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Sarah Badcock

Support for the Socialist Revolutionary Party during 1917, with a case study of events in Nizhegorodskaia guberniia

Abstract

The Socialist Revolutionary Party (PSR) in 1917 presents two key paradoxes; the PSR enjoyed massive grassroots support during 1917, despite continued endorsement of the essentially unpopular policies pursued by the Provisional Government, and it failed to resist the Bolshevik seizure of power despite its mass support. Four key explanations for these paradoxes are presented here. The divisions within the PSR at a range of levels prevented it from forming a single coherent whole, which disabled it as an effective opposition force to the Bolsheviks. Divisions enshrined within the party's theoretical foundations were further magnified by the party's organisational weaknesses. The difficulties of administering the countryside, where most of the PSR's supporters lay, accentuated their organisational weaknesses. Finally, the PSR decision to boycott Russia's democratic organisations after the Bolshevik seizure of power was a catastrophic mistake, which enabled the Bolsheviks to consolidate their shaky power in the provinces despite lacking mass popular support. Image prevailed over substance as the basis for the party's town and country support during 1917. The social and educational backgrounds of party members explain divisions within party membership. Special consideration of Nizhegorodskaia guberniia in the town, villages and factories illustrates the party's problems in 1917. The town Duma was critically weakened by conflict within the coalition, which undermined the town's attempt to resist the Bolshevik seizure of power. Widening rifts between village administration and their central bodies, along with the isolation and introversion of the villages caused the PSR's local leaders to become entirely detached from central party policy. The failure of conciliatory politics to improve worker conditions in Sormovo eroded strong PSR support there. Majority support was not enough to resist the Bolshevik seizure of power.



Support for the Socialist Revolutionary Party during 1917, with a case study of events in Nizhegorodskaia guberniia.

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, at the University of Durham,
Department of Slavonic Studies, Ustinov Institute, 2000.



19 JUN 2001

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List of abbreviations and note on dates.

The dates used throughout adhere to the Julian (Old Style) calendar, which ran thirteen days behind the Gregorian (New Style) calendar.

For the sake of brevity, references in footnotes are given in full in their first citing in each chapter, then in the abbreviated form of author's surname and shortened title thereafter.

Four references are given in abbreviated form throughout, in exception to this rule:

GARF- *Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii*

RGASPI- *Rossiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsialnoi i Politicheskoi Istorii*

GANO- *Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Nizhegorodskoi Oblasti*

Politkatorzhan- M.M. Konstantinov and F.M. Tochilin (ed.) *Politicheskaia katorga i ssylka: Biograficheskii spravochnik chlenov Obshchestva Politkatorzhan I ssyl'no poselentsev*. (Moscow, 1934)

Introduction

In revolution as in war it is inevitable that the victor should receive more attention than the vanquished. A lost cause is soon overlaid by the dust of neglect, and its surviving image is grossly distorted by prejudice and purposeful misrepresentation.¹

Oliver Radkey's words are an appropriate beginning to this thesis, which aims to dust the debris from the PSR's image, and to correct the distortions and slanders that have maligned the PSR. Inevitably, this study is something of an inquest; the PSR, despite its electoral victories and apparently massive popular support, was unable to respond significantly to the Bolshevik seizure of power. Three key factors are identified in the PSR's impotence; the profoundly flawed tactics of the party's leaders, the inherent divisions and weaknesses within the party, and PSR supporters' low commitment to the institution of the party itself. Though ostensibly a study in politics, this thesis sets itself the task of explaining human motivation, and untangling the impetus for the waxing and waning of PSR support. This thesis forms a link between the schools of social and political history, which is crucial in developing insight into the revolution, since political possibilities in 1917 were structured by popular movements, identities and understandings.² Looking through the prism of PSR support allows us to acquire a deeper understanding of Russia's disastrous slide into civil war.

The PSR's mass support in the early months of 1917 was undisputed even by Lenin himself.³ This mass support caused Soviet historians significant problems. The paramount considerations for the Soviet historian of the revolution were to place the events and movements of 1917 within their appropriate Marxist class-based analysis, and to substantiate the claims that Bolshevik one party rule came about as a result of the wishes of the majority of the working population.⁴ The PSR was portrayed as politically, ideologically and organisationally bankrupt by the middle of 1917. Since the Bolsheviks were considered to be the de facto proletarian party, representing the interests of workers and 'poor peasants', the PSR's support base had to be found elsewhere, hence its customary tag of *melko-burzhaznyi* (petty bourgeois) in Soviet

¹ O. Radkey, *The Sickle Under the Hammer: The Russian Socialist Revolutionaries in the Early Months of Soviet Rule* (New York 1963), foreword, p. ix.

² For the most recent discussion of the revolution's historiography, see S. Kotkin, '1991 and the Russian Revolution: Sources, Conceptual Categories, Analytical Frameworks' *The Journal Of Modern History* 70(3) 1998, pp. 384-425.

³ 'The backwardness of the dark (*temnyi*) poor peasantry caused them to be led by kulaks, the wealthy, capitalists, and petty bourgeois intelligentsia. This was the era of domination of the petty bourgeois Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries.'; V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1977), vol. 37, s. 312

⁴ See K.V. Gusev, *Partiia eserov ot melkoburzhaznogo revoliutsionarizma k kontrrevoliutsii: istoricheskii ocherk* (Moscow, 1975), p. 5

literature.⁵ The absolute inadequacy and speciousness of such all-encompassing class labels is now evident, but left the Soviet historians spinning falsehoods about the events of 1917 generally, and support for the PSR in particular. Historians writing outside the constraints of Bolshevik dogma largely discounted the PSR for many years as a peasant party with substantial support but no real influence on the course of 1917. A handful of historians, led by the party's greatest chronicler, Oliver Radkey, have attempted to assess the party's support and influence in revolutionary Russia, but until very recently have been hampered by the unavailability of documents pertaining to the party held in Soviet archives.⁶ The opening of the former Soviet archives has offered an opportunity to investigate the basis for the party's support in Russia, and to reassess the models of the party offered thus far. Limited publication of documents pertaining to the PSR, and a collection of new works on the PSR by Russian historians reflects renewed interest in the party and its role in Russia.⁷

This thesis has evolved around two key focal points. Firstly, the party's mass support and regional activists have been placed at the heart of this study of 1917, since it was the lower level party members and supporters that formed the mass of the party's supporters. Radkey's two books on the PSR, which remain the definitive works on the PSR's place in the high politics of 1917, focus around the machinations of the party's intelligentsia leadership as they struggled to come to terms with 1917. The party's foot soldiers of 1917, its regional activists and supporters in the provinces, were, as Radkey acknowledged, largely ignored. This study prefers to focus on these foot soldiers, and rather neglects the party's national leadership. It is shown that the PSR's electoral success in 1917 was predicated on the eclecticism both of the party's popular image and its membership. This effectively allowed the PSR to encapsulate a whole range of

⁵ Examples include Gusev, *Partiia eserov*, Kh. M. Astrakhan, 'The History of Russia's Bourgeois and Petty-Bourgeois Parties in 1917 in the Most Recent Soviet Literature', *Soviet Studies in History* 15(1) 1976, pp. 3-30, M.I. Stishov 'On the Question of the So-Called SR- Menshevik Conception of the Proletarian Revolution' *Soviet Studies in History* 10(4) 1971, pp. 299-310.

⁶ Radkey's 1958 monograph, and the writings of Manfred Hildermeier and Maureen Perrie were the only significant commentaries on the PSR outside Russia until the more recent work of Michael Melancon, Immonen Hannu and Chris Rice.

⁷ Three volumes of documents and materials pertaining to the PSR have been promised by the publisher Rosspen, but so far only the first has emerged; N.D. Erofeev et al (ed.) *Partiia sotstalistov-revoliutsionerov: dokumenti i materialy 1900-1907gg.* (Moscow, 1996). Rosspen has also published three new works on the PSR; P.A. Gorodnitskii, *Boevaia organizatsiia partii sotstalistov-revoliutsionerov v 1901-1911 gg.* (Moscow, 1998), M.I. Leonov, *Partiia sotstalistov revoliutsionerov v 1905-1907 gg.* (Moscow, 1997), K.N. Morozov, *Partiia sotstalistov-revoliutsionerov v 1907-1914gg.* (Moscow, 1998). A work on the PSR during 1917 by N.D. Erofeev has been advertised by Rosspen, but has not been published to date.

policies and attitudes. The national party provided an umbrella for a plethora of disparate mobilised groups with a range of agendas.

Secondly, this study focuses particularly on Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia*, with additional reference to the *guberniias* Kazan, Simbirsk, Tambov and Penza, which have been used to sample various PSR membership figures. Russia's enormity and geographical diversity are undisputed, yet there was a tendency among historians, lately being corrected, to talk about the 'Russian people' as if they were a single and undivided body.⁸ This runs the risk of distorting the picture of Russian revolution. While generalisations allow for grand statements and broad brushstrokes, they risk obscuring the reality of local responses to revolution, and turning the 'Russian people' into a gross caricature. A micro study of one province, or one factory, or even one village, does not of course provide substantiation for generalisations about the Russian revolution, but does contribute to the forming of a picture which defies generalisation, and which reflects the massive regional and social differences which were encompassed in experiences of the Russian revolution.

The PSR was the dominant political party in Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia* during 1917. Its dominance does not however illuminate the climate of the *guberniia* clearly. Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia* provides a regionally specific example of how the divisions within the party outlined in the first three chapters were formed and developed in 1917. This study is arranged thematically. It examines the real difficulties for local party workers, in the towns, the villages and the factories, and the diversity of the party's image and actions. The dynamics of power operating in the *guberniia* are explored, between the party and its supporters, between town and village administration and the population, and between central government and local government. The picture that emerges, inevitably, is one of massive vicissitude, within and between the *uezds* of the *guberniia*, and within and between different social groups. Both context and practical manifestation for the development of locally specific policy by local PSR leaders, and the kaleidoscopic nature of the party are revealed by this focus on Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia*.

⁸ There have been a number of studies of revolutionary Russia in the last fifteen years which have concentrated on a specific geographical area. The most important of these are O. Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution* (Oxford, 1989) and D. Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga: 1917 in Saratov* (New York, 1986). A number of articles have been published more recently which reflect interest in regionally specific studies of revolutionary Russia; H. Phillips on Tver, M. Hickey on Smolensk, A. Khalid on Turkestan, R.A. Pierce on Tashkent, and E-M. Stolberg on Siberia.

The sources for this study include memoirs, newspapers, party and police records, published materials and records of local government. These sources inevitably present a range of difficulties for the historian, since they tend to tell us more about the writer than about the events or opinions described. The newspapers surveyed are almost exclusively those published regionally or nationally by the PSR, and are used extensively throughout this thesis. This focus on PSR publications provides information on party activity that is sparse outside such publications. Their usefulness in indicating the opinions of their writers is undeniable, but like any newspaper, they require cautious handling when being used as a source on the events and feelings of the day. Ultimately any written source, but particularly any politically affiliated publication aimed at mass distribution, only presents its authors' and editors' concerns, and does not provide an objective commentary on events. Newspaper reports, when used as a record of events rather than as a record of party feeling, have been treated with due caution.

The Sormovo district of Nizhnii Novgorod has been used repeatedly as a case study of PSR activities in a worker community. Sormovo provides a valuable case study of PSR support in the factories, not least because of an exceptionally rich source pertaining to it. In April 1917 Zinovii Magergut wrote a detailed and referenced history of the Sormovo PSR organisation during the period April 1916 to April 1917.⁹ Magergut is something of an elusive individual for his biographer; the history is written with very few references to the author, even though his modesty could not conceal his prominent role in the organisation. He arrived in Sormovo illegally in March 1916, but does not mention his whereabouts before this time. Rather disappointingly, there is no trace of his existence to be found in Nizhnii Novgorod State Archive (GANO). Although he was clearly prominent in Sormovo and Nizhegorodskaia PSR organisations up to May 1917, after this time he was not mentioned again in party press or documentation. One can only presume that he moved out of the area or died. Magergut presented parts of his account at party meetings, and the thoroughness with which it was constructed would suggest that he planned to publish.¹⁰ The 30,000 word account even includes numbered supplements in the form of leaflets and pamphlets referred to in the text.

Though this thesis deals ostensibly with February to October 1917, its scope is inevitably pushed beyond these narrow limits. Perceptions of the PSR and the origins of

⁹ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 84-113. writings of Magergut, member of the Sormovo PSR organisation, reporting the activities of the group April 1916 – April 1917.

¹⁰ *Narod*, 28th April, no. 26, p. 4

divisions within the party have their source in the party's conception at the end of 1901, and even before, in the 1870's *Narodnik* movement.¹¹ Party divisions were still being manifested in the civil war period, and indeed beyond into the emigration of some party leaders. Whilst the material used to assess local leadership has focused around 1917, much of the analysis of party members' backgrounds deals with the years prior to 1917. In looking at events in Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia*, the thematic approach does not lend itself to chronological neatness. The chronological period studied stretches to the responses of the *guberniia* administration to the Bolshevik seizure of power, but inevitably skips somewhat through the events of 1917.

This study of the PSR in 1917 illuminates the complex web of motivations and delineators that drove political behaviour in 1917. Ronald Suny, in his work on the historiography of 1917, commented that while explanations of 1917 based upon the dominance of a few prominent individuals or the machinations of high politics were inadequate, so too had social historians tended to neglect the importance of politics and ideology. He concluded that:

One way to bring politics and society back together is to discover the hidden ways in which people understand what they are doing and who they are.¹²

This thesis follows Suny's proposal for the direction of study on the Russian revolution. By looking at popular understandings of political parties, grassroots party activists, and the manifestations of party political activity in one *guberniia*, politics and society are brought firmly together. Self interest is of course a key motivator in political decisions, but individuals' understanding of their self interest is the important question which is addressed. Too many clichés exist already on the importance of the Russian revolution in our understanding of twentieth century history. It suffices here to suggest that this regional focus, looked at through the prism of PSR support, enables further aspects of the Russian revolution's diversity and complexity to be revealed.

¹¹ F. Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia* (London, 1960). See E.K. Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs of the Russian Revolution* (Stanford, 1931), for a superb contemporary's account of the 1870's and 1880's movement, especially chapters one to four.

¹² R. Suny, 'Revision and Retreat in the Historiography of 1917: Social History and Its Critics' *Russian Review* 53(2) 1994, p. 182.

CHAPTER 1: DEFINING THE PARTY

What being a party member constituted, and what contemporary understandings of political parties were are important precursors in understanding the basis for PSR support. This chapter will tackle these problems from two directions, by offering a formal definition of what a political party was, and by looking more specifically at patterns of membership and leadership in the PSR itself. The first part of this chapter establishes a formal definition of the political party within the context of revolutionary Russia, then looks more specifically at the PSR, and considers the party's theoretical basis, patterns of membership and the role of communal behaviour in membership of the party. The second part of the chapter considers the challenges to a formal definition of the party which were posed by the indistinct nature of PSR 'orthodoxy', and by the issue of inter-party mobility. The final part considers selection of the party's local leadership. This chapter will demonstrate that although it did provide a theoretical framework, the PSR was largely defined by its members. Rather than trying to impose an alien vocabulary and political structure on Russia, it actually metamorphosed to accord with rural Russia's political traditions, which enabled the party's programme to be defined by its supporters.

TOWARDS A FORMAL DEFINITION

The political party was an organisation of vital importance in 1917. The structure of the voting system for the Constituent Assembly elections, which offered the electorate choices between party lists rather than individuals, made the political party unit one that was crucial for the electorate both to understand and to embrace if the elections were to have any democratic meaning. One newspaper put the importance of the party in the new state structure succinctly:

It is necessary not only to become acquainted with political parties and their demands, but to enter into their life, and to form them yourselves, to select and put forward your own candidates; otherwise the Constituent Assembly and *volost zemstva* will not represent all the living desires of the peasantry.¹

The role and contemporary understanding of political parties in 1917 was far from straightforward. The structure of Russian civil government prior to the February revolution makes the status of revolutionary political parties difficult to define. Blondel's formal definition of a political party as 'groups whose membership is open

¹ *Simbirskaiia narodnaia gazeta*, no. 17, 7th June 1917, p. 3

and which are concerned with the whole spectrum of matters which the polity faces'² is clear, but does not really clarify the role of the party within the structure of the state. Such modern definitions become obsolete when the context, role and functions of political parties in pre-revolutionary Russia are considered. Blondel described the role of political parties as the means by which political conflicts are domesticated, both by giving the public a voice in debate, and by reducing or even repressing conflict,³ and stated that parties can only exist where national authorities are linked to the population and require those links with the populace. The modern concept of political parties working to reduce conflict is based around the idea of a party which is working within an established democratic state, whereby support levels affect the amount of influence that a group has on the political system, and where it is in the interests of that party to work within the existing framework. The autocratic system that existed in Russia prior to the 1905 revolution, and arguably right up to Nicholas II's forced abdication in 1917,⁴ did not provide this precursor to the existence of political parties. The pre-1917 Leninist concept of a revolutionary party offered a further alternative to these formal definitions. The Bolsheviks regarded the party as a vanguard movement, in which there were clear distinctions between the party and their supporters.⁵ This concept contrasted with the PSR conception of the party embracing mass membership.⁶

Special problems are raised by the essence of revolutionary parties. Where a party's prime goal was to destroy the existing state structure and to place a new power structure in its place, as was the case with Russian radical socialist parties prior to 1917, that party could never work effectively within the existing framework. The minimum and maximum programmes worked out by the PSR attempted to accommodate this paradox, but could not mask the inconsistency of a reformist programme from a party whose first priority was the overthrow of the autocratic regime. The February revolution forced the radical socialist parties to dramatically reconsider their attitude towards the state. Such reconsiderations did not necessarily accord with the framework of the party that had

² J. Blondel, *Comparative Government – An Introduction* (London, 1995) p. 132

³ Blondel, *Comparative Government*, p. 129

⁴ A number of works explain the ineffectiveness of the State Duma as a check on autocracy; R. Pearson, *The Russian Moderates and the Crisis of Tsardom* (London, 1977), G. Hosking, *Russia's Constitutional Experiment: Government and Duma 1907-1914* (Cambridge, 1973), P. Waldron, *Between Two Revolutions: Stolypin and the Politics of Renewal in Russia* (Illinois, 1998)

⁵ V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done?* (Peking, 1973), pp. 137-156, but esp. p. 147.

⁶ Though the PSR programme accepted that revolutionary parties would be a 'revolutionary vanguard' in the first instance, its first aim was to 'merge with the masses and to incorporate them into its ranks'. (Translated from the PSR Party Programme in V.V. Shelokhaev et al. (ed.) *Programmy politicheskikh partii Rossii konets XLX-XX VV.* [Moscow, 1995], p. 141)

been established in an autocratic context. The PSR's decision to support the Provisional Government, and to work within the new administration established by the February revolution, was in many ways a surprising move for a party with such a radical tradition.⁷ This decision to work within the new 'revolutionary' status quo forced the party to dramatically redefine itself, a redefinition that contributed significantly to the eventual split of the party.⁸

In 1917 the Russian press paid a great deal of attention to the concept that it was the duty of Russia's population to participate in the new democratic process. In order for them to do this, it was considered imperative that they become acquainted with the system of political parties:

Every Russian citizen must now thoughtfully get a grasp of the programmes and demands of different political parties, in order to choose one from these whose demands are most suitable for him, and to join that party or at the very least to vote for it.⁹

In this context, the massive influx of new members into the socialist parties, particularly the PSR, is not surprising. The socialist press carried the message that it was a citizen's duty to participate in the political party system. There was recognition of the problems of defining political parties within the context of post-revolutionary Russia, and attempts were made by the national press to address them. The problem was of course compounded by the unfamiliarity of the electorate, particularly in the countryside, with democratic structures and political parties generally. The following assessment of contemporary definitions of political systems and parties demonstrates that contrary to the suggestion of Orlando Figes,¹⁰ the language of revolution was not in fact couched in terms foreign to the villages. The language of revolution was itself defined by existing peasant understandings of politics.

Articles with titles like 'What is a party, and why do we need them?'¹¹ appeared in local newspapers, and sought to clarify what a party was, and more importantly emphasised the political party's importance and central role in the formation of Russia's new state structure. The description of parties offered in the socialist press often started with an

⁷ M. Melancon, 'Left Socialist Revolutionaries and the Bolshevik Uprising', in V.N. Brovkin (ed.) *The Bolsheviks in Russian Society* (New Haven, 1997), p. 60. 'Chernov's new, unwonted moderation was also a factor (in the party's shift to the centre). . . Chernov never explained this deviation from his accustomed path.'

⁸ The party officially split at the end of October 1917, when those left SRs supporting Lenin's new government were expelled from the party.

⁹ *Zemlia i volia, krestianskaia gazeta*, no. 22, 15th August 1917, p. 1

¹⁰ O. Figes, 'The Russian Revolution of 1917 and its Language in the Villages', *Russian Review* 56, 1997, esp. pp. 324-5

¹¹ *Simbirskaia narodnaia gazeta*, no. 17, 7th June 1917, p. 3

essentially Marxist discussion of class divisions produced by the control of capital, and exploitation of working people particularly. Political parties were presented as mass movements whose aim it was to unite people with common class interests, in order to achieve their demands in changing the political and economic life of the country. The differences between political parties were often drawn out in broad brush strokes in the first instance, separating the socialist parties from their 'bourgeois' rivals:

All parties may be divided into two distinct categories: one strives to build in our future life a situation where there will be no rich and no poor, and every member of the community can receive all that he needs in life through his own labour- these are the socialist parties. The other category of party considers such a future to be an impossible dream, that it is impossible to abolish property and capitalist gains from waged labour- they consider only certain improvements possible. Socialist parties call such parties bourgeois, since they defend the inescapable interests of the bourgeoisie- the wealthy and not the working class of the population.¹²

Appeals were made to a general understanding of political activity based on peasant traditions; the political party was presented as a form of national *obshchestvo*, whereby unity brought strength. An article in a newspaper published by the *Nizhegorodskaia guberniia* Soviet of peasants' deputies emphasised this:

Alone it is impossible to achieve anything, as an individual will not be considered at any time in any place. . . A united political party, on the other hand, which can count in its ranks tens of thousands of united people, achieving as one, and acting to one plan by identical means. . . for such a party, of course, there will be strength, and it can achieve all and everything in life.¹³

This description of the potential strength of united action was complimented by consideration of the relationship between the member and the party:

Every member of the party is bound to submit to party discipline, to act as has been decreed by the party, that is by a majority of their members. The path of public life and all laws on this can only be founded if the minority submits to the majority.¹⁴

These contemporary definitions perceived political parties as mass movements that embodied the views of their mass membership, and used the power that they gleaned from such support to carry out their programme in public life. The projection offered was of the membership shaping and defining the policy and character of the party, rather than the party offering a vision that members would subscribe to. Unanimity was considered of central importance in the life of these political parties, and therefore in the functioning of the state; if there was discord within the party, then the minority had to submit to the majority. The political press utilised widely understood and recognised

¹² *Simbirskaiia narodnaia gazeta*, no. 17, 7th June 1917, p. 3

¹³ 'Zemlia i volia', *krestianskaia gazeta*, (*Izvestiia Nizhegorodskago guberniia sovet krestianskikh deputatov*), no. 22, 15th August 1917, p. 1.

¹⁴ *Simbirskaiia narodnaia gazeta*, no. 17, 7th June 1917, p. 3

peasant understandings of the functioning of organisational bodies that existed at village level, and transferred them onto the new national democratic organisations.¹⁵ Despite the difficulties of producing a formal definition, political parties were recognised as forming the basis for the new democratic state in 1917. The very definition of the party was formed in part by the party's membership and supporters. Political parties unavoidably became an important part of Russian life.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PSR

The theoretical background in which the PSR operated is an important backdrop to the party's attitudes and policies in 1917, and was largely formulated and enunciated by Victor Chernov. The political philosophy of the PSR is generally recognised as stemming from Russian Populism.¹⁶ Populism was characterised by strong influence from western European Marxism, while maintaining a critical distance from it.¹⁷ The idea of Populism as representing the Slavophiles with Marxism representing Westernisers was something Chernov sought to combat.¹⁸ Far from perceiving Russia as an exception, which was apart from the rest of Europe, Chernov saw Russia to be an integral part of Europe, which as such was subject to the patterns of economic development outlined by Marx.¹⁹ He was keen, however, to adopt the ideas of the Austrian Otto Hertz, who emphasised that in terms of agrarian problems, each country had specific national problems, and that these should be examined accordingly.²⁰ The

¹⁵ T. Shanin, *The Awkward Class- Political Sociology of Peasantry in a Developing Society: Russia 1910-25* (Oxford, 1972), esp. p. 34, discusses the form of peasant politics prior to 1917, 'The wide functions of the commune made the gathering into a most powerful body, at least potentially. The actual process of decision making, however, was far removed from the formally democratic procedures laid down by the law. The decisions were typically unanimous. . .' There have been a range of studies considering the role and importance of the commune in Russian peasant life. D. Moon, *The Russian Peasant 1600-1930* (London, 1999), chapter 6, pp. 199-236; summarises the functions and importance of the peasant commune. C. Worobec, *Peasant Russia: Family and Community in the Post Emancipation Period* (Princeton, 1991); highlights the central role the peasant commune took in regulating and maintaining peasant society. M. Lewin, 'The *obshchina* and the Village' in R. Bartlett (ed.) *Land Commune and Peasant Community in Russia. Communal Forms in Imperial and Early Soviet Society* (Basingstoke 1990), chapter 3, pp. 20-35; discusses the importance of the commune as a political and social centre for village life.

¹⁶ For the problems of defining Populism, see R. Pipes, 'Narodnichestvo; A Semantic Enquiry' *Slavic Review* XXIII(3) 1964, pp. 441-58.

¹⁷ H. Immonen, *The Agrarian Program of the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party 1900-1914* (Helsinki, 1988), p. 31

¹⁸ This view of populism was presented by Peter Struve, *Kriticheskie zametki k voprosu ob ekonomicheskom razvitiu Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1894), p. 29 (Reference from Immonen, *Agrarian Program*, p. 34)

¹⁹ Chernov outlined his theoretical stance on the agrarian question in a series of articles published in *Russkoe bogatstvo* in 1900. V. Chernov, 'Tipy kapitalicheskoi i agrarnoi evoliutsii' *Russkoe bogatstvo* 4 (1900), pp. 137-139.

²⁰ Hertz's book, which was produced in response to the assertions of Karl Kautsky that subscribed to Marxist theory of concentration both in agriculture and in industry, was produced in Russian in 1900;

positive aspects of capitalism, manifested primarily in large scale production and the co-operative movement, could be realised in Russia without the unmitigated development of capitalism. Chernov's aim in attempting to outline non-capitalist development of agriculture was to protect peasant interests.²¹ The peasantry did not have to become industrial proletariat for socialism to triumph. Chernov argued that this view, far from being Slavophile, was actually mirrored in the development of other western European socialist parties.²² The PSR expressed itself as an organic part of social democrat oriented international socialism. Chernov's attempts to assimilate the developing SR theories with western European socialism waned after 1902, however, when western European socialism came to be associated with reformism, while Chernov preferred to be positioned firmly on the side of 'revolutionaries'.²³

The analysis of class relations offered in the 1905 programme adopted Marxist analysis of exploitation models and the relations of capital; private control over means of production resulted in the development of two classes in society; the 'exploited toilers' and the 'exploiters'.²⁴ The programme was careful to elucidate the intelligentsia's role within this model. They were portrayed as alienated by the 'bourgeois exploiters' controlling society, which left them apart from the exploiting class from which they originated socially. Class, though important, was regarded as secondary to education and understanding in forming social groups. From the outset the PSR propounded belief in the 'third way' which united toilers and intelligentsia and avoided the spectre of out and out class war, instead offering Russia the opportunity to develop its own brand of socialism. Though this was not really specified within the 1905 programme, working peasants were included in the category of toilers,²⁵ and their unity of interests with the industrial proletariat was stressed repeatedly in party literature, particularly in 1917. The

Gerts, *Agrarnyi vopros. Perevod s nemetskago pod redaktsei A.A. Manuilova* (Moscow, 1900). See V. Chernov, 'Tipy . . .', *Russkoe bogatstvo* 4 (1900) pp. 135, 138; V. Chernov, 'Tipy . . .' *Russkoe bogatstvo* 10 (1900), p. 127 (References from Immonen, *Agrarian Program*, pp. 42-3)

²¹ Chernov, 'Tipy . . .' *Russkoe bogatstvo* 5 (1900), p. 48

²² Chernov, 'Tipy . . .' *Russkoe bogatstvo* 10 (1900), pp. 251-256; Chernov, 'K voprosu o kapatilisticheskoi i agrarnoi evoliutsii' *Russkoe bogatstvo* 11 (1900), p. 259

²³ See Immonen, *Agrarian Program*, p. 74. Chernov's disassociation with Hertz, with whom he had formerly sympathised, can be seen in his article 'Sotsializatsiia zemli i kooperatsia v sel'skom khoziastve', published in *Revoliutionnaia Rossiia* 14 (1902)

²⁴ 'Parallel to the development of the foundations of contemporary society, society itself increasingly forms itself into two classes; a class of exploited toilers who receive increasingly lower rewards for the wealth their work creates, and a class of exploiters who have a monopoly on the control of natural forces and the social means of production'. (Translated from the PSR First Party Programme in Shelokhaev, *Programmy politicheskikh partii*, p. 139)

²⁵ For an elucidation of this, see L. Shishko, *Po programmnyim voprosam* (Moscow, 1906), p. 39. Shishko was among the leading theorists of the PSR, participating in the working out of its programme, and a member of the PSR committee abroad.

PSR propounded that the class system would ultimately fall aside, and man, not just the working class, would be united. Rather than playing on the imagery of class war, Chernov preferred to regard the destruction of private property as benefiting exploiters, as well as toilers. Toilers would be freed of 'excessive work and semi-starvation', while the exploiters would be relieved of 'the degeneration of mankind from uselessness and superfluity'.²⁶ The vision of united class interests among peasants, workers and intelligentsia dominated PSR propaganda in 1917, and defined their vision of the revolution. Though such unity of interests can in retrospect be looked upon as altruism, the PSR's vision of Russia's future was certainly more palatable than that of Lenin's, whose open 'class warfare' stance and willingness to use terror against political opponents provoked massive bloodshed.

The role of urban workers within the PSR's economic vision was always rather subordinated to the role of the peasantry. The 1905 party programme placed the role of the peasantry as central in Russia's economic and social problems, and linked the woes of urban workers specifically to the paralysis of productive forces in the villages. The autocracy had been viewed as the originator of all Russia's social problems prior to 1917. The fall of Nicholas II forced a rapid turnaround of that precept. With the autocrat gone and Russia facing ever deepening social and economic problems, the PSR had to replace high flown rhetoric with policies which could tackle these woes. The experience of 1917 shows that this was beyond them. The party's programmatic reliance on the autocracy as the source of all Russia's afflictions left them without clear programmatic formulas for the establishment of a democratic state.

PSR ORGANISATION AND DISCIPLINE

Where does the formal definition of what constitutes a political party fit into discussion of the PSR? The party was expected to transform itself in 1917 from an underground movement whose position was based on opposition to the regime, to a party with an integral part both in the new democratic process and in governing the country, but the diversity of party members' aspirations ultimately resulted in chaotic haemorrhaging of the party's leadership and supporters in 1917. The party was held together for much of 1917 by practical considerations, but the party's spiritual unity had been irreparably eroded by disagreements over the war. The party's capacity to operate as a united

²⁶ Note the reference here to the superfluous man, a theme of late nineteenth century literature, perhaps most famously in Mikhail Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* (Harmondsworth, 1966)

political party was undermined most of all by the PSR's theoretical stance on party discipline.

Despite the restrictions of underground operation, the party had succeeded in establishing a central organisation, written membership cards, a system of dues to be paid monthly to the party, and detailed party regulations.²⁷ The PSR came through the challenge of its underground existence recognised as a political party with nationally recognised aims and objectives. Members were expected to contribute a regular sum to party funds, which affirms the notion of party members displaying a lasting commitment to the party. A list entitled 'Where the duties of the party worker lie', published in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*'s PSR newspaper *Narod* implied that the duties of membership were onerous indeed. Fifteen detailed points were included, which ranged from the all important payment of regular contributions to the party funds, to attendance at party meetings, propagandising and self-education and 'to display maximum initiative and activity in the actions of the organisation'.²⁸ The party strove to build a committed, educated and diligent membership. Despite this, the PSR was a notoriously indistinct organisation, without strong party discipline, and without a clearly defined regional structure. Zenzinov remarked in September 1917 that:

If there's one thing we agree with the Bolsheviks, it's that we must establish the unity of our party front, and that this is better done late than never.²⁹

The PSR did not succeed in addressing these issues of control over their membership or of strengthening party discipline, either in the party's centre or in the regional organisations. The only disciplinary measure open to the Central Committee was expulsion, which was ultimately a self-defeating measure, since if extensively utilised it allowed the party to splinter. Expulsion was only really used after the left group had formally split from the main PSR group after the Bolshevik seizure of power in October. The use of expulsion to combat open party disobedience merely exposed the party's hopeless disunity. The core reason for the party's lack of discipline can however be found in the party's uniquely liberal attitude towards the question of party discipline. In an article entitled 'Freedom of thought and unity of action',³⁰ differences among the party's membership were not only accepted, but paraded proudly. The anonymous

²⁷ GARF, f. 9591c, op. 1, d. 31, pp. 24-28. Membership card for the Moscow-Zastovskii region, with detailed party regulations, and section for party stamps to be inserted with each monthly payment, filled in by one Ivan Starakov, a soldier, on 25th September 1917. Membership procedures varied considerably from region to region, however; see this chapter, 'Role of Communal Behaviour', pp. 29-31.

²⁸ *Narod*, no. 10, 7th May 1917

²⁹ *Delo naroda*, no. 159, 20th September, p. 1, article entitled 'Unity of the Party'.

³⁰ *Delo naroda*, no. 78, 18th June 1917, p. 1

author emphasised that the party's programme and resolutions were sufficiently broad to be acceptable to a wide range of comrades of different temperaments, types and characters. John Stuart Mill was quoted to accentuate the importance of the PSR membership's broad political views:

If all mankind was of one opinion, and only one person held another view, then all mankind has to stand by the rights of that one individual, since to stifle one man is to stifle all of mankind.³¹

This liberal position opposes the concept that the minority should submit to the majority in a political party. Having established the right and even the desirability for party members to express a range of discordant political views, the author went on to state that unity was necessary both for party work and for party existence. With this in mind, the third party congress drew up points of instruction for regional party groups, instructions on agitation and a list of permitted party slogans. It demonstrated an extraordinary political naivety to suggest that personal freedom of political opinion and such wide scope of political difference and discordance was in any way compatible with the construction of a single orthodox party line. The party's theoretical basis was absolutely unsuited to the demands of constructing a disciplined and organised united party. Two main practical difficulties also inhibited the development of effective party discipline in 1917. Firstly, the party lacked the existing infrastructure required to co-ordinate party activities across vast geographical areas. This does not in itself explain the party's organisational failings; all socialist political parties whose activities had been illegal in the tsarist regime, including their main rivals the Bolsheviks, faced such difficulties. The PSR's difficulties were enhanced however by the size and speed of growth of their mass membership, and by the party's inherently loose philosophy which allowed and even encouraged the proliferation of opinions within the party. This encouraged factionalism and blurred understandings of party orthodoxy.

The problems in establishing any degree of party orthodoxy and discipline among the disparate party cells and regional organisations that materialised in 1917 were insurmountable. Radkey commented that regional groups did not send money or reports of their activities and provided nominal support for the policies supported by the Central Committee.³² It is estimated that in 1917 there were 436 regional party organisations,

³¹ *Delo naroda*, no. 78, 18th June 1917, p. 1. Such an opinion from Mill can be found in his discussion of representative government, in chapter seven, on 'true and false democracy'; J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism, Liberty, Representative Government* (London, 1960), pp. 256-262.

³² O. Radkey, *The Sickle Under the Hammer. The Russian Socialist Revolutionaries in the Early Months of Soviet Rule* (New York, 1963), p. 198.

312 committees and 124 groups,³³ though this is almost certainly below the true number of groups describing themselves as 'PSR'. The party lacked basic information about its new mass membership and regional organisations; the issue for the Central Committee in the first instance was not in ensuring party discipline among these regional groups, many of which were new, but just of finding out how many and how strong they were. A detailed questionnaire was sent to *guberniia* organisations, in an attempt to establish information about the state of the party.³⁴ This questionnaire enquired of the form and amount of party work going on in factories, villages and garrisons, the structure and hierarchy of the regional party organisation, and participation in organs of regional self government. A reply was demanded no later than 1st May, but only 123 of 426 regional organisations submitted responses.³⁵ The PSR group in Petrograd was among those who did not submit a response, indicating the laxity of organisation even in large central party organisations. These requests for information from the PSR's regional organisations were repeated throughout 1917, especially before the fourth party congress held between 26th November and 4th December. The party leaders were largely ignorant of the size and political mood of the party's regional groups.

Before condemning the party for their negligence in this respect, some consideration must be made of the real issues that were faced in establishing discipline within the regional organisations. Any one *guberniia* was enmeshed in an array of PSR organisations of varying levels and densities, which even the *guberniia* PSR committee struggled to track and maintain links with. Geographically based groups formed in villages, *volosts*, small towns and *uezds*, supplemented by interest based groups of peasants, workers and soldiers. These groups often formed at the initiative of individuals who did not have any connection with the *guberniia* organisation, far less with the Central Committee. Further, they formed and expanded at a speed that the *guberniia* organisations were unable to keep up with. The physical distances separating these groups, and the difficulties of travel and communications,³⁶ particularly within rural areas, enhanced their isolation. An infrastructure which could adequately maintain

³³ Figures from V.V. Shelokhaev et al. (ed.) *Politicheskie partii Rossii, konets XIX- pervaiia tret XX veka: entsiklopediia* (Moscow, 1996), p. 440

³⁴ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 112-3. Form sent to regional organisations by the commission on the formation of the third PSR party meeting, undated.

³⁵ *Partiniia izvestiia*, no. 3, 19th October 1917, pp. 20-24, in section 'Party Life'.

³⁶ On the problems of communication generally, and more particularly the difficulty of spanning Russia's vast geographical distances, see R. Pethybridge, 'The Significance of Communications in 1917' *Soviet Studies* 19, 1967, pp. 109-14.

such a web of organisations effectively required a durability which could only have come from sustained operation. The makeshift structures established in 1917 were inadequate to this mighty task.

The most pressing problem for the PSR's central organisation was of how to extract money from the local groups. This problem can be seen right down the party's organisational chain, with each level of organisation struggling to extract money from another.³⁷ This theme of party financing was prominent in party literature in 1917, and reflected the financial crisis the party faced. The *guberniia* organisations levied 10% of their subsidiary organisations' income, and the Central Committee in their turn levied 10% from the *guberniia* organisations, but this money did not all filter back to the Central Committee. The Central Committee also organised a range of specific funds, which had some success in attracting donations from a range of party and non-party organisations. Some of their funding initiatives, like for example the establishment of 1st July as the day when all members should donate one rouble to the party funds,³⁸ smacked of desperation, and the success of this initiative was not reported, suggesting that it did not extract significant sums. Besides, Radkey remarked that only 3% of the party's money came from the party organisation itself, and that the remainder was furnished from bank loans.³⁹ Radkey's remarkable figure indicates that despite its massive membership the PSR was in a profoundly unstable financial position. Shortages of funds crippled attempts to strengthen links with the regional organisations.

PATTERNS OF PSR MEMBERSHIP

It is impossible to assess the total number of PSR members in 1917 accurately. A tentative figure of some one million for 1917 can be estimated by compiling known figures of regional memberships and the active army.⁴⁰ Soviet historians forwarded

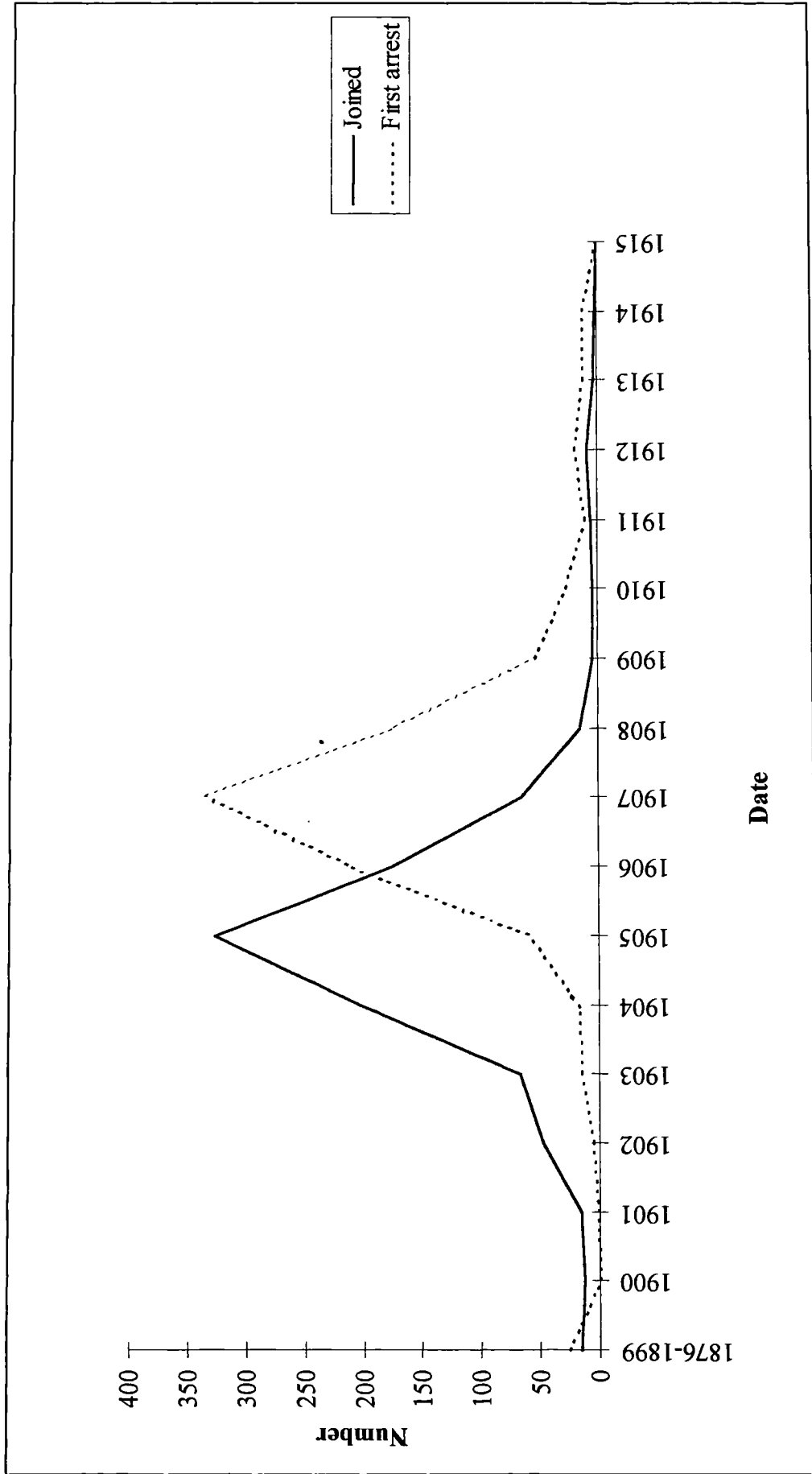
³⁷ At the Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* PSR conference on 23rd-24th April, a senior party figure complained that there was a severe shortage of funds, and that members of the organisation paid their party dues with extraordinary inaccuracy. (*Narod*, no. 5, 26th April 1917, p. 3)

³⁸ See *Delo naroda*, no. 84, 25th June 1917, p. 1

³⁹ Radkey, *Sickle Under*, p. 200

⁴⁰ See *Partiniia izvestiia*, no. 1 (September 28 1917), pp. 18ff., no. 2 (October 5th 1917), pp. 49-50, no. 3 (October 19th 1917), pp. 35ff., no. 5 (January 20th 1918), pp. 56, 59-60.

TABLE 1.1. DATES OF MEMBERSHIP AND FIRST ARREST OF PSR MEMBERS



estimates of between 250,000 and 400,000 PSR members in the active army.¹ The Voronezh PSR group claimed 100,000 members, as did the Samara organisation,² but because membership procedures were not effectively monitored or standardised, these figures cannot be considered reliable. The extensive survey of membership numbers of the *Povolzhe* PSR organisations in 1917 by M.S. Tochenyi reveals the extreme tenuousness of these figures. While one Samara factory was cited as having between 12,000 and 14,000 paid up PSR members, the Simbirsk organisation could boast only seventy members.³ This highlights the lack of standardisation in membership figures offered by local organisations. While exact numbers of party members are elusive, one can discuss general trends of party membership and activity from 1900 to 1917. The party arose in the provinces, and was to remain a predominantly black earth and Volga phenomenon. The 1905-7 revolution was a training ground for the young generation of PSR activists,⁴ but it was to be a training dearly bought; the concerted police oppression after the 1905-7 revolution decimated the party organisation, and prematurely cut short the revolutionary careers of many of these trainees. The party faced a real crisis with the disclosure of Azef as a tsarist agent,⁵ and the decimation of their ranks again in 1909 after an attempted revival. The party grew rapidly between 1905 and 1907, but recruitment ceased almost entirely between 1907 and 1909.

Graph 1.i opposite clearly demonstrates patterns of membership, and persecution of party members.⁶ Party recruitment hit a peak in 1905, and was high between 1903 and 1906. Date of members' first arrests⁷ show that police activity kept up with this growth in the party- arrests peaked in 1907, and were high between 1906 and 1908. Based on

¹ L.G. Protasov, 'K istorii bor'bi eserov za armiiu v 1917g.' in K.V. Gusev (ed.) *Neproletarskie partii Rossii v trekh revoliutsiiakh* (Moscow, 1989), p. 171.

² V. Alekseev, *Oktiabr i grazhdanskaia voina v TsChO* (Voronezh, 1932), p. 38; Leikina, 'Oktiabr po Rossii' *Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia* XLIX(II) 1926, pp. 213-214.

³ D.S. Tochenyi, 'Sotsialnyi i chislenyi sostav organizatsii melkoburzhuznykh partii na Povolzhe (Mart'-Oktiabr' 1917)' in K.V. Gusev et al (ed.) *Bolsheviki v bor'be neproletarskimi partiiami, gruppami i techeniiami*. (Moscow 1983), pp. 177-180

⁴ O. Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism. Promise and Default of the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries, February to October 1917* (New York, 1958), p. 63

⁵ For further information on Azef's role with the PSR organisation, much of it quoted directly from archival sources, see K.N. Morozov, *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov v 1907-1914gg.* (Moscow, 1998) pp. 164-249. A highly emotive account of Azef's life, which demonstrates rather selective use of the sources presented by Morozov, is presented by A. Geifman, *Entangled in Terror; The Azef Affair and the Russian Revolution* (Wilmington, 2000). Chapters 5 and 6, in particular (pp. 105-142) deal with the effects his exposure had on the PSR.

⁶ The data presented in this graph is based on 999 PSR members included in *Politkatorzhan*. See also M. Perrie, 'The Social Composition and Structure of the Socialist Revolutionary Party Before 1917' *Soviet Studies* 24(2) 1972, pp. 225-227.

⁷ The date of members' 'first' arrests are rather difficult to ascertain, since most of the individuals were arrested on a number of occasions prior to being tried for their revolutionary activity. The date taken here corresponds with the members' first arrests which resulted in a trial.

this, one can estimate that the average pre-revolutionary member was active in the party for around two years before trial. Trials were almost inevitably followed by either Siberian exile, or a spell in a hard labour prison followed by Siberian exile. Almost all of the individuals whose arrest history is tabulated above were not able to return to European Russia until after the February revolution. In the light of this record of police persecution, Zenzinov's report that the party organisation was shattered by 1909, and that former party activists refused to come forward for their party, is unsurprising.⁸ Spiridovich, a police officer who published a survey of the PSR in 1916, commented that:

By the beginning of 1914 there was no party organisation operating within Russia in the stricter sense of the word. There were only socialist revolutionaries scattered around different towns, dreaming of such organisations and of party work.⁹

At the beginning of 1917 the PSR was reduced to a skeletal organisation of illegal groups, with no centre, an inert constituency, and most of its workers exiled or imprisoned. Party activity did continue in Petrograd, Moscow, the *Povolzhe* area, and Nizhnii Novgorod, but police activity necessitated small, secret, underground organisations, which were frequently harried or halted by searches and arrests.¹⁰ Sviatitski's account of his tour of the Urals and the Volga in Spring 1916 showed no trace of SR agitation,¹¹ indicating that the remaining party activists were forced into inactivity, or into highly surreptitious work by police surveillance. The latent PSR organisation blossomed after the February revolution, as those in prison, exile, hiding, or simply cowed by tsarist oppression offered their open support for the party. Groups driven underground or even apparently wiped out in the years between the revolutions made their presence felt. Those imprisoned and in exile, the party's best known figures and their less notable comrades, hurried back to Russia. Exiles from Siberia, Europe and the United States flooded back to Russia. Victor Chernov returned on 8th April, coming through Great Britain to return to Petrograd. The 'grandfather' of revolution, Mark Natanson, courted hostility within his party by coming back with Lenin in the infamous 'sealed train'.¹² Katherine Breshkovskaia returned from Minusinsk triumphant. After a

⁸ Radkey, *Agrarian Foes*, p. 80. Radkey based this on a personal interview with Zenzinov.

