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THE THIRD REVOLUTION
POPULAR MOVEMENTS IN THE REVOLUTIONARY ERA
VOLUME THREE

Murray Bookchin
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Preface

The *Third Revolution* has attempted to recount movements in which exploited classes attempted to regain achievements stolen from them by their putative revolutionary leaders. In England in the 1640s, toward the end of the Long Parliament, revolutionary troops marched on London; in the United States in the 1780s local democracies combated the creation of a central government. Such efforts also were made in France, from the Great Revolution of 1793 to the Paris Commune of 1871, and as we shall see in this volume, in the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917. Readers of the first two volumes will have noted that the phrase 'the third revolution' is not of my own making. It was raised during the French Revolution, under the Convention in 1793, and during the June uprising of the impoverished Parisians in June 1848; it was raised again, most stridently, by the 'Red Sailors' of Kronstadt in 1921.

The *democratic revolutions* discussed in the first two volumes were primarily focused on political changes, notably the liquidation of the feudal institutions and absolute monarchies, as well as on economic changes, such as the rise and consolidation of industrial capitalism, the more equitable distribution of land, and the abolition of a host of privileges accorded to members of the aristocracy. Despite these eighteenth- and nineteenth-century revolutions, much of the *ancien régime* remained to plague the twentieth century, especially quasi-feudal political and social privileges and military hierarchies. The outbreak of the First World War sparked the great revolutionary upheavals that made the first half of the twentieth century the most revolutionary era in history.

This volume focuses on the emergence of a new kind of revolution: *proletarian revolutions*. Eighteenth-century Americans borrowed republican ideas from the English, completing in a sense what the Levellers had started in the 1640s; the French in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries added a new dimension—socialistic economic ideas. The French came closest to a socialistic revolution in June 1848, but the Paris Commune of 1871 has
acquired the reputation of the first proletarian revolution in history—especially after Karl Marx tried to show that the Commune was a proletarian dictatorship (a characterization whose fallaciousness he admitted shortly before his death). After the Russian Revolution of October 1917, later insurrections tried to approximate a proletarian revolution as their loftiest ideal.

It has been one of my purposes to examine the doctrines of the revolutionary period and to try to show what was sound about them—and what was decidedly wrong. The pages that follow may be heterodox, but they are also, I hope, realistic. I regard the Bolshevik coup of 1917, for example, as an expression of European socialism. But the most workable set of revolutionary ideas for Russia that were available at the time were those of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, whose revolutionary populism best addressed the crisis in which post-February Russia found itself. If anything resembling socialism could have been devised to suit Russia in 1917–21, it was the program advanced by the Left SRs, not that of Lenin or Trotsky, let alone that of the ideological free-for-all outlook known as anarchism that plagued Petrograd and Moscow. Regrettably, the Left SRs and their program have received relatively little attention in the literature on Russia in 1917.

The fourth and final volume of this series, focusing on workers’ uprisings in Germany and Spain, will complete my account of proletarian revolutions.

First and foremost I acknowledge my enormous good fortune in having the aid of Janet Biehl, a superb editor, an author in her own right, and a devoted companion, who gave much of her free time and energy to correcting my manuscript and assiduously checking facts. These were no minor tasks. Janet spent the greater part of her free time over some four years helping me rewrite, clarify, and abridge a very complicated text, smoothing out difficult formulations that otherwise might have left the book accessible only to very knowledgeable readers of revolutionary history. Janet brought a fresh eye, a remarkable literary talent, and an extraordinary degree of patience to the continual insertions and rewrites of tangled events that ultimately made this book accessible to a general public. For her patience, insights, and editorial excellence, I cannot praise her enough.

R.V. Daniels showed great kindness in making available to me his recent books and papers on the Bolsheviks and the popular movement in the Russian Revolution.

I would like to thank Daniel Chodoroff, with whom I co-founded the Institute for Social Ecology in 1973, for thirty years of close friendship, collegiality and many stimulating discussions. Thanks also to Chaya Heller, whose insights and theoretical abilities inspire in me hope for the coming generation. Brooke Lehman and Betsy Chodoroff generously provided me with practical means for dealing with physical infirmities that greatly helped me to write and conduct research. Their friendship and support have been invaluable to me.

I am grateful to Wesley Eldred and June Troyah of the Bailey-Howe Library at the University of Vermont for providing me with indispensable scholarly texts. Through the Interlibrary Loan system, Fred G. Hill of the Fletcher Free Library in Burlington made available to me literature from research libraries in North America and Europe to which I otherwise would not have had access. I am deeply grateful for his efforts in this regard.

I do not profess to have written a work of advanced scholarship. The Third Revolution is intended more for the general reader than for the specialist. But it makes accessible scholarly research that is too often found only within the walls of academia, and in its exposition of the popular movements in the revolutionary era, I am willing to affirm that it is unique.

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CHAPTER 36  The Awakening of Russia

It is one of history's remarkable paradoxes that the most schematic, sophisticated, and revolutionary interpretation of Marxism—a theory born of the Western Enlightenment and the French Revolution—established its deepest roots in the Russian empire, a sprawling landmass whose traditions and social role in European affairs made it a reactionary exemplar of Asian despotism. By comparison with England, which by the mid-nineteenth century was the most industrialized and politically free country in Europe, Russia had barely emerged technologically from the medieval world. This formless continental entity, populated overwhelmingly by an illiterate and largely enserfed peasantry (many of whom lived as little more than chattel slaves), was saddled with a 'divinely' ordained autocracy and a clerical hierarchy modeled on reactionary Eastern Orthodoxy; it was steeped in superstition and a parochially narrow outlook.

This system was the product of a long, impoverished history that saw centuries of cruel defeats of popular aspirations. Unenviably situated between the urban West and the pastoral steppelands to the East, the Slavic Rus was buffeted between two antithetical worlds. For centuries the influence of Central Asia reduced inchoate Russia to a tributary of the Tartar and Mongol khanates. Nor was the Rus free of internecine warfare: city fought city and prince fought prince, partly for treasure and power, partly in self-defense. The physiography of this vast, often frozen land worked against the creation of a flourishing society. Even the soils of that Eurasian grassland seemed suitable mainly for pasturage and warlike nomadism. Russia's greatest poet, Pushkin, once asked, 'What kind of society could be created out of the saddle of a nomad's horse?' Only the southern belt of the great plain with its loess 'black earth' or chernozem soil provided a good environment for intensive agriculture. Otherwise, every component of the physical environment seemed an obstacle to settlement and stability: bitter arctic winds that swept down from the north, huge snowfalls, and short growing seasons even in the black earth regions.

The very disposition of the landmass created the need for the emerging Rus to expand if it was to survive enemy attacks: hence it was either being besieged or was trying to besiege and devour its neighboring states. The nomadic Tartars and Mongols, who periodically united into powerful armies, demanded that cities and towns provide them with booty and regular tribute, and murdered princes who were unwilling to debase themselves in supplication. Rebellious populations were simply enslaved or exterminated. Subject Russian princes were schooled in the arts of obedience—arts that they learned to inculcate in their own people. What seemed to many foreign observers like inborn stoicism among Russian peasants, or a quietist 'Slavic soul' and 'Asiatic' resignation, actually stemmed from intractable social domination. During the First World War, when Nicholas II's German wife, the Tsarina Alexandra, remarked that Russians loved to feel the knout, she echoed a judgement that nearly all of the empire's rulers had held for centuries.

Finally, after successive centuries of expansion, the Russian empire came into existence, stretching from the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea to the western shores of the Pacific Ocean. The empire encompassed a large number of non-Slavic peoples and cultures, all with different religions, languages, traditions, and even levels of social development. Holding such a sprawling and diffuse empire together required a state of commanding and centralized authority, with a military power, a bureaucracy, and the concerted application of the means of terror. Fear was a sine qua non for its very existence. To outsiders and visitors, the structure of the imperial state seemed highly stable and entrenched. But the internal Slavic heartland of the empire was by no means a unified whole. Russia was sharply divided along class lines. The two most important social classes—the peasantry and the gentry, including a bureaucratic nobility that administered the empire—lived in completely different cultural, material, and even traditional worlds. Over several centuries a once-free class of farmers had been degraded into poverty-stricken peasants and a large number enserfed, indeed reduced to virtual chattel slavery. This immense oppressed agrarian class constituted more than 90 per cent of the population in late imperial times. More than half of its members were serfs of individual masters and of the Church, living in villages on the manorial estates of the gentry or of monasteries. Most of the remainder were 'state'-controlled peasants, working the vast estates and newly conquered lands controlled by the monarchy. The world of the gentry was far removed from that of the exploited tillers of the soil—indeed, most well-to-do landowners spent the long Russian winters in their city mansions, leaving the management of their estates to unscrupulous supervisors.
RUSSIA'S PARADOXES

History, however, is replete with turning points and unfulfilled possibilities. A freer and more enlightened Russia might well have emerged, had its internal development not been tammeled by outside invaders. During the middle of the eleventh century, Kiev could have become to European Russia what Paris was to France. Like the nearby cities of Suzdal, Vladimir, and Gallich, this city on the Dnieper was notable for its vibrant spirit of progress and even freedom. Kiev's wealth was based principally on agriculture, but in striking contrast to Western Europe, Kiev and its neighbors had no real feudal system. To be sure, serfdom, growing out of the indebtedness of the peasants to moneylenders, was beginning to appear, and slaves, composed mainly of prisoners of war, were a continual presence. But even landless workers, who were obliged to sell their labor to the gentry, enjoyed the same political rights as the more pecuniary Kievan. Most of Kiev's food cultivators were free and independent farmers (serfs) who owned their own homes, land, implements, and animals.

Moreover, the city was a commercial center as early as the fifth century and flourished both economically and culturally, reaching its zenith in the eleventh. Its eight marketplaces, teeming with wares from as far away as Constantinople, made Kiev one of the most worldy cities in northern Europe. Like its neighboring cities, Kiev was run not merely by a prince but by a citizens' assembly or vechet composed of all free men. The powers of the nobles and princes were limited by a legal code that carefully defined their powers. These neighboring cities joined together in the tenth century to form a loose federation of city-states, known as the Kievan Rus, nominally led by the grand prince of Kiev.

Whether this way of life could have persisted and expanded throughout Slavic Russia must remain a matter of conjecture, for it came to a sudden and untimely end. In 1199 the city was sacked by rival princes, and in 1240 it was overrun by Tartar and Mongol nomads; Kievan democracy as well as independence came to an early end. As the Kievan federation fell, the southern Rus atrophied economically and culturally, its cities shriveling in size and its roads falling into ruin.

The decline of Kiev and its federation shifted the center of political gravity in free Russia northward to Novgorod and its dependency, Pskov. These two cities were protected from Mongol occupation by forests and swamps and hence retained their ancient democratic vechet well into the fifteenth century, leaving their political life vibrantly free. At its height in the fourteenth century, Novgorod had a population of 30,000, many of whose members were foreign merchants; indeed, after it became fairly large, the city was not self-sufficient agriculturally and depended upon trade for its existence. As part of the great Baltic commercial market, Novgorod carried on a vigorous trade with German, Lithuanian, and Swedish cities—indeed, members of the Hanseatic League maintained semi-independent quarters in Novgorod.

Novgorod's vechet was based on its component five wards (formerly five independent satellite towns), each of which retained its own local vechet, council, and administrative officials. Each ward, in turn, was divided into hundreds, which were then combined to form streets. 'Throughout the system,' as Bernard Pares tells us, 'ran the same principles of local self-government.' Eventually, to be sure, Novgorod developed a complex hierarchy of social classes, and the nobility gained considerable de facto power. But until that happened, as Michael T. Florinsky observes, the vechet functioned remarkably democratically.

The vechet was the institution through which the urban populace expressed its will and took part in public affairs. ... It was an assembly of the adult male population of the cities and their dependencies. There were no franchise requirements and no fixed rules of procedure. The vechet could be summoned either by the prince or by a high officer ... or by any citizen. Its decision was required on every occasion when the prince was in need of effective popular support, for instance, in the declaration of war. ... Cruel, ruthless, passionate, anarchistic, and often bloody as they were, the meetings of the vechet, it was the nearest approach to a democratic institution Russia has ever experienced.

In the earlier days of Novgorod's democracy, the vechet could be convened by anyone who simply rang the great vechet bell in the town hall. But differences among various factions in the assembly, especially those based on differing class interests, led to conflicts that could be settled only by sheer muscle power and bludgeons: the groups met on the bridge over the Volkhost River, which bisected the city, and attacked one another in a wild free-for-all, each group trying to throw its foes into the river. Such battles, presumably conducted to achieve the traditional unanimity that was expected in early Russian village assemblies, could become so bitter that the city's archbishop and clergy, clothed in full church vestments and raising religious banners and icons, would intervene to bring the fighting to an end.

The general vechet, however, had virtually unlimited powers. It could invite, replace, or simply dismiss ruling princes and even select the archbishop. It could decide on all momentous issues from declarations of war and the mobilization of troops to the imposition of taxes. Novgorod's judicial system, based on juries and mediation, was notable for its mildness and humaneness (in contrast to its vechet), with minimal if any recourse to torture. This feature
alone distinguished it from nearly all cities of that era, Western and Russian alike. But following the city's annexation by Ivan III in 1477, the coup de grâce to Novgorod's democracy was delivered in 1570 by Ivan IV, who deported the city's upper classes to Muscovy and slaughtered thousands of its ordinary citizens. After this bloody conquest, Novgorod faded into a gray provincial town, never to recover its brilliant status.

Nearby Pskov, whose population was far less differentiated by class than Novgorod's, remained a flourishing democracy up to the time of its takeover by Muscovy. Unfortunately, and perhaps unavoidably, most of the relatively free Slavic city-states that were not immediately subjugated to nomad invaders fell into internal discord owing to the development of privileged and antagonistic classes. The conflict between the haves and have-nots within most of the free cities, in large part a product of material scarcity, led to their internal social stratification. As power was concentrated into the hands of privileged classes, civic life became increasingly demoralized. In a world perpetually threatened by invasion from Tartar, Mongol, and Turkic nomads, by the imperialism of despotic city-states from the south, and by rapacious states from the west, any effort to retain urban levels of material egalitarianism would have required a much higher technological level and a much greater abundance of goods than was possible at the time.

But in their heyday the free cities of northwestern Russia were in close contact with Europe, and the Hansa towns carried on a steady economic and cultural exchange with Russian communities near the Baltic Sea. Not only were these Russian communities nourished by Western trade, they also imbibed many of the West's cultural traditions, including elements that would later give rise to the more politically vigorous European city-states. Had Russia been able to retain its Novgorodian traditions, drive back the nomads, and keep its face turned toward the West, it might well have flourished like the freest and most advanced cities of Europe.

But history and reality were to dictate otherwise. Although the marshlands and forests of northwestern Russia prevented the Mongol 'golden horde' from sacking Novgorod and its satellite cities, the great nomadic invasions swept over most of European Russia. Significantly, Mongols also occupied Moscow, deeply imprinting the experience of despotism into that city's consciousness and traditions. Mongol rule, a debasing system of sovereignty resting on tribute and fear, lasted for more than two centuries. When Ivan III, the Grand Duke of Muscovy (who was profoundly influenced by his Byzantine wife, Sophia), finally created an independent state in the heartland of European Russia, he also swallowed up the cities that lay within the reach of his armies and governed them along highly despotic Byzantine lines. Thus at a time when the Renaissance was well under way in Western Europe, Russia was being absorbed by the autocratic Muscovite tsars—and became a thoroughly despotic nation. With the ascent of Ivan IV ('the Terrible') in 1547, the sovereign of Muscovy was crowned Tsar ('Caesar') instead of prince of 'all Russia'. This autocracy—with its double-headed eagle and the title of tsar—was modeled more on Byzantium, whose caesars had perfected their own autocracy over the centuries, than on the Mongols and Tatars, whose khansates were basically unstable and comparatively short-lived.

As Leo Tolstoy lamented in the nineteenth century, expressing the lingering dreams of Russia's progressive thinkers:

One Rus has its roots in universal, or at least in European culture. In this Rus the ideas of good and honor and freedom are understood as in the West. But there is another Rus: the Rus of the dark forests, the Rus of the Taiga, the animal Russia, the fanatical Russia, the Mongol-Tatar Russia. This last Russia made despotism and fanaticism its ideal. . . . Kiev Rus was a part of Europe; Moscow long remained the negation of Europe.3

Although Russia was undergoing great changes by Tolstoy's time, the empire still had little to show but a lagging industry, severe repression of political and religious dissidents, and gnawing poverty. Save for a grossly privileged, generally ennobled elite whose French-speaking members, from the eighteenth century onward, barely knew their own native language, and whose provincial gentry in the far reaches of the land still believed in ghosts and witches—Russia could justly be regarded as a social and cultural backwater. While London under Queen Victoria was comparable only to Paris as an urban civilization, St Petersburg, the new, seemingly Western capital built by Peter I (the Great) in 1703, and particularly Moscow, traditionally viewed as the Slavic capital of Asia, were primarily administrative and imperial centers that kept a great variety of people in shackles under the suffocating tyranny imposed by Nicholas I.

Yet England, with its relatively large industrial proletariat, its commitment to progress, and its claims to the ideals of freedom, remained largely impervious to Marx's proletarian socialism; it was to be despotic Russia, with its largely illiterate peasant population, its artisans, its culturally and socially regressive features, and its reverence for a brutal, paternalistic autocrat (regarded by his most oppressed subjects as the 'little father'), which spawned the only Marxist movement that was to make a successful revolution in the name of the proletariat.

Even the most enigmatic of paradoxes, however, can be accounted for to some extent. Russia had entered the nineteenth century as a victorious power over an otherwise undefeated Napoleon and, with its massive serf army and
backward autocracy, saddled itself on Europe as, in Marx's phrase, 'the last great reserve of European reaction'. This 'great reserve' was the product not only of the empire's vastness—it constituted one-sixth of the earth's land area and could easily have absorbed the North American continent—and its relatively large population, which formed a huge human reservoir for military repression; it was the product of a long, impoverished history that chronicled endless defeats of popular attempts to rise above an animalistic level of existence. For centuries it was closed to the culture of the Western world, and failed on its own to develop ideals of individual worth, free expression, and the most elementary concerns for human well-being.

Even the internal Slavic heartland of the empire failed to congeal into a unified whole. Aside from the mutual hatred that it oppressed nationalities felt for one another, Russian national entities were also sharply divided along class lines. The two most important social classes—the peasantry and the gentry, including a bureaucratic nobility that administered the empire—lived in completely different cultural, material, and even traditional settings. Over several turbulent centuries a once-free class of farmers had been degraded to poverty-stricken peasants, including a large number of serfs who were reduced to virtual chattel slavery.

This immense oppressed agrarian class constituted more than 90 per cent of the population in late imperial times. Yet more than half of its members were serfs of individual masters and of the Church, living in generally pitiful villages on the manorial estates of the gentry or of monasteries. Most of the remainder were 'state'-controlled peasants, working the vast estates and newly conquered lands controlled by the monarchy. The world of the gentry was far removed from that of the exploited tillers of the soil—indeed, most well-to-do landowners spent the long Russian winters in their city mansions, trying to emulate their more sophisticated counterparts in the West, while leaving the management of their estates to notoriously unscrupulous supervisors. The *barin*, as a member of the gentry was known to his serfs, barely took notice of the village—the *mir* or *obschchina*, as it was called interchangeably—until the nineteenth century, when young intellectuals began to study its collectivist values as a key to the moral and social uniqueness of Russia by comparison with the more individualistic rural West.

In the seventeenth century, the gentry—at least that prestigious segment known as nobles, who also owned the largest private tracts of land and were close to the imperial and provincial courts—began to cultivate Western aristocratic manners, dress, languages, and lifestyles, due in no small measure to the demands of Peter I, Russia's major regal Europeanizer. This enterprise served only to deepen the empire's dichotomies. The nobility was hierarchical in its outlook, holding a pyramidal view of society as a system of command and obedience. The peasantry, by contrast, had an egalitarian outlook and saw the world in terms of complementary relationships in which each household deserved to receive its fair share of land based on need rather than status. Thus, to the nobility, social ties were 'held together by subordination', while to the peasantry, they were 'held together by mutual responsibility'. Moreover, the nobility, with its new European ways and its appetite for city living, tended to be cosmopolitan, while the peasantry, virtually boxed into its scattered villages, was devoutly parochial. The gentry was 'oriented to state service', to the extent that it was oriented toward any form of service at all. The peasantry, by contrast, was 'oriented to survival', and viewed any external attempt to control the village as morally demonic. Finally, the gentry viewed land as private property, whether it had been acquired by inheritance, robbery, or as a gift from the tsar. The peasantry, in very sharp contrast, regarded land as a communal resource that 'belonged to God' (a typical Russian peasant aphorism) and could not be truly owned by any individual.

This ensemble of peasant ideas—egalitarianism, mutual responsibility, and communalism—was expressed in the village concept of *volja* or 'freedom' (a word that can also be translated as 'will'). In part, it can be traced back to the Cossack frontier spirit of personal liberty in a free-wheeling egalitarian community and included a communal commitment of villagers periodically to redistribute the rich dark soil of central Russia and the Ukraine to meet the changing needs of peasant households—the legendary *chernyi peredel*, or 'black redistribution'.

This peasant view of a 'God-owned' land—so markedly different from the highly proprietarian attitudes that eventually developed in the French peasantry—shaped the outlook of Russia's rural masses. The peasant ideal of *volja*, reinforced by the *chernyi peredel*, turned land 'ownership' into a form of public usufruct based on need rather than individual property. Moreover, owing to the traditional three-field system of rotation, which required that a third of all village land be kept fallow for a year to renew its fertility, and to strip systems of farming, the Russian peasant necessarily had to develop collectivist values. Without broad agreement within the village about how land was to be divided among households, sown, harvested, and in the case of meadows and woodlands, shared for the common good—peasant agriculture would simply have collapsed. These village collectivist values and practices, part of the peasant's vision of *volja*, were later pitted against the *barin*'s decidedly proprietarian values and practices—deepening the contradictions that already separated the *barin*'s domain from the peasants and, together with invasions from abroad, making Russia a cauldron of social unrest.

The paradoxes that distinguished the tsarist empire from the nations of the West were not mere curiosities. In time they mutated into explosive social
contradictions that made Russia tremble and laid the basis for rebellions and revolutions that brought it onto the stage of world history. Not only did serfdom remain a blight on Russian society, even after it was brought to an imperfect end in 1861, but the issue of whether to provide the peasantry with sufficient land to make it into a prosperous middle-class yeomanry persisted into the twentieth century. Moreover, the conflicting trajectories followed by revolutionary movements in Russia are impossible to understand without exploring the various views held by the radical intelligentsia on the nature of village democracy and especially the 'black redistribution'. Indeed, one of Russia's earliest revolutionary organizations took the name Chernyi Peredel, in order to express the most prized feature of the peasantry's vision of volya.

RAZIN AND PUGACHEV

In contrast to Europe, where serfdom had emerged slowly and organically, in Russia it was consciously created in the sixteenth century, notably in Muscovy, whence it spread to the central 'black earth' region. During the reign of Ivan IV, the state made a determined effort to anchor Russian peasants in specific landholdings in order to prevent them from fleeing into the wilder and underpopulated regions conquered by the monarchy. Under Ivan the legal migration of free peasants to new territories was abolished, confining them permanently to their original home districts.

During the stormy 'Time of Troubles' between 1604 and 1613, peasant rebellions shook the autocracy to its very foundations, and its reaction was to further enserf Russia's peasants. Among the many uprisings of the time, the rebellion led by Ivan Bolotnikov in the south was the most conspicuous and, for the authorities, the most frightening. In 1606, this runaway slave, preaching a message of violent expropriation of the rich by the poor, managed to rally to his standard the serfs, discontented peasants, fugitives, slaves, and numerous displaced vagabonds of the south. This motley army reached as far as the gates of Moscow before it was checked by the disciplined troops of the monarchy. Two years after Bolotnikov's rebellion, another army composed of Cossacks and Bolotnikov's scattered followers again rose up but was again brutally defeated. The country remained in a state of continual upheaval, which ultimately degenerated into dynastic conflicts within the ruling strata itself, until in 1613 it settled down under Michael Romanov, founder of the ruling dynasty that bore his name.

Although Cossack bands continued to roam the land and uprisings by peasants, serfs, and slaves were endemic, they presented no major threat to the autocracy until the legendary uprising of the Don Cossack Stenka Razin in 1670. Razin, a hard-drinking warrior cut in a heroic if barbarous Russian mold, managed to rally every oppressed and militiamen segment of the population around his standard, from native tribesmen to peasants, serfs, slaves, and wild Cossack adventurers of the Volga region. But despite its great numbers, this riotous and undisciplined armed force again could not prevail over the highly trained and disciplined regiments that were sent against it. Defeated within a year by the much smaller but professional troops of Prince Bariatinsky, Razin, whose revolt had been directed not against the tsar but against the nobility—was delivered over to the crown by conservative Cossacks of his own Don region and executed. According to Florinsky, Razin's uprising:

was typical of the Russian revolutionary movement in the seventeenth century. Spontaneous, violent, anarchistic and savage, it never succeeded in exploiting its initial success, and in spite of the support of the masses invariably collapsed when confronted with organized resistance. Brief as was the career of Stenka Razin, he became the central figure of a popular epic, and his exploits, largely imaginary, are celebrated in songs still heard in Russia.6

If anything, the Razin-type myth that a disorganized but fervent mass rebellion could conquer almost any force sent against it nourished a costly reverence for pure popular spontaneity over organized struggle. In later times this myth would become an article of dogmatic belief among intellectuals who hypothesized the 'revolutionary instinct' of the people over the need for concerted, coherent, and well-organized attempts to overthrow an oppressive state.

In response to these elemental uprisings, the monarchy, far from mitigating the lot of the peasantry, intensified its severity. In 1649 it created a new body of laws—the Ulozhenyi—that streamlined the government and ruthlessly imposed serfdom on the entire Russian heartland. To the extent that Russian serfs were provided with an ideological justification for their ever-harder exploitation, it was the widespread notion that the nobility needed their labor so that it could freely discharge its obligations as servants of the state and the tsar. But this old pretension evaporated in 1762 when the 'social contract' between the nobility and the monarchy was jettisoned by Peter III, who issued a manifesto removing all governmental service obligations from the landed estate. As Donald Mackenzie Wallace observes:

According to strict justice this act ought to have been followed by the liberation of the serfs, for if the nobles were no longer obliged to serve the State they had no just claim to the services of the peasants. The
Government had so completely forgotten the original meaning of serfage that it never thought of carrying out the measure to its logical consequences, but the peasantry held tenaciously to the ancient conceptions, and looked impatiently for a second manifesto liberating them from the power of the proprietors.7

Amid the unrest that followed the proclamation of the tsar's manifesto, Peter was murdered in a palace coup that placed his wife, Catherine II ('the Great'), on the throne. Even after Peter's assassination, however, a myth spread throughout the countryside that the late monarch was still alive, hiding from the nobility, and was eager to free the serfs once he could regain his throne.

In 1773 Peter's alleged mantle as advocate for the serfs was taken up by the Don Cossack Emilian Pugachev, who rode into Russian history once again at the head of an army of slaves, serfs, Tartars, and Cossacks—this time armed with weapons and artillery produced by a new breed of serf factory workers. The pugachevshchina, as the movement was called, spread throughout the southern and central parts of European Russia, leaving in its wake massacred gentry, priests, and smoldering manors. Pugachev undoubtedly had the sympathy of the majority of serfs and oppressed nationalities who knew about the uprising. But again lacking careful organization and faced with trained armies, the uprising had little more chance of success than its predecessors. Pugachev's forces were decisively defeated near Tsartyn, and this 'false Peter' was turned over to Catherine again by conservative Cossacks and executed in the capital. Fears of a recurrence of such Cossack-led uprisings were to haunt the upper and even the growing middle classes of Russia until well into the twentieth century. To the revolutionary intelligentsia, however, it was an inspiration.

Catherine was so unnerved by the pugachevshchina and later the French Revolution that she abandoned any pretensions to being an 'enlightened despot' and firmly up her alliance with the reactionary gentry. In her Charter to the Nobility of 1785, the empress (to use the designation of Russian monarchs introduced by Peter I) granted the gentry enormous power in local affairs and allowed landowners to exploit their serfs with implacable ruthlessness. Short of taking their lives, Catherine permitted landlords to treat serfs as chattels. They could be flogged, exiled to hard labor, bought and sold as individuals, given as gifts—in short, used and exchanged as commodities—with impunity. From 'peasants' or 'subjects', they were demoted to mere 'souls', and it is no small matter that, for imperial tax purposes, the property of a landowner was estimated not in terms of his income or his acreage but in terms of the number of 'souls' he owned.

While the monarchy adopted the maxim 'Autocracy, Orthodoxy, Nation', however, the sons of Russia's nobility after Waterloo were returning from France to their estates filled with ideas of the French Enlightenment and the Great Revolution. Particularly in 1812 Russia's rulers were deeply at odds with this new progressive stratum. As Count Semyon Vorontzov, the Russian ambassador to Britain, wrote to his brother in 1792, a war to the death between the haves and the have-nots was sweeping the world, and he presciently warned, 'Our turn, too, will come.'8

THE PEASANT WORLD

At a time when the industrial revolution was getting under way in the West, Russian social life was dominated by a countryside that was based on a seemingly ancient system of domestic and economic collectivism—the obshchina, or village land commune. The origins of the obshchina remain a subject of considerable debate among historians and social anthropologists. For much of the nineteenth century it was often sentimentally regarded as an ancient collectivist institution that dated back to the very beginnings of food cultivation by the Slavs and other peoples, when all land and goods were ostensibly held in common. More recent research, however, places a strong emphasis on the role that the monarchy, particularly Peter I, played in economically solidifying the Russian village as a stable community reservoir to facilitate tax collection and military conscription.

Male villagers of all ages, even married men with their own families and children—and certainly all unmarried daughters—usually occupied the same paternal household if practicable, pooling their earnings into a common fund from which each adult was allotted what he or she needed by a presiding male, usually a grandfather or at least the oldest father in the family.

3 The Russian words that denote the village world—mirk and obshchina—are commonly translated as the participial or redistributial 'land commune'. According to Dorothy Atkinson, historians have generally employed the term used by educated society for the modern redistributial commune, obshchina, to refer to communes at any point in the past... The peasants, in contrast, used a more familiar and older term, mir, to refer to a rural community sharing the use of some land. In the peasants' construction, mir could be applied to communities observing either communal or hereditary tenure, since the community was understood primarily as a collectivity unified in the assembly of household heads. Dorothy Atkinson, The End of the Russian Land Commune, 1905–1930 (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1983), p. 5.
Even more striking than this household collectivism was the Russian village's collectivist manner of allocating land. Villages commonly redistributed their land allotments according to the needs of individual households, or as the peasants commonly put it, according to the number of 'eaters' or 'workers' in each household. The actual redistribution of the village's land was usually undertaken by an assembly, or skhod, of all adult householders or, in larger villages, their elected representatives. Land redistribution was by no means the skhod's only function: it also elected the village starosta or 'elder' who guided the assembly through its meetings and acted as the village's spokesman in relations with the landlord, his steward, and government officials. But the fair distribution of land was often the skhod's most important function, especially in the black earth region of central Russia, where the redistributinal obshchina* was almost ubiquitous.

According to the moral precepts of the Russian peasant, it was profoundly wrong to appropriate land as private hereditary property. Worse still, it was sinful for land to become a form of capital, stored up acquisitively for mere gain and used as a source of prestige and power. The ordinary peasant looked with often bitter hostility at the gentry and well-to-do individualistic peasants who legally owned land as a form of wealth, to be bought, accumulated, or sold as a commodity. Excessive wealth, even the modest wealth possible in the Russian village world, was viewed as a moral defilement and as unchristian greed. Indeed, it was fervently believed that it was an affront to morality and godliness for the deserving and the needy to have too little land to satisfy the family's needs, while the undeserving and affluent had too much. The Russian peasant, in effect, was an ingrained leveller.

Holding on to money and goods for their own sake was considered perverse, even antisocial. Indeed, under conditions of volyà such as God intended for his children (they commonly believed), all would be equal and well provided for in a collectivist social arrangement marked by sharing. A peasant who experienced any stroke of good fortune—be it a lucky windfall, a happy event, or a deserved acquisition of goods—often invited his comrades, indeed the entire village, to share his luck in the local tavern and engage in binges of vodka drinking. This behavior was a form of material disaccumulation: it was regarded as inappropriate not to share one's good fortune with the community as a whole. The dispensers of things on one occasion might well be needy on another occasion and have to rely on the village's spirit of material benefi-

* To avoid confusion, I shall use the term obshchina to refer to the Russian village that manages its affairs by an assembly of household heads and redistributes its land collectively, since this is the word that most often appeared in the Russian revolutionary literature of the nineteenth century.

cence. Who could tell, in that small and uncertain village society, when today's dispenser of drinks and food would be tomorrow's unfortunate who needed all the assistance he could get?

While thrift and shrewd bargaining were certainly respected, miserliness and hoarding were viewed with extreme contempt. To be carelessly generous and thoughtlessly to spend any surplus income was seen, almost intuitively, as a communal act that won favor rather than disdain. Olga Semyonova Tianshanskaya's personal and detailed account of peasant life in the 1890s provides us with a valuable picture of the values of that world:

You might say that peasants never have any money. . . . Your average peasant is not used to having extra cash around, and so he quickly drinks up what little extra money has come his way. . . . Peasants believe that it is a sin to pile up money. Savings are just one more stone around a sinner's neck.\textsuperscript{9}

She also points out:

Peasants regard 'capital' [money] as more precarious than land; it can slip from your hands much faster because of the temptation to which it exposes its owner. One of the most deep-rooted and firm convictions among peasants is that one day all the land will become theirs.\textsuperscript{10}

This future equitable redistribution of land would be an almost millenarian occurrence that would transform Russia morally as well as materially, and would, it was generally believed, indeed constitute the fulfillment of God's own will for a truly moral human condition.

To survive in their harsh environment, the peasants' extremely primitive agricultural methods (including the three-field system of land rotation), and the terrible warfare that descended from time to time—as well as the chronic war that the Russian ruling classes waged against the peasant in the form of exploitation—a well-knit collectivity was patently indispensable. The peasant dully needed not only the material resources to survive the impacts inflicted on him by the natural world and by an inequitable society; he also needed the collective cushion that mutual aid and simple sharing among his fellows afforded him. His collectivism was the product not only of traditional ideals but, above all, unrelenting necessity. In addition, he clung to the powerful and enduring myth that the tsar was his true friend, his devoted 'father', who was kept uninformed of the sufferings of his 'children' by the aversive gentry and the bureaucracy. This illusion persisted well into the twentieth century and frustrated the populists for several generations after the founding of the narodnik or populist movement.
Equally important for sustaining this naive outlook were the advantages provided by custom and tradition. Having been abused for centuries and forced to use all his cunning merely to survive, the Russian peasant naturally fell back on long-tested strategies for avoiding danger. Respect for elders understandably stemmed from their experience and a large repertoire of orally transmitted knowledge. Hence the Russian peasant was extremely conservative—he was not prone to be experimental, or to take inordinate risks, still less seize upon new ideas. And when faced with a problem that was beyond his personal capacity to solve, he took refuge in the large collectivity of his household, just as his household took refuge in the larger collectivity of the obshchina.

Until 1861, the obshchina was the serf's fortress against the outside world, whose cultural walls could be breached only by the landed nobility and the state. Those walls not only protected but also enclosed him. The obshchina contained the crucial institutions that were needed to stabilize life on Russia's vast open plain. The institutional power of the obshchina reposed in the s kho d, which often met on demand to settle local disputes or problems, to collect taxes and select conscripts (initially inducted into the army for 25 years, later ten), even to address the minutiae of family and personal quarrels. Its primary economic function, however, was to maintain a rough form of material equality, notably by caring for impoverished and infirm peasants where needed and, most significantly, by the redistribution of village land.

**THE CHERNYI PEREDEL**

How was the chernyi peredel, or 'black [soil] redistribution', conducted? To begin with, it was carried out within certain parameters that involved not only the quantity of land that was redistributed as new needs arose but also its productive quality. Garden plots of individual households were regarded as inviolable; they could not be factored into a local chernyi peredel but were handed down within the same household for generations. But where communal lands were fairly sizable, the obshchina made every attempt to redivide land not only to meet the number of 'eaters' or workers that existed in each household but in such a way that poor, medium, and good-quality land was shared equitably. To achieve this goal, the s kho d had to consider the quality of a tract as well as its quantity. Accordingly, poor, medium, and productive land was divided into strips, which were allocated to the village's households in sufficient number and quality to meet their needs in a fair manner.

However much this system of distribution satisfied the demand for equity, it was highly regressive agriculturally. To cultivate their allotments, household members had to waste their time traveling at some distance from one strip to another. Moreover, the narrow strips could not be plowed, seeded, and harvested without collectively arriving at predetermined schedules in order to interfere minimally with an adjacent family strip. Strip farming, as well as the three-field system of land rotation, thus held back modern agricultural advances well into the twentieth century, although it reinforced the collectivist nature of peasant life and values.

The s kho d, which undertook the actual redistribution, varied in size according to the population of the village. If households were few, the s kho d might be conducted indoors, in the starosta's house. Such proceedings were relatively informal and were closely supervised by leading villagers who saw to the propriety of the meetings. Where the obshchina was large, the s kho d meetings were best conducted out-of-doors in hopefully clement weather, often near the local church or another public building.

A group composed of the most respected individuals in the obshchina would initiate the discussion of the problem that had brought the community together. They discussed it quite openly, under the watchful eyes of everyone in the assembly. At length, when a conclusion to their discussion seemed at hand, the village starosta might formally bring the issue before the entire assembly. Vocal members of the assembly could be expected to pose queries, others to provide answers, and if the discussion drifted off the point, the starosta would call the assembly back to order again.

Finally, after everyone had talked himself (or herself) out, either a majority opinion or consensus would be reached. If the assembly was divided, the starosta simply asked supporters or opponents of a solution to stand to his left or his right, so that a head count could be made if necessary. Often everyone in the obshchina was free to attend the s kho d—children, young men, and women who were obviously not household heads—but only the heads of households could participate in discussions and decision-making. The assembly's decisions normally had a finality that commanded general respect. As the peasant proverb had it: the decision of the obshchina (usually the peasant used the word mir) was 'law' or 'sacred' and had to be obeyed—a responsibility that was usually honored with little reservation.

This village democracy, which was lauded by Western visitors as well as by Russian observers, varied from place to place in many details. The s kho d and especially its powers to redistribute land were commonly condemned as oligarchic in practice, as well as an impediment to Russia's agricultural progress. A starosta might be very high-handed, or well-to-do peasants might cunningly skew the s kho d's decision to suit their interests at the expense of their poorer neighbors. But most peasant villages, in fact, generally followed the form of the
assembly meeting just described. More recent descriptions of the obshchina
tend to be sympathetic to the shtod and see it as an impressive example of
village democracy.

Numerous as were their differences, the greatest single difference among
villages turned around the manner and extent to which land was redistributed.
In Siberia and in regions that were non-Russian or free from tight imperial
control—notably Finnish and some Baltic, Polish, Tartar, and Cossack areas—
the authority of the village to redistribute land was either weak or had never
been established. The chernyi perekrest was most commonly practiced in the
huge central region—the black earth belt of highly fertile soil. Within Russia
proper, this region extended from roughly the Black Sea north to Kiev and
northeast to the Urals and into western Siberia.

In this central and southeastern black earth region the redistribution of land
was most prevalent. Before serfdom was abolished in 1861, the highest
percentage of privately owned serfs (at least 60 per cent and often substantially
more) lived in southwestern Russia, between the Sea of Azov and Moscow—
comprising an area larger than France. Directly to the east, in a somewhat
larger area where serfs constituted nearly two-thirds of the population, the
gentry favored the famous "barshchina" or corvée type of work obligation,
according to which as many as four or five days of the peasant's work week
went to the landowner. Finally, in the north, where the harsh climate made for
low soil productivity, the gentry favored the obrok, or payment in the form of
money or produce, which often compelled the peasant to find work in nearby
towns and cities to meet his payments to the landowner.

THE DECEMBRIST REVOLT

In the rapidly changing world that followed the French Revolution, tsarism
was faced with tensions and problems of historic proportions. In the early
nineteenth century social unrest was becoming sufficiently widespread to
compel Alexander I to restrict some of the worst features of serfdom and
absolutism that Catherine had earlier reinforced. In time, however, Alexander's
liberalism diminished, and his promises of reform were only partially fulfilled.
The relatively minor or ineffectual reforms that the tsar tried to enact met with
such opposition by the gentry that further, more effective attempts to restrict
serfdom came to an end.

Industrial growth, which received a strong impetus from the production of
armaments to defeat Napoleon, followed a curiously mixed pattern: the state
tried to adapt its new factories to its semi-feudal system by using serf labor
instead of employing ostensibly free proletarians to produce modern
commodities. Moreover, the existence of serfdom in the most populous areas of
Russia greatly inhibited the development of a domestic market for factory-
produced goods, thereby retarding the growth of both industry and a prog-
ressive middle class. With the reaction that followed the Napoleonic wars,
Metternich's efforts to suppress all liberal thought and institutions in Europe
were especially effective in Russia.

Accordingly, attempts to reform Russia necessarily went underground. By
the early 1820s two secret revolutionary organizations composed mainly of
younger enlightened army officers had been formed: the Society of the North,
based in St. Petersburg, and the Society of the South, based in the garrison
town of Tulchin in the Ukraine. In time the two societies joined forces to form
a loosely linked conspiracy. Abetted by smaller army societies and even a
civilian group, this network basically sought to restructure Russia's govern-
ment along constitutional lines and to abolish serfdom. The Society of the
North, the less radical of the two, hoped to establish a limited monarchy, while
its southern counterpart, led by Colonel Pavel Pestel, supported the formation
of a Jacobin-type republic. Both societies, despite their differences, were pre-
pared to use military force and, if necessary, even to assassinate the tsar to
achieve their ends.

In December 1825, immediately following Alexander's death, the members
of the conspiracy rallied several regiments in Senate Square in St. Petersburg
with the intention of arresting the late tsar's successor, the notoriously reac-
tionary Nicholas I, and his supporters. Serfdom was to be completely abol-
ished, and a parliamentary government, together with Western civil liberties,
was to replace autocratic rule.

Despite the high-ranking officers who led it, this 'Decembrist' coup, as it
was called, staged by the Society of the North, was organizationally as ill-
prepared as it was politically ill-conceived. Its nominal leader, Prince Sergey
Trubetskoy, apparently panicked by the boldness of the plan, failed to show up
in the square at all. As hour followed hour without any action by their com-
manders, the rebellious regiments remained inert, in perfect parade order
before an empty Senate building, while a large and growing crowd of civilian
supporters eagerly cried for arms. Meanwhile the government mobilized its
own troops, leading to a confused standoff in which neither side took any
action against the other for most of the day.

Plainly the Decembrist rebels lacked the decisive leadership that would have
been necessary to take over the state. None of the officers among them
exhibited the presence of mind to order the troops into any action, let alone
seize the new emperor, who was nervously ensconced in the nearby Winter
Palace with his entourage. Burdened by the aristocratic prejudices of their
class, the young officers neglected to reach out to sectors of the Russian population that might have given them the mass support they needed. As night drew near, Nicholas finally took the initiative: his loyal troops used artillery to drive the mutineers from the square in a bloody clash that claimed the lives of numerous civilians as well as the confused rank-and-file soldiers.

In the south the Southern Society fared no better than its northern counterpart. Pestel was arrested on the day of the St Petersburg fiasco. Ten days later, when news of the Petersburg debacle reached the south, the southern officers rose with their own troops, even though the defeat in the capital made it evident that the coup attempt was doomed to failure. After several days of wandering indecisively through the Ukrainian countryside, the troops led by the Southern Society’s officers were rounded up by imperial forces. At no point did the leaders of the conspiracy in the south try to take Kiev, which might have given them some urban leverage over Nicholas’s forces.

Brought before the tsar’s investigating commission, few of the captured Decembrist leaders exhibited any firmness. Even Pestel was evasive, despite the fact that he had authored the most important document of the Decembrist conspiracy, Russian Law, whose demands were considered so radical that the coup’s own leaders literally buried it before they entered Senate Square with their regiments. This unfinished work, which was made available to the public only later in the century, was a revolutionary Jacobin document that called not only for the abolition of serfdom but for an egalitarian redistribution of the land. Pestel demanded that every Russian male should have access to government-owned land at least sufficient in size to meet all his personal needs and those of his family. In each district of the empire, Pestel contended, the land should be divided into two parts:

The first of these will constitute common land, the other private land. Common land will belong collectively to the entire community of each district, and will be inalienable. It may be neither sold nor pawned; it will be used to obtain the necessaries of life for all citizens without exception, and will belong to each and all. Private land, on the other hand, will belong either to the State or to private persons who will own it in complete freedom, and will have the right to do with it what they think best. These lands will thus be used as private property and to create plenty.¹³

So unnerved was Nicholas by Russian Law that he concealed it even from the commission that subsequently investigated the uprising. In the end, five of the Decembrist leaders, including Pestel, were hanged on July 13 1826, in the notorious Peter and Paul Fortress in St Petersburg. Most of the other 120 convicted members of the two societies were sentenced to hard labor in Siberia.

The Decembrist uprising became legendary. Its martyrs were the first organized conspirators inspired by Western liberal ideas to directly challenge the Russian autocracy and serfdom. December 1823, in effect, marked the opening of a new era, in which opposition to the autocracy went beyond whispers in the salons and drawing rooms of progressive nobles, officials, and members of the middle class. In contrast to the elemental uprising or hunt of disorganized peasant insurgents, the year marked the beginning of a new ideological, programmatic, and above all organizational level of Russian rebelliousness.

Hardly to be celebrated for any progressive views while he was still a grand duke, Tsar Nicholas I, after the Decembrist revolt, became an intractable reactionary and oriented his rule of the empire accordingly. For more than a quarter of a century, this canny and vindictive man dragged Russia into the bleakest recesses of despotism. He firmly saddled the country with a highly sophisticated secret police system—the notorious “Third Department” of the Imperial Chancery—a stringent censorship, and an educational system guided by the regressive maxim ‘Autocracy, Orthodoxy, Nation’. Any semblance of liberal thought, indeed the merest expression of dissent, met with the harshest of penalties; the mere ownership of an unauthorized printing press became a capital offense. Russians were prohibited from traveling to the West without official sanction. Poland, where Russian autocracy always tried to present its best face to Western Europe, was divested of its autonomy, while all minority religions and non-Russian nationalities were subjected to humiliating restrictions of their civil rights.

But these measures failed to stifle the opposition that was slowly gathering against the autocracy. Following the failure of the Decembrist uprising, Russian dissidents—usually lesser nobles, educated middle-class elements, writers, and students—all began to form small, intellectual ‘study circles’. Historically the most famous of these groups was the Petrashevsky Circle, comprising a number of liberal Petersburg intellectuals, mainly of lower-middle-class social origins, who discussed a wide range of topics and ideas, in many cases anticipating the ideas of later generations of radical democrats, populists, and socialists.

Starting in 1845, the Circle met regularly, on Friday evenings, in Mikhail Petrashevsky’s modest drawing room in St Petersburg. There the participants, numbering up to 40 people, explored current events, read aloud papers they had written, argued over a wide variety of social ideas, and soon coalesced into several tendencies, some of which raised only mild political demands while others were zealously revolutionary. Petrashevsky himself, a follower of Charles
Fourier, was generously humane in his utopian visions; he was a gradualist in his approach to social change and a firm opponent of violence. One of the most incendiary members of the Circle, Fyodor Dostoyevsky (the arguably reactionary novelist of later years), even shed his early belief in a vague form of social Christianity and embraced atheistic materialism and Jacobin ideals. Unknown to its founder, the Circle also harbored young men who were committed to an armed uprising and met secretly, outside the Circle, to exchange their shared revolutionary views. Despite the capital nature of the offense, they even put together a printing press, although it was never used.

In April 1849, after a year of close surveillance, the Circle was rounded up, and 21 of its members, including Dostoyevsky, were sentenced to death. With characteristic cruelty Nicholas placed the doomed men before a firing squad—then at the very last moment dramatically commuted their death sentences to imprisonment in Siberia. At least one man went insane following this mock execution, while Petrashevsky spent the remainder of his life in exile and died in poverty at the age of 42.

Blocked from direct expression, much of the opposition that existed under Nicholas’s reign expressed itself in literature and literary criticism. The period between the reactionary tsar’s ascent in 1825 and his death in 1855 saw the opening of Russia’s extraordinary contributions to the European novel. Russian intellectuals and artists channeled their suppressed revolutionary energy into brilliant works of fiction, many of which were barely disguised attacks upon every aspect of the autocracy, the gentry, the bureaucracy, and all the repressive features of Russian daily life. Alexander Pushkin, Russia’s greatest poet and a Decembrist sympathizer, wrote some of his finest verse and short stories during Nicholas’s rule. Nikolai Gogol’s Dead Souls, published in 1842, offered a savagely satirical overview of all layers of Russian society in the days of serfdom and all but initiated the modern Russian novel as a medium for social criticism, a trajectory that culminated in the works of Ivan Turgenev. Other highly influential social critics included the social revolutionary Alexander Herzen and the romantic revolutionary Mikhail Bakunin. For the most part, however, until the death of Nicholas in 1855, Russian political life languished in a strangely troubled limbo. A year later Russia’s defeat in the Crimean War at the hands of Turkish, British, and French armies awakened the country to the internal and international weaknesses of the entire tsarist social order.

NOTES
10. Ibid., p. 151.
11. For an appreciative description of a village shish by an eyewitness observer, see ch. 15 of Wallace’s Russia on the Eve of War and Revolution.
CHAPTER 37 Peasants and Populists, Workers and Marxists

EMANCIPATION AND AFTERWARD

Following the death of Nicholas I in 1855, Russian liberals and radicals viewed very warily the accession of his son, Alexander II, to the throne. What kind of regime would the new tsar introduce? And how would he deal with serfdom? For more than a generation, Nicholas had tried to quell liberal ideas. The new tsar, at 37, was known to have been carefully schooled by his father in autocratic rule and reactionary ideas.

But Russia’s defeat in the Crimea in 1856 showed clearly that the empire, once the most formidable reactionary power in Europe, was lagging far behind the Continent militarily as well as politically and economically. Surprisingly, too, the new emperor, the heir of Nicholas, exhibited strong reformist proclivities, and by 1858 it was evident that he was leaning in a liberal direction. The young tsar seemed eager to go down in history as a reformer, perhaps even as a modernizer, and to accommodate the emerging educated and middle classes, who eagerly sought to build a progressive and respected Russia after her humiliating Crimean defeat. With the support of his more progressive ministers and advisers, Alexander II modernized the old system of local self-government, notably the municipal, district, and provincial assemblies. These zemstva had been created in the mid-sixteenth century; to an unprecedented degree, under Alexander’s reforms, they now took over the provision of important local services, such as education, road building and maintenance, medical and veterinary care, emergency food reserves, and social welfare. Press censorship was relaxed, greater autonomy was granted to nations ruled by the imperial double eagle, and a system of universal military service replaced the coercive recruitment method, by which peasants were hijacked into the tsar’s armies for most of their lives.

The prospect of freeing Russia’s serfs—many of whom belonged to the state as well as to private proprietors and the monarchy—was an issue of paramount importance in Alexander’s mind. In 1861, after much internal discussion and investigations by various government committees, Alexander finally abolished serfdom—the empire’s greatest, indeed most embarrassing social burden. The Emancipation granted peasants the right to buy land from their former landlords according to a prescribed formula: they could purchase up to half of the land that they had previously cultivated as serfs for a redemption fee, to be paid to the state in annual installments over a span of 49 years. The other half—the otrezhy, or ‘cutting off’—was retained by the landlord as his own property, to be kept or sold as he chose.

Materially, however, this arrangement actually left the peasant in a worse condition than before Emancipation. The payments that peasants were obliged to make for their own land allotments were heavily weighted in favor of the landlords, reducing the economic impact of the agrarian reform to a minimum: the government paid the gentry the full sum for its lost land all at once, but peasants were obliged to reimburse the government in payments that many villages could ill afford. Indeed, Emancipation became a boon to the many impoverished landlords who were on the edge of bankruptcy. Moreover, many privileges that the peasants had enjoyed as serfs, such as free access to the gentry’s forests and meadows, were now closed to them unless they made additional payments to their former landlords.

Accordingly peasant unrest, far from diminishing, began to increase, and the more outspoken press that Alexander’s relaxed censorship had created soon made the emperor himself the target of growing criticism. Many provincial zemstva filled with former serf owners imposed themselves and their interests on the more liberal zemstva, significantly acting as a retarding force on the middle classes and peasants whose representatives demanded serious reform.

The difficulties raised by the Emancipation were addressed by the government in only a piecemeal fashion and over a protracted span of time, leaving the peasantry, middle classes, and liberal gentry increasingly dissatisfied. Meanwhile, most of Alexander’s reform policies, including civil rights, began to unravel and move in a regressive direction, outraged liberal opinion and fostering revolutionary sentiments among the intelligentsia. By the late 1860s, populist or narodnik movements were emerging and firing up widespread popular unrest. Although Russia had entered into a new era upon Alexander’s accession to the throne, the important changes made by the government were in response to rising expectations, pressure, and anger from below rather than the tsar’s eagerness to modernize Russia.
"TO THE PEOPLE!"

The new imperial regime and the problems created by Alexander's reforms between the late 1860s into the 1880s created a fertile field for the emergence of a populist movement, in marked distinction to the military conspiracy of the Decembrists. Especially among Russia's educated youth, a cry arose—an appeal to 'go to the people', especially the ignorant if riotous peasantry. Its ideological inspiration has generally been attributed to the writings of Alexander Herzen, who had left Russia permanently after 1847 and become a Swiss citizen to avoid extradition and imprisonment. After flirting with European socialist doctrines, Herzen embraced populist doctrines based on the simple virtues of the ostensibly unspoiled Russian peasantry, which he publicized in writings that, up to his death, enjoyed a very wide underground distribution in his homeland.

Russian populism, in fact, rested on two key tenets that the literate public had entertained long before Herzen began to publicize them. The first was an unrelenting opposition to autocratic rule, by means of either reforms or revolution. To achieve a free Russia, it was necessary to gain the support of the peasants—who formed roughly 90 per cent of the population. According to the second tenet, making a thoroughgoing revolution depended upon fulfilling the hope that the village communal system of self-management and the "chernyi pereyel" would not only be preserved but extended throughout the countryside and yield a morally induced form of collectivism that could benefit society as a whole.

To all revolutionary populists, the "obshchina" system of communal land redistribution was a venerable form of collectivism that reflected the unique moral core of Russian peasant life. Populists were generally convinced that the existence of village assemblies—with democratic decision-making and land distribution according to household needs—could allow Russia to bypass all the ills of Western industrial capitalism, especially the miseries of proletarianization that afflicted England, and move the country directly to a modern form of agrarian communism. The "obshchina", they held, might well be a means of achieving a virtuous, democratic, and communistic society, without suffering Western industrial travails.

The early 1870s were marked by Herzenesque attempts by young people, principally students, to live with peasants, to 'serve' them, and to proselytize them with messages of social freedom and moral redemption. This 'Children's Crusade', as it was mockingly called, got under way earnestly in the summer of 1874 under the slogan 'V narod! ['To the people']!'. Large numbers of zealous but naif youths in their late teens and early twenties dressed up in peasant clothing and tramped along country roads, settling where they could into villages and proclaiming a messianic message of a social resurrection. The young narodniki of the zealous V narod 'crusade' endeavored to serve the peasants as ordinary teachers, especially to instruct them in reading, writing, and other basic skills. Although they were often well received, and some peasants listened respectfully to their ideas, most of the populists were no more equipped to talk to peasants than they were to cynical government bureaucrats. When some of the more extreme 'crusaders' exhorted peasants to rise in revolt, they were either ignored or became the butt of jokes. In time the peasants came to regard the young narodniki as privileged urban residents or else as alien intellectuals who had little understanding of their lifeways—and in the worst cases they turned them over to the police. The Children's Crusade, in the end, accomplished little more than to disillusion the young idealists, who, discouraged that their message was rejected, returned to their universities and homes. About 800 were arrested and detained in miserable conditions, of whom more than 160 were tried and sent off to years of prison or administrative exile.

The failure of the V narod movement, the unresponsiveness of the peasantry, and the emperor's drift away from serious reforms stoked up Jacobin tendencies that were latent in the populist movement, whose remnants ran the gamut from service to political dissent to terrorism against the autocracy. Perhaps the most influential of the propagandistic populists was Nikolai Chernyshevsky, who gained the profound admiration of his generation as much by his personal example as by his writings. For several young educated Russians, Chernyshevsky was the epitome of a dedicated, uncompromising, and above all professional revolutionary. Ideologically, he stood at the crossroads between the more sophisticated forms of revolutionary populism and the Marxist ideas emerging in the West. Settling in Petersburg in the 1850s, Chernyshevsky wrote literary criticism for the liberal periodical Sovremennik (The Contemporary), where he gained a considerable following. His didactic 1863 novel What Is To Be Done? stands out among all his writings as the most important and influential. Marx, and later, Lenin, greatly admired Chernyshevsky's work, although he was neither a naive populist nor a conscious Marxist. In contrast to Russian Marxists (albeit not to Marx), he defended the "obshchina" and its promise for a collectivist society, earnestly convinced that Russia could provide a model for the industrialized West. In this view, Chernyshevsky was at one with most Russian populists and even Slavophiles. But he refused to accept the Slavophilic romantic belief in Slavic cultural superiority and the populist dream that a free Russia was destined to be a world redeemer. Indeed, in certain respects, his views were close to those of the later Marxists, who regarded Russia's 'Westernization' as a sine qua non for socialism, a view that placed him remarkably close to later revolutionary ideas that mingled agrarian anarchism with proletarian socialism.
In the later half of the nineteenth century a plethora of Russian radicals, mainly narodnik, opposed the autocracy with growing revolutionary zeal and tried to build a national organization that could compete with the regime in centralization and effectiveness. Mikhail Bakunin, a devotee of bunty, found followers in Russia who called for the immediate dissolution of the state, indeed of any form of legal constraint and authority. By contrast, Pyotr Tkachev called for a highly centralized revolutionary elite to lead the masses and to establish a revolutionary state apparatus vigorously to suppress the old order, as well as to reconstruct society along socialist lines. "The Russian Revolution, as any other revolution," he wrote, "cannot escape any hanging and shooting of gendarmes, public prosecutors, ministers, merchants and priests." A firm economic materialist, Tkachev was one of the earliest Russian revolutionaries to have been deeply influenced by Marx’s writings on history and economics, which he intermingled with organizational views akin to those of Louis-Auguste Blanqui. *

Starting in the 1870s, revolutionaries in Russian cities, not only in villages, began to form kruzhky—small groups or study circles dedicated to education and propaganda. The Petrashevsky Circle of the 1840s had been a pioneering endeavor of this kind, although its participants had concerned themselves more with educating themselves and discussing socialist literature than with public agitation. In 1871 Nikolai Tchaikovsky (brother of the great composer) formed a kruzhok in Petersburg that expanded to other Russian cities as well. Ideologically, Tchaikovsky himself adhered to a mystical, anarchic form of social Christianity and was committed to the libertarian notion of a spontaneous transformation of society by the masses. In fact, he and his closest associates abjured any attempt to provide political leadership or organizational guidance to the masses; their own work among the urban proletarians and later the rural peasants was strictly educational and generally ineffective.

NARODNAYA VOLYA

Other kruzhky, however, began to crystallize with a view not only toward achieving political enlightenment but toward producing a major political transformation—and to do so by violently challenging the autocracy itself. The economic notion of 'serving the people' was yielding to a political orientation focused on the need completely to alter the Russian state through terrorist and revolutionary methods. Significantly, they tried to appeal to the industrial working class that was emerging in Russian cities. The label 'Socialist Revolutionary' came into use as a loose designation for the more political populists, notably those who had veered away from the strictly agrarian concerns of the earlier populists. Revolutionaries now tried to coalesce into Western-style parties with cadres, programs, and newspapers that would reach the general public, especially the proletariat, and to devise methods of collaboration with all the oppressed in the face of common problems.

In 1876 revolutionary circles in St Petersburg attempted to consolidate themselves into a substantial nationwide organization under the name Zemlya i Volya. In 1879 the new organization convened a secret congress in Voronezh, where the delegates generally agreed that the most effective means to unseat Russian tsarism would unavoidably be terrorism. The congress thereupon adopted a policy of employing systematic terror as the principal means for destabilizing and ultimately disorganizing the autocracy—following which, it was hoped, the new party would be able to convene a constituent assembly that would be supported by the great majority of the Russian masses.

Historically, the most important result of the congress was the emergence of the Narodnaya Volya (People's Will), a terrorist organization that had the support of the majority of the delegates. Neither a small kruzhok nor a national party, Narodnaya Volya would actually gain worldwide notoriety for its boldness, and its members would earn considerable acclaim for their courage and persistence. Among its prominent figures were Andrei Zhelyabov and Sophia Perovskaya, both of whom were veterans of the Tchaikovsky Circle, as well as some of the most important figures in Russian revolutionary martyrdom.

Despite their narodnik convictions, most narodovoltsy (as they were called) were urban in orientation. Indeed, Narodnaya Volya was a conscious reaction against the failure of the V narod movement 'to the people' and against the older narodnik conviction that education and acts of service could prod the peasantry into a massive movement against the autocracy. A Russian revolution, the narodovoltsy insisted, could be achieved not by attempts to foster economic discontent among the inert peasantry but only through political means—namely the heroic and disruptive deeds of individual terrorists—institutionally to dislocate the autocratic state. The autocracy had to be attacked directly, indeed physically, and its machinery had to be paralyzed by assassinations in ongoing guerrilla warfare against leading authorities and key institutions, particularly the tsar and his most important aides. Only when the political apparatus of the autocracy yielded to these attacks would it be remotely possible to reach the oppressed and inspire them to outright revolutionary action.

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* For more on Bakunin’s and Blanqui’s views, see vol.2 of The Third Revolution.
Narodnaya Volya undertook the most persistent and daring attacks against the autocracy that Russia had yet seen. When its feared executive committee pronounced a death sentence on Alexander, the tsar became so unnerved that visitors to the court noted that they could sense the dread in his demeanor. After several bold attempts on Alexander’s life, including one that occurred within the highly protected confines of the Winter Palace itself, the organization finally succeeded in killing the tsar with two bombs on 13 March 1881.

The assassination, of course, produced an uproar throughout the empire. The principal leaders of People’s Will—notably members of the executive committee—were quickly captured and hanged publicly. Andrey Zhelyabov and Sophia Perovskaya, as well as Nikolai Rysakov, Timofey Mikhailov, and Nikolai Kibalchich, who walked to the scaffold in Semyonovsky Square in St. Petersburg on 3 April 1881, acquired legendary status among revolutionary movements abroad. Apart from the heroic inspiration they provided for later generations, however, the five who were hanged for regicide failed to achieve any major political gains for the Russian people.

Quite to the contrary: the period following Alexander II’s death was marked by implacable repression. The new emperor, Alexander III, who had imbibed none of his father’s relatively liberal views, responded to the terrorists with savage counterblows and introduced a decades-long period of deep reaction, comparable to that of Nicholas I. He gave the police unbridled license arbitrarily to sweep up all revolutionaries. Narodnaya Volya and its supporters were ruthlessly hunted down. Students were forced to wear uniforms, and their organizations were suppressed; manuscripts had to be censored before they were put into print, and any periodical could be closed down for even the most frivolous reason, simply with the approval of four government ministers. A new repressive cadre of land captains were installed in the rural areas to supervise the already-restricted zemstva and municipalities. Even Russian liberals retreated hastily from significant public activity.

The 1880s soon became a decade of ‘small deeds’; actions for broad social change were replaced by acts of local service, and once-bold revolutionaries limited themselves to work as schoolteachers, medical attendants, midwives, and administrative assistants to the zemstva. In time, these minimal deeds would reap their own reward in helping to create a major agrarian party—the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries, or PSR—but in the 1880s a retreat into charitable work largely replaced the robust social activism and ideological challenges that had flared up with the explicitly political populist movement of the 1870s.

This sharp shift profoundly attenuated the very notion of popular agency in struggling for basic social change. As Allan K. Wildman has put it: ‘No longer was “the people” viewed as the chosen agency of social transformation; it was now regarded as the helpless object of disinterested service, moral uplift, and protective measures administered by enlightened zemstvo leaders.’ It was also a decade of Tolstoyan mysticism, a psychological turn toward inwardness and personal redemption, and often a quasi-religious commitment to a highly idealized good as a matter of personal faith.

The memory of Narodnaya Volya lingered on, to be sure, among students who had little or no experience in underground work. Through the 1880s, in courageous attempts to follow the path of the old People’s Will, they hatched plots that invariably came to grief, but the violent populist legacy of heroic, often lonely personal resistance never died out. Perhaps the best known expression of this legacy was the attempt to assassinate Alexander III in 1886, by a group of students that included Alexander Ulyanov, the elder brother of Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov, later known to the world as Lenin. These young narodovoltsy were easily apprehended by the police, and Alexander Ulyanov was hanged together with four other students. But apart from their trial, the 1880s were marked largely by social resignation and political quietude.

THE WORKER-PEASANTS

At the time of the Decembrist revolt in 1825 industrial enterprises in Russia barely exceeded 5000 small concerns, employing about 200,000 workers and producing commodities valued at only 46 million rubles. A full generation later, Russian industry had barely kept pace with population growth and trailed far behind Western Europe in manufacturing, railroads, urban population, and adequate roads. Indeed, as late as 1861 only 7 per cent of the empire’s population of 80 million people lived in towns, and as few as 10 per cent were engaged in non-agricultural pursuits.

Following the Emancipation, however, which significantly opened the empire’s internal market, Russia’s economic development began to take off. Between mid-century and the early 1880s Russian industrial enterprises sprinted from fewer than 10,000 in number to more than 21,000, and its workforce leaped from less than half a million to nearly 800,000. Accordingly, the value of Russian manufactures soared from about 160 million rubles to nearly a billion. Nor did the extraordinary pace of economic growth level off at the end of the century. In 1900 the number of factory workers in places employing sixteen or more employees reached 1.6 million. Adding workers who were not subject to the government’s factory inspectorate, and including transport and building workers, brought the number of Russian workers to 3.3 million out of an 1897 population of 129 million. If this figure seems paltry,
observes J.L.H. Keep, it should be noted that 'industrial workers were concentrated in key centres from which, if they acted in an organized manner, they could exercise an influence out of all proportion to their numerical strength.'

The highly concentrated nature of the Russian proletariat—and its economically strategic features—cannot be overstated. At the turn of the century installations where much of the proletariat worked were highly capital intensive, indeed on a scale unequaled by industrialized countries elsewhere in the world. Many Russian plants and mills, although relatively few in number, had very large workforces: more than a third of Russian factories employed 500 people or more (while in Germany plants with so many workers constituted only 14 per cent of the industrial economy). Nearly a quarter of all Russian industrial workers were employed in plants of 1000 or more (while in corresponding German plants the figure was only 18 per cent). These Russian factories contained the most sophisticated machinery that Germany and Britain placed on the market. Notwithstanding the economic backwardness of the empire, its relatively small industrial proletariat (in manufacturing, mining, transportation, construction, and trade) of about three and a quarter million people was employed in the most capital-intensive and hence most advanced individual enterprises in Europe.

WORKING-CLASS LIFE

Most worker-peasants, newly arrived in Petersburg and other cities from the countryside, worked in appallingly cramped and unhealthy conditions. All too often they were also obliged to live in their filthy shops, directly adjacent to their machines and workbenches. Literally locked into their workplaces or buried in congested dormitories, newly arrived peasants were removed as much as possible from any contact with the cities in which they worked. The plants, guarded by brutal factory police who ostensibly kept the 'peace', were often immense compounds with walled, prison-like yards. Thoroughly insulated from the city that surrounded the plant, they might never be permitted to go outside to taverns and public areas, eat their meals in company dining halls, and bought their necessities from company stores. If they left the compound, they were searched by the factory police for stolen goods, and their absence might be carefully recorded, which effectively discouraged them from leaving their workplaces.

After several seasons of work in the city, single men often brought their families to the city for the span of the work season. Based on his own childhood memories, Henri Troyat reconstructed life in a small Moscow factory in 1903 that specialized in treating flax and hemp. Once the visitor entered the work area, Troyat writes, he might think:

he was entering a tropical forest of damp and discolored foliage. Bundles of fibres hung from the ceiling and intercepted the daylight. To move forward, he had to push the damp and woody beards apart with his hands. The floor was covered with a thick layer of sticky nauseating filth, with here and there a pool of black water in front of a steaming bucket. Along the wall, close to the windows, stood the machines for breaking the fibres, which consisted of two pieces of wood, held together at one end by a strong pin. The lower piece was mounted on four feet. The whole thing formed a sort of cage, about three yards long and three yards wide.

This restricted space 'served both as a work place and a lodging for the worker's family', where they lived for twenty-four hours a day. At meal-times the whole little tribe sat on the ground between the piles of hemp and the bowls of dirty water; to sleep they stretched out on planks with bundles of fibre as pillows. Living together, these poor people have lost all sense of modesty... They have no embarrassment in promiscuity. The women even give birth here in front of everybody.

At the foot of a machine, writes Troyat, the visitor might see a prone, seemingly sleeping boy, curled on a bundle of rags, who was sweating and shivering with fever, while his father mechanically worked the machine above. Nearby, a mother was seated on an upturned bucket suckling a baby. The atmosphere of the place was kept excessively warm and humid to keep the fibres from drying out, with the result that the workers and their families lived with cracked and dripping walls and ceilings eaten away in part by a brownish mold.

These wretched families, in Troyat's account, never left the workshop throughout the entire year, except to return to their village. In short they slept, ate, procreated, and even died beside their machines. Nor were these 'mills' unusual:

it's the same in all the smaller factories where work is still done by hand or at least by simple mechanical means... particularly the small silk and woollen factories and the textile printing works. In these workshops, they sleep on the floor, under the benches, or on looms covered with planks.
The weavers’ babies lie in cradles hooked up to the ceiling and are lulled to sleep by the rhythmic beat of the lays.4

Until the late 1890s workers might be paid in kind or in company chits, with which they ‘bought’ their necessities from company stores within the plant compounds. These payments were often very irregular—at best made after a month of work. Workers were normally required to carry occupational booklets that indicated that they belonged to Russia’s peasant estate and that listed all the important details of their working backgrounds, including why they had left previous jobs. This internal passport, specifically designed for workers, was an abiding feature of Russian society even after Emancipation and placed them completely at the mercy of their employers.

During working hours their foremen treated these workers as little more than beasts and fined them for every trivial or alleged infraction. The authorities almost always gave the bosses the benefit of any doubt, and punishments were commonly inflicted without recourse to hearings. Any restlessness among workers was normally considered subversive and dangerous. To subdue and control restless workers, factory owners invited Orthodox priests to conduct classes in reading, writing, and especially religious subjects. Every part of a factory or shop had an icon to which workers, especially worker-peasants, bowed, duly making an expansive sign of the cross from shoulder to shoulder, a ritual in which they routinely engaged while beseeching a holy blessing before and after each weekday.

But this was a working class that was never tamed. Finding the labor force too volatile, most industrialists tried to replace them with ever more sophisticated machines from abroad. Soon industrial enterprises in St Petersburg, Moscow, Ivanovo-Voznesensk (Russia’s Manchester), Odessa, Kiev, and the cluster of textile cities in the southwest were inundated by automatic machines, operated by skilled employees that left the worker-peasants with routine labor tasks that required little or no training. Russian factories thus developed ‘labor aristocracies’ in their own right, composed of highly skilled and well-paid workers on one layer, and unskilled, badly paid, partly rural laborers on a lower layer, who were grossly overworked and ill-treated.

Yet far from dividing the factory workers against each other, the ‘elite’ element actually enhanced the ability of all the workers—unskilled as well as skilled—to carry out struggles against the employers. Deeply class conscious and filled with a strong sense of craft pride and self-respect, the skilled workers were the most educated, experienced, and urbanized members of the working class. Owing to their skills and their scarcity in an overwhelmingly rural country, they were in great demand and highly valued by management. They could thus afford to take a fairly assertive position in their dealings with plant supervisors. Although well paid by Russian standards, they were capable of becoming very radical if aroused and were ultimately more susceptible to genuine revolutionary ideas than other proletarians.

Despite the privileges that this proletarian elite enjoyed—they often earned three or four times the wages of unskilled workers and lived outside factory dormitories in rooms or apartments of their own—they provided a workplace with able militants, the indispensable nuclei or cadres around which all the workers of an enterprise collected. This stratum, especially skilled metal-workers, became the spokesmen for the workers in their department and even in the factory as a whole. Accordingly, they were the stratum the employers most feared because they were the most articulate, the natural leaders of a potential labor movement. They often read the tracts that were surreptitiously distributed to them by student revolutionaries and made their contents intelligible to the illiterate or ill-read worker-peasants in their midst.

The employers nevertheless did surprisingly little to win the sympathies of the workers: every factory was filled with bitter class mistrust and antagonism. Police informers were ubiquitous—in all plants, educational institutions, even taverns and workers’ dining places—providing reports not only on ‘dangerous individuals’ and organizations but on the proletariat’s ‘state of mind’. The workers, entirely mindful of their presence, exercised the utmost circumspection. A conspiratorial atmosphere necessarily prevailed: extreme caution was a necessity that, if ignored, guaranteed any active worker or revolutionary a place in prison or confinement to Siberia.

Had reformist, Western-type trade unions been permitted to form in Russia, they might well have domesticated most Russian workers as they did their counterparts in Europe. But neither the state nor the bourgeoisie was prepared to permit Russian workers to form legal and independent protective organizations, let alone allow them the right to strike. The authorities did allow workers to form mutual aid societies to assist unemployed or infirm members and their families. They also allowed philanthropic organizations to provide libraries and educational institutions of modest proportions. But if work-peasants participated in labor agitation and strikes, they might be ‘exiled’ back to their villages or imprisoned by government authorities.

Industrialists, to be sure, were free to form their own economic associations and had an extraordinary amount of leeway in repressing labor associations. Together with the government, they viewed every working-class industrial action and every attempt to establish an independent union, not merely as an attempt to redress a glaring injustice but as a political conspiracy against the social order. Accordingly they granted little or nothing to the Russian working class unless popular unrest, such as a spontaneous riot or strike, panicked them into making limited concessions.
THE BIRTH OF RUSSIAN MARXISM

By the 1890s, the revolutionary intelligentsia began to tilt toward the view that Russia was following the West's road toward capitalism—and as highly advanced industrial enterprises became permanent features of the Russian economy, socialist ideas and organizational traditions, too, migrated from European to Russian cities.

Marx's ideas traveled into Russia well within his lifetime, at first more as an esoteric ideology than as the basis for a political movement. A Russian version of Capital (significantly, the first European-language translation to be published) appeared in 1872. It was approved for publication by the imperial censor because its seemingly academic nature and its outsized length made it too forbidding to be seditious. Yet it gained rapid popularity, especially among those who saw in it an indictment of the Western capitalism that Russia, they believed, must avoid. In fact its initial 8000 print run sold out more rapidly than had the original German edition.

Owing to Marx's association with the International and his feud with Bakunin, his work attracted considerable interest in the large colony of Russian students who lived in Swiss cities. Inasmuch as Russia had no significant proletariat or even bourgeoisie in the 1870s, what narodnik students found appealing about Capital was its indictment of European capitalism's brutal degradation of life and its commodification of all relationships, cultural achievements, traditions, ideas, and values—ideas that nourished the intensely moral populist sentiments of the students and their fears of industrial development.

But this enthusiasm was not wholehearted: what the diffuse narodnik tendencies found troubling in Capital was Marx's dictum in his preface that 'with iron necessity ... [t]he country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future.' This short passage, and the more extensive discussions of the same idea that he elaborated in later years, suggested that, to Marx, capitalism was an indispensable and pre-conditional stage in the achievement of a socialist society. By rapidly advancing the means of production, Marx seemed to argue, capitalism laid the objective basis for a society with an adequate supply of the means of life and for a minimum of toil. This notion sharply countered the thrust of populist thinking, which saw in the Russian peasantry's egalitarian and collectivist values the moral basis and institutions for a socialist society.

Leading Russian revolutionaries frequently visited Marx in London, and he began to treat them with growing respect. Russia's defeat in the Crimean War in the 1850s, the heroic deeds of Narodnaya Volya, and the warm response that Russians, both in Petersburg and in Switzerland, gave his writings, eroded his notorious distrust of most Slavic visitors. He learned Russian and studied Russian economic and social data with great interest. But during his own lifetime, he made surprisingly few Russian converts to his ideas. His Russian admirers usually put his ideas to use too eclectically to satisfy his demands for coherence by incorporating bits and pieces of 'Marxism' into the broader moral and psychological contexts that prevailed in Russian thinking.

But this situation began to change in the early 1880s, when the ablest of the Chernyi Perekh leaders, George Plekhanov, arrived in Switzerland. Plekhanov, the son of a noble army officer, acquired a reputation as a particularly courageous agitator when, in December 1875, he publicly denounced the autocracy before a small crowd in front of Petersburg's Kazan Cathedral. This was the first time a Russian revolutionary had dared to express such views in a public rally, under the very eyes of the authorities. Plekhanov then joined Zemlya i Volya, but when the group's 1879 congress came out in favor of terrorism, he split off from the majority with a group of delegates and adopted the name Chernyi Perekh, after the obschina's partitional land practice. Eschewing terrorism in favor of propaganda and mass action, Plekhanov's group argued that only a broad social revolution could overthrow the autocracy, a view that brought the Chernyi Perekh very close to Western Marxism.

By the early 1880s Plekhanov found it necessary to flee to Geneva to avoid arrest. He was soon joined in Zurich by two other Chernyi Perekh members, Vera Zasulich and Pavel Axelrod. Axelrod lacked Plekhanov's theoretical prowess and Zasulich's flair; but as an outstanding organizer—a rarity in Russia at the time—he was an enormous asset to the new group, even more important than Zasulich, who had gained considerable fame as a terrorist. Axelrod, with his strong proclivity for practical affairs, saw to the publication of the group's paper, which also bore the name Chernyi Perekh.

But Plekhanov, Zasulich, and Axelrod were not rural populists in spirit, and from the first issue of their newspaper, in January 1880, a great deal of ideological confusion was apparent. It professed to accept a populist anarchism together with the proletarian orientation of Marx's 'scientific socialism.' In later issues 'scientific socialism' soon began to displace anarchism, and proletarian socialism displaced agrarian populism. As an émigré in Switzerland, Plekhanov abandoned his residual populism and became an avowed Marxist, as did Zasulich and Axelrod, and in 1883 they dropped the name Chernyi Perekh and adopted the more proletarian-sounding name Liberation of Labor Group. The new group thereupon claimed to be the first authentic Russian Marxist krest'ianstvo (a claim that some populists, such as Pyotr Lavrov, indignantly challenged). Not only was the Liberation of Labor Group intent on popularizing Marx's views among the émigrés and in Russia; it also hoped to create an effective organizational vehicle to put them into practice.
The Liberation Group also changed its program significantly. Instead of favoring an equitable redistribution of land, it called for the nationalism and industrialization of agriculture and emphasized the hegemonic role, not of Russia’s massive peasantry, but of her very small proletariat. Indeed, mechanically applying Marx’s disdainful view of the French peasantry to the class as a whole, Plekhanov concluded that the Russian peasantry was a petty-bourgeois and thoroughly reactionary class whose complete disappearance would be a desideratum for a Russian socialist movement. Notably, he drew little distinction if any between the largely collectivist Russian peasantry and its highly individualistic French counterpart. Strongly influenced by Plekhanov and his small circle abroad, Russian Marxists soon considered the peasants to be a reactionary social class who were eager to become nothing more than grasping private landed proprietors. Even peasants who lived in the obshchina were dismissed as a pre-capitalist archaism, destined to be eliminated by inexorable laws of historical development—and the sooner this occurred, the better.

PLEKHANOV’S MARXISM

Plekhanov’s influence was slow to penetrate the tsar’s domain. Nonetheless European socialists, especially German Social Democrats, soon came to regard Plekhanov as the foremost theorist of Russian Marxism, indeed as its ‘father’, and treated him deferentially as Russia’s foremost representative to the newly formed Second International. Indeed, together with Karl Kautsky, he ranked second only to Friedrich Engels as a popularizer of Marx’s ideas. His works were translated into a variety of European languages and may have found a wider readership in Western and central Europe than in Russia.

Russia, Plekhanov argued, would have to pass through a lengthy capitalist stage of development before it could possibly develop the material and cultural conditions for a socialist society. The industrial proletariat alone, he insisted, was destined to become the hegemonic class of a socialist revolution, and he placed a strong emphasis on impersonal economic forces or ‘laws’ as the driving force of revolutionary development. His conversion of Marx’s ideas into the ‘official’ canon of Russian Social Democracy thus turned Russian Marxism into a highly schematic dogma, a social physics dressed in concise laws and architecturally complete ideas. Marxism in Plekhanov’s (and often in Kautsky’s) hands remained singularly uncreative; it became highly codified, inflexible, and impervious to new social and political developments. This codification greatly distorted Marx’s ideas: although Marxism emphasized the importance of analyzing society ‘scientifically’, of prioritizing economic factors, and of focusing on the leading role of the industrial proletariat in a socialist revolution, Plekhanov turned many Marxian ideas into crude formulas that made them as simplistic as they were rigid.

Significantly, before Plekhanov overly schematized Marx’s basic views, an amiable relationship had existed between the narodovoltsy and the Marxists. The various Russian socialist movements had normally shared their resources and even published each other’s works. In 1884, however, Plekhanov and his group in Switzerland launched a harsh campaign against populism that was picked up by other Marxists who regarded any emphasis on the peasant movement as an obstacle to a systematic, presumably ‘scientific’ theory of revolutionary socialism. Plekhanov’s 1884 pamphlet ‘Our Differences’ insisted that the obshchina had to be eliminated by capitalism before Russia could hope to achieve socialism, and he directed much of his polemical ire against narodism as ‘petty bourgeois’ and ‘idealist’.

Most of Plekhanov’s younger colleagues imbibed his dogmatism and read Marx’s oeuvre very much as though it were a source of irrefutable truth. By allowing for no modifications or ‘deviations’ from his ‘exact’ writings and those of his key interpreters, the Russian Marxists developed a conception of a future Russian revolution that became as hardened and lifeless as a dogma. Russia herself would ultimately pay dearly, in time, for the ideological sclerosis that Plekhanov introduced.

MARX ON THE OBSHCHINA

Ironically, Marx did not share the Russian Marxists’ disdain for the Russian peasant and the obshchina. In marked contrast to his Russian followers, with their aversion to the narodovoltsy, he decidedly did not believe that his prognoses on the development of capitalism in Europe could be mechanically applied to Russia. In a letter to Vera Zasulich in 1881, only two years before his death, Marx wrote that the expropriation of the ‘agricultural producer’, so necessary for the full emergence of capitalism, had occurred in a ‘radical fashion’ only in England and to some extent in other Western European countries:

Hence the ‘historical inevitability’ of this process is expressly limited to the countries of Western Europe. … Hence the analysis provided in Capital does not adduce reasons either for or against the viability of the rural commune [the obshchina], but the special study I have made of it, and the material for
which I drew from original sources, has convinced me that this commune is
the fulcrum of social regeneration in Russia, but in order that it may
function as such it would first be necessary to eliminate the deleterious
influences which are assailing it from all sides, and then ensure for it the
normal conditions of spontaneous development.*

Significantly, Marx placed the words ‘historical inevitability’ in quotation
marks. Whatever he may have thought in his earlier writings, the elderly Marx
clearly distanced himself from this kind of language and avoided the rigid
economic schema that Plekhanov, Kautsky, and others imputed to him.

Rather, and surprisingly, he adopted the populist position that the Russian
village, based on the collective ownership of the land, could be the nucleus for
a new society, and that the obshchina could provide a point of departure for
agrarian communism. The obshchina, in effect, could be a possible means to
bypass a capitalist development in Russian agriculture. In contrast to Plek-
hanov’s belief that the Russian village would have to pass through a ‘his-
torically inevitable’ phase of capitalist agriculture, Marx suggested that if a
successful socialist revolution occurred in the West, Russia might well advance
directly to agrarian communism by means of improvements and advances in the
obshchina!

As late as January 1882, in the course of writing his preface to the new
Russian edition of the Communist Manifesto, Marx penned several remarkable
lines on the role of Russia in the forthcoming European revolution that stood
in marked contrast even to the view he held in the 1840s, ‘when Russia
constituted the last great reserve of all European reaction.’ ‘How very different
today!’ he exulted, ‘... Russia forms the vanguard of revolutionary action in
Europe.'* If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian
revolution in the West, so that the two complement each other,’ he concluded,

* Karl Marx, letter to Vera Zasulich (Mar. 8, 1881), Collected Works, vol. 46 (New York:
International Publishers, 1992), pp. 71–2. Marx plainly intended this letter, which he
wrote very carefully after rejecting several longer drafts, to be taken as a sober judg-
ment, fully cognizant that his disciples in Switzerland were fighting the narodovoltsy.
He must have been aware that the narodovoltsy, had they known his views, could have
used them with compelling effect against Plekhanov. Plekhanov and Zasulich, for their
part, prudently concealed the letter for years; it was not published in Russian until
1924, when the issues between the émigré Marxists and the narodovoltsy long ceased to
have strategic importance. Plekhanov, in effect, censored Marx’s views and perpetuated
the notion that Marx considered the Russian peasant to be ‘petty bourgeois’, even
predispersed, because of his “class status”, to support capitalism. This basically false
image profoundly affected Lenin’s view of the peasant masses and partly explains his
chilly attitude toward his erstwhile Left Socialist Revolutionary allies in 1918.

The present Russian commons ownership of land may serve as the starting point
for communist development.*

To the founder of ‘scientific socialism’, in fact, the hostility that Plekhanov’s
dogmatism generated between the narodovoltsy and the Marxists seems to have
been incomprehensible. Marx had an unflagging admiration for Narodnaya
Volya and largely approved even its terrorist tactics. Given the structure of the
Russian autocracy, he argued, it was entirely possible that a terrorist coup
could trigger a revolution in Russia. Cautiously, however, he and Engels tried
to remain aloof from the quarrels that beleaguered the Russian exile com-

Engels actually arranged a meeting in his home in London between the
leaders of the two groups among the Russian socialist refugees, in order to
unite Narodniki and self-proclaimed Marxists into a single party. But, what
with the ardor of the Russian temperament in controversy, and the diffi-
cence of Engels to intervene in a dictatorial manner, the plan fell through.
Yet to Engels it seemed that it had failed only because these sectarians lived
in the bitter ‘night of exile’, in isolation from a mass movement. Thus his
last word on the Russian question was a gently urgent plea for the uni-
fication of the Russian Marxists and the Russian Populists.*

The reconciliation never occurred. A generation later, in 1917, amid a his-
torical revolution of world-shaking proportions, the most radical narodnik
tendencies actually made organic contact with the most radical Marxist tend-
cencies, and each tendency might have nourished the other in producing a
revolutionary program to satisfy the needs of Russian workers and peasants
alike. But dogma and distrust—as well as circumstances—would drive a
wedge between the two tendencies, once again bringing them into furious
opposition—and this time with shattering consequences for the Russian people.
NOTES

7. Ibid., p. 24:426; emphasis added.

CHAPTER 38 Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries

THE AWAKENING OF THE WORKING CLASS

In 1891–2 a disastrous famine swept over much of the southern black earth region, including Saratov and Tammov, ravaging at least seventeen normally highly productive wheat provinces. Crop failures encompassed an estimated half-million square miles, on which lived approximately 30 million people, claiming the lives of at least a million peasants from hunger and disease. The autocracy handled the disaster with characteristic ineptness: it not only continued to export cereals to Europe for a half year into the famine but even tried to prevent news of the famine from spreading outside the stricken area to the rest of the Russian people, with the result that little aid was forthcoming for months.

At length the government had no choice—it finally appealed to the public for assistance. The response was overwhelming. People from the cities, including distinguished writers like Chekhov and Tolstoy, personally made their way into the hunger-stricken districts, where they tried to help the starving peasants, and famine relief and medical committees were spontaneously formed to meet the vast emergency.

The small and dormant socialist movement, which had lived a mole-like existence for nearly a decade, began to stir and make its presence felt to a new constituency, especially among the informed middle classes, students, and—significantly—the growing urban proletariat. By the 1890s urban factories were seething with the kind of unrest that closely resembled the sentiments that had aroused Western European workers in previous decades. Nor were strikes confined, as they had been in the past, to Petersburg and Moscow. Major strikes now exploded in Riga, in Ukrainian cities, and especially in Russian Poland.
KRUZHKY, OR STUDY CIRCLES

Even as the Liberation of Labor Group in Switzerland was slowly winning over Russian students abroad in the 1880s and 1890s, Marxism slowly percolated throughout the Russian intelligentsia at home. Not only were Plekhanov's writings on Marxism published in Russia to considerable acclaim, reaching a wide public, but they attracted emerging and able young writers such as Pyotr Struve, A.N. Potresov, M.I. Tugan-Baranovsky, Julius Martov, and not least Vladimir Ulyanov, the younger brother of the martyred narodnik student Alexander.

Several factors made Marxism especially attractive to Russian intellectuals. By the century's end narodism had produced only meager results. Contrary to all narodnik expectations, the famine crisis of 1891–2 did not generate any major peasant uprisings. Not only had there been no significant bounty, but with few exceptions the peasants had seemed to accept their fate with stoic resignation. By contrast, the huge industrial strikes of 1896 and 1897 in central Russia suggested that the industrial working class provided a new reservoir for social initiative and self-organization. These strikes, if anything, seemed to confirm the Marxist prediction that the future of a Russian revolutionary movement lay not with the peasantry but with the proletariat, however numerically small it might still be.

Another reason for the growing interest in Marxism was the rapid industrialization that Russia was undergoing. The 1890s saw the rapid spread of capitalism in key areas of the empire. In that single decade Russia's output of coal, petroleum, and iron tripled, and in the two years from 1898 to 1900 a clearly definable Russian working class rose from 1.3 to 2.1 million. In the 1890s the mileage of railroad track—a key index to a country's increase in commercial penetration—nearly doubled. The prediction, voiced by Plekhanov's émigré group—that the advance of capitalism in Russia was inevitable—seemed to be amply supported by reality, a fact that was not lost on radical intellectuals of the time.

Finally, the ground had been carefully prepared in the previous decade for a systematic theoretical approach to social problems. During Alexander III's repression of the 1880s young men and women felt a compelling need to acquire a basic theoretical knowledge to underpin their revolutionary impulses—certainly if they expected to become an effective force for social change. Marxism, which cautioned against mindless and precipitous action, seemed eminently suitable to meet this demand. Its growing literature made the study of ideas and strategies for social revolution a practical activity in its own right—a feature of Marx's works that nourished practice even as the new tsar's highly repressive reign tried to shut and bolt the doors to political action.

The need for a theory that served a practice did not go unobserved among the more thoughtful populists. It was espoused by Pyotr Lavrov, an associate of Marx, who as early as the 1870s had called upon Russian intellectuals to take the greatest pains to educate themselves in social theory and history, indeed in all fields of knowledge. His emphasis on knowledge and consciousness over mindless activism, spontaneity, and personal deeds was new to the young, heady world of Russian populism, which up to now had been accustomed to calls for immediate action. Revolutionaries, Lavrov argued, had the duty to educate themselves fully, all the more to impart to the people an understanding of the causes of their oppression, not simply to foment an ill-informed struggle against the autocracy and the gentry. Without studying the history of past revolutionary movements and the most advanced ideas of the day, Lavrov warned, Russian socialists would inevitably fail to achieve their high-minded but grossly untheorized social goals.

Lavrov's insistence on consciousness and knowledge brought him into sharp conflict with Bakunin and his anarchist supporters, who normally disdained any attempt to privilege theory. As Avraham Yarmolinsky has described it, Bakunin's disciples dismissed the Lavrovists demands 'as an attempt, dictated by cowardice and sluggishness, to relegate the revolution to an indefinite future.'

The idea of placing so much emphasis on booklearning! ... And surely the peasants needed no enlightenment. They lived by a traditional philosophy grounded on belief in equality, and hostility toward private property and centralized political authority alike. Undoubtedly they would be the first to get rid of the State. Hadn't the master [Bakunin] written: 'The Russian people are socialists by instinct and revolutionaries by nature? All the agitator had to do was to organize their revolt.'

Calling themselves bounty, or supporters of bounty, the Bakuninists preferred local uprisings, even failed ones, over well-planned insurrections, ostensibly because of their educational effect. What fatally flawed this primitivist, anarchistic approach was the stark reality that ineffective uprisings gravely damaged the revolutionaries' credibility with the masses and often generated among the militants widespread demoralization that lasted for years.

By contrast, at the end of the century, Lavrov's emphasis on the importance of education provided highly rewarding results in the form of kruzhky, especially among the Petersburg working class. Despite all the obstacles they encountered, the Russian intelligentsia began to reach systematically into the new factories with effective messages and literature.

As we have seen, populist students had helped create workers' kruzhky as
early as the 1860s. By the 1870s Marxists too began to appear in factory districts, either working with or rivaling the populists. Not surprisingly, the two tendencies melded Marxist ideas of proletarian hegemony in the cities with the populist focus on the obshchina in the countryside. This combination might well have produced a fruitful socialist movement that was eminently suited to Russian conditions. Skilled, elite workers were often avid readers, even by comparison with members of the land-based gentry, with an insatiable eagerness for learning. Their literacy rates were extraordinarily high by Russian standards: over 80 per cent of the metalworkers and 90 per cent of the workers in the elite printing trades could read and write. They eagerly attended lectures and seemed to have a boundless passion for general knowledge. Richard Pipes's accounts of such workers are truly moving: the narodovoletz late operator I.V. Krutov, obviously a highly skilled worker,

was well read and endowed with a good memory; at the same time he disposed of not inconsiderable agitational talents. One could meet him almost every day in the workers' club [the men's room] conducting debates on subjects of all kinds. Sometimes, before an unappreciative audience, he would unravel the theory of Darwin, causing consternation among his listeners: how could man descend from ape? Usually the public frequenting the club would not hear to the end Krutov's argument: after attacking some weak point in it, they would scatter without waiting for a reply. ... While imbuing his audience with knowledge, Krutov was a changed man: he underwent a rejuvenation; he was ready to embrace and kiss anyone who shared his ideas or altogether anyone who understood him.2

Some workers spent almost all the income they could spare buying books and periodicals until, in one case, a worker proudly built up a library of a thousand books. Still others lingered in libraries after eleven or more arduous hours of work, painstakingly deciphering books that contained complex ideas, and even politely turning to nearby students for assistance. In the 1870s and 1880s these worker-intelligentsia (as revolutionaries actually called them) pioneered study circles or kruzhky to explore almost everything from high-minded literature on ethics to scientific and political works. These kruzhky, in fact, were often formed quite independently of the radical intelligentsia, and schisms between the two along class lines and prejudices were often unavoidable.

Julius Martov, for example, was a Social Democrat who viewed the worker-intelligentsia, indeed workers generally, with enormous enthusiasm and zealously reached out to recruit them as participants in leading committees of the revolutionary organizations. But if some worker-intelligentsia shared common beliefs with men like Martov and interacted with them ideologically and organizationally, most workers profoundly distrusted the socialist intellectuals. Suspicious and even hostile, they saw intellectuals as an alien and privileged social class that was likely either to use them for their own political ends or to abandon them in times of severe repression. Occupied primarily with their immediate economic problems, most ordinary workers tended to respond with anger when students and intellectuals tried to foist socialist ideas on their own self-organized kruzhky. All too frequently, workers newly recruited from the countryside resolutely supported the tsar, in the naïve belief that he paternalistically regarded them as his 'children'. They rebuffed revolutionary intellectuals who spoke ill of Alexander III or his heir, Nicholas II, and like the peasants during the 'Children's Crusade', even reported them to the authorities.

Moreover, most workers regardless of status had a quite practical reason for their wariness of intellectuals. The police often viewed study circles organized by ordinary workers as harmless efforts at self-improvement, but nothing was more likely to awaken their suspicions than the arrival of socialist intellectuals at workers' kruzhky, whose more fastidious dress, manners, and cultivated speech easily caught the attention of the ubiquitous secret police agents and exposed the workers' kruzhky to charges of political subversion.

Accordingly workers often formed their own kruzhky and prudently kept the revolutionaries at a distance. The tensions that emerged between the workers' circles and those established by the socialists often reached acute levels of intensity. It was not without difficulty that revolutionaries slowly broke down the workers' hostility toward them; indeed, for years workers either excluded socialist propagandists from their kruzhky or, when they needed them as guides, prudently invited them singly into their circles under well-controlled conditions.

By the same token, surprisingly, the socialist intelligentsia had its own reservations about workers. Despite their claim to be training 'Worker Bebels', or proletarian socialist propagandists, socialist students and intellectuals were uncomfortable about admitting workers to their more sophisticated kruzhky, let alone giving them leading positions in their organizations. Status-ridden Russia did not make it easy even for Social Democrats to free themselves from ingrained prejudices against unsophisticated workers. The Russian proletariat, by comparison with the French and German, was extremely raw, and socialist propagandists were obliged continually to teach working-class participants in the kruzhky the fine points of reading, not to speak of doctrinal interpretation.

The first important group to break through the wall of mistrust between workers and intellectuals were the Jewish workers of Russian-occupied Poland, Lithuania, and the 'Pale' or Jewish settlement districts in southwestern Russia,
The Jews were among the most educated sector in the empire. Not only did they embrace socialism en masse but they provided the revolutionary parties with some of their ablest theorists and activists. During the quiescent 1880s Social Democratic kruzhky began to spring up throughout the Pale, and Marxists of Jewish origin such as Julius Martov had little difficulty in organizing them. In Poland and Lithuania—especially in Vilnius in 1893—Jewish workers already engaged in strikes that were often led by Marxist socialists. By the turn of the century, the largest and most successful workers' party in Russia was the Jewish Workers' League, or Bund, in whose formation Martov played an immensely important role and which soon became a mass organization modeled on politicized Western European trade unions.

If the theoretically oriented Marxists were occupied with forming kruzhky in these years, the action-oriented narodovoltsy were not far behind. The narodovoltsy and the Marxists functioned together in the same committees, occasionally even conducting joint kruzhky, promoting the same popular literature, and sharing similar resources for bringing literature into Russia. They published translations of Marx, Engels, Bebel, and other leading Marxists, as well as their own theorists, and some self-professed Marxist kruzhky even believed in terrorist activities. Indeed, until the 1890s, many Russian workers could not draw a clear distinction between the two socialist movements, and those who did seldom opposed their joint activities.

In the 1890s, due largely to the harsh behavior of the autocracy, Russian workers temporarily set aside their suspicion of revolutionary intellectuals. The government's repression of all agitational activity unlocked the workers' traditional mental and psychological doors and drove them into the arms of the revolutionary students and professionals. This marriage was caused in great part by the workers' need to gain the intelligentsia's assistance in matters of political agitation and education. The last decade of the nineteenth century, moreover, marked not only the end of one phase of revolutionary education but the beginning of a radically new one. From 1900 onward the need arose to move beyond the study group movement, or kruzhkovshchina, into consolidated political organizations that allowed for the national or 'all-Russian' mobilization of the proletariat as a class.

AGITATIONAL COMMITTEES

The first step in this direction came in 1894 when Julius Martov, who was infused with the experience of working with large masses of proletarians, introduced the Petersburg kruzhok to a highly provocative pamphlet by Arkady Kremer entitled On Agitation, which had already been widely distributed in Minsk. The pamphlet produced an ideological furor among the Petersburg workers. On Agitation called upon the kruzhky to shift from secretively conducted propaganda to open agitation in streets and factories. Propaganda kruzhky were to be, not simply subterranean study groups, but agitational committees occupied with leafletting and systematically organizing the workers.

Moreover, erstwhile propagandists (commonly students) were now called upon to propel the masses into strikes, public manifestations, and hopefully outright clashes. They were asked to don workers' clothing, adopt proletarian manners, and take jobs in the workplaces of Petersburg and other cities in the hope of inspiring militancy among the laboring masses, whether by means of strikes or street demonstrations. At great risk to themselves, these revolutionary agitators were expected to disseminate their literature among large masses of people and, wherever possible, barrage them with public speeches.

These demands, dangerous as they were, constituted a logical escalation of revolutionary activity. The kruzhky, although valuable in instilling the knowledge needed to guide revolutionary activity, were useless if they did not enter into the public domain. Sooner or later they had to become a living social presence and give tangibility to their ideas. If this step was not taken, they risked the possibility of becoming monastic retreats, not active social forces to change the world.

The challenge came soon enough. In May 1896 the St Petersburg textile workers downed their tools and went on a strike of unprecedented proportions in Russia, both in the number of workers involved and in its level of organization. The strike began when textile employers refused to give full pay to their workers—the textile workers were the lowest paid and most overworked in the capital—for participating in a three-day official holiday to celebrate the coronation of Nicholas II, the new tsar who had just succeeded his late father Alexander III. An estimated 30,000 cotton spinners and weavers spontaneously struck the plants—and thereby opened the gates of pent-up working-class resentment. From a mere request for three days of holiday pay, the strike demands escalated into a movement to reduce the workday from thirteen to ten and a half hours. The strikers also demanded monetary wage payments instead of company chits; and an end to the capricious fining of workers for real or imagined infractions. At a rally in the Ekaterinov Park near the huge Putilov metalworks, the strikers formed what Richard Pipes actually calls a 'prossovet' of a hundred representatives to formulate and press their demands.7

Throughout the two weeks that they remained off their jobs, the strikers showed an extraordinary degree of discipline. They abstained from drunkenness and acts of violence that would have easily provoked bloody Cossack and
police attacks. They prudently stayed at home instead of gathering in provocative crowds in the streets, and they established a well-organized network of representatives who maintained close contact among Petersburg's striking factories.

The textile strike aroused widespread sympathy not only in Petersburg but throughout Russia and even abroad. In England, Germany, France, and other European countries, workers took up collections to aid the strikers. Public meetings of support were held in many European cities. But the funds that the workers collected were not sufficient to sustain the 30,000 striking men and women—a problem that faced every self-contained general strike. Moreover, skilled workers in the strategic metallurgical plants of Petersburg, who were relatively well paid and already had a shortened workday, did not join in the strike. At length, primarily for lack of material resources, the workers were compelled to go back to the factories without any immediate gains.

Yet the strike was far from a complete failure. The government, pressured by another large strike of the textile workers the following January, was obliged to establish the eleven-and-a-half-hour workday. Employers were required to place limitations on child labor, to pay all wages in cash, and to fine workers only for a narrower range of infractions. Many of these improvements were honored primarily in the breach, to be sure, yet even so, the strikes had shown what workers, many of whom were illiterate semi-peasants and women, could achieve. The fact that the strikes were led by working-class militants suggested that hidden cadres of worker-activists had long existed within the plants, many of whom were probably trained in kruzhky.

But the influence of the socialists, especially the Marxists in Petersburg, on the strikes of the 1890s remains a matter of historical dispute. Were the strikes entirely spontaneous, the product of working-class initiative and self-discipline, in which socialist intellectuals played no role? Or did a lengthy period of socialist education in joint worker-intellectual kruzhky, as well as the important socialist literature produced before and during the strikes, contribute significantly to the strikers' clan and discipline? In fact, the best evidence supports the view that the Marxist intellectuals played a very important role in helping the strikers formulate their goals, sustain their morale, and above all act in a disciplined manner.

As Allan K. Wildman has written, the older intellectual leaders of the kruzhky were of immense importance in establishing the basis for the strong, self-conscious, and effective workers' movement that sustained the 1890s strikes.

Their brief agitational leaflets listing immediate grievances and demands were to a large extent substitutes for direct participation; they crystallized the workers' mood and channeled it into co-ordinated action without exposing the Social Democratic leaders to easy observation by the police. The dramatic culmination of their activity in the general strike of textile workers ... seemed to confirm beyond all doubt the efficacy of the St Petersburg [agitational] methods and won for them imitators in all parts of Russia.4

During the strikes, the Marxists and narodovoltsy busily produced leaflets spelling out the workers' demands and urging them to behave in a disciplined manner. Once the strikes got under way, the socialist intelligentsia may well have been in continual consultation with striking militants, offering them advice based on their knowledge of workers' movements in the West.

Propaganda and agitation are interdependent and are both patently necessary. Obviously the weight they are given may vary in different periods; in a time of reaction or repression like the dark 1880s, when fomenting strikes and street actions was virtually useless and even foolhardy, study-oriented kruzhky were the best form of activity in which Social Democrats could engage without being wiped out by the police. By the same token, in periods of unrest, agitation clearly deserved to have priority over propaganda. But agitation alone was insufficient to consolidate the workers into an organized and informed social force, and the shift from propaganda-oriented kruzhky to agitational committees was not without problems: the proletariat was badly in need of its Russian 'Bebels', who could explicate socialist theory, together with agitational organizers who were able to create new activist committees.

THE FORMATION OF THE RSDWP

The awakening of the working class at the turn of the century impressively confirmed the Marxist emphasis on the proletariat's hegemonic role. Marx's systematic ideas, moreover, came very much into vogue. In contrast to the narodovoltsy, whose anarchic dispositions favored small-group activity, Marxists were committed to the formation of a national Social Democratic party based mainly on working-class support. This impetus gained crucial reinforcement from Germany with the fall of Bismarck and the legalization of the German Social Democrats, who had already had a mass following even while the Iron Chancellor held office. Now that Russia was industrializing, and strikes were no longer a rarity in Russian cities, the Petersburg, Moscow, and Minsk Social Democrats could hope that they too would be able to create an organized mass movement with a disciplined and politically sophisticated...
working-class following, in contrast to the small, conspiratorial, clandestine groups typical of anarchism. By the 1890s the time finally seemed ripe formally to establish a Social Democratic party throughout the Russian Empire.

The first tangible steps toward achieving this end were taken by the newly formed Yiddish-speaking Bund, which had the material means for holding a fairly representative party ‘congress’. Drawing upon its contacts and resources, the Bund convened an illegal congress on 13 March 1898. The Bundists, however, were eager to preserve their autonomy as a Jewish workers’ organization within an all-Russian congress. Accordingly, their leaders made every effort to control the proceedings and steer them in a quasi-federalist organizational direction.

This ‘First Congress’ of the new Russian Social Democratic party was convened in Minsk, which contained a large Jewish proletariat, and its handful of delegates were not disposed to place any severe ideological and organizational restrictions on the wishes of the Bundist leaders. Actually nine highly accommodating delegates showed up, who claimed to represent the Bund, the Petersburg Union of Struggle, and krugly in Kiev, Moscow, and Ekaterinoslav. Nor did the new all-Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party (RSDWP), as it named itself, formulate a program. Rather, it adopted a soaring and general manifesto, stating the all-important Social Democratic position that the proletariat would have to make a ‘bourgeois democratic’ revolution in Russia because the domestic bourgeoisie was too weak and fearful of the working class to fulfill its own historical destiny. This meant that the workers, while leading the overthrow of tsarism, would have to be restrained from venturing beyond bourgeois-democratic limits by their own leaders and party.

With the formation of the party many Marxist and even semi-narodnik krugly were eager to affiliate with it, generally abandoning the name ‘circles’ for ‘committees’ to conform to the fledgling party’s organizational ideas. Local Social Democratic periodicals appeared, and in a number of places local committees began to co-ordinate their krugly into loosely confederal Unions of Struggle.

The fledgling RSDWP elected a central committee of three members and selected the Kiev krugy’s periodical, Rabochaya Gazeta (Workers’ Paper), as its official organ. For its chief propagandist, it chose a rising star in Russian Marxism, V.I. Lenin (as Ulyanov now called himself), to edit a series of introductory propagandistic pamphlets. It dutifully selected Plekhanov’s prestigious émigré group to represent it abroad. Its Russian organizational structure was extremely loose; the real power in the party, it was agreed, should rest with its constituent local committees, which in practice could ignore the Central Committee’s directives if they regarded them as inapplicable to their local conditions. The Central Committee, in turn, was obliged to consult with a party congress on all important issues that did not require immediate action.

The newly constituted RSDWP’s initial influence among the masses however, was virtually nil. In fact, shortly after the congress proceedings came to an end, most of the few delegates who attended were rounded up by police. Almost everything that this shadowy congress created eventually had to be reconstituted later (at the crucial Second Congress of the RSDWP). Yet although the First Congress was hardly more than a formality, it gave a certain tangibility to the existence of a Marxist party in Russia that slowly attracted the interest and then the support of the growing number of committees that sprang up throughout the empire.

THE AWAKENING OF THE PEASANTRY

The late 1890s also saw a widespread awakening, after generations of dormancy, of the Russian peasantry. By 1902 and 1903 the accumulating burden of the redemption payments, combined with the increase in the rural population and the scarcity and high price of available land, had become intolerable burdens to many peasants, who often responded by migrating to the cities. Others looked longingly at the vast uncultivated lands that remained in the possession of the gentry. In some case, peasants simply took their scythes in hand and attacked the property of the gentry, especially in the Ukraine, the Volga, and the central black earth regions. Once again peasants staged bunt in numerous parts of central Russia, fusing as a potentially rebellious presence with the workers’ movement in the cities.

By the early 1900s the authorities were obliged to deal with young peasants who, significantly, had never known serfdom’s humiliations and were not likely to settle for a hapless and servile way of life. These wilful and increasingly militant young people were learning how to read and write and eagerly listened to radical new ideas. Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaya—one of the elders of Russian populism, a woman of noble birth who had taken part in the V narod movement of 1874 and spent twenty years in Siberian exile—astutely observed:

The first thing that sprang to my attention was the significantly greater extent of literacy and the desire of the more literate to read serious books in the hope of finding answers to their insoluble problems. . . . Next, one could not help noticing a greater independence of behaviour and, among the younger peasants, a deliberate ignoring of the gentry and the state
officials. Moreover, there was hardly a single teenage girl, not to mention the lads, who had not been working away from home, travelling hundreds of miles to the south of Russia at harvest time, or to the sugar refineries of Kiev and elsewhere.

Breshko-Breshkovskaya was not alone in her fascination with the changes in the countryside. Her feelings were shared by many Russian revolutionaries who believed it was crucial to win the peasantry—the great majority of Russians—over to socialism. These new narodovoltsy prudently settled into the countryside, where they found permanent jobs as teachers, physicians, medical assistants, agronomists, and zemstvo officials. Some of them were professionals who worked in schools, clinics, and the like. Here the new army of radicals patiently educated the peasants not only in reading, writing, and calculating but also in their basic human rights—and laid the groundwork, not for a new ‘children’s crusade’, but for a stable and persisting agrarian movement.

These narodovoltsy, more than any other socialist tendency in Russia, focused their attention on the problems of the agrarian village and spoke about social issues in a moral language that the peasantry easily understood. Moreover, they seemed willing to discuss those problems with a revolutionary élan that especially reached the young peasants, who were festering with anger against the regime in Petersburg as well as the local authorities.

THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARIES

By the century’s end, Russian populists could look with the same enthusiasm on the growth of their influence and ideas that the Marxists did during the previous decade. The Socialist Revolutionaries—or SRs, as many narodovoltsy began to call themselves—tried to meld the traditional narodnik assertion of Russia’s agrarian exceptionalism with the emerging realities of European industrialization and proletarianization.

But they were not converts to Marxism. Most notably, where the Russian Marxists attributed to the peasantry a regressive, petty-bourgeois, and even counter-revolutionary role, the Socialist Revolutionaries, with much greater insight, gave them a positive and decisive role in radical social transformation. Although they readily acknowledged the many limitations that the working peasant exhibited, as the Marxists emphasized, as a proprietor and a landowner, they also insisted that he was a worker, not as a bourgeois of any kind. Unlike the French peasant, the Russian peasant—the meschik—was not averse to the socialization or nationalization of the land, which in his words ‘belonged to God’ and not to any man. Indeed, the obshchina required that the land be distributed among individual households and redistributed periodically according to need. The peasantry, in short, normally did not claim to ‘own’ the land, let alone turn it into salable bourgeois property. Rather, it generally favored the periodic redistribution of the land according to the changing requirements of a village’s families.

Not only did Russian Marxists display sovereign contempt for the obshchina, they considered the industrialization of agriculture by capitalism and the proletarianization of the peasantry by large bourgeois estates to be a historical pre-condition for a socialist revolution, to be followed by the nationalization of agriculture by a workers’ state. Marxists, in effect, favored a highly rationalized and factory-like form of collectivization. As Victor Chernov, the foremost SR theorist of the day, later characterized their position:

By analogy with industry, the Social Democrats expected the same process of development in agrarian capitalism, but through a slower and more painful process. They expected the landed gentry to be transformed into modern large-scale landowners, creators of rationalized ‘grain factories’. They expected to see the village broken up, the minority of the peasants transformed into petty capitalists, while the majority would become landless proletarians, the village branch of the industrial working class.

By contrast, the SRs took a radically different approach: in their view, the obshchina constituted the nucleus for a future socialist society. As such, the obshchina might well make it possible for Russia to avoid a capitalist stage of development—with all the consequent ravages of capitalist industrialization—and allow agrarian Russia to develop socialism independently of the course taken by the West. Traditional notions of volya and peasant ties to the obshchina resonated, they believed, with revolutionary demands for ‘land and freedom’ and ‘the abolition of private ownership of land’.

Thus for SRs the peasantry’s belief that the land ‘belonged to God’ and should be available to everyone who was willing to work it made the villages a highly promising social and revolutionary agent. Deeply ingrained in the peasant’s psyche, this belief had a fervent moral, even semi-religious core; it was fundamental to the traditional notion of volya. To the peasantry, the gentry’s imposition of property rights on a God-given resource—the village’s ‘mother’, the land—was fundamentally immoral. Land pre-existed all social classes and should never be owned. It should only be used—a view that fused economic realities with moral sensibilities and gave an almost metaphysical revolutionary edge to the thinking of the worker-peasants who arrived from the countryside.
Finally, where Russian Marxists emphasized economic forces as the driving 'laws' of history, the SRs warned that this basically impersonal and abstract theory overlooked the dire economic and demoralizing consequences of capitalist development for the workers and peasantry and ignored an indispensable moral premise that inhered in the outlook of millions of oppressed Russians. Socialists did not have to 'bring' a collectivist morality to the peasant majority of the empire; they already had it. This morality also fostered a strong predisposition for voluntarism and direct action. In contrast to the Marxists, who disdained emphasis on moral categories, the populists insisted upon their centrality, albeit without denying the importance of economic factors in producing historical change. They believed profoundly in the moral character of their own demands: their movement sought not only economic fairness but also moral redemption. Populist ideas were repeatedly couched in strong ethical, even semi-religious terms and were inspired by an almost transcendental sense of justice and truth.

Thus the narodovoltsy often called their organizations 'brotherhoods', not merely knegby, and preached an organizational message of personal affinity expressed by dedicatory vows, fervent declarations of allegiance, and inspired initiation ceremonies. Their beliefs were sustained by a spirit of mutual sacrifice, a personal hatred of privilege, intense feelings of guilt (among upper-class populists) for the suffering of the people, and lofty sentiments of idealism. In contrast to the Marxists, who emphasized the 'objective laws of history' and 'scientific socialism', eschewing sentiment and ethical explanations for their beliefs, the narodovoltsy were greatly nourished on the subjectivism of theorists like Nikolai Mikhailovsky, who affirmed the importance of will and moral motivation.

The SRs' high esteem for the peasantry, however, did not blind them to the fact that previous generations of populists had failed miserably to win the countryside over to radical ideas or even diminish its traditional devotion to the tsar. Like many young intellectuals at the time, they were influenced greatly by Marx, and many of them acknowledged the importance of the proletariat in advancing the cause of socialism. Industrial workers appeared to be more acutely hostile to the tsarist regime than their rural cousins, and it was very obvious that they were more responsive to revolutionary ideas and activities. In the 1890s some SRs freely incorporated notions of proletarian socialism into their programs. Even decades before, as Pipes points out, the original Narodnaya Volya was so impressed by the surge of the industrial proletariat and by its response to socialist propaganda that, in its party program of 1879, it expressed the belief that the proletariat would constitute the vanguard of the Russian revolutionary movement."

But this was not the typical SR view. Many SRs simply considered both groups, the proletariat and the working peasantry (as well as the radical intelligentsia, especially students), to be indispensable to the success of a future revolution. Unlike Plekhanov and most Marxists, they could see no reason to discount the peasantry as a potentially revolutionary force. These 'neopopulists', as they were to be called—led primarily by Victor Chernov—essentially expanded the definition of words such as workers and toilers to include the working peasants—'toilers of the soil'—who cultivated the land to meet their families' needs, occasionally with the aid of a hired hand. Chernov in particular fell back on passages in volume 3 of Marx's Capital to justify his view that 'the workers' included non-industrial as well as industrial strata.

On the whole, however, the majority of SRs were ambivalently suspicious of Marxism as an amoral, industrial, and overly materialistic ideology that was alien to their outlook, and they adhered to the traditional populist view that the peasant and the obshchina were central to an ethical Russian radicalism that upheld spiritual ideals and volya, the unique Russian village concept of freedom.

THE FORMATION OF THE PSR

By 1900 all socialist tendencies in the empire were faced with the imperative of organizing and mobilizing resources on a broad national scale. Narodovoltsy had been forming their own small-group organizations for nearly two generations, but the awakening of the peasantry in the 1890s obliged them to establish a distinctly identifiable national party. Like the Marxists, they tried to pull their segmented organizations and supporters together into an all-Russian confrontation with the autocracy.

The moving force behind the creation of a functional populist party, however, was undoubtedly Victor Chernov, who established several populist 'brotherhoods' and even succeeded in convening a provincial peasant congress that provided the framework for an active, socialist agrarian movement with a decidedly populist program. Chernov's incipient agrarian party was soon dispersed by police. After 1899 he traveled to Western Europe, making contact with various Russians in exile, including the quarreling Social Democrats in Zurich, and trying to mobilize their support for the creation of a quasi-Marxist populist party at home. Although a few assorted exiles were willing to give him a hearing, he was spumed by most of them. But Chernov persisted and traveled to Paris, where older narodnik exiles gathered around the most venerated living figure of Russian populism, Pyotr Lavrov, who enthusiastically
hailed his vision of a united movement. Unfortunately Lavrov died shortly after Chernov’s arrival, but his funeral became the occasion for a new gathering of the most distinguished populist exiles and émigrés in Europe.

While still gathered in Paris, the Russian populists formed an exile organization called the Agrarian-Socialist League. As Chernov put it, Lavrov’s funeral became ‘the christening party of our Agrarian-Socialist League: the dear departed [Lavrov] was its invisible godfather.’ The League adhered to a fairly orthodox version of populism that regarded the obshchina and the collectivist Russian peasantry as a direct common route to a truly socialist society. Yet it also supported ‘broadening’ the workers’ movement. Its founding appeal declared: ‘In view of the need to broaden the course of the revolutionary movement in general, and of the workers’ movement in particular, by attracting to it the working masses of the countryside, the Agrarian-Socialist League has been formed abroad with the aim of aiding all comrades working directly or indirectly in this direction in Russia.’

The mere decision to create a national party galvanized the populist movement throughout Russia. Many other groups besides the northern and southern organizations eventually had a hand in the formation of the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries (PSR) in 1901. When the Agrarian-Socialist League affiliated with the PSR, it finally legitimated the new creation as a party hallowed by tradition, which rapidly attracted isolated populist groups of various hues throughout the empire.

The PSR was centered in Saratov, a city, as we have seen, long noted for its lively populist movement. In fact, Saratov became for the PSR what St Petersburg eventually became for the Bolsheviks. At its first unified congress in 1905–6, the PSR adopted a basically neopopulist program and acknowledged Revolyutsionnaya Rossiya (Revolutionary Russia), a periodical edited and ideologically influenced by Victor Chernov, as its official organ. The PSR’s central committee included the most venerable populists in Russia, but it also made room for populism’s newly arrived young leaders. Reaching out through the empire, it established oblast or regional committees in the larger regions; guberniya or provincial committees;uezd or district committees; and where possible, volost committees (a volost being the smallest, most basic administrative unit in Russia, consisting of several villages). The local volost committees often had a merely nominal existence, particularly because they were continually being depleted by the arrest of their members.

Despite the burst of enthusiasm created by its official founding in 1901, the PSR grew slowly as a party; ‘all the tiny rivulets of Populism were flowing into a single stream,’ to use Oliver Radkey’s metaphorical expression, ‘as yet of no great breadth or depth, but already running swiftly.’ Notwithstanding its slow rate of growth, for the first time a permanent, hopefully mass party had emerged from the long, often unsteady stream of Russian populist groups, now strengthened by a clear identity and the outlines of a nationwide revolutionary organization.

THE PSR PROGRAM

On 29 December 1906, at its first nationwide congress in Imatra, Finland, the PSR adopted a program that clearly reflected the influence of Victor Chernov’s neopopulism. The congress, which attracted 95 delegates, representing 51 local and regional party organizations, lasted five days, passing into the New Year from 1906 to 1907. Its main debates were over the contents of the program. Indeed, so preoccupied were the delegates with ideology that the debates continued well into the early morning hours of January 2. The congress closed with an enthusiastic ovation to Chernov, whom one delegate hailed as ‘the young giant who has for five years carried on his shoulders the entire weight of the theoretical development of our programme.’

Typically, the program contained a minimum program that called for an end to the autocracy and the immediate establishment of a Western-style republic, freed of all the features of monarchism and feudalism, and fostering considerable autonomy for all nationalities. A free electorate was to convolve a constituent assembly to adopt a modern constitution. Trade unions and all working-class organizations were to be immediately legalized, a compulsory eight-hour day was to be instituted, and working conditions in factories were to be vastly improved. Church and state were to be separated in all aspects of educational and civic life. Freedom of the press, speech, and assembly were to be guaranteed, and a suffrage system was to be instituted based on proportional representation and to include the right to recall representatives and the frequent use of referenda.

Going well beyond Western constitutions, the PSR program demanded agrarian legislation that would ‘socialize’ all Russian land. By this the SRs meant not only that all large landed properties were to be nationalized but that their holdings were to be divided according to need among the peasant communes, thereby transforming the chernyi peredel into a hallowed custom into a legal stricture. Accordingly, each household would have the full right to cultivate its crops on a family basis—as families did in the obshchina—in a system predicated on domestic needs.

SRs were deeply preoccupied with the difference between the socialization of the land and its nationalization in a state-planned economy. What they called ‘socialization’ was very different from what Marxists usually meant. They
wanted to create, not an agricultural proletariat, but a social system of agriculture tailored to meet family and social needs. But the PSR never clearly worked out what kind of institutions (apart from the obshchina itself) would 'socialize' the land or, for that matter, the factories and other non-agrarian means of production.

The PSR's maximum program, on the other hand, was surprisingly similar to that of the Social Democrats. Both parties agreed that as the masses matured culturally and ideologically after a basically 'bourgeois democratic' revolution, they would move toward the full collectivization of agriculture as well as industry and abolish the obshchina's household methods for land redistribution. Following the education of the countryside and the nationalization of the land, they held, food cultivation and land ownership could now be collectivized. Where the Russian Marxists called for a highly centralized state, the SRs were decidedly more decentralistic. As Oliver Radkey observes:

In opposition to the centralizing tendencies of many socialist parties, the SRs favored maximum decentralization. ... During the period of the minimum program the SRs were prepared to accept an abnormal degree of decentralization—even by their own standards—which they would be the first to rescind with the advent of a fully developed socialism. ... As to the local organs, the party might expect to win a majority in some of them well before it could hope to duplicate that feat in the country at large.12

Which raises the question of why it did not occur to the SRs to extend the basically communalist or municipalist orientation of its transitional expectations into its minimum program from the very outset of the dogmatically prescribed 'bourgeois' revolution, and simply call for a Russia of free villages, towns, and cities, all united into a network of confederations that would control the land and factories regionally. Such a political and economic structure was politically the most natural end toward which Russia, following its most rational development, was unfolding, and one that was eminently suited to a largely decentralized economy in the early twentieth century. But Marxist notions had infiltrated Chernov's thinking and closed his mind to the lessons of nearly a century of socialist experience. Ideologically at least, the PSR was really a Marxist party that tried desperately to meld populist theories with those that were emanating from Plekhanov in Geneva.

The PSR, moreover, retained the narodnik tradition of terrorist activity. Its Fighting Organization (initially independent of the party itself) undertook spectacular assassinations of high government officials as well as minor police infiltrators and agents provocateurs. Indeed, the Fighting Organization assassinated several major state officials, including a member of the royal

family. Nevertheless, the PSR leadership did not have a favorable attitude toward spontaneous peasant uprisings against the landlords' property. Like the Social Democrats, who regarded many bunty as immoral acts of plunder, PSR leaders were strongly committed to organized, party-orchestrated peasant uprisings. Village-planned seizures of land, crops, cattle, and machinery such as occurred in the countryside during times of social unrest filled these largely town-born middle-class revolutionaries with dread. The leaders of the populist movement, notwithstanding their claims to represent the interests of the peasantry, placed their real trust not in the raw muchikh but in the sophisticated intelligentsia and, more generally, in the enlightened middle class as a whole. The 'ax and torch', which symbolized events like the pogacheskaya, were no less fearsome to Russian populists and Marxists than they were to the landed proprietors who lived so uneasily among the desperate 'dark masses'.

NOTES

3. Ibid., p. 103.
9. 'To Comrades in Thought and Deed' (1900), quoted in Perrie, Agrarian Policy, p. 39.
11. Quoted in Perrie, Agrarian Policy, p. 132.
CHAPTER 39 Bolsheviks and Mensheviks

VLADIMIR ILYICH LENIN

Perhaps the most remarkable of the Russian exiles who kept this émigré world in a state of continual polemical ferment was the younger brother of Alexander Ulyanov, Vladimir (or Ilyich, as his close colleagues called him) Lenin.

Born at Simbirsk (later Ulyanovsk) in 1870 of a Volga German mother (according to recent scholarship, of Jewish ethnic origin) and a father of decidedly Kalmuck ancestry, the young Ulyanov came from a hard-working family of the minor governmental nobility. Lenin’s father, a provincial public official, died early of a cerebral hemorrhage; Ilyich inherited not only his father’s epicanthic Kalmuck eyes and high cheekbones but the physical infirmities that were to claim his life at the age of only 53. The Ulyanov family lived more in accord with the restraints of German sobriety than with the fervent spontaneity attributed to Russians at the time. Lenin’s mother, Maria Ulyanova (née Blank), was a highly educated woman who knew German, French, and English fluently and imparted their rudiments to all of her children. She shared her love of literature with her family by reading aloud to them during the long nights of the Russian winter. Tidy and methodical in managing the household, she was, like many Germans in the Volga region, very progressive in her ideas, both socially and as a parent.

The young Ilyich apparently imbibed these traits from her. A brilliant student, he was permitted by the authorities to attend Kazan University, despite the handicap of being the brother of an executed regicide. But—always an object of official suspicion after Alexander’s execution—he was expelled in 1887 for being a political ‘troublemaker’. He completed his law studies at home, entirely on his own and was accepted by the bar. Like many of his fellow students, he became involved in revolutionary activity, initially as a populist and later, after 1889, as a Marxist.

Following his arrival in St Petersburg in 1893, Lenin joined the Radchenko circle, and after he met Martov two years later, the two men eagerly joined forces to establish the St Petersburg Union of Struggle for the Liberation of the Working Class, a name suggested by Martov and probably inspired by Plekhanov’s Liberation of Labor group. After the 1896 textile strike, in which the new group was heavily involved, both Lenin and Martov were among those arrested and sent into Siberian exile for three years, from 1897 to 1900.

Lenin was sent to the remote village of Shushenskoye, which by Siberian standards was nevertheless a very comfortable refuge that allowed the future Bolsheviki leader to engage in study and writing. His wife Nadezhda Krupskaya, his closest comrade in the Petersburg kruzhok, was permitted to share his quarters in Shushenskoye, where she entered upon her role as his indispensable aide. Martov, by contrast, who had been arrested shortly after Lenin, was exiled to Turukhanov, in the far north, where he was obliged to spend his three years under very physically demanding conditions. Most likely Martov’s exile was more rigorous because he was a Jew and a commoner, but their differing circumstances never produced any ill feelings between them, even after political differences eventually ended their close friendship.

During his years in Shushenskoye, Lenin’s authorship of The Development of Capitalism in Russia (published in 1899) earned him considerable prestige among Russian Marxists. The book was designed to deflate narodnik visions of the hegemonic role of the peasantry in the struggle against tsarism and to debunk the notion that Russia could bypass a ‘bourgeois stage’ of development. Using an enormous amount of statistical material, Lenin tried to establish that capitalism was already so well established in Russia that it precluded any prospect of making the Russian Empire into a populist haven. At the same time Lenin’s extraordinary organizing abilities, which he used to establish and maintain contacts with important individuals and groups in western Russia, contributed to a growing influence that soon exceeded that of more venerable and better-known figures in the emerging Social Democratic movement, apart from renowned figures like Plekhanov and Zasulich.

Lenin normally formed his theoretical ideas slowly and methodically, only after serious thought and study. A notable feature of Lenin’s mentality was his analytical keenness. Marxism had taught him to go to the root of a problem and follow its internal logic unrelentingly—a practice that made him an anomaly among most Russian intellectuals. Averse to lingering inconclusively over inchoate political discussions, Lenin would become so impatient with what he regarded as directionless chatter that he could easily antagonize his close colleagues with his refusal to discuss interminably. Yet Lenin could also be very charming, pleasantly ironic, and sincerely solicitous of the welfare of his comrades. Contrary to the image that he was a brutal man, the founder of
Bolshevism was initially more prone to act from kindness than from cold indifference. In later years the terrible civil war that followed the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution would drive him to acts of severe repression, but there is no evidence that he was inherently harsh in his personal dealings with people.

Lenin’s thinking and behavior were guided by the conviction, based on compelling historical reality, that the bourgeoisie (be it liberal or reactionary) would never yield its social supremacy to the proletariat without an unrelenting, often bloody struggle, and that capitalism could not be replaced by a socialist society without the stern leadership of a highly centralized party, composed of completely dedicated and disciplined professional revolutionaries. His strong commitment to a vanguard party was in large part a reaction to the historical fatalism that permeated many contemporary European Marxists—notably their conviction that, owing to the ‘inexorable’ laws of social development, socialism was a ‘historical inevitability’. According to this very widespread and dogmatic interpretation of the Marxists ‘laws’ of history, the principal function of a workers’ party was limited to the task of furnishing ideological assistance to the proletariat. The party, in short, would function as the most conscious custodian of the working class’s ‘inherently’ revolutionary impulses—which would grow out of the conflict between wage labor and capital.

Lenin could not have been unaware of Marx’s own statement in the Inaugural Address of the First International that the ‘emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working classes themselves.’ This ‘line’—widely cited both by anarchist-syndicalists and by Marxists—did not prevent the founder of Bolshevism from insisting that the proletariat as a class could not be expected to rise above a mere economic trade union consciousness. This pragmatic concept, more than any idea in Lenin’s theories, lies at the core of ‘Leninism’, a thoroughly fabricated ideology that in all other respects is simply a revolutionary (as distinguished from a reformist) interpretation of Marx’s writings. Capitalism and the everyday demands of survival, he believed, had locked the majority of workers into elemental demands for improved wages, hours, and working conditions—a level of consciousness, in Lenin’s view, that was quite compatible with the continued existence of bourgeois society. All its militancy notwithstanding, the proletariat on its own could seldom, if ever, be expected to look beyond capitalism as a given social order, and left to itself, it would attempt to satisfy immediate piecemeal demands within the framework of bourgeois social relations.

To Lenin, then, it required ‘professional revolutionaries’, thoroughly trained in Marxist theory, to lift the proletariat beyond social conditions defined by capitalism, to advance from a struggle for the amelioration of its economic misery to a struggle for complete economic and social emancipation. Such revolutionaries, it should be emphasized, were neither strictly proletariat nor middle-class intellectuals. They belonged to a new social stratum of their own that, like Chernyshevsky’s ‘new men’, transcended bourgeois lifeways and tried to lead the working class to a socialist society.

Lenin’s ideas on professional revolutionaries and disciplined organization were laid out in his booklet of 1902, What Is To Be Done?—a title appropriately borrowed from Chernyshevsky. Lenin’s work provoked a sensation in Russian Social Democratic circles and became the foundational book in Bolshevism. Like so many of Lenin’s writings, What Is To Be Done? is a decided polemical work, in this case directed against the ‘economists’ in Russian Social Democracy who were eager to emphasize everyday economic issues around which the working class could be mobilized. The role of an authentic Marxist party, in Lenin’s eyes, was clearly and without equivocation to lead the masses toward socialism, not toward the mere amelioration of its enslavement under bourgeois social conditions.

That his argument would generate bitter disputes, Lenin all but took for granted. The epigraph to the booklet quoted a sentence from Ferdinand Lassalle in an 1852 letter to Marx: ‘Party struggles lend a party strength and vitality; the greatest proof of a party’s weakness is its diffuseness and the blurring of clear demarcations; a party becomes stronger by purging itself.’ This idea was to guide Lenin throughout his life. While disagreements at conferences and congresses were indispensable for the ideological development of the party, however, the utmost centralization, Lenin argued, was needed during interim periods, if the struggle against capitalism was to be effectively advanced. A central committee would take responsibility for formulating its day-to-day policies and see to their consistent execution. Capitalism had to be fought, in effect, on its own terms: by armed revolutionary means, pitting a proletarian ‘state in the making’ against the prevailing bourgeois state. This was a struggle that allowed for no quarter. It had to be fought by the party’s central committee, like a general staff, supported, as in any army, by an infrastructure of disciplined professionals who guided a historically hegemonic social class—the proletariat. Thus, a truly revolutionary, coherent, and purposive Social Democratic (really a Communist) party, in Lenin’s view, had to consist of people who were committed Marxists, class-conscious internationalists, and revolutionaries. The party had to be thoroughly unified by fundamental principles and by a discipline to which all members were unreservedly committed. Its press had to be the ‘voice’ of the party’s central committee (although it could openly publish major disputes between opposing political factions and tendencies within the party itself).

Lenin’s attempt to achieve an effective and disciplined party, however, came at a steep price. However much he verbally praised democracy, the future
Bolshevik leader tended to denigrate it as 'superstructural' and more commonly to dismiss his critics who made appeals to democracy as 'soft' or lacking in revolutionary zeal. This kind of language became so commonplace that it often tainted even minor differences among Lenin's followers and created a party atmosphere in which demands for internal democracy were viewed as alien to a Marxist outlook. (See, for example, Lenin's behavior at the Tenth Congress, in reaction to the Workers' opposition in 1921.) For Lenin, democracy was never an end in itself, a form of human and social self-realization. Rather, it could justifiably be sacrificed to 'higher', presumably historic, ends.

ECONOMISM AND REVISIONISM

But democracy was not to be the primary issue that confronted Lenin and the RSDWP in 1903. The most important issue was the emergence of a reformist tendency, of a kind that came to the forefront of most socialist parties in the 1890s, especially the German Social Democrats (influenced by Eduard Bernstein). These Social Democrats sought, not to organize a revolutionary movement, but to return to the 'good works' and reforms of the early populists under Alexander II and help workers resolve their immediate economic concerns. By shifting the movement's focus to immediate economic issues, they expected to expand the base of Russian Marxism. They did not exclude political activity, but they were essentially trailing the Bernsteinian tendencies that were then neutralizing German Social Democracy as a revolutionary movement.

In 1897 workers from groups in and near Petersburg joined forces to publish a new mimeographed periodical that would be free of any influence or control by intellectuals. Rabochaya Mysl (Workers' Thought) tried to voice 'pure and simple' labor concerns, often publishing reports about factory conditions and grievances rather than social analyses. During the four years of its existence, between 1897 and 1901, workers in the Petrograd area proved to be highly responsive to this reformist turn; they regarded Rabochaya Mysl as their own periodical and distributed it widely to fellow workers in the shops and plants of the capital.

What made Rabochaya Mysl particularly interesting to the workers was its wealth of information about immediate and concrete working-class issues. The periodical provided an outlet for the expression of practical grievances felt by its proletarian readers, concerning wages and working conditions. But it also showed that Russian workers, left entirely to themselves, actually exhibited very little concern with analyses of the basic causes of their social problems, such as the existence of the autocracy and capitalist relations. The periodical was permeated by a narrow economic pragmatism that was decidedly more trade unionist and even syndicalist than Marxist. Editorially, the periodical vacillated between revolutionary Marxism and reformism, but the most widely read articles were closer to Eduard Bernstein's 'revisionism' than to Marx's revolutionary outlook. Its editorials also exhibited a marked bias against politics and theory.

In What Is To Be Done? Lenin sharply criticized Rabochaya Mysl for favoring the trade unionist tendencies and Bernstein-style reformism emerging in Russia. Immediate economic problems, he emphasized, could easily be resolved within the framework of the capitalist system, as was vividly occurring in Western Europe. Trying to reform the existing system, he insisted, would vitiate the workers' revolutionary spirit and their support, however vague, for revolutionary goals, while giving primacy to demands that would reinforce the workers' trade union consciousness.

It did not take long for other Social Democratic writers to follow the editors at Rabochaya Mysl and openly support Bernstein's ideas. Even leading Social Democrats—including the founders of Russian Social Democracy—expressed a measure of receptivity to the conclusions of Bernstein's revisionism. Axelrod and even Plekhanov, the 'father of Russian Marxism', were prepared to cede a great deal of theoretical ground to revisionist outlook. These leading Russian Social Democrats seemed to regard revolution as a remote goal, to a great extent irrelevant to their present social concerns. Lenin, by contrast, insisted on a firm commitment to revolutionary change. It is important to emphasize that the divisiveness that has been attributed to the future Bolshevik leader often stemmed from his recognition that seemingly minor differences could reveal serious latent divergences that had to be exposed and clarified. Indeed the problem of 'reform versus revolution', as it was usually called, would bitterly divide the party for the next fifteen years and remain a serious problem for the Left well into the twentieth century.

THE CREATION OF ISKRA

In addition to ideological disputes, organizational disputes divided the Russian Social Democrats as well, breaking out mainly around such issues as the functions and personnel of the party's official periodical. Since the 1880s, when early émigrés in Switzerland could barely have filled a small room, Russian Marxists had understood the need to create a center for their move-
ment that would mobilize and direct serious and committed Marxists, raise their theoretical level, and knit them together in a national party. But no one grappled with this need in so comprehensive, if often inflexible, a manner as Lenin. The nature of such a center may very well have been in his mind from the earliest days of his revolutionary activity. Following his exploratory four-month trip in Western Europe in the spring and summer of 1895, when he met and conferred with Plekhanov and Axelrod as well as other revolutionary émigrés, Lenin became aware that a Russian Marxist party could not hope to make any advances among the workers without some form of a guiding committee of trusted and convinced revolutionaries.

The first step in forming such a center, Lenin proposed, should be to create an editorial committee to publish a national Marxist periodical. Apparently the plan had entered his mind in 1898, during his Siberian exile, when he condemned economism and revisionism. Cutting against the Russian grain, he was resolved that Marxism had to be buttressed by a consistently Marxist organ that essentially controlled a top-down political party—views he shared with his closest friend, Julius Martov. The name of the proposed periodical—Iskra (Spark)—was chosen from a remark that a Decembrist had made to Pushkin: 'From the spark shall grow the flame.' Krupskaya later recalled that as Lenin’s exile drew to an end in February 1900—that is, when Vladimir Ilyich had conceived [his] organizational plan and the periodical—he began to champ at the bit with eagerness. Characteristically, he ‘hardly slept at all, and grew terribly thin. He sat up all night, working out his plan in fullest detail. . . . He grew more and more impatient as time went on, eager to throw himself into the work.” Letters in invisible ink and codewords were sent hastily back and forth from Shushenskoye to comrades who were privy to Lenin’s plans, particularly Martov and Potresov—the ‘troika’ or threesome, as they called themselves. The three men selected the future editors of the periodical as well as its contributors and even the kinds of articles needed, as well as methods for its circulation.

When their exiles came to an end, Lenin, Martov, and Potresov fanned out over Russia, establishing personal contact with supporters of a center and a national newspaper. Potential Iskra-ists were carefully sorted out from ‘soft’ Social Democrats and were then invited to join the periodical’s emerging network with a view, in the long run, to forming the cadres for a rejuvenated Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party. Lenin carried his message to exiles in Europe, meeting with Plekhanov, whom he still regarded as his teacher and mentor—and whose general support he received. But the younger man also encountered a serious problem. He had counted on the émigré group to produce Iskra, but Plekhanov, he found, had split his own Geneva group, taking the older veterans (Zasulich and Axelrod) with him and leaving the younger members to dangle on their own. Plekhanov tried to dismiss his erstwhile youthful admirers as ‘economists’ and revisionists, but to Lenin, Plekhanov seemed motivated less by ideological differences than by pettiness and injured vanity.

An obvious division appeared among the six people who made up the board: the younger Lenin, Martov, and Potresov, on the one hand, and the old veterans—Plekhanov, Zasulich, and Axelrod—on the other. How to avoid deadlocked decisions between the two equally numbered sides? Astonishingly, on Zasulich’s suggestion, the board agreed to give Plekhanov two votes, which guaranteed that his views would prevail. Then Plekhanov categorically refused to participate on the editorial board unless the others accepted this patently outrageous arrangement.

Plekhanov’s behavior had a lasting effect on his most important disciple. In a tormented letter to the troika and to Krupskaya, Lenin spoke of the ‘humility’ that he had previously felt before Plekhanov, the extent to which he had been ‘enamored’ of him, his initial willingness to forgive his ‘beloved’ mentor, and the ‘indignation’ he now felt, which, as he put it, ‘knew no bounds’. ‘Young comrades “court” an elder comrade,’ Lenin wrote in apparent pain, ‘out of the great love they bear for him—and suddenly he injects into this love an atmosphere of intrigue.’ His experience with Plekhanov taught Lenin ‘to regard all persons without sentiment, to keep a stone in one’s sling.’ Although it would be simplistic to regard a single event as completely formative of a personality, Lenin’s encounter with Plekhanov’s vanity clearly shaped his attitude, to one degree or another, toward many of his future associates.

Thus the old affection that the younger members felt for their seniors gave way to a businesslike and increasingly wary relationship. Zasulich alone among the veterans was most deeply involved in Iskra and worked closely with the three younger members in Munich, where the earliest issues of the periodical were prepared and published. Zasulich, Martov, Potresov, and Lenin were the de facto editors of Iskra and consulted with Axelrod and Plekhanov mainly by mail. The affairs of the periodical were conducted very ‘coolly’, to use Lenin’s word, while the old personal warmth between the former teacher and student waned steadily.

The first issue of Iskra, which appeared in December 1900, contained a very general statement of goals, titled ‘Declaration by the Editorial Board of Iskra’. Written by Lenin, it opened with a description of the spread of socialist ideas throughout Russia, lamenting that:

the principal feature of our movement, which has become particularly marked in recent times, is its state of disunity and its amateur character, if
one may so express it. Local study circles spring up and function independently of one another and—what is particularly important—of circles that have functioned and still function in the same districts.  

After warning about the dangers of ‘economism’, revisionism, and the ‘fashionable “criticism of Marxism”’ that collectively ‘push into the background the task of forming a revolutionary party to lead the struggle at the head of the whole people,’ the statement issued a call for all Social Democrats to establish unity ‘fortified by a unified Party programme.’ This, the ‘Declaration’ argued, must be followed by the establishment of an ‘organisation’ especially for the purpose of establishing and maintaining contact among all the centres of the movement, of supplying complete and timely information about the movement, and of regularly delivering our newspapers and periodicals to all parts of Russia. Only when such an organisation has been founded, only when a Russian socialist post has been established, will the Party possess a solid foundation and become a real fact, and, therefore, a mighty political force.  

In demanding ideological coherence and an enduring struggle against deviations from Marxism, the editors promised to carry on ‘open polemics, conducted in full view of all Russian Social-Democrats and class-conscious workers.’

The first issue also contained an unsigned article, ‘The Urgent Tasks of Our Movement,’ that warned the workers that they must organize ‘not only in mutual benefit societies, strike funds, and workers’ circles; but organise also in a political party; organise for the determined struggle against the autocratic government and against the whole of capitalist society.’ It then declared:

We must train people who will devote the whole of their lives, not only their spare evenings, to the revolution; we must build up an organisation large enough to permit the introduction of a strict division of labour in the various forms of our work.

In short, the movement must cultivate the ‘professional revolutionary’, whose entire life and resources were to be devoted to building a vanguard party and who was prepared to sacrifice everything to the needs of the party and the revolution. The still-anonymous author—who was none other than Lenin—pledged that he would ‘devote a series of articles in ensuing numbers to questions of organisation’—a pledge he more than amply fulfilled.

Strikingly, Lenin’s views contained a high degree of voluntarism that conspicuously departed from the simplistic determinism of many contemporary Marxists. Far from being a fatalist, Lenin was thoroughly imbued by a belief in the need for human agency in changing society, indeed often in direct opposition to the conventional Marxist determinism of the time. As J.L.H. Keep has observed:

It was plain that, for all his pious obeisances in the direction of Marxist determinism, Lenin was essentially a believer in the limitless opportunities open to the individual, if only his energies were properly inspired and directed. . . . What counted in politics, in his view, was the power of men and ideas. Never had theory been more important than in the present time of confusion: ‘Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.’

In this respect, Lenin was perfectly sound: without theory and leadership, the proletariat seldom rose beyond the level of a strike. The question was not, ‘Should there be leadership?’ but ‘What kind of leadership should there be, and how should it be institutionalized?’ Lenin’s answer was to call for an organization based on ‘strict secrecy, strict selection of members and the training of professional revolutionaries. If we possessed these qualities, something even more than “democracy” would be guaranteed to us, namely, complete, comradely, mutual confidence among revolutionaries.’ Although denying that a democratic revolutionary organization was possible in tsarist Russia, where even independent trade unions were prohibited, Lenin significantly tried to make a virtue of necessity by decried ‘toy democracy’. The authoritarian implications of Lenin’s plan became evident only when they were translated into a fully articulated party constitution, setting forth in some detail and in cold print the requirements for membership in the renovated RSDWP.

Even as he wrote up these plans, Lenin continued to maintain close contact with many Iskra agents, groups, and readers throughout Russia, especially through the efforts of Krupskaya, who meticulously dealt with all of the periodical’s correspondence. By the time the Munich-based editorial board transferred its operations to London in April 1902, Lenin had already built up a sizable network of agents who were committed to his organizational views. Characteristically, he personally met with all agents who arrived at the Iskra offices, and he or Krupskaya gave them the instructions and advice they needed to spend their time in London. With his extraordinary attention to detail, he carefully calculated the degree of support he had within the party and Iskra network as well as within the periodical’s editorial board. He painstakingly studied reports from agents, from supporters within Russia, and
from the émigrés. He managed the collection and disbursement of all finances; and he gave the most detailed instructions to the periodicals' distributors, creating a strong base of personal supporters within as well as outside Russia.

THE SECOND CONGRESS OF THE RSDWP

The next step in forming a co-ordinated nationwide Marxist organization was self-evident: a 'second' RSDWP congress had to be convened. The 'founding congress' in Minsk in 1898, as we have seen, had been more of an ad hoc and symbolic affair than a reality, but the memory of its convocation was sentimentally incorporated into the party's annals. Now a new congress, it was widely believed, would be able to put the RSDWP on the firm and lasting footing that the 'first' congress in 1898 had failed to do.

But what kind of congress should it be? Could the Social Democrats simply issue a call for people who regarded themselves as Marxists to participate? In fact thousands of individuals, in and out of the bruchsly, who knew little about Marxism, regarded themselves as Marxists. Many populists, for example, considered themselves 'Marxist' in the sense that they regarded Marx and his works as basic guides to their activities and analyses—albeit as guides that carried equal weight with the works of Mikhailovsky and other 'subjectivists'. Other self-described 'Marxists' favored terrorististic methods, the trademark of the populists and anarchists; and still others were even admirers of Bernstein and liberals like Struve, who had drifted away from socialism.

The Socialist Revolutionaries had been content to piece together a party with highly disparate elements—people who held vague ideologies and sentiments. To the Iskra Marxists—particularly Plekhanov, Axelrod, Potresov, Martov, and Lenin—the tendency to mingle half-formed populist with half-formed Marxist principles seemed dangerously obfuscatory. For them theory was a matter of the grassest importance; they planned to build their party around clearly formulated and coherent principles. They decided not to intend to reproduce it in their midst the prevailently confused atmosphere in which contradictory ideas coexisted and sound ones were so divested of content that they would lead toward a tepid liberalism.

To Lenin in particular, with his concern for what he construed as the theories and practices of 'orthodox' Marxism, a free-wheeling congress would be intolerable, leading only to confusion and to debilitating compromises. Raw Social Democrats, whose ideas were still very hazy, had to be educated, and correct interpretations of Marxism (notably Lenin's) had to be fully explicated. A network of basically like-minded Marxists was needed to elaborate propaganda and broaden the network of committees (or party-affiliated units) if a revolutionary workers' party were to be effective and preserve its revolutionary integrity.

Most of the Iskra-ists joined Lenin in supporting a centralized and disciplined Social Democratic organization. But others wanted the RSDWP to remain the loose decentralized party it had been—or professed to be—at the First Congress. The Jewish Bund especially wanted a federal structure that would give it cultural and structural autonomy, and the League of Russian Social Democrats (a group of émigrés alleged to be 'economists' by Plekhanov and his supporters) opposed a high degree of centralization. Finally, the young recruits opposed their elders' control of the new party and called for freedom from their personal constraints. Many debates over internal organization took on a nationalistic and generational character, with the Bundists and younger members making quasi-anarchistic demands for autonomy, at least from the central committee of the all-Russian party.

After much preparation and many preliminary meetings, the Second Congress of the RSDWP finally convened in Brussels in July 1903, amid an air of great ideological uncertainty. The 57 delegates who assembled in the Belgian city were patently not representative of all the self-designated Social Democratic committees in the Russian Empire. An unknown number of such committees were not invited to the congress at all, or else they scorned its convocation. Others lacked the resources to send delegates. Of the 57 who participated, fourteen were 'consultative' delegates who had a voice in the proceedings but had no votes; only 43 were regular voting delegates. Eight of those 43, including Lenin and Martov, had two votes each—one as Iskra editors and the other from a sympathetic domestic Russian group. Five votes were given to the Bund, three to the 'economistic' League of Russian Social Democrats, and eight 'irresolute' delegates came with ten mandates (primarily from the Ukraine). Taken together, the voting delegates totaled 51.

The congress was infiltrated by Belgian and Russian police agents, who carefully followed its delegates from venue to venue, absurdly trying to pick up bits and pieces of information by eavesdropping on them in restaurants and hotel corridors. But the delegates apparently made no effort to mure their discussions. After an inspirational opening speech by Plekhanov, followed by a tearful singing of 'The Internationale', the congress rapidly fell into a quarrel over credentials and was flooded with procedural denunciations well into the morning hours. Early on the delegates agreed unanimously to adopt a party program that Plekhanov had drafted in advance. The program was geared to a two-stage conception of a Russian revolution—a 'bourgeois democratic' revolution, followed by a socialist revolution—and accordingly it contained
members from the Central Committee, two from the Central Organ, and one
elected by the congress—a total of five members.

After some unsavory maneuvers on Lenin’s part, the new leader of the
bolsheviki (‘majorities’) decided to tighten the Central Organ in his favor by
reducing its membership from six to three. Axelrod, Potresov, and the
venerable Zasulich, all of whom had been hostile to Lenin’s views, were simply
eliminated from the editorial board. This reorganization left Plekhanov (who at
the time supported Lenin), Lenin, and Martov as Iskra’s sole editors. Since
Martov’s ‘soft’ influence could be overcome by the votes of Plekhanov and
Lenin, the Bolshevik leader had thus positioned himself to exercise control
over the party’s ideological organ.

Lenin achieved this outcome by means both fair or foul and at great cost to
his friendship with devoted party comrades. In solidarity with the three ejected
veterans, particularly Zasulich, Martov refused to sit on the Iskra Central
Organ—which made Lenin’s control over the periodical even more secure.
Martov, who until the congress had been Lenin’s closest friend, indignantly
denounced him as seeking to be the party’s dictator and portrayed himself
and his supporters as the defenders of intra-party democracy. Their friendship
was thenceforth irreparably destroyed. It was a rupture Lenin had not desired
personally, and he usually spoke of his old friend with respect and affection
up to the day of Martov’s death in 1923, notwithstanding their furious differences
over the years.

The Second Congress of the RSDWP, which was intended to produce a
single national Marxist party in Russia, actually ended up creating two Social
Democratic parties—the Bolshevik ‘majorities’ and the Menshevik ‘minorities’.
The first was held together by Lenin, often with an iron fist; the second,
more collegial in character and more loosely structured, was ultimately
to be guided in the end by the gentler and more empathetic Martov. Not-
withstanding attempts to bring the two factions together, especially at the
Fourth, so-called ‘Unification Congress’ at Stockholm in 1906, the relations
between the two were always uneasy and by 1911 finally came to an end.

**IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES**

Initially, the issues that separated the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks at the Sec-
ond Congress were mainly organizational in nature. But these differences were
rooted in a much deeper ideological split. Lenin was convinced that capitalism,
for all practical purposes, was already the ‘dominant’ economy of Russia, in
contrast to Plekhanov, who believed that it had yet to achieve so hegemonic
a status. This disagreement had immensely important consequences. If capitalism was already dominant, as Lenin maintained, then socialists should always interweave their ‘minimum’ with their ‘maximum’ programs and keep the creation of a workers’ and poor peasants’ revolutionary dictatorship at the forefront of all their goals—even goals that conventional Marxists would have called ‘bourgeois democratic’. But if capitalism was not yet dominant, as Plekhanov argued, then a ‘bourgeois democratic’ stage would have to involve a prolonged phase of capitalist economic development in which Social Democrats were obliged to act merely as political allies of the bourgeoisie, subordinating themselves to the liberals, pending the full economic and political achievement of a ‘bourgeois democratic’ revolution. Plekhanov’s position became the conventional wisdom of the mainstream Mensheviks in the years that followed, which essentially turned them into handmaidens of bourgeois politicians. Only a minority of the Mensheviks, led by Martov, eventually veered leftward toward a position closely akin to—but by no means the same as—Lenin’s analysis. It would take years for these differences to become apparent to both parties, but they were present from the Second Congress onward and explain the contrasting organizational views held by Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

In the meantime, faced with arrests and deportations by the Belgian police, the Second Congress was obliged to move from Brussels to London, where it reconvened in a hospitable ‘Christian socialist’ church. The wrangling over theoretical and organizational issues continued for weeks until, out of sheer exhaustion, the congress petered out in the late afternoon of Saturday, 23 August. About three weeks had passed since the delegates enthusiastically opened their congress by warmly singing ‘The Internationale’. It closed in considerable disarray, torn by conflicts that would take years to sort out and clarify.

Close friendships had been broken, former benefactors had cut off their financial support—usually bitterly remonstrating against Lenin’s methods—and the demoralized delegates scattered to their respective homes. Attempts to patch up the differences between the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks proved fruitless: the debate between the two ‘factions’ continued mainly in print. To Lenin, however, the congress was a blazing success if only because it opened and clarified issues without whose resolution a clearly defined Russian revolutionary movement would be impossible. Nor did he hesitate to use the label Bolshevik—the ‘Majority’—to his fullest advantage, even when his party clearly constituted a minority within the RSDWP.

The Mensheviks, for their part, enlisted Kautsky and even Rosa Luxemburg against Lenin’s ‘disruptive’ tactics. Lenin’s association with Plekhanov did not survive the Second Congress; the older man considered his former acolyte to be a follower of Narodnaya Volya and hence an embarrassing apostate. Lenin analogized his dispute with the Mensheviks as a fight between latter-day ‘Jacobins’ (the Bolsheviks) and ‘Girondins’ (the Mensheviks). In the years to come, this contrast would prove to be as troubling as it had been more than a century earlier, in 1793.

NOTES
Chapter 40 The Revolution of 1905: The Liberal Phase

The Liberal Opposition

By 1904 Russia had become a pile of tinder awaiting precisely the spark that would set the empire aflame. That spark came on 8 February 1904, when Japan—Russia's long-standing rival in the Far East for territory and raw materials—attacked Port Arthur, a Chinese coastal city that was at that time under Russian control. Although the attackers threw Russia on the defensive, the regime was confident that the empire would prevail over the relatively small Japan; her certain victory, moreover, would restore the tsar's waning prestige at home. Unknown to the regime, however, Japan had recently undergone a rapid modernization, and her military was well equipped and disciplined. The tsar's army, by contrast, was poorly trained, and its capacity to provision its forces were inadequate: the recently constructed Trans-Siberian Railroad, linking east and west over thousands of miles, comprised only a single track, one section of which was still unfinished.

Japan's quick and numerous victories in the Russo-Japanese War astonished not only the tsar but the world. Port Arthur fell in January 1905. In March, in a furious engagement that claimed nearly 90,000 Russian lives, Japanese forces pushed the Russian army out of Manchuria, capturing the strategic city of Mukden. The following May, Japan's modern navy crushed Russia's fleet in the Battle of Tsushima Strait. The autocracy's defeat at the hands of an ostensibly small power exacerbated all the civil conflicts on the Russian mainland. As its exhausted and mutinous army retreated from Mukden into Siberia, tsarism stood on the brink of a domestic crisis unequalled by any since Napoleon's invasion of 1812.

No section of Russian society was more acutely aware of this crisis than the liberals, who looked for ways to contain the thoroughly irresponsible system of government and modernize the regime. Initially very diffuse, liberal opinion now consolidated into a definable spectrum of political views that ranged from cautious monarchists, who wished to curb the autocracy by turning it into a quasi-constitutional state, to virtual republicans, who hoped to emulate Britain's parliamentary system and hold the monarchy in check with legal and political restraints. To influence the events that were rolling over Russia, however, they needed an institutional base. In September 1903, after a series of preliminary meetings, Pyotr Struve, Pavel Milyukov, and other liberals led enlightened members of Russia's professional organizations and urban intellectuals in forming the Union of Liberators, an illegal organization that formalized its existence in January 1904. The Union provided liberalism with a broad underground organizational framework. In order to cast a wide net in its pursuit of influence, its leaders reached out to constitutional monarchists as well as potential republicans. Hence the organization was loose and its demands vague; it prudently sought a constitutional monarchy of sorts—not a republic—based on universal suffrage.

Another part of the liberals' institutional base were the zemstva, the district and provincial assemblies that had been modernized by Alexander II (see Chapter 37). Zemstva and their various administrative and statistical bureaus could be found in the 34 Russian provinces of the empire (excluding the borderlands and Siberia) and included representatives from cities, towns, and even peasant villages, drawing their members from non-noble as well as noble strata. The powers of the zemstva were markedly limited, but with the growth of social unrest their annual assemblies were a potential arena for exercising rights that the general public would otherwise have been denied. Although gentry dominated the zemstva assemblies, many large landowners were becoming alienated from the autocracy and joined with discontented professionals in using the zemstva as forums for voicing their outrage over the persistent inequities of Russian society. Especially in the north where big landlords were relatively few in number, even the peasantry found a voice and a vote in assemblies.

Zemstva also encompassed various working and administrative boards, through which they remained an ongoing year-round presence. Many middle-and upper-class progressives regarded the zemstva as potential units of self-government that could well become the building materials for local and national legislatures. The Ministry of the Interior had the authority to veto any objectionable decision or action that the assemblies and boards adopted and frequently did so; but the government in Petersburg often simply ignored zemstvo complaints. Despite their limited powers, however, zemstvo discussions easily drifted from strictly pragmatic to quasi-political issues. Equally impor-
tant, the salaried men and women who staffed their boards—doctors, teachers, medical assistants, lawyers, agronomists, veterinarians and clerks—were often liberals and in growing numbers tilted toward radical, even narodnik views. Indeed, often deeply rooted in local life, they became the most actively progressive public servants with whom the Russian peasant had a trustful relationship and a potential pool of recruits for the Socialist Revolutionaries.

With the rising tide of demands for greater popular representation in government, the zemstvo soon became a stepping-stone for the convening of a constituent assembly, and cautiously but persistently, liberal zemstva called for the creation of a national representative institution. As early as May 1895 zemstvo leaders gained permission from the interior minister to hold a zemstvo conference, which met in Nizhny-Novgorod in August 1896. But sensing the danger of parliamentary government, the autocracy banned a second conference that was scheduled for 1897.

To these few liberal breezes that might have rescued the autocracy from revolution, the tsar responded with characteristic fatuity and indecisiveness. As the Russian army and navy met with one defeat after another at the hands of Japan in 1904–5, zemstvo liberals tried to establish a national organization to aid wounded soldiers and provide for families who had lost their breadwinners in the conflict. But before he would permit it, the minister of the interior, Vyacheslav von Plehve—a man favored by Nicholas but detested by nearly all enlightened Russians for his malevolent anti-Semitism and reactionary policies—demanded the right to approve the men chosen for zemstvo offices. This demand the zemstvo refused to concede, whereupon Plehve canceled the election of several of their chairmen. One of the men rejected was Dmitri Shipov, a spokesman for the moderate zemstvo constitutionalists. The Moscow board, incensed that Shipov’s election had been canceled, defiantly chose in his stead Fyodor Golovin, a ‘radical’ liberal who stood to the left of Shipov politically. This affair opened a major breach between the zemstvo and the autocracy, which served to isolate Nicholas II still further from his increasingly restive country, particularly the more enlightened members of his nobility.

On 15 July 1904, a few months after this crisis, Plehve was assassinated. Two years earlier his predecessor, D.S. SPIAGIN, had been killed by an SR terrorist. These two assassinations, coupled with the zemstvo’s challenges, threw the monarchy off balance, and it embarked on a dizzying course of brutal repression mixed with belated concessions that succeeded only in bringing Russia closer to a revolutionary upsurge.

THE AUTOCRACY BELEAGUERED

While Nicholas lamented in his diary the death of his ‘irreplaceable’ friend Plehve, crowds cheered his assassin, the SR student Egor Sazonov. The contrast—Russia’s supreme autocrat brought to tears by an event that elated his subjects—was so incongruous that even the dowager empress, Maria Fyodorovna, urged her son to appoint a more benign minister. After five weeks of uncertainty and delay, the reluctant tsar finally chose a new interior minister: Prince Pavel Sviatopolk-Mirsky, an amiable man known for his humane and relatively moderate views.

In the summer of 1904 Sviatopolk-Mirsky proposed a program of reforms that included greater religious tolerance, the removal of ‘non-violent opposition’ from the government’s list of political crimes, and the return of a number of political prisoners from exile. Of paramount importance, Sviatopolk-Mirsky also proposed to relax the censorship and harsher limits on public expression. He even proposed to expand the autonomy of the zemstva. The moderates hailed these meager and rather belated measures as the arrival of a new ‘spring’. A number of Sviatopolk-Mirsky’s proposals were actually instituted: the harassment of zemstvo officials was brought to an end, and the press was given greater leeway in publishing mildly critical articles.

But Sviatopolk-Mirsky’s concessions, far from pacifying the liberals, only whetted their appetites. The more he conceded to them, the farther leading liberals like Miluykov moved leftward. In September 1904, at a conference held in Paris, the Union of Liberation even joined a bloc of socialist parties—namely Socialist Revolutionaries, Lettish Social Democrats, Polish Socialists, and other minority socialists—in calling for a representative government based on universal suffrage and the right of self-determination for national minorities. ‘No enemies on the Left’ now became the slogan advanced by this coalition in its efforts to form a broad united front against the autocracy.

At the end of October the Union of Liberation met illegally in Petersburg and decided to mount a political campaign to replace the autocracy with a constitutional regime. It tried to gain the support of the zemstvo, various progressive municipal dumas (or parliamentary bodies), and professional unions. Meanwhile on November 6, zemstvo representatives held a congress whose purpose was to address zemstvo problems and regain the rights that Plehve had taken from them, but like so many events initiated by moderates at this time, the congress’s agenda got out of hand. Members of the Union of Liberation insisted that the congress make broader political demands, and the congress ended up adopting a political program—the Eleven Theses—that militantly called for full legal equality for all Russian citizens as well as full civil liberties. The program closed by demanding that the government summon
freely elected representatives of people so that, with their help, it can lead our people along a new path of political growth marked by the establishment of the rule of law and by cooperation between the government and the people.11

Following in the tradition of French liberals during the months preceding the 1848 Revolution, the Union next planned a series of banquets, during which various speakers, in the guise of dinner speeches, would make political presentations that called for a constituent assembly. On 20 November the Union launched the banquet campaign, which was an extraordinary success. Banquets were held in the larger cities of European Russia, where speeches called for a constitution and civil liberties. District zemstva and municipal dumas adopted resolutions supporting the Eleven Theses. Workers and labor unions participated, while demonstrators in Petersburg and other cities raised red flags and fought with police. A meeting of businessmen insisted that zemstvo representatives should be permitted to enter the sacrosanct meetings of the government's State Council.

These events created a crisis that Nicholas could no longer ignore—but the way the tsar chose to respond to the movement only worsened the situation. On 12 December he issued a carefully worded ukaz that instituted only a few mild reforms to ease public discontent, alleviating discrimination against dissident religious groups and loosening some controls over the press. This ukaz, together with later, equally inept efforts, brought him into a head-on collision with both the liberals and the increasingly radicalized workers.

'POLICE UNIONISM'

During these years the Russian secret police were hard at work trying to knit the workers ever more closely to the autocracy. In the decades since the early populists, the police had gained considerable experience in assuming a camouflaged leadership among political groups whose activities they were expected ruthlessly to suppress. The goal of this 'police unionism' was to actively enroll workers in police-sponsored welfare organizations that were actually in the service of the autocracy.

As early as 1898 Sergey Zubatov, a former revolutionary who had shifted his allegiances to the government, sent a secret memorandum to D.F. Trepov, the hated police prefect and governor-general of Moscow, urging him to establish police-sponsored labor organizations that could be used to counteract the influence of the revolutionary movement. Such organizations, Zubatov shrewdly suggested, should adopt policies that were similar to those of the 'economist' wing of the Social Democrats. Under their guidance, workers would seek piecemeal economic gains, such as improved wages and working conditions, without challenging the authority of the state.

Having gained the tentative acceptance of Trepov and the then interior minister, Spiagin, for his plan, Zubatov managed to establish several government-controlled labor unions in Moscow. He had his greatest success among Moscow textile workers, organizing as many as 1200 in several mills. Ironically, workers were eager to join the police-controlled unions, precisely because they naively believed that they gave governmental legitimacy to their activities.

But the Zubatov movement, or Zubatovskhina, soon found itself in a contradictory position: in order to gain significant influence over the workers, the organizations had to satisfy at least some of the mounting working-class grievances and look the other way, if possible, during strikes. Moreover, some workers within the 'police unions' were making far more provocative demands than Zubatov and the police could possibly accept—demands such as an eight-hour workday and even potential revolutionary demands like workers' control of factories.

Such demands brought the Zubatov organizations into open conflict with the employers. After an SR terrorist assassinated Minister Spiagin on 2 April 1902, the arch-reactioneer Plehve, who had no interest in giving even minimal concessions to workers, occupied the late Spiagin's position. Zubatov-organized workers raised demands from a French employer, Jules Goujon, the owner of a Moscow factory, that went far beyond those permitted for a 'police union'. In reaction, Goujon called for curbs on the Zubatovskhina, and in fact the government terminated the Zubatov organizations altogether.

In their place, with the collusion of Russian industrialists, the government tried to create a more traditional outlet for worker discontent by allowing them indirectly to choose so-called 'factory elders', or stariki. The stariki were expected humbly to bring the workers' grievances to management, which would paternalistically redress them as it saw fit. The workers, to be sure, would not be permitted to choose the stariki directly; rather, they would select several candidates, from whom the employers would choose the most suitable. This typically Russian semi-feudal system of representation failed miserably because the workers did not take it seriously and ignored their pre-selected elders.

Nevertheless, Zubatov refused to be stopped. To mollify this zealous police official, Plehve 'promoted' him to head the Special Section of the Police in St Petersburg, which also included the repressive anti-revolutionary Okhrana. Zubatov wrongly supposed that this 'promotion' was evidence of the government's support for his policies, and in the fall of 1902, now headquartered in the imperial capital, he proceeded to reconstitute his unions in Petersburg. Recruiting a former Social Democrat, one V. Pilaukov, to help him establish
police-controlled labor organizations, Zubatov urged his new aide to get members of the clergy to support the 'police unions'.

This new approach brought Zubatov into contact with Father Georgy Gapon, a young priest who was both a fervent monarchist and a romantic social Christian. Gapon had been gaining a reputation among many influential circles as a champion of the downtrodden and especially the workers, whom he began to influence as a result not only of his own personal zeal but of the faith they placed in his special status as a priest. Indeed, Gapon seemed ideally suited to lead Zubatov's Petersburg labor movement.

Initially, Gapon was reluctant to place himself in Zubatov's hands. The police chief's sinister activities in Moscow were already well known in Petersburg; the Social Democrats, in particular, had given his earlier activities considerable negative publicity. Among the Petersburg workers, 'police unionism' had acquired an unsavory reputation, although within the Church, it was considered too radical to gain ecclesiastical blessing, and even Sergey Witte, president of the Council of Ministers, took pains to warn top clerics about Zubatov's activities.

Eventually, however, the two men seem to have reached an understanding. After a good deal of intrigue and maneuvering, Zubatov was able to establish a labor organization of sorts in Petersburg, which Gapon visited irregularly. In May 1903 (as Gapon tells the story in his autobiography) five workers approached him and urged him to join the Zubatov organization 'in order to capture it for our own use'. 'We met again at their lodgings, and after a long discussion I yielded,' Gapon recounts. 'Then and there we organized ourselves into a secret committee.' Apparently Gapon planned to exploit the organizing opportunities afforded by the Zubatovishchina without becoming Zubatov's docile instrument. Gapon was surprisingly open about his new relationship with the police, but he also tried to be as independent as possible of his official sponsors.

In mid-August 1903, as a result of the feud between Witte and Plehve, Zubatov was transferred out of Petersburg, leaving the unsupervised Gapon free to function as he chose. The clerics thereupon proceeded to discard the entire Zubatov organizational structure and build a new union, free of police influence. Using his religious piety, rhetorical abilities, and clerical garb to great effect, he proceeded to establish 'clubhouses' in all the districts of Petersburg, places where workers could assemble for religious, informational and moral instruction. Tearooms were established where members could relax and socialize (gambling and alcoholic beverages were strictly prohibited); indeed, as mutual aid societies, they established funds to provide for ill and unemployed members and their families, cover funeral expenses, and the like. Weekly kruhky and other meetings were held, as the statutes put it, for the 'prudent discussion' of workers' 'general needs and self-education'.

house members met in 'assemblies' and prudently opened meetings with prayers, due to police surveillance, but occasionally the workers dealt with political issues in very moderate tones.

Moreover, to retain their legal status, the overall ambience of the clubhouses was necessarily pious. The workers' goals, and their means of achieving them, exuded a moral, religious, and nationalistic uplift. They seemed to provide workers with a strong sense of their Russian heritage; their walls were adorned with icons and portraits of the tsar; and their libraries were stocked with patriotic books and periodicals. This approach had a special appeal to workers, many of whom were still infused with religious orthodoxy and a genuine devotion to the person of the emperor.

The clubhouses and their assemblies, in turn, were soon united as a formal organization under a weighty and patriotic name: 'The Assembly of the Russian Factory and Mill Workers of the City of St Petersburg'. The Assembly's seal included an Orthodox crucifix, both to validate its piety and to convey an impression of political innocuousness to the authorities. In late 1903 the Assembly officially adopted a set of statutes, stipulating its goals, membership qualifications, and the like. Great pains were taken to make the Assembly seem like a strictly recreational, educational, and cultural association, patriotic in outlook and religious in spirit, while its tone was entirely conciliatory toward the authorities. In short order the Assembly's statutes were even approved by the Interior Ministry, which thereby made it a legal organization duly sanctioned by the government.

At its height, Gapon's movement had approximately eleven branches, mainly within Petersburg proper and a few in the outskirts of the city. The branches attracted thousands of earnest working-class members—the commonest estimate places their number at 7000—with many more unregistered sympathizers. Gapon had personally installed himself in the Narva borough branch, where the huge Putilov shipbuilding and arms-manufacturing plant was located, making it the Assembly's largest and most influential clubhouse, indeed its semi-official center. *

* Gapon had discovered what many socialists and anarchists were discovering in Europe and the United States: the importance of establishing radical neighborhood centers where oppressed people could congregate, attend lectures, discuss, and study topics of community interest. Such centers appeared in the Spanish labor movement—the Socialists created casa del pueblo (houses of the people) and the anarcho-syndicalists centros obreros (workers' centers)—and in other socialist organizations at the turn of the twentieth century as well. These centers were identified by the political and social outlook of their proletarian clientele. As a radical civic dimension, their historical roots lay in the cafés of revolutionary France. Neighborhood centers have long faded from the memory of the revolutionary movement—at great cost to its future prospects.
As the Assembly swelled in numbers and influence, the politically naïve Gapon apparently began to fancy himself as a new Russian messiah who had been called upon to deliver the working class from suffering and oppression. He made passionate speeches condemning the injustices and ill-treatment suffered by the workers. A charismatic personality, he was revered by large numbers of Petersburg workers, whose apolitical outlook seemed to qualify them as good subjects of the tsar, but he was despised by the radical intellectuals who were trying to win the workers to socialist ideas. When Gapon focused on economic concerns, he normally larded his sermons with religious or spiritual expressions, prudently avoiding all political references; to all appearances, Gapon was simply a humanitarian priest, loyal to his tsar, his fatherland and the needs of the poor. His ideas seemed to resonate with the mentality of ordinary Petersburg workers, notwithstanding the common belief of many Russian socialists and anarchists that workers were imbued with innate 'revolutionary instincts'.

But in the politically heated year of 1904, when Russia went to war with Japan and even Russian liberalism seemed to be moving in a radical direction, no one dedicated to the interests of workers could have confined himself only to workplace injustices. Gapon was in fact influenced to some degree by the radical ideas of social change that were then prevalent, and fairly early on he made every effort to win over workers with quasi-socialistic ideas, who in turn would make his movement attractive to Petersburg's more politically serious workers—especially those in the metal industries.

In fact, Gapon's grasp of politics was simplistic. He understood a political idea only insofar as he could use it quite pragmatically to serve his immediate ends. According to I.I. Pavlov, although Gapon was a 'revolutionary', he 'could make any compromise in order to achieve his immediate goal, and this was his weakest point: he had no consistent outlook.' Thus Gapon flitted quite sincerely from one outlook to another, depending on its immediate practical value rather than its consistency.

Ironically, his failings served him well. His influence among the workers was a product not only of his clerical status but of his simple ideas and a capacity to talk to workers in a language they could easily understand, incorporating all the religious allusions that they were accustomed to hear from childhood, especially if they came from the countryside. The many workers who supported his movement, in turn, were not only persuaded by the content of his speeches but elevated by his manner of address and language. Gapon, a commoner, relied on moral injunctions more than reasoned explanations, often echoing ideas that worker-peasants had already heard in the villages from which they came.

BLOODY SUNDAY

The Assembly, in turn, became an organization of great personal importance to workers, who acquired a strong sense of personal self-worth from the humanistic and pious arena it provided. They felt that their lives could change dramatically for the better if only the sympathetic authorities in the government, particularly the emperor, could hear their complaints and simple aspirations. Clearly it was only a matter of time before the gaponovshchina would collide head-on with the industrialists in the capital and their supporters in the state.

Unknown to any of his followers, Gapon had privately prepared a program that made overtly political and economic demands that he had culled from Socialist Revolutionary and Social Democratic propaganda tracts. His program called for sweeping civil liberties, equality of all Russians before the law, the transfer of the land to the people, an eight-hour day, and a minimum wage, to cite its more important items. Had this 'secret program' become known to the government, it would almost certainly have suppressed his entire movement. Whether he wrote the 'secret program' only to gain the support of the socialistic workers or to express his deepest convictions—or both, as seems most likely—will never be known, but it crossed a line that turned his 'police unionism' into a potentially revolutionary labor movement.

Although the Assembly had earned the aversion of the revolutionary parties, small groups of workers who were either members of the parties or influenced by them also joined the Assembly (as Gapon in fact had hoped), although they too viewed Gapon's intentions—and his police history—with deep suspicion. They were led by Alexey Karelin, a skilled lithographer who had been a Social Democrat but left the RSDWP because he felt it was guided too much by intellectuals and failed to address the economic concerns of the working masses. Karelin's group had established itself as a separate caucus within the Assembly and met regularly in his apartment to study and formulate a socialist policy.

The Assembly also included several widely respected and critically minded socialistic workers who were not affiliated with any of the revolutionary parties: notably, Nikolai Varnashev and Ivan Vasiliev, as well as Dimitri Kuzin, a Menshevik worker of independent views. Rather trustfully, Gapon, who greatly esteemed these revolutionary workers, decided to take them into his deepest confidence. On 4 March 1904, he met secretly with Karelin, Varnashev, Kuzin and Vasiliev in his apartment and presented them with his hitherto-unknown 'secret program'. The four men read the document with amazement and responded enthusiastically. All five dramatically swore on pain of death to keep the document's existence secret; its contents were to be disseminated.
only among very select workers who seemed politically prepared to accept its demands.

The four men with whom Gapon had shared the program, in turn, slowly began to draw radical workers into the Assembly and raise the level of discussions in the clubhouse. As Walter Sablinsky observes:

Karelin and his group gave the Assembly an undeniable stamp of respectability among workers dedicated to the labor movement and opened the way for attracting many who had previously avoided the clubhouse. From then on, Varmashev commented, the clubhouse 'brimmed with life'. Sympathetic laymen offered to arrange lectures for the clubhouse; meetings became more lively; the scope of discussions broadened. In the gatherings of the leadership, debate centered around the 'Program-of-the-Five'.

Surprisingly, the secret was amazingly well kept, and the police got no wind of the program or its contents.

By now, Gapon and his confidants were decidedly leading double lives. While the authorities were hailing the Assembly as a reliable support of the autocracy, the five men were prudently disseminating a 'secret program' among its more radical members that challenged the authority of the autocracy. The program now constituted the Assembly's authentic aims, notwithstanding the pious rhetoric that suffused so many of its discussions and its outward religiosity. This duplicity served the interests of all the members: that of the undeveloped workers who shied away from revolutionary parties, and that of the revolutionaries, who were shielded by the priest's outward piety and respectability. Nevertheless, it was only a matter of time before government officials and industrialists would begin to suspect that the Assembly was actually a radical trade union hidden underneath a priest's cassock.

During the summer of 1904 Karelin's socialist group, perhaps inspired by the liberals' petitions and military defeats in the Far East, tried to convince Gapon to prepare a labor-oriented petition in the Assembly's name. Gapon initially vacillated, but in November, after a disappointing meeting with progressive Petersburg liberal leaders, he agreed to launch the petition campaign. Assembly leaders, in turn, decided that such a petition should be presented directly to Nicholas by a well-organized demonstration of workers.

Although no specific date was set for the event, early in December 1904 a foreman in the Putilov's carpentry shop, one A. Tetiavkin, fired four workers who were also members of the Assembly's Narva branch. The foreman was particularly hostile to the Assembly; he was a member of a rival workers' organization that the Putilov management had established to counteract the Assembly's influence. The factory's director, A.I. Smirnov, supported the firings and was determined to assert the authority of the Putilov works over the Assembly.

Gapon regarded the dismissals as a direct challenge to his movement. As many as 12,000 Putilov workers were members of the Assembly, but when the hated and intransigent Smirnov bluntly challenged the very right of the Assembly to take up the workers' grievances, this led most of the remaining putilovtsy to join the movement in solidarity with their dismissed co-workers. They appealed to factory management to reinstate the four dismissed workers and to the government to pressure the factory management, but to no avail. Their efforts exhausted, on Sunday, 2 January 1905, about 6000 putilovtsy, meeting at the Narva branch of the Assembly, voted to stage a strike the next day, demanding that the four fired workers be reinstated and that foreman Tetiavkin be dismissed.

3 January thus dawned portentously—with a complete shutdown of Russia's largest manufacturing plant. Approximately 12,000 workers left their benches for the streets. During the next week the strike spread throughout the capital, and more than 100,000 workers in as many as 360 factories left their jobs. The initial and modest demands of this unprecedented strike were now expanded to include an eight-hour day and an increase in wages. As time passed, in fact, the action escalated into one of the largest strikes in Russian history and brought capital and labor into a confrontation of historic proportions.

On 5 January, after the Putilov board of directors rejected a Gaponite delegation's attempt to settle the strike, the Assembly's branches openly conducted sessions to explore the 'Program of the Five' as the basis for a petition to the tsar. The next day, guided by the wishes of the workers in Assembly branches, Gapon redrafted the petition into a court and proposed that the Assembly organize a respectful public procession to deliver it directly to the tsar at the Winter Palace on the following Sunday, 9 January. The contents of the petition and the idea of a sober, working-class procession caught on at once; most of the workers in St Petersburg now agreed to participate in the march.

The government learned of the plan as soon as it was proposed and over the next two days deployed thousands of troops, cavalry, and police at strategic locations in Petersburg, posting a warning on 8 January that forbade all processions and gatherings. Military force, it stated, would be used against 'massive disorder'—although the Assembly expressly eschewed such disorders. The tsar and his family, in fact, were actually away from Petersburg, disporting themselves in nearby Tsarskoe Selo, but the flag that indicated that they were in the Winter Palace was still flying aloft, apparently overlooked by the palace authorities.
During the nights of 7 and 8 January the Assembly branches were abuzz with excitement. Thousands of workers who now associated the Assembly with the Putlov strike joined it or attended its branch meetings. Years later S. Somov, a Menshevik activist, recalled the excitement generated by the Assembly's local meetings. 'A kind of mystical, religious ecstasy reigned the whole time at the meeting,' he wrote; 'thousands of people stood side by side for hours in the dreadful heat and closeness and thirstily devoured the artless, strikingly powerful, simple, and passionate speeches of their exhausted worker orators.' Often tearful and touchingly sincere, these terribly oppressed people had collected into what was virtually a religious congregation in the hope of gaining some respite from their unbefitting exploiters.

On 9 January, to the ringing of Petersburg's Sunday church bells, masses of workers gathered at Gaponist Assembly halls in various parts of the city to carry the petition directly to the Winter Palace. The petition's tone was reverential toward the tsar, written in the manner of devout subjects, who were appealing to their 'father' for the redress of their grievances. 'Do not turn Thy help from Thy people,' it pleaded; 'Lead them out from the grave of lawlessness, poverty, and ignorance. Allow them to determine their own future; deliver them from the intolerable oppression of the officialdom. Raze the wall that separates Thee from Thy people and rule the country with them.' Decrying the scorn and maltreatment that workers suffered from management, the petition asked—'in accordance with God's laws' and emphasizing the hope for 'salvation' that had brought them to the 'walls of Thy palace'—for a declaration of basic rights, an eight-hour workday, progressive income taxes, equality before the law, compulsory popular education, and the election of a constituent assembly by 'universal, secret, and equal suffrage'—a demand that could only mean the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. The gaponovshchina had taken a qualitative leap forward, from a pious, apolitical, and limited economic protest to an explicitly political movement that, in the eyes of the authorities, was dangerously revolutionary.

Slowly, from their various starting points at the Assembly meeting halls, the workers' procession got under way. Estimates of the number of participants range from 150,000 to a quarter of a million. There was nothing defiant about the demonstrators' demeanor. Quite to the contrary: carrying religious icons, portraits of the tsar and the tsarina, and the Russian flag, the procession at the Narva branch set out first, led by a white-garbed Gapon carrying a cross, followed by similar processions that set out from other parts of the city and even from nearby communities on the periphery of the capital. As the solemn marchers passed, intoning prayers or singing hymns and the national anthem, bystanders and even traffic police respectfully removed their caps and made the sign of the cross.

When the Narva march reached the vicinity of the Narva triumphal arch—which Alexander I had erected to greet the victorious troops of the Napoleonic Wars—it was abruptly stopped by troops and cavalry, who had orders not to let the procession pass. After several cavalry forays the workers and their families, showing remarkable courage, regrouped to continue their march. The order to fire was given three times, but the infantrymen did not respond, so unexpected was the evident piety of the marchers. Finally several soldiers fired two volleys of shots over the heads of the crowd. A group of marchers fell to their knees and opened their garments to show they were unarmed and harmless. Another volley, directed point-blank at a group of pleading marchers, then went off. As marchers rushed toward the soldiers to beg them to lower their rifles, they too were shot down. More than 40 were instantly killed or wounded.

At Troitskaya Square two columns of demonstrators were stopped, then trampled on by cavalry. More rifle volleys were fired, leaving behind nearly 50 casualties. Further indiscriminate volleys followed as other workers' columns headed toward the palace. Many marchers, utterly disbeliefing that authorities fired upon them, were determined not to stop and managed to make it by one means or another past the troops toward the square of the Winter Palace.

The largest contingents of troops and cavalry were concentrated at the Palace Square itself, as was the largest crowd, including well-to-do onlookers who followed the procession or simply stood by and observed it. As the square filled, people from already dispersed processions along the way brought shocking accounts of the massacres they had witnessed. To the ordinary worker-peasants in the crowd, it seemed inconceivable that the tsar would allow soldiers and police to shoot down his devout, unarmed, and loyal subjects. Stunned processers knelt in humility before the Winter Palace, whispering prayers and respectfully raising religious icons before the imposing stronghold.

For many demonstrators that night washed away in blood their once-reverential faith in the monarchy and the protection that they were sure the tsar offered them. The order to shoot the marchers came directly from the commander of the Guard, Prince Vasilchikov. Having tried unsuccessfully to clear the square, the soldiers, who were free to fire at their discretion, indiscriminately mowed down men, women, and children, covering the whole area with dead and wounded bodies. Despite more massacres in the side streets, the stunned crowds still did not disperse until nightfall. Desultory shooting continued for several hours into the night, while the population, middle class and working class alike, tried to absorb the meaning and horror of the event. The entire capital was swept by feelings of shock and disbelief.

The number of people killed on Bloody Sunday was and remains impossible
to determine, even after nearly a century. The figures given by the Jewish Bund, which very carefully surveyed the available data, ranged from 960 to 1216. Soviet historians variously tallied the dead from several hundred up to a thousand. The foreign press reported that the shootings produced as many as 4600 casualties. The correct count remains unknown. No one took seriously the government's official figure of fewer than 100 dead.

What was important about 'Bloody Sunday', as it came to be called, was less quantitative than qualitative: for an incalculable number of workers, peasants, and even ordinary middle-class citizens, the autocracy had irretrievably lost its legitimacy. No longer was it easy to revere Nicholas II as the 'little father' of his suffering people who would tend to their needs, and no longer could innumerable Russians comport themselves as his obedient 'children'. Workers who had revered the emperor and the progressive public of all classes, which had believed at least in the basic morality of the autocracy, experienced the greatest shock. Outside of St Petersburg, the peasants were probably least affected by Bloody Sunday: it would take more than a shooting to dissolve their faith in the imperial tradition. But the autocracy had stained itself irreparably, and millions of Russians, upon whose goodwill the tsar's legitimacy rested, no longer revered him as their protector.

AFTERMATH OF BLOODY SUNDAY

Far from ending labor unrest in Petersburg, the massacre of 9 January produced a general strike in the Russian capital the very next day that spread to Moscow, where an estimated 30,000 workers downed their tools. Further strikes rolled out from both cities in consecutive waves, reaching Kharkov, Lodz, Voronezh, Mogilev and Saratov on each subsequent day, and finally by 20 January embraced nearly every major town and city in European Russia as well as major industrial centers on the empire's periphery, such as Warsaw, Vilna, Helsinki and Batum. Nearly half a million workers went on strike in January alone, exceeding the total number of strikers in the decade between 1894 and 1904. Neither ethnic nor geographic boundaries obstructed the strike's spread. The workers who downed their tools were often supported by students, teachers and even middle-class people who had never before taken to the streets.

Saratov, whose working class went on strike on the twelfth, verged on insurrection—troops had to be brought in to prevent the workers from seizing the railroad station. Riga was gripped by a general strike, during which 15,000 demonstrators openly defied the governmental authorities. There the protest ended only when police and troops drove many marchers in a mass demonstration onto the thin ice of the Dvina River, causing 70 people to drown. As for the Poles, they were so unruly that additional troops were required to supplement the quarter million soldiers already trying to keep the country under Russian rule. In Lodz, the great textile-manufacturing city, fierce barricade fighting broke out between the population and army, lasting for four days and claiming 150 lives, according to official figures.

These strikes and uprisings were not ignited solely in reaction to Bloody Sunday. As Solomon M. Schwarz notes, they were actually a continuation of the workers' movement that had been increasingly active since the mid-1890s. Many of the strikes protested long-standing economic grievances, and when they encountered police and military repression, they became political in nature. Yet Bloody Sunday truly marked the beginning of the Russian Revolution of 1905. Before workers, liberals and revolutionaries could fully realize it, a movement for deep-seated social change was now under way in the empire.

Where ordinary workers had once trusted, even revered the tsar, they no longer removed his icon from the walls of their homes. They also became far more resolute and organized: factory committees emerged on the shop level in many industrial enterprises, initially as ad hoc organizations. During an early strike wave such committees took hold in Petersburg at the huge Obukhov metalworking plant, then spread to other enterprises in the capital. Finally, Bloody Sunday evoked a strong emotional and empathetic response from nearly all educated sectors of society. Liberals reacted to the massacres by escalating their own offensive to replace the autocracy with a constitutional representative regime, paralleling and intersecting with the labor movement's agitation. The lead in this middle-class mobilization was taken by the Union of Liberation, which had already veered leftward in the autumn of 1904.

Despite worldwide press condemnation of his behavior, Nicholas responded to the events of 9 January with characteristic indecision and incomprehension. He viewed the entire gaponovshchina—including the blood that his loyal petitioners had spilled on the streets and squares of Petersburg—as an act of scandalous impertinence arousing the contempt of even his close counselors. On 19 January, induced somehow to come to terms with the workers, the tsar stiffly met with a token 'delegation' of carefully selected workers, but far from attempting to fathom their needs, he imperiously announced to the workers that he 'forgave' them for their supposed malfeasances on 9 January! He thereupon vaguely promised that he would provide aid where possible, then enjoined them to inform their fellow workers of his intended munificence. This insufferable condescension reflected the tsar's vacuity: the last of the crowned Romanovs had neither the mental nor the
emotional equipment to perceive that his subjects were little more than misbehaving children.

The tsar then proceeded to appoint the detested General Dimitri Trepov as interior minister and hence head of the imperial police system. Trepov went to work as the virtual dictator of St Petersburg, cracking down on labor unrest, provocatively using courts-martial to suppress workers, peasants and revolutionaries, forbidding teachers to pass political resolutions, and closing down dining halls, dormitories, and finally all the universities in the empire, in order to end student protests. The few attempts at reform that the monarchy did make served only to fuel the workers' demands for their own autonomous labor organizations, a demand that was nurtured by the obshchina's strong collectivist traditions.

Finally, late in January 1905 Nicholas established a commission—chaired by one Nikolai Shidlovsky—to explore the causes of unrest among the proletariat. Petersburg workers were permitted to elect independent spokesmen from their factories—one for every 500—to be their representatives to the Shidlovsky Commission, as the new body was called. The delegates were elected with considerable gusto, often at heated mass meetings; even in the grim world of the heavily policed factory, the workers found that they could function with the same initiative that they had exhibited in the village slobod.

Even more remarkable, the results of the elections reflected the workers' new trust in the revolutionary militants. Twenty per cent of the workers' delegation were Social Democrats (mainly Mensheviks), while 40 per cent were unaligned socialists. Revolutionary socialists—in many cases the ablest workers in a factory—thus had a numerical majority on the body and openly insisted that they be granted full civil liberties and that electors who had been arrested for their subversiveness be released; otherwise, they said, they would boycott the commission's deliberations. But Nicholas could not have cared less: rather than make these concessions, the government simply dissolved the Shidlovsky Commission.

The Commission, however, was not forgotten in Russia's industrial plants and shops. For the first time workers had been permitted to flex their muscles and actually select deputies of their own liking to speak for their interests in a class-defined body. The process of finding leaders and electing them was an experience of inestimable importance in the development of Russian working-class organization. After the Commission was dissolved, the more militant workers continued to exercise considerable influence in the workplace—which would soon come to fruition in the form of workers' councils, or soviets.

NOTES

4. Quoted in ibid., p. 127.
5. Ibid., p. 105.
7. Quoted in Sablin, Road to Bloody Sunday, p. 189.
Chapter 41  The Revolution of 1905: The Popular Phase

During the spring and summer of 1905 the prestige of the autocracy plummeted to its nadir. The empire was seething with resentment and anger, and ever more voices were calling for a new social dispensation that would eliminate tsardom's egregious injustices. The revolutionary parties, especially the Marxists, awoke from their political torpor and inundated the workers with anti-war propaganda. A strike movement emerged, starting in the industrialized twin cities of Ivanovo-Voznesensk, issuing economic demands for an eight-hour day, a decent minimum monthly wage, and other basic improvements. What makes the strike distinctive in the annals of revolutionary history is that to manage their strike, these workers formed a soviet composed of deputies elected by proletarians from all branches of industry. In itself this council would not have been unusual, but the soviet soon became more than a strike committee. It assumed a variety of political and civic powers, fixing prices and organizing a workers' militia. The panicked employers and local government officials fled the two cities, leaving the populace almost entirely in the control of the soviet. This new polity comporting itself as an orderly and responsible government, handling nearly all the local municipal affairs and even providing radical education programs, with lectures and readings. A parallel network of popular institutions emerged that threatened to preempt the traditional institutions of the tsarist state.

After ten weeks the workers and employers came to a mutually satisfactory agreement, and the soviet dissolved itself. But its very existence revealed a degree of political and administrative maturity on the part of the Ivanovo-Voznesensk working class and provided an example of self-government for workers in other cities. Bereft of all respect for the tsar, the autocracy, and the Church, radicalized workers slowly came to view the soviet as a new, potentially revolutionary popular government, comparable to the way populists visualized the village commune, as distinguished from a bureaucratic state.

In the autumn Russia was jarred by often-violent strikes, followed by harsh repression, and growing tensions between the opposition parties and the regime. The Baltic and Polish provinces, indeed much of the empire's western and southern periphery, erupted repeatedly in violent uprisings, while agricultural laborers in at least fifteen provinces, including the Don Cossack region, waged uncoordinated but turbulent bunty against the landowners, cutting down timber and harvesting grain and hay. On 31 July to 1 August a secret assembly meeting near Moscow created a new Peasants' Union, which would soon be led by rural workers (teachers, lawyers, agronomists, zemstvo officials, and medical personnel) and other liberals. In its program the new Peasants' Union demanded not only a solution to the land question and a reduction of peasant debts but the convening of a constituent assembly and the nationalization of landlords' holdings.

Faced with this growing ferment, Nicholas again made a concession to his restless subjects. On 6 August 1905, the tsar proclaimed that elections would soon be held for representatives to a Duma that was to meet on 15 January 1906. This Duma was to be a strictly consultative body, which at most would provide preliminary recommendations to the tsar. The franchise for electing the representatives was to be drastically limited; property qualifications were set so high that not only the entire working class but many small property owners would be excluded from voting. And except for select non-Russian cities like Warsaw, Lodz, Baku and Tiflis, only Russia proper would be represented. Voting would be indirect—deputies were to be elected through the zemstvo and municipal dumas, which would weight the Duma's composition heavily in favor of well-to-do rural and urban classes. Far from being the representative legislature based on universal suffrage that even liberals demanded, the Duma was certain to be a mockery of a parliament.

All the socialist parties opposed participation in the Duma and actively supported a boycott of the elections. But inasmuch as the Duma would allow for more representation than any Russian autocrat had ever previously granted, the question of whether to participate in it became highly problematic for the liberals. The Union of Liberation, the zemstvo movement, and the middle-class progressives were divided internally, but among most liberals support for participation finally prevailed. Fearful of depriving tsarism of its power to control 'the dark masses', the Constitutional Democratic Party, or Kadets, newly formed by members of the Union of Liberation, decided to strike a constitutional accommodation with the existing regime: they would accept a Duma that excluded the workers from participation in Russian political life.
This decision put an end to the liberal policy of 'no enemies on the Left'. Indeed, it led to a 'parting of the ways', to use Gerald Surt's expression, between the liberals and the revolutionary Left, and leadership of the assault on the autocracy now passed from the liberal organizations to the revolutionary populist and working-class organizations.

THE OCTOBER GENERAL STRIKE

On 23 August Witte negotiated the Treaty of Portsmouth (August 23), bringing the disastrous Japanese war to an end, and nearly a million Russian soldiers on the Manchurian front began the slow return home. Many of the troops were reservists—generally, villagers from the central provinces—who not only hated the war but detested military life with its suffocating restrictions, poor rations, and endless personal humiliations. Characteristically, the various bureaucracies assigned to transport them back to their villages and towns, bungled the demobilization to a point that the first troop trains to leave the Far East did not depart until a full month after the peace treaty had been signed.

At the same time the railroad workers were becoming increasingly discontented. Not only did they form a strategic section of the working class, knitting the empire together through the rail transport system, but many of them—such as skilled locomotive engineers, repair-shop machinists, telegraphers, and signalmen—had skills that were in short supply in Russia. Collectively, they had a vital knowledge of the complex machines and operations that were absolutely necessary to keep the transportation system functional. Without their co-operation the entire economy, as well as the transportation of troops and supplies, could be brought to a dead halt.

In September 1905 the onus of demobilization fell entirely on to the shoulders of the railroad workers, who were already exhausted and infuriated by the many burdens that the war had placed upon them. Vague calls for a general strike began to circulate along the key railroad lines. In a moment of dizzying euphoria the liberal parties declared that they would support a general strike, if only to alert Nicholas to the fact that the country would plunge into turmoil if he did not grant the middle classes greater political freedom. Accordingly, the Ministry of Transportation and Communication decided to use a carrot-and-stick policy in dealing with the railroad men: when workers were too recalcitrant, the government threatened to conscript them into the navy—but it also decreased their working hours from the insufferable to the merely bearable. Finally, in a spirit of seeming liberality, the head of the ministry, Prince M.I. Khilko, called upon the workers to join him at a special congress in Petersburg on 20 September to review and hopefully resolve their most pressing grievances.

The Central Bureau of the Union of Railroad Workers, aware that the congress was merely a ploy to pacify the railroad men and distract them from their political objectives, took steps to see that delegates chosen by the workers were not notably radical. Almost simultaneously several events heightened the government's clash with the workers. On 20 September, even before the railroad congress convened, the Moscow printers suddenly exploded in a militant strike. Within ten days their strike became general, sweeping in the railroad workers—together with nearly all the different tradespeople in the old capital. On 4 October the workers on the Moscow-Kazan rail line, including the administrative employees, left their jobs, and day after day other lines radiating out of Moscow, the railroad hub of the empire, shut down until the country's entire rail transportation system was paralyzed. In fact, the tsar himself was now obliged to remain in his palace at Peterhof because no train would carry him the short distance to his palace at Petersburg—indeed, after five frustrating days Nicholas was finally obliged to use a ferry to make the trip.

The Petersburg printers, in turn, quickly decided to support their Moscow comrades with a three-day sympathy strike. They were soon joined by workers in the Neva shipbuilding works, in the city's Schlüsselburg district; they now walked out exclusively for political reasons—namely, in opposition to the forthcoming Duma. Before long the shipyard strikers were joined by the workers of the all-important Obukhov steel plant, who marched out of the mill singing the 'Marseillaise', boisterously demanding the so-called 'four-rail' suffrage: a voting system that was direct, secret, equal, and universal. Soon, virtually all the industrial workers of Russia had ceased to work, largely in support of the general strike. Industrial and transportation workers were joined by students (even from elementary schools), teachers, clerks from every branch of the economy, foremen, merchants, professors, civil servants, and on occasion liberal members of the bourgeoisie and nobility. Soldiers in a number of units, both in the east and at home, also went on 'strike' to protest against the abuses they suffered in the army.

In all, at least a million factory workers actively joined the general strike, as well as more than 700,000 railroad men, 50,000 government employees, and uncounted thousands of office and retail clerks, professionals of nearly all types, students, and service workers ranging from domestic servants to messengers. Even the most utopian of syndicalists could scarcely have envisioned the October General Strike of 1905, as it came to be called, in which the proletariat paralyzed a huge empire; nor had the modern
working class ever so clearly demonstrated the enormity of its power. Workers who had toiled quietly in the grim proletarian districts of the industrial cities suddenly emerged from their warrens to take their destiny into their own hands. By the many thousands they filled the great avenues of Russian cities, marching with red flags and singing revolutionary songs, battling with the unnerved police and indecisive troops, invading public buildings, ransacking shops for food, and holding mass rallies denouncing the autocracy.

The strike's demands varied from place to place. Many of them were economic in nature, such as demands for an eight-hour day, improved working conditions, and pensions. But strikingly, political demands were also common, notably for a constituent assembly, civil liberties, and the rights of national minorities, and freedom for political prisoners. The socialist parties, especially the Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, and Socialist Revolutionaries, did what they could to radicalize the strike even further and were especially engaged in collecting weapons and ammunition. Lenin, who did not arrive in Petersburg until around 8 November, sent off urgent letters to his comrades on the scene, calling on them to prepare for a military uprising. That an insurrection was even possible for the Petersburg workers, who had little more than a few thousand pistols and a few hundred rifles among them, is doubtful at best. But Lenin was not only trying to turn the strike into a workers' insurrection; he was working zealously to drive the insurrection beyond 'bourgeois democratic' limits to a quasi-proletarian revolution with the support of the poor peasants—a doubtful alliance and one that stood in flat contradiction to current Marxist dogma. The Mensheviks, for their part, were focusing largely on democratic demands that would neither frighten nor alienate the big bourgeoisie.

The grassroots origins of the great strike movement has often left the impression that this tremendous force emerged entirely spontaneously. Close inspection, however, reveals that the preparations for it were actually long in the making. The kruglo movement of the late 1880s and 1890s and the emergence of the worker-intelligentsia in almost all branches of industry was part of the preparation, as was the industrial workers' experience in electing representatives to the Shishlovsky Commission in February 1905. Finally, the creation of the soviet during the May–July strike at Ivanovo-Voznesensk had taught the proletariat how to organize a working governmental framework, not only for managing a strike but even for toppling the monarchy.

Collectively, these experiences bore fruit when the various factory committees were obliged to co-ordinate themselves into a united and effective body. From this rich human base soviets now emerged on a wide scale, ultimately taking root within at least 40 or more Russian towns and cities. In a few rare cases soviets also emerged among the soldiers in the army and the peasants in the countryside, although they had only a transient existence.

THE SOVIETS

Like the soviets generally, the Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies (Sovet rabochechkh deputatov) arose during the October General Strike because various factory committees had to co-ordinate their common activities into a unified body if they were to render the strike general, coherent, and effective. In 1905 the use of councils was directly inspired by the Council of Printers in Moscow, whose 260-plus deputies from approximately 110 enterprises played a decisive role in carrying out the strike. But the most historic initiative was apparently taken by the Petersburg Mensheviks, who on 10 October called on the Petersburg workers to convene at the Technological Institute and form a 'General Workers' Committee' or, according to another account, a 'Workers' Council of Deputies'. By whatever name, the famous Petersburg Soviet was definitely created at a meeting of workers' deputies on 13 October at the Institute, mainly following the Mensheviks' appeal to the proletariat. Indeed, no mere strike committee could be considered equivalent to the soviet that finally emerged in the capital in October 1905. Strike committees were normally convened solely to carry out concrete strike activities and disbanded soon after the strike came to an end. But the Russian soviets of 1905, especially in Petersburg, became more permanent institutions. They were marked by all the institutional attributes of a governmental power based on mass proletarian and even middle-class support.

The original 40 members who appeared on 13 October at the first meeting of the Menshevik strike committee was soon augmented by 226 deputies from 96 factories, five trade unions, and the railroad workers' strike committee. Four days later the committee officially renamed itself the St Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies. Membership in the Soviet fluctuated greatly: at its peak in November, more than 550 deputies attended the Soviet's meetings from 181 enterprises, including sixteen trade unions. By far the majority of its deputies, 351, came from the metal trades, followed by 37 from textiles and 32 from the printing trades. But as J.H.L. Keep tells us, 'It seems to have been a simple matter for anyone who wished to attend to do so. The Soviet met in public—this was regarded by its supporters as one of its principal virtues.'

Workers in large plants democratically and directly elected their deputies in face-to-face assemblies of the entire factory proletariat. Following the pattern of working-class representation to the Shishlovsky Commission, every 500
workers in a given enterprise were expected to elect one deputy in workers' meetings that were typically raucous—wildly applauding speakers whose remarks they favored and whistling or booing insistently at those they opposed. But in other respects order was remarkably well kept, and most speakers, however disagreeable their views were to their hearers, were permitted to express them fully. Despite the seemingly disorderly and earthy features of the meetings, the workers at the factory level held democratic procedures in high regard: once elected, deputies were obliged to give a full accounting to the workers of what was going on in the Soviet and how they had voted on various disputed issues.

The Petersburg Soviet's first chairman was a lawyer, George Nosar (generally known by the nom de guerre Pyotr Krustalev). Krustalev was highly respected for his legal support of labor causes and was apparently chosen because he was a non-party man. The vice-chairman, Lev Bronstein, known by the pseudonym Yanovskiy, soon came to be celebrated under another pseudonym, Leon Trotsky. Trotsky at this time was too independent politically to be properly classified as either a Bolshevik or a Menshevik, although in party disputes he tilted toward the Mensheviks. A brilliant writer, an immensely gifted theorist, and a spellbinding orator, he had been courted by Lenin and, to a certain extent, by Martov during the Second Congress of the RSDWP. The 1905 Revolution brought Trotsky's immense talents into public view, at which point he became the independent personification of the Soviet's power for the rest of its existence.

On 17 October the Petersburg Soviet established a supervisory executive committee, with a total of 31 members, including two representatives elected from each of the city's seven neighborhood districts plus strictly advisory (or non-voting) representatives from the Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, and Socialist Revolutionaries. Later, representatives of the trade unions were added. Thus the executive functioned more like a steering committee than a decision-making body, although when clearly necessary, it issued directives in the name of the Petersburg Soviet as a whole.

Most of the Soviet's deputies were not affiliated socialists, but had a socialistic orientation, nourished by the obduracy of the tsarist regime. Among the deputies were even a small number of white-collar employees (mainly pharmacy clerks), as well as occupationally varied liberals, especially in Moscow. But workers formed the overwhelming majority of the Petersburg body. In fact, the workers seemed to regard the Petersburg Soviet as a proletarian parliament—and by directing the strike and fulfilling many civic responsibilities, it essentially functioned as one. People from nearly all classes of society—middle class as well as working class—were obliged to deal with it in everyday affairs—a fact that immensely enhanced its prestige. Not only did it co-ordinate the activities of soviets in other cities by sending and receiving deputations to and from them, but it became the dual and explicitly class-oriented revolutionary power in opposition to the existing imperial government, which proved to be dysfunctional at the height of the Soviet's power. As the strike continued, the Petersburg Soviet's quasi-governmental authority expanded to include a number of the capital's practical affairs, such as setting the hours when retail stores could open each day, guarding property, maintaining order, attending to urban services, and seeing to the well-being of the citizenry. Industrial managers and storekeepers alike had to gain the assent of the council to do business in the capital, while commissions of deputies were formed to collect funds to sustain the striking workers and to acquire arms for a possible insurrection.

The source of the Soviet's power, above all, lay in its ability to determine if and when the transport and utility systems operated—and its ability to restrain overzealous workers from plunging the city into a premature and bloody uprising. It also provided reliable news for the public—to which end it published its own newspaper, Evstia (News). As long as the workers could still act according to its orders, the Soviet literally ran the city; but neither the Petersburg workers nor their Soviet pressed for demands that went much beyond what Marxists would label 'bourgeois democratic'. The Soviet called for an eight-hour day, 'four-tall' suffrage, a popular militia to replace the police and armed forces, and a constituent assembly. All of these were demands to which the autocracy could easily have acceded if it had wanted to; indeed, none of them was properly socialist in nature.

THE OCTOBER MANIFESTO

Any intelligent monarch would have realized that workers could easily have been mollified with a European-style constitutional monarchy. But Nicholas II was not notable for his intelligence. In a letter to his mother, the dowager empress, Nicholas wrote:

It makes me sick to read the news! Nothing but new strikes in schools and factories, murdered policemen, Cossacks and soldiers, riots, disorders, and mutinies. But the ministers, instead of acting with quick decision, only assemble in council like a lot of frightened hens and cackle about providing united ministerial action. ³

Nicholas's brief description of the crisis was not inaccurate, but true to form,
he at first tried to repress the strike, offering absolutely no concessions to his resistive people. Troops were ordered to break up mass meetings—if necessary with live ammunition—and serious attempts were made to expel 'outsiders' (namely, assemblies of workers) from the schools. The order, however, could not be enforced. At length, Nicholas and his 'eckling' ministers collectively laid an egg. On 18 October they famously issued the October Manifesto, a dizzyingly liberal document that promised freedoms of speech, assembly, and association and vowed to establish a 'new legislative order', including a State Duma that was based on universal suffrage and whose consent would be a precondition for the viability of any law.

Nothing like this manifesto had ever been promulgated in Russia, and for several days, from 18–21 October—the so-called Freedom Days—Petersburg and other cities were so euphoric that the strike movement began to wane. For three days joyous demonstrators, waving red flags and singing revolutionary songs, filled the capital's streets. Delirious throngs gathered in public squares, schools, and key street intersections to celebrate the 'new legislative order'. In the countryside, peasants gathered to petition the government not only for political reforms but for a chernyi peredel. In the central provinces, they even organized concerted attacks on manors and began forcibly to take over the land.

The more astute revolutionaries, however, knew better than to take Nicholas at his word. The Manifesto's promises were unaccompanied by a timetable for their fulfillment. National groups were granted nothing whatever, and Nicholas still retained the executive powers of the state in his own hands, making the ministers responsible directly to him rather than to the Duma—a sine qua non for a modern constitutional government. Trotsky addressing a huge crowd from the balcony of St Petersburg University, warned that the monarchy had as yet granted nothing concrete and that guarded mistrust was more in order than naive credulity. But the crowd was either too eager to believe the Manifesto's promises or too frightened to take on the conspicuously well-armed and disciplined forces that Trepolov had concentrated in the capital.

Some liberals felt that the Manifesto had not granted enough to the incipient revolution, but others felt that with the Manifesto the revolution had gone far enough, and they did precisely what Lenin had feared. They deserted the general strike, definitively ending their former alliance with the workers. The indubitable leader of the Kadets, Pavel Milyukov, had no love for the soviets. He was committed to a bourgeois parliamentary form of government, and its achievement by largely peaceful means. The possibility that the strike might turn into an insurrection alarmed him. Especially after the October Manifesto, he decided to make his Kadet party into a loyal opposition to the tsar's government rather than a movement for major social change.

Actually, Milyukov's fears of an insurrection in Petersburg were unwarranted—the strike movement was already ebbing. The Soviet, to be sure, still enjoyed considerable authority. When it demanded that printing establishments refrain from sending any copy to government censors, the employers, fearful of a printers' strike, assented. As a result, for the first time in her long history, Russia briefly had a free press. Moreover, workers put an eight-hour day into effect simply by instituting it in practice, mainly in the metalworking industry. On 29 October the Soviet insisted that employers and the government accept the de facto shortened workday for industry as a whole and, if they failed to do so, called upon workers simply to leave their jobs directly after eight hours of work.

But the general strike was seriously flagging in any case. For weeks the workers had been living on hopes for basic democratic change—and in the process had endured considerable material privations. They had idled the railroads and factories for the greater part of two weeks without any income to support themselves or their families. As Friedrich Engels had predicted decades earlier, a prolonged general strike would inflict greater damage on the workers than on the bourgeoisie, which had the means to withstand personal economic hardships, and soon the workers would be obliged to return to work. On 19 October, faced with this likely prospect, the Petersburg Soviet decided to terminate the strike. The executive committee saw that by calling off the flagging strike in a seemingly disciplined and authoritative manner, it could still appear to be in full control of its proletarian supporters.

The end of the strike was all the regime needed to reverse the course of events. A few days later it cracked down on the popular movement. During the last week of October the police, already reinforced with troops from the Far East and with Cossack patrols, vigorously attacked workers who gathered in the streets and broke up all public gatherings. Brutal gangs of 'Black Hundreds', the extremely reactionary groups that the monarchy had surreptitiously funded, roamed the streets spouting virulently anti-Semitic and monarchist slogans. Liberals, socialists, and particularly Jews were murdered in the many hundreds, especially in Odessa, where a bloody pogrom shocked the entire world. Students, identifiable by their uniforms, known oppositionists from every walk of life, and even individuals whose working-class dress and earthy behavior seemed to invite suspicion were openly assaulted and, in many cases, beaten to death. The police usually stood by indifferently—that is, when they did not openly join in with the gangs. Although a number of these actions may initially have been spontaneous, the authorities soon eagerly encouraged them.

Despite the repression, however, the eight-hour-day campaign continued. On 26 October the Kronstadt sailors and soldiers rose up, but the authorities
quickly suppressed the revolt and prepared to court-martial the 1200 arrested insurgents for violating military discipline, a charge that exposed them to the death penalty. Two days later, on 28 October, the regime declared martial law in Poland. Meeting on 1 November, the Soviet daringly called upon the Petersburg workers to reinstate the general strike the very next day, 'to demonstrate its fraternal solidarity with the revolutionary soldiers of Kronstadt and the revolutionary proletariat of Poland.' It urged the strikers to demand an end to field courts-martial, the use of the death penalty, and the imposition of martial law everywhere it had been proclaimed.

For the second time the Petersburg proletariat exhibited an extraordinary capacity for action. On 2 November, in response to the Soviet's appeal, more than 112,000 workers took to the streets. A day later the strikers peaked in numbers at 119,000 and closed down 526 factories in the city. Considering that less than two weeks had passed since the materially debilitating October General Strike was terminated, these numbers were a staggering show of both working-class resolution and the Soviet's influence.

Most of the Petersburg workers were willing to stay away from their jobs for a limited period of time, but given their virtually depleted material resources, they could not sustain the strike indefinitely. The Soviet's plans would have had to culminate in something more decisive than a walkout—indeed, logically, in an armed insurrection. But such an insurrection could not possibly have succeeded in Petersburg, where the autocracy's troops remained impressively loyal to the government. The second strike showed signs of flagging after only a few days, especially among the railroad workers. Once again, to avoid losing its credibility and prestige with the public, the Soviet on 7 November terminated the strike in a disciplined manner.

But the tumult in Petersburg was not yet over. The eight-hour-day campaign continued, but now the employers felt more confident about repressing working-class militancy. Meeting on 7 November, the directors of 72 metalworking plants decided to lock out all workers who tried either to leave their jobs after eight hours or to strike in support of a shorter workday. Employers in other industries followed suit, until the Soviet estimated, with only slight exaggeration, that 100,000 Petersburg workers had been locked out by 13 November. 'The eight-hour-day campaign was a losing cause,' observes Gerald Suri, if only because it was 'atomizing the factory movement led by the Soviet into a series of separate struggles with individual employers in which the collective strength of the Soviet could not be brought directly to bear.' Indeed, before the campaign was called off on 13 November, it had divided the Soviet and its worker-deputies over what strategy to pursue.

On 26 November, sensing that the balance of power was shifting to the autocracy, Witte arrested the Soviet's president, George Nosar. The Soviet could not hope to bring out the workers on a third general strike in retaliation; instead, on 2 December, it called upon all Petersburg citizens to refuse to pay taxes. To undermine the solvency of the banking and monetary systems, it urged Russians to withdraw their money from the banks and cash in their paper rubles for coins. As might be expected, the Soviet's appeal, called the Financial Manifesto, had only a minor impact on the economy and was quickly forgotten. Nosar was replaced by a more militant presidium that included Leon Trotsky, but the upper hand was clearly passing over to the side of the government.

The next day Witte, who by now had become such a vindictive counter-revolutionary firebrand, officially curtailed freedom of speech and proclaimed martial law in Petersburg, prohibiting strikes and all unauthorized meetings. To deliver a definitive blow against the Soviet, the minister sent troops to surround the building where that body met and arrested its executive committee, including Trotsky, and all the deputies that could be found. In so doing, Witte definitively lost whatever liberal credentials he had pieced together over previous years and irreparably damaged his capacity to gain the trust of Russian progressives, who had hoped to strike a compromise with him and the monarchy. An eventual revolution by the workers and the Left intelligentsia was all but unavoidable.

Within days of the suppression of the Soviet, an illegal alternative Soviet was formed of deputies who had escaped arrest, and of newly elected or chosen deputies who became substitutes for those in jail. This Soviet was chaired by Parvis (Alexander Helphand), a close collaborator of the arrested Trotsky. Finally on 8 December, for a third time, the Petersburg Soviet desperately called for a general strike, and once again the Soviet's appeal brought out as many as 111,000 workers from 200 factories, attesting to the remarkable fortitude of the Petersburg proletariat.

But this last general strike was only a gesture of defiance, revealing the limits of syndicalism as a revolutionary strategy. It continued for a few days until 14 December, after which it collapsed from sheer exhaustion. The workers by now were too demoralized and hungry to confront Witte's aggressive government any further. On 2 January 1906, the illegal Soviet's executive committee was also arrested, and during the ensuing weeks and months police and troops rounded up its deputies. The Petersburg Soviet of 1905 now passed into history.

But it did not pass out of the memory of the Russian working class. The October General Strike of 1905 had compelled the tsar to consent at least to a semi-constitutional government. It had brought shorter hours to workers in many factories as well as other economic improvements. Lastly it showed that Russian workers had great staying power during the course of a struggle with
the bourgeoisie. Russian workers, in effect, gained a strong sense of their identity as a powerful class within the empire—a class that might one day bring the autocracy to its knees.

The Petersburg uprising of 1905 above all provided evidence of the tactical promise of the general strike, but it had been brought to an end by the workers' dire material need. The strike alone had not been enough to overthrow the autocracy, let alone capitalism. Accordingly, the strategic question raised by Engels years earlier still remained: how could striking workers repulse a serious effort by the state to crush a strike? To gain victory in a revolution, a general strike clearly had to lead rapidly to an armed confrontation with the state—that is, to an outright insurrection in which the workers tried to take power. But not even insurrectionary workers could make a successful revolution, unless they gained the support of the armed forces. Those who failed to confront this searing reality were certain to succumb before the firepower of the military and suffer devastating reprisals in the end.

In June 1906 Trotsky and the other executive committee members were tried on charges of fomenting armed insurrection. Trotsky turned his defense speech into a brilliant indictment of the autocracy itself. His eloquence and intellectual acuity made his oration a landmark defense of Social Democracy. Together with fourteen other defendants, he was found guilty and condemned to lifelong exile in Siberia, but while he was on route to his place of exile, he managed to escape and make his way to Finland. There he met up with Martov and Lenin—both of whom received him very warmly—and thence to Vienna, where he was to remain for almost a decade.

THE MOSCOW INSURRECTION

In Moscow the general strike and subsequent repression actually led to an insurrection—indeed, to the most important armed uprising Europe had seen since the Paris Commune of 1871. Moscow had far more textile mills than steel plants, and far more craft and consumer-goods-manufacturing enterprises than heavy industrial ones. Economically this made the old Russian capital more like Paris than Berlin. Paradoxical as it may seem, as Abraham Ascher insightfully notes, Moscow also had a high proportion of white-collar workers, 'who because of their greater exposure to radical ideas were more easily captivated by the slogans of extremists than skilled workers.' Socialist militants were more likely to exist in greater numbers among educated workers, even white-collar employees, than among illiterate workers. As to the textile and other less sophisticated laborers, they were so exploited that they 'felt that they had little to lose' by engaging in risky social actions.*

Due in great measure to their rural background, the Moscow workers in 1905 were more prone to engage in direct action than even their St Petersburg counterparts. Moscow workers participated so enthusiastically in the October General Strike that they nearly shut down the imperial government in the city, from the offices of the bureaucracy to the courts, utilities, and light industrial plants. But not until a month after the formation of the Petersburg Soviet did the Moscow workers create a soviet of their own. The Moscow Soviet met for the first time on 22 November with 145 deputies and elected an executive committee organized along the same lines as the Petersburg Soviet. The Bolsheviks played the most proactive role, making many decisions for the Soviet in their own party committees—but responding to Witte's repression with considerable hesitation.

Meanwhile, the soldiers in the Moscow garrison unexpectedly mutinied, for strictly practical reasons, namely their desire to be demobilized. To all appearances, in fact, two sapper battalions in the Moscow garrison as well as infantry and grenadier regiments seemed on the point of mutinying, and in both cases they even sent a representative to the Soviet on 27 November to express their support for a workers' insurrection.

But incredibly, the Soviet did nothing to respond to this appeal for collaboration. The Rostov grenadiers in particular were so disgruntled that they finally did mutiny on 1 December, just as the political situation in Moscow was coming to a head, and on 3 December they formulated a list of their grievances. Mostly, however, they centered issues of work and living conditions, with the result that the mutiny never acquired a political tone. Ironically, the Rostov grenadiers were hostile to the SR and Bolshevik agitators who came into their midst and attacked the tsar. Finally, on 4 December, the soldiers gave in to their commanders and ended their 'strike,' as they chose to call the mutiny, and were followed by other dissatisfied military units.

Moscow labor organizers, however, seem to have been under the highly misleading impression that the Rostov mutiny had major political aims and thus began to act with a sense of power that they actually did not possess. On 5 December, workers' representatives of 29 railroad lines decided to

* Abraham Ascher, The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Distress (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 307. Considering the strata that participated in nineteenth-century insurrections (craftworkers and intellectuals), this may explain why the Moscow insurrection, extolled by Soviet historians because of Bolshevik influence, was given comparatively little attention by non-Communist historians of the Russian revolutions. Today Marx's fetishized 'blue collar' workers are no more radical than 'white collar' employees, as strikes and political movements in the United States currently reveal.
strike. During the same day a large meeting of Bolshevik Party—in concert with the Moscow Mensheviks—agreed that the Soviet should call a political general strike and try to turn it into an insurrection. During the following afternoon, on 6 December, the Moscow Soviet, led by the Bolsheviks, convened to approve a 'general political strike', as they called it, whose stated aim was to overthrow the monarchy and replace it with a 'democratic republic'. The vagueness of this aim was good politics: it rallied a very large cross-section of Moscow's population. A 'democratic republic', in the eyes of most Muscovites—including many members of the old capital's middle class—was long overdue. Most of the 126 deputies, representing 91 factories, expressed their clamorous support, and some members of the Soviet's executive committee were transformed into an insurrectional leadership.

Although the Moscow insurrection had a somewhat adventurist character, the city's factories and their delegates were clearly ready to take up arms to create a 'democratic republic', or at the very least resist the regime's efforts to trample on so broad a struggle. Accordingly, the strike call was widely observed: on 7 December the Moscow workers shut down the city's industry and suspended its municipal services. Most strategically, the railwaymen closed down all the lines leading out of Moscow (except for the crucial Nikolaevsky Line, which connected the city with Petersburg). An estimated 80,000 workers took to the streets. According to V. Zenzinov, a prominent Moscow Socialist Revolutionary, the insurrectionary workers felt that it was 'better to perish in a struggle than to be bound hand and foot without a struggle. The honor of the revolution was at stake.'

Prior to the insurrection, the Bolsheviks, following Lenin's hearty prescriptions for the arming of the workers, had actively engaged in creating a militia. By the first day of the strike the armed workers numbered about 1000 fighters, organized into small combat squads (druchiny) of about 40 men each. Equipped with semi-automatic pistols, bombs, and a small number of rifles, they were supported by another 4000 workers and a large number of students who functioned as reserves. To all appearances the druchiny were led by a Soviet-controlled Coalition Council of Druzhiny. During that evening workers acquired weapons by raiding police stations, disarming regular policemen, and breaking into gun shops.

The government, for its part, suspected that attempts to suppress the coming Moscow uprising would prove very difficult, and it acted decisively. In November Witte appointed the forceful Admiral F.V. Dubasov as the city's governor-general. Dubasov arrived on 4 December, only three days before the uprising began, and declared a state of emergency. The admiral had at least 8000 well-armed troops and police at his disposal, a force that was more than adequate to crush the insurrection. But Dubasov seems to have doubted the reliability of his troops and withdrew nearly all of them from the city's streets lest they become politically contaminated by the insurgents. As a result, the city was left for a time almost entirely in the hands of the druchiny, which allowed the revolutionary militia and its student and working-class allies freely to roam Moscow's streets. The druchiny, supported by the largest general strike Moscow had ever seen, were careful not to antagonize the general population of the city, not even members of the bourgeoisie. Due perhaps to Dubasov's irresolution, the strike received a great deal of support from many members of the middle classes as well as the workers; indeed it acquired a remarkable transclass, truly populist character.

On 9 December the leadership of the insurrection decided to dissolve itself and, in keeping with its populist features, asserted that 'the local soviets must assume direct leadership of the struggle'. As a result, the insurrection assumed a decidedly libertarian form: the druchiny and their supporters were given the free run of the city. Insurrectionary groups were not even controlled by the district soviets that emerged in various quarters of Moscow but rather formed their own loose commands on an ad hoc basis. The druchiny commanders and the district soviets together became the sole publicly recognized governmental authorities in the city. In fact the revolutionaries made no attempts to take over the city as a whole or occupy its institutional buildings, with the result that the city's institutions were left in the hands of the imperial government.

This decision to follow a scattered guerrilla-like strategy instead may well have been reinforced on 12 December when more than 2000 railroad workers, aided by several hundred druchiny, engaged in a pitched battle (which they lost) to gain control of the Nikolaevsky Line, which linked Moscow with Petersburg. Thus between 7 and 9 December the insurrectionaries and the government were frozen in a standoff. While the druchiny controlled the streets, Dubasov cautiously refrained from deploying his forces and sent urgent messages to Petersburg requesting 'reliable' reinforcements. In the meantime the governor could not simply stand by and let the uprising continue. On 9 December he began to send out select troops to surround meetings, confiscate arms, and arrest their owners, while government dragoons patrolled the streets and engaged in sporadic forays against the crowds at open-air meetings.

Of all the confrontations at this stage, the most serious occurred during the night hours of 9 December at the Friedler Academy, a Protestant school whose liberal director was sympathetic to the revolutionaries. Young druchiny had virtually turned the building into their headquarters, and that night it was hosting a meeting of the railway union, attended by as many as 500 people