1918, p. 4.

¹⁴⁷Malashko, *K voprosu*, p. 145.

¹⁴⁸See an account by one of the Komuch leaders, V. I. Lebedev, *Bor'ba russkoi demokratii protiv bol'shevikov*, New York, 1919.

¹⁴⁹For his memoirs, see I. Maiskii, *Demokraticheskaja kontr-revoliutsiia*, Moscow-Petrograd, 1923.

¹⁵⁰F. Dan, "Nado poniat'," *Iskra*, Moscow, no. 4 June 29, 1918, p. 1. On Menshevik-SR relations, see B. Nikolaevskii, "Martov i Esery," *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, New York, 1944, no. 9, p. 113-117.

¹⁵¹For the background on Kolchak's coup, see a collection of documents edited by V. M. Zenzinov, one of the SR leaders: *Gosudarstvennyi perevorot admirala Kolchaka v Omske 18 noiabria 1918 goda*, Paris, 1919.

pressed by the Bolshevik dictatorship on the one hand and by the Whites, after the Bolsheviks had been overthrown, on the other.

Lower Volga, Kuban', and Don Areas

In this area, the Menshevik-SR bloc was a significant but not a decisive factor in local politics. Here too, to be sure, the Mensheviks scored electoral victories in the soviet elections, where they were held; but the political weight of the soviet and the outcome of the power struggle varied from city to city.

Three factors characterized the region as a whole.

1) In contrast to Industrial, Black Earth, or Volga-Urals provinces, here a whole spectrum of political and military forces fought for power. Besides the Mensheviks, the SRs, and the local Bolsheviks, there were Cossacks, White volunteers, Germans, a number of itinerant Anarchist bands, and armed detachments of Bolsheviks from Moscow contesting control over the region.

2) The local feuds among the Bolsheviks themselves and between the Bolsheviks and their Left SR and Communist-Anarchist allies, as in Tambov or Tver', attained here the proportions of open warfare.

3) The shaky Bolshevik regime in some cities was a military one, established in the wake of a military conquest.

Rostov-on-Don represents the prototype of the political trajectory that many Russian cities were to follow later in the Civil War. Within six months after October 1917, the city had been overrun by the Bolsheviks, then by the Whites, then again by the Bolsheviks, and then again by the Whites. The policy of the local Menshevik organization deserves particular attention.

After October 1917, the Bolsheviks briefly seized power in Rostov. By Martov's admission, they enjoyed popular support in those early days. Very soon, however, Martov wrote: "The Bolshevik methods generated a strong reaction, and the workers have abandoned the Bolsheviks." General Kaledin's Don government was established. Citing reports from Vasil'ev, the leader of the Rostov Mensheviks (and in 1917 chairman of the city duma), Martov asserted that:

The workers who used to be Bolsheviks declared that: "we will comply neither with the orders of the Don government nor with those of the People's Commissars. We recognize only the authority of the Constituent Assembly, and until its convocation, that of the city duma."¹⁵²

¹⁵²L. Martov, "Rol' partii proletariata," *Novykh luch*, Petrograd, no. 18, December 22, 1917; Nik. Col. no. 6, box 2 [a newspaper clipping].

The Menshevik chairman of the Rostov soviet assured Martov that the workers overwhelmingly supported the Mensheviks.

In February 1918, the Bolshevik troops entered Rostov. A unique document, the minutes of the proceedings of the soviet session, reveals the complexity of the political struggle in the city. The key question, which triggered stormy debate in the assembly, was who had the right to carry out searches, requisitions, and executions. The Secretary of the MRC, M. I. Ravikovich complained that: "Now there is a dual power in Rostov. Moscow's commissars, Antonov* and Voitsekhovskii, have declared that they are the supreme power in Rostov." The MRC declared in response that it recognized the commissars' power only insofar (*postol'ku poskol'ku*) as they did not violate the MRC policy. Ravikovich claimed that Voitsekhovskii had threatened to arrest the local MRC and had begun to censor its paper. The Menshevik speaker, B. S. Vasil'ev, suggested that the conflict between the MRC and the Moscow commissars should be seen against the background of the executions, raids, and arrests then being carried out: "Who has the right to do that?" All power in the city was supposed to belong to the soviet. Ravikovich of the MRC retorted that Antonov-Ovseenko had told him: "Truly, power belongs to the soviet, but your soviet is no good and we will disband it!" Another Menshevik speaker declared that in the interests of the workers, a concerted effort to repulse the Moscow commissars was required. Ravikovich agreed that Rostov did not need "governor-generals" from Moscow. The Mensheviks were ready to support the MRC in its struggle with the commissars.

Passions flared at the session after a speech by a commander of the workers' detachment from Petrograd, E. A. Trifonov, who had traveled under Voitsekhovskii's command. He said:

Comrades! I may die at the hand of a hired assassin after this session, but I must testify that Voitsekhovskii is a murderer! His route from Moscow to Rostov is covered with the corpses of innocent people!

The Mensheviks rose from their benches and shouted, "Bolshevik murderers! Scoundrels! There is blood on your hands!" The session adjourned in a highly tense and emotional atmosphere.¹⁵³

In the following weeks, rivalry among the Bolshevik organizations did not abate. Power in the sense of administration simply ceased to

*V. A. Antonov-Ovseenko is meant here.

¹⁵³All the quotations from various speakers at the session of the Rostov city soviet on February 15, 1918, are taken from: "Istoricheskoe zasедanie Rostovo-Nakhichevanskogo na Donu soveta rabochikh deputatov," Nik. Col. no. 6, box 2.

exist. Power in the sense of control of the streets constantly changed hands. One band of "revolutionary" soldiers from the MRC would declare another band of "revolutionary" soldiers counterrevolutionary and seize "power." All these revolving "powers," no matter what the name, were virtually indistinguishable from one other. They all exacted tributes, raided the bourgeoisie, assaulted the Menshevik-SR clubs and newspapers, and fought each other. Indemnities, requisitions, confiscations, "socializations," and raids were often indistinguishable from plain robbery. Whole trains were stopped, passengers searched, and possessions "socialized." These bands were often referred to as "Red Hundreds."¹⁵⁴

The Mensheviks' sharpest attacks were addressed to the vociferous Brotherhood of Revolutionary Cossacks and Sailors. This band was notorious for its raids on the bourgeoisie. One of its chief political slogans was: "Kill all the bourgeoisie and the Jews!"¹⁵⁵ The Brotherhood claimed it had been preparing a St. Bartholomew's Night for the bourgeoisie of Rostov.¹⁵⁶ The most confusing thing for the workers, complained the local Mensheviks, was that all these "ruling" bands called themselves Bolsheviks, Communists, Anarcho-Communists, or Left Revolutionary Socialists, discrediting socialists of all persuasions. True, some of the local Bolshevik leaders condemned the anarchist excesses in just as strong words as the Mensheviks did; but no cooperation between the two parties was possible. The Mensheviks believed that anarchism was a direct result of the degeneration of Bolshevism. Indeed, most of the anarchists were former Bolshevik supporters. The Mensheviks wrote, in some key articles on the subject, that the Bolsheviks had perverted the whole idea of socialism, by appealing to the lowest instincts of the masses.¹⁵⁷ "Seize!" "Loot!" "Overthrow!"—these were slogans from the Bolshevik arsenal. Socialism, which was to bring about the realization of the humanistic aspirations of the people, had been turned by the Bolsheviks into *pugachevshchina*.¹⁵⁸ No wonder déclassé soldiers were carrying on in this vein. The Mensheviks made

¹⁵⁴The label "Red Hundreds" (*Krasnosotentsy*) was obviously coined to point to a similarity between the Anarchist-Communist bands and the Black Hundreds, notorious under the Old Regime for their massacres of helpless people and especially of the Jews. Maria Spiridonova, the leader of the Left SRs, described briefly the atrocities of these Red Hundreds in her *Otkrytoe pis'mo Tsentral'nomu Klomitetu partii Bol'shevikov*, Moscow, 1919.

¹⁵⁵A. Lokerman [one of the Menshevik leaders in Rostov], *74 dnia sovet'skoi vlasti (iz istorii diktatury Bol'shevikov na Donu)*, Rostov, 1918, pp. 60-61.

¹⁵⁶Lokerman, *74 dnia*, p. 71

¹⁵⁷Editorial: "V roli partii poriadka," *Vpered*, Moscow, no. 63, April 14, 1918, p. 1.

¹⁵⁸"Rabochii kontrol' nad rabochim kontrolem," *Delo naroda*, Petrograd, no. 42, May 15, 1918, p. 1.

the most of the situation politically and in their paper, *Rabochii golos*, published vivid reports on socialism à la Bolshevik. Commenting on the requisitions of luxury goods, perfume, and women's clothing from one of the stores downtown, the Mensheviks sarcastically asked: "Is it necessary for the suppression of the bourgeoisie or for the strengthening of socialism?" They demanded new elections to the soviet, claiming that the artificial Bolshevik majority would disintegrate at the first elections. They appealed to the trade unions, the departments of the city duma, and the soviet. As in other cities, the Menshevik platform demanded a decisive struggle with the anarchists, and the restoration of a popularly-elected city government. The election returns brought them a sizable majority in the city soviet. The Mensheviks received 53 seats, the SRs—14 seats and the non-party delegates 42; the Bolsheviks managed to gather 51 seats and the Left SRs—8. The non-party delegates joined the opposition bloc whose 109 deputies vastly outnumbered the Bolshevik-Left SR bloc of 59.¹⁵⁹ As it turned out, the Menshevik victory could have ended tragically for them. The Mensheviks found out that the Bolsheviks were planning to install machine guns in the soviet building and shoot the "Menshevik counterrevolutionaries" during the session. In the event, the soviet was simply disbanded, the Menshevik paper shut down and the Menshevik and SR parties declared to be counterrevolutionary.¹⁶⁰ A Menshevik reported that by mid-May, the whole population was so tired of the Bolshevik rule that outbursts of hatred could no longer be contained. When the Germans entered the city, they were greeted, to their surprise, as liberators.

In Tsaritsyn, the Mensheviks also won the soviet elections.¹⁶¹ In Novorossiisk, the Menshevik-led workers overthrew the Brotherhood of Sailors.¹⁶² Bolshevik rule in the Don and Kuban' area ended by June 1918. Not the Mensheviks and SRs, however, but General Krasnov (Don) and General Alekseev (Kuban') came to power, declared all the laws of the Bolsheviks and of the Provisional Government of 1917 to be null and void, and restored the laws of the Russian Empire. The

¹⁵⁹Lokerman, *74 dnia*, p. 43. The Menshevik victory was also reported in "Pobeda Men'shevikov," *Utro Petrograda*, no. 1, April 1, 1918, p. 2, citing *Izvestiia Rostovskogo na Donu soveta* of March 26, 1918.

¹⁶⁰A. Lokerman [Lokerman], *Les Bolsheviks à l'oeuvre*, Paris, 1920, p. 54. It is noteworthy that in this edition of Lokerman's *74 dnia* the description of the atrocities of the Whites was dropped, whereas the Bolshevik ones were emphasized. See also "Izgnanie oppozitsii iz soveta. Rostov-na-Donu," *Vpered*, Moscow, no. 64, April 16, 1918, p. 4; and "Otkrytoe pis'mo Donskogo komiteta RSDRP," *Bor'ba*, Tiflis, no. 74, May 23, 1918, p. 3.

¹⁶¹Gurewitsch, "O položenie v Rossii," p. 2.

¹⁶²"Novorossiisk," *Vecherniaia zvezda*, Petrograd, no. 71, May 21, 1918.

threat of a tsarist restoration haunted the local Mensheviks and their leaders in Moscow, and it had a deep and long-lasting impact on their mentality and future policy. Local Menshevik organizations again requested guidance from the CC. What should the party policy be under the Whites? Was any cooperation with the Bolsheviks possible? The CC had to define the party policy for those cities where the overthrow of the Bolsheviks was likely and where it might lead to a tsarist restoration. This was the problem the Mensheviks had to tackle throughout 1919.

In many cities of European Russia, regardless of the geographic region, the Mensheviks were only partially successful in channeling popular discontent. Often the Mensheviks' ceaseless campaign to hold new elections to the soviets and to restore city government did not lead to an organized mass labor movement. Apathy and withdrawal from politics was followed in those places by violent rebellions. It should be stressed from the outset that most of the bloodiest clashes took place in small towns. Crises rapidly got out of control there, and the authority of the local party leaders was quickly overrun by the furor of the mob. The cycle of events leading to spontaneous outbursts of violence was remarkably uniform. The Mensheviks and SRs would denounce Bolshevik requisitions and blame them for the starvation of the working folk. The Bolsheviks in the local soviet would overreact and fire at the crowd, as it happened in Kolpino, Kovrov, Rybinsk, and other towns.¹⁶³ Menshevik "troublemakers" would be arrested and martial law declared. In most cases, this only added oil to the fire. Burials of comrades, marches, processions, singing of revolutionary songs, speeches, and condemnation of the Bolshevik "bandits" created an atmosphere of martyrdom and fearlessness. No one was concerned any longer with the elections to the soviet; it was stormed.¹⁶⁴ The telegrams of local Bolshevik leaders speak for themselves:

Vladimir: Situation in Vladimir province most critical—reports of rebellions; work at factories coming to a standstill. The province on the eve of anarchy. Save and help us with resources from Moscow!

Bogorodsk: Send bread for the sake of the salvation of Soviet power!

Serpukhov: Situation serious. Rebellion ripening!

Briansk: Commissariat embattled by crowds of workers, peasants, and

¹⁶³"Besporiadki v Kolpino," *Novyi den'*, Petrograd, no. 38, May 11, 1918, p. 3; "Kovrov," *Novaya zaria*, Moscow, no. 1, April 22, 1918, p. 41; "Krasnogvardeiskii pogrom," *Vpered*, no. 78, May 3, 1918, p. 2; "Vos'moi Sovet partii Eserov," *ESER*, Vladivostok, no. 9, May 3, 1918, p. 1.

¹⁶⁴On mass executions of rebellious peasants by the Bolsheviks, see for example, "Po bol'shakam i proselkam. Kartina revoliutsionnoi provintsii," *Vecherniaia zvezda*, Petrograd, no. 43, March 27, 1918, p. 3.

soldiers. Any day now, excesses are possible!¹⁶⁵
 Novgorod: Rebellions going on!¹⁶⁶

In most of these smaller towns, the Mensheviks were swept aside by the tide of violence. A rally would turn into a riot, and bloodshed followed. Once ablaze, the fire could not be contained. In Porech'e, the mob stormed the soviet, shouting: "Beat them! Kill all them commissars!" In Belyi, all the members of the soviet were killed. In Soligalich, Pavlovskii Posad,¹⁶⁷ and other towns as well, the soviet was locked and burned with everyone in it. The dramatic events in Pavlovskii Posad were described in *Delo naroda*:

Angered by grain requisitions, the peasants from nearby villages came to the town. Assembled in front of the soviet, they demanded a change of government. When the commissar appeared, they would not let him speak. Shouts: "Down with the soviets!" The commissar: "Clear the square!" He threatened to open fire. Shouts: "Go away yourselves!" "We have nowhere to go! In any case, we'll starve!" The crowd got infuriated. People began to pick up paving stones. A shot was fired, according to one version, from the crowd; according to another, from the soviet. The fact is that after that, shots were fired at the crowd, which responded with a hail of stones. More and more people were converging on the square. By then, a few people had been killed. The mob went completely wild. Someone shouted: "Let's burn them!" and this was enough. They brought a fire engine and sprayed gasoline on the soviet and set it on fire. Some of those inside tried to surrender but were immediately killed by the crowd. The others were burned together with the building. Twenty-three were killed among those in the crowd and eight or twelve burned in the soviet.¹⁶⁸

As a Menshevik analyst observed: "Sometimes these spontaneous movements acquired a certain semi-religious character. In Klin the masses marched to the soviet in a semi-hysterical mood, singing, 'Christ is risen!'"¹⁶⁹ In Kostroma the mob cried: "Down with the

¹⁶⁵These telegrams were assembled by S. A. Sokolov in *Revolutsiia i khleb*, Saratov, 1967, p. 25.

¹⁶⁶E. G. Istomina, ed., *V. I. Lenin i Novgorodskaiia gubernia*, Leningrad, 1970, p. 79.

¹⁶⁷G. Kuchin, "Za nedel'iu," *Novaia zaria*, Moscow no. 3, May 1, 1918, p. 25; "Po tsentral'noi oblasti: v polose terrora," *Novaia zaria*, Moscow, no. 1, April 22, 1918, p. 35; *Les Echos de Russie*, Stockholm, no. 20/21, September 1, 1918, p. 22; "Pogrom soveta v Pavlovskom posade," *Delo naroda*, Petrograd, no. 42, May 15, 1918, p. 2.

¹⁶⁸"Besporiadki v Pavlovskom Posade," *Delo naroda*, Petrograd, no. 44, May 17, 1918, p. 4.

¹⁶⁹"Po tsentral'noi oblasti: v polose terrora," *Novaia zaria*, Moscow, no. 1, April 22, 1918, p. 35.

commissars! It used to be better under the Tsar!"¹⁷⁰ Rebellions of this kind were reported in Orekhovo-Zuevo, Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Vologda, Rybinsk, and other towns.¹⁷¹ The local Menshevik leaders panicked, seeing that the anti-Bolshevik movement could quickly turn into a movement against any soviets, socialists of any persuasion, and the Jews. The Menshevik nightmares were beginning to come true. They were astonished to discover that some of the same people who had been voting Bolshevik in November, Menshevik in March and April, would no longer want to vote for anyone in June, but only burn and kill. The Menshevik leaders in the CC were just as shocked and perplexed by these events as the local leaders. These outbursts of popular anger were repugnant to the Mensheviks, reminding them all too vividly of the excesses against the nobles a few months ago. Of course, some Mensheviks took consolation in the fact that this time the popular wrath was turning against the Bolsheviks. The Mensheviks had warned from the very beginning that the Bolshevik methods would discredit socialism in the eyes of the masses and lead to the worst type of counter-revolution. However, the "I-told-you-so" posture did not make it any easier to stomach these upheavals, which the Mensheviks simply could not fit into their notions of class struggle. The predominant mood in the party was one of alarm.

In the political process in Russia in 1918 there are three factors that emerge from the evidence presented here, and which I believe have been neglected by scholars. The first is the impressive success of the Menshevik-SR opposition in the soviet elections in all regions of European Russia. The second is the Bolshevik practice of outright disbandment of the Menshevik-SR-controlled soviets. The third is the subsequent wave of anti-Bolshevik uprisings. These factors reveal the fundamental changes that took place, during the first half of 1918, in the October political settlement. The election returns invite a reconsideration of the nature of social support in the country. The evidence on the disbandment of the soviets necessitates a re-examination of the process of institutionalization of the Bolshevik regime. The wave of anti-Bolshevik uprisings calls for a revised interpretation of the subsequent Menshevik policy.

There is ample evidence to suggest that by the summer of 1918, Bolshevism as a mass movement was in deep crisis. It is therefore necessary to take a second look at the allegiance of the Bolsheviks'

¹⁷⁰G. Kuchin, "Pod znakom goloda i narodnykh vosstaniï," *Novaya zaria*, Moscow, no. 5/6, June 10, 1918, p. 37.

¹⁷¹"Po tsentral'noi oblasti: v polose terrora," *Novaya zaria*, Moscow, no. 1, April 22, 1918, p. 35.

supporters at the end of 1917. It seems that as soon as the interests of the workers collided with the interests of the Bolshevik state, workers' "Bolshevism" to a large degree subsided. Haimson's conclusions on the social support for the Bolsheviks are based exclusively on the evidence of the election returns for October-November 1917. If, however, we follow the evolution of popular attitudes in the subsequent months, very different conclusions, based on the new evidence from the later elections, emerge.

The data presented here demonstrate that the Menshevik-SR bloc won the city soviet elections in 19 out of a total of 30 provincial capitals of European Russia where soviet power actually existed. It should be recalled that I did not include the capitals in this survey. Pskov province was occupied by the Germans; in Simbirsk, the ruling party and the opposition had parity; in two provinces (Novorossiisk, Novgorod) there were no elections; and for six provinces (Voronezh, Ufa, Perm', Astrakhan', Petrozavodsk, Smolensk) there are no data. Therefore, in all provincial capitals of European Russia where elections were held on which there are data, the Mensheviks and the SRs won the majorities in the city soviets in the spring of 1918.

The case studies of local politics presented here show that workers' concerns focused on everyday, down-to-earth problems: famine, unemployment, police brutality, and the threat of foreign intervention. Bolshevik socialism had proven to be much less desirable than the October slogans had given them to believe. Workers' euphoria over "immediate socialism" had given way to more sober thinking. The working class electorate then abandoned the ruling party and supported the opposition, as so often happens in many countries. These elections were held six months after the Bolsheviks had come to power and hence reflected the electorate's attitudes to Bolshevik rule, rather than to Bolshevik promises. The opposition parties offered their alternative solutions to the country's problems. There was no "paralyzing grip" on the life of the Mensheviks, as Haimson has suggested.¹⁷² On the contrary, they showed flexibility, resourcefulness, and responsiveness to the needs of their constituencies. The Mensheviks regained the workers' support and staged a remarkable political comeback in the spring of 1918.

In my judgment, the triumphal march of "soviet power" existed only in Lenin's rhetoric and in the imagination of his apologists. The cases of Tambov, Rostov, and Iaroslavl' demonstrate not only that the Mensheviks and SRs were much stronger than has generally been believed, but also that the local Bolsheviks who seized military control

¹⁷²Haimson, "The Mensheviks after the October Revolution," p. 205.

of the cities were not, for the most part, the instruments of Moscow. They seized this power for themselves, and they often resisted interference by the Moscow commissars.

It was not consolidation, but rather regionalism in local politics and fragmentation of central authority that prevailed in the spring and summer of 1918. In early 1918, the soviet assemblies were not yet "sounding boards" in the Bolshevik command structure; rather, they continued for a while to be popular revolutionary centers, without much power, that reflected the changing aspirations of the electorate.

The crucial question for the institutional development of the Soviet regime in early 1918 was whether the soviets would develop into centers of local self-government or would become local extensions of the Cheka. Several possibilities for political development were still open in early 1918. Neither the Moscow nor the local Bolsheviks had the manpower to govern the country. The personnel with the expertise to maintain the system of taxation, provisioning, and administration were to be found predominately among the moderate, democratic, intelligentsia.

The radicalized soldiers, who were the backbone of Bolshevik local "government," quickly lost social support and, with it, their capacity to maintain a grip on the cities. The heart of the matter was that the Mensheviks and SRs were winning the elections to the soviets in addition to retaining control of local trade unions and dumas. The process of the Menshevik-SR electoral victories threatened Bolshevik power. That is why in the course of the spring and summer of 1918, the soviet assemblies were disbanded in most cities and villages. To stay in power, the Bolsheviks had to destroy the soviets. Local authority was handed over to the ExComs, the Cheka, the military, and special emissaries with "unlimited dictatorial power." These steps generated a far-reaching transformation in the soviet system, which remained "soviet" in name only.

Dependent on help from Moscow, the local Bolshevik satraps did indeed, little by little, become "transmission belts" in the Bolshevik central apparatus. This transformation was, therefore, not determined by the contingencies of the Civil War, which was only beginning. Neither was this transformation predetermined by the Bolsheviks' Marxist ideology. The Mensheviks, their chief opponents in this period, were Marxists as well. Rather, I would argue that such a course of development in the soviet system was a direct consequence of the Bolsheviks' losing the soviets to the opposition. Perhaps the reason that the Mensheviks' political comeback remained largely unnoticed was that electoral politics did not last long, being followed by a full-scale civil war.

The experience of the local Menshevik organizations in various

parts of the country had a profound impact on the Menshevik mentality, attitudes, and subsequent policies. As we have seen, by the summer of 1918, the country was sliding into chaos. The Menshevik leadership had to re-examine the party policy in the aftermath of Bolshevik disbandment of the Menshevik-SR-led soviets, followed by uprisings, the overthrow of the Bolsheviks by the SRs or by the Whites, and violent, pogrom-type, anti-Bolshevik rebellions in smaller towns. The struggle against the Bolsheviks could no longer be waged within the framework of election campaigns. An answer had to be given to the question, What is to be done? Should the local organizations support the SR effort to overthrow the Bolsheviks in the name of the Constituent Assembly and of the restoration of democracy? Many of those local leaders in the Volga-Urals and even in the central provinces who had developed close ties with the SRs, having experienced expulsion from the soviets, arrests, and persecution, were willing to support the nascent SR government on the Volga. They argued that the party had committed itself to the principle of a Constituent Assembly in its election campaigns, and that after the Bolsheviks had virtually declared a war on the party, there was no other course than to join the SRs in their struggle. However, the SRs' cooperation with the officers, the White restoration on the Don and the rebellions against all socialists in small towns were the source of a contrary sentiment. The Mensheviks were frightened by the specter of counterrevolution. For the center-left Mensheviks of Martov's persuasion, the victory of the Whites signified the destruction, together with Bolshevism, of all that they thought had been achieved in February 1917. For this reason, the Bolsheviks were perceived as a lesser evil. They were a dictatorial party, but nevertheless one that recruited its supporters from the masses. These Social Democrats believed that after a period of turmoil and brief popularity of radicalist and maximalist parties, the Social Democrats would prevail. These leaders, who valued their well-established ties with the workers, argued that the aim of the party should rather be to organize its sizable workers' constituency for peaceful pressure on the Bolshevik regime to restore democracy. Many local Menshevik leaders, especially in large industrial cities, felt that Menshevik endorsement of armed struggle would only encourage the Bolsheviks to use military force to crush the party; that it would transform the political struggle into a military one, which would clearly work to the Bolsheviks' advantage, since they held state power and were more than willing to settle matters by armed force. After a protracted dispute in the CC, Martov and Dan's leadership explicitly banned armed struggle against the Bolsheviks. This decision, as we have seen, precipitated a split between the center-left Mensheviks and the right Mensheviks and SRs and paved the way for Martov's future

doctrine of a loyal, legal opposition to Bolshevism. Retrospectively, in view of what the Bolshevik regime developed into, Martov's doctrine of peaceful opposition to Bolshevism may seem to be naive, for the Bolsheviks would not tolerate any opposition. One may be tempted to conclude that the center-left Mensheviks, at least at that time, did not understand the nature of the Bolshevik dictatorship. But let us not forget that in July 1918, avenues for political change were not closed. Both the SRs and right Mensheviks and the center-left Mensheviks were convinced, for reasons mentioned above, that their way to oppose Bolshevism was more effective. The dilemmas that they had to resolve are still acute today.