⁹ A.E. Spiridovich, *Revoliutsionnoe dvizheniie v Rossie; partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov i eia predshestvenniki* (Petrograd, 1916), p. 495. Note that the Bolsheviks were also crushed as a result of police surveillance by 1916. (E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-23* [Harmondsworth, 1983], vol. 1, p. 79)

¹⁰ RGASPI, f 274, op. 1, d. 26, pp. 84-113. Writings of Magergut.

¹¹ 'Voina i predfevrale' *Katorga i ssylka* LXXV(II) 1931, pp. 32-33

¹² Radkey, *Agrarian Foes*, p. 139.

rapturous reception in Moscow, she arrived in Petrograd on 29th March, to be greeted by representatives from the Petrograd Soviet and from the Provisional Government.¹³

These heroes of the party were joined by large numbers of lesser known party activists who returned from Siberia and overseas. An indication of the demand from exiles to return to Russia was the activities of the ‘Society for the assistance of freed political prisoners’ established in Petrograd in 1917,¹⁴ and other related organisations, like the multi-party conference established in Chicago early in 1917 to assist émigrés wishing to return home. Alexander Shneider was one such returnee- he had been forced to leave Russia in 1908 with his wife and son, having escaped from Saratov guardhouse in 1907. He was a member of the Detroit PSR group, but was understandably eager to return to his homeland in the days of glorious revolution.¹⁵ Such returnees were to form the corps of party activists, and were central in defining and promulgating party policy in the provinces and in the centre. Iosef Tsingovatov, for example, a native of Penza, was imprisoned in 1907 for party work, and after two years in prison was sent to exile in *Eniseiskii guberniia*. He fled exile in 1910, and lived illegally in Paris, where he took part in revolutionary work, till 1917. He was accompanied by his wife Varvara Tsingovatova-Serdobova, who had been exiled to *Eniseiskii guberniia* in 1908, but who fled to France with her husband. Tsingovatov and his wife were quick to return to Penza, where he played a central role in the Penza PSR organisation. He was elected president of the Saransk Soviet of peasants’ deputies, was a representative of the Town Duma, and was elected as a PSR member to the Constituent Assembly.¹⁶

The bulk of the party’s mass membership in 1917 came from individuals who were new to the party. Radkey refers to an influx of white collar workers, known as ‘March SRs’, who by their cautious Kadet-oriented politics lent stability to the SR- Kadet coalition.¹⁷ Investigation into the PSR’s 1917 grassroots and the path of regional party politics do not show any evidence of ‘March SRs’.¹⁸ Regional party activists and supporters

¹³ See Shelokhaev, *Politicheskie partii Rossii*, pp. 86-88

¹⁴ The records of this society are held in GARF, fond R-3349 (72 pages)

¹⁵ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 5, l. 10: a printed form produced by the Chicago committee multi-party conference, filled in by Shneider. The existence of a PSR group in Detroit gives some indication of the size of the émigré community in Detroit.

¹⁶ *Sotsialist revoliutsioner*, no. 13, 26th October 1917, p. 3

¹⁷ Radkey, *Agrarian Foes*, pp. 185-7. (Also, see Chernov ‘Oschischenie partii’, *Delo naroda*, no. 218, 24th November 1917)

¹⁸ For assessment of the party’s grass root supporters in Petrograd, namely workers, soldiers and peasants, see M. Melancon, ‘Soldiers, Peasant Soldiers, and Peasant Workers and Their Organisations in Petrograd: Ground level Revolution During the Early Months of 1917’ *Soviet and Post Soviet Review* 23(3) 1996, pp. 161-90.

generally speaking drew to the left, and not to the right, in the course of 1917, and in fact became increasingly divorced from the moderate policies of the party's Central Committee. The most obvious example of this is the pursuit by the PSR's largest support group, the peasants, of 'land and freedom', as they defined it. This group pushed PSR activists towards more radical policies that contravened the PSR Central Committee's continued policy of support for the Provisional Government.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNAL BEHAVIOUR.

The ways in which people joined the party, and the obligations they undertook in joining, helps to establish the significance of party membership for those one million or so individuals who chose to join the party in 1917. In this section, attention will be concentrated on recruitment procedures in the villages, since rural people made up a significant proportion of the party's membership numbers, and understanding recruitment in the villages presents special problems. Towns and factory communities had a greater concentration of party activists and access to media, and party membership there was more likely to follow generally understood patterns of urban political behaviour.¹⁹ Radkey commented on the crude methods used by PSR activists to enrol members, especially in the villages, and the lack of standardisation in membership procedure.²⁰ Consideration of propaganda in the villages demonstrates that many peasants did understand the concept and the significance of their support for a given political party.²¹ This study illustrates the ways in which peasant membership of the party operated, and the significance of communal decisions in membership.

Communal decisions and actions played a large part in peasant behaviour in 1917,²² and played a part in party membership practices. There is some evidence of communal voting patterns operating during the Constituent Assembly elections: rather than voting being the decision of individuals, it was the decision of either the head of household,²³ or the *obshchestvo*, taken at the village *skhod* or some other communal gathering. This evidence comes in the form both of the almost unanimous vote offered to the PSR in some villages, and in reported decisions of the communal gatherings. In Gorodets

¹⁹ See chapter 2, pp. 75-76.

²⁰ Radkey, *Agrarian Foes*, pp. 234-5

²¹ See chapter 2, 'Propaganda in the Villages', pp. 71-75

²² O. Figes, 'The Peasantry' in E. Acton et al. (ed.) *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution 1914-1921* (Bloomington, 1997), p. 458.

²³ Figes, 'The Russian Revolution', p. 337; O. Radkey, *Russia Goes to The Polls – The Election to the All Russian Constituent Assembly, 1917* (Ithaca, 1989), p. 66

village, Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia*, for example, when voting was opened for the Constituent Assembly,

A *muzhik* turned up, delegated from the whole village, and declared that “We’re all for list No. 3!”²⁴ (List no. 3 was the joint list of the PSR and the Soviet of Peasants’ deputies)

Voting patterns varied considerably from village to village- in some places, the ‘Peasants’ Unity’ list (*Krestianskoe Edinstvo*) won significant proportions of the vote, and at least six lists usually registered some votes, even in smaller villages. These village to village variations refute to some extent the claim that PSR support represented nothing more than symbolic bloc voting,²⁵ though communal voting did go on to some extent. In the Constituent Assembly elections in Troitskii *volost*, Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia*, the PSR/Peasants’ Soviet list received a staggering 82% of the votes, and in Kstovo village in the same *guberniia* the PSR list won 92% of the vote.²⁶ Most compelling of all perhaps, is the victory won by the PSR list in the Constituent Assembly elections for Penza *guberniia*. Support from 81% of the electorate is astonishing, when one considers what this meant in real terms- of 636,247 votes cast, the PSR list received 517,226.²⁷ The eleven other lists competing for votes between them polled only 19%.

Communal decisions to join the party challenge our conceptions of what it meant to become a political party member, and offer explanation for the tiers within party membership that developed in 1917. Based on twenty-nine reports of events where peasants joined the party,²⁸ enrolment to the party generally occurred after a village meeting, whether this was called by local PSR representatives, or was a routine occurrence. In thirteen of the twenty-nine reports, party programmes were considered. A party committee was often formed, and in about half of all samples, membership fees and monthly dues were established. These payments to the party varied enormously from village to village: in some places, a single payment of twenty-five kopecks was all that was required; in others, a one rouble membership fee was payable, followed by a monthly contribution, ranging in size from twenty-five to fifty kopecks. In at least two

²⁴ *Narod*, no. 112, 28th November 1917, p. 4.

²⁵ Figes, ‘The Peasantry’, p. 550, claimed this. Radkey, *Russia goes to the Polls*, pp. 65-71 looked at a sample of village electoral returns, and concluded that although some degree of communal voting existed, there was evidence for real division of opinion.

²⁶ *Narod*, no. 112, 28th November 1917, p. 4

²⁷ *Sotsialist revoliutsioner*, no. 16, 14th December 1917

²⁸ Taken from *Narod* and *Sotsialist revoliutsioner*.

cases, monthly contributions to the party were linked to the income of the contributor.²⁹ This variation of payment is an important indicator of the localism, and responsiveness to peasant demands, which dominated PSR membership at village level.

In Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*, of twenty-two separate samples, only three specifically refer to the village assembly's decision that the entire village would join the PSR. At any one event where peasants joined up, however, the average number of individuals joining the party was fifty-one.³⁰ This substantial number indicates some level of communal decision, rather than solely individual decisions. Of the eight reports available from Penza *guberniia* on how peasants joined the party, a different pattern clearly emerges. Three reports specifically state that membership of the PSR was decided by the village *skhod*, and in contrast to Nizhnii Novgorod, where almost half of the accounts report that political programme was discussed, in Penza only two of the eight accounts refer to any discussion or agreement of PSR political programme. This leaves one to suspect that PSR membership in Penza *guberniia* was, generally speaking, less informed and more communal.

One should not, however, assume that all the PSR's new membership joined the party on this communal basis. The organisers of Insar town PSR group, Penza *guberniia*, declared that 'the organisation aimed to recruit members not in quantity but in quality.'³¹ Patterns of membership undoubtedly varied from village to village, and in some places, like Insar, the PSR organisation recruited members on an individual, rather than a communal, basis. There are major ramifications for our understanding of party membership figures where membership was a communal activity rather than a solely individual choice. Though these group decisions to join or to vote for the PSR indicate the prominence and popularity of the PSR at grassroots level, they cannot be taken to imply the same level of commitment as was offered by pre-revolutionary individual members. The nature of underground work compounded localism and lack of unity within PSR politics, but also meant that those willing to join the party were likely to be both aware of and committed to the party programme in some form. The risks they took in becoming involved at all were considerable;³² a cursory glance at the records of long-term PSR members reveals that by 1917 all had endured police interest, ranging from

²⁹ An example of means tested payments being established is in *Narod*, no. 34, 2nd July 1917, p. 4, at a meeting of Kniagininskii-Novostarinsko *volost*, Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*.

³⁰ These figures are taken from reports of rural communities joining the PSR in *Narod*.

³¹ *Sotsialist revoliutsioner*, no. 6, 4th September, p. 4

³² On the strains and dangers of joining the party prior to the revolution, see also B. Clements Evans, *Bolshevik Women* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 49

secret observations to long spells of hard labour and exile. Breshkovskaia commented of the pre-revolutionary membership that:

Only those joined the membership who felt themselves capable of paying the price for their audacity in entering into an open battle with the hundred-headed dragon whose teeth and claws were eternally renewed.³³

Furthermore, the conditions in which PSR groups operated prior to the February revolution were undoubtedly difficult. Zinovii Magergut's memoir of the Sormovo PSR organisation between April 1916 and April 1917 gives an impression of the difficulties faced by pre-revolutionary groups:

General meetings and mass meetings went on in a wood. Dragging myself along to a meeting six or seven *verst*s away, in varying weather, through swamp and thick mud, placing patrols and sometimes as a result of alarms having to move from place to place; a massive amount of time, energy and strength was spent unproductively.³⁴

The conspiratorial nature of pre-revolutionary work inevitably lent these active pre-1917 members peculiar qualities. Magergut added:

In the current time, when the organisation is legally active, I regret the loss of comradesly intimacy, sociability, solidarity and friendship which strongly united members of the underground organisation, bringing them closer to mutual understanding and founding a strong feeling of regret among former comrades.³⁵

This comment can be read as a criticism of the new wave of membership, as much as nostalgia for the veterans of the movement. Similar sentiments were voiced by Chernov himself, who bemoaned the terrible shortage of experienced party workers.³⁶ The commitment and fervour offered to the PSR by those who committed to the revolutionary cause while it was still illegal was in some cases remarkable. A number of sources express the semi-religious fervour of party members.³⁷ The excerpt below from a letter written by Maria Spiridonova in 1906 is expressive of what it meant to be an SR member for the hardened activist corps. Although Spiridonova, as an *intelligentka*, does not provide an ideal contrast with peasants in attitudes towards membership, she

³³ E. K. Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs of the Russian Revolution* (Stanford, 1931), pp. 103-4

³⁴ RGASPI, f. 274, op.1, d. 26, l. 105. Writings of Magergut.

³⁵ RGASPI, f. 274, op.1, d. 26, l. 110. Writings of Magergut.

³⁶ Quoted by Radkey, *Agrarian Foes*, p. 185, and footnoted by him as originating from the manuscript of a chapter Chernov wrote entitled 'Partiia S-R'.

³⁷ For comment on the religious connotations of PSR membership, particularly terrorist action, see A. Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill; Revolutionary Terrorism in Russia, 1894-1917* (Princeton, 1993) p. 49, and A. Knight, 'Female Terrorists in the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party' *Russian Review* 38(2) 1979, pp. 147-8. Knight also remarks that women were particularly prone to fervent devotion; 'As might be expected, the resolution behind such acts of rebellion demanded total commitment to the revolutionary cause. Once they had made the break, women threw themselves into their radical activities with a fervour that knew no bounds. The revolution became their life, leading them to strive for complete harmony between moral conviction and act'. (p. 142)

nevertheless provides a vivid illustration of the importance of membership for committed party members:

To me membership of the Socialist Revolutionary Party does not only mean unconditional acknowledgment of its programme and tactics, but something more. In my opinion it means dedication of one's life, one's thought, one's feelings to the realisation of the party's ideas; it means owning nothing but the interests and ideals of the party; utilising every moment of one's life in such a way that the Cause may be the richer for it . . . by my enlistment in your ranks I have no right to order my life personally. Therefore I subordinate it to your decision, for the jurisdiction of the many- when it is in the interest of the Cause- is greater than the jurisdiction of the one. I repeat: I submit myself to you. Marusya³⁸

Spiridonova declared herself to be personally responsible to the party. Her highly individual perception of party membership contrasts with the group decisions made in 1917. Spiridonova's high blown ideals were not of course so relevant in Provisional Government Russia, and were unlikely to have been embraced by the peasants who joined the party in such large numbers in 1917. They were to become relevant again, however, in the wake of the Bolshevik seizure of power, particularly after the split of the left SRs from the Bolshevik government. This approach gives one explanation for the relative silence of the massive PSR majority in the countryside. Just as they had not been willing to embrace commitment to the party at Spiridonova's levels in tsarist Russia, so they were unwilling to embrace similar commitment in the face of Bolshevik oppression. Furthermore, the persecution endured by party members active before 1917 in tsarist prison and exile hardened their political attitudes and made them more irreconcilable towards political opponents.³⁹ There were undoubtedly distinctly stratified levels of membership in the PSR, and the distance between these strata increased markedly in 1917. There was a significant difference in commitment and understanding of what it meant to be a member of the party between those members who were active prior to 1917 and those who joined in the course of 1917.

WHERE WAS PARTY ORTHODOXY?

The difficulties of establishing any sort of systematic central party policy in the provinces were almost insurmountable. Multiplicity of opinion within regional party organisations left the voters teeming with uncertainty. Did the PSR support internationalism, an end to the war and radical land policies, or did it support the Provisional Government unconditionally, along with continuation of the war and other increasingly unpopular policies? Such variations within regional party organisations

³⁸ I. Steinberg, *Spiridonova- Revolutionary Terrorist* (New York, 1971), p. 41

³⁹ For discussion of members' experiences in prison and exile, see chapter three, pp. 112-123.

ensured that voters could identify with the policies they preferred from the PSR's political programme. Support for the PSR from a particular group within the population did not imply anything about their approval of central party policy, but only approval of the PSR policy selected by them, as presented by their local activists.

The essentially ill-defined nature of PSR policy left it peculiarly open to vagaries of 'interpretation'. Despite its position as the single most popular political party of 1917, and its status as Russia's 'organic' socialist party, the political programme of the PSR has been shrouded in uncertainty. Beyond vague assertions of the party's connections with 'land and freedom', and their links with the peasantry, it is difficult to find clearer elucidation of the party's programme as it stood in 1917. This uncertainty was an accurate reflection of the PSR's essentially vague programme.⁴⁰ The best known prong of its programmatic position was socialisation of land, but even this lacked any clear and evident practical application in 1917. As early as 1901, Chernov spelt out the heterogeneity that the PSR embraced:

Every vital developing social movement which comprehends reality according to local conditions of strength cannot expand without certain programmatic and tactical disagreements. Moreover, these disagreements may rightly be called the moving force to develop a party programme. A party must be able to guarantee to its members in each given moment freedom of opinion, full freedom of speech in defining their tactics [while] uniting with this full discipline to act in the completion of those tasks accepted by majority decision. The party must be organised democratically.⁴¹

Chernov's enthusiasm for democracy and disagreement within the party structure placed him in stark contrast with the party philosophy developed by his counterpart in the Bolshevik party, Lenin.⁴² Such philosophy inevitably led to a degree of wooliness in any attempts to define party policy; a definition too rigid would have excluded parts of the PSR's membership. This is absolutely key to understanding the party's activities in 1917; there was not only a precedent, but actually a programmatic commitment to the profound discord and disunity that was to tear the party apart in 1917. Dissent within the party was so widespread that it was the norm, rather than the exception, within the party; almost any single element of party programme was not unanimously supported. Radkey,⁴³ Erofeev and Anoprieva⁴⁴ all divided the party's membership into the left, the

⁴⁰ See the PSR first party programme in Shelokhaev, *Programmy politicheskikh partii*, pp. 139-146.

⁴¹ Victor Chernov [under pseudonym O.], 'Bibliografija', *Nakanune*, 1901;3(28), pp. 343-344 (Reference from T.B. Cross, 'Purposes of Revolution: Chernov and 1917' *Russian Review* 26(4) 1967, pp. 356-357)

⁴² See R. Service, *Lenin- A Biography* (Basingstoke, 2000), pp. 138-146, on the genesis of 'What is to be done?', Lenin's thesis on the necessary organisation of the revolutionary party.

⁴³ Radkey, *Agrarian Foes*, p. 198, footnote 41; attempts to delineate the party members into six factions ranging from left to right.

centre and the right, with subdivisions within each of these groups. These categories operated only as indicators of broader trends within the party.

Victor Chernov was the leading theorist of the party, but the party never had a single, clearly expressed leader.⁴⁵ This was symptomatic of the deliberately loose structure within which the party operated. A number of figures were dominant in party leadership, and though Chernov was an active party spokesperson, and provided often telling theoretical analysis of the situation in 1917, he was not the dominant influence on party policy in 1917. Abram Gotz and Vladimir Zenzinov were among the most influential figures in keeping the party tied to the Kadet dominated coalition government for much of 1917, and in maintaining an irreconcilable pro-war stance, both positions which countered Chernov's left centrist views. Radkey attributes the party's inability to respond adequately to the challenges of 1917 to the failures of the PSR's leadership.⁴⁶ While Radkey makes the failings of the PSR's leading figures clear, it is misguided to blame the party's incoherence on individual leaders. The party's founding tenets embraced a heterogeneity that was at odds with the demands of taking power in a divided and troubled country. Radkey concentrates on the idea that predominance of the left faction of the PSR would have given the party a better chance of challenging the Bolsheviks in the factories and garrisons where they came to predominate by the close of 1917. To suggest that the left could have dominated is however to forget that the essence of the party was its idea of unity of interests; if the left had seized the agenda, this unity of interests would have been damaged.

The resolutions of the third party congress, which opened on 25th May 1917, and closed on 4th June 1917, served as the basis on which party orthodoxy was established by the centre. The resolutions passed there, on the war, on land and on the question of future governmental forms, were to be quoted by regional groups as the official party programme for much of 1917, even when their sentiment and content had been overwhelmed by the changing political climate. Though the resolutions passed there did clarify party policy, the congress also served to confirm the irreconcilable differences between members on a range of key issues. Right, left and centre all vied for political

⁴⁴ G. Anoprieva, N. Erofeev, joint authors of the 19 page entry on the Socialist Revolutionary Party in Shelokhaev, *Politicheskie partii Rossii*, p. 440; commented that there were three trends of thought within the party, right, centrist and left, and that within each of these factions there were significant differences of opinion.

⁴⁵ See Morozov, *Partiia sotsialistov revoliutsionerov*, p. 109.

⁴⁶ The failure of PSR leadership to respond adequately to the challenges of 1917, and instead to depend on Menshevik and Kadet initiative, is a running theme of both Radkey's major works on the PSR in 1917, *Agrarian Foes*, and *Sickle Under*.

dominance, and while the centre came to dominate the Central Committee, which controlled official party policy, both right and left threatened factionalism at the outset of 1917. The right was close to forming a separate party prior to the third congress,⁴⁷ and published its own national paper, *Volia naroda*. The right failed to make a final break from the party, as a result both of lingering loyalty to and nostalgia for the PSR, and the disproportionate influence it was able to wield within the party's Central Committee. The left, however, with the figureheads of Maria Spiridonova and Mark Natanson, and led by Boris Kamkov and A.L. Kalagaev, was from the outset a dangerous group within the party, since it was largely disenfranchised by the Central Committee and by the PSR's policy direction in 1917.⁴⁸ The PSR's left faction had existed semi-independently from the official party since 1909, though its final break from the party can be dated to its members' expulsion from the party conference at the end of October 1917. The Central Committee of the party itself was almost evenly split between two essentially irreconcilable groups. Spiridonova's comments on central party policy made in the leftist newspaper *Nash put* highlight the extent of party divisions:

The PSR is under the influence of the right wing of the party, which is filled with narrow-mindedness, and does not have any elements in common with socialism. They stray further and further from the true path- close links and unbreakable unity with the people.⁴⁹

These factions polarised around the war question, although in truth the war only accentuated existing rifts within the party. Though the defencist group within the Central Committee had a majority of one and thus dominated party policy, this could not conceal the large and increasingly vocal minority of the left.⁵⁰ This essential division of the Central Committee made the existence of competing regional groups unsurprising- away from the shelter of central party discipline, party rifts transformed into open competition. The profound divisions within the party centre enabled the selectivity of provincial organisations in defining their picture of party 'orthodoxy' in 1917.

The Sormovo PSR group's treatment of a Maximalist group formed in Sormovo during 1916 offers an example of the ways in which local PSR groups could attempt to define

⁴⁷ See Radkey, *Agrarian Foes*, p. 188

⁴⁸ Radkey did not credit Spiridonova with much political credibility. A more positive view of her role in the Left PSR is put by S.V. Bezberezh'ev, 'Mariia Aleksandrovna Spiridonova' in *Rossii na rubezhe vekov: istoricheskii portrety* (Moscow, 1991), pp. 335-355.

⁴⁹ From an article by Maria Spiridonova, 'O zadachi revoliutsii', *Nash put*, no. 1. This article may well have been considered a significant turning point in the crystallisation of the rift within the party- it was published in the Kazan newspaper *Za zemliu i voliu*, no. 5, 11th October 1917.

⁵⁰ Radkey, *Agrarian Foes*, chapter 6, entitled 'The Third Party Congress' discusses the rifts within the Central Committee of the party in detail; see particularly pp. 187-233.

party orthodoxy, as well as demonstrating the potential any one individual had in challenging such 'orthodox' party policy.

In August 1916 a worker from Petrograd came to Sormovo, with the nickname "Mishka Chernyi". The fellow was intelligent, well read, and was a good talker who expressed his ideas well, but by nature he was violent and desperate. He was quickly made the hero of the crowd, who love sensationalism. It came to this, that all around Sormovo rumours were carried about the formation of an SR group, which was based wholly on terrorist acts and expropriations. . . We could not ignore such exploits in the name of the SR Maximalist group.⁵¹

The Maximalist group, as well as physically threatening the Sormovo PSR group (apparently one of their first acts of expropriation was to steal the Browning pistol belonging to a member of the Sormovo PSR group), was clearly regarded as a threat to the 'orthodox' position held by the Sormovo PSR. It was quickly disbanded by the Sormovo PSR organisation, and the enigmatic Mishka Chernyi⁵² sent packing. It is not possible to say what the Sormovo group based their 'orthodoxy' on, or how they identified the schismatic Maximalism of Chernyi so effectively. The only references to central party activities were when the Sormovo PSR group heard reports from party members, usually illegals passing through or settling in Sormovo, who had been to Petrograd or Moscow recently. Despite this shortage of information on what Central Committee policy might be, the 'orthodoxy' of the group displayed a clear and evident identification of and loyalty to the PSR.⁵³

What was regarded as party orthodoxy was defined by the actions and persuasions of the local group, or of a dominant individual within a given locality. Definitions of party orthodoxy in some cases included barely a nod to central party policy. This flexibility within party orthodoxy is an important consideration when attempting to define the party, since flexibility undermined any preconceptions we may have on the political party as a monolithic entity. The significance of individual members in defining the political position of the party in localities was enormous, and denied any real possibility of standardisation in PSR programme. A report dated May 1917 from Cheboksar town in Kazan stated that the president of the Soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies,

⁵¹ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 91. Writings of Magergut, a member of the Sormovo PSR group, on its activities April 1916- April 1917.

⁵² Mishka Chernyi could well be a pseudonym, as Chernyi, meaning unskilled worker, was commonly used. In certain respects, however, Mishka Chernyi measures up with a certain Lev Chernyi, an anarchist who was involved in Moscow *uezd zemstvo* 1913-1917, and was repeatedly imprisoned and exiled and eventually shot by the Bolsheviks in 1921. (Shelokhaev *Politicheskie partii Rossii*, p. 682.)

⁵³ Yet despite such apparent 'orthodoxy', in fact the Sormovo PSR group is an excellent example of a group where the extreme left of the party held sway in 1917, and promulgated policy in direct contravention to the PSR's Central Committee. (See chapter 6, pp. 202-206)

Grasis, who did not affiliate himself to any political party, dominated political life in the town:

Grasis is not representative of any well-known world outlook, but his convictions and his alone, as an individual, are the centre of local life around which everything turns.⁵⁴

Though the extent of Grasis' influence was uncommonly large, this domination of a small number of individuals in local politics is not unusual. Given the divisions within the PSR's Central Committee, freedom for individuals to interpret party policy as they chose was considerable. A huge range of political opinion was expressed by the party's local activists in 1917 as 'official' party policy. On the question of socialist participation in the Provisional Government, for example, some activists are recorded as condemning coalition with the Kadets, and declaring that only an all-socialist administration would be acceptable, despite the central party policy of acceptance of coalition.⁵⁵ The radicalism of SR led soldiers' committees and the Soviets of peasants' deputies significantly overstepped the policy lines set out by the party's Central Committee.⁵⁶ This freedom for individuals to interpret the ill-defined PSR policy as they chose goes some way towards an explanation of continued PSR support in the villages despite actions that blatantly opposed 'orthodox' PSR policy. A letter published in *Narod*, received by the Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia* PSR committee from PSR sympathisers in Apraksina village typifies the problems faced by the party's Central Committee in establishing an 'orthodox' national policy:

Comrades! We have many people in our village who sympathise completely with the PSR programme, and in the near future will certainly form a PSR *volost* organisation. But recent events have been difficult to explain. People, purportedly SRs, came to the village, and persuaded the peasants that they should quickly take over for the common need buildings, inventory (living and dead) and grain owned by *pomeshchiks*. The *pomeshchiks*, of course, would not voluntarily agree to this, and they declared that they only left their property because of pressure from the peasants. This 'SR' propaganda has, of course, strongly agitated the local population. As a result of these events, we urgently wish to know how the PSR looks on this rapid seizure of *pomeshchiks*' property, even where this property is to be used to fulfil the needs of all the *obshchestvo*, and for every member of the *obshchestvo* separately, and even if it was made with the agreement (in truth forced) of the *pomeshchiks*.

We wish to know if the party considers such tactics and propaganda necessary and expedient, or if it considers them bad, since they decide questions prematurely, which must be decided only by the Constituent Assembly. We, for our part, sympathise with the PSR programme, do

⁵⁴ *Golos truda*, no. 8, 1st June 1917, p. 4. A rather unfortunate postscript to Grasis' political career was that he was arrested on 2nd July 1917 for 'spreading disorder and setting one part of the population against another, and aiming to discredit the power of the Provisional Government'. (*Golos truda*, no. 19, 10th July 1917, p. 4)

⁵⁵ *Narod*, no. 18, 26th May 1917, p. 3, as reported in the second Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia* PSR conference, 21st May 1917, and continued in *Narod*, no. 19, 28th May 1917, p. 3.

⁵⁶ For discussion of the activities of the SR led soldiers' committees and Petrograd Soviet of peasants' deputies, see Melancon, 'Soldiers, Peasant Soldiers', pp. 161-90.

not trust such propaganda, and are convinced that such actions harm the most important affair in the current time for the future- the organisation of the peasantry and the preparation for Constituent Assembly elections. We ask the party to give us some explanation of this question and to clarify directly the views of the party on such seizure of property of *pomeshchiks*, since we need to know if these agitators act in the name of the PSR, or if they only protect themselves with the name of the party. (Signed by sympathisers of the party)⁵⁷

The latter part of this letter does not ring true- the writer clearly knew that official PSR policy was to leave all such decisions to the Constituent Assembly; indeed, the phrasing echoes official PSR proclamations on the matter. The letter may well have been invented, or certainly tampered with, by someone in the *guberniia* committee, to whom it was sent, in order to press home the point. Within the villages, such cavalier usage of PSR identification was surely common, however, and offers a convincing explanation for the party's massive support despite the unpopular policies supported by the Central Committee.

The PSR group formed in Saransk *uezd*, Penza, in September 1917 set as one of its organisational objectives 'to supply every party member with a party programme and the provisional organisational rules of the party in a popular summary.'⁵⁸ Not all local party members were so well supplied, however. What local people recognised as PSR party policy and identity was shaped by the attitudes of local party leadership and organisation. The party's organisation, both at national and regional level, was not sufficient to maintain any sort of established party policy. In Penza *guberniia*, for example, it was noted that links between the *guberniia* PSR organisation and the *uezd* and village groups were very poor.⁵⁹ This effectively meant that interpretation of party policy was in the hands of local group leaders, who did not necessarily promulgate policies acceptable to the party's Central Committee.

The conflicts that developed within regional party organisations presented apparently insuperable obstacles to the party's attempts to define a clear party line. The PSR organisation in Kazan provides excellent illustration of this phenomenon, and to some extent mirrors the schism of right and left groups from the central party organisation that occurred later in 1917. This study of splits in the Kazan group shows how factionalism manifested itself, and also demonstrates the irreconcilability of the factions despite the substantial common ground that they held. The PSR organisation in Kazan was profoundly divided almost from the very inception of revolution, and it was a

⁵⁷ *Narod*, no. 34, 2nd July 1917, p. 4.

⁵⁸ *Sotsialist revoliutsioner*, no. 6, 4th September, p. 4

⁵⁹ *Sotsialist revoliutsioner*, no. 3, 14th August 1917, pp. 2-3- from a report at the second Penza *guberniia* PSR conference.

stronghold of the Left SR group, particularly among its peasant supporters.⁶⁰ Three identifiable factions emerged in Kazan. The proto-internationalist 'left' SRs described themselves both as the 'Young PSR Committee' and the 'SR Internationalists', and were often referred to by their opponents within the party as 'SR Bolsheviks'. The 'Old Committee', which supported the centre-right policies pursued by the PSR's Central Committee in 1917 was recognised by the Central Committee as the orthodox and legitimate PSR organ in Kazan. A third grouping emerged after the unification of these two groups in mid September, a breakaway rightist group that called itself the Kazan PSR Elders' Committee. The PSR Central Committee took an active role throughout 1917 in the verification of party orthodoxy and the reconciliation of these groups; V.G. Arkhangel'skii⁶¹ attended the PSR Kazan *guberniia* conference held on 6th–7th August, and confirmed that the Old Committee was recognised by the Central Committee, as not digressing from the decrees of the third party congress.⁶²

The origins and development of these splits are unclear, though two PSR committees and newspapers existed in Kazan almost from the beginnings of revolution in mid-April.⁶³ The SR Internationalists published their own newspaper, *Sotsialist revoliutsioner*. Surprisingly, this newspaper did not represent the extreme left of the party- it repeated faithfully much of the party line from the Central Committee in Petrograd. Its main point of departure from its competitor newspaper published by the 'old committee', *Golos truda*, was the prominence given to reporting of the Zimmerwaldist conference, and its internationalist stance on the war. A general meeting of the Old Committee held on 11th June discussed their competitor group and its newspaper, and, not acknowledging their apparent common ground, declared the group to be in cohort with anarchists and Bolsheviks. All relations were broken off with the Internationalist group, and an appeal was made to any individuals who had joined the group in good faith as SRs to leave at once and instead join the Kazan (Old) Party Committee.⁶⁴ This split within the local party was clearly a focal point of discussion for the Old Committee, although curiously the Internationalist SR's newspaper *Sotsialist revoliutsioner* never referred to internecine party strife.

⁶⁰ O. Radkey, *Agrarian Foes*, p. 192

⁶¹ A member of the Central Committee.

⁶² *Golos truda*, no. 29, 14th August 1917, pp. 3-4, in section 'Party Life'.

⁶³ *Za zemliu i voliu*, no.1, 29th September 1917, p. 1, editorial.

⁶⁴ *Golos truda*, no. 20, 13th July 1917, p. 1

Despite the June resolution to break off relations with the SR Internationalists, the Old Committee resumed talks with them in July over elections to the Town Duma. Disagreements between the groups continued to hinder attempts at co-operation; the Old Committee's references to the Internationalist group as 'SR Bolsheviks' are a fair indicator of its tone towards them. The SR Internationalists opposed the June offensive, considering it a 'strike to the spine of the revolution', and refused to form a bloc either with the Peasants' Union or with the Mensheviks. The Old Committee refused to relinquish the bloc they had already formed with the Mensheviks, and confirmed their support for the offensive.⁶⁵ Negotiations were broken off abruptly. The situation was clearly very confusing for the party's potential supporters in the factories, garrisons and villages. There was a scuffle between the opposing SR sides at a soldiers' meeting on 20th July 1917. A representative from the Internationalist group asserted that there was only one PSR committee, the Internationalists. This reportedly provoked outcry from the assembled soldiers, who demanded a return to the podium of Old Committee representatives.⁶⁶ This was no doubt rather sanguine reporting by the Old Committee's newspaper; a later report from the PSR military organisation reported that merging with the Internationalist group was desirable for 'more intensive and productive work'.⁶⁷ The rift within the Kazan party organisation adversely affected the party's recruitment and support. The PSR factions in Kazan showed themselves unable to consolidate their considerable common ground for the greater good of the party.

The Central Committee recognised the dangers of this schism, and took affirmative action to remedy the situation. The Central Committee finally sent one of their members, Dmitrii Rakov, to Kazan in September for a resolution of the issue. Rakov arranged a town PSR conference for the 12th September, and a *guberniia* conference the following day. He supervised the election of committees for both with representatives from both party factions, which according to the new united PSR newspaper *Za zemliu i voliu* liquidated the rift between the groups:

Now all strength of the party is again united and directed along the same channel. It is unnecessary to speak of the massive work which lies before the party prior to the elections for the Constituent Assembly, unnecessary to speak about this because the difficulties of party work have been reflected in organisational divisions. Now we are again united, no two different individually named committees, no two party newspapers. . . Let there be differences of opinion between us- this is necessary in a party which is growing and broadening, but now after the liquidation of divisions all strength of the Kazan PSR goes on one path of revolutionary activity.

⁶⁵ *Golos truda*, no. 20, 13th July 1917, p. 3, in section 'Party Life'.

⁶⁶ *Golos truda*, no. 22, 20th July 1917, p. 4, in section 'Party Life'.

⁶⁷ *Golos truda*, no. 37, 14th September 1917, p. 4, in section 'Party Life'.

And so, in Kazan one united PSR organisation will act. A long and persistent struggle lies ahead in continuation of which the flag of revolutionary socialism cannot be for one minute lowered. All strength of the party must be returned to the great struggle for land and freedom.⁶⁸

This optimistic report reaffirmed Chernov's vision of a broad and all inclusive party, and glossed over the serious issues which had divided the Kazan group so abruptly in 1917. It is unsurprising in this context that within days a group splintered from the new united organisation. This was the rightist Kazan PSR Elders' Committee, which disagreed with the Central Committee commissioned Kazan organisation enough to run a separate list for the Constituent Assembly elections.⁶⁹ The Kazan PSR Elders' Group continued to publish *Golos truda* in the name of their faction, and regarded themselves to be the representatives of Central Committee policy, even though they had formed in opposition to the express wishes of the Central Committee. This perplexing situation was a practical manifestation of the PSR's originally stated desire to embrace a range of opinions within the forum of the party. Central Committee attempts to unify the Kazan organisation were doomed. When the policies loosely formulated prior to 1917 were faced with practical applications in the year of revolution, key irreconcilable differences inevitably emerged among members who had been drawn to the party with different agendas, and the disparate groups were unable to co-exist successfully. The party's philosophy had never before embraced rigid party discipline, and was thus unable to instil it with its feeble attempts in 1917.

INTER-PARTY MOBILITY

This section will establish the ways in which different political parties were delineated, and will show that there were distinct shifts in the ways socialist parties interacted with one another after the February revolution. The pressure of work underground prior to the revolution had encouraged many local groups into close co-operation: Melancon commented of pre-1917 that 'Russian political parties had not yet achieved a high degree of definition; they were movements, operating in daunting circumstances, rather than parties.'⁷⁰ After February 1917 however, the old solidarity of an oppressed minority flaked away, so that the harsh inter-party conflict which had always existed between party leaders permeated down to local activists. This breakdown of co-operation among the socialists enabled clearer distinctions to be drawn between political

⁶⁸ *Za zemliu i voliu*, no. 1, 29th September 1917, p. 1 editorial.

⁶⁹ *Za zemliu i voliu*, no. 3, 6th October, 1917, p. 1 editorial.

⁷⁰ M. Melancon, "'Marching Together!': Left Bloc Activities in the Russian Revolutionary Movement, 1900 - February 1917' *Slavic Review* 49(2) 1990, pp. 251-2

parties, even if differences in the parties' programmes were not always recognised by the electorate.⁷¹

There are numerous examples of solidarity within the socialist camp generally prior to 1917, and more specific examples of individuals who moved relatively fluidly between party affiliations. Melancon has argued convincingly that socialist parties' cadres, especially the Bolsheviks and PSR, worked in relative harmony on a practical level prior to the February revolution.⁷² Geifman offered evidence of extensive co-operation among terrorist groups of varying political affiliation,⁷³ and Perrie's study of the PSR's 1905-7 membership, which looked specifically at inter party mobility, found that 16.1% had at some time changed or shared party allegiance.⁷⁴ This considerable degree of mobility amongst the revolutionary parties was offered by Perrie as confirmation of David Lane's thesis on party allegiances:

The rank and file membership of the revolutionary groups might for many purposes be regarded as one group, the members having 'revolution' as the common goal and showing little awareness of the details of policies.⁷⁵

'Rank and file' understandings of loyalty are complex issues. The idea of the revolutionary parties being 'more together than apart' is most applicable when considering the pre-revolutionary, underground socialist party organisations. There is certainly ample evidence of collaboration and even interchange between parties in such groups. Even before the revolution, however, there was also evidence that competing political parties, despite willingness to collaborate on practical issues, maintained a barbed hostility in their relations. The Sormovo PSR group's attitude towards their only political rivals in the area prior to the revolution, the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, demonstrates collaboration between the rival parties, but also presents clear delineations between these parties. These clear delineations quickly transformed into open competition after the February revolution.⁷⁶ The Mensheviks were largely discounted by the SRs; they were apparently unwilling to become involved in any illegal activity, which rendered them irrelevant, in contrast to the vitally radical plans of the PSR and Bolshevik groups in Sormovo. Relations between the Sormovo PSR and the Sormovo

⁷¹ D. Koenker, *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution* (Princeton, 1981), pp. 190-193; discusses the low levels of partisan awareness of the Moscow workers in 1917.

⁷² Melancon, "'Marching Together!": pp. 239-252.

⁷³ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, ch. 6, pp. 181-206, and pp. 182-6 on PSR collaboration with other radical groups.

⁷⁴ Perrie, 'Social Composition and Structure', p. 229

⁷⁵ D. Lane, *The Roots of Russian Communism. A Social and Historical Study of Russian Social Democracy, 1898-1907*. (Assen, 1969), pp. 116-7.

⁷⁶ See chapter 5.

Bolsheviks were relatively harmonious prior to the February revolution as a result of the practical difficulties of underground work. In a number of cases in 1916, most notably in the organisation of strikes and mass meetings, there was active collaboration between the PSR and the Bolsheviks. This example refers to a mass meeting that was arranged by the Sormovo PSR group as a result of unrest in the Sormovo factories in 1916:

It was decided to get into contact with other party cells for agreement of a general plan for the carrying out of a strike. On the following day, the 24th July, in the wood by Barikhoi village, a general meeting of SRs and Bolsheviks was held regarding the strike. Around 100 organised comrades attended, and several Mensheviks were amongst them. The Bolshevik Levik MAKAROV was elected president. After a long debate, in which the SRs and Bolsheviks, the majority, expressed in favour of the strike, and the Mensheviks strongly opposed it, because they predicted it would be defeated by repression, it was decided: on the 25th July work would not start in the morning...⁷⁷

Despite these apparently cordial relations, the hostility of the Sormovo PSR towards their Bolshevik comrades was palpable. References to them were littered with disparaging remarks:

It is characteristic that the Sormovskii group of Bolsheviks asked Tiurikov [a leading PSR member in the area], through a member of their group, the provocateur MALINOVSKII, to create a leaflet, which they published in the name of the Bolshevik organisation.⁷⁸

This implied that the Bolshevik group lacked anyone with the abilities of Tiurikov, and had to resort to PSR assistance even in literary matters. When describing a pre-strike meeting at the Sormovo factory, the inadequacy of the Bolshevik organisers was emphasised:

Because of the disorganised nature of the meeting, the initiators of which seemed to be Bolsheviks, nothing was decided until long into its opening.⁷⁹

Other remarks commented on the high number of provocateurs involved in the Sormovo Bolshevik group,⁸⁰ a feature apparently characteristic of Bolshevik underground organisation. This, given the immense police surveillance operations pressuring all the revolutionary organisations at that time, was unsurprising but unflattering to the Bolsheviks when secrecy was of the essence for revolutionary work, and the Sormovo PSR's prided themselves on having had no provocateurs in their group.⁸¹

⁷⁷ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 88. Writings of Magergut.

⁷⁸ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 97. Writings of Magergut.

⁷⁹ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 88. Writings of Magergut.

⁸⁰ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 85. Writings of Magergut.

⁸¹ The absence of provocateurs is backed up by police records. (see GANO, f. 2, op. 7, op. 8; records of Nizhegorodskaiia guberniia Police administration, 1916- February 1917)

After the February revolution, the suppressed hostility between the two groups was openly expressed. Both groups were vying for the votes and support of the Sormovo workers, and the usual modes of political competition operated. Anweiler commented that the Soviets were often politically undifferentiated in the early months of revolution, but that political parties gradually won sizeable followings as 1917 progressed.⁸²

Koenker's study of Moscow workers in 1917 confirms the idea posited here that the open political competition of 1917 promoted heightened awareness of political party delineations, and increased the significance of political affiliations.⁸³

Party identifications were usually given when describing a politically active individual, both prior to the revolution, and in 1917. This affinity for 'labelling' demonstrated a clear awareness of and affinities with separate political parties. Within Sormovo, revolutionary activists not supporting a particular party were uncommon, and worthy of particular note. An activist from the Kazan PSR organisation, Golikov, for example, with whom the Sormovo PSR forged links, was described as having worked with the Bolsheviks and the PSR, but having no party affiliation.⁸⁴ That such particular note is made would indicate that it was not considered usual to lack party affiliation. Perrie pointed to the fluidity of party affiliations in the members of the society for political prisoners and exiles,⁸⁵ and while this fluidity was clearly an important feature of political behaviour, this should not devalue the importance of political affiliations altogether. That each political affiliation was clearly stated and each change of party carefully noted down by party members is indicative of the importance placed by individuals on party affiliation. Whilst they may have changed parties as situations altered, or worked in relative harmony with other groups underground or during terrorist campaigns, these changes were considered important- their exact dates are noted down.⁸⁶ The inter-party divisions among pre-revolutionary political prisoners were so passionately held that in some cases different party groups were barely on speaking

⁸² O. Anweiler, *The Soviets: the Russian Workers', Peasants', and Soldiers' Councils 1905-1921* (New York, 1974), pp. 115-6.

⁸³ Koenker, *Moscow Workers*, p. 187ff.

⁸⁴ RGASPI, f 274, op 1, d. 26, p. 87. Writings of Magergut.

⁸⁵ Perrie, 'Social Composition and Structure', pp. 227-229

⁸⁶ Valer'ian Alekseevich Bronevskii, for example, an agronomist's son from Taganrog, joined '*Zemlia i volia*' in 1877, and then joined '*Narodnaia volia*', carrying out propaganda and participating in terrorist acts under the pseudonym 'Bronia'. In 1880 he was arrested and sent to Peter Paul Fortress, before being sent by administrative exile to Tobolsk for four years, but he escaped abroad. In 1905 he returned and joined the RSDRP group in Taganrog, and was a member of their committee, but was seriously wounded and escaped from the prison hospital to Kharkov, where he joined the PSR and worked in a laboratory making explosive materials. (*Politkatorzhan*, p. 776)

terms, despite the pressures drawing political prisoners into close association.⁸⁷ This use of labelling is evident in 1917, and gives a strong indication of the significance that affiliation with a particular political party had. In the highly charged party political environment of the Sormovo factories, party affiliations were important, and may well have been ascribed with increased fervour in the first months of revolution.

Another feature of personal 'labelling' was the modes of behaviour expressed at the demonstrations and parades that were a feature of the young revolution.⁸⁸ Banners identifying political parties and interest groups were an important element of such demonstrations, and offer a physical manifestation of individual decisions to affiliate with a particular party.⁸⁹ At the celebrations for 1st May 1917⁹⁰ held by the Sormovo and Kanavin factories in Nizhnii Novgorod, around 80,000 people attended, carrying some 150 flags.⁹¹ The procession of the demonstration was defined by these banners, and though the banners denoted a range of different affiliations, party devices were certainly an important feature of affairs:

Slowly and solemnly, in immaculate order, the dense columns of workers and citizens advanced. Every factory shop came forward separately with their banners, and every party section under the leadership of its representatives. The PSR's workers' and peasants' organisations presented their own especially beautiful picture. The whole banner was embroidered and painted with loving care with the party's devices and slogans- "In struggle you will get your rights", "Land and freedom" and others- these swayed over harmonious columns of thousands of organised comrades. In every hand, on every breast, in every buttonhole, were red bands, bows, ribbons with party initials and divisions. . .⁹²

This description indicates that party affiliations were of sufficient importance in 1917 to be credited with ample symbolic representation.

Disenchantment with party politics generally however, and more specifically with the splits within the socialist camp,⁹³ encouraged increased ambivalence towards

⁸⁷ Lydiia Dan recalls that the Social Democrat prisoners refused to call PSR and Bundist prisoners 'comrade', but referred to them as 'mister', which caused a lot of hostility. (in L. Haimson (ed.) *The Making of Three Russian Revolutionaries* [Cambridge 1987], pp. 164-166.)

⁸⁸ For a discussion of these popular festivals and their role in the early days of the revolution, see O. Figes, B. Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution- The Language and Symbols of 1917*. (New Haven, 1999), pp. 43-48

⁸⁹ On the importance of flags and emblems in the February revolution, see Figes and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, pp. 41-43

⁹⁰ The May day celebrations, were, rather confusingly, actually held on 18th April, in order to coincide with the Julian calendar.

⁹¹ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 112. Writings of Magergut.

⁹² GARF, f. 9591c., op. 1, d. 11, l. 13. Xeroxed three page leaflet, first page missing, signed by Tiurikov, undated.

⁹³ Koenker remarks on the support within Moscow workers for solidarity among revolutionary socialist parties (Koenker, *Moscow Workers*, p. 227). In April 1917, the soldiers of the sixth company, 121st infantry reserve regiment made a proclamation of their views on the political situation, which included the statement that 'we trust the PSR and the Russian Social Democrat workers' party'. This indicates that

identification with a particular political party. A number of commentators remarked that the soldiers in Nizhnii Novgorod garrison did not subscribe to any specific political party's view or programme, even after the Bolshevik seizure of power, an event which might have been expected to polarise their political positions.⁹⁴ This letter published in *Narod* in mid-November 1917 exemplifies such disenchantment with political party affiliations, particularly in the wake of the Bolsheviks' cavalier treatment of the Soviets in Nizhegorodskaia guberniia:

In view of the prevailing mood, I consider it necessary to clarify the following. I am a member of the executive committee of the soldiers' section of the Soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies, and from the very first days of revolution I have not and do not stand with any one party, and not now or before have I ever stood with the Bolshevik party, though all the time I have sympathised with the Social Democrats, and only a month ago at a general meeting I declared that I sympathised with the ideas of the Bolsheviks. But that was a month ago. I now remain without party affiliation (*bezpartiinnyi*). I ask comrades not to consider me in any other way. I do not hold any political responsibilities, but remain a member of the Soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies. M.L. Dun.⁹⁵

The first months of 1917 saw a rise in the clarity of political affiliations, as legality and the new charged climate offered the socialist parties unprecedented scope in publicly framing their image and their programmes. This clarity inevitably led to a break up of the 'united front' presented by the socialist parties in the years prior to the February revolution, when the threat of tsarism had been of greater importance to local party activists than the threat of socialist competition. The second half of 1917, however, witnessed a certain loss of interest in party labelling as disenchantment with the new regime and confusion about the political situation caused some groups to eschew party politics altogether.⁹⁶ This disenchantment was dangerous, since the rejection of political labelling signified a broader divorce of ordinary people from the aims of the democratic revolution, and gave the Bolsheviks, a minority group, scope to operate their seizure of power.

they did not distinguish between the two parties particularly, but recognised them as both 'defending the people's interests'. (GARF, d. 9591, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 14-15; Booklet of the soldiers of the sixth company 121st regiment of the infantry reserve regiment.)

⁹⁴ See chapter 4, pp. 159-160.

⁹⁵ *Narod*, no. 101, 14th November 1917, p. 4. Koenker comments that *bezpartiinnyi* when used later in 1917 may have been a euphemism for those individuals who had defected from the PSR and Mensheviks, but were not yet willing to join the Bolsheviks. (Koenker, *Moscow Workers*, p. 227) I feel this explanation rather flatters the Bolsheviks.

⁹⁶ This was the situation in Smolensk, where between July and November there was a massive fall off in turnout for elections, and the garrison, in particular, did not support any one political party. (See M. Hickey, 'The Rise and Fall of Smolensk's Moderate Socialists. The Politics of Class and the Rhetoric of Crisis in 1917' in D. Raleigh (ed.) *Provincial Landscapes. Local Dimensions of Soviet Power 1917-1953* [Pittsburg, forthcoming in 2001], p. 5)

SELECTION OF LOCAL LEADERSHIP

There is ample evidence that in 1917 peasants and workers increasingly rejected intelligentsia involvement and leadership in their affairs of government.⁹⁷ This leaves something of a paradox, since of the twenty Central Committee members in 1917, nineteen were classified as intelligentsia, and only one was a worker. This was not unique amongst the leadership of Russian revolutionary parties; both Bolshevik and Menshevik leaderships were dominated by intelligentsia.⁹⁸ An explanation for this paradox was that local leaders were of far more significance to local party members than national leaders in defining party policy and as figureheads representing the party. These local leaders were almost exclusively local working people, who were therefore able to avoid the tag of 'outsider' that plagued those outside these categories. There is evidence that certain party leaders were recognised as the vanguard of the party by mass membership; there were numerous examples of peasants addressing petitions, letters of support, and requests, to Victor Chernov, as leader of the PSR, or more commonly as land minister of the Provisional Government.⁹⁹ Peasant understanding of mass politics and democracy, however, precluded the notion of a single leader who defined party policy. The leaders of the party were regarded as nothing more than implementers of mass will by the peasantry, while local leaders were recognised and accepted by the village population as real leaders.

Ways in which the local leadership was selected and recognised are a useful means of understanding the priorities of the electorate when considering their political leaders. The method of selecting candidates for electoral lists, and the information provided about these candidates, allow the interest in and loyalty to the individual candidate compared to interest in and loyalty to the electoral list itself to be assessed. Establishing this balance between 'personality politics' and straightforward voting by list is an important means of identifying on what basis the electorate chose to support and

⁹⁷ O. Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War; the Volga Countryside in Revolution*, (Oxford 1989) chapter 1, gives an excellent assessment of peasant organisations and peasant autonomy in 1917-1918. See also chapter 5, 'The Missing Intelligentsia' pp. 186-190.

⁹⁸ See Shelokhaev, *Politicheskie partii Rossii*, supplement 7, pp. 772-779, for a full breakdown of education, *soslovie* and occupation of members of the Central Committee of the RSDRP 1898-1910, the Bolshevik Central Committee 1903-1918, and the Mensheviks and 'United Social Democrats' 1912-18. On the Bolshevik leadership, see Lane, *The Roots*, p. 37, p. 47. On Menshevik leadership, and indeed the intelligentsia character of their membership, see Z. Galili, *The Menshevik Leaders in the Russian Revolution: Social Realities and Political Strategies* (Princeton, 1989), p. 29

⁹⁹ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 6. File containing greeting telegrams to the minister for land Chernov in view of the entry of socialists into government. In *Delo naroda*, a column was often included entitled 'Messages of greeting to Comrade Chernov', which reproduced telegrams and letters of support sent to Chernov, usually from peasant communities.

ultimately vote for PSR candidates. Heated engagement of the electorate in the selection of electoral candidates is an important indicator of the significance of individual candidates within the electoral process. In Lebedianskii *uezd*, Tambov, even election of delegates to the *guberniia* meeting that was to select Constituent Assembly candidates was ‘hotly and seriously discussed- all understood the seriousness of the elections.’¹⁰⁰ This ‘seriousness’ is reflected in the thoroughness with which the Tambov *guberniia* peasants’ meeting drew up their list of candidates to the Constituent Assembly. A list of fifteen candidates was drawn up, but a member of the Executive Committee claimed he had not been consulted, which led to a further two-hour discussion of the list. Finally, several of the former candidates were replaced, and the order of the candidates altered altogether.¹⁰¹ The Constituent Assembly candidates for Penza *guberniia* were chosen at the *guberniia* PSR conference, and agreed with the *guberniia* Soviet of peasants’ deputies.¹⁰²

Candidate selection for *uezd zemstvo* elections in Voskresenskoe village, Makarevskii *uezd*, Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* demonstrated a rigorous selection procedure. Of the fifty candidates put forward, seventeen were selected. Each of the candidates had to present his biography to the meeting, and explain how he would act in the *zemstvo*, and what interests he intended to defend. He was cross-examined, to test the strength of his convictions and his sincerity. The candidates were then sent out of the room for a final decision to be made. The attitude displayed towards political parties has important implications for considerations of membership and of leadership:

Many of the candidates declared, “I don’t know a party programme, but I will say only this, that I will with all my strength strive, that all the freedom goes to all the people, and that all the land goes to all the labourers without any compensation.”¹⁰³

Superficially expressed as a statement of individuality, this sentiment actually reflected communal political belief. Breshkovskaia commented that this communal political belief was identified by the ‘to the people’ movement of the 1870s, and that ‘the inalienable right of the worker to the tools of production and the products of their labour’ became the basis of the Socialist Revolutionary movement.¹⁰⁴ While avowedly declaring a disinterest in political programmes the declaration in fact included a succinct summary of the PSR’s abiding slogan, ‘Land and Freedom!’ This slogan had been

¹⁰⁰ *Delo derevnia*, no. 5, 26th August 1917, p. 4

¹⁰¹ *Delo derevnia*, no. 14, 22nd September 1917, p. 1

¹⁰² *Chernozem (Narodnaia gazeta)*, no. 14, 8th August 1917, pp. 1-2.

¹⁰³ *Narod*, no. 66, 17th September, p. 4

¹⁰⁴ Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs*, p. 340

developed on the basis of the early *Narodniki's* grasp of peasant psychology. This offers another example of the party's grassroots supporters defining what the party was. The avowedly non-party attitude declared by these local candidates can safely be projected onto those individuals who affiliated themselves loosely with the PSR, perhaps voting for the party without taking further interest in party politics, or joining the party in a communal gathering without taking further interest in the party. Such individuals were unlikely to recognise central party leadership as authoritative in their political lives, and therefore the dominance of intelligentsia groups in the Central Committee was an irrelevance to them.

The most tangible physical link between central party leadership and the regional leadership was in the allocation of seats for the Constituent Assembly elections. The PSR's Central Committee was usually allotted the first one or two places on the list. In theory the regional leadership was compelled to accept the first Central Committee candidate, though in practice their acceptance was hotly debated by the *guberniia* organisations.¹⁰⁵ Of the eventual 325 PSR delegates to the Constituent Assembly, only fifty were nominated from the centre.¹⁰⁶ Efforts were made by the Central Committee to place their candidates in areas where they had existing connections- Victor Chernov was unsurprisingly placed in Tambov *guberniia*, where he had been based when organising *Narodnik* cells, and the PSR itself. Martiushin, the Central Committee candidate in Kazan, was a local peasant, and Avksentev, who was one of the Central Committee candidates for Penza, was a native of the region. Acceptance of these Central Committee candidates was a matter which was given serious consideration by regional electoral boards. In Kazan, the candidates proposed by the Central Committee, Vera Figner and G.A. Martiushin, were discussed at length at the PSR *guberniia* conference, and it was concluded that since both candidates had strong local connections, they would be accepted.¹⁰⁷

Information offered about electoral candidates was generally dominated by the occupation and local background of the candidate. Their poverty, devotion to the party and spells in prison and exile were other factors that were emphasised. The Nizhegorodskaia PSR/Soviet of Peasants' Deputies' list offers almost no information

¹⁰⁵ For a discussion of the wrangles within the Central Committee of the party over candidate nominations, see Radkey, *Sickle Under*, p. 285ff. Kazan, Nizhegorodskaia, Simbirsk and Tambov all stood one Central Committee candidate, while only Penza stood two Central Committee candidates.

¹⁰⁶ Radkey, *Sickle Under*, p. 288.

¹⁰⁷ *Golos truda*, no. 30, 21st August 1917, p. 4.

about its candidates. One can speculate that loyalty to the PSR and the Soviet of peasants' deputies ensured that biographical information on candidates was not required. Who needed personality politics, when the pull of the organisations listed was so great? The list put forward by the Kazan PSR and the Soviet of peasants' deputies was also sparse- the only biographical information offered was the candidates' occupation and his birthplace.¹⁰⁸ Ten of the twelve candidates on this list were peasants, and the remaining two industrial workers. Eleven of the twelve were local people. The compilers of the list clearly considered that these were the only factors of any consideration for those voting for their list, apart from its association with the PSR and the Soviet of peasants' deputies. That the candidate was *trudiashchiisia* and in touch with local issues was perhaps enough.

This lack of information was not uniformly replicated in other lists. Penza and Tambov both offered quite detailed biographies of their candidates, though the compilers of the two lists clearly had different ideas about what to prioritise in these biographies.¹⁰⁹ Only five of the fifteen candidates in Tambov have any mention of a record of prison and exile, despite the fact that they certainly had prison records. In Penza, on the other hand, eleven of the fourteen candidates had their prison and exile records mentioned. Indeed, this material predominated, and emphasised the idea of individuals who served 'the cause' regardless of personal risk and discomfort. One can detect a certain kudos and pride attached to those individuals who had suffered most grievously at the hands of the authorities. Breshkovskaia commented that those individuals with records of prison and exile were considered trustworthy, as they had shown their dedication to improving the position of the villages.¹¹⁰ V.M. Konogov, a candidate on the Penza list, had his devotion to 'the cause' illustrated by an account of his prison and exile record. He was exiled to eastern Siberia in 1907, but continued his work:

in 1912 he was arrested again and sent even further, to the extreme north of Eniseiskii *guberniia*. But nothing could break his will, and all the time, right up to the revolution, he continued to take part in illegal party work.¹¹¹

Both Kazan and Simbirsk had two separate PSR lists in the Constituent Assembly elections, as a result of conflicts within their regional organisations. The list which can be likened to regional PSR lists in other *guberniias*, in so far as it included candidates

¹⁰⁸ *Za zemliu i voliu*, no. 8, 23rd October 1917

¹⁰⁹ In Tambov, *Delo derevnia*, no. 14, 22nd September. In Penza, three newspapers have been used to compile the final list- *Chernozem*, no. 14, 8th August, *Chernozem*, no. 65, 15th October, *Sotsialist revoliutsioner*, no. 13, 26th October.

¹¹⁰ Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs*, p. 268

¹¹¹ *Sotsialist revoliutsioner*, no. 13, 26th October 1917, p. 3

from the Soviet of peasants' deputies, in both Simbirsk and Kazan was pitted against a second SR list of similar name in both cases- in Kazan, it was the 'Kazan Elders' PSR', and in Simbirsk the 'Simbirsk PSR Elder-defencists'. The Kazan Elders' PSR list offered very detailed biographies of its members,¹¹² who were all well-educated; one, Firsov, was the eminent professor of history at Kazan University. With the exception of Firsov, the candidates on this list had all been long term PSR members, and had lengthy prison, hard labour and exile sentences to their names. Each candidate's biography emphasised that 'All his life has been a struggle for freedom, land and freedom.'¹¹³ The list offered by the Simbirsk *guberniia* PSR and the Soviet of peasants' deputies offered detail on their candidates that in some cases defies classification- the occupations of the eleven candidates, for example, in eight cases changed at least three times. Like the Kazan list, though, eight of the eleven candidates were of peasant family. The working, poor peasant background of these candidates was emphasised. Also, like Kazan, emphasis was placed on their local origins- ten of the eleven candidates came from Simbirsk *guberniia*. The Constituent Assembly electoral list of the Vologda PSR group even included the candidates' addresses, emphasising the importance of local origin and residence in selection of candidates.¹¹⁴

Peasant communities demonstrated a lively interest in the elections to the Constituent Assembly. The attributes they considered significant in selecting these candidates are a useful guide to peasant priorities and perceptions of their political representatives. Concentration on candidates' local backgrounds, working occupations and their commitment to the revolutionary cause emphasises the localism inherent within peasant politics. More significance lies in the information that was not given, however. Nowhere on the electoral lists studied, even in those offering detailed information, did the candidate express any political intentions beyond the omnipresent slogan 'land and freedom!' There is no evidence that the candidate was recognised and voted for as a political entity; rather, a local *trudiashchiisia* was the popular candidate, not because of his political affiliations, but because he was 'one of us'.¹¹⁵ This confirms earlier speculation that the importance and significance of the party's Central Committee

¹¹² *Golos truda*, no. 43, 20th November

¹¹³ *Golos truda*, no. 43, 20th November

¹¹⁴ *Partiniia izvestiia*, no. 3, pp. 31-34

¹¹⁵ D. Koenker, *Moscow Workers*, pp. 222-225; assessed the candidates put forward by the Menshevik and Bolshevik parties as candidates to the city and local Dumas, and concluded that Bolshevik success came down to 'them and us' mentality; the Bolsheviks fielded more candidates who were themselves workers, and these were the candidates most likely to be voted in.

leadership was limited. Regional and local politics took precedence over national concerns.

CONCLUSIONS

Political parties were a key part of political activity in 1917. They were defined according to the understandings already held by members and supporters of political action, within the PSR's theoretical framework. Peasant understandings of unanimity and representation within political life played a significant part in these definitions. The sections of this chapter are drawn together by their recurring theme of divisions within the party. Though exact membership numbers for 1917 cannot be established, it is possible to outline patterns of membership prior to 1917, which show that the party's activists joined the party predominantly between 1903 and 1906, but that arrests kept up with the growth of the party, so that most activists suffered imprisonment or exile. The return of these members in 1917 allowed the nascent PSR local organisations to flourish. The bulk of the party's vaunted one million members were however entirely new to the party. This provides a substantial differentiation between long term members of the party, almost all of whom had suffered imprisonment and exile for their support of the party, and the new wave of 1917, who were not initiated into the committed mentality of the party veterans. Communal behaviour played a large part in peasant actions in 1917, and extended into party membership decisions and voting behaviour in some villages. This communal element of peasant behaviour challenges conceptions of what party membership and support meant. It certainly implied much lower levels of commitment to and support for the party, as compared to the PSR's pre-1917 membership. These factors enable a clear delineation to be drawn between pre-1917 and 1917 membership.

Party 'orthodoxy' was unclear, and its representation in the provinces varied from village to village and depended on the inclinations of local leadership, who played a key role in defining and promulgating what was understood as 'party policy'. Splits within regional organisations contributed to the blurring of understandings of what PSR policy involved. This enabled a wide range of opinions to be expressed within the regional PSR organisations. Inter party mobility was a major feature of pre 1917 politics, as a result of some essentially compatible policy lines, combined with the pressure of tsarist police on local organisations, and the pragmatism of their local leaders. Identifications with separate parties were however always distinct, and in the climate of political competition and rivalry for support in 1917, these identifications clarified and took on

further significance. There was a fading of interest in party affiliations in the latter part of 1917, however, as the confusion of coalition government and of rivalries among socialist parties left a significant proportion of the population, particularly in the garrisons and factories, feeling dangerously disenfranchised.¹¹⁶

Local leaders played an important part in the definition and promulgation of PSR policy in their localities. Factors influencing the selection of these local leaders were dominated by the individual's occupational category and local background. The predominance of *trudishchiisia* local people within local leadership demonstrates a sharp rift between local leaders and the Central Committee, and illustrates the priorities of voters when selecting political parties. The importance of candidates' local connections and the imprecise slogan 'land and freedom' confirm that the political party in 1917 was defined by the demands and understandings of the electorate, which did not necessarily correspond with formal understandings of the role of political parties.

¹¹⁶ A superb literary example of this confusion can be found in Mikhail Sholokhov's novel *Quiet Flows the Don* (London, 1997) in which the lead character Grigory Melukhov became progressively more perplexed by the bewildering array of political 'solutions' and conflicts presented him in 1917.

CHAPTER 2- PARTY IMAGE

The image of the PSR during 1917 was of key importance in their electoral successes.

Lane commented:

The theory of the party is quite distinct from the appeal of the theory, and the exploration of purely theoretical or logical aspects of party policies in no way helps explain who supports it, or why support comes its way.¹

Well established stereotypes of PSR members existed in the pre-revolutionary period. A caricature drawing from the 1905 to 1907 period provides a useful contemporary's view of the PSR member.² A bird-like schoolmistress, in her fifties, with her grey hair tightly scraped back, and pince-nez balanced on her nose, held a smoking gun in her outstretched and shaking hand. This image of PSR members as teachers, often women, of intelligentsia type, and involved in terrorism, was a popular PSR stereotype, closely tied in with Populist-*Narodnik* associations of the PSR.³ The PSR woman in her fifties in 1905-7 was in the generation of students 'going to the people' in the 1870's and 1880's which included Vera Figner and Ekaterina Breshkovskaia.⁴ This reflects close associations of the PSR with its Populist past. This stereotype is useful in understanding some of the problems for the party in 1917. The vital role terrorism had played in the shaping of party consciousness was no longer applicable in the window of constitutional democracy offered Russia for the tenure of the Provisional Government. The complex muddle of supporters which came to the party in 1917 altered the profile of the 'average' PSR supporter beyond all recognition. Peasants and workers came to form the party's mass membership, and provided a significant number of the regional activists who were to define PSR identity and policy in the regions. Women in the party is another factor brought out by the caricature. While women were certainly prevalent

¹ D. Lane, *The Roots of Russian Communism. A Social and Historical Study of Russian Social Democracy, 1898-1907.* (Assen, 1969), p. 4

² The caricature was one of a set of four by E. Sokolov displayed in the 'History of the revolution' museum, Moscow, August 1998. The other three drawings depicted a Social Democrat, an anarchist and a proletarian.

³ The active participation of women in the Populist movement goes back to the Chaikovskii circle in the 1870's. For a useful discussion of women's participation in revolutionary Populism, see G. Gamblin, 'Anarchism and Populism: The Chaikovskii Circle' (1999, published in CREES series, ResPREES, University of Birmingham)

⁴ See E.K. Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs of the Russian Revolution* (Stanford, 1931), pp. 111-120; Breshkovskaia offers vivid and personal portraits of the other women with which she was imprisoned in 1875. V. Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (De Kalb, 1991), esp. pp. 46-174, for Figner's activities in this period.

within the Populist movement and the PSR, they were conspicuous for their absence in the ranks of regional party activists during 1917.⁵

This chapter seeks to explain the PSR's support, by looking not at theoretical or logical aspects of party policies, but at the less quantifiable factor of the party's image in town and country. Assessment of the importance of innate understandings of the party, and symbolism will be considered, which were of particular importance in the Russian countryside. Next, the impact on the party's image of two contrasting aspects of the party's policy is considered, respectively terrorism and their attitudes towards political power. This will establish to what extent these factors affected public perceptions of the party. The final two parts of this chapter will look at the ways in which the party presented itself to the electorate, by propaganda in the villages and in the factories. Symbolism and the party's historical associations with the peasantry are shown to be of massive importance in attracting the PSR's mass membership. Study of propaganda campaigns in 1917 illustrates the problems of party orthodoxy discussed in chapter one, and shows the flexibility of the PSR's public image.

SYMBOLISM AND ASSOCIATIONS FOR THE PSR

There was undoubtedly sound loyalty to the PSR in some rural areas, but what this loyalty was based upon is a complex question. The multiplicity of local PSR groups' responses to revolution has already been commented upon, and was particularly acute in rural areas, where central party directives were even less likely to permeate popular perceptions of the party. The importance of image over substance was greatest in parts of the population which had the least formal political education; that is, the peasantry. It was the strength of the PSR's image prior to the revolution, and loyalties to its slogans, symbols and devices, particularly in rural areas, that cut across the confusions of 1917, and provided the party with a sound electoral base. The PSR as a party dominated by peasant interests and indeed peasant membership is however a concept which is profoundly outdated. The peasantry was not an element divorced from the soldiers and the workers; social identity was a complex issue. Many workers continued to maintain links, whether these links were physical, material or emotional, with the villages, and the vast majority of the army in 1917, whose members are often categorised as if a group apart, in fact continued to maintain their old identities as peasants, workers, or

⁵ See chapter 3, pp. 105-107 for an explanation of this phenomenon.

even peasant-workers.⁶ *Zemliachestva* provide an excellent example of the continued ties even established or skilled workers maintained with their village communities.⁷ The continued identity of workers and soldiers with their peasant roots is clear in the activities of soldiers' committees during 1917, and the Petrograd Soviet of peasants' deputies, which was made up of soldiers and later workers who, their current occupations notwithstanding, chose to gather as peasants and discuss peasant issues. These gatherings of peasant soldiers and peasant-workers were dominated by PSR delegates.⁸ The PSR's image in the villages is therefore in no way divorced from the PSR's image in the towns. The factors which operated on voting behaviour of villagers no doubt also operated on workers and soldiers, particularly those who maintained close links to their village.⁹ Other variables within the towns however, require particular consideration.

Hildermeier, Melancon, Perrie, Rice and Venturi have all demonstrated worker involvement in the PSR movement.¹⁰ Venturi assessed the links between Populism and the worker movement very effectively,¹¹ and Rice and Melancon both conducted research into PSR activity amongst workers prior to 1917. Melancon pointed out that the groups which were precursors to the PSR, with the exception of the Agrarian Socialist League, decided to target workers rather than peasants in their first programmes, because the workers, as more conscious elements of society, would be more fertile recipients of propaganda.¹² When the party was formed in 1902, the general

⁶ G. Freeze, 'The *Soslovie* Paradigm and Russian Social History', *American Historical Review* 91(1) 1986, pp. 11-36. For the difficulties of distinguishing between 'peasant-workers' and 'cadre-workers' see S. Smith, *Red Petrograd; Revolution in the Factories 1917-18* (Cambridge 1983), pp. 14-23

⁷ *Zemliachestva* were the fellow-villagers' organisations which emerged within worker populations. See J. D. White, 'The Sormovo-Nikolaev Zemlyachestvo in the February Revolution' *Soviet Studies* XXXI(4) 1979, pp. 475-504; M.C. Hickey, 'Urban *Zemliachestva* and Rural Revolution: Petrograd and the Smolensk Countryside in 1917', *Soviet and Post Soviet Review* 23(3) 1996, pp. 142-60.

⁸ M. Melancon, 'Soldiers, Peasant Soldiers and Peasant Workers and Their Organisations in Petrograd: Ground Level Revolution During the Early Months of 1917', *Soviet and Post Soviet Review* 23(3) 1996, pp. 161-90.

⁹ D. Koenker, *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution* (Princeton, 1981). In chapter 5, she argues that SR political support was based upon their success among peasant-workers, and their strong identification with the villages. Though this work contradicts her thesis of SR support based on political ignorance, her work acknowledged PSR identification with rural issues.

¹⁰ F. Venturi, *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia* (London, 1960); C. Rice, *Russian Workers and the SR Party Through the Revolution of 1905-07* (Basingstoke, 1988); M. Melancon, 'The Socialist Revolutionaries from 1902-1907: Peasant and Workers' Party', *Russian History* 12(1) 1985, pp. 2-47; M. Perrie, 'The Social Composition and Structure of the Socialist Revolutionary Party before 1917', *Soviet Studies* 24(2) 1972, pp. 238-246; M. Hildermeier, *Die Sozialrevolutionäre Partei Russlands: Agrarsozialismus und Modernisierung in Zarenreich (1900-1914)* (Köln, 1978), esp. ch. 9, pp. 281-304.

¹¹ Venturi, *Roots Of Revolution*, pp. 469-506

¹² Melancon, 'The Socialist Revolutionaries From 1902', p. 6

wisdom was that the pro-peasant parts of the party dominated the pro-worker parts,¹³ but Melancon points out that the PSR continued to devote a lot of attention to activity amongst workers.¹⁴ Perrie's assessment of the social background of PSR supporters demonstrates that they won support from a whole gamut of workers, from the unskilled to the most highly skilled.¹⁵ This analysis successfully scotched the thesis that PSR support from workers came primarily from those individuals newly arrived from the villages, or the unskilled. Hildermeier's assessment of St. Petersburg workers' voting behaviour during the 1907 second State Duma elections shows conclusively that the PSR won significant support among workers of all skill levels, and that their showing was strongest (51%) in the metalworking factories associated with a skilled and 'conscious' workforce.¹⁶

Although the upsurge in peasant radicalism after 1902 presented the spectre of a truly revolutionary peasantry, workers were still regarded as an important part of a tripartite group of peasant, worker and intelligentsia leading Russia to revolution. PSR participation in the International, an indubitably Marxist proletarian organisation, confirmed its interest in and affiliation with the Russian workers. Melancon confirms that PSR committees dedicated to work amongst the urban proletariat were formed in a number of cities including Saratov, Voronezh, Penza, Tambov and Nizhnii Novgorod.¹⁷ There is further evidence to suggest that workers formed a central part of PSR regional activity. The Sormovo PSR organisation was the predominant single political influence in Nizhnii Novgorod, and possibly the Volga region.¹⁸ Chapter six focuses on the Sormovo PSR organisation, and serves as an example of PSR activism amongst workers. This Sormovo PSR group was active both among the worker population and in outlying villages, but their activities within peasant circles were outreach groups, and peripheral to the main activities that went on within worker circles.¹⁹ The first *guberniia* conference of the Nizhegorodskaia PSR confirmed the party's commitment to the worker population emphatically:

¹³ M. Perrie, *The Agrarian Policy Of the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party From Its Origins Through The Revolution Of 1905-1907* (Cambridge 1976), p. 58

¹⁴ Melancon, 'The Socialist Revolutionaries From 1902', p. 9

¹⁵ Perrie, 'The Social Composition And Structure', pp. 223-50.

¹⁶ Hildermeier, *Die Sozialrevolutionäre Partei*, table 5.1, p. 302.

¹⁷ Melancon, 'The Socialist Revolutionaries From 1902', p. 15

¹⁸ GARF, f. 9591c, op. 1, d. 11, l. 4. Protocols of the first Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* PSR conference, 23rd-24th April 1917.

¹⁹ GARF, f. 9591c, op. 1, d. 19, l. 3; a copy of a letter submitted to Moscow newspaper *Zemlia i volia*, from Sormovo PSR organisation, and l. 7; Xeroxed report of public meeting held by Sormovo PSR organisation, 15th April 1917.

Peasants certainly come and go from the PSR. We must attract the proletariat in their place, and show them the community and unity of interests of the peasants and workers.²⁰

This wording indicates that the writer identified the PSR primarily with the peasantry, but that a change of emphasis was required in order to ensure the success of the party. The other reports from the group representatives at the first Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* conference of SRs, from which this excerpt was taken, confirmed the urban-worker base of PSR support. Though the PSR's primary associations were with the peasantry, they won significant support in worker communities as well, both as a result of the continued links between villages and factories, and because of their enduring propaganda work in the factories.

The PSR held its biggest political advantages over other political parties in the villages. Despite the post 1907 tsarist repression that had crushed local party organisation, the party maintained a high national profile through the terrorist activities of its supporters, and the foundations of party activity in the villages were not eradicated. In Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*, it was reported that the Bolsheviks did not even attempt to campaign in rural areas where PSR organisations were already formed.²¹ The association of the PSR with the needs of the peasantry was primarily image, rather than policy, related; this left the Bolsheviks with no positive way to challenge it effectively. Though the PSR had staked out clear ideological differences between them and their socialist rivals, differences in party image between different revolutionary parties were at least as important as these ideological differences in political party support and voting behaviour in the villages. Comparison with the public image of other revolutionary parties offers some explanation for the PSR's domination in the countryside. The Social Democratic parties were broadly identified as workers' parties, and accordingly their image was of an urban party.²² The Mensheviks were primarily urban, both in background and in orientation, and evinced a deep seated mistrust of the peasantry, whom they regarded as a symbol of Russia's backwardness.²³ The Bolsheviks, who later in 1917 tried to embrace the peasantry in their definition of 'working class', remained associated primarily with the urban working class.²⁴

²⁰ GARF, f. 9591c, op. 1, d. 11, l. 4; Protocols of the first Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* PSR conference, 23rd-24th April 1917.

²¹ *Narod*, no. 112, 28th November, p. 4

²² D. Lane, *The Roots*, p. 50.

²³ Z. Galili, *The Menshevik Leaders in the Russian Revolution: Social Realities and Political Strategies*. (Princeton, 1989), p. 29

²⁴ On Bolshevik popular identity, see D. Koenker, *Moscow Workers*, p. 225

The symbols and slogans that were intimately associated with the PSR, however, had their most poignant connections with the political sentiment of the villages. '*Zemlia i volia*' ('Land and Freedom') was the rallying cry of the party, and tied in with the most basic desires of the peasants. Closely following this slogan in prominence in party literature was '*V bor'be obretesh' ti pravo svoi*' ('In struggle you will get your rights') which was a rallying cry to resist the tsarist regime prior to the February revolution. Its continued use in 1917 demonstrated its potency among supporters of the party. The party's symbolic associations with rural Russia enabled them to milk these slogans for popular support in the villages. Of the thirteen slogans authorised by the party for use in the 'peaceful demonstration' held in Petrograd on 18th June, none were directed specifically at workers, while three were aimed specifically at the land question; '*Zemlia i volia*', '*Sotsializatsiia zemli*' ('Socialisation of land'), '*Vsia zemlia narodu, vsia volia narodu, mir' vsemu miru*' ('all land to the people, all freedom to the people, peace to all the world'). The other slogans called for an end to war, and support for the coalition Provisional Government.²⁵ Given that this was a city demonstration, this choice of slogans provides a strong indication of the PSR's rural bias.

PSR songs composed or used in 1917 offer another dimension in considering the party's symbolic status among the peasantry. A whole range of political parties and institutions produced political songs for 1917,²⁶ and these songs were an important mechanism in the mobilising of mass support for political parties, as well as in the self organisation of revolutionary crowds.²⁷ The song reproduced in Appendix 3 was printed in an SR newspaper during July 1917.²⁸ It gives an indication of the clear political message included in such songs, and implicitly their ability to infiltrate the population with their message. Its reference to the 'yoke of tsarism' indicates that it was composed prior to the revolution. Its content clearly translated well to the revolutionary era, although reference to those 'oppressed by the damned kulaks' could have been considered incendiary in the delicate 1917 climate. Note too, that though this refrain was not directed specifically at the peasantry, but towards the 'labouring family', the reference to equal shares, and the 'glorious apportioning' were surely referring to black repartition

²⁵ See *Delo naroda*, no. 77, 17th June, p. 1.

²⁶ See O. Figes, B. Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution- The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven, 1999), p. 69, which remarked that 'in 1917 . . . virtually every socialist grouping, however small, had its own (and sometimes several) collections.'

²⁷ See Figes, Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution*, pp. 39-41

²⁸ See song reproduced in Appendix 3.

of the land, which would have appealed particularly to those who retained links with the land.

The most important and recurrent factor cited by peasants in defining peasant voting behaviour was their identification of the PSR as the party which defended the needs of the peasantry. The connections formed between the PSR and peasant organisations in 1917 ranged from informal affiliations at village level to jointly published newspapers²⁹ and the PSR candidates for the Constituent Assembly standing in a joint electoral list with the Soviet of peasants' deputies. These links were both formative and symptomatic of peasant identification with the PSR. An example of the more formal connections that existed between the PSR and peasant organisations can be seen in Kazan, where a conciliatory commission forged an agreement whereby the Peasants' Union reached a formal agreement with the PSR, and described itself as the Peasants' Union of SRs, which accepted the PSR programme worked out in a popular form. The PSR sent two of its representatives to the Peasants' Union Executive Committee, and had absolute control over any literature produced by the union.³⁰ Joint electoral lists are among the most significant factors in explaining the basis for PSR support in the Constituent Assembly elections; the peasants' Soviets 'were the only legitimate organs of state power in the countryside'.³¹ In Troitskii *volost*, Vasil'skii *uezd*, Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*, it was reported that in the elections 'the most important and best loved candidates were those from "krestianskii no. 3."³² A similar phrase was used to describe the PSR's in Lunino village, Penza *guberniia*, 'the peasants trust the *muzhiks*' party.³³ These comments reflect peasant identification of the joint PSR and Soviet of peasants' deputies electoral list as 'their own'. This complicates our understanding of the PSR's electoral success; it is difficult to determine to what extent their electoral success was based on support for the peasants' Soviet, rather than for the PSR.³⁴ If peasant support

²⁹ *Narod* went into joint publication with the Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* Soviet of Peasants' deputies on 3rd September 1917. *Zemlia i volia* was published jointly by the Simbirsk *guberniia* Soviet of peasants' deputies and the *guberniia* PSR committee. *Za zemliu i voliu* was published jointly by the Kazan *guberniia* Soviet of peasants' deputies and the PSR *guberniia* committee.

³⁰ *Golos truda*, no. 20, 13th July 1917, p. 3

³¹ O. Figes, 'The Russian Revolution of 1917 and Its Language in the Villages', *Russian Review* 56, 1997, p. 340.

³² *Narod*, no. 112, 28th November 1917, p. 4

³³ *Sotsialist revoliutsioner*, no. 7, 11th September 1917, p. 4

³⁴ O. Radkey, *Russia Goes to the Polls* (New York, 1989), pp. 107-111. Radkey details three provinces where there was a breach between the Soviet and the PSR prior to the Constituent Assembly elections, in Bessarabia, in the Amur region, and in the Uralsk district, in northwestern Turkestan. Though Radkey noted that information on all these three provinces was very limited, in Bessarabia the PSR won 33.6% of the vote, against the Peasant Soviet's 27.2%. The situation in Amur was very complex, with an even four way split of the PSR vote.

for the party was based solely on their 'innate' identity with the PSR, or on their association with the Soviet of peasants' deputies, then one can argue that PSR electoral success signified little more than a knee-jerk reaction from the peasants, who voted for 'their' party. This would certainly account for the lack of clear support for central party policy, and for the lack of organised defence of the PSR after the Bolshevik seizure of power.

THE PSR AS TERRORISTS

The PSR's image was inseparably connected with its involvement in terrorist campaigns prior to 1917, and the mentality of those involved in terrorist campaigns was to be an important source of influence on sectors of the party's leadership. Terrorist campaigns had provided massive publicity for the party, and tangibly linked PSR activists with the overthrow of tsarism. Marx had discounted terrorism as the futile attempts of individual idealists to enact changes that could only be wrought by mass movements.³⁵ Chernov justified terrorist tactics on Marxist lines by arguing that political assassination was inseparable from the political struggle of the masses.³⁶ The goals of terrorism were threefold; to protect the revolutionary movement, to bring fear and disorganisation to the ranks of the government, and to operate as a radicalising tool among the working population, and to popularise the revolutionary cause.³⁷ Chernov's distaste for terrorist methods was however evident in his refusal to revive terrorist methods against the Bolsheviks after the October seizure of power.

The success of national terrorism campaigns had massive national impact, and played an important part in raising the profile of the party,³⁸ a factor which the 1917 leadership was keen to capitalise upon. *Narodnaia Volia* had operated successfully between 1878 and 1881 and won the Populists considerable notoriety, particularly as a result of the

³⁵ Engels, however, admitted the potential of terrorist groups like *Narodnaia volia* to overthrow tsarism in their 1860's campaign. (See P. Blackstock and B. Hoselitz (ed.) *The Russian Menace to Europe* [London 1953], p. 238; reproduces Engels' article written in 1894.)

³⁶ 'Terroristicheskii element v nashei programme', *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, No. 7, June 1902. (Published in N.D. Erofeev et al. (ed.) *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov: dokumenty i materialy 1900-1907* [Moscow, 1996], pp. 78-88.) See R.A. Gorodnitskii, *Boevaia organizatsiia partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov v 1901-1911 gg.* (Moscow, 1998), pp. 27-33, for a discussion of the PSR's decision to accept terrorism.

³⁷ M. Hildermeier, 'The Terrorist Strategies of the Socialist Revolutionary Party in Russia, 1900-1914', in W.J. Mommsen et al. (ed.) *Social Protest, Violence and Terror in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Europe* (New York, 1982), p. 83

³⁸ A. Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill; Revolutionary Terrorism in Russia, 1894-1917*. (Princeton, 1993), p. 56. Vera Figner, however, commented that this was not the case, and that national terrorist campaigns of the 1880's were not significant to peasant communities, though direct agrarian terrorism could play a radicalising role. (Figner, *Memoirs*, p. 64)

assassination of Alexander II. Many of the PSR's leaders had been heavily involved in *Narodnaia Volia*.³⁹ Terror became a pseudo-religious weapon in the fight against tsarism for some members of the party, and was accordingly revered.⁴⁰ The tendency of the party's senior members to romanticise and even venerate terrorists is complex in its origins, and far reaching in its implications. The veneration offered to terrorists established a psychology that was difficult to equate with the legal democratic operations required of the party in 1917. The successful penetration of the unpleasant figure of Evno Azef into the party's highest ranks, despite his evident lack of personal charm, and his absence of sympathy with and understanding of the party's aims, has been linked to the attitude of awed respect assumed by the party's leaders towards the terrorist corps.⁴¹

Reverence for terrorism was perhaps most notable in members' willingness to sacrifice themselves at the 'altar of revolution'. The operations of terrorist groups can be compared to religious sects; women were particularly prone to submerge themselves in pseudo-religious justifications and motivations for carrying out terrorist acts.⁴²

Zenzinov, in describing Maria Benevskaia, a young SR terrorist, commented on his confusion as to how she, a deeply religious, charming and loving young woman, could turn to terrorism. He concluded that, 'In the end I understood that she became a terrorist, not to kill, but to sacrifice herself.'⁴³ Maria Spiridonova, who became the leader of the PSR's left faction in 1917, in many ways epitomised this spirit of pseudo-religious self sacrifice. She had been arrested and initially sentenced to death for her attempt to kill General Luzhenovskii on behalf of the Tambov PSR organisation in 1906. Her case caught the attention of the national press, not least, one suspects, because she was allegedly beaten and raped when in custody. The sympathetic response to her treatment is reflected in the fact that her sentence was reduced to life imprisonment as a result of

³⁹ Of the sample of 77 Central Committee members, the backgrounds of 45 (58%) are not known, but 21 of those known, 27% of the total, had been involved in the terrorist circles of the 1880s and 1890s. For a discussion of the formation of intelligentsia attitudes towards terrorism, see A. Geifman, 'The Russian Intelligentsia, Terrorism and Revolution' in V. Brovkin (ed.) *The Bolsheviks in Russian Society* (New Haven, 1997), ch. 1, pp. 25-42

⁴⁰ On the religious language of SR terrorists, see M. Perrie, 'K voprosu o 'religioznosti' Russkoi intelligentsii: Religiozni iazik u eserov-terroristov nachala XX veka', in B.A. Uspenskii (ed.) *Rossia: Russkaia intelligentsia i zapadnyi intellektualizm: Istorii i tipologii* (Moscow, 1999), pp. 86-94. See also Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, pp. 48-9.

⁴¹ See A. Geifman, *Entangled in Terror; The Azef Affair and the Russian Revolution* (Wilmington, 2000) p. 61.

⁴² A. Knight, 'Female Terrorists in the Socialist Revolutionary Party', *Russian Review* 38(2) 1979, pp. 143, 147, 148.

⁴³ V.M. Zenzinov, *Perezhitoe* (New York, 1953), pp. 280, 311-12.

public pressure.⁴⁴ She was a ‘martyr to the cause’, and was mythologized, like Breshkovskaia, the ‘patented grandmother of revolution’,⁴⁵ as one who suffered for the good of the peasantry.⁴⁶ Even the generally restrained members of the Constitutional Democrat party were willing to regard the terrorists as innocent victims, martyrs, and even saints. An article in the Kadet newspaper *Rech* described Spiridonova compassionately, and declared that, after her attempt on Luzhenovskii’s life:

her life (*zhizn*) ended. And then began her *zhitie*. (a term used in Russian exclusively to indicate the life of a saint.)⁴⁷

The combat units (*boevyi druzhiny*) which operated in the provinces from 1905⁴⁸ demonstrate that the party’s terrorist activity won support and participation from local activists, as well as the theoretical support of the party’s leadership. These combat units carried out local terrorist activity that was often divorced from decisions made by the party’s Central Committee, unlike the party’s central terrorist organisation (*boevaia organizatsiia*) whose activities were, in theory at least, supervised and directed by the party’s Central Committee.⁴⁹ This divorce from the centre allowed these groups to operate in a sometimes indiscriminate fashion- after October 1905, for example, despite the PSR declaration that its terrorist campaign had ceased, assassinations carried out by local PSR terrorist organisations continued.⁵⁰ In some cases their actions could not be identified with wider party aims. There is evidence too, that some of the PSR’s terrorist

⁴⁴ See A. Rabinowitch, ‘Spiridonova’, in E. Acton et al. (ed.) *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution* (Bloomington, 1997), p. 182. For further evidence of Spiridonova receiving public sympathy, see V. Vladimirov, *Mariia Spiridonova* (Moscow, 1906)

⁴⁵ Breshkovskaia was described as such by V.P. Antonov-Saratovskii, *Pod stiagom proletarskoi bor’by: Otryvki iz vospominanii o rabote v Saratove za vremia s 1915g. do 1918g.* (Moscow, 1925), p. 92.

⁴⁶ On Breshkovskaia’s iconic status in Russia and abroad by 1917, see J.E. Good, D.R. Jones, *Babushka: The Life of the Russian Revolutionary E.K. Breshko-Breshkovskaia* (Newtonville, 1991). Evidence of Spiridonova’s lasting reputation as icon and martyr of the revolution was the warnings Lenin received that her imprisonment could provoke a European national scandal’, and his decision to release her from prison in 1921. (See ‘Ob osvobozhdeniia M.A. Spiridonovoi’ *Izvestiia TsK KPSS* 5, 1991, pp. 178-180.)

⁴⁷ *Rech*, no.18, 25th March 1906, p. 2

⁴⁸ A.E. Spiridovich, *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii: Partiiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov i eia predshestvenniki* (Petrograd, 1916), p. 195ff.

⁴⁹ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, p. 48; asserted that the *boevaia organizatsiia* was isolated from the Central Committee, and tended towards autonomy. Gorodnitskii, *Boevaia organizatsiia partii*, pp. 20-21 considered that Geifman underestimated the role of the Central Committee in directing terrorist activity.

⁵⁰ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, p. 68. Not all local terrorism was as successful, or as bloodthirsty, as the groups described by Geifman. An account of the Sormovo PSR organisation in the period 1916-17 refers to their tentative and utterly unsuccessful attempts to establish a combat unit. (RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, ll. 90-91; Writings of Magergut, a member of the Sormovo PSR group, on its activities April 1916-April 1917.)

practitioners were not members of the party, and had little interest in its political programme.⁵¹

The PSR's activism during the 1905-7 revolution, when spontaneous or organised attacks by the peasantry on the estates of landowners (agrarian terrorism) was not condemned, is another major feeder into the PSR's popular identity. This issue contributed to the splinter from the party of the Maximalists in 1905, who espoused agrarian and factory terror as an adjunct to political terror, factory socialisation, and absolute hostility to collaboration in 'bourgeois' assemblies.⁵² These Maximalists were important to the question of PSR image, since not only did they originate from the PSR, which meant that their actions, even under another organisation's jurisdiction, would have been associated with the PSR, but in some cases they continued to use the PSR name.⁵³ The Maximalists were described by Radkey as 'pretty wild people'.⁵⁴ Geifman comments that a new type of radical developed in 1905-6, who was 'a blending of revolutionary and bandit, whose extremist psychology was marked by liberation from all moral restraints.'⁵⁵ Though this 'new type' was formally rejected by the PSR's Central Committee, who decreed against agrarian terror in 1905, one can claim that no matter what line of moderation and conciliation the PSR pushed in 1917, popular perceptions of them remained rooted with the face of the party which offered land to the peasants, and endorsed terrorism as a means of destabilising the regime. Terrorism's central role in forming party consciousness made the party's 1917 task of reforming itself in a legal mould a difficult one.

The significance of terrorism, and more specifically of local terrorist organisations, whether they worked for PSR goals or for indiscriminate and personal motivations of their own, was considerable. Though Geifman points to the killings of petty tsarist officials and 'other figures of relative unimportance'⁵⁶ as evidence of the random brutality of these groups, one can speculate that their utilisation of local targets such as

⁵¹ N. Schleifman, *Undercover Agents in the Russian Revolutionary Movement; the SR Party 1902-1914* (London, 1988), p. 77. Schleifman remarked of the St. Petersburg 'Northern organisation' terrorist group, 'By January and February 1907 the situation had reached a point where only two of the unit's ten members were ideologically motivated SRs. Not one of the remaining eight was a party member. They had joined the group for a motley of reasons, ranging from an excess of youthful revolutionary ardour to a desire for personal revenge.'

⁵² Rice, *Russian Workers*, p. 55

⁵³ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, p. 156

⁵⁴ Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism. Promise and Default of the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries* (New York, 1958), p. 66

⁵⁵ Geifman, 'The Russian Intelligentsia', p. 33

⁵⁶ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, p. 67

a particularly brutal local police chief may have actually increased their local notoriety and even popularity among the local population more than the killing of some publicly renowned figure. The proliferation of local terrorist activity, whether it was popular or not, nevertheless succeeded in promoting the party's profile. Put more simply, no publicity is bad publicity. The public executions of their members, at which many of the revolutionaries mustered a calmly heroic demeanour, drew attention and sympathy to the revolutionary cause.⁵⁷ Attention should be drawn here to the possible mental instability and suicidal tendencies of participants in the terrorist movement. Knight gives an example of such apparent suicidal tendencies:

After shooting General Min in 1906, Konopkliannikova (*a young SR woman*) was given the right to appeal her death sentence but declined. According to one observer, "she went to her death as one would go to a holiday festivity."⁵⁸

The mental instability of terrorists is a running theme of Geifman's book, and she devotes five pages to a consideration of their psychological instability, manifested in, among other things, suicidal tendencies. Geifman is unable, however, to determine how one is to classify such 'mental illness'. One can legitimately argue that high rates of suicide attempts among terrorists reflected the unusually harsh and despairing lives of terrorists, who lived in a hunted and shady underworld, and that their willingness to kill and be killed for the cause despite their enlightenment sensibilities was a reflection of their absolute, quite rational opposition to an unyielding regime.⁵⁹ The term 'mentally unstable' is surely so subjective, and so open to abuse by both contemporary and retrospective observers, that it cannot be used without grave qualification.⁶⁰

The return of the terrorist cadres from prison and exile in 1917 must be regarded as an important contribution to PSR activists' mentality. The PSR leadership in 1917 showed

⁵⁷ A.V. Gerasimov, *Na lezvi s terroristami* (Paris, 1985). The tsarist police chief described the terrorists thus; 'the terrorists without exception, but especially the women, went to their deaths with great dignity and courage. Zinaida Konopliannikova went to the gallows declaiming Pushkin. One has to say that the heroism of these youths provoked sympathy in society.' (pp. 122-23). Lydiia Dan spoke of the emotional bond she felt with terrorists despite programmatic differences with them, because 'when you see people going to their deaths, you have to feel some bond with them.' (in L. Haimson (ed.) *The Making of Three Russian Revolutionaries* [Cambridge, 1987], p. 162)

⁵⁸ A. Knight, 'Female Terrorists' p. 150

⁵⁹ An example of this quite rational mentality, not obviously touched by the slightly unhinged persona presented by the likes of Spiridonova, can be seen in Vera Figner's account of her decision to become involved in terrorism; Figner, *Memoirs*, pp. 58-61.

⁶⁰ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, especially pp. 167-172. Geifman's enthusiasm to discredit the unhinged and bloodthirsty terrorists she describes at times overwhelms historical perspective, and unfortunately rather discredits her often compelling arguments. The problem of motivations, on which she dwells, is particularly perplexing. Personal inadequacies were certainly part of individuals' motivations in taking up terrorism, but surely such personal inadequacies are the cog of every individual's decision making. Ultimately, her enthusiasm to indict the terrorists results in her writing something of an apology for the inflexibility and violence of the tsarist regime.

itself willing to utilise the renown of its martyrs, whether they were *compos mentis* or not, in order to enhance its own popularity and credibility. The fifteenth of July 1917 was declared by the PSR Central Committee to be 'PSR Day' to mark the thirteenth anniversary of Plehve's death, who had been killed by the SR Egor Sazonov.⁶¹ 'PSR Day' was intended to rally the regional organisations, and to win more mass support. Sazonov himself was truly a martyr to the cause, having committed suicide whilst in a harsh Siberian prison in order to draw attention in his suicide letter, to 'the barbaric regime which was capable of driving political prisoners to suicide'.⁶²

Even in the new legal climate of post-February 1917, the PSR leadership utilised the cachet of their terrorist past in order to rally their supporters, and to attract new members to the cause. Despite the fact that terrorism was no longer directly relevant to party activity, it continued to play a significant role within the PSR, through the mentality of former terrorists, and its prominence in the party's image. The resuming of terrorist activity was a possible means of struggle against the 'criminal' Bolshevik regime instituted after the October coup. The killing of Lenin and Trotsky was proposed by individual party members, and plans made, but Chernov along with the Central Committee decisively renounced such methods.⁶³ This refusal to resort to the old method of struggle against the PSR's new mortal foe reflects Chernov's difficulty in embracing terrorism in the first place, as well as his underestimation of the Bolsheviks' ruthlessness. The manifestation of popular support for the PSR in the Constituent Assembly elections, and the sound and carefully thought out legislation which Chernov envisaged the Constituent Assembly endorsing was an inadequate weapon against the Bolsheviks, who showed themselves quite prepared to ride roughshod over popular opinion and to embrace political violence in order to consolidate their hold on power.

THE PSR AS DEMOCRATS

The PSR's participation in the State Duma had the potential to affect their public image considerably. The constitution granted Russia in October 1905 provided the PSR with its first major challenge in terms of its relationship to the state. Other European socialist

⁶¹ *Delo naroda*, no. 97, 11 July 1917, p. 2, *Delo naroda* no. 101, 15th July 1917, p. 1. Incidentally, this 'great day of celebration' was not mentioned in *Narod*, which was generally speaking very loyal to Central Committee policy. This would imply that the great day of celebration did not catch on.

⁶² Quote from the suicide note cited in Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs*, pp. 344-5

⁶³ Chernov explained his opposition to a resumption of terrorist activities in V. Chernov, *Pered burei. Vospominaniia* (New York 1953), pp. 347-351. For an account of terrorist proposals, and the Central Committee's response to them, see O. Radkey, *The Sickle Under the Hammer. The Russian Socialist Revolutionaries in the Early Months of Soviet Rule* (New York, 1963), pp. 181, 184, 333.

parties had faced this problem of participation in essentially unsatisfactory state structures. The Second International formed in 1889 was intended to be an international socialist organisation that would contribute to international socialist solidarity and the co-ordination of different socialist parties' policies. At the Copenhagen meeting in 1910, the International boasted 896 delegates from 23 nationalities.⁶⁴ The 1904 Amsterdam congress discussed the problem of whether socialists ought to participate in 'bourgeois' government, and voted against it. The PSR's decision to boycott elections to the first State Duma was to the left of this position; the German Social Democrats, who dominated the International, were very active in Germany's Reichstag. Opposition within the PSR to non-participation resulted in the boycott being lifted, and PSR participation in the second Duma.⁶⁵ After the proroguing of the second Duma, the PSR resumed its boycott of the Duma.

The PSR won electoral success in the State Duma despite the imposition of an increasingly restricted franchise. The total incompatibility of the PSR's espousal of revolutionary terror and participation in the existing system was avoided by having the terrorist organisation (*boevaia organizatsiia*) of the party entirely separate from its political wing. Participation in the tsarist system of government implied a certain acceptance of lawful means of change. Alexander Kerensky, who was the only PSR member elected to the fourth Duma, sat with the Trudoviks. Kerensky, by his involvement in the Duma, represented a member who embraced Russia's new

⁶⁴ This term, rather than 'countries', is used because some of the nationalities represented did not actually have nation states.

⁶⁵ See N.D. Erofeev et al. (ed.) *Partiia sotsialistov revoliutsionerov. Dokumenty i materialy 1900-1907 gg.* (Moscow, 1996), pp. 217-8, for the resolution of the Second Party Soviet about participation in the elections to the second State Duma, in October 1906. The First Duma (27th April 1906- 8th July 1907), had 34 members who described themselves as PSR, even though the party had officially boycotted the elections, and 102 Trudovik faction members. The Second Duma (20th February 1907- 2nd June 1907) had 39 PSR members, 16 Popular Socialists, and 104 Trudoviks. The Third Duma (1st November 1907- 9 June 1912) had 13 Trudoviks. The Fourth Duma (15th November 1912- 25th February 1917), had 10 Trudoviks. (M. McCauley, *From Octobrists to Bolsheviks* [London, 1984] p. 16)

PSR participation in the Duma is difficult to quantify simply, because alterations to the franchise had a major impact on PSR support, and because even though the PSR boycotted the first Duma, 34 PSR candidates were voted in. Another confusion in consideration of PSR participation in the Duma is their relations with the Trudovik faction, which is sometimes described as if synonymous with the PSR. The Trudovik faction was formed in April 1906 at the meeting of the first State Duma, and declared itself the representative of the "working class of people". It had no party affiliations, though it was broadly aligned with the forces of the left, and had close connections with the PSR, the All Russian Peasants' Union and the Popular Socialists, as a result of the largely peasant background of its members. After the dissolution of the first Duma, Kadets were prohibited from joining. There was never a formal link between the PSR and the Trudovik faction, though those SRs who were voted into the third and fourth Duma's despite the party boycott sat with the Trudovik faction. The Trudoviks did not become a political party until June 1917, and in their time as a Duma faction, they endorsed legal 'peaceful democratic' methods of politics. (V.V. Shelokhaev et al.(ed.) *Politicheskie partii Rossii konets XIX-pervaia tret XX veka; Entsiklopediia* [Moscow, 1996] pp. 617-619)

parliamentary structure. This is particularly so given that he came to be regarded in 1917 as a figurehead for the reformist right of the PSR. Kerensky's position as a moderate should not be overstated; he did not forsake revolution by participation in the State Duma. His fiery speeches condemning the tsarist regime and calling for radical change regularly had him barred from the chamber and his words removed from the court records.⁶⁶ In this context, it is useful to look at his position at the onset of war, when he abstained from the vote on war credits, but solemnly pledged his support in the defence of Russia. Kerensky's continued virulent condemnation of the tsarist regime from within the Duma is symptomatic of the attitude that the PSR took towards the Duma, as a body giving opportunities to attack the regime and to agitate for change.

Given this, participation in the Duma did not change the PSR's political aims or public image in the reformist way one might have expected. Participation in the Duma did not dilute the party's radical and antagonistic image. The party's participation in the Provisional Government, however, certainly contributed to a weakening of the PSR's popular identity, by association with Kerensky's failing government, and its policies which were increasingly identified with bourgeois values,⁶⁷ namely protection of property, establishment of military discipline, and curbing of worker militancy. Interim power arrangements were crucial, and indeed defined 1917. By approving the Provisional Government at the outset, the PSR formally refused the power which was there for the taking in the early heady days of revolution. The reasons for this refusal were focused around an over-estimation of the power of the right, and fears of counter-revolution, alongside absolute disarray of the party organisation. Another factor was the reluctance of the party's defencists to cause upset while the country was at war. Any challenge to the new order could be represented as a challenge to the nation's security. There was no visible dissent at the party centre to the decision to support the Provisional Government, partly because support was conditional on supervision of the Provisional Government by the Soviet. The picture was very different in the PSR's provincial organisations, some of which expressed stern opposition both to the Provisional Government, and to the socialist decision to enter coalition government.

The Central Committee initially rejected coalition with the Provisional Government, unwilling to become tainted by association with the 'bourgeois class enemies' from the

⁶⁶ R. Abraham, *Alexander Kerensky: the First Love of the Revolution* (London, 1987), pp. 58-9, p. 71.

⁶⁷ See B.I. Kolonitskii, 'Antibourgeois Propaganda and Anti-"Burzhui" Consciousness in 1917' *Russian Review* 53, 1994, pp.183-96, for a useful discussion of the complexity of the word 'bourgeois' and its use as a term of abuse.

Kadet party who dominated it. Kerensky's decision to join the Provisional Government was an independent decision which was regarded by the party as an unapproved aberration of party policy. Kerensky had a rocky relationship with the party anyway, as the politics behind his absence from the party's Central Committee showed.⁶⁸ Zenzinov⁶⁹ maintained the fragile links between Kerensky and the PSR's Central Committee, but in truth Kerensky never fully affiliated himself to the party, and as 1917 progressed presented himself as above party politics.⁷⁰ The inclusion of Chernov in the coalition government marked the beginning of new theoretically closer relations between the Provisional Government and the party. The conclusion of formal coalition alienated the left of the party, who never forsook their opposition to participation in the 'bourgeois' Provisional Government. This further rift of the party indicated an even deeper division within the party. While the right of the party had forsaken social revolution in the name of the war, the left perceived the February revolution as only the first stage of revolution, which would soon be followed by socialist revolution. Though this characterisation is acceptable as far as it goes, it does not allow for those who did not fit neatly into either camp. Chernov was the most public figure of the party actively supporting and actually participating in the coalition, but he certainly had not given up his ideal of social revolution. The decree of the third Party Congress on power offered support to the Provisional Government and to the coalition government, but was careful to recognise it as only a stage on the road to socialism.

The crisis within the Provisional Government deepened in July, to the extent that when the Kadets resigned their posts on 22nd July in a sea of acrimony and slander against Chernov, *Delo naroda* welcomed their exit, and proposed the establishment of socialist government.⁷¹ Despite the slander thrown at Chernov by the Kadets, they continued to share places in the cabinet with him until the storm over the Kornilov affair crushed the second coalition. Chernov's withdrawal from the Provisional Government and his hardening of attitudes towards coalition enabled him to salvage his popularity among the peasantry. Despite the drubbing given the PSR at the second peasant congress in November 1917 over their participation in the coalition Provisional Government and

⁶⁸ See Radkey, *Agrarian Foes*, pp. 224-233; on the machinations behind Kerensky's absence from the party's Central Committee.

⁶⁹ A founder member of the PSR, Zenzinov was prominent on the party's Central Committee in 1917, and represented the centre-right of the party. He was also a personal friend of Kerensky.

⁷⁰ A.F. Kerensky, *The Crucifixion of Liberty* (London, 1934), p. 261. Indeed, his relations were reportedly always cordial with political opponents in his time as deputy in the fourth Duma, so long as they had progressive intentions. (See Abraham, *Alexander Kerensky*, p. 61.)

⁷¹ *Delo naroda*, no. 108, 23rd July, p. 1

their inability to enact concrete measures on redistribution of land, Chernov received a stirring welcome from the peasant delegates.⁷² Though Maria Spiridonova beat him in the competition for chairmanship, the voting was very close.⁷³

The most important and enduring factor in PSR attitudes towards power in 1917 was their continued deferrals to the Constituent Assembly, as the body which would legally decide Russia's political and constitutional future. The party's dogmatic commitment to this body reflected its allegiance to democracy, but left the party paralysed in the face of need to take urgent action on a range of issues where immediate action was required in order to halt the country's slide towards civil war. The Bolshevik seizure of power in October, along with the final break of the left faction from the party was to doom the Constituent Assembly to irrelevance. The Bolsheviks, supported by the left SRs, discounted the Constituent Assembly as an irrelevance when all power lay with the Soviets. The PSR, its schisms finally manifested, was left with an empty dream. The PSR continued to regard the Constituent Assembly as Russia's only legitimate ruling body, but it was overruled and discarded by the machinations of Bolsheviks and left SRs after its only session met on 5th January 1918.

The PSR's support was most severely damaged among the workers and soldiers, and this weakening is reflected in voting for the Constituent Assembly elections.⁷⁴ The party continued to win massive electoral success in the villages, however, despite its official support of unpopular policies, because its image remained relatively unaffected by the realities of coalition politics. The buoyancy of its support and its image of radicalism was caused both by the longevity of its presence in the villages, and by the policies of the individuals and groups that represented the party in the regions. This continuation of support in the villages is perhaps the best evidence that the PSR's support in the countryside was based more on image than on policy content. The politically dynamic environments of the garrison and the factory operated more effective arenas of political competition, and exhibited more responsiveness to the events of 1917 than the villages, whose political activism did not embrace the same levels of competition and national awareness.

⁷² Radkey, *Sickle Under*, pp. 209-10.

⁷³ Radkey, *Sickle Under*, pp. 228-9.

⁷⁴ See Appendix 2, showing voting patterns in the Constituent Assembly elections. The PSR and Mensheviks dominated workers' and soldiers' Soviets up till July-August 1917. An indication of this is the membership of the All Russian Central Executive Committee of workers' and soldiers' deputies (*Vserossiiskii Tsentral'nyi Iсполnitel'nyi Komitet*). The SRs made up 37% of its members between June 1917 and October 1917. (See G.E. Zlokazov, *Menshevistsko-eserovskii VTsIK sovetov v 1917 godu* [Moscow 1997], esp. pp. 298-306)

PROPAGANDA IN THE VILLAGES

This flexibility of party policy and image is mirrored in study of the ways in which propaganda was received, especially in the villages. PSR propaganda in the villages of Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* demonstrates the flexibility with which party activists were forced to work in the villages, and provides a case study to back up the assessment of party orthodoxy in chapter one. The extent of knowledge and understanding of party policy in the villages is a key factor in establishing the relative significance of electoral support for the PSR. Understanding of party policy was dependent upon the individuals representing the party in the localities, the nature of propaganda carried out, and ways in which this propaganda was interpreted. There is evidence of extensive PSR agitation and propaganda work in the villages during 1917. Figes asserted that propagandists faced great difficulties in getting their political message across to their audience, since it included concepts and vocabulary that were unfamiliar to the villages.⁷⁵ Naturally, village understanding varied from one village to the next, with greater levels of political ‘sophistication’ in areas near large industrial conurbations, or with an established history of migrant labour.⁷⁶ The picture presented here, however, counters Figes’ assertion that the language of revolution was a foreign language in the villages: propagandists had their material defined by the interests and demands of their audience.

As has already been discussed, concepts of political parties and governmental systems were popularly defined in terms of their largest audience, the peasantry. This ensured that the questions of support for political parties, and the new form of Russian government were not entirely foreign, even if the understandings held of them were not necessarily as they would be formally defined. The flexibility of the propagandists working in the villages ensured that the material which they offered was at some level registered and understood. The peasants demonstrated a pro-active approach to the new regime, and to the information which was offered to them. Unlike the situation at a regional or national conference,⁷⁷ a speaker in the villages had no captive audience- if the speaker was incomprehensible or dull, the audience could heckle or walk away. It was expedient for PSR propagandists, therefore, to address those issues which were

⁷⁵ Figes, ‘The Russian Revolution’ pp. 324-5

⁷⁶ B. Engel, *Between the Fields and the City: Women, Work and Family in Russia 1861-1914* (Cambridge, 1994), discusses the effects of female migratory labour on village life, especially chapters three and four.

⁷⁷ Figes, ‘The Russian Revolution’, p. 326. Figes refers to a debate on federative principles among SR leaders which occurred at the Kurgan’ peasant congress in April 1917, and which lost the interest and understanding of the peasant delegates present. This problem was surely confined to the regional and national meetings; lower level meetings were dominated by the peasant delegates themselves.

most pressing, and to shape their propaganda according to the demands of their audience. This responsiveness of the propagandists to the demands of their audience ensured that party image and understandings of party policy were further kaleidoscoped, and moved another step away from any sense of party orthodoxy.

The need for flexibility is reflected in reports of propaganda meetings; in Palets village, Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*, for example, at a PSR meeting held over the 28th-29th June, proceedings initially followed the planned order of lectures. A heckler in the audience, however, changed the mood of the meeting altogether, by claiming that many workers at the Sormovo factory were only there to evade military service. This assertion provoked hostile cries from the peasant audience, directed against the workers. To prevent any further disorder, the leader of the meeting quickly altered his agenda- he passed a resolution demanding that all those evading military service be called to their duty, and then took advantage of the calm this resolution induced to end the meeting.⁷⁸ Such an incident demonstrates the fine line for propagandists between pursuing their own objectives of presenting a 'political vision', and moulding to the demands of their audience.

There is evidence suggesting that peasants sought explanation of the new political climate.⁷⁹ A reporter from Lunino village, Penza, commented that 'the peasants ask for people to teach them, and to help them in questions of politics.'⁸⁰ Some of the PSR propaganda work clearly reflected peasant desires for information on the current political situation. PSR orators spoke not only on the PSR programme, and party attitudes towards affairs of the moment, but a wide range of general topics. The graph overleaf is based on a sample of thirty-two PSR propaganda meetings held in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* during 1917, reported in the local PSR newspaper *Narod*. These propaganda meetings were enthusiastically attended and indeed requested by village, *volost* and *uezd* assemblies and organisations. The categories have been formulated based on the number of times each of these subjects was specifically mentioned as discussed in the meeting. All the thirty-two meetings surveyed referred to at least one topic of discussion, and several referred to more than one. The category labelled 'other' refers to all topics that occurred only once, for instance a discussion of

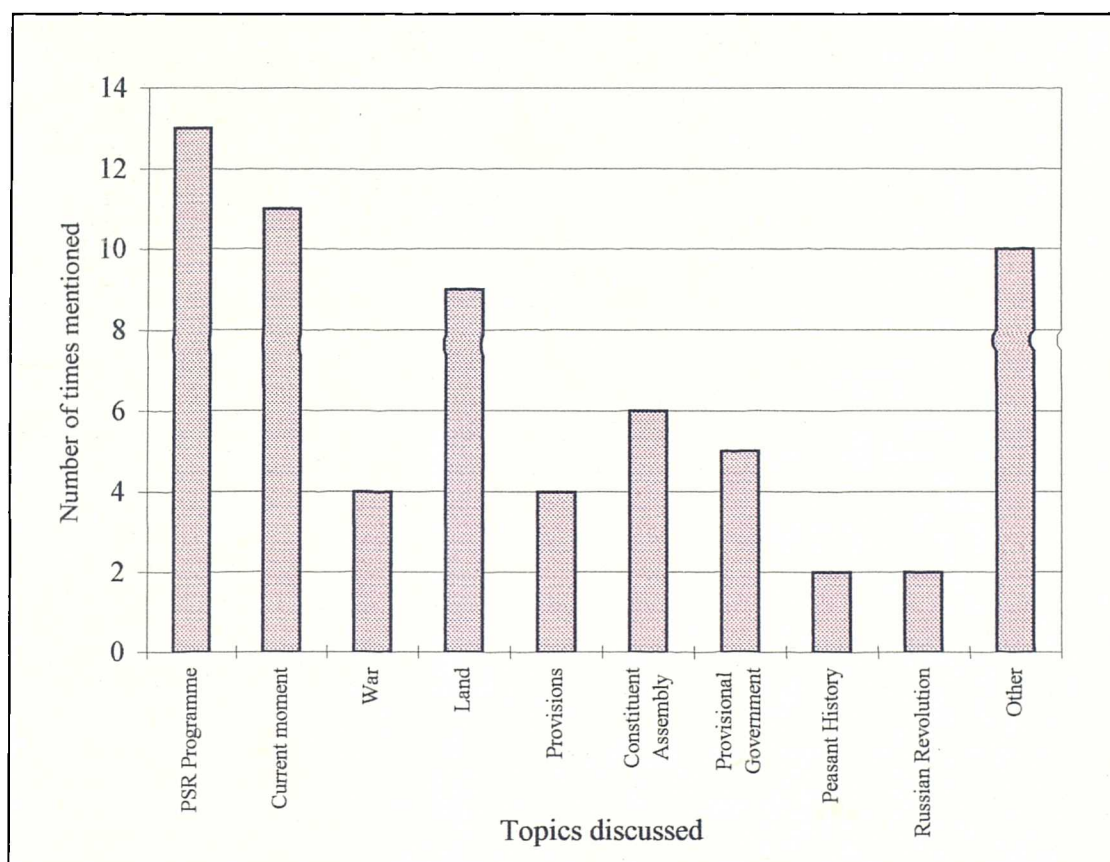
⁷⁸ *Narod*, no. 37, 9th July 1917, l. 4

⁷⁹ Figes, 'The Russian Revolution', p. 328

⁸⁰ *Sotsialist revoliutsioner*, no. 7, 11th September 1917, p. 4

the eight hour day in one village,⁸¹ or the meeting in another raised to discuss the fuel question.⁸²

TABLE 2.1 TOPICS DISCUSSED AT PSR PROPAGANDA MEETINGS IN NIZHEGORODSKAIA GUBERNIA DURING 1917



These propaganda meetings were enthusiastically attended and indeed requested by village, *volost* and *uezd* assemblies and organisations. Though PSR programme was the most frequently mentioned topic, it is reflective of the patchy nature of these propaganda efforts that in nineteen of the thirty-two meetings, all held specifically for the promulgation of PSR membership and support, the programme of the PSR was not specifically mentioned. PSR propaganda activity in a village did not guarantee that the programme of the party would have been discussed even in rudimentary form. The land question was unsurprisingly the most talked about single issue; this reflected the popularity of this topic among the peasantry. It is surprising that the war did not appear more frequently as a single issue, but this can be explained by newspaper reporters categorising discussion of the war within the topic the 'current moment'. One can speculate that the editors of *Narod* would have been anxious to deflect attention from

⁸¹ *Narod*, no. 10, 7th May 1917, p. 3

⁸² *Narod*, no. 22, 4th June 1917, p. 4

the issue of the war, since they supported the defencist position taken by the PSR's Central Committee, which was hotly opposed by many individuals within the Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia* PSR organisation.⁸³

Some PSR propaganda occurred at a relatively sophisticated level: in Spasskii *uezd*, Kazan *guberniia*, a general meeting, attended by some 300 people, met at the initiative of the Spasskii PSR group, in order to acquaint those present with the PSR programme, and with the resolutions passed at the Third Party Congress.⁸⁴ Those deciding to support the party as a result of such a meeting, whether as individuals or as part of a communal decision, had been acquainted with the policies of the party's Central Committee, and not only the vague notion of 'land and freedom' with which the party was associated. Such thoroughness was not the norm, however. In other villages, supporters are described as accepting PSR programme, but worked out in a popular form. What this popular form might involve covers a range of possibilities, from the programme just simplified in its most complex areas, through some bowdlerisation of programme, to blatant misrepresentation of central party policy.

Even where the PSR programme was discussed, the content of such discussion is uncertain. The demands on the Constituent Assembly formulated by the PSR group in Arkhangel'skoe-Piatinskoe *obshchestvo*, Penza *guberniia*, could have come straight from the PSR programme; they demanded redistribution of all land by the Constituent Assembly, to be enacted by local land committees, free and comprehensive non-secular education, elected law courts, and the standing army to be replaced by a people's militia.⁸⁵ A declaration made by a group of PSR members on 23rd June 1917, in Kasanikha village, Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia*, voiced similar sentiments though, critically, made no reference to the Constituent Assembly.⁸⁶ The step from an orthodox voicing of PSR policy on the land question to an unorthodox demand for transfer of all land to the working peasantry was a very small one.

Some propagandist meetings did not tackle PSR policy thoroughly. At a PSR meeting in Kazhleika village, Nizhegorodskaiia *uezd* and *guberniia*, the orators spoke about

⁸³ The internationalist position taken by a majority of PSR activists in Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia* was evident at the Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia* PSR conference, held in April 1917, at which all the views expressed represented the internationalist left of the party, and the resolution on the war passed by the conference concluded with calls for an International Socialist Congress to be held. (GARF, f. 9511, op. 1, d. 11, ll. 4-5; protocols of the conference.)

⁸⁴ *Golos truda*, no. 14, 22nd June 1917, p. 4. The third party congress provided a definition of PSR policy for 1917.

⁸⁵ *Sotsialist revoliutsioner*, no. 8, 18th September 1917, p. 4

⁸⁶ *Narod*, no. 35, 5th July 1917, p. 4

'freedom, land and provisions', and commented on the new Provisional Government policy banning sale and purchase of land.⁸⁷ The concentration here on land issues reflected an understanding of PSR policy limited to the one issue most pressing to the peasantry. Audiences demanded the information they required from the propagandists, then selected parts they wanted to accept. To a certain extent, peasants defined their own propaganda in 1917. This contradicts the long voiced notions of the peasantry as a political vacuum, ready to be filled by the first idea that was presented to them,⁸⁸ as well as Figes' more recent analysis which returns to notions of a 'dark' peasantry.⁸⁹

PROPAGANDA IN THE FACTORIES

The complex interactions between propagandists and propagandised in the villages demonstrates the sophistication and responsiveness of campaigns there. Conducting propaganda in worker conurbations inevitably took on a different character to that conducted in the villages. In the villages, geographical isolation and sparse population meant that the arrival of a newspaper or a speaker from the town could be considered something of an event. Townspeople, on the other hand, were overwhelmed with images and alternatives for 1917. The classified advertisements of any local newspaper in 1917, where competing lectures, social evenings, reading rooms and so on were offered by different political parties, and information on party membership advertised, confirm the wealth of political activity that occurred. Such proliferation of material placed propagandists in direct and open competition with one another, and propagated the development of harsh inter-party conflict, as each sought to nourish its own support, and sap away that of its opponents. In the factories, as well as meetings and leaflets, labour activism, most notably striking, could be used as a tool for propaganda. A further important difference between propaganda campaigns between the towns and the villages was that in the villages propagandists were often outsiders; even returning soldiers, and migrant workers, the two groups of propagandists that can be considered to have maintained a close tie with the villages, brought a new world view and new experiences to the villages. In the factories, however, those active as propagandists were almost inevitably part of the worker body themselves, as a result of the nature of factory based

⁸⁷ *Narod*, no. 24, 9th June, p. 4

⁸⁸ Radkey, *Russia Goes to the Polls*, p. 57, Radkey, *Sickle Under*, p. 278.

⁸⁹ O. Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924* (London, 1996). Despite asserting that the peasants 'often revealed remarkable political sophistication' (p. 98), the portrayal of the Russian peasantry in *A People's Tragedy* plays to stereotypes of the peasantry as essentially brutish, ignorant, undifferentiated and dirty.

party work, and of the political education that workers received.⁹⁰ The organic nature of workers' propaganda gave it a very different character to that of the villages.

A huge range of lecture series were organised in the towns during 1917. These provided a valuable forum for consideration of major political questions, and offered workers access to a potentially high level of political education. Enthusiasm to elucidate the differences in the parties' political programmes is clearly seen in PSR propaganda programmes. In a lecture series advertised in *Delo naroda*, a lecture was scheduled specifically to delineate the differences between the programme of the PSR and that of other parties, to be given by A.K. Boldyrev.⁹¹ The content of this lecture, given on 10th July 1917, can be estimated by consideration of supplementary notes written in December 1917 by Boldyrev with the title 'What distinguishes the PSR programme from the programmes of other Russian political parties'.⁹² This document was in the form of a chart, with the various programmatic points of each party carefully listed and compared. This by no means proves that such programmatic differences were widely known by party activists; indeed, such care in pointing out differences might indicate that the Central Committee recognised a need to define the party's differences from other parties more clearly. It does, however, demonstrate the party's clear ideological separation from other revolutionary groups.

The following case study of the propaganda activities of the Sormovo PSR group between 1916 and 1917 provides a useful model for the ways in which the party operated within worker circles, prior to the revolution and during 1917, thus providing some indication of what its support in the factories was based upon. The ways in which these propaganda activities could operate provide an interesting contrast to the propaganda carried out in the villages. The size and density of the worker population allowed work to be carried out intensively, and attempts could be made to incorporate propaganda activities into part of the workers' social and educational life. The Sormovo PSR group expanded steadily from April 1916 up to the February revolution, when its membership and activities underwent a massive boom. Prior to the revolution, its propaganda efforts were astonishingly wide considering the blanket police surveillance that existed at this time. The most important area of activity was in the formation of

⁹⁰ J. Bradley, *Muzhik and Muscovite: Urbanisation in Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley 1985), esp. part 1, pp. 9-99, presents a useful case study of urbanisation and its impact in Moscow.

⁹¹ *Delo naroda*, no. 85, 27th June, 1917, p. 1.

⁹² RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 5, ll. 131-168. Supplement to lectures to be read by PSR Petrograd military committee course, dated December 1917.

worker 'cells'. Such cells were important forums for the familiarisation and education of workers with the PSR programme, which were to provide a substantial corps of conscious party cadres after the revolution. The emphasis in these cells was on education, and their activities would seem to have been intense:

In the majority of cases reading circles were created from workers from one workshop or shift. . . members of the circles were close among themselves and saw each other daily. Some gathered to interpret and understand interesting questions in conversation. After the report of a propagandist or a reading of books, questions were asked, and the propagandist tried to carry on a general conversation around the discussed questions, directing it so that all those attending took part in the general debate. Relations between the central group and the circles were carried out by representatives of the circles. . . members of the circles systematically gathered for activities, circulated literature, leaflets, carried out agitation, recruited new members, made donations.⁹³

The activities described here accord entirely with the description of PSR activity among the workers offered by Spiridovich,⁹⁴ which would suggest that the activities of the Sormovo group were a fair reflection of national patterns of party organisation among workers. The group's main difficulty was a shortage of trained propagandists; that is, individuals who were familiar with the party's programme, and who were able to communicate effectively.⁹⁵ It was reported that often one propagandist was forced to travel around a number of different cells in the same evening, trying to supervise the work of the cells.⁹⁶ This lack of supervision rather throws into doubt the 'orthodoxy' of these cells; with so little assistance, it is doubtful that workers emerged from such cells fully drilled in the policy and tactics of the party.

Production of revolutionary pamphlets was the other major propaganda area of the Sormovo PSR group prior to the revolution. The efficacy of such leaflets is of course questionable; one can be sure of the numbers produced, and of the contents of those leaflets that have been preserved, but how such leaflets were received is always an unknown. Inevitably, colloquial reports abound of leaflets being used as cigarette paper and toilet roll!⁹⁷ In the case of the Sormovo PSR organisation, the number of leaflets distributed ensured that they made some impact. The organisation had succeeded in purchasing a primitive typography in November 1916, and not long afterwards produced 1000 copies of a leaflet, which was distributed widely among the workers of Sormovo, the neighbouring industrial suburb Kanavin, and the factories and workshops

⁹³ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 110. Writings of Magergut.

⁹⁴ Spiridovich, *Revoliutsionnoe dvizheniie*, p. 101

⁹⁵ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 103. Writings of Magergut.

⁹⁶ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 109. Writings of Magergut.

⁹⁷ See V. Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution* (New Haven, 1936), p. 156

of Nizhnii Novgorod town. It was even pasted on the walls around Sormovo and Kanavin factories. This leaflet was reportedly a success:

it had a striking effect on the mood and hopes of the working mass, won the PSR group popularity and extended its group of sympathisers.⁹⁸

Industrial action, most notably strikes, was also utilised as much as a forum for political education for workers as to place pressure on the factory administration.⁹⁹ Organisation of a strike, even if, like the strike of July 1916, it was economic rather than political in character, enabled the party to address very large groups of workers, and to present the party's ideas to them. Though it was reported that the failure of the July 1916 strike caused a depression in the party's activities in August and September 1916, striking remained a powerful tool to raise awareness of the party as the workers' leader.

Widespread industrial action was planned by the Sormovo PSR group, in collaboration with the Bolshevik group, for the 3rd February 1917. The occasion of this strike was to protest about the trial of workers imprisoned for leading the strike of July 1916, and it was intended to be 'solely political' in nature.¹⁰⁰ Though the ambitious rising that was planned failed, as workers proved reluctant to come out and police agents moved in on the activists, its high profile undoubtedly contributed to a heightening of the party's profile in Sormovo and the surrounding areas. The short march orchestrated by the PSR of 100 workers headed by a red flag was an exciting precursor to the February revolution, and attracted considerable interest from the worker community, as well as police oppression.¹⁰¹

The group's propaganda work prior to the revolution often encompassed pleasant social events, such as social evenings, literary-music evenings and picnics, which encouraged sympathisers to attend, raised funds, and increased a sense of comradely feeling among activists.¹⁰² An 'organisational picnic' held in June 1916 on a river boat, was attended by thirty-five comrades, as well as some twenty interested bystanders. As well as political speeches, food and drink was provided and revolutionary songs were sung.¹⁰³ The organisation's New Year party, attended by some ninety people, included a similar mix of business and pleasure. The evening commenced with a survey of the political

⁹⁸ RGASPI, f. 274, op.1, d. 26, l. 96. Writings of Magergut.

⁹⁹ See chapter 6, 'The Sormovo Strike', pp. 205-210.

¹⁰⁰ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 99. Writings of Magergut. There are of course always problems in trying to categorise a strike as solely political or solely economic in nature. Such delineations refer to worker demands, but not to their motivations. Smith suggested that it took a certain level of political consciousness to become involved in any kind of strike in wartime. (Smith, *Red Petrograd*, p. 49)

¹⁰¹ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 102. Writings of Magergut.

¹⁰² RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 110. Writings of Magergut.

¹⁰³ RGASPI, f. 274, op.1, d. 26, l. 87. Writings of Magergut.

situation, but then progressed to entertainment, including games, music and dancing.¹⁰⁴ This use of recreation as part of propagandist activity was used extensively in 1917, especially in Petrograd and Moscow, where the PSR organised a range of literary-revolutionary events, held at the big concert halls and featuring guest appearances from such revolutionary luminaries as Breshkovskaia and Kerensky. The advertising for such events recalled banners for a musical or theatrical event.

The activities of the Sormovo PSR group mushroomed after the February revolution. Offices were taken, ironically in the former study of the police officer. A full time secretary, a full time propaganda worker and three typography workers were employed. Delegates were sent to the villages, and links established with the town group and with the PSR intelligentsia.¹⁰⁵ Though the organisation was small relative to the number of workers in Sormovo in the year prior to the February revolution, with organisation centred as a small activists corps, rather than 'broad mass organisation', its work established the party on a sound footing by March 1917, and enabled it to take the lead in the first months of the revolution. Former party members, who had not taken an active part in the group's underground activities, came forward at the beginning of the revolution and took a most active role in party organisation and propaganda.¹⁰⁶ Party cadres were further boosted by the return of exiled party members at the beginning of April.¹⁰⁷ Tens of thousands of leaflets, brochures and party newspapers were distributed in the first few weeks after the revolution.¹⁰⁸

A large number of mass meetings and gatherings were held. Some of these, like the demonstration of 15th March to celebrate the revolution attended by some 50,000 Sormovo workers, and the May Day celebrations attended by around 80,000, were multi-party, but had clear partisan affiliations. These partisan affiliations are conspicuous both in the practice of marching in groups under the flag of party

¹⁰⁴ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 98. Writings of Magergut. Note that such combinations of business and pleasure were common; The military section of the Kazan PSR group had suffered grievously from shortages of funds, but when they did collect some 1000 roubles as a result of an increase in membership, they used a significant portion of it to host a *gulian'e* (festive gathering, or spree) in a local gardens. (*Golos truda*, no. 37, 14th September 1917, p. 4)

¹⁰⁵ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 111. Writings of Magergut.

¹⁰⁶ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 106. Writings of Magergut.

¹⁰⁷ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 111. Writings of Magergut.

¹⁰⁸ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 112. Writings of Magergut. At the Sormovo PSR group's organisational meeting held on 15th April 1917, it was declared that between 1st March and 15th April, 40,000 leaflets, 10,000 brochures and 14,000 party papers had been distributed. This publishing activity was funded by members' subscriptions and workers' donations to the group. (see chapter 6, tables 6.i and 6.ii, p. 212) Whatever shortages workers faced in this period, we can be sure that cigarette and toilet paper were not among them.

organisations, and in the competing orations that went on between SR and Social Democrat speakers. Just as in the villages, the speakers addressed issues of the war, the revolution and its problems, the eight hour working day, and the need for peace.¹⁰⁹ Note that the issue of land, so prominent in village propaganda meetings, was not generally brought up at these urban gatherings. Such speakers reportedly enjoyed a highly attentive and appreciative audience. The Sormovo PSR group held daily meetings and gatherings independently, at which the party programme was read, and general issues discussed.¹¹⁰ Though the numbers attending such meetings were obviously smaller than those at the demonstrations mentioned above, they were still too large to find a building suitable to house them- because of this problem, PSR mass meetings in Sormovo were held outdoors.

As well as the organisation of meetings and lectures, the Sormovo PSR group opened a well stocked library, and ran courses to train propagandists and to familiarise members with party programme:

Wide agitation and propaganda work is carried out amongst the peasants, a library is available, in the day elementary courses are run on the questions of programme and tactics, and in the near future it is proposed that a school of propagandists be opened. Steps to buy their own typography have already been proposed, and this offers the opportunity to publish their own newspaper and other literature (small brochures).¹¹¹

There was clearly strong awareness of the need to inform and involve the workers in new democratic establishments, as this declaration of the PSR faction in the Sormovo office of Nizhegorodskaja Soviet of workers' deputies indicates:

In the aims of the utmost acquaintance of the broad democratic masses with the activities of the Soviets, we must strive for the creation of public meetings of the office, and also to acquaint the masses by way of special excerpts, articles, reports and so on.¹¹²

The enthusiasm and commitment shown by the Sormovo PSR organisation to educate the workers reflected their long-term commitment to establish both the party, and after the revolution the new democratic organisations, firmly within the workforce. Without mass worker understanding and participation, the Sormovo PSR group recognised that the gains of the revolution were under threat. The role of the Sormovo PSR organisation as an educating force also elucidates their links with the workers; from the close and intense underground work of 1916 to the wide sweep of educational activities in the

¹⁰⁹ GARF, f. 9591c, op. 1, d. 19, l. 8. Copy of report which appeared in *Narod*, no. 4.

¹¹⁰ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 111. Writings of Magergut.

¹¹¹ *Narod*, no. 58, 27th August 1917, p. 4, in section entitled 'Sormovo Life'.

¹¹² *Narod*, no. 49, 6th August 1917, p. 4

course of 1917, the process of education and organisation meant that the PSR group was intimately connected with workers' daily life.

CONCLUSIONS

The image of the party was of critical importance to its popularity and electoral success in 1917. The foundations of its popular image were focused around imprecise but powerful symbols and slogans, which were addressed primarily to the rural community. The interconnections between town and country ensured however that these slogans won support in the towns as well as the villages. Among the determining factors for the party's image was its terrorist past, which had given the party a prominent public profile, and party members' reputations as martyrs for the cause of free Russia. The prominent role taken in the party by former terrorists ensured that the mentality of these 'fighters for freedom' had an impact on the party's climate. The party's participation in the State Duma did not play a significant role in the development of the party's public profile, as it continued to be associated with radical and provocative politics, but its association with the 1917 Provisional Government caused its support among workers and soldiers to be eroded.

The party's attempts to define itself were metamorphosed by the local conditions faced by propagandists, who created a party 'reality' and 'orthodoxy' which reflected and was defined by the demands and needs of local supporters, but did not necessarily reflect 'orthodox' PSR policy. The delivery of propaganda in the villages was a complex and delicate affair, but propaganda in the factories was presented at a different level, as a result of workers' familiarisation with national political issues, political concepts, and the greater level of political competition that operated. The propaganda activities which went on among the Sormovo workers indicates that the PSR operated very successfully in Sormovo, and built up a sound and well informed support base.

Chapter 3: MEMBERS' BACKGROUNDS

This chapter seeks to establish the socio-economic background of different sectors of PSR membership. Parental occupation, education levels and occupation are all categories which broadly speaking can be grouped and categorised. Using these categories, a comparative study of different membership groups is made, which clarifies divisions between rural and urban activists, and between the party's leadership and regional activists. Women did not take the leading role that would be expected given their numbers and prominence in party activity prior to 1917. A breakdown of women's role within the PSR is provided here in order to furnish an understanding of why they were so conspicuously absent in 1917. This assessment of women's work in the PSR challenges the stereotype of women party workers as terrorists and tea makers.

Radkey's discussion of the divisions within the party concentrated on a split between working class and intelligentsia party members, with the working class contingent representing the left, and the intelligentsia the right of the party.¹ Chapter one has gone some way towards spelling out the essential divisions which existed among PSR members which did not necessarily correspond with Radkey's delineations. While such demarcations based on class may be broadly representative of trends within party membership, they do nothing to elucidate such splits, or to provide clear explanation for formation of members' political beliefs. A life experience which was common to virtually all the PSR members considered was their experiences in prison, exile and emigration. By assessing individuals' backgrounds and experiences, a foundation for the splits in the party can be found. Explanation for divisions within the party have so far emerged, primarily between those members who were active in the party before 1917, and those who joined in the heat of 1917. This study of the social background of members elucidates the splits within the party further, and identifies quantifiable trends which divided the PSR membership.

SOURCES FOR THIS STUDY

Sources providing detailed social background for party members are inevitably massively skewed. The most information is available on those who were senior in the party, and who had correspondingly high social and educational backgrounds, since such individuals were more prone to leave written records of their lives. Further, many

¹O. Radkey, *Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism; Promise and Default of the Socialist Revolutionaries* (Stanford, 1958), p. 133, p. 141

party leaders were given the opportunity to leave such records in the wake of 1917, when those not killed in the civil war or imprisoned by the Bolsheviks went to live abroad, where they had ample opportunity to complete fulsome reflections.²

Information on local party leadership and rank and file membership is much more limited. Almost no information has been found on the PSR's transient supporters, who came, and then seemingly drifted away again the course of 1917, and as a result this politically very significant section of the party's membership is neglected here. The richest source of material for regional party activists is in electoral lists, some of which offer a bewildering array of biographical information.

The seventy-seven members of the Central Committee³ provide one source of membership figures, and are useful primarily as a contrast with the education levels of the local party leadership and other members. These individuals have not been included in occupational categorisation, because they were all considered to be 'professional revolutionaries', and therefore could not be compared in terms of occupation with other party members. A second source of biographical information has been taken from the records of the sixty-two individuals who sat with the PSR faction in the second State Duma.⁴ The Duma members were certainly prominent and respected figures within their local party organisation, and so provide a useful biographical indicator of local party leadership. The third source, and one which due to its size is the most statistically useful is the 999 PSR members of the 'Society for political prisoners and exiles', a multi-party organisation formed in 1918, and which survived until its disbandment by

² Below is a selection of some of the memoir material produced by former PSR Central Committee members- A.A. Argunov, *Mezhdru dvumia bol'shevismami* (Paris, 1919); A.N. Bakh, *Zapiski narodovol'tsa* (Moscow, 1931); E.K. Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs of the Russian Revolution* (Stanford, 1931), *Ideali i deistvitel'nost: Sorok let zhizni i raboti riadovogo rus. intelligentsia (1879-1919)* (Berlin, Paris, 1919); F.F. Fedorovich, *Obvinitel'noe zakliuchenie po delu tsentral'nogo komiteta i otdel'nikh chlenov inikh organizatsii Partii s-r po obvineniu ikh v vooruzhennoi bor'be protiv Sovetskoii vlasti* (Moscow, 1922); E.E. Kolosov, *V Siberii pri Kolchaka. Vospominaniia, materialy, dokumenty* (Petrograd 1923); A.F. Rakov, *V zastenakh Kolchaka* (Paris 1920); N.S. Rusanov, *Iz moikh vospominanii* (Berlin 1923); V. Chernov, *Zapiski sotsialista-revoliutsionera* (Berlin, Moscow, Petrograd, 1928), *Rozhdeniia revoliutsionnoe Rossii* (Russia, Paris, Prague, New York, 1934), *Pered burei. Vospominaniia* (New York, 1953); M. Vishniak, *Dan' proshlomu* (New York, 1954); V.M. Zenzinov, *Perezhitoe* (New York, 1953); Alexander Kerensky wrote four monographs and two articles, the most extensive and final personal reminiscences being *The Kerensky Memoirs* (London, 1966)

³ Information in the memoir material above has been supplemented by the information on Central Committee members found in M.N. Leonov, *Partiia sotsialistov revoliutsionerov v 1905-7gg* (Moscow 1997) pp. 491-498, V.V. Shelokhaev et al. (ed.) *Politicheskie partii Rossii konets XIX- pervaiia tret XX veka*, (Moscow 1996), supplement 6, pp. 768-771.

⁴ Leonov, *Partiia sotsialistov*, pp. 499-506. there were 39 PSR members officially elected to the Duma as PSR candidates, a further six who left the faction, and seventeen individuals who joined the PSR faction at the beginning of the Duma session.

Stalin in 1935. The society published a biographical list of all its members in 1934,⁵ referred to throughout the thesis as *Politkatorzhan*. This source, providing by far the largest detailed sample of PSR membership yet encountered, is immeasurably valuable, but for its usefulness as a source to be understood, two factors need serious consideration. The first is how exactly this very detailed information on members was compiled in the early 1930's. The second is to consider what section of the party's membership such a list encompasses.

It seems truly remarkable in retrospect that *Politkatorzhan* was published in entirety. The PSR, after all, had been an 'enemy of the state' in the civil war, still a relatively recent event in the early 1930's, yet this document described in detail the political pasts of former party members, from the commencement of their political activity, right up to their location at the time of the February revolution.⁶ Accounts unfortunately come to an abrupt halt at this point, though the editors pleaded that this cessation of information was because the study and verification of the political activities of members after the February revolution had still not been concluded.⁷ The guide was compiled from forms filled in by members, verified and supplemented by information from 'the museum of the revolution, *istparti*, and many Soviet institutions in the centre and in the provinces'.⁸ Based on analysis of the biographical information provided, it would seem that police and court records were used extensively to supplement the information offered by society members; the biographies include the codes and exact names of the crimes for which the members were tried, information it is unlikely they would have remembered. Such supplementation prevented gross falsification of members' political pasts- the

⁵ M.M. Konstantinov, F.M. Tochilin (ed.) *Politicheskaia katorga i ssylka; biograficheskii spravochnik chlenov obshchestva politikatorzhan i ssyl'no-poselentsev* (Moscow, 1934) (Referred to throughout as *Politkatorzhan*). A list was first published in 1927, but with much less information on participants. The 1934 document was Perrie's primary source in her study of PSR pre-1917 membership- (M. Perrie, 'The Social Composition and Structure of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party Before 1917', *Soviet Studies* 24(2) 1972, pp. 223-50. Note that Perrie finds 1,029 SR members from the list for consideration, while I have only 999. My only explanation for this anomaly is that I did not include individuals who were associated with the party in their police records, but did not, in their biographies, confess to any such connections.

⁶ When the wife of prominent left SR Isaac Steinberg asked Skrypnik, a senior Communist party member, in the period after the civil war, when the persecution of her husband would end, since he was no longer involved in politics. Skrypnik replied "It will never end for you. Bolsheviks cannot leave the SRs in freedom. We will form a special camp in order to isolate all SRs." ('Eseri posle revoliutsii' in *1965-1970: Politicheskii dnevnik* [Amsterdam 1975], pp. 60-61, as reported by Steinberg's son.)

⁷ *Politkatorzhan*, p. 7 If this is the case, and information was gathered but not fully verified or published, then the archives of the society will surely hold even more gems on PSR membership.

⁸ *Politkatorzhan*, p. 5

editors commented that in case of discrepancies between the autobiographical information offered and archival sources, archival sources were favoured.⁹

Whilst the information can be regarded as reliable, a difficult variable to establish is who was attracted to membership of such a society. The social composition of this group was very heavily biased towards the urban population, as chart 3.i showing parental occupations of the *Politkatorzhan* demonstrates. Chart 3.iii, of PSR members' occupations, shows that the *Politkatorzhan* group included a disproportionately high number of second generation workers and artisans, and relatively few people engaged in agriculture. This would indicate that the group did not form a representative sample of the party's mass membership. One anomalous facet of the *Politkatorzhan* group's occupations is the high proportion (17%) described as students. (see chart 3.vii) Most of the *Politkatorzhan* members were in middle age¹⁰ when asked to state their occupation for the *Politkatorzhan* survey published in 1934, yet 165 described themselves as students, without specifying a place or course of study. One can speculate that the term 'student' was something of a euphemism, and was used by those with no fixed occupation. This would account for its predominance. The absence of information on members after the February revolution makes it difficult to speculate on their 1917 activities; some no doubt relinquished party work altogether. Based on their general commitment to revolutionary ideals, however, as evidenced by their persistent party work underground, and continuation of such work even in exile, one can conjecture that these individuals became party activists in 1917. Their occupations suggest that the vast majority of them would have lived and worked in Russia's towns and cities.

⁹ *Politkatorzhan*, p. 13

¹⁰ See Perrie's breakdown of the age groups of *Politkatorzhan* members, in 'Social Composition and Structure', pp. 229-234.

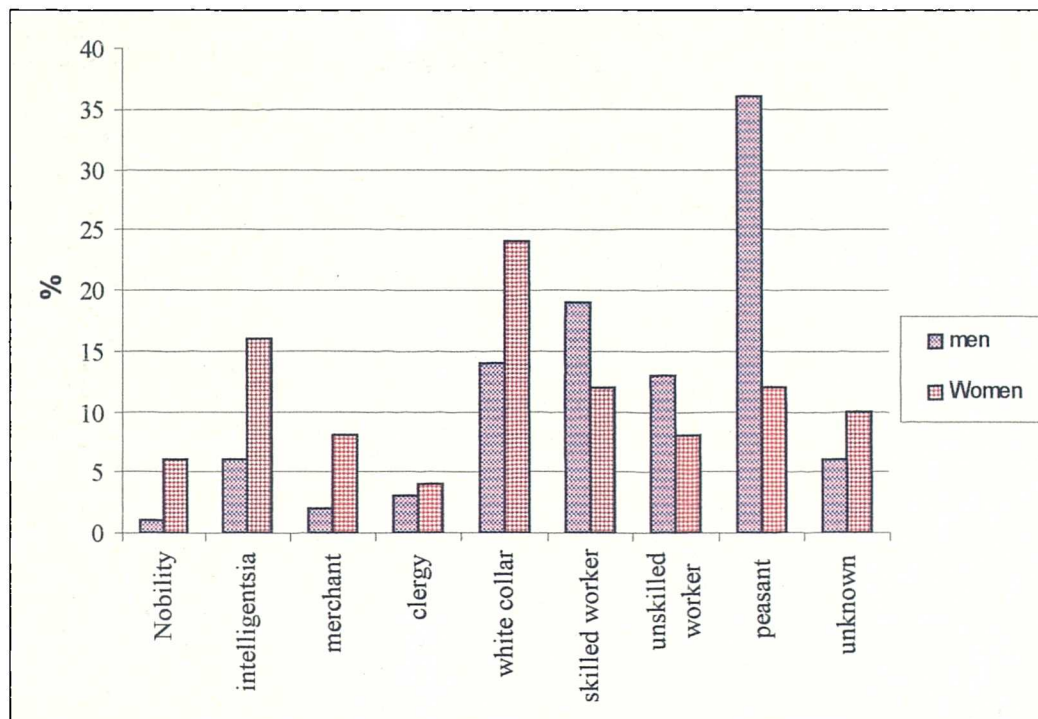
CHART 3.I PARENTAL OCCUPATIONS OF *POLITKATORZHAN*

Chart 3.i showing parental occupation of the *Politkatorzhan* PSR members has a slightly different categorisation system than that offered for members' occupations. The category 'intelligentsia' includes the categories education, medical, other intelligentsia and student. Because these groups are all relatively small, they are more revealing combined in this case. The category 'merchant', referring to those making a living from trading, applies only to parental occupations, and not to any of the sample of members' occupations. This study confirms that the *Politkatorzhan* group as a whole was not representative of Russian society, and probably not of PSR membership either. The *Politkatorzhan* were dominated by second generation workers; almost a third had parents who were skilled or unskilled workers, and a further 15% had parents who were white collar workers, occupations that were generally city based. About a third of the sample was of peasant parentage, which is surprisingly low, given that most of the sample were born in the 1880's. The figures show male and female parental occupations separately, and the difference is palpable; the women in the sample were far more likely to come from white collar or intelligentsia background than men. *Politkatorzhan* represented primarily the PSR's urban-worker supporters.

The fifty-one PSR candidates for the Nizhegorodskaia Town Duma elections in July 1917¹¹ present a similar urban face of party activists, though this sample undoubtedly formed the corps of the PSR's city activists. The similarity of the profile of their occupations with those of *Politkatorzhan* members confirms the latter's urban bias, and the affinity between these two groups. The final sample group, of ninety-two PSR Constituent Assembly candidates, is based on information offered in candidates' lists in the *guberniias* of Nizhegorodskaia, Kazan, Penza, Tambov and Simbirsk.¹² This group provides a particularly interesting comparative study, since it demonstrates that these individuals who were recognised by their local communities and the electorate as representing the PSR were predominantly of peasant background. This assessment of the backgrounds of Constituent Assembly candidates shows that Radkey's suggestions that they were largely rural intelligentsia and right-oriented peasants are false.¹³ This work highlights two gulfs within the party; between the party's Central Committee leadership, and the majority of their regional activists, and between urban and rural party activists.

PROBLEMS OF CLASSIFICATION

Classification of individuals' lives is inevitably a treacherous business, since its very nature is generalisation, which inevitably loses something of the individual along the way. Even education, not an obviously contentious area of classification, has its problems. 'Home' education, for example, reveals little about the standard of education the individual attained. For some, namely those from wealthy nobility backgrounds, this involved parental employment of a number of private tutors who brought the pupil up to high levels of educational attainment. For others, it might mean nothing grander than the only literate member of the family teaching the pupil his letters and maybe some basic arithmetic. Because no other groups offered such a category, the four individuals listing themselves in *Politkatorzhan* as 'barely literate' (*malogramotnyi*), and the forty-eight describing themselves as 'self taught' (*samouchka*), have been incorporated into

¹¹ Information on these candidates was found in GANO, f. 27, op. 638a, d. 94, ll. 9-11. This *delo* provides a full list of all candidates to the Town Duma, along with candidates' age, occupation and membership of revolutionary governmental organisations in 1917. Of the 51 PSR candidates, 40 were elected to the Duma. (See chapter four, p. 141)

¹² These lists were collated from various local newspapers, namely, *Narod* (Nizhegorodskaia PSR/Soviet of peasants' deputies list), *Za zemliu i voliu* (Kazan PSR-Soviet of Peasants' deputies list), *Golos truda* (Kazan Elders' PSR list), *Delo derevnia* (Tambov PSR/Soviet of peasants' deputies list), *Chernozem*, *Sotsialist revoliutsioner* (Penza PSR/Soviet of peasants' deputies list), *Zemlia i volia* (Simbirsk PSR/Soviet of peasants' deputies list), *Simbirsk narodnaia gazeta* (Simbirsk PSR Elders-defencists)

¹³ O. Radkey, *The Sickle Under the Hammer: The Russian Socialist Revolutionaries in the Early Months of Soviet Rule* (New York, 1963), p. 290.

the 'home' category, thus expanding its scope further. 'Middle' education included the diverse categories of technical schools, teacher training colleges, priests' seminaries, and the classical gymnasia.

The first main difficulty in the categorisation of occupation lies in identifying potential equivalencies of occupational title.¹⁴ This is a thorny issue- dividing such a diversity of occupations into a handful of categories inevitably leads to questionable value judgements. The most obviously problematic categories are of skilled and unskilled worker. Where the only information offered is 'worker', this is classified as 'unskilled worker'. This no doubt inflates the 'unskilled worker' category, but because it is used consistently, it allows comparison of the figures across different sample groups. 'Artisan' workers have been included in the skilled worker category, since in truth an artisan is no more than a skilled worker; a joiner or a blacksmith or a shoemaker could work alone or in a larger enterprise, just as those more traditionally associated with the category 'skilled worker', like a metal turner or fitter, could do.¹⁵ The heterogeneity in large factories, and their use of smaller 'workshop' units within the larger enterprise further blurs the need to separate 'skilled worker' and artisan.¹⁶

The second main problem for classification of occupation lay in separating the assessment of occupational structure and occupational mobility. The problems of this issue are twofold. Firstly, many individuals had split occupations; migrant workers, for example, were peasants for much of the year, but in quieter periods went to work in local towns. Artisan peasants, too, supplemented their peasant income by plying an additional trade, as a carpenter, blacksmith, tailor or suchlike. The only way of categorising these individuals accurately would be to create an extra category for them, or to make a detailed study of their socio-economic position. Such a study is beyond the scope of this work. Instead, those describing themselves as peasants with an additional occupation have been categorised as peasants. After all, dependent upon geographical

¹⁴ M. Katz, 'Occupational Classification in History', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3, 1972-3, p. 64, on the universality of these problems.

¹⁵ V. Bonnell, *Roots of Rebellion: Workers' Politics and Organisations in St. Petersburg and Moscow 1900-1914* (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 21-43, discusses the difficulties of defining the working class, and points out the weakness of allowing factory workers to dominate the picture of the working class, which was numerically predominated by artisan trades.

¹⁶ See Appendix 4 for a listing of classification of occupations.

location, many peasants participated in a range of trade and craft activities to supplement their incomes.¹⁷

The designation of 'peasant', particularly with regard to Constituent Assembly candidates where little biographical information was offered, can be one which is problematic, since it is not clear whether the peasant designation referred to the estate (*soslovie*) of the individual, or their occupation. In rural constituencies, those drawing up such lists were clearly keen to identify their candidates as *trudiashchiisia*, and may have stretched the term to include those who were no longer making a living as peasants. In the case of the State Duma deputies, occupations as well as *soslovie* were specifically stated, so there is no such ambiguity.¹⁸ Within the *Politkatorzhan* group, 18 individuals (2% of the total sample) described themselves as *batraki*, that is, those who laboured on the land for payment, but often had no land of their own. The *batraki* formed the lowest economic strata of the peasantry. As it has not been possible to break down the peasantry in other respects, it would have been anomalous to give the *batraki* a separate category, so they have been categorised as peasants.

The second prong of this issue of selecting an occupational category was the transience of individuals' occupational activities. The realities of individual lives meant that such categories were very difficult to apply. This was particularly the case of many PSR members, whose lives often involved repeated enforced relocation, or changes in lifestyle based on new life priorities. This particularly lively biography of D.P. Petrov, a Simbirsk Constituent Assembly candidate, provides an excellent illustration of the problem:

¹⁷ J. Bradley, *Muzhik and Muscovite: Urbanization in Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, 1985); J. Burds, *Peasant Dreams and Market Politics: Labour Migration and the Russian Village, 1861-1905* (Pittsburgh 1998); B.A. Engel, *Between the Fields and the City: Women, Work and Family in Russia, 1861-1914* (Cambridge, 1994); P. Gatrell, *The Tsarist Economy 1850-1917* (London, 1986); P. Gregory, *Before Command: An Economic History of Russia from Emancipation to the First Five-Year Plan* (Princeton 1994); R.E. Johnson, *Peasant and Proletariat, the Working Class of Moscow in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Leicester, 1979); E. Melton, 'Proto-Industrialization, Serf Agriculture and Agrarian Social Structure: Two Estates in Nineteenth Century Russia', *Past and Present* 115, 1987, pp.69-106; J. Pallot, 'Agrarian Modernization on Peasant Family Farms in the Era of Capitalism', in J.H. Bate and R.A. French, *Studies in Russian Historical Geography* (London, 1983) vol.1, pp.413-49; J. Pallot, 'Women's Domestic Industries in Moscow Province, 1880-1900', in B. Clements et al. (ed.), *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation* (Berkeley, 1991), pp.163-84; J. Pallot, *Land Reform in Russia 1906-1917. Peasant Responses to Stolypin's Project of Rural Transformation* (Oxford 1999), ch.8; J. Pallot and D.J.B. Shaw, *Landscape and Settlement in Romanov Russia, 1613-1917* (Oxford, 1990), ch.9.

¹⁸ F. Rodkey (ed.) *Gosudarstvennaia дума, St. Petersburg, 1906-1917* (Published on microfiche as part of the series *Russian Historical Sources*) This includes a list of members of the State Duma, by elected region, giving *soslovie* and occupation of each member.

D.P. Petrov, a peasant from Biurgan village, Buinskii *uezd*, 32 years old. Born in a poor, land-deprived family. Lived and grew up in the country. Between the ages of 10 and 22, he worked on the land. Afterwards he trained, and became a village teacher. In 1905 he organised a teachers' union in Buinskii *uezd*, establishing the famous section of the All-Russian Union of teachers and participants in popular education. Simultaneously, among the peasants he organised cells of the All-Russian peasants' union. On leaving school, he travelled around villages, and explained the meaning of the events of that time to the *skhods*. When agrarian unrest began in the *uezd*, the *pomeshchiks* lay all blame on him and several of his colleagues. Persecution began. In fifteen months he was forced to relocate three times. At last on 15th December 1906 he was forced to leave teaching and go into hiding. Members of the administration and local *pomeshchiks* were especially strongly up in arms against him, and he gave them no peace, with exposures of their local 'activities' in the pages of '*Simbirskii vesti*'. Meanwhile he began work in Chuvashskoi PSR organisation, as a member of the Kazan Oblast committee. A police inquiry was aroused against him. For six and a half years he was under unremitting police observation. After the destruction of the party organisation, he moved into newspaper work, collaborating in local and metropolitan newspapers. He spent the years 1908-9 in Kazan, where he played a significant part in the exposure of the commissariat's embezzling of public funds. In 1910 he was arrested in Kazan and sent home. At the beginning of the war, he went to Moscow, where he took a course at Shaniavskii popular university, where he took the school leaving certificate, then became a student in the former imperial university, but he did not succeed in finishing; he was called up for military service, and became an ensign. At the start of the revolution, he took a lively part in the organisation of Simbirsk *guberniia* peasantry. He was secretary for the first *guberniia* peasants' meeting on 20-21st March, and president of the second and third meetings, on 15-20 July, and the 25-27 September. He took part in several *uezd* meetings, and in the production of several leaflets and editorials of '*Izvestiia* of the *guberniia* Soviet of peasants' deputies.' He is President of the *guberniia* Soviet of peasants' deputies, a member of the *guberniia* land committee, and of other public-political organisations.¹⁹

How is one to categorise such a life neatly? Even though Petrov was only thirty-two years old, he had been through at least five recognisable career moves, and could also, by dint of his party work, lay claims to being a professional revolutionary. The category of military is noticeably underused in classification. A significant proportion of the *Politkatorzhan* sample had been drafted to the tsarist army prior to their trials, so could legitimately have been categorised as 'military'. Such drafted soldiers have been regarded as being in a transient profession, and their stated occupation has been used instead, even though they may not have been engaged in it for some time. The only groups containing any 'military' are the two from 1917, Nizhegorodskaia Town Duma, and the Constituent Assembly candidates. The soldiers in these groups have been categorised as such, even though they too were all drafted soldiers, because they categorised themselves as soldiers and offered no alternative occupational category. For the year of 1917 it was prestigious to be a soldier, as the Petrograd garrison was

¹⁹ *Zemlia i volia*, no. 1, 6th October

perceived to have liberated the nation from tsarism, and soldiers in the rear all over Russia regarded themselves as revolution's guardians.²⁰

The category 'professional revolutionary' is a term which is used by contemporary literature and Russian biographical sources. This definition based on Leninist theory clarifies the concept:

At higher levels of the organisation, where agents had to be spirited from one safe house to another over extensive regions of the country, it was evidently impossible to be in normal settled employment. Such people would have to be professionals in the dual sense that they were reliant on the party for their livelihoods, as well as being thoroughly trained and proficient in the whole range of skills and techniques of operating in the underground. These men would, in Russian conditions, have to be skilled, full time professionals.²¹

How readily this term was applied by contemporaries, and to what extent such 'professionals' were indeed supported by their party organisation is hard to establish. Of the 999 *Politkatorzhan* members surveyed, only one, E.A. Bibergal, was described as a professional revolutionary.²² Given that this sample is made up entirely of people with long prison and exile terms for their political activities, the scarcity of 'professional revolutionaries' in the sample is surprising. Bibergal's party activities did not set her apart specially from many of her comrades whose careers were similarly documented. Her father was a political exile, which no doubt contributed to her categorisation, but the other four individuals listed whose parents were political exiles were not categorised as professional revolutionaries.²³

Only Central Committee members were described predominantly as professional revolutionaries. This is hardly surprising- if the term did not apply to them, the 'leaders of the vanguard', to maintain Leninist terminology, whom could it apply to? Its application is more complex than this, however. The term 'professional revolutionary' applied most easily to those who had sufficient private means, or wealthy friends, to support themselves without taking on paid work. In short, it was a term that applied most easily to the 'intelligentsia of no direct occupation' whom Spiridovich referred to

²⁰ A. Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army: The Old Army and the Soldiers' Revolt (March-April 1917)* (Princeton, 1980), p. 159; 'The soldiers quickly developed a sense of their historic role and inherent power. The further course of events served to entrench this consciousness ever more firmly, as the various competitors for power entreated, flattered, cajoled and sought to overawe them in order to harness this new force for their own political designs.'

²¹ N. Harding, *Leninism* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 31-32. V. Lenin, *What is to be Done?* (Peking, 1973), esp. pp. 122-156 spells out Leninist theory on the need to lose the amateurish nature of party work, and to replace it with trained, paid professional revolutionaries.

²² *Politkatorzhan*, p. 65

²³ The other four, from *Politkatorzhan*, are V.S. Gorbachevskii (no direct occupation), p. 73, MG Kazantsev (employee), p. 259, Nikita E. Prokop'ev (worker), p. 517, V.A. Frontshtein (peasant), p. 677

as forming a key part of the PSR's intelligentsia support.²⁴ The Central Committee members, who operated from overseas for much of its pre-1917 existence, could not avoid the classification of 'professional revolutionary'. They procured party literature, publications and armaments for the cause, and party funds or private means supported them in exile. A worker, however ardent his devotion to the cause, and however lengthy and arduous his prison and exile terms, would still, generally speaking, be a worker, since whatever else he would continue paid employment in order to maintain himself. This is evident from *Politkatorzhan's* lack of professional revolutionaries. Bartagov for example, a worker from Iuzovska, began revolutionary work in 1904, joined the PSR in 1906, and worked illegally until he was arrested in 1908 and sentenced to six years *katorga*.²⁵ He spent ten years committed to party work, yet was still categorised as a worker. Kanatchikov's memoirs, which described his formative years, including imprisonment and two exiles, concluded with the line, 'I chose a new specialisation- I became a professional revolutionary.'²⁶ This indicates that the term professional revolutionary could not apply to an individual who was devoted to the cause, but only to an individual that was solely devoted to the cause. On this definition, the professional revolutionary category is one that is hard to assign with certainty.

Despite all these clearly recognised quirks and pitfalls, this material has provided a useful set of comparative figures. The most important criteria, and one which has been applied rigorously, is consistency, since as long as the classification is systematically carried out across categories, there is some basis for a comparative study. The results of these assessments may be seen charts 3.vi and 3.vii. These show the percentage of total sample of each group, which is the most effective visual means of allowing a comparison between the sample groups.

WOMEN PARTY WORKERS

Before going on to discuss members' socio-economic background more generally, some account must be made of women within the party. This study shows that women played important roles in the PSR prior to the revolution. They are conspicuous for their absence, however, in samples of 1917 party activists. Such absence is investigated here,

²⁴ A. E. Spiridovich, *Revoliutsionnoe dvizheniie v Rossi: Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov i eia predshestvenniki* (Petrograd, 1916), p. 98

²⁵ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 289. List of candidates to the Constituent Assembly, undated, no area given.

²⁶ S.I. Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia- The Autobiography of Semion Ivanovich Kanatchikov*, (tr. and ed. R.E. Zelnik) (Stanford 1986), p. 384.

and an explanation offered for the dearth of women party activists during 1917. The historiography of writing on women revolutionaries active between 1905 and 1921 exposes the predominance of studies on Bolshevik women.²⁷ This reflects the availability of ample source material on *Bolshevichki*, who were revered by the Communist party, and who wrote a substantial number of autobiographical accounts.²⁸ Studies on SR women are much less numerous, and most of the available memoir material comes from the few who penetrated the party's upper echelons.²⁹ Rank and file PSR women played an important part in the PSR prior to 1917, but were conspicuous for their absence from electoral lists and party press in 1917. This study will offer some explanation for this absence, and will assess the roles they took on within the party. This challenges the stereotype that emerges as a result of lack of information of PSR women as either terrorist-martyrs in the mould of Spiridonova, or 'tea makers'; that is, those providing administrative backup for the men who formed the real corps of party activists. The figures offered are based on 143 women PSR members which were included in *Politkatorzhan*. The unrepresentative nature of this source has already been commented upon. In dealing solely with women, however, it forms a more representative sample, since women revolutionaries tended to be better educated and with some experience of urban life as a result of their education and occupations.

The women involved in the PSR and its predecessor Populist movements came disproportionately from the upper classes. The *Politkatorzhan* sample represents the whole range of social backgrounds relatively evenly (see chart 3.i) but the intelligentsia occupations, nobility and mercantile classes are numerically over-represented, conforming to the general imbalance within the revolutionary movement towards upper and middle class women. Some explanation can be provided for this social imbalance of women party activists. There was a steady increase in educational opportunities for

²⁷ B. Clements Evans, *Bolshevik Women* (Cambridge 1997); A. Bobroff, 'The Bolsheviks and Working Women, 1905-20' *Slavic Studies* 26(4) 1974, pp. 540-567; B.B. Farnsworth, 'Bolshevism, the Women Question and Alexandra Kollontai' *American Historical Review* 81, 1976, pp. 292-316; B. Fieseler, 'The Making of Russian Female Social Democrats, 1890-1917' *International Review of Social History* 34, 1989, pp. 193-226; C.E. Hayden, 'The Zhenotdel and the Bolshevik Party', *Russian History* 3(2) 1976, pp. 150-173.

²⁸ See Clements Evans, *Bolshevik Women*, pp. 15-20

²⁹ V. Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (DeKalb, 1991), Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs*. V. Vakhovskaia, the wife of Central Committee member A.O. Bonch-Osmolovskii, wrote *Zhizn' revoliutsionerki* (Moscow, 1928). Isaac Steinberg, a left SR, wrote a fascinating and personal biography of Maria Spiridonova, which includes a substantial amount of material from Spiridonova herself- *Spiridonova; Revolutionary Terrorist* (New York, 1971). Spiridonova herself wrote a memoir of her time in Nerchinskoi *katorga*, published in three parts in the journal *Katorga i ssylka- 'Iz zhizni na Nerchinskoi katorge'* *Katorga i ssylka* 1(14) 1925, pp. 185-204; 2(15) 1925, pp. 165-182; 3(16) 1925, pp. 115-133.

women from moneyed classes, though this was restricted mainly to noble women.³⁰ Education in itself offered an escape route from the conventions of Russian patriarchal life,³¹ and higher education in particular exposed young women to radical student politics and socialist ideas.³² There was no corresponding increase in suitable occupations for such educated young women, however.³³ The restrictive nature of Russia's essentially patriarchal society was a further inflammatory factor for women from the moneyed classes, since despite their education, they were expected to relinquish professional ambition, and accept the traditional role of wife and mother.

A number of noble women refer in their memoirs to increasing awareness of social injustice, at a range of levels. Breshkovskaia suggested that children of the land owning nobility were drawn to the revolutionary movement by their close associations with peasant life, both by its geographical proximity to their dwellings, and by the peasant servants that brought them up, though other women revolutionaries, like Vera Figner, did not make such connections.³⁴ Furthermore, their parents, though not often radical, had often absorbed the ideals of the enlightenment, and of the French revolution.³⁵ There was of course no single model to illustrate what drew women into the revolutionary movement.³⁶ The family predominates, however, as the area in which young women learnt to be critical of their environment. For those associated with Populism, and later the PSR, awareness of social injustice was most often associated with the condition of the peasantry.

Working class and peasant women, on the other hand, had their access to the revolutionary movement restricted by a number of factors, primarily lack of education

³⁰ R.A. Dudgeon, 'The Forgotten Minority: Women Students in Imperial Russia, 1872-1917', *Russian History* 9(1) 1982, pp. 1-26; By 1916, there were some 44,000 women students, and they made up a third of the total student body.(p. 8) High tuition fees and lack of state subsidies largely excluded poorer women from higher education.(pp. 4-5)

³¹ Clements Evans, *Bolshevik Women* pp. 41-43; on the importance of education in transforming women's lives, and of offering them an escape route from the future planned for them by their parents. Teaching was regarded by some as the only alternative to marriage (C. Ruane, *Gender, Class and the Professionalisation of Russian City Teachers 1860-1914*. [Pittsburgh, 1994], p. 72)

³² See B. Alpern Engel, *Mothers and Daughters; Women of the Intelligentsia in Nineteenth Century Russia* (Cambridge, 1983) pp. 105-107, pp. 156-172

³³ Dudgeon, 'The Forgotten Minority', pp. 10-15; looks at the difficulties and restrictions for educated women trying to pursue careers. Teaching was the only fully accepted women's vocation.

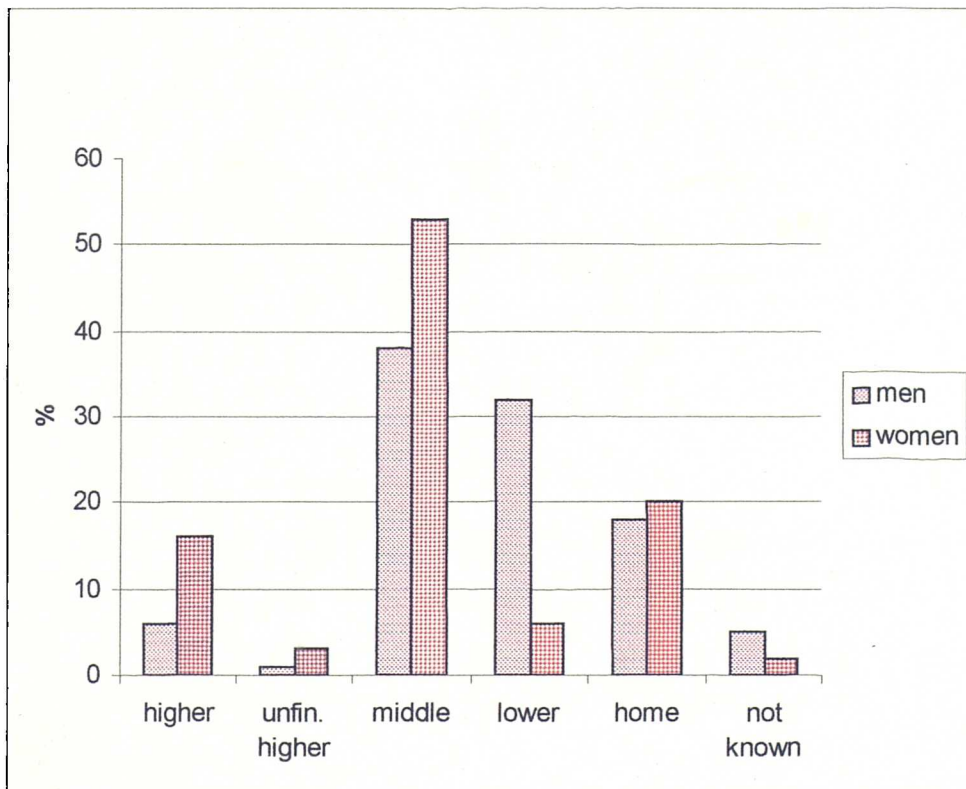
³⁴ Figner, *Memoirs*, pp. 18-21. Sofia Perovskaia, Figner's fellow prisoner in Shchluselburg, also a terrorist-populist, associated her affinity with socialism to revulsion towards her father's attitudes towards peasants, and indeed to his relations with the rest of her family. (Figner, *Memoirs*, pp. 104-5)

³⁵ Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs* pp. 322-5

³⁶ For a collection of accounts on what drew women into revolutionary and feminist movements, and 'awakened' their social conscience, see J. McDermid, A. Hillyar, *Women and Work in Russia 1880-1930* (Essex, 1998), pp. 97-116.

and lack of leisure time. In 1897, only 47% of women living in towns and cities were literate. This percentage dropped to 17% of women for the whole of Russia.³⁷ Though some working class women did enter the ranks of PSR activists, they were in a minority. The figures below in graph 3.ii showing the education levels of female PSR activists demonstrates their exceptional level of education. 15% of them had some experience of higher education, compared to only 5% of the men, and 52% of them had attained middle education, compared to 39% of men in the sample. The most striking comparison in education levels is that while 31% of the men had received lower education, only 5% of the women were educated only at a basic level. This demonstrates clearly that the women PSR activists not only held an unusually high level of literacy, but that they had much higher levels of education than their male comrades. This is a reflection of their social background, and of the obstacles for women in becoming involved in revolutionary activism.

CHART 3.II GENDER COMPARATIVE OF *POLITKATORZHAN* EDUCATION LEVELS

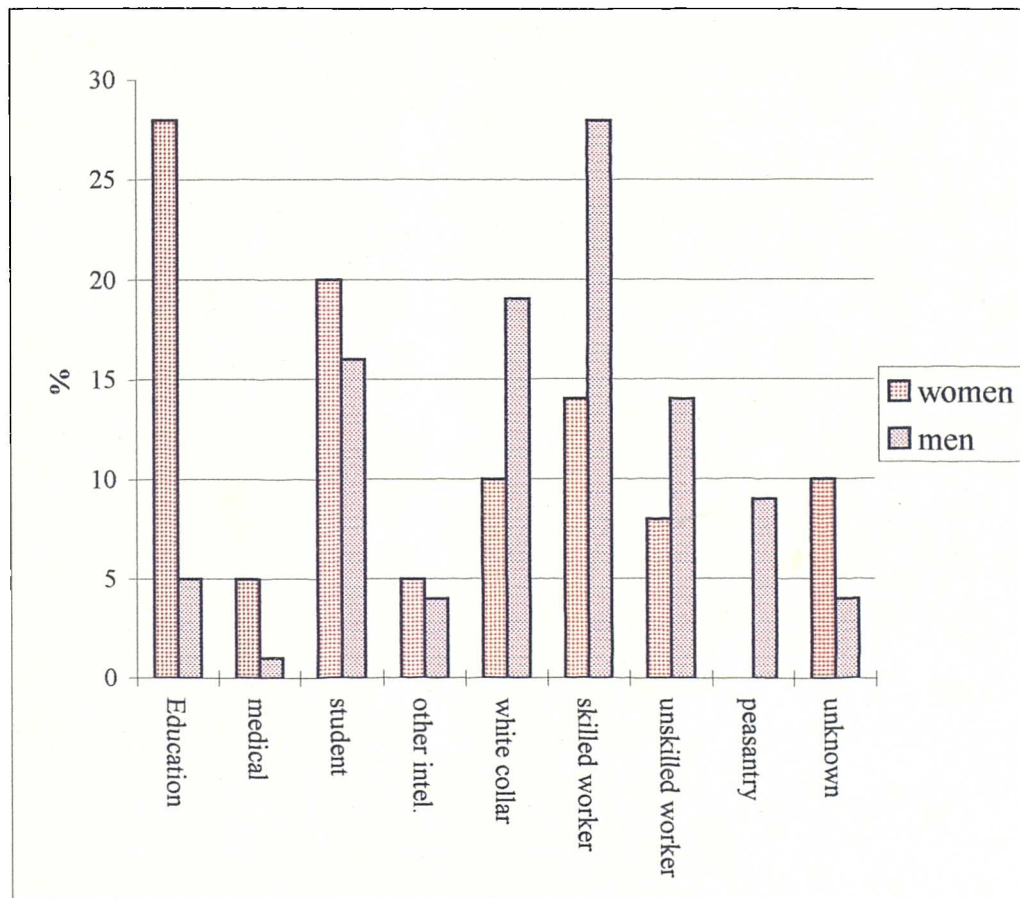


Comparison of men's and women's occupations as shown in chart 3.iii brings further clarity to the differences between men and women in the sample. Almost a third of the women activists were involved in education, as compared to only 5% of the men. This figure tallies with the proportion of pre-Revolutionary Bolsheviks' education, where

³⁷ Clements Evans, *Bolshevik Women*, p. 40

25% of women, and 5% of men were involved in education.³⁸ This is unsurprising since teaching, along with medicine, was among the only professional fields open for educated women. The *Politkatorzhan* women did not all fit the stereotype of the Populist-inspired village teacher, however. 14% of them were skilled workers, and 13% unskilled workers. The importance of working class women, as well as the predominant category of women from highly educated backgrounds demonstrates their importance as grassroots activists for the PSR.

CHART 3.III GENDER COMPARATIVE OF *POLITKATORZHAN* OCCUPATIONS



CATEGORIES OF WOMEN'S PARTY WORK

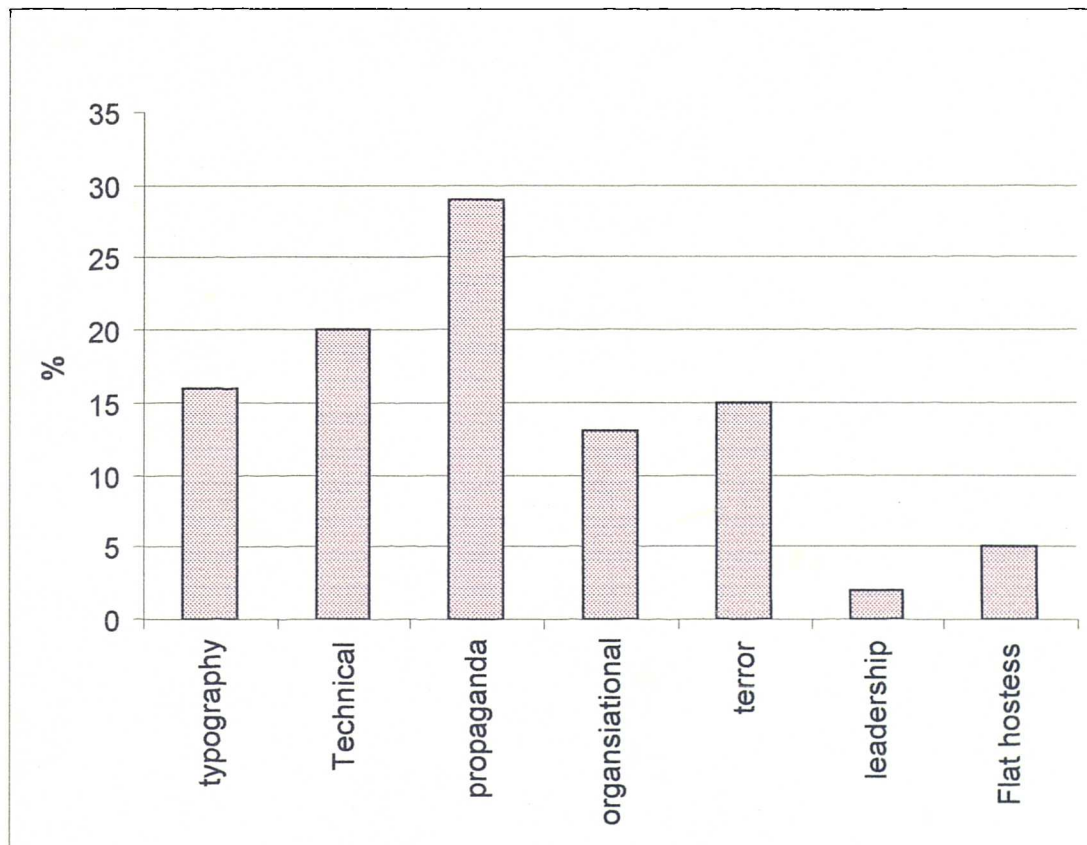
There have been a number of studies on the participation of women within the terrorist wing of Populism and the PSR.³⁹ Whilst such accounts are valuable, and demonstrate the significant role played by women in terrorist activity, there is a danger of skewing impressions of their part in PSR activities. To this end, a survey has been conducted of

³⁸ Clements Evans, *Bolshevik Women*, p. 45, table 7.

³⁹ On women's role as terrorists within Populism and the PSR, see B. Engel and C. Rosenthal (eds.) *Five Sisters: Women Against the Tsar* (New York, 1975); V. Broido, *Apostles Into Terrorists: Women and the Revolutionary Movement in the Russia of Alexander II* (New York, 1977); A. Knight, 'Female Terrorists in the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party', *Russian Review* 38(2) 1979, pp. 139-159.

the roles that women took within the party. Seven categories have been created; typography, technical,⁴⁰ propaganda, organisational, terror,⁴¹ flat hostess and leader.⁴² Although there is some obvious overlap between these categories, they are appropriate, since these were the terms used by the women themselves when describing their work. Chart 3.vi, below, clearly illustrates that women participated in the whole range of party activities, and with the exception of leadership, were not under-represented in any section.

CHART 3.IV CATEGORIES OF WOMENS' PARTY WORK.



The majority of women pursued work in more than one of these categories. 32% were involved in two of the categories, and 15% in three. Vera Figner, one of the old heroines of the movement and included in this survey, pursued work in all six of the categories, though she was the only individual to be categorised as such. This multiplicity of

⁴⁰ Technical (*tekhnika*) was the term used by contemporaries for a range of work, including arranging meeting places, hiding revolutionaries on the run, collecting and disbursing money, keeping communications open within the Russian party organisation and with overseas organisations, transporting, storing and distributing illegal literature.

⁴¹ Not only individuals who participated in actual assassinations, but also those who worked in laboratories making explosive materials and devices have been included in this category.

⁴² An individual was categorised as 'leader' only if her biographical information specifically stated that she had led a local group or organisation. This category may be under-represented, as not all women who led local organisations will have stated this specifically.

categories confirms the breadth of women's involvement in party work.⁴³ Sixteen percent of the sample were involved in typography work. This work was by no means a soft option. Operation of underground typographies was difficult and dangerous work. Zinovii Magergut, a founder member of the Sormovo PSR group, gave detailed recollections on the operations of their underground typography during 1916-17 which demonstrate the hardships and dangers associated with such work. Before the organisation acquired a typography they reproduced leaflets using 'limed pulp', which was invented by an engineer from the Sormovo factories. This limed pulp dried out, cracked and hardened very quickly, and it was only possible to take fifteen copies before replacing it.⁴⁴ This made the work slow and laborious. The purchase of a typography in November 1916 increased the number of copies which could be produced, but did not improve conditions of work for its operators:

In order to print 150 copies of a leaflet on the hectograph, we had to boil the pulp three times, and work two nights on end at the end of the working day. Conditions were worryingly bad in the flat that we rented, but we had to be content with anything, as long as we had the chance to continue our work. The second leaflet we produced, for example, was printed in an attic flat. In the day, the roof, which was made of concrete reinforced with iron, heated up, and the only window was tightly shut in order that people in the house opposite could not see any light. Even the door was shut, in order that we weren't caught unawares. It was in these conditions of terrible stuffiness, dripping with sweat and literally choked that we worked all night. . .⁴⁵

The Sormovo group did not have their own conspiratorial flat, so they had to lug the heavy typography and type-setting from one temporary location to the next, which was a massive risk when under close police observation. The typography itself consisted of '2-3 *puds* of type face, a bordered green plate with bolts, and green rollers, made in a Sormovo factory.'⁴⁶ Maria Kashmenskaia, one of the founders and most active members of the Sormovo group, played a lively role in the typography. In January 1917 police discovered the location of the typography and Kashmenskaia herself carried the type-setting through the streets to a new location. She was tailed by a police spy, and after many attempts to throw him off and avoid the considerable police presence, she was forced to throw the typesetting into a nearby garden, where it was later found by the police. As a result of this incident, Kashmenskaia along with her comrade Sokolov was forced to flee Sormovo at the end of January 1917.⁴⁷ Such accounts confirm that

⁴³ 54 of the women (37%) were involved in only one category of work, 47 (32%) in two, and 25 (17%) in three or more.

⁴⁴ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 86. Writings of Magergut, member of the Sormovo PSR group, recounting the group's activities between April 1916 and April 1917.

⁴⁵ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 109. Writings of Magergut.

⁴⁶ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 96. Writings of Magergut.

⁴⁷ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 100. Writings of Magergut.

typography work was no soft option, but among the more dangerous and unpleasant aspects of party work.

One way to avoid such risky manoeuvres of typographies was for the local party group to take on a conspiratorial flat. 'Flat hostess' was an occupation mentioned by twelve of the *Politkatorzhan* women, and was clearly an important post for any party group, though the duties involved varied from one group to the next. Some were used as social centres for the local revolutionary community, where those underground or in exile could meet with their comrades. Such was the form of the flat hosted by the SR Elena Ivanovna Averkievaia in Saratov, as described by the Bolshevik worker Semion Kanatchikov.⁴⁸ Kanatchikov claimed that such 'salons' resembled political clubs; the Social Democrats and SRs in Saratov each had their own salon, which did not intermix. These flats may have contributed to the image of revolutionary women as tea makers for the men;

On the table were big platters filled with large loaves of coarse bread, fat little rings of white bread, and butter. Seated at the table pouring tea was a stout, short-haired woman in a wide cotton-print blouse. . . .She poured a glass of tea, offered some bread, butter and sugar, and then continued either to darn children's socks or to read. She was. . . "Auntie Marseillaise" (Elizaveta Adrianovna Diakova)⁴⁹

Not all the conspiratorial flats offered such salubrious conditions however. Some were specifically used to hold an illegal typography, as a base for 'technical' work, bomb making or the storage of illegal literature or explosives. The potential duality of purpose of such flats meant that the women who hosted them became involved in a wide range of party work, which ranged far from Diakova's position of gracious hostess. One more extreme example was of Maria Benevskaia, who, while assisting in the unloading of a bomb, had part of both hands blown off. 'With complete presence of mind she sent her comrades away, cleaned up all traces of the bomb, and went alone to the hospital, where she claimed she had had an accident in the kitchen.'⁵⁰ The duties of a hostess could be far ranging indeed.

The most popular category of work was propaganda. This was unsurprising given the predominance of teachers within the sample, and the links of the party with the 'Going to the people' movement of the 1870's. Propaganda work has been broken down in chart 3.v, below, into five categories, in order to obtain a clearer picture of what such work involved for the women who conducted it. As with party work, of course, some

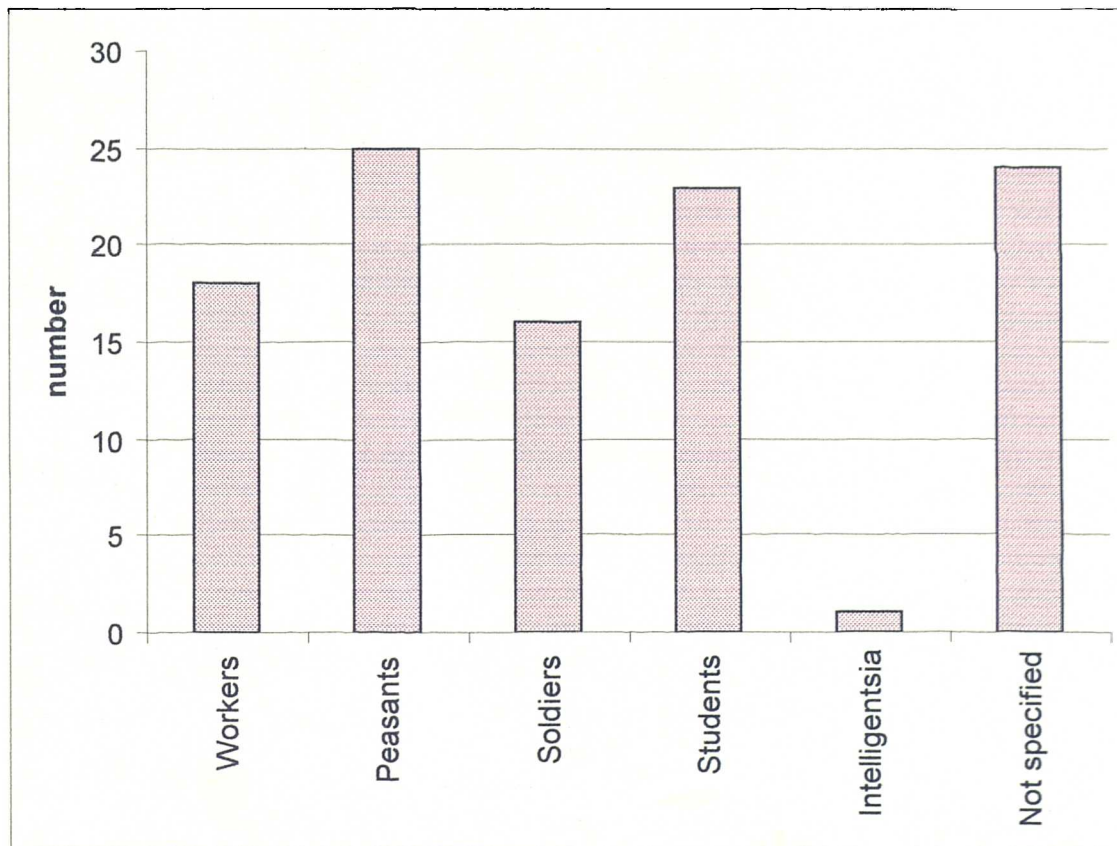
⁴⁸ Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker*, pp. 191-2

⁴⁹ Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker*, pp. 189-90

⁵⁰ Knight, 'Female Terrorists', p. 148

categories overlapped; a number of women conducted propaganda work among more than one social group.

CHART 3.V PROPAGANDA WORK CONDUCTED BY WOMEN



These figures clearly show that women propagandists worked across a range of propagandising environments. The greatest proportion was connected with propaganda work among the peasantry. This is to be expected given the PSR's links with the Populist movement, which had focused on work in the countryside, and the predominance of teachers within the survey, who were well placed to conduct work among the peasantry. It is difficult to envisage how these largely well educated, urban women were received in the villages. Consideration of voting behaviour and local leadership has demonstrated the villages' enthusiasm for 'insiders', and their resistance to outsiders. Breshkovskaia's descriptions of her work among the Ukrainian peasantry in 1874 showed her willingness to adopt the dress and lifestyle of the villagers in order to penetrate the villages unnoticed and become accepted as part of village life.⁵¹ Vera Figner's medical training enabled her to take on a valued role within the village community but did not win her any success as a propagandist; on the contrary, her experience showed her absolute lack of preparation for or understanding of village

⁵¹ Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs*, pp. 31-52.

life.⁵² The experience of such hardened campaigners no doubt assisted the young recruits to revolution in their attempts to assimilate into the villages in order to propagandise effectively. Some were clearly successful in their work. Maria Perveeva, a peasant's daughter from Voronezh who worked as a propagandist and teacher among the peasants from 1904, was clearly popular among the villagers; when she was arrested in 1904 local peasants freed her from prison.⁵³

The number of women who were involved in propaganda among the soldiers provokes comment. The practical difficulties of such work must have been enormous- as well as the obvious problem of infiltrating an all-male environment without police detection, the women faced mistrust and even abuse from some of the soldiers.⁵⁴ The party's decision to prohibit women from work among the military indicates the level of difficulties involved, and possibly its ineffectiveness.⁵⁵ One particularly interesting individual involved in soldiers' propaganda was Anna Pigit. She was a merchant's daughter born in 1884, and had been a very active party member since 1902, when she was just eighteen years old. She was arrested and exiled in 1903 for her participation in the organisation of May Day demonstrations, but escaped abroad, where the party's Central Committee commandeered her to return to Russia in order to establish a Ekaterinoslav PSR group. She began work among the military in 1905, and after the party decreed that women were to be prohibited from work among the soldiers, she established a military propagandists' group within the party, and worked in it, in

⁵² Figner, *Memoirs*. Figner went 'to the people' twice as a young woman. Her first sojourn in the villages was alarming for her; 'I felt lonely, weak, helpless in this peasant sea. Moreover, I had no idea how to approach a common person. . . I had hardly a chance to look into their souls; my mouth could not open for propaganda.' (pp. 49-51). Figner's second attempt in the villages was less alarming for her, as she was accompanied by her sister. She reported that they were accepted and revered within the village community, but that their reputation was attacked by the priest, the landowner and the policeman. These are stereotypical figures of the old regime in the villages; it may be that Figner was embroidering her experience to accord with the clichés repeated about pre-revolutionary village life. (pp. 54-62)

⁵³ *Politkatorzhan*, p. 484

⁵⁴ A graphic and entirely believable view of women's treatment within the garrisons is presented by Maria Botchkareva, the commander of the 'Women's battalion of death', who had joined the army in 1914. Her autobiography recounts endless sexual molestation and abuse from soldiers she encountered: M. Botchkareva, *Yashka: My Life as Peasant, Officer and Exile* (as laid down by Don Levine) (New York, 1919); p. 78 recounts her troubled first night in the garrison. A relatively mild account of the sort of sexual harassment women working among soldiers might be presented in Marina Yurlova's account of an officer's molestation of her. (Yurlova was a young Cossack woman who fought with a Cossack regiment): M. Yurlova, *Cossack Girl* (London, 1934), pp. 126-7.

⁵⁵ This information is from *Politkatorzhan*, p. 495. I speculate that the motivations of party leaders in decreeing against women doing work among the military were that such work was ineffective, rather than concerns about women's safety- such concerns were not taken into account, after all, for women who participated in terrorism.



contravention of party regulations. She continued to work among soldiers and sailors, latterly at Kronstadt, until forced to flee abroad once more in 1907.⁵⁶

Propaganda among workers was also a field of work fraught with difficulties. A woman trying to propagandise among male workers might well face prejudice and hostility;

'The Social Democrats believed then that working class men would never submit to instruction from a woman and moreover would likely assume that any woman who approached them was a prostitute.'⁵⁷

Though such negative attitudes towards women propagandists surely existed in some quarters, this did not mean that they were universal. Sofia Korneeva-Brodskaia, the daughter of a Kharkov worker, carried out propaganda among rail workers and students between 1901-1904, and in 1904-5 worked as a PSR propagandist in Moscow, Petrograd and Ekaterinburg. She was elected as a member of the Petrograd Soviet of workers' deputies in 1905, for which she was arrested and imprisoned. After her release in 1906, she continued propaganda work, this time among soldiers and sailors.⁵⁸

Korneeva-Brodskaia was clearly successful and popular in her work as propagandist among men. Leontina Sabinskaia-Nazarova, a teacher from Samara, also worked among rail workers, and was accepted by these men- she was a member of their strike committee in 1905.⁵⁹

Work among women workers, meanwhile, also had its problems. Many women workers had little or no education, and were involved in low or unskilled work which involved long hours for low pay and minimal job security. They tended to be more conservative than their male counterparts, and less willing to strike. The primary determinants of political culture and activism, however, were levels of skill, and not sex; women working in skilled jobs were as likely to strike as their skilled male counterparts, and unskilled workers, regardless of sex, were least likely to strike.⁶⁰ Though a number of political activists at the turn of the twentieth century complained about the difficulties of work among women workers,⁶¹ the SR activists clearly enjoyed some level of success.

⁵⁶ *Politkatorzhan*, p. 495

⁵⁷ Clements Evans, *Bolshevik Women*, p. 100

⁵⁸ *Politkatorzhan*, p. 305

⁵⁹ *Politkatorzhan*, p. 559

⁶⁰ D. Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old regime, from the February Revolution to the July Days*. (London, 1983), pp. 16-27

⁶¹ Beta Kaminskaia, for example, a young SR student in Moscow attempted propaganda work among women workers in a rag sewing and cloth factory in 1874, but 'found the women workers uninterested in talk of revolution.' Other revolutionaries had the same negative experience among women workers, "She found them deaf to propaganda, which bounced off them like peas off a wall." Alpern Engel, *Mothers and Daughters*, pp. 148-9.

Though most of the women who stated that they had worked as propagandists among workers were students or teachers,⁶² others had the advantage of being workers themselves, which gave them greater access and a more willing ear to workers than propagandists coming in from outside. Maria Klement'eva-Ukhina, for example, a dressmaker born in Tiflis, initiated the organisation of a union of sewing-machinists in Vladikavkaz in 1905, and participated in the organisation of strikes until her arrest in 1907.⁶³ Mal'vina Patlazhan-Kamionskaia demonstrated similar abilities in organising skilled women workers from within. While doing a four year stretch in *katorga* for her technical and terrorist work within the PSR, Kamionskaia was sentenced to an additional six months for her role in instigating strikes in the sewing machine factory.⁶⁴

Only one woman specifically mentions propaganda work among the intelligentsia. This was Nadezhda Terent'eva, a teacher, who commented that she worked as a propagandist among teachers, peasants and workers.⁶⁵ Work among the intelligentsia usually went on within occupational groups, and without the formality required of 'campaigns' among the workers, soldiers and peasants. Spiridovich's description of such work by the PSR makes this clear:

Propaganda amongst the intelligentsia was carried out independently by individuals, rather than systematically. Work went on in the community by profession, through people the propagandists met at work, and were already familiar with, which gave socialist revolutionaries the opportunity to identify other people of a suitable persuasion, who had like ideas and would join with them. To people who showed such interest, literature was offered, and the current propaganda was spread.⁶⁶

Most intelligentsia party activists probably participated in this sort of propaganda, but did not name such work specifically. Propaganda among student circles, mentioned in 23% of cases, was perhaps more systematic in nature than that which went on among the intelligentsia, but was often carried out among the women's own circles of acquaintance when they were students themselves.

This summary of women's activities within the PSR organisation demonstrates the breadth and importance of the roles they fulfilled within the party. Though a significant minority were involved in terrorism, many more participated in the day to day running of local groups, propagandising and organising party activity. Maria Kashmenskaia's

⁶² Thirteen of the seventeen women who pursued propaganda among workers described themselves as students or teachers. The veracity of the category 'student', has however already been commented upon.

⁶³ *Politkatorzhan*, p. 282

⁶⁴ *Politkatorzhan*, p. 478

⁶⁵ *Politkatorzhan*, p. 632

⁶⁶ Spiridovich, *Revoliutsionnoe dvizheniie*, p. 98.

activities within the Sormovo PSR group demonstrate the pivotal role that women took on within local PSR groups in the underground. Kashmenskaia, who was only twenty-three years old in 1917, and employed as a clerk,⁶⁷ was an initiator and founder member of the group, and the only woman on its Central Committee. She initiated the creation of a workers' circle in Nizhnii Novgorod town, and was entrusted by the group to arrange the purchase of a typography. Kashmenskaia did not fit the stereotype of a revolutionary woman predisposed towards terrorist activity as a result of her emotional inadequacies, as posited by Knight.⁶⁸ She did not involve herself in the group's terrorist undertakings, and established her rational and non-violent stance in her opposition to expropriation activity proposed by the group in September 1916. Her opinions and judgements were clearly valued by her male comrades, and she was able to speak out on a range of issues. At a mass meeting in September 1916, she gave a report on the attitude of German Social Democrats toward the war, which was 'interesting and rich in content'.⁶⁹ Along with Dmitrii Tiurikov, the Sormovo group's most experienced member, in December 1916 she was sent to Voronezh to establish links with other PSR *Povolzhe* organisations, and to discuss the formation of a party conference. This was a delicate and dangerous commission, and the hopes of the Sormovo group rested on her.⁷⁰ Forced to leave Sormovo in January 1917 over the typography affair, Kashmenskaia finally returned to Sormovo in April 1917.

Kashmenskaia's record in the Sormovo PSR group is testament to the active and full role women played in party organisations prior to 1917. One would have expected her, and her female compatriots around the country, to take a full and active role in political life during 1917. Based on women's participation in the various elected bodies of 1917, and the absence of female names in the contributors to local party press, this was not the case. Despite the fact that women made up around 47% of the total factory workforce, men dominated the factory committees and Soviets that sprang up in 1917. Of the ninety-two candidates to the Constituent Assembly from the *guberniias* of Nizhegorodskaia, Tambov, Penza, Kazan and Simbirsk, only three were women. Ekaterina Breshkovskaia, not so much a woman as a national icon, stood as candidate

⁶⁷ Biographical information from her entry in GANO, f. 27, op. 638a, d. 94, l. 11; list of candidates to Nizhegorodskaia Town Duma.

⁶⁸ Knight says 'their intense emotional faith in the cause and their will to heroic martyrdom prevented them from analysing their terrorist activities in terms of rational objective politics.' (Knight, 'Women Terrorists', p. 157)

⁶⁹ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 93. Writings of Magergut.

⁷⁰ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 97. Writings of Magergut.

for the Simbirsk PSR Elder-defencists' list. Victor Chernov's wife A.N. Chernova Sletova stood alongside her husband on the Tambov list. The only unknown woman among these three was Vera F. Vasileva, a worker from the Alafuzovskii factory in Kazan, and a member of the factory committee there. Candidates to the Nizhnii Novgorod Town Duma included four women out of fifty-one candidates, three of whom were teachers, and the last a clerk. All these were placed very low down the electoral list, at numbers thirty-five, thirty-nine, forty-eight and forty-nine, so that despite the fact the 40 PSR delegates were elected to the Duma, only two women took a seat.

This is a pitiful proportion given the prominence of women in the movement prior to the revolution. Where did the PSR women activists go in 1917? One possible explanation for their low profile was the shunning of the intelligentsia that went on in the villages during 1917.⁷¹ As many of the women activists were highly educated and from higher social backgrounds, they were most likely to leave, and to be ejected, from village politics. This does not however explain the lack of women activists in the towns. Bolshevik women took on the technical and propaganda roles they had fulfilled prior to the revolution, as well as engaging in public speaking.⁷² Technical and propaganda work, though important to party activity, certainly did not have a high profile in the press, which would account for the PSR activists' apparent absence in political life. In a sample of 182 Bolshevik women in 1917, nearly 40% were involved in party work, 30% were members of Soviets, and less than 10% worked as Duma delegates.⁷³ These figures are however not an accurate reflection of national patterns of female participation in political life, since they are heavily weighted to Moscow and Petrograd, where most of the Bolsheviks were based, and where women were most likely to be elected to political organisations. These figures are undoubtedly much higher than national averages for women's participation in Soviets and Dumas.

Clements-Evans commented of the Bolshevik party that 'The party proved more hospitable to women than other political institutions of the new Russian democracy'.⁷⁴ This was no doubt true of the PSR party organisation as well. Prior to the February revolution, women had operated within the party cocoon, which was inhabited largely speaking by well educated, egalitarian, individuals who treated men and women as equals. This sheltered environment allowed women to take up the prominent positions

⁷¹ See chapter 5, 'The Missing Intelligentsia', pp. 186-190.

⁷² Clements Evans, *Bolshevik Women* pp. 125-30

⁷³ Clements Evans, *Bolshevik Women* p. 136, table 15.

⁷⁴ Clements Evans, *Bolshevik Women* p. 135

within party organisations that their varied talents deserved. With the February revolution, however, the nature of the party was altered significantly as it was subjected to mass democratic will. The realities of Russian political life in 1917 showed that the electorate largely speaking wanted to vote for local working men, and not women, to be their political representatives in 1917. Men predominated political decision making in village life, and though women were enfranchised in this period, many lacked the education or the political understanding to use their vote independently.⁷⁵ In the factories too, although some women workers did mobilise and take on new levels of political awareness, there is no doubt that men dominated the political scene.⁷⁶

How did the likes of Maria Kashmenskaia respond to the new climate of the PSR? Clearly retaining some degree of her high profile within the Nizhegorodskaja PSR group, she was put forward as a candidate for Nizhnii Novgorod Town Duma, although she was placed right down the list, at no. 48. For reasons that are not clear, however, she withdrew her candidacy. The only other trace of her existence to be found in the local press was a letter she wrote to the PSR newspaper *Narod*, which was published in December 1917. It is reproduced below, to do full justice to Kashmenskaia's principled and articulate tone:

In view of the written inquiry from comrade Valinchevskii,⁷⁷ I wish to place on the pages of *Narod* my explanation of the following incident. In private conversation in a break of the Town Duma meeting, occurring in the theatre on 28th November, I asked comrade Valinchevskii why he was a member of the Duma, but sat apart from them, in the balcony. He responded that the tactics of the faction shamed him- I abruptly replied that I consider such a position dishonourable, since if he considers their tactics unworthy, he must openly declare it and leave the faction, but not disgrace it behind its back. Such attacks in private I consider unworthy of a true SR, therefore on the rights of an old party comrade I take on myself the courage to loudly repeat this accusation.⁷⁸

Based on this letter, it is clear that Kashmenskaia continued to be active in the party, and to take a passionate interest in the politics of the moment, as one would have expected her to, based on what is known of her underground activities. Kashmenskaia's conspicuous absence, however, from reports of party activity in the local press, and indeed in the lists of contributors to the local paper, suggests that she did not take on the profile her political experience and ability merited. This is in contrast to the other main protagonists of the Sormovo PSR group of which she was a part, many of whom were

⁷⁵ See O. Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War; The Volga Countryside in Revolution* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 37-8.

⁷⁶ D. Koenker, *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution* (Princeton, 1981), p. 207

⁷⁷ Valinchevskii was a PSR deputy in Nizhnii Novgorod Town Duma. For details of the operation of the Duma in this period, see chapter 4, 'Governing the towns'.

⁷⁸ *Narod*, no. 114, 1st December 1917. letter signed by Kashmenskaia and dated 29th November 1917.

regularly mentioned in party press in various party and public capacities. The PSR women activists can be regarded as among the party's foot soldiers in 1917. Despite their abilities and experience in the political and organisational spheres, they were relegated to backroom positions by the needs of mass democratic politics. This was to deprive the party's organisation of some of its most experienced workers, and no doubt contributed to the further deterioration of party organisation in 1917.

MEMBERS' SOCIAL BACKGROUND, EDUCATION AND OCCUPATION

In chart 3.vi showing education levels of PSR members, the most obvious feature is the elevated level of higher education in the Central Committee group; 73% were involved in higher education, of which 54% completed their courses. Only 34% of the State Duma deputies and 9% of the *Politkatorzhan* group had any experience of higher education. This reflects the wealthier background of Central Committee members, and highlights the stark social gap between them and the mass of party activists and supporters. The majority of the *Politkatorzhan* group had been educated at middle or lower levels, which ensured that they were adequately literate, and many had education in their chosen trade.

Chart 3.vii showing occupations of members is more revealing. Two interesting patterns of occupation emerge; there are clear corollaries between the State Duma deputies and the Constituent Assembly candidates, and the *Politkatorzhan* and Nizhegorodskaia Town Duma candidates. The State Duma and Constituent Assembly candidates are predominated by peasants (47% and 45%, respectively), and unskilled workers (10% and 9%, respectively). Chart 3.vii also shows that they included similar proportions of white collar, education and other intelligentsia occupations. This indicates that these two groups were selected using the same criteria, and demonstrates the predominance of *trudiashchiisia* among them. Skilled workers, white collar workers and the intelligentsia professions predominate among the *Politkatorzhan* and Nizhegorodskaia Town Duma candidates. This correlation is useful; the Nizhegorodskaia Town Duma candidates are known to be urban party activists, and the closeness of their occupational structures confirms earlier speculation that *Politkatorzhan* were also urban party activists.

CHART 3. VI EDUCATION OF PSR MEMBERS

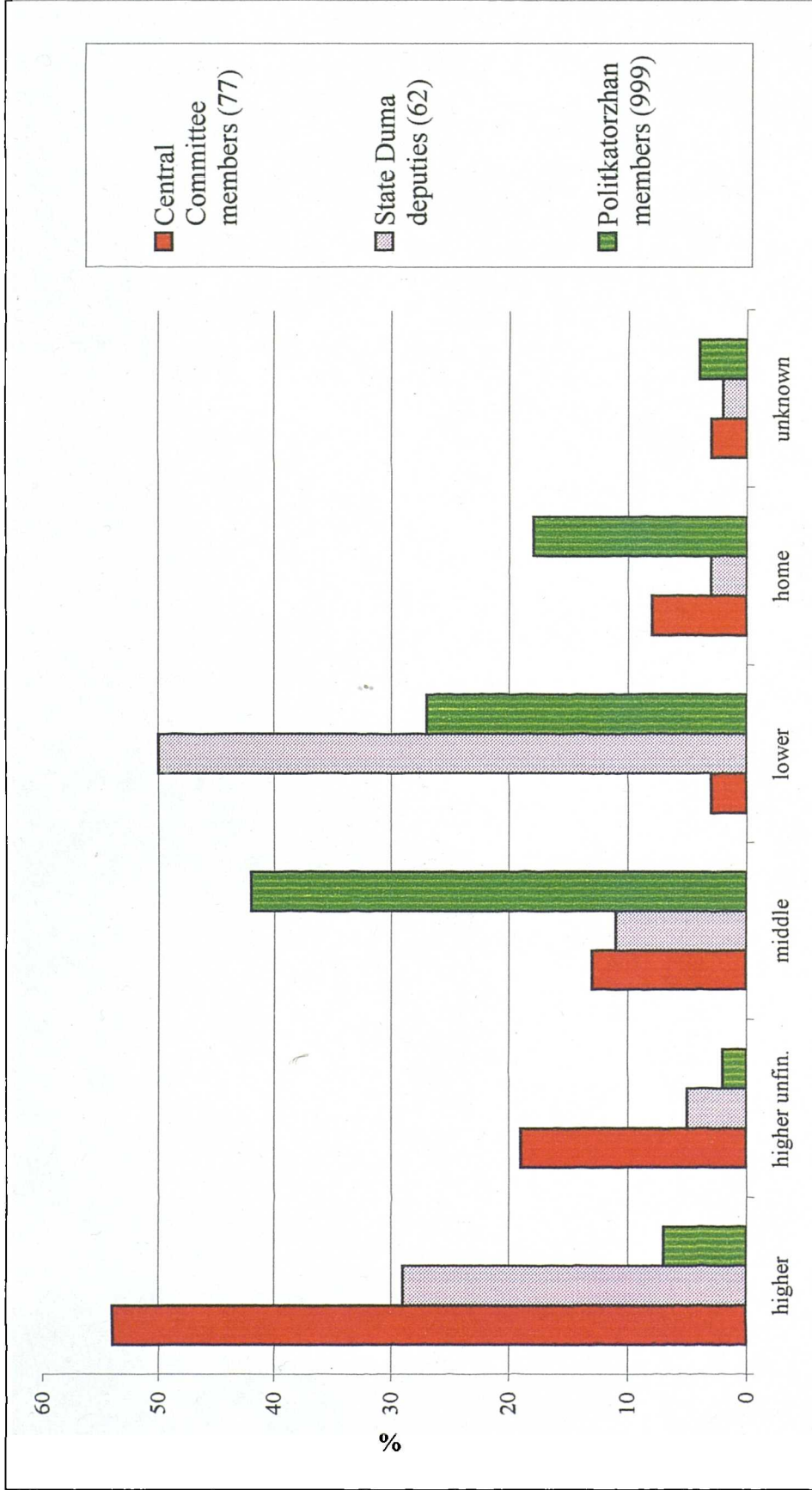
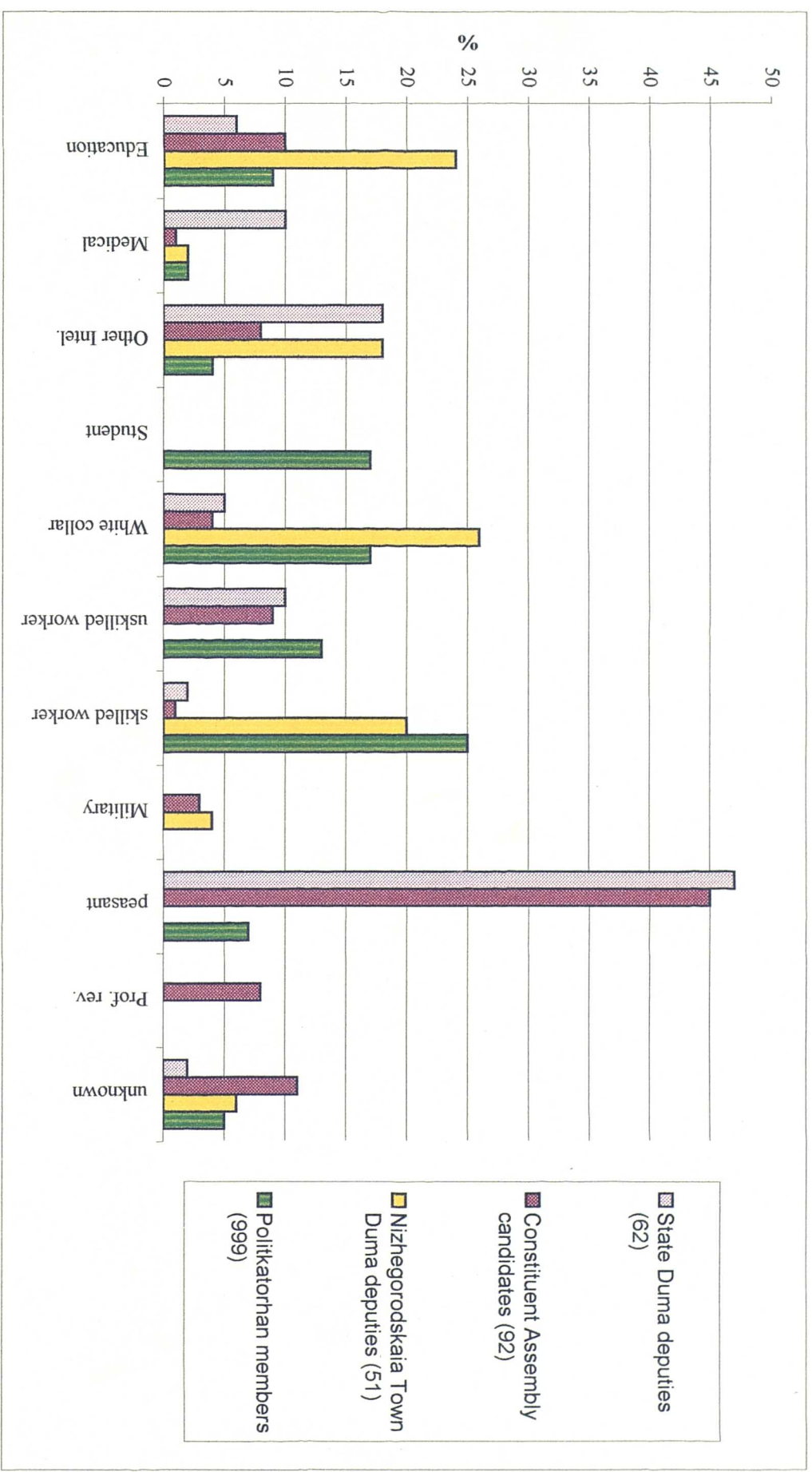


CHART 3. VII OCCUPATIONS OF PSR MEMBERS



Of the State Duma deputies, almost a third (29%) had been in higher education, and the other 70% had middle or primary education. This 30:70 split is approximately reflected in the occupations of Duma deputies; 34% were involved in intelligentsia occupations, and 64% occupied with manual or white collar work. A more detailed biographical study of three Duma deputies offered below fleshes out the detail of these statistics, and offers some elucidation of this split. Gavril Ivanovich Kabakov¹ was born in Perm in 1851, and was from a poor peasant family. He joined the PSR in 1902. His basic literacy enabled him to be an active propagandist in Alapat'evskii *volost*, his home area, and he organised political circles amongst the peasantry. Ivan Emel'ianovich P'ianikh² was of the same generation, born in 1863, and was also from a peasant family. He attained a higher level of schooling than Kabakov by finishing middle school, and joined the regional PSR group in 1903, the same time as Kabakov. Both men were initiators of the All-Russian Peasants' Union (*Vserossiiskii Krestianskii Soiuz*), in their areas, and were elected to the Second State Duma from the peasant vote. P'ianikh sat with the PSR faction, whilst Kabakov continued to be a PSR member, but joined the Trudovik group. The speeches in the Duma of both Kabakov and P'ianikh called for the transfer of all land to the peasantry without compensation for landowners. This focus on the land question reflects the popular misconception of the PSR as a one issue party, but is unsurprising given the lower educational level and peasant background of the two men. Kabakov was arrested in 1907, after which nothing is known of him. P'ianikh was also arrested in 1907, but his case came to be something of a *cause celebre*, and there was an unsuccessful campaign for his release in 1916/17. Following his release after the February revolution, he recommenced his active political life, and was elected to the Russian pre-parliament by the Soviets of Peasants' Deputies, and to the Constituent Assembly as a PSR member for Kursk.

A third Duma deputy, Mikhail Gregorovich Berezin,³ had certain key differences from Kabakov and P'ianikh in his background and political life. Of the same generation (born in 1864), he came from a 'petty bourgeois' family and participated in higher education. He completed his degree in the physics-mathematics faculty of Kazan University in 1889. He organised *Narodnik* circles in the 1880's, and was arrested in 1892, then sent into exile. He continued to work in *Narodnik* circles during his period of exile, and participated in workers' groups. Like Kabakov and P'ianikh, he joined the PSR in 1903,

¹ Shelokhaev, *Politicheskie partii*, p. 234

² Shelokhaev, *Politicheskie partii*, p. 493

³ Shelokhaev, *Politicheskie partii*, p. 66

and was an organiser of the All-Russian Peasants' Union before being elected to the Second State Duma in 1907. From the floor of the Duma, he spoke on the agrarian question, but also made a speech opposing the death penalty, and called for an amnesty on political prisoners. Like P'ianikh, in 1917 he was elected to the pre-parliament by the All Russian Soviet of Peasants' Deputies.

These potted biographies reveal strong similarities in the political careers of the three State Duma deputies, but also a certain duality between the two of peasant background and lower education, and Berezin with his higher education and better off family.

Though all were involved in the All Russian Peasants' Union and other grassroots activities amongst peasants and workers, Berezin's education differentiated him from Kabakov and P'ianikh in a number of ways. He had worked as a statistician for the *zemstvo*, which set him apart from those he tried to propagandise, unlike the two of peasant background who worked within their communities, which ensured they were accepted by the peasant community, and made them more effective propagandists.

Whilst Berezin had travelled, to university in Kazan as a student, then all over Russia in his period of exile, there is no indication that Kabakov or P'ianikh had moved far from their villages before their election to the second State Duma. This gave Berezin an altogether more cosmopolitan outlook, which the other two did not apparently share. It reflects Berezin's broader political perspective that he was the only one of the three with higher education and was also the only one to speak out on issues other than land in the Duma.

Some conclusions can be drawn from this assessment of education and occupation groups. The Central Committee was separated from its local activists and mass membership by its high level of education, and divorce from occupations. The local leadership was primarily *trudiashchiisia*, and of middle-lower range educational backgrounds. Their backgrounds enabled them to be identified by their constituents as individuals relating to the needs of the moment, and thus enabled them to be selected through the electoral process. The *Politkatorzhan* group, along with the Nizhegorodskaia Town Duma candidates, can be regarded as representative of urban party activists. This is somewhat surprising, since one might have expected the enormous sample involved in *Politkatorzhan* to have been more representative of the broad sweep of the party, including their predominantly rural membership and activists. Instead, they illustrate the gulf that existed between the urban based and rural based party organisations.

PRISON AND EXILE

The great majority of PSR activists had 'suffered for their cause' in tsarist prisons, in Siberian exile and in forced emigration. These experiences of prison, exile and emigration are an apparent uniting factor in all facets of the PSR's membership, from Central Committee members to rank and file party supporters. Chernov commented on the significance of Siberian exile in forming the mentality of the party's leaders.⁴ The chief question addressed here is how universal experiences of prison, exile and emigration were; were the conditions such as to cut across the divisions that have already been outlined in terms of class, education and occupation, or did prison and exile provide further manifestations of these differences? *The picture that emerges is complex, but allows further areas for division of party membership based on social background, occupation and education levels of individuals.* This study is not by any means exhaustive; it is based upon the *Politkatorzhan* records, supplemented with a selection of memoir material. This sample is however substantial enough to be useful in assessing prison and exile experience. Three main areas will be considered- conditions within prisons and hard labour camps, conditions and work in Siberian exile, and conditions in emigration.

Of the Central Committee, all those of whom anything is known had spent lengthy periods in prison, exile and emigration.⁵ This was also the case for almost all the regional activists come across for various sources. Though one cannot categorise simply the range of experiences these individuals went through, and the effects such experience had on their political lives, it is possible to distinguish clear fault lines which emerged among members which broadly speaking followed the same trends as those seen when looking at socio-economic background of members. *Trudiashchiisia* were more likely to be marginalized and to suffer extreme material deprivation in prison and exile, while those of nobility or with private means were overall less likely to suffer the same levels of material hardships. To make further assumptions on the process of individuals' radicalisation is difficult, since each individual was affected by their experiences dependent on their personal circumstances and temperament. A relatively minor inconvenience for one person could be a defining radical moment for another. There are however three main areas which can be identified indicating that those of nobility or

⁴ V. Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution* (New Haven, 1936), pp. 118-9.

⁵ Of the 77 members of the Central Committee traced, backgrounds are not known for 23 of them, but those of whom anything is known all spent some time in prison or exile.

with private means overall had a less traumatic time in prison and exile. Firstly, those of nobility or with sufficient private means were provided for more amply in prison and exile, which cushioned the horror of their experience, and in some areas they enjoyed better provisions and material conditions from the regime than those with no private means or of low birth. Secondly, those with sufficient private means were more likely to leave Russia and spend their exile abroad, which though inconvenient, did not compare with the searing grimness of distant Siberian exile. Finally, those with higher levels of education were better equipped to cope with the rigours of solitary confinement and distant exile.

Spiridonova⁶ commented that the experience of prison was borne best by 'higher intelligentsia', for whom the time in prison blended night into day as they took the opportunity to study and read. It was harder for the worker, 'the less developed individual' (*malorazvitoi chelovek*) to sit in prison, because such inactivity distorted and disfigured their whole understanding of what life was. She commented that several former soldiers and workers in *katorga* were sent to work in the gold mines, and wrote happy letters from there, because such labours gave them some fresh air and made them feel valued.⁷ Such interpretations of social groups' responses to confinement are contentious, but this study shows that such assertions had some factual basis.

The experiences of political prisoners both in prison and hard labour camps, and in exile within Russia, indelibly shaped the prisoners' attitudes against conciliatory politics, and engendered a very specific camaraderie and loyalty. Breshkovskaia, referring to imprisonment conditions in the early 1870's, made it clear that the harsh regime took its toll on all the political prisoners:

hungry, covered with lice, were given no exercise, and were denied the right of correspondence with their relatives. . . the most youthful ones usually contracted typhoid fever or consumption and died, or they became insane.⁸

The prison regime did alter between the 1870's and 1917, and conditions within prisons varied considerably, depending on the prison itself, the reason for imprisonment and, to

⁶ Maria Spiridonova was well placed to make such observations- she spent most of her adult life in prison; from 1906 till 1917 under the tsarist regime, then spent most of her remaining twenty-three years from 1918 in Soviet prisons and labour camps. She was finally shot in 1941 along with 170 other political prisoners at the instigation of Stalin's security chief Lavrentii Beria. (A. Rabinowitch, 'Maria Spiridonova's Last Testament', *Russian Review* 54, 1995, pp. 424-46)

⁷ M. Spiridonova, 'Iz zhizni na Nerchinskoi katorge', *Katorga i ssylka* 1(14) 1925, pp. 188-9. Spiridonova had made these comments as a response to Dostoevsky's assertion that it was harder for intelligentsia to endure confinement than for simple (*prostyi*) people. Her 'categories' of prisoner were based on those established by Lavrov.

⁸ Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs*, p. 109

a certain extent, the social class of the inmate.⁹ Conditions for well connected and wealthy prisoners were certainly better than for those without such advantages.

Kanatchikov, a Bolshevnik worker, commented that:

in prison one could feel with special acuteness the difference between our class origins and those of our comrades in struggle- the intelligentsia.¹⁰

Prisoners of higher social standing were better treated by prison guards and interrogators than those of less exalted ranks.¹¹ In some prison regimes those with money could purchase any requirements they had, and could receive food and clothing from relatives and friends. An extreme example of the more comfortable experience enjoyed by the better connected in prison and exile is to be found in the memoirs of the SR R.V. Ivanov-Razumnik.¹² Though Ivanov-Razumnik may well have exaggerated the laxity of the tsarist regime, his treatment after arrest for his part in student demonstrations in 1901 presented a bizarre picture of tsarist imprisonment, which contrasts starkly with the horrific regime described by Breshkovskaia. Ivanov-Razumnik described his St. Petersburg prison as airy, spacious, warm and clean, and the food, sent by wealthy relatives of the students, as plentiful and excellent. Prison life included an 'open cell door' policy, and the inmates amused themselves with cards, chess, amateur dramatics and reading. Both his exiles were to destinations chosen by him- he went first to his family's estate for the summer, and in the second to Simferopol,

because my health was in sore need of a southern climate and also because one of my comrades...lived there and could help me get settled in an unfamiliar town. Both my prison and my first exile proved to be of a similar light comedy variety. I worked hard, did a lot of reading and writing, and enjoyed a number of Crimean walks.¹³

⁹ For a graphic and moving account of the prison regime in the infamous Shlsselburg fortress, and the significant improvements in the conditions there over a period of some twenty years, see Figner, *Memoirs*, pp. 175-292. On the regime in Kiev's prisons, see A. Belen'kaia, 'O rabote Kievskoi organizatsii v 1905g.' *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* 2, 1926, p. 263, and Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs*, pp. 78-94. A terrifying account of the terrible beatings meted out by the prison guards to thirteen newcomers in Orlov central *katorga* can be found in Bibilin, 'V Orlovskom tsentrale', *Katorga i ssylka* 1, 1921, pp. 21-25. An example of a less severe regime was Taganka in Moscow, as described by Lydiia Dan in L. Haimson (ed.) *The Making of Three Russian Revolutionaries* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 146-8

¹⁰ Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker*, p. 248. Kanatchikov may of course be exaggerating this breach; he was keen to disassociate proletarian from 'bourgeois' experiences.

¹¹ Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs*, p. 88, Clements Evans, *Bolshevik Women*, p. 93; stated that noblewomen were treated courteously in prison.

¹² R.V. Ivanov-Razumnik, *The Memoirs of Ivanov-Razumnik*, (tr. and ed. P.S. Squire) (Oxford, 1965). These memoirs were written secretly in the early forties just before Ivanov-Razumnik's death, and concentrated on his terrible experiences of prison and exile at the hands of the Soviet regime between 1933 and his death in 1943. Only the first chapter, entitled 'First Baptism', dealt with his experiences under the tsarist regime, and may well have been sanitised in order to provide a suitably stark contrast with the horrors of prison and exile in Stalinist Russia.

¹³ Ivanov-Razumnik, *The Memoirs*, pp. 11-12

Ivanov-Razumnik's brief detainment in St. Petersburg's penal facilities, in the company of his student friends, should most certainly not be taken as a norm. As well as having unusually accommodating guards, Ivanov-Razumnik had been taken in for a relatively minor first time offence, as a short term measure, and had the backing of very wealthy friends and family, who provided both material assistance and pressure upon the authorities to ensure that their son would be treated properly. This was not the position of many of the political prisoners in tsarist jails. Many PSR convicts had been arrested in connection with terrorist activity, and were very often kept in solitary confinement until their trial. In certain cases, a regime of solitary confinement was maintained for years of imprisonment.¹⁴ The conditions in St. Petersburg's infamously dank and gloomy Peter and Paul Fortress were rivalled by the conditions offered in some provincial prisons:¹⁵

At that time established order of any kind was unknown in Siberian prisons. They were individual republics, full of violence, abuses, thefts, dirt, infection, and disorder. The prisoner had absolutely no rights. . . the prisons. . . were dirty and unpainted. The passages were not swept; the chimneys and stoves were not cleaned. There were no lights except one tiny, smoking lamp at the end of the passage. There was absolute silence in the daytime.¹⁶

Though political prisoners were almost always kept separately from criminal prisoners, they lived in close quarters to them, and the foul language and violence commonplace among the criminals had the political prisoners fearing for their lives.¹⁷ It has been asserted that prior to 1907, the 'discipline and supervision were often shockingly lax' in Russia's prisons.¹⁸ This, and Geifman's insinuation that life in tsarist penal institutions was relatively pleasant, is misleading however.¹⁹ Egor Sazonov's description of the conditions he endured in a Nerchinskii prison from 1908 evokes nightmarish visions of bedlam, with forty half-starved political prisoners packed into one tiny cell.²⁰ Prisoners

¹⁴ See Figner, *Memoirs*, for example; Figner spent some seven years in solitary confinement.

¹⁵ See references in footnote 78 to Kiev and Orlov prisons, and Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker*, pp. 247-8 on the conditions in which he was held in Saratov prison, 'The cell was large, gloomy, and uncomfortable, with cold, thick walls; it was filled with a foul human odour and was populated by innumerable bedbugs. . .'

¹⁶ Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs*, pp. 185-6. Clements Evans *Bolshevik Women*, p. 95, comments that 'Even the most benign tsarist prison was a dark, dirty verminous place, dank with disease and despair.'

¹⁷ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, pp. 165-6. Geifman further reports that many 'politicals' from extremist groups, including anarchists, lost their 'political' status after 1907, and were incarcerated alongside common criminals. (p. 229)

¹⁸ H. Philips, 'From a Bolshevik to a British Subject: The Early Years of Maxim M. Litvinov', *Slavic Review* 48(3) 1989, p. 390. Spiridonova, 'Iz zhizni na Nerchinskoi katorge', *Katorga i ssylka* 3(16) 1925, p. 192, commented that up until 1907, the regime in *katorga* there was very liberal.

¹⁹ Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, pp. 223-5.

²⁰ Steinberg, *Spiridonova*, pp. 120-121. The prison of which Sazonov spoke, Gorny Serentui, was intended for 300 prisoners, and contained 899. Sazonov said, 'The only thing I cannot get used to is the crowd of people and the resulting constant noise. . . apparently the cell is full to overflowing, but every week it seems able to stretch, as if it were blown up like a rubber ball.'

in *katorga* had to wear heavy leg chains and sometimes hand chains as well.²¹ The physical condition of prisoners on being freed in 1917 was testimony to the hardships they had endured; photographs of the young SR terrorist Alexandra Izmailovich, one taken on her arrest in 1906, the second after her release from *katorga* in 1917, present a terrifying picture of premature aging. The strikingly beautiful 28 year old in 1906 was transformed into a broken woman, who looked to be well into her fifties, by 1917.²² Magergut described the liberation of *katorga* prisoners from Nizhnii Novgorod jail on the 28th February 1917:

The comrades from *katorga* arrived. The chains still stung their bodies. . . one comrade arrived, his body bent by the burden of long imprisonment. He moved slowly, his feet covered with wounds, eyes unaccustomed to the light, and ears unable to cope with the roar of the rejoicing crowd. For almost ten years he had been oppressed in solitary. . . his voice trembled and his feet could not hold even his decrepit body. The years had forcibly done their business.²³

Further evidence for the grimness of conditions is the number of individuals who lost their minds when in captivity, particularly in solitary confinement regimes.²⁴

Breshkovskaia commented:

the monotony of solitary confinement slowly wears down the strength of any prisoner. All five of his senses are starved, and in addition he has spiritual hunger...drowsiness and apathy set in...²⁵

Solitary confinement was a part of many political prisoners' experiences of imprisonment, and it was in this that the educated classes had further, less tangible advantages over their working class comrades. Education was a great aid in coming through solitary confinement, and the isolating experiences of imprisonment and distant exile, with one's mental faculties intact. The ability to read and study meant that the horrors of solitary might recede. Alexander Kerensky's view of his month in solitary is illuminating in this:

Strangely enough, I almost enjoyed this solitary confinement, which gave me leisure to think, to look back at my life, and to read to my heart's content.²⁶

²¹ Though the enforcement of such regulations would seem to have been dependent on the individual prison governors concerned.

²² Steinberg, *Spiridonova*, p. 107

²³ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 104; Writings of Magergut.

²⁴ I.F. Armand, *Stat'i, rechi, pis'ma* (Moscow, 1975) p. 192; describes the shrieking of the eighteen year old girl in the adjoining cell who had begun to hallucinate. Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs*, p. 101; describes a similar incident of a young girl with whom Breshkovskaia corresponded with briefly when in prison, but who went mad shortly afterwards. See also Figner, *Memoirs*, p. 186. See chapter 2, 'The PSR as Terrorists', p. 64, on the alleged mental instability of PSR members.

²⁵ Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs*, p. 121. Vera Figner's memoirs provided an account of her emotional turbulence and the effects of solitary confinement on her mental stability which surpasses others in lucidity and honesty. She impressed how close she came to total insanity. (Figner, *Memoirs*, book 2, esp. pp. 181-2)

For those unaccustomed to contemplative work, however, prison was a dramatic and radicalising experience. Kanatchikov's comments on workers' responses to imprisonment confirm Spiridonova's statement on workers' attitudes to confinement:

Cases of insanity were not infrequent in the preliminary detention prison, what with its horrible regime of isolation. And it was the workers, people accustomed to physical labour, who fell victim to mental illness most of all. The experience of complete idleness and their unfamiliarity with intellectual activity had such a murderous effect on the workers' nervous systems. . . . Materially, we workers were generally better off in prison than we were in our regular lives, when we worked in factories. And yet I have never encountered a single worker who was capable of recalling his first solitary confinement without trembling.²⁷

This gives an indication of the differences in the level of stress inflicted on uneducated people, as compared to the literate as a result of long bouts of confinement and isolation. Breshkovskaia described how during her solitary imprisonment in the Peter and Paul Fortress between 1876 and 1877 she corresponded with her highly educated comrades imprisoned in adjoining cells by means of complex tapping codes that were established. These codes were commonplace in prisons.²⁸ Virtual chess games were conducted in the evenings, and the imprisoned men and women became very well acquainted.²⁹ Breshkovskaia commented that women were better able to withstand the rigours of prison life than men, because they enjoyed more humane relations with one another, and did what they could to ease the burdens of prison life.³⁰ These humane relations among educated women, and men, in prison were evident in the communities which developed among the political prisoners of all social classes.³¹ In some cases *zemliachestva* were set up within the political prisoner communities.³² There was particular emphasis on scholarly activity and self betterment in the activities of these

²⁶ Kerensky, *The Kerensky Memoirs*, p. 66. Kerensky's testimony should be read with caution, of course; he may have cast a retrospective rosy glow over his time in prison, given that these words were written some forty years after the event.

²⁷ Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker*, pp. 126-127

²⁸ Figner, *Memoirs*, p. xi (introduction to the text by Richard Stites) comments that the telegraphic system of tapping on pipes or walls had been devised earlier in the nineteenth century by prisoners in Europe, and was widely known in Russia.

²⁹ Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs*, p. 124ff. The extent of these tapping codes was such that Alexandra Izmailovich even fell in love with 'Karl', the former terrorist group leader situated in the cell above her, whilst in solitary confinement. The two conducted a passionate love affair, using only the cipher tapped through the wall, and an occasional note transported by a friendly guard. (Steinberg, *Spiridonova*, pp. 107-119.)

³⁰ Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs*, p. 111

³¹ Steinberg, *Spiridonova*, pp. 92-99 describes the harmonious if somewhat ascetic conditions in which the women prisoners, including Spiridonova, lived in at Malzev *katorga*, and the harmonious though rather strained close relations between male prisoners, including Egor Sazonov, in Gorny Serentui *katorga* between 1907 and 1910, pp. 121-2. See also M. Spiridonova, 'Iz zhizni na Nerchinskoi katorge', *Katorga i ssylka* 1(14) 1925, p. 187

³² Spiridonova, 'Iz zhizni na Nerchinskoi katorge', 1(14) 1925, p. 186. *Zemliachestva* were associations formed among people, usually of peasant origin, who originated from the same area, and had moved to work, usually in the factories.

groups; Gorny Serentui prison was called by many former prisoners 'Serentui University'.³³ There were, of course, those among the highly educated political prisoners that fell victim to hysteria and madness in confinement, but on the whole it was those with little or no formal education that suffered most. This indicates that education gave individuals an additional advantage in surviving the experiences of prison and exile intact.

Those who had committed lesser offences, or were returning from a spell in Siberia were often exiled administratively to one of the provincial Russian cities. Kanatchikov's description of a group of leading SRs gathered in Saratov in 1900 illustrates how those with private wealth and connections might have spent their time in European Russian exile:

All the great whales of the SR party were gathered in Saratov: some were exiled there by gendarmes against their will, others picked the city "voluntarily" to be their abode after they had served time in prison or in Siberia. Most of these people were highly cultured and well educated, with a long tenure in the revolutionary movement; they were honourable people, with numerous connections to liberal *zemstvo* deputies, government functionaries, lawyers, and even merchants. Comfortably well off materially, they possessed ample leisure time, and were able to devote themselves to their dreams, to art and to science. . .³⁴

Conditions were undoubtedly easier in European Russian exile, particularly for those who were personally and financially well connected. The difficulties of remote Siberian exile was something of a leveller among social classes; all had to cope with the depressing climate and isolation that Siberian exile wrought. Even in Siberia, however, significant distinctions were made in the treatment of exiles according to their *soslovie* (estate) and personal wealth. This distinction was manifested at all stages of exile. An exile sentence did not assure the convict of being provided for by the prison service—Breshkovskaia referred to making clothes, along with a group of other female political prisoners, which were to be donated to the convicts and exiles who were without private means.³⁵ The wealthier political prisoners were at least able to provide themselves with clothes and foodstuffs that would make the journey to Siberia more bearable. The long and arduous journeys towards places of exile were unpleasant for all, but the worst privations were reserved for those prisoners from less exalted ranks:

³³ Steinberg, *Spiridonova*, p. 122. The later years of Vera Figner's confinement in Shchluselburg were filled with concentrated scientific study of university level, alongside her fellow prisoners (Figner, *Memoirs*, pp. 242-248.)

³⁴ Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker*, p. 268. Kanatchikov's description should be read with caution. His views and judgement were no doubt clouded by Lenin's notorious contempt for the intelligentsia, and subject to the inevitable constraints on a good Communist party member writing in the twenties.

³⁵ Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs*, p. 175

We grew weaker from lack of sleep, from dirt, starvation, and the barbarous shaking in the carts, which had not even a layer of straw. . . The barge was small, dirty and stinking. Our compartment for "the nobility" had been a horrid, foul hole. We could well imagine the condition below in the dark, stuffy underdecks of this barge bound for Tomsk.³⁶

This brief survey of conditions demonstrates that assertions of 'shockingly lax' conditions in tsarist prisons are largely unfounded; though incidents of comfortable prison experiences can no doubt be found, the overall impression is one of fearful overcrowding, squalor and brutality. As a generalisation, it can be suggested that those who were materially better off, of higher social ranking, and with higher educational levels, were better equipped to survive the experience, and in some cases enjoyed rather better material conditions. The working classes were more likely to have a traumatic experience, especially in solitary confinement. This trauma for the working classes may have contributed to the more radical and non-conciliatory line they pursued in the politics of 1917.³⁷

OCCUPATIONS IN SIBERIAN EXILE

On arrival at the point of exile, further differences in condition and activity of exiles were manifested according to their wealth and social status. Kanatchikov commented that the intelligentsia at his exile in Izhma received a government allowance higher than that allowed for the members of the 'base classes'.³⁸ Breshkovskaia became acquainted with young exiles in Barzugin who were clearly handsomely provided for financially; she commented waspishly that they whiled away their time of exile in hunting, and the pursuit of 'wine, women and song'.³⁹ Lydiia Dan and Boris Savinkov, exiled together in Iakutsk, did not pursue any paid work, but studied and took up photography.⁴⁰ These are, however, only isolated examples which do little to contribute to the overall picture of how individuals lived in exile. People of such independent means like the young men of Barzugin were in a minority among exiles, but it is difficult to establish how the mass of exiles lived. One rich source of information are the 999 records in *Politkatorzhan*. Of these, 425 (42%) gave information of how they maintained themselves in exile. Based

³⁶ Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs*, pp. 183-4. An account of the exiles' journey to Iakutsk given by Maria Botchkareva in 1913 indicates that conditions had not improved from Breshkovskaia's time. (see Botchkareva, *Yashka*, pp. 45-48.)

³⁷ As suggested by Radkey, *Agrarian Foes*, p. 133, p. 141

³⁸ Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker*, p. 363

³⁹ Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs*, p. 211, p. 215

⁴⁰ Haimson, *The Making of Three Russian Revolutionaries*, p. 168ff.

on a breakdown according to parental occupation, and individuals' occupation and education levels, these 425 are representative of the *Politkatorzhan* sample as a whole.⁴¹

First, explanation needs to be offered for the categories of occupation in exile given in table 3.viii. Teaching is given a separate category, despite the fact that it has been categorised elsewhere as an intelligentsia occupation, because so many individuals, from all different occupational backgrounds, pursued it. Mining, which has otherwise been categorised as unskilled worker, is also given a separate category, again because of its frequency across a range of different occupations. The first column, 'own occupation', has been accorded only to those individuals who, at any time in their period of exile occupation, pursued the occupation for which they had originally been trained. This gives a useful indicator of the level of occupational flexibility undertaken by the exiles, but is not altogether reliable, since many of those in the white collar section did not have a category any more specific than 'employee' which does not give any clear indication of training. This is also the case for unskilled workers, who did not generally provide a known work specialism. The explanation for the predominance of skilled workers occupied in their specialist trade is that so many of them had a specified trade (fitter, turner, shoemaker, dressmaker, etc.)

⁴¹ Parental occupation of *Politkatorzhan* Siberian exiles

| parental occupation | number (%) of exiles in occupation | % of all <i>Politkatorzhan</i> 's parental occupation |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Nobility | 10 (2%) | 2% |
| Intelligentsia | 36 (8%) | 8% |
| White collar | 47 (11%) | 15% |
| Merchant | 11 (3%) | 3% |
| Skilled worker | 86 (20%) | 18% |
| Unskilled worker | 50 (12%) | 12% |
| Peasant | 149 (35%) | 32% |
| Clergy | 13 (3%) | 4% |
| Unknown | 22 (5%) | 6% |

TABLE 3.VIII OCCUPATIONS TAKEN BY *POLITKATORZHAN* IN SIBERIAN EXILE

| Occupational group | Occupation taken in exile | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------|
| | Own occup. | Teach | mines | intell. | white collar | skilled worker | Unskill. worker | Peasant |
| Intelligentsia | 29 (22%) | 30 (23%) | 8 (6%) | 30 (23%) | 60 (46%) | 16 (12%) | 18 (14%) | 12 (9%) |
| White collar | 7 (12%) | 4 (7%) | 11 (19%) | 0 | 33 (57%) | 3 (5%) | 5 (9%) | 8 (14%) |
| Skilled worker | 53 (40%) | 9 (7%) | 14 (10%) | 0 | 17 (13%) | 72 (54%) | 19 (14%) | 22 (16%) |
| Unskilled worker | 4 (8%) | 3 (6%) | 12 (25%) | 0 | 5 (11%) | 14 (30%) | 30 (64%) | 3 (6%) |
| Peasant | 13 (30%) | 1 (2%) | 5 (12%) | 0 | 7 (16%) | 5 (12%) | 9 (21%) | 15 (35%) |
| Not known | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 |

The exiles in this sample were sent predominantly to Irkutsk, some to Yakutsk and a few to Eniseiskii *guberniias*. These *guberniias* must have benefited economically from the glut of trained workers who came to their under-populated towns and villages.

Authorities' attitudes to exiles' work seem to have varied; exiles being employed as teachers was against government regulations, but this regulation was disregarded.⁴² The demand for manual and skilled labour in the factories and mines of Siberia may well have outweighed owner and police disquiet about employing known 'unreliable elements'. In this respect at least, workers were in a better position than when they were exiled within European Russia, where they could be made unemployable by their political record combined with a ready supply of local labour.⁴³

The overall picture which emerges from these records of occupations in exile is one of massive occupational instability and mobility. Though some individuals held one job for their period of exile, many went through between two and five jobs. A.I.

Cherkashennikov, for example, a worker's son and a teacher, worked as a hammerer, an unskilled worker, and in an expedition exploring the river Lena during his period of Irkutsk exile.⁴⁴ In his time of Irkutsk exile, M.E. Goriachev, also a teacher, worked as a docker, then taught for a while, before finally becoming a time-keeper in a factory.⁴⁵

V.S. Khersontsev, a peasant's son who had worked as a telegrapher before his arrest, lived as a peasant in Irkutsk for six years, then in 1915 was employed as a book-keeper

⁴² Clements Evans, *Bolshevik Women*, p. 99

⁴³ For an account of the problems of unemployment due to blacklisting in European exile, see Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker*, pp. 255-267

⁴⁴ *Politkatorzhan*, p. 704

⁴⁵ *Politkatorzhan*, p. 159

for the mines. Such instability of occupation beset all levels of occupation; instability was not confined solely to unskilled and manual work. Jobs were not easy to come by; Konstantin Norinskii's memoirs report that during his exile to Sol'vichegodsk, Arkhangel'sk *guberniia*, he did not have enough money to live on, and that the police chief ordered that political exiles could not take work. Though he did eventually find some paid work, he struggled to survive.⁴⁶ He also recounts the trials of one of his acquaintances, Sergei Belov, a former *zemstvo* teacher, who was unable to find any work despite frequent searches around the area.⁴⁷

An explanation for the unstable nature of exile occupation was that in the first instance, exiles were often sent to very remote small towns or even tiny villages in order to isolate them effectively, and minimise their chances of escaping. If they served a few years in the more remote place without trouble, they were often allowed to move to a larger town. While there was little chance of finding any paid work outside handicrafts, farming and hunting in the more remote regions, in the bigger towns, particularly Irkutsk, there were more opportunities for white collar work. There were also a number of large mining settlements and a salt factory around Irkutsk and Yakutsk, which offered opportunities for work. Mining is a prominent feature of these records of exile occupation, particularly among the white collar and unskilled workers. Whilst its prominence among unskilled workers is unsurprising, since they had no skills to offer the workplace outside manual labour, the number of white collar workers in mining suggests a degree of desperation. It was a big step from the offices to hard manual labour. Of those from intelligentsia occupations, almost one third worked in unskilled manual labour, as peasants, unskilled workers, or miners. Again, this reflects the hardship that would drive those from highly skilled occupations to take such work.

Another feature of these records is the proportion of people who had to diversify, and do jobs that they had not trained for. Those categorised as skilled workers were most likely to find some sort of work as a skilled worker, and even to pursue the vocation for which they were trained, be that fitter, turner, seamstress or shoemaker. Almost one quarter of those from intelligentsia backgrounds taught, either to provide an income, or to supplement what they earned from other work. The practice of teaching to generate income was not however exclusive to intelligentsia occupations. A handful of individuals from all the other occupational categories also took on teaching work to

⁴⁶ K.M. Norinskii, *Pod nadzorom politsii: Vospominaniia* (Moscow, 1974), pp. 68-79

⁴⁷ Norinskii, *Pod nadzorom politsii*, pp. 76-7.

supplement their incomes. Those formerly in intelligentsia occupations were most likely to become involved in white collar posts, as employees for private companies or co-operatives.

A proportion of individuals from all occupational backgrounds lived and worked as peasants for some of their time in exile. Many of these worked as *batraki* (hired labourers), which was low paid and physically trying work. This, like the number of individuals working in mines, suggests some level of desperation; working as a peasant in such a hostile climate, particularly for those who were not accustomed to agricultural labour, must have been difficult and unrewarding work. For those without generous contributions from home, the daily struggle to make ends meet was a daily challenge, which drove them to the land and to the mines in search of income.

This information is revealing, as it reflects the harshness of life in Siberian exile for many, who were compelled to take any sort of work in order to survive. This harshness surely operated as a radicalising factor in the development of these individuals' political temperament. For the majority of exiles, who did not have sufficient independent means to sustain them without working, work in Siberian exile operated as something a leveller, since work, regardless of social background, involved diverse and often physically demanding jobs. The rate of occupational mobility indicates that there was little job security. This lack of security affected all social classes. For the majority, who were without independent financial means, Siberian exile involved hard labour and involvement in a daily struggle to survive.

EMIGRATION

Whilst some parallels can be drawn between Siberian exiles regardless of education and background, émigrés present a very different picture. All the members of the Central Committee had spent time abroad, and spent correspondingly less time in Siberian exile. Experiences of emigration are another area which can be put forward as a possible arena for differences between the Central Committee and the local party activists.

Kanatchikov suggested that those studying or conducting party operations from abroad were more prone to moderation⁴⁸ whilst others commented that émigré life in Western Europe only emphasised the deadening weights of illiteracy, superstition, bureaucracy and oppression that restrained political activity in Russia, and that this operated as a

⁴⁸ Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker*, p. 178

radicalising force.⁴⁹ Like Siberian exile, the variety of experience in emigration was as numerous as the individuals who experienced it. One can establish, however, that those who went abroad generally came from more comfortable backgrounds. The physical distance of émigrés from Russia and her problems undoubtedly engendered a certain divorcing of émigrés from the realities of Russian life. Those who remained in the Russian underground complained of the divergence of émigré leadership from the realities of Russian political life.⁵⁰

It is possible based on the records of the 125 *Politkatorzhan* members who spent some time in emigration, to build up a picture of the type of PSR member who went into emigration, and the range of experiences they encountered. Forty of the 125 émigrés (32% of the total) who spent time abroad were women, which was more than double their overall representation in the *Politkatorzhan* group. Their over-representation in this group may be as a result of the predominance of individuals from wealthier parental backgrounds in the ranks of émigrés.

Table 3.ix clearly shows that individuals from worker or peasant background were much less likely to go into emigration than those from wealthier backgrounds. The opportunity for emigration was one which was restricted to those with sufficient private means to finance such an expedition. Escape from Siberia was very expensive; the cost of Lydia Dan's escape from Siberia to Geneva was some 3,000 roubles!⁵¹ Levels of education among émigrés as compared with the total sample of *Politkatorzhan* confirm that it was pursued disproportionately by those with higher levels of education. Almost all of the *Politkatorzhan* group went abroad after an escape either from prison or more commonly from Siberian exile. Travelling across the vast wastes of Siberia, and foreign travel, was an expensive business, far beyond the means of those living off a working wage. The only way to finance such expeditions was external funding, whether that came from private wealth, family assistance or party funds.⁵²

⁴⁹ M. Waller, *Democratic Centralism: An Historical Commentary* (Manchester 1981) p. 26

⁵⁰ For this attitude on the part of a Social Democrat activist, see Shvarts, 'Kievskaiia partorganizatsiia v 1911-1912gg.' *Litopis revoliutsii* 4, 1928, p. 150

⁵¹ Lydia Dan in Haimson, *The Making of Three Russian Revolutionaries*, p. 174 ff.

⁵² Clements Evans, *Bolshevik Women* p. 116, recounts the flight of Evgeniia Bosh, and her lover Iurii Piatikov from Siberia to Switzerland in 1914, financed by money sent to them by their families.

CHART 3.IX PARENTAL OCCUPATIONS OF ÉMIGRÉS

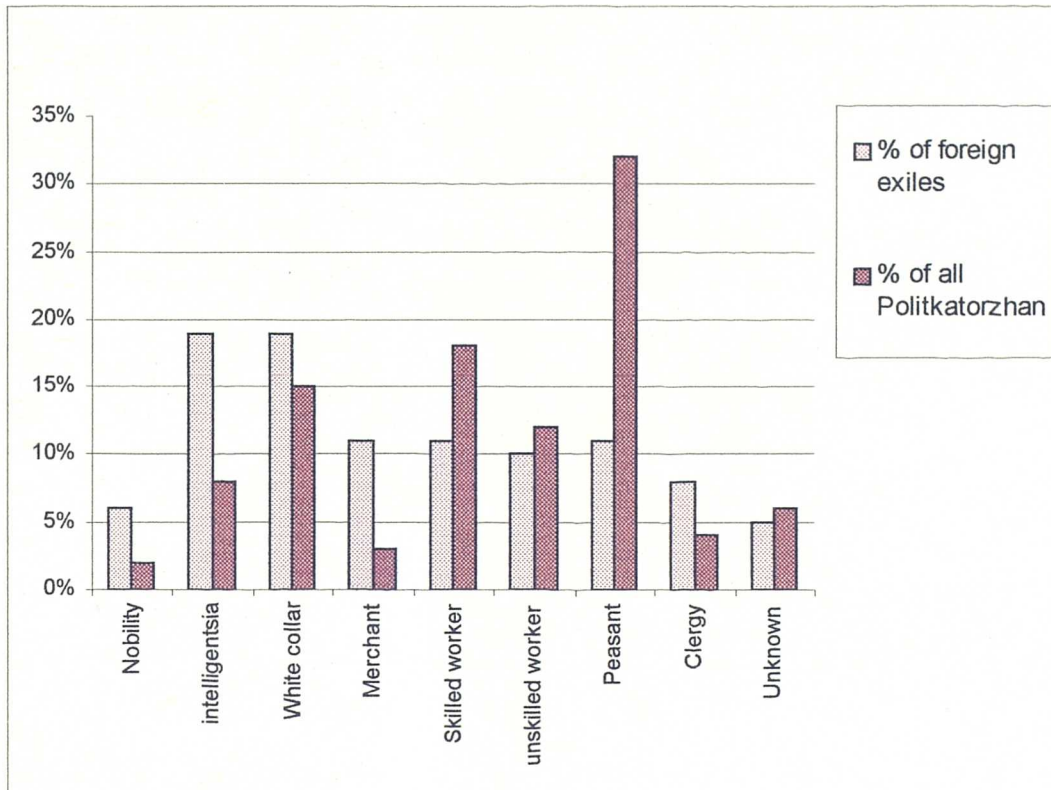
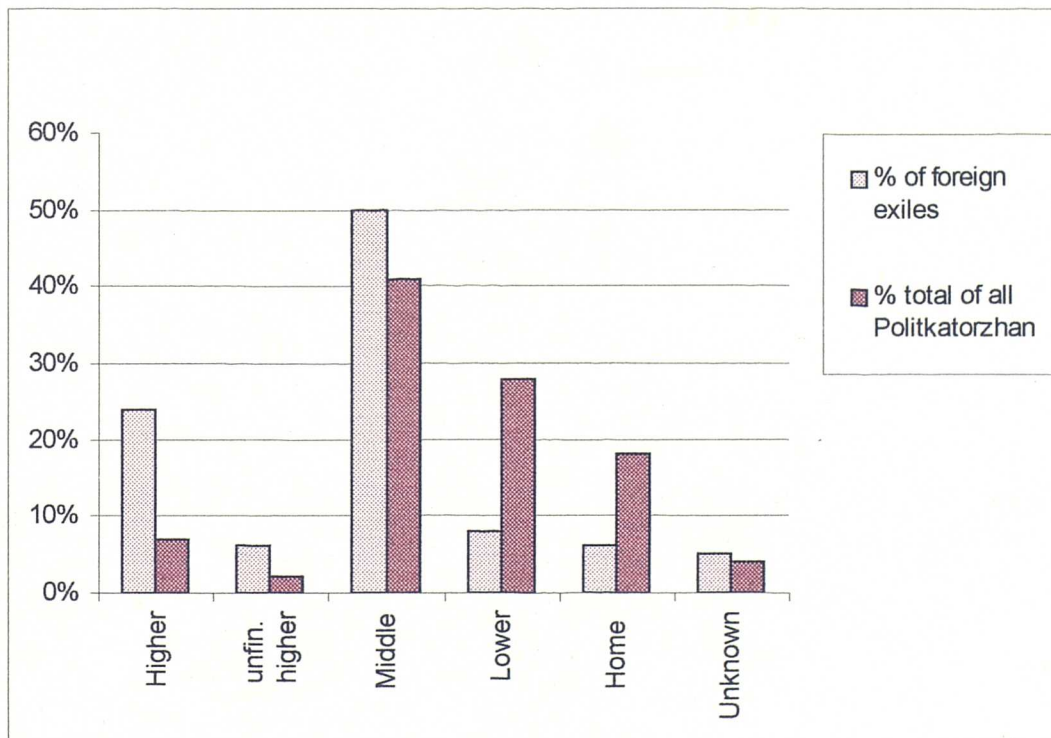


CHART 3.X EDUCATION LEVELS OF EMIGRES



One third of this group moved countries during their period of exile,⁵³ and the most popular destination for exiles was Paris, where almost a quarter of them lived for some time.⁵⁴ An organisation existed in Paris specifically for the assistance of Russian former prisoners and exiles.⁵⁵ Apart from Paris, a range of destinations was frequented roughly equally by the exiles, all over the globe.⁵⁶ The most popular of these were France, Switzerland, the United States of America and Australia. Paris and Geneva were historically centres for Russian exiles, and had a thriving Russian community to embrace the new arrivals.⁵⁷ In Paris there were separate Russian libraries run by Social Democrats and SR members, and a non-party club, where social events were held and political questions discussed. Political differences were reduced by the strains of emigrant life in Paris, although the war served to polarise political views.⁵⁸

In contrast to the supportive community awaiting Russian exiles in Paris, one can well imagine the isolation and hardship exiles faced in Australia. Though the figures are not large enough to be authoritative, this sample suggests that those going to Australia were of lower educational standards and more humble parental occupations than those going to other destinations; 20% of the sample who went to Australia had only lower education, compared to 8% of all the émigrés. This may have been an option open to those who did not have substantial private means. The political activity of some of these Australian exiles, however, indicates that despite the problems, they succeeded in

⁵³ Of the 125 émigrés, 38 (30%) spent time (not just passing through!) in more than one country.

⁵⁴ 29 of the 125 émigrés (23%) spent time in Paris.

⁵⁵ *Politkatorzhan*, p. 618- P.I. Stokov lived in Geneva and Paris till 1917, and worked in an organisation for the assistance of Russian prisoners and exiles.

⁵⁶ Place of emigration for *Politkatorzhan*

| Place | Number of <i>Politkatorzhan</i> living there |
|---------------------------|--|
| Paris | 29 |
| France (apart from Paris) | 20 |
| Switzerland | 19 |
| U.S.A. | 17 |
| Australia | 14 |
| Germany | 9 |
| England | 8 |
| Belgium | 7 |
| Italy | 6 |
| Finland | 5 |
| Austria | 5 |
| Japan | 5 |
| China | 1 |
| Not specified | 18 |

⁵⁷ 'In the early 1870's, . . . Zurich sheltered the largest and most politically active émigré colony in all of Western Europe.' Its popularity among women was enhanced by the University of Zurich, which allowed women to enrol on an equal basis with men. (Alpern Engel, *Mothers and Daughters*, p. 127)

⁵⁸ Iadov, 'Parizhskaia emigratsiia v godi voini', *Katorga i ssylka* 3(10) 1924, pp. 198-9

finding like-minded individuals at their places of exile. G.N. Dolgunin-Chugunov, a worker from Riazan, ran to Australia from Tomsk in 1911, and returned to Russia in 1917 as a member of the Australian Communist party.⁵⁹ G.F. Rodionov, a deacon's son from Kursk, escaped from his place of exile in Eniseiskii *guberniia* through Japan to Australia, and was imprisoned there for his anti-war activity.⁶⁰ Both D.N. Alabovskii and M.F. Omel'kov participated in revolutionary party activity during their Australian exile.⁶¹ B.E. Skvirskii escaped from Irkutsk exile to Australia in 1913, where he took an active part in professional activities, in a society for the assistance of politicals, a workers' club, and was a delegate at a worker conference held to resist the general military call-up.⁶²

There is little information on occupations of individuals once they were in emigration, but it is not possible from the information given to distinguish between those who had sufficient private means to live without working, and those who worked but did not record their occupations. Iadov, a former Paris exile commented:

Alas, many of us there, in that free exile, learnt chauvinism, learnt to approach a solution to the questions of life that were not for the workers, and not for revolution, but for *meshchanstvo*, and for the career.⁶³

Iadov continued that if in former years the exiles had been not just intelligentsia, but rich intelligentsia, who had money and the linguistic skills and cultural understanding necessary to live in a foreign country, the new wave of emigrants, from the 1890's onwards, were mostly proletariat, who struggled to come to terms with language and cultural problems as well as the daily fight for means to live. Those who knew a trade were able to find work, but even this was difficult, because of unfamiliar working practices.⁶⁴ Iadov's comments on Paris life are undoubtedly coloured by his Bolshevik enthusiasm to draw class distinctions within the community. The *Politkatorzhan* group of émigrés continued to be dominated by intelligentsia, and not 'proletariat'. Of the 125 in emigration, eight pursued higher education courses, eighteen pursued political activism of various kinds, and only seven commented on their occupational work in

⁵⁹ *Politkatorzhan*, p. 196

⁶⁰ *Politkatorzhan*, p. 542

⁶¹ D.N. Alabovskii, p. 769, *Politkatorzhan*, M.F. Omel'kov, p. 457, *Politkatorzhan*

⁶² *Politkatorzhan*, p. 588

⁶³ Iadov, 'Parizhskaia emigratsiia v godi voini', p. 196

⁶⁴ Iadov, 'Parizhskaia emigratsiia v godi voini', p. 197

exile. Two young women worked as sewing machinists in Paris during their exile,⁶⁵ and three of the men worked in manual labour.⁶⁶ Iadov spoke of the 'sediment' of the Russian emigrant community, who worked in factories and other industrial enterprises. So many Russians worked as chauffeurs, that it was joked that all the chauffeurs in Paris spoke Russian.⁶⁷ There was clearly a solid émigré community in Paris, and no doubt in other centres of exile, which provided the incomers with some degree of support and comfort. The diversity of the experiences of émigrés was considerable, but on the whole it can be argued that their experiences did not rival the grimness of those who remained in Siberia or in prison to see out their terms. The climate and the isolation, combined with unstable work prospects ensured that those who spent their pre-1917 years in Siberian exile or prison suffered terribly for their cause.

CONCLUSIONS

Some associations may be drawn between this study of the backgrounds of PSR members and the problems of establishing grounds for the divisions within party membership in 1917. Social background, education and occupation clearly played a part in delineating divisions between central party leadership and local party leadership, and offer an explanation for the differing political priorities of these groups. Study of women party workers demonstrates that women played a major role in all aspects of party work prior to 1917, but that the demands of the mass electorate cut them out of public party work in the revolutionary period. Women lacked the electoral backing that so empowered *trudiashchiisia* men with local connections within local party leadership. Experiences in prison and exile provide a useful model for ways in which these divisions based on education and occupation could play a part in the development of individuals' political outlook. Emigration presented very different problems, and was generally a less radicalising experience than Siberian exile. PSR members in emigration came disproportionately from those with higher education and with wealthier backgrounds and could become divorced from the real situation in Russia. The working classes were likely to suffer more grievously than their intelligentsia comrades, and hence more likely to adopt political positions to the left of the political spectrum. Such

⁶⁵ Maria E. Klemeteva-Ukhova, a dressmaker by trade, who was in Paris and Brussels between 1910 and 1917 (*Politkatorzhan*, p. 282), and Pavla G. Kallistratova, a deacon's daughter and student who worked in a Paris sewing machine factory between 1911 and 1917 (*Politkatorzhan*, p. 262)

⁶⁶ One of the more interesting of these is L.I. Murashko, who lived in New York between 1912 and 1917, and worked in unskilled work, on steamers as a navvy, and a cinematic technician. (*Politkatorzhan*, p. 423)

⁶⁷ Iadov, 'Parizhskaia emigratsiia v godi voini', p. 198

generalisations cannot of course be taken as a rule. They do, however, give some explanation for the tendency of the local leadership, dominated by working class groups, to stand to the left of the central party leadership, and to resist coalition politics.

CHAPTER 4: GOVERNING THE TOWN

Nizhnii Novgorod was a town on a knife edge in 1917. This tense atmosphere was as much a result of the enormous economic and social pressure its occupants were under as the political rivalries which existed. This chapter seeks to establish the town's underlying tensions, as well as exploring the dynamics of power between competing political parties. Ultimately, the PSR's failure to capitalise upon their support in order to resist the Bolshevik seizure of power in the town is a central theme. This chapter starts by discussing the state of Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* in 1917, and in particular the two key problems for *guberniia* administration in 1917- the instability of the population and the provisions crisis. The Town Duma, which formed the hub around which democratic forces operated in Nizhnii Novgorod during 1917, is given detailed consideration. The PSR dominated the Duma, as well as the Soviets created in the town, and thus circumnavigated the operation of 'dual power' in Nizhnii Novgorod. The successes and failures of the Duma as a political force within the town are analysed, and its apparently apolitical nature is reassessed. The party political motivations of Duma members, despite common aims, ultimately exposed rifts within the Duma and paralysed struggle with the Bolshevik seizure of power. Just as in the villages where an individual or small group of individuals could wield a considerable amount of influence within an institution or community, so in the Duma it was the personalities and politics of a small number of representatives which defined Duma activity. The PSR's falling support among the town's garrison is of particular importance in the power dynamics of 1917, because the garrison's size and armed strength enabled it to wield considerable influence in shaping the politics of 1917.

SETTING THE SCENE IN NIZHEGORODSKAIA GUBERNIIA

Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* was situated in the Central Industrial area of Russia,¹ and provides an example of a *guberniia* with both heavy industry and large agricultural areas. Literacy levels in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* ran at around 22%, which was higher than surrounding Central Black Earth and Volga regions, but compared poorly with other Central Industrial provinces.² Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* effectively had a foot in each camp; it had affinity with both the largely rural, less educated Volga

¹ See Appendix 5, map of European Russia, and Appendix 6, map of Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*.

² Central industrial region; 27% literacy, Central Black earth; 18% literacy, Lower Volga; 19.6% literacy, Mid Volga; 18% literacy (From P. Gatrell, *The Tsarist Economy 1850-1919* [London, 1986], p. 36)

provinces, and the more industrialised Central Industrial provinces. As such, it offers a particularly interesting case study of PSR support. The *guberniia* was split into eleven *uezds* and 249 *volosts*. The population of the *guberniia* in 1917 was around two million,³ of which only 361,000 lived in the thirteen towns of the *guberniia*. Of these, 204,000 lived in Nizhnii Novgorod itself, a large and highly industrialised city. There were some 70,000 workers situated in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* in 1917, most of whom were active in heavy and metallurgical industries. The biggest industrial centres were situated in the suburbs of Nizhnii Novgorod, in Kanavin and Sormovo.

The state of the *guberniia*'s finances in 1917 was parlous. By September 1917 the situation looked irreparably appalling; the town public administration had 90,320 roubles collateral at its disposal. The cost just of paying state employees and workers for September came to 300,000 roubles. Though representatives were sent from the Duma to request assistance from commercial banks, no help was forthcoming.⁴ This left the administration in a position of total bankruptcy. This was to have significant impact on all spheres of life in the *guberniia*. Militias, for example, had to be voluntary rather than paid, which made them even more open to corruption, and difficult to recruit. The administration had few options in maintaining public order. When factories had difficulty paying wages, as at the Simens and Gal'ske works, the *guberniia* commissar was forced to appeal to the Provisional Government for 25,000 roubles- the *guberniia* administration simply did not have the means to help.⁵

AN UNSTABLE POPULATION

Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* faced unprecedented turbulence in its population in the years 1914-1917, which brought a peculiar instability and unique atmosphere to the area, as social identities were challenged by changes in occupation and location. Figures on population size are difficult to assess because the *guberniia*'s transitory population, including the garrison, refugees and relocated workers are not included in official tallies.⁶ These groups together swelled the population of the *guberniia* by some 100,000, and the soldiers at least were centred in Nizhnii Novgorod itself. The war was

³ P. A. Golub et al (ed.) *Velikaia Oktiabr'skaia Sotsialisticheskaia Revoliutsiia - Entsiklopediia* (Moscow, 1987), cites 2,081,200 population in 1917; N.P. Oganovskii (ed.) *Sel'skoe khoziastvo Rossii v XX veke; Sbornik statistiko-ekonomicheskikh svedenie za 1901-1922g.* (Moscow, 1923), pp. 20-21, cites 2,051,700 in 1916.

⁴ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 3, l. 39; From Duma records, 16th September 1917.

⁵ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 25, l. 231. Telegram from *guberniia* commissar Demidov to Prince Lvov, Ministry of Internal Affairs. Page undated, but *delo* covering the period 3rd March-3rd July 1917.

⁶ D. J. Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga: 1917 in Saratov* (New York, 1986), pp. 29-31

the driving force in movement of the *guberniia*'s population. Mobilisation for the army took men out of the *guberniia*, while an influx of refugees, the town garrison and evacuated factories all brought people in. The majority of the *guberniia*'s population, some 1,696,800 people, were situated in the villages, and were occupied with agricultural production. The conscription of men between the ages of eighteen and fifty-five severely damaged Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*'s agricultural economy, as it left the village economy in the hands of women and the elderly.⁷ Between 1914 and 1917, the sown area in the *guberniia* went down by 50%, and more than 20% of peasant households were without sown land altogether.⁸ The haemorrhaging of men from the villages had considerable social as well as economic impact.⁹

In the towns, the population was swelled by the by the evacuation of eight large factories from Riga and Petrograd to Nizhnii Novgorod in 1915.¹⁰ One can only speculate on the effects the influx of a big city workforce with traditions of worker radicalism may have had on the indigenous worker population of Nizhnii Novgorod. The garrison stationed in the town had a greater quantifiable impact on life in Nizhnii Novgorod. Numbering some 40,000 men, and predominantly reserve infantry regiments, the soldiers were a force numerically approaching that of workers in Nizhnii Novgorod.¹¹ The presence of a relatively large garrison in Nizhnii Novgorod was an additional strain on Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*'s provisions situation, and an inflammatory influence on local politics. Their capacity to influence political life was

⁷ Of the inspected village population of 1,587,800, 919,400 (57%) were women. (Oganovskii, *Sel'skoe khoziastvo Rossii*, pp. 20-21).

⁸ Golub, *Velikaia Oktiabr'skaia*, p. 335

⁹ See A. G. Meyer, 'The Impact of World War One on Russian Women's Lives' in B. Clements et al. (ed.) *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation* (Berkeley, 1991), pp. 216-218; for an assessment of women in agriculture and the plight of soldiers' wives.

¹⁰ Golub, *Velikaia Oktiabr'skaia*, p. 335. 8 industries from Riga were evacuated to Nizhnii Novgorod in 1915, including the factories 'Erba', 'Felzer', 'Novaia Etna' and others. The number of workers moved is not specified, but based on the number of industries moved, one would estimate that it was considerable.

¹¹ Though 40,000 was a significant force, it paled in comparison with the forces situated in neighbouring *guberniias*, as this table of approximate garrison sizes shows (based on information from Golub, *Velikaia Oktiabr'skaia*).

| Province | Estimate of 1917 garrison sizes |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| Voronezh | 70,000 |
| Kazan | 50,000 |
| Nizhegorodskaia | 40,000 |
| Don oblast | 30,000 in Rostov alone |
| Penza | 70,000 |
| Samara | 100,000 |
| Saratov | 19,100 |
| Simbirsk | 70-90,000 |
| Tambov | 100,000 |

enhanced by their location in Nizhnii Novgorod, which was the centre for the *guberniia*'s administration, and the seat of power for the area. A Soviet of soldiers' deputies was formed on 4th March, and was dominated by the PSR. The PSR's dominance within the garrison was however steadily eroded in the course of 1917, and was replaced with growing support for the Bolsheviks, and a general uncertainty and lack of commitment among the soldiery. The uncertain mood of the garrison was a major factor affecting the Bolsheviks' seizure of power in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*. The town's administrative bodies recognised at the outset the possible threat posed by the garrison to established authority. One of the first acts of the post-February revolution Duma, for example, was to award 5,000 roubles for the purchase of Easter gifts for all the 'brave soldiers defending us' in the garrison.¹² Ultimately, however, such gestures were powerless against the rising tide of frustration and insubordination in the garrison.

The influx of refugees and evacuees into Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* placed a massive strain on *guberniia* administration and provoked tension and hostility among the population. It is estimated that by January 1917 within the Russian empire, some six million people had been forcibly displaced by the war.¹³ These refugees were concentrated in the mid-Volga region, because it was transversed by the Riazan-Ural'sk and Trans-Siberian railways.¹⁴ Such massive dislocation of population inevitably had serious implications, both for the refugees themselves, and for the areas in which they sought refuge. In Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*, the commissar reported that there were more than 53,000 refugees in the *guberniia*.¹⁵ Of these, some 10,000 settled in Nizhnii Novgorod's famous market area, turning that relatively small area into a 'living town'.¹⁶

The reception these newcomers faced is difficult to gauge, not least because the refugees trickled in over three years, and attitudes towards them changed in that time. While it is reported that refugees were welcomed into Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*

¹² GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 1, l. 97; from Duma records, 4th-5th March 1917.

¹³ P. Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia During World War One* (Bloomington 1999), p. 3. Gatrell suggests a lower figure of just under five million in his earlier work; P. Gatrell, 'Refugees in the Russian Empire 1914-1917: Population Displacement and Social Identity', in E. Acton et al. (ed.) *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution 1914-1921* (Bloomington, 1997), p. 554.

¹⁴ O. Figes, 'Peasant Farmers and the Minority Groups of Rural Society: Peasant Egalitarianism and Village Social Relations During the Russian Revolution (1917-1921)' in E. Kingston-Mann et al. (ed.) *Peasant Economy, Culture and Politics of European Russia 1800-1921* (Princeton, 1991), p. 391.

¹⁵ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 22, l. 19; telegram from *guberniia* commissar Sumgin to the Ministry for Internal Affairs, undated.

¹⁶ Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking*, p. 249.

villages in 1915 with gifts of wood and bread,¹⁷ attitudes towards the newcomers deteriorated, in direct relation to their large numbers and to the threat of food shortages that beset the *guberniia* by 1917.¹⁸ Anti-Semitism was repeatedly mentioned in reports as a factor provoking hostility towards refugees from the population. One village declared that they would be happy to accept some refugees, but that the Jewish refugees stationed in their village would have to be replaced by Christian families.¹⁹ While anti-Semitism was certainly an important feature of hostility towards refugees, the provisions crisis was a more important factor. The *guberniia* commissar linked the rise of anti-Semitic feeling and the provisions crisis specifically:

. . . manifestation of discontent towards the Jewish-refugees is clearly seen. The population of Liskov village urgently demands their rapid removal. Such unfriendly attitudes of the population to Jewish-refugees have direct links with insufficiency of provisions.²⁰

Many sources refer repeatedly to the threat of pogroms, and these pogroms may well have been a reflection of the instability of the *guberniia*'s population as a result of population movement and displacement. Soldiers played a prominent part in the best reported of the pogroms in Nizhnii Novgorod. Pogroms themselves may well have been under-reported in the socialist press, partly out of anxiety from the reporters that publicity did not encourage such movements to escalate.²¹ This sentiment can be seen in the refusal of the Duma leader Vladimir Ganchel to publicly acknowledge even the threat of pogroms, despite his acceptance of measures taken to combat them.²² An editorial warned in May of the 'affairs of dark forces', and stated that pogroms would be nipped in the bud, and that soldiers were authorised to arrest those inciting pogroms.²³ The soldiers' rising of July sparked two days of pogrom activity in Nizhnii Novgorod town.²⁴ Other sources suggest that in early October the pogrom movement active in Tambov *guberniia* spread into Ardatovskii and Lukoianovskii *uezds*.²⁵ A report in

¹⁷ Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking*, p. 68.

¹⁸ Figes, 'Peasant Farmers and the Minority Groups', pp. 392-3.

¹⁹ Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking*, p. 249.

²⁰ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 43, l. 361; Report from the *guberniia* commissar to the Minister for Internal Affairs on the mood of the population in Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia*, August-September 1917.

²¹ A useful discussion of the 'filtering effect' of press sources on local events can be found in D. Koenker, W.G. Rosenberg, *Strikes and Revolution in Russia, 1917* (Princeton, 1989), pp. 222-229.

²² GANO, f. 27, op.1, d. 4, l. 127; Duma records, 31st October 1917.

²³ *Narod*, no. 12, 12th May 1917, p. 2.

²⁴ *Narod*, no. 35, 5th July 1917, p. 3. See chapter 4, pp. 157-158.

²⁵ D.A. Chugaev et al (ed.) *Revolutsionnoe dvizheniie v Rossii nakanune Oktiabr'skogo vooruzhennogo vosstanie (1-24 Oktiabr' 1917)* (1962, Moscow), doc. 419, p. 386, in a note from the assistant of the commander of Moscow military region Lieutenant Rovnii, to the Captain of the war ministry's political administration, Lieutenant V.V. Sher, about the situation in the *okrug*.

Narod on 20th October warned of pogrom agitation, and of the distribution of Black Hundreds leaflets.²⁶

Uezd commissar reports referred to a range of pogrom activity, often anti-Semitic in character. Makarevskii *uezd* commissar warned of the threat of imminent pogrom activity directed against refugees, stimulated by the provisions crisis, and by anti-Semitic feeling:

Resentment towards Jewish-refugees is clearly seen, with urgent demands from the population for their rapid removal from the village, and what is more, these demands are accompanied by threats to Jewish addresses. It is my deep conviction, based on sound information on the mood of the region, that these threats may be carried out....This anti-Jewish movement came about in direct connection with the terrible situation of the provisions question...Provisions disorder has initiated a rising of dark strength of a counter-revolutionary type, which up till now was not giving any such signs of life; in the backs of provisions stores strong agitation against all committees, and against provisions and land courts is being carried out...²⁷

This report suggests that hostility towards refugees was a trigger to other, more general protests against the local administration, which enabled the forces of the right to mobilise. The *guberniia* administration struggled to provide adequate maintenance for the refugees; as early as April, reports came in of their urgent needs:

Refugees settled in Misovskii *volost* do not receive rations and quartering money, and are in severe need, not knowing where to turn with requests about the improvement of their situation.²⁸

Housing of the refugees also posed a problem; the *guberniia* commissar was forced to petition the Minister of Internal Affairs in September for permission to requisition private housing in order to provide shelter for the influx of refugees and those, like the Riga workers, evacuated to Nizhnii Novgorod.²⁹ The refugees themselves in Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia* were clearly aware of their untenable position, and actively sought to improve their position and to move elsewhere. Several thousand refugees joined labour teams (*rabochie družiny*) in Nizhnii Novgorod which were formed by the refugees themselves in an attempt to gain useful employment.³⁰ This reflected a national trend of refugees organising in support of claims for better conditions.³¹ The *guberniia* commissar reported petitions from refugees to move to other *guberniias* which had enjoyed better harvests. The commissar requested to the Minister of Internal Affairs that

²⁶ *Narod*, no. 80, 20th October 1917, p. 2. This evocation of Black Hundreds activity may have been nothing more than moderate socialist hysteria.

²⁷ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 43, l. 365-6. Makarevskii *uezd* report, October 1917.

²⁸ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 42, l. 371; report from the captain of Seimenskii police to Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia* meeting about refugees, 26th April 1917.

²⁹ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 45, l. 221; from *guberniia* commissar to Ministry for Internal Affairs, 2nd September 1917.

³⁰ Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking*, p. 134.

³¹ Gatrell, 'Refugees in the Russian Empire 1914-1917', p. 560.

an order be made to the *guberniias* Viatka, Ufimsk and Samara to accept a migration of those refugees in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* who wished to be sent. This migration was only possible while the river routes were open.³² The commissar would have been glad to lose at least some of his uninvited guests. The instability of Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*'s population was undoubtedly an important factor in the tense mood of 1917.

THE PROVISIONS CRISIS

The problem of feeding the *guberniia* was of monumental proportions from the outset of 1917, and fuelled the tensions in the population engendered by the volatile population. These difficulties had profound political and social implications. Reports from the *uezds* repeatedly linked fears about provisions to a rise in extremist actions, and the population's divorce from the work of public organisations. An editorial in the local PSR newspaper *Narod*, written in September 1917, entitled 'In the Country' reported that everything in the *guberniia* revolved around the supply question, and that if the population were provided with grain in the coming year, the *guberniia* would be able to transfer peacefully into its new democratic life.³³ The *guberniia* commissar's report for the months of August and September stated that:

Generally, public organisations worked satisfactorily, although the population's interest in public life waned to a marked degree as a result of the worrying state of the provisioning situation.³⁴

References to high grain prices, insufficiency of supplies, and the urgency of the provisions situation were a common factor in *uezd* commissar reports.³⁵

The mood of the *volost* raises alarm. Even if the *volost skhod* does not gather, it is impossible to avoid major incidents in many villages, with hostility, led mostly by Timofei Rezchukov, directed against provisions courts. If the *skhod* does gather, serious incidents will result. There has been information from many villages about preparations for unrest, because business at the *skhod* touches upon the most painful question of provisions.³⁶

In Gorbatovskii *uezd*, there were food riots that went on for four days in August, which culminated in the crowd calling for the heads of the provisions *Uprava*.³⁷ The problem of grain shortage was threefold in origin- reduction of sown area, the pressure of feeding the garrison and refugees, and the breakdown of trade relations between town

³² GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 22, l. 19; Telegram from *guberniia* commissar Sumgin to the Ministry for Internal Affairs, undated.

³³ *Narod*, no. 69, 24th September 1917, pp. 2-3.

³⁴ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 43, l. 361: report from the *guberniia* commissar to the Ministry for Internal Affairs, on the mood of the population in August and September 1917.

³⁵ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 13, l. 155-9; protocol of the meeting of *uezd* commissars in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*. 10th-11th April 1917.

³⁶ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 270. Semenovskii *uezd* commissar report, August 1917.

³⁷ *Narod*, no. 61, 3rd September 1917, p. 4.

and country. The All-Russian Soviet of peasants' deputies in May 1917 outlined this third problem succinctly:

the peasantry surrenders all the produce of its labour and economy at established prices. Without further delay, fixed prices must be introduced on manufactured goods to correspond with the prices on grain. . . This must be done to correct the injustice, also to prevent the ruin of the working peasantry.³⁸

On 2nd August, Nizhegorodskaja Town Duma discussed the need to fix prices on products other than grain, demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of one of the causes of the provisions crisis. This discussion however was to centre on conflict between the socialists who favoured state control of the economy, and the liberal Kadets who sought to avoid restrictions on free-market economy.³⁹ The Provisional Government was aware of this problem, and proposed an attempt to fix prices on the goods required in the countryside, and to make them available in order to facilitate the exchange of goods between town and country.⁴⁰ This monumental enterprise required nothing less than control over the whole economy, and never got beyond committee stage.⁴¹ The proposed state control of agriculture and industry was beyond the authority of the Provisional Government, which as Kerensky pointed out, had no state mechanism of control available.⁴² This was symptomatic of the ad-hoc measures that the Provisional Government took, without having the means or the motivation to make the measures effective. There was an essential dichotomy between the use of anti-market, administrative levers to stabilise the economy, and the use of democratic norms and procedures to implement them.⁴³

Ganchel, leader of the Duma and PSR member, pointed out inadequacies of the current provisions committees, and called for new administration in provisioning.⁴⁴ On 12th September the Duma decided, following the precedent set by the Petrograd Town Duma, to take over the provisions committees.⁴⁵ Ganchel's general report on the provisions situation in September was gloomy:

³⁸ R. Browder and A.F. Kerensky (ed.) *The Russian Provisional Government 1917; Documents* (Stanford, 1961), vol. 2, doc. 545, p. 631; report from *Den'*, no. 61, 17th May 1917.

³⁹ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 2, l. 172-8, from Duma records, 2nd August 1917.

⁴⁰ Browder and Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional*, vol. 2, doc. 535, p. 621; announcement of the Provisional Government regarding the grain monopoly, 28th March 1917.

⁴¹ V. Mau, 'Bread, Democracy and the Bolshevik Coup', *Revolutionary Russia* 7(1) 1994, p. 37

⁴² A.F. Kerensky, 'The Policy of the Provisional Government of 1917' *Slavonic and East European Review* XI(31) 1932, p. 12; 'the government had to replace police compulsion by moral conviction.'

⁴³ Mau, 'Bread', p. 36.

⁴⁴ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 2, l. 172-8; from Duma records, 2nd August 1917.

⁴⁵ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 3, l. 19; from Duma records, 12th September 1917.

nothing has come of attempts to purchase grain in Kazan, Simbirsk and Viatka *guberniias*. The last two have almost no grain, but Kazan is withholding grain, which is antisocial and goes against the Provisional Government. . . Ganchel proposes sending a delegate to Kazan for talks with the Kazan provisioning organisations, and to explain the serious situation in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*.⁴⁶

The grain crisis threatened the stability of the whole *okrug*; the Kazan *guberniia* commissar complained to Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* commissar in September about Nizhnii citizens coming to Kazan to try to buy grain, which threatened to cause civil disturbance.⁴⁷ The grain purchasing commission, established to buy grain from neighbouring provinces, continued to face little success:

“You must see Bashkirov urgently, to report to him, that despite all measures taken by the Nizhegorodskaia Purchasing Commission, they have not been successful in providing bread for Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*, because of the resistance of Kazan, Viatka, Simbirsk, Ufimsk, Samara *guberniias* to protocols of the regional *volost uezd* committees. The situation of the town in the populated factory area of the breadless *uezds* is catastrophic. The town is not supplied with bread even for a day. Tobolsk and Kuban evade the fulfilment of October and September orders; Ufimsk and Kazan also refused to fulfil October orders. For the safety of the situation it is necessary to send a scheduled train of grain, to call on the *guberniia*”⁴⁸

The *guberniia* commissar appealed directly to the Minister of Internal Affairs in an attempt to make Kazan sell grain to Nizhnii:

I report first, that provisions hunger has come to the *guberniia*, especially Balakhninskii, Semenovskii, Makarevskii and Gorbatovskii *uezds*, where already hunger is seen. It is necessary to transport grain from other *guberniias* before the closure of navigation. I request that the minister of Provisions gives permission for the regional *volost uezd* provisioning committees to buy grain from Kazan *guberniia*, because purchase of grain is prohibited. I ask the Kazan *guberniia* commissar to urgently confirm that permission is given to the *guberniia* Provisions committee for free purchase of grain for export to Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*.⁴⁹

Apart from its attempts to acquire grain from neighbouring provinces, the Duma and the *guberniia* commissar sought to blunt the *guberniia*'s impending hunger by acquiring 500,000 puds of potatoes ‘to procure cheap potato flour for the poor.’⁵⁰ Even this measure was fraught with difficulties, as the preparation of the potatoes was very slow, and the price of potatoes rose steadily. As the year progressed, acquiring imported food supplies became increasingly urgent, both because existing supplies were running low, and because as the freeze set in, some parts of the *guberniia* became inaccessible. This

⁴⁶ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 3, l. 19; from Duma records, 12th September 1917.

⁴⁷ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 22, l. 87; report from Kazan about the provisions crisis, with a note written by Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* commissar on the reverse, 26th September 1917.

⁴⁸ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 4, l. 5. from Duma records, telegram sent to DV Sirotkin of the Nizhegorodskaia Purchasing commission, and read out in the Duma chamber on 5th October 1917.

⁴⁹ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, p. 305. Letter from Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* commissar to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, undated but probably September 1917.

⁵⁰ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 3, l. 18; from Duma records, 12th September 1917.

meant that they had to have reserves laid in before late autumn. An atmosphere of rising panic is clearly discernible in the *uezds*:

In view of the extremely severe situation of the provisions question in the village Liskovo; the complete absence of grain supply at the regional markets; the *volost* provisions board of neighbouring Vasil'skii and Kniagininskii *uezds* where the peasant population is incomparably better supplied with bread than the population of Makarevskii *uezd*, in the most senseless way, and in spite of all common sense, on the basis of a total misunderstanding of their functions they delay and requisition every pud of provisions products transported to Liskovo village, and this makes the population terribly angry. . . The most immediate measures must be taken for the cessation of the totally unjustified and terribly damaging anarchist activities of these boards.⁵¹

In Balakhninskii *uezd*, violence was shown against members of the provisions administration.⁵² Despite the increasingly desperate attempts of Balakhninskii's Town Duma, there was no success in purchasing grain and other foodstuffs; this left the population hungry and without food reserves.⁵³ Makarevskii *uezd* commissar made a desperate report to the *guberniia* commissar:

The provisions question is situated in its most severe form. The expense of grain products does not abate, and opposition is intensifying. The urgent necessities of the poor population of the village Liskov are satisfied only by great labours. I am putting forward all my strength to smooth over the approaching severe hunger as far as possible. . . In all cases I must again ask you not to leave Liskovskii *raion* without help of grain from Nizhnii, otherwise, if the measures I have taken seem insufficient, there is a possibility of disorder.⁵⁴

The confusion engendered by the events of October only worsened this incendiary situation. Though this source was obviously very hostile to the Bolsheviks anyway, an article in *Narod* entitled 'Bolshevism at work' suggested that the Bolshevik seizure of power considerably worsened the provisions situation of the poor peasantry:

the speculators, protected by Bolshevism, say "Now anything is possible." And the country 'spiders' (*pauki*) try everything- they buy grain at 10 roubles, and sell it at 25-30 roubles. The poor peasants are hungry, but the speculators are triumphant- the 'new rights' have come, and everything is possible.⁵⁵

These desperate reports are a vital backdrop to the political climate of Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia* during 1917. The provisions crisis exacerbated existing political instability in Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia*, and placed an untenable strain on the already pressured town, village and factory administrations. This strain, when coupled with movement of the population, contributed to an uncertain mood in the *guberniia*, and put further pressure on the *guberniia*'s administration.

⁵¹ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 45, l. 170; Makarevskii *uezd* commissar report, 23rd September 1917.

⁵² GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 314; report to *guberniia* commissar, 10th October 1917.

⁵³ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 45, l. 205; copy of writings from the journal of the meeting of Balakhninskii town Duma on the question of preparation of provisions, 28th September 1917.

⁵⁴ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 435. Report of Makarevskii *uezd* commissar, October 1917.

⁵⁵ *Narod*, No. 106, 19th November 1917, p. 3.

THE MYTH OF DUAL POWER

There is general reference, especially in Soviet sources,⁵⁶ to the existence of dual power in the provinces. This dual power referred to a mirroring of the situation in Petrograd, whereby the ‘bourgeois’ organs of power, usually embodied in the town Duma and the ‘committees of public safety’ that sprang up in 1917, developed as a separate entity from Soviet power, which supposedly represented the working people. These two bodies, so the Soviet analysis goes, were essentially incompatible and destined to compete for control of the provinces. The existence of dual power is widely accepted, even by western historians,⁵⁷ but any attempt to impose one model on the whole of Russia is profoundly flawed. The activities of Nizhnii Novgorod Town Duma demonstrate that it is not possible to draw clear demarcations between these ‘bourgeois’ organisations, and the various Soviets and ‘democratic’ organisations that existed in the town. The two strands of ‘dual power’ were by and large administered by the same individuals, who worked for the same common goals.

The Town Duma of Nizhnii Novgorod was established in 1781, and though its membership was transformed in 1917, the institution itself was to remain a significant uniting force for democratic elements in Nizhnii Novgorod town. It acted as the town’s administrator for much of 1917, but the most significant manifestation of this uniting role was its part in resisting the Bolshevik seizure of power. The responses of the Town Duma to revolution in February 1917 challenge at a most basic level the concept of dual power within Nizhnii Novgorod. Though the Duma hesitated over the demands of crowds of workers and soldiers to free all political prisoners on 1st March, this was before the deputies had received any official confirmation of events in Petrograd. Receipt of Rodzyanko’s telegram confirmed revolutionary events, and enabled the Duma to free the town’s political prisoners.⁵⁸ Despite the moderate liberal make-up of its mainly Kadet members, the revolution was unanimously welcomed:

Rodzyanko’s telegram was read. Deafening cries of “hurrah!” and loud applause drowned out the last words of the town mayor.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ P.N. Pershin, ‘Krest’ianskii zemel’nye komitety v period podgotovki velikoi Oktiabr’skoi sotsialisticheskoe revoliutsii’, *Voprosy istorii* 7, 1948, p. 73; remarks on the existence of dual power in the Russian provinces.

⁵⁷ For example, see E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*, (Harmondsworth, 1983), volume 1, pp. 81-111; D. Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Regime, from the February Revolution to the July Days* (London, 1983), pp. 63-66, 79-84.

⁵⁸ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 104. Writings of Magergut, member of the Sormovo PSR group, accounting the group’s activities between April 1916 and April 1917.

⁵⁹ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 1, l. 59, from Duma records, 1st March 1917.

From the very outset of the revolution, the Duma sought to embrace the new 'democratic' organisations, and to offer them representation within the Town Duma. This ensured that there was no clear distinction between the local state apparatus and 'revolutionary democracy'. The Town Public Committee which the Duma established to 'promulgate the aims and orders of the state Duma' included representatives from a range of public organisations, including Soviets, unions and *zemstva*.⁶⁰ On 10th April it was agreed to include representatives of other public organisations, including delegates from the Soviet of workers' deputies, in the constitution of the Town Duma.⁶¹ This declaration was extended to include representatives from the Soviet of soldiers' deputies at the end of April.⁶² This show of unity on the part of the town's democratic organisations was two way- the Provisions committee, for example, included five representatives of the Duma as well as representatives from the *zemstva*, Soviet of workers' deputies, the Peasants' Union, the refugee committee and the town co-operatives.⁶³ This ensured that the Duma maintained some level of credence and authority despite its restricted franchise.

New elections were not held until 16th July, but their basis of four tailed suffrage ensured that the Duma rightfully represented the town population. The Duma became a genuine democratic authority in the town. This democracy was not matched by the bastardised anarcho-syndicalism of the Soviets.⁶⁴ Results of the July elections demonstrated the authority enjoyed by the PSR. Of the 105 seats, they won 40. Note that in contrast to many other provincial cities, the PSR stood independently, rather than participating in a socialist bloc with Mensheviks and Popular Socialists (NS).⁶⁵

⁶⁰ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 1, l. 59, from Duma records, 1st March 1917.

⁶¹ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 1, l. 191, from Duma records, 10th April 1917.

⁶² GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 1, l. 287, from Duma records, 29th April 1917.

⁶³ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 1, l. 282, from Duma records, 24th April 1917.

⁶⁴ Radkey quotes Chernov's very negative analysis of the Soviets as anti-democratic organisations which offered a façade for the dictatorship of the party which controlled them. (O. Radkey, *The Sickle Under the Hammer: The Russian Socialist Revolutionaries in the Early Months of Soviet Rule* [New York, 1963], pp. 139-140.)

⁶⁵ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 2, l. 69-70. From Duma records, 28th July 1917. For a summary of the social and educational backgrounds of the PSR Duma deputies, see chart 3.vi, p. 107, chart 3.vii, p. 108. The PSR victory in Nizhnii Novgorod was exceeded in Moscow, where the PSR won some 50% of the vote in the June elections to the Moscow municipal town Duma. (For an analysis of these results, see D. Koenker, *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution* [Princeton, 1981], pp. 196-208). An analysis of results of Duma elections of 1917 in other towns can be found in W.G. Rosenberg, 'The Russian Municipal Duma Elections of 1917', *Soviet Studies* 21(2) 1969, pp. 131-163.

TABLE 4.I: POLITICAL CONSTITUTION OF THE NIZHNII NOVGOROD TOWN DUMA FROM JULY 1917

| Party | Number of seats |
|--|-----------------|
| Socialist Revolutionary Party (PSR) | 40 |
| Party of Peoples' Freedom (Kadets) | 25 |
| Trudovik 'Popular Socialists' (NS), and the RSDRP group ' <i>Edinstvo</i> ' | 15 |
| Social Democrats (Mensheviks) and <i>Bund</i> | 12 |
| Zionist | 4 |
| Social Democrats (Bolshevik) | 4 |
| Trade-Industry group | 2 |

The opening speech of the newly constituted Duma was given by Vladimir Genrikhovich Ganchel, who became President of the Duma's executive committee and town mayor. Ganchel was accordingly one of the most influential men in the town. A PSR member, he was a soldier in the 185th Infantry Reserve regiment, stationed in Nizhnii Novgorod. Of a Polish accountant father, and a Ukrainian mother, Ganchel had been brought up in Kiev, where he had completed a teaching course, and attended the Kiev Commercial Institute, until it was evacuated from Kiev in 1914, and Ganchel himself called up for military duty in 1916. He had been president of the *zemstvo* employees' society in Kiev, written for illegal and legal newspapers, and had been an active PSR member since 1906.⁶⁶ This political experience made him a valuable commodity within the Nizhnii Novgorod soldier body after the February revolution. He was elected first president of the Nizhegorodskaia Soviet of soldiers' deputies. Ganchel's prominent role in the soldiers' Soviet and the town administration confirms the difficulty of applying the concept of dual power in Nizhnii Novgorod.

Ganchel's nomination for presidency of the *Uprava* provoked protest from the Kadets. His nomination, and indeed his legitimacy as a Duma member, was challenged, because he was a soldier, because he was not a resident of Nizhnii Novgorod, and because his

⁶⁶ F. Seleznev, 'Our Town Mayor in 1917', *Nizhegorodskii rabochii*, June 1999, p. 6. His background, of middle education, teaching background and public activities, was typical of the PSR's urban activists (See chapter 3, 'Members' Social Background, Education and Occupation', pp. 106-111).

mother was Ukrainian. These objections were ignored by the socialist majority, who voted him in regardless:

Ganchel already takes on the responsibilities of the post, and though he is not a regional resident, and is a soldier, above all else he is a citizen, and that is why he will carry out his duties for all the working population of Russia.⁶⁷

Recognising that Ganchel's role as soldier theoretically precluded him from such political participation, the leaders of the Duma sent a letter directly to the Minister of War Kerensky, requesting that Ganchel, and another soldier elected to the Duma, A. Ivanov, be released from military service.⁶⁸ This incidentally must have caused Kerensky some difficulty, so desperate to maintain fighting discipline within the army, and to control the rampant politicisation of the armed forces.⁶⁹

Ganchel's political tenor, broadly speaking, corresponded with the policies championed by the PSR's Central Committee. His acceptance speech of the mayorship provides ample evidence of his upbeat but starkly realistic view of the tasks faced by the Duma; he emphasised the need for continuation of the war, preservation of revolutionary victories, and for all classes of the population to combine in order to combat the grievous economic crisis besetting Russia.⁷⁰ Ganchel provides an example of the party worker so desired by central party bodies- educated, informed, but aware of and in agreement with central party policy. This is in marked contrast to other major figures within the Nizhnii Novgorod PSR group.⁷¹ It was his moderation and support of the Provisional Government which defined the policies of the Duma. His confrontational attitude in opposing the Bolshevik seizure of power, however, was to divide him irrevocably from his moderate socialist allies in the Duma.

The Duma's commitment to working in harmony with the other revolutionary-democratic organisations of the town was clarified by this declaration on 2nd August. The Duma clearly embodied a bridge between the 'bourgeois' Provisional Government, and revolutionary democracy:

⁶⁷ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 2, l. 84. From the speech of S.S. Vekslerchik (PSR) in the Town Duma, 1st August 1917.

⁶⁸ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 2, l. 105. Letter to Kerensky, in Duma records, dated 4th August.

⁶⁹ Kerensky played something of a double game, in trying to reassure the allies that Russia would remain a leading force, the officers and generals that he would strive to restore order, and the ordinary soldiers that the Provisional Government worked in their best interests. Kerensky's efforts to galvanise the front for the June offensive, demonstrate, however, that his priorities lay with the war, not the soldiers. (A.F. Kerensky, *The Kerensky Memoirs* [London, 1966], p. 282, offers a poignant account of Kerensky's efforts on the front.)

⁷⁰ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 2, l. 85. Ganchel's acceptance speech in Duma records, 1st August 1917.

⁷¹ The leading figure in the Sormovo PSR group for example, Dmitrii Tiurikov, promulgated policy which was to the left of the PSR (See chapter 6, 'PSR Orthodoxy in Sormovo', p. 203).

Nizhegorodskaja Duma in its meeting declares that it will act in total agreement with revolutionary-democratic organisations, and will render utmost support of government for the safety of the country and revolution, along a united path of relentless struggle with counter revolutionary attempts for the safety of revolutionary Russia . . . and together with this decisive revolutionary courage, steady pursuance in life of democratic programmes of the Provisional Government from the 8th July. In this heavy and laborious task the democratic Duma takes on itself the responsibilities of organising and uniting town democracy, and with all its strength and means to support the revolutionary politics of the Provisional Government and to carry out its programmes in the regions.⁷²

The Duma saw itself as taking a leading role in uniting the disparate elements of the town's democratic forces. It aimed to be the hub of power, but not the whole wheel. The coalition between the dominant PSR group and the other political parties in the Duma were the key to this role.

A TENUOUS COALITION

On the surface, Duma activities in the course of 1917 appeared to progress with little regard to political conflict. Even in moments of gravest danger, when the Bolsheviks encamped outside the Duma with an armed guard on 31st October, the Duma minutes recorded eight pages of reports on administrative matters, and just one, labelled 'the current moment', on the political situation in the town.⁷³ This reflects the responsibility Duma members felt towards the continued successful running of the town, as well as their enduring naivety. A closer look at Duma proceedings, however, reveals clear and at times irreconcilable political differences, which made the successful operation of coalition politics a challenge that was too great for the increasingly alienated socialist parties and the Kadets. The revolutionary parties were ill suited to the rigours of coalition politics. Chernov remarked that:

Exclusion from legal political activity tended to ideological intensity, to relentless logic, bordering on the fanaticism of party dogma. Illegal struggle at all times and among all peoples has been a school of impractical theorising, of proud irreconcilability.⁷⁴

This was an accurate reflection of the problems the town Duma faced, despite the essentially harmonious programmes of the moderate socialists. The presence of four Bolshevik deputies in the Duma was not a large enough force to affect the proceedings of the Duma significantly, and the Bolshevik deputies rarely participated in Duma debate. Their presence in the Duma was however an uncomfortable reminder to the Kadets and moderate socialists that their view of revolution was not unopposed:

⁷² GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 2, l. 121. Duma records, 2nd August 1917. This measure was proposed by PSR member Tepkin, and was passed with two small amendments proposed by the Kadets.

⁷³ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 4, l. 118-126. Duma records, 31st October 1917.

⁷⁴ V. Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution* (New Haven, 1936), p. 118

GS Bitker (Bolshevik) declared, that the SR majority's view on power had been well established since the first days of the revolution, and that the experience of six months of revolution showed, in his opinion, the rightfulness of the Bolshevik point of view. "It is necessary to move away from the idea that one group can give up its class demands; the Bolsheviks reject coalition with the bourgeoisie. . .the only possible coalition is socialist workers and poor peasants."⁷⁵

Bitker actively sought the development of dual power in Nizhnii Novgorod, based on the polarisation of class interests in the town. He wanted the unity of town power which the Duma stood for broken down, in order to present the Soviet movement with the opportunity to seize power. The Duma had been successful in uniting 'democratic elements' of the town up until the Bolshevik seizure of power, which left the Bolsheviks with little room for manoeuvre in the first months of 1917. The coalition of forces was however terribly fragile. The Kadets were a significant minority of some 25%, but could not influence policy making in any way unless one of the major socialist groups backed them. As a result, from the very inception of the new Duma in July, the Kadets complained about being sidelined; as a mark of protest, they refused to take their allotted two places on the Duma *Uprava*.⁷⁶ Records of proposed bills and proposed amendments show that any Kadet initiative was routinely voted down. Increasing impatience and hostility towards the Kadets as representatives of the hated capitalist classes intensified through 1917,⁷⁷ and after the Kornilov affair in August manifested itself in ways which prevented coalition from functioning at all. These attitudes were mirrored by rising hostility towards the Kadets on the part of the PSR Central Committee, most particularly Chernov, who was baited mercilessly by the Kadet press. By the time the Kadets resigned from the Provisional Government on 22nd July, their exit was openly welcomed by *Delo naroda*, the national newspaper representing the PSR Central Committee.⁷⁸ The presence of a significant Kadet minority in the town Duma was a grave challenge to the successful continuation of coalition politics.

The lack of consensus within the Duma was not caused only by the Kadets. The Menshevik group, too, though they played an active role in the Duma, increasingly found themselves bulldozed by a coalition of the PSR and NS groups. The culmination of this, on 3rd November, was a grave blow to attempts at resistance to Bolsheviks:

A. B. Zakhoder declared that the Menshevik faction believes that the socialist bloc has been violated, because recently all the proposals made by the Mensheviks have been systematically declined. The faction cannot in the future take on itself responsibility for work in the Duma. It

⁷⁵ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 3, l. 10. Duma records, 9th September 1917.

⁷⁶ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 2, l. 82. Duma records, 1st August 1917.

⁷⁷ 'Zemlia i volia', *krestianskaia gazeta.*, no. 22, 15th August 1917, p. 1. This editorial highlighted the deep seated enmity that existed between the socialists and the Constitutional Democrat party.

⁷⁸ *Delo naroda*, no. 108, 23rd July 1917, p. 1.

withdraws from the Duma presidium A.V. Traube, and from the *Uprava* membership S.E. Grinevitskii and A.E. Ivanov.⁷⁹

The successful operations of the Duma based on a coalition of moderate socialists was breaking down well before the Bolshevik seizure of power in October. The discussion about the sending of delegates to the Democratic Conference, convened in Petrograd on 14th September, degenerated into open hostility between the factions, and total impasse. The debate centred upon whether or not to support the principle of continued coalition with the Kadets. Bolsheviks, NS's, *Edinstvo* and the PSR all proposed formulae for the sending of deputies, and all attacked the Kadets roundly, particularly in the light of the Kornilov affair.⁸⁰ Despite this apparent common ground, all deputies voted against all proposals except the one offered by their own faction. Further divisions, between the socialists in the Duma and those in other democratic organisations of the town, formed in the course of 1917. While the Duma sent its representatives to the Moscow state conference in August without discussion,⁸¹ the Sormovo branch of the Soviet of workers' deputies sent a telegram to the Moscow Soviet to protest against the participation of revolutionary democracy in that conference.⁸² Just as in Kazan, where centrifugal forces operated within the PSR organisation, so in Nizhnii Novgorod attitudes towards the war and to national governmental structures pulled the moderate socialists apart. These divisions within the Duma and among the moderate socialists were a key factor in enabling the Bolshevik coup to succeed.

RESPONSES TO THE BOLSHEVIK SEIZURE OF POWER

The dynamics of power in Nizhnii Novgorod after the Bolshevik seizure of power in Petrograd are complex. The moderate socialists who dominated the Soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies rejected the local Bolsheviks' call to transfer all power to the Soviets. The following day, however, on the 28th October, the Bolsheviks formed a Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC) and with the help of a Red Guard made up of some 300 Sormovo workers, and unspecified numbers of soldiers, the Bolsheviks seized the telegraph and telephone networks, and some typographies. Committee members of the seized telegraph and typography were arrested, as were a number of railway

⁷⁹ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 5, l. 27. Duma records, 3rd November 1917.

⁸⁰ Note that in the Duma's response to the Kornilov affair, the socialists indulged in histrionics, whilst Kadet condemnation was noticeably lukewarm. (GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 215-20, Duma records.)

⁸¹ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 2, l. 123, Duma records, 2nd August 1917. (Ganchel, incidentally, was selected by unanimous vote to represent the Duma, and a Kadet was also chosen, thought with a split vote.)

⁸² D.A. Chugaev et al. (ed.) *Revoliutsionnoe dvizheniie v Rossii v Avguste 1917g.- Razgrom Kornilovskogo miatezhe* (Moscow, 1959), doc. No. 399, p. 406; telegram dated 13th August.

workers, and the captain of the garrison.⁸³ On 29th October, the Bolsheviks were acknowledged as holding power in the city,⁸⁴ but this meant little; the Duma continued to administrate the town, and local government in the *guberniia* was not significantly affected. *Narod* commented that it was laughable to talk of Bolshevik success, since people would demand bread and peace, and the Bolsheviks were not empowered to give this, tomorrow or beyond.⁸⁵

There was profound discord amongst the groups who sought to resist the Bolshevik seizure of power, which to a certain extent mirrors the discord seen in the Duma prior to October. This discord was manifested both in the structures that were formed, which evolved rapidly in the course of six weeks, and in the attitudes of participants within these structures. The most poignant division was over the form of resistance to be taken. The Menshevik faction opposed any resistance which they considered could lead to bloodshed, whilst the PSR and NS factions both took a more hard-line stance. Another conflict for the Duma was the contradictions and conflicts inherent in attempting to continue its elected role as town administrator, whilst refusing to co-operate with the Bolsheviks.

The Duma sought to establish itself as a hub of resistance against the ‘unbidden rising against all the country of the Petrograd war-revolutionary committee’.⁸⁶ The PSR group within the Moscow Town Duma had set the precedent for the Duma as a focal point of Bolshevik resistance.⁸⁷ The Moscow Duma sent its representative, B.N. Kovarskii, to Nizhnii Novgorod. Despite the apparently unanimous feeling among Duma members to create a united revolutionary front against the Bolshevik seizure of power, from the very beginning there was a split in the city’s resistance to the Bolshevik seizure of power. The Duma formed a special committee for the ‘defence of the revolution’ (CDR), though a provisional revolutionary committee (PRC) had already been formed which included representatives from the Soviet and from the town’s democratic and public organisations. The Duma sought to insulate resistance to the Bolsheviks from any hint of co-operation or compromise, and as Kaliuzhnov, a prominent PSR member pointed out, if the moderate socialists pulled out of the soviets, the PRC would be left with a

⁸³ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 4, l. 106. Duma records, 29th October 1917.

⁸⁴ *Narod*, no. 89, 31st October 1917, p. 4.

⁸⁵ *Narod*, no. 88, 29th October 1917. p. 1.

⁸⁶ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 4, l. 89, from the speech of the G.R. Kilevein (Kadet) in the Duma, 26th October 1917.

⁸⁷ Radkey, *Sickle Under*, p. 50.

Bolshevik majority.⁸⁸ Initially, Ganchel favoured unification of the two committees, but after extensive bickering, the Duma agreed only to send its delegates to the PRC, so long as it did not include Bolshevik representatives.⁸⁹

The CDR included representatives from the Duma and from all public democratic organisations, who were to work on contacts with all organisations with the aims of ‘supporting the Provisional Government, prevention of civil war, and the preservation of all rights and freedoms of the citizen.’⁹⁰ The ten Duma members that were elected onto the CDR included representatives from all parties in the Duma except the Bolsheviks.⁹¹ The CDR was recognised by the PSR newspaper *Narod* as the legitimate centre of resistance to the Bolsheviks.⁹² Ganchel was the central figure in this committee; when he threatened to resign from the CDR if it did not reflect the views and wishes of the Duma, the other committee members categorically stated that the committee could not work without him.⁹³ He continued to hold his position as town mayor.

From the very inception of the CDR, profound divisions within the moderate socialist camp on attitudes towards the Bolshevik seizure of power were clear. The PSR, just as in Moscow, led staunch resistance to the Bolsheviks.⁹⁴ Ganchel emphasised the importance of an unyielding and hostile attitude towards the Bolsheviks. He stated on 28th October:

If CDR has the support of the population, it will be strong; we must show the most active opposition to the Bolsheviks, with no possibility of agreement with them. We must take measures now, not that blood be shed, but measures of active oppositional activity.⁹⁵

This resolute position supported by the NS and PSR factions was however resisted by the Mensheviks, whose squeamishness about bloodshed castrated their resistance. The Menshevik attitude in Nizhnii Novgorod was replicated among the Moscow Menshevik group.⁹⁶ The Menshevik P.F. Naletov declared that while he condemned the Bolshevik adventure as stupid and destructive, there should be no armed active rising against the Bolsheviks, since this would bring bloodshed. Ganchel in reply reiterated his

⁸⁸ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 4, l. 89, Duma records, 26th October 1917.

⁸⁹ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 4, l. 98, Duma records, 28th October 1917.

⁹⁰ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 4, l. 89, Duma records, 26th October 1917.

⁹¹ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 4, l. 89. These members included three PSR's, two from the NS/*Edinstvo* bloc, two Kadets, one Menshevik/Bund, and one Zionist.

⁹² *Narod*, no. 87, 28th October 1917, p. 1.

⁹³ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 4, l. 109, Duma records, 29th October 1917.

⁹⁴ Radkey, *Sickle Under*, pp. 59-61; on PSR resistance to the Bolsheviks in Moscow.

⁹⁵ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 4, l. 97, Duma records, 28th October 1917.

⁹⁶ Radkey, *Sickle Under*, p. 68.

determination to oppose the Bolsheviks with all available means, including even arms if a defence of the Duma building was necessary. K.N. Dertev, a member of the NS faction, accused the Mensheviks of holding a class based position, and emphasised the anarchic, non-political nature of the Bolshevik rising. The position of both NS and PSR members provoked protests from the Mensheviks, who objected to Ganchel's 'aggressive character in relation to the political rising of the Bolsheviks.'⁹⁷ Ganchel's declaration on the need to protect the Duma proved to be prophetic, since the Bolsheviks had no qualms about taking an aggressive character in relation to the political activities of the Duma. On the 29th October, at 2.30am, an extraordinary meeting of the Duma was held to discuss the entry of an armed guard of soldiers into the building, with Bolsheviks at their head, asking to enter into discussion with CDR. Kostin, a Bolshevik representative, was admitted to the meeting, and was informed that the Duma building was inviolable. Once again, the Mensheviks took a non-confrontational position; Naletov advised that the meeting disperse in order to avoid armed conflict. This provoked the indignation of other Duma members, although they agreed to ask the student guard outside the Duma to disperse, in order to avoid bloodshed, and to resist any armed attempt themselves, with their bare hands if necessary.⁹⁸

S.S. Vekslerchik, SR and member of the town *Uprava*, reported on the 30th October that the Bolsheviks were not coping with power, and that there was serious danger of pogroms.⁹⁹ The Bolshevik committee had dispersed the Junkers, who had provided a defence against pogrom activity, but there was little to replace it. The worrying mood of pogrom agitation in the town led the CDR to go to the Bolshevik MRC to discuss measures to halt the nascent pogroms. It was proposed that a special committee be elected, with members from both the MRC and CDR. The PSR faction of the CDR declared that the Duma would not remove its armed support, or disarm the militia, whose purpose was solely to combat pogroms. The Menshevik faction refused to endorse this proposal, and declared that if armed strength was not withdrawn, they would leave the CDR.¹⁰⁰ The attitude of the more conciliatory CDR members hardened, however, as the Bolshevik MRC became increasingly aggressive. The MRC threatened the Duma with dissolution if the political conflict between them was not resolved,

⁹⁷ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 4, l. 97, Duma records, 28th October 1917.

⁹⁸ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 4, l. 102, Duma records, extraordinary meeting, 2.30am, 29th October 1917.

⁹⁹ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 4, l. 127, Duma records, 31st October 1917.

¹⁰⁰ *Narod*, no. 92, 3rd November 1917, p. 3.

although it declared itself willing to accept the assistance of the Duma in administrating the town. By 1st November, the CDR agreed not to leave the Duma building, not to withdraw its armed guard outside, and not to enter into agreement or coalition of any kind, except that dealing with the prevention of pogroms.¹⁰¹ This new more militant attitude was short lived, however, since on 3rd November the CDR was forced to cease its activities under Bolshevik pressure.¹⁰² The Duma responded resolutely by electing a new committee from its members.¹⁰³ The new town committee of ten members included four SRs, a Kadet, and representatives of the NS/*Edinstvo* bloc; the Mensheviks, of course, had withdrawn.¹⁰⁴

A defining factor of the fissures in resistance to the Bolsheviks was the attitude of the Duma and the CDR towards the strikes of public workers which spread across Nizhnii Novgorod. On 30th October the bank, telegraph and postal employees went on strike as protest against the Bolshevik seizure of power, and railway and provisioning organisations threatened to follow them. Ganchel declared that whilst he did not strive for excess, and would not initiate such strikes, equally he would not induce the employees to end such strikes.¹⁰⁵ This ambiguity provided the Bolsheviks with ammunition to attack Ganchel personally, as acting against public spirit. The Duma was forced on 2nd November to issue a denial of the Bolshevik declaration that Ganchel had been calling for strikes.¹⁰⁶ On 22nd November, the Bolsheviks seized the state Bank, which provoked significant response from the town. The banks' employees went on strike in protest, and the Duma attempted unsuccessfully to initiate mechanisms to control the bank through the Soviets and the Duma. Once again the crux of the issue was whether or not the Duma was willing to support industrial action against the Bolsheviks which might inadvertently damage the strained infrastructure of the town. The Duma continued to offer 'utmost moral support' of strike committees,¹⁰⁷ but did not offer more definite support. This highlights the difficulty the Duma faced in opposing the Bolsheviks whilst at the same time trying to ensure uninterrupted public services for the town. It is in retrospect astonishing that the Duma did not throw its full weight behind these potentially very disruptive strikes, which could have caused the Bolsheviks

¹⁰¹ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 5, l. 3, Duma records, 1st November 1917.

¹⁰² GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 5, l. 15, Duma records, 3rd November 1917.

¹⁰³ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 5, l. 15, Duma records, 3rd November 1917.

¹⁰⁴ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 5, l. 17, Duma records, 3rd November 1917.

¹⁰⁵ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 4, l. 114, Duma records, 30th October 1917.

¹⁰⁶ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 5, l. 6, Duma records, 2nd November 1917.

¹⁰⁷ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 6, l. 6, Duma records, 4th December 1917.

considerable logistic difficulties. Instead, the Duma's publicly responsible behaviour negated some of their most powerful weapons against the Bolsheviks.

By the end of November, the Bolsheviks took increasingly bold action against the Duma. On 23rd November, the Duma stated its position towards the Bolshevik seizure of power categorically:

In the grievous era of Lenin's and his fellow-campaigners' gloomy autocracy and the total chaos of political, public and economic life of the Russian Republic, Nizhnii Novgorod Town Duma declares that it does not and will not recognise the governmental power known as "People's commissars".

The Duma protests with profound and extreme indignation against all violent actions of the Bolsheviks over our young and weak Republic. The attacks on the Petrograd and Moscow town Dumas is a crime before the people and insult to those sacrifices which were offered to the People's Republic of Russia in the struggle for freedom and human rights.

The power of the People's commissars is based on the bayonets of betraying individuals and the soldier masses worn out by the duration of the war; criminally deceiving people, provocateurs, informers from the tsarist regime, blackmailers and thieves, adventurists and Black Hundreds are grouping around a number of closest cronies and sympathisers of power. This power leads the Russian republic to ruin and shame.

The seizure of military power in Stavka, the murder of honest public servants, including the head commander Dukhonin, and the opening of talks with German generals about a separate peace brings this great country to shame and gives her over to the mercy of our conquerors.

The seizure of the state bank and the plunder of state property, the disorder of all economic life of the country, the freeing of German and Austrian prisoners of war, political blackmail, and the arrest of deputies to the Constituent Assembly, compels Nizhnii Novgorod Town Duma to strongly demand that this is enough treachery and treason, enough of foolish attempts over the living organisms of the country, enough violence towards and mockery of the people.

All power only to the Constituent Assembly."

Nizhnii Novgorod Town Duma calls on all citizens to unite around it for defence of the rights and authority of the Constituent Assembly, and demands that the Bolsheviks answer to the people embodied by the All Peoples' Constituent Assembly for all the violence and mockery, for all their actions which lead to the shame of our republic, for all shootings and arrests, and for the terror that they have carried out.¹⁰⁸

This direct condemnation of Bolshevik actions contributed to a hardening of the Bolshevik line towards the Duma. On 27th November, Ganchel was arrested in his flat, and taken to Moscow. Other Duma members, members of the Soviet of peasants' deputies, the *guberniia* committee of the *Edinstvo* Social Democrat group, and part of the PSR *guberniia* committee were also arrested.¹⁰⁹ The captain of the Military revolutionary committee Grachev, who had ordered Ganchel's arrest, produced a written report of the reasons for Ganchel's arrest. The indictment is an intriguing

¹⁰⁸ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 5, l. 102, Duma records, 23rd November 1917.

¹⁰⁹ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 5, l. 165, Duma records, 27th November 1917.

mixture of vague and extraordinary accusation, and a very probable account of Ganchel's own words:

Comrades! I have arrested the 'Black Hundreds' town mayor Ganchel, who in talks with me asserted that there is not government, but that there are Bolsheviks, who won power dishonourably. Insulted staff. Called for pogroms. In general a great scoundrel.¹¹⁰

Ganchel's arrest provoked protest from a diverse range of bodies, including the Sormovo workers, peasant assemblies, Nizhnii Novgorod students residing in Moscow, and the PSR *guberniia* committee, which gives an indication of his enduring popularity and respect within Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*.¹¹¹ The Duma sent Vekslerchik to Moscow, to demand Ganchel's release. On 7th December, Ganchel's release was secured, on the basis of a report by a member of the Nizhnii Novgorod Soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies.¹¹² Ganchel returned to the Duma on 19th December, and gave a defiant speech calling for struggle with the Bolsheviks till the bitter end.¹¹³

The splits already inherent within the Duma were further exacerbated with the tension caused by the Bolshevik seizure of power. The strong Kadet Duma faction was largely excluded from participation in the anti-Bolshevik movement, despite the fact that their attitude towards the Bolsheviks was less conciliatory than that of the Mensheviks. The Duma's tenuous coalition was strained past breaking point in discussions over participation in the All-Russian Council (*Vserossiiskii Sobor*). The Kadets opposed participation, on the grounds that the Council constituted a challenge to the Constituent Assembly, but were overruled. The usual Kadet-socialist division was confused, however, by divisions within the socialist camp. The Menshevik A.B. Zakhoder supported the involvement of all socialists, including the Bolsheviks, in the Council. This provoked outrage from PSR member Vekslerchik and NS member Sutkevich, who both declared the inadmissibility of any agreement with or inclusion of Bolsheviks. In the end the Duma voted to exclude Bolsheviks and Kadets from participation in the Council. This issue provoked extended bickering which demonstrated the utter irreconcilability of the various factions. The Menshevik faction subsequently announced its decision to renounce responsibility for the work of the Duma, and recalled its

¹¹⁰ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 6, l. 5, Duma records, 4th December 1917.

¹¹¹ Reported in *Narod*, no. 113, 30th November, p. 1 (PSR *Guberniia* committee), *Narod*, no. 114, 1st December, p. 4 (students), *Narod*, no. 117, 5th December, p. 4 (Sormovo workers), *Narod*, no. 129, 20th December, p. 4 (peasants of Revezen village, Kniagininskii *uezd*).

¹¹² GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 6, l. 13, Duma records, 7th December 1917.

¹¹³ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 6, l. 45, Duma records, 19th December 1917.

representatives from the presidium and *Uprava*, since it considered the Socialist bloc to have been violated by the systematic decline of all Menshevik proposals.¹¹⁴

The Duma's place as hub of resistance to the Bolsheviks was finally renounced on 22nd December, when the PSR and NS factions announced their decision to resign from the Duma and from all its executive bodies. This resignation was tendered on the grounds that:

in the conditions of Bolshevik seizure of sectional branches of the town economy, and violence upon employees of town administration, they [the NS and SR factions] could not take responsibility before the population for the proper running of the town economy. SR and NS factions called on the Duma to protest against interference in the affairs of town administration with more than just words. The Duma would not accept this point of view. Our exit from membership of the *Uprava*, displayed our exceptional solidarity with the views of our faction, the demands of our political conscience, and our views of our responsibilities before the population.¹¹⁵

The factions announced that all further decisions were to be made by their respective central party organisations. No formal withdrawal from organs of government was ever ordered by the PSR Central Committee, and the motivations for the factions' withdrawal are hazy, though the decree of the old Central Committee ordering PSR withdrawal from the second congress of Soviets was taken as a guide by regional PSR groups.¹¹⁶ The PSR and NS decision to withdraw from the Duma forced a crisis, as the Duma could not operate constitutionally when the majority of members had resigned. The Duma was understandably anxious to avoid further elections in the militant and unsettled atmosphere pervading the town, but could not claim any legitimacy without the participation of the PSR and NS factions, who constituted more than half of the Duma membership.¹¹⁷ By withdrawing on point of principle, the PSR effectively denied themselves the opportunity to continue to administer the town.

There is terrible irony in the Bolsheviks' continued participation in the Duma. Bitker, one of the four Bolshevik members of the Duma, who continued to attend the Duma's meetings, made a declaration that:

Those masses, who are described as unconscious, consciously left the PSR, since the PSR cheated their hopes, these masses moved to the Bolsheviks, and awaited peace, which the Constituent Assembly could not give. The question of land was settled on 28th November. The Bolsheviks raised a revolt in order to give this land and peace quickly. The Bolshevik faction

¹¹⁴ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 5, l. 26, Duma records, 3rd November 1917.

¹¹⁵ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 6, l. 86, letter preserved in Duma records, typed and signed.

¹¹⁶ Radkey, *Sickle Under*, pp. 187-188.

¹¹⁷ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 6, ll. 62-66, letters between the Duma and NS and PSR representatives, 23rd to 28th December 1917.

commission Bitker to report that the Duma, elected on 16th July, does not have a place, since it does not reflect the will of the people. . . which is with the Bolsheviks.¹¹⁸

The Duma was in a position whereby the only members who supported it were powerless or resigned their office, and those that remained sought to destroy it. The Soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies was dominated by moderate socialists in October, and offered the Duma both a powerful ally and an additional seat of power. The Soviet voiced its opposition to the Bolsheviks as early as July.¹¹⁹ The Bolshevik proposal that the Soviets take over the town was rejected 105 to 62, on 27th October. The meeting agreed to a re-election of the Soviet in three days, as a response to the support offered to the Bolsheviks from parts of the garrison and Sormovo workers.¹²⁰ Vekslerschik commented on the re-elections of the Soviets of workers' and soldiers' deputies that 'the elections were conducted abnormally, and under pressure of bayonets.'¹²¹ *Narod* reported that because the Bolsheviks had successfully seized power in Nizhnii Novgorod only an hour after the conclusion of the old meeting, Bolshevik intimidation and censorship dominated the pre-electoral campaign. It was not possible to hold meetings of any sort in the regiments without the approval of the Bolshevik commissar, and in the factories, freedom of speech was granted only to Bolsheviks. These tactics ensured that the Bolsheviks won a majority in the new Soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies. The PSR and Menshevik factions proposed a joint socialist ministry, whilst the Bolsheviks demanded "All power to the Soviets!" The Soviet of peasants' deputies refused to accept the Bolshevik proposal, and so was excluded.¹²² The peasants' Soviet continued to offer staunch resistance to the Bolshevik regime, but their authority was felt only in the countryside, and did not have direct bearing on the Bolsheviks' seizure of state apparatus.¹²³

This authority was however felt in the countryside, where the voting for the Constituent Assembly was dominated by the PSR list. The Bolsheviks did not even attempt to campaign in areas where PSR organisations were already formed.¹²⁴ Results of the Constituent Assembly elections showed that despite Bolshevik gains, PSR support had not waned as much as their political influence. Even before the end of counting on 24th

¹¹⁸ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 5, l. 26, Duma records, 3rd November 1917.

¹¹⁹ *Narod*, no. 41, 19th July.

¹²⁰ *Narod*, no. 87, 28th October 1917, p. 2.

¹²¹ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 5, l. 15, Duma records, 3rd November 1917.

¹²² *Narod*, no. 93, 4th November 1917, p. 4. The PSR enjoyed a dominant position in the Soviet of peasants' deputies; their overwhelming success in its elections were reported in *Narod*, no. 43, 23rd July.

¹²³ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 5, l. 97, Duma records, 23rd November 1917.

¹²⁴ *Narod*, no. 112, 28th November, p. 4.

November, the PSR hailed a great victory. Of the nine elected deputies to the Constituent Assembly from Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*, six were PSR members, two Bolshevik, and one represented the Peasant Unity group (*Krestianskoe edinstvo*).¹²⁵ This PSR success in the *guberniia* masked, however, their weaknesses in key areas. The garrison's soldiers, many of whom had been undecided in their political affiliations, demonstrated support for the Bolsheviks in the elections, with over 60% of them casting votes for the Bolsheviks, and just over 20% for the PSR list. The mostly overlooked Kadets scored a victory in Nizhnii Novgorod's town elections, winning more than 30% of the vote, and beating the PSR faction into third place behind the Bolsheviks.¹²⁶ The Bolsheviks' support among the garrison gave them the opportunity to consolidate their power in Nizhnii Novgorod town, since the large armed garrison was the crucial element in deciding who was to wield political power.

The Duma continued to make attempts to undermine the Bolsheviks by actively supporting and drawing attention to the newly elected Constituent Assembly. On 28th November, a day of national holiday was declared in celebration of the Constituent Assembly, and fifteen meetings held around town to clarify the ideas and significance of Russia's new elected parliament. *Narod*, on the 28th November, as well as offering copious advertising of the national holiday, changed the title of its regular news section, 'Bolshevik seizure of power' to 'Bolshevik Activity', a clear attempt to diminish the Bolshevik take-over.¹²⁷ Duma members sought active participation in this enlightenment- member of the NS faction P.A. Sutkevich announced on 29th November that he was to hold Sunday meetings to acquaint the population with the importance of the Constituent Assembly, and of struggle with the Bolsheviks.¹²⁸ On 7th December, the Duma allocated 1000 roubles to 'the Union for defence of the Constituent Assembly', which organised a metaphorical rather than literal defence of the Constituent Assembly by means of lectures, meetings and publications to raise awareness of and support for the Constituent Assembly.¹²⁹ The Union's exclusion of Kadets caused the alienated Kadet faction to leave the voting hall. Despite lacking majority support, the Bolsheviks

¹²⁵ *Narod*, no. 117, 5th December 1917, p. 4.

¹²⁶ See Appendix 2 for full breakdown of Constituent Assembly election results. These figures are not complete or revealing, as only figures for Bolsheviks, PSR and Kadets are offered; a further 21% of the electorate voted elsewhere, presumably for the Mensheviks. It is not known if the garrison's votes were included in the figures for town voting, which would go some way towards explaining the collapse of PSR support in Nizhnii Novgorod town from 40% to 14%.

¹²⁷ *Narod*, no. 112, 28th November 1917, p. 3.

¹²⁸ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 5, l. 165, Duma records, 27th November 1917.

¹²⁹ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 6, l. 39, Duma records, 7th December 1917.

were able to consolidate their hold on power in Nizhnii Novgorod due to the inability of their political opponents to find common ground, and their success in winning the support of the garrison.

SOLDIERS IN THE TOWN

The PSR's failure to retain its support from the garrison in 1917 was a crucial factor in the success of the Bolshevik takeover. The Nizhnii Novgorod Soviet of soldiers' deputies was dominated by moderate PSR members for much of 1917, which ensured that the leadership of the garrison supported the Provisional Government. By May 1917, it was reported that the PSR had organisations in all the garrison's regiments, and had a total of 1350 members within the garrison.¹³⁰ By the time of the Constituent Assembly elections, however, the PSR vote had plummeted to 21%, in contrast to the Bolsheviks share of 67% of the vote.¹³¹ Of the surrounding *guberniias*, only Tambov garrison showed less support for the PSR. A possible reason for the PSR's poor showing in Nizhnii Novgorod garrison was the possible radicalising and destabilising effect of the July rising on the soldiers of the garrison. Another factor was the arrival of 12,000 soldiers from the front in June 1917,¹³² who tended to be most disposed to Bolshevism. Undoubtedly, the focal point in the PSR's falling off of support among the garrison was the support offered for the war by the PSR's Central Committee. The party's official position on Russia's involvement in the war supported a defencist position with Internationalist overtones, whereby the need for defence of Russia's borders was acknowledged, but the blame for the conflict centred on capitalist and imperialist policy, rather than on German aggression. Many of the party's leaders, who had spent the previous years of war outside Russia in other European countries, were divorced from popular Russian opinion on the war, and sought to cast the revolution in the model of a pro-war rising which overthrew the tsarist administration primarily because of its inept handling of the war.¹³³ Another factor in these émigré leaders' attitudes towards the war was their pollution with the anti-German feeling prevalent among the allied countries. This emotional hostility towards the Germans inhibited the thorough development of

¹³⁰ *Narod*, no. 17, 24th May 1917, p. 3, in the minutes of the Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* PSR meeting. This contrasts with the Bolsheviks' organisation which claimed around 380 members by October 1917, though this number escalated to 1,500 by December 1917. (Golub, *Velikaia Oktiabr'skaia*, p. 336.)

¹³¹ See Appendix 2.

¹³² Golub, *Velikaia Oktiabr'skaia*, p. 336.

¹³³ See Kerensky, 'The policy of the Provisional Government'; the revolution itself . . . had been created by a high enthusiasm of patriotism which flatly refused the thought of the possibility of a separate peace' (p. 8). This assertion provoked an editorial comment questioning its historical accuracy.

truly internationalist ideas of the 'fraternity of the working classes'. A persistent point of conflict in attempts to set up another international socialist conference on the war was that some socialists from the allied countries refused to attend if the Germans were invited, an attitude which rather negated the chances of success of such a venture.

The war was an enormously emotive issue; those on the right who believed in 'active defence' and absolute prioritisation of the war over other issues were viewed by those on the left as traitors to socialism, and selling their socialist souls for jingoistic nationalism, while those on the left who favoured only defence of Russia while trying to establish an international socialist solution to the war were viewed by those on the right as pseudo-Bolsheviks who were selling the freedom of their country for the price of socialist dogma. The June offensive further deepened the gulf between those who favoured 'active defence', and the left who were uncomfortable with any spectre of advance and conquest. Chernov's willingness to be associated with the strongly defencist positions held by the Central Committee was surprising. His own attitude towards the war was solidly internationalist, but never defeatist. Unlike Lenin, even the more extreme left SRs never preached the disintegration of the Russian army by fraternisation and desertion. The importance of a strong army was recognised by all elements of the party, and Chernov proposed that the front be maintained, and Russia's borders defended, while pressing the other combatants hotly for peace, and renouncing all imperialistic war aims. This position of 'defence without victory' was theoretically very sound, and certainly more defensible than Lenin's 'peace at any price'.

Such sound theory, however, was not so palatable as the simple message 'peace!' for worn out and rebellious soldiers. Indeed, 'defence without victory' was more difficult to understand than a more jingoistic slogan of 'war until final victory!' The democratisation of the army had enabled discussion and consideration to occur among the soldier body. This discussion was however entirely at odds with the maintenance of the army as a fighting force, which required the mindless carrying out of orders, and a total disregard for personal safety. The politicians of 1917 were unable to recognise the brutal truth that the mindless violence of war was incompatible with the slow and careful processes of democracy.¹³⁴ The disintegration of the army, and its turn to

¹³⁴ A substantial range of literature available on the break up of the Russian army as a fighting force in the course of 1917. The most comprehensive work on the break up of the Russian army is A. Wildman's two volume work; *The End of the Russian Imperial Army: The Old Army and the Soldiers' Revolt (March-April 1917)* (Princeton 1980), *The End of the Russian Imperial Army: The Road to Soviet Power and Peace* (Princeton 1987). A fascinating account of the results of committee activity among front line

Bolshevism, is a reflection of this. The PSR, with its responsible and carefully thought out attitudes, increasingly lost its place among men who placed the end of the war above all other considerations.

The incident for which the Nizhnii Novgorod garrison is best known is the so-called 'July rising' of 4th and 5th July 1917. This rising provides a good example of the divergence between the moderate socialists who professed to lead the garrison, and the soldiers themselves, whose prime motivation was avoidance of the front. Curiously, Duma records do not report the crisis which was later hailed as the first buds of Soviet power in the area. The rising did not have any clear leadership. The committee ostensibly leading the soldiers' rising was actually formed to exercise restraint over the soldier body, and to restore order to the town. Its membership was predominantly PSR and Menshevik. Lenin remarked that the suppression of the rising was one of the first signs of factual transfer of state power to the hands of counter-revolutionaries.¹³⁵ A more careful assessment of this so-called rising reveals that it was essentially the garrison's resistance to the 62nd regiment's dispatch to the front. The 62nd Infantry reserve regiment was escorted by a group of Junkers to the station, where several of the 62nd regiment escaped. They returned to the barracks, to ask for help from their comrades, and several soldiers were killed in a bloody conflict between Junkers and garrison members at the station. The Junkers were arrested, along with other loyal elements in the garrison, and the evacuees freed. The Soviet of soldiers' deputies was disbanded, and preparations for forthcoming elections announced for workers', soldiers' and peasants' soviets. Meanwhile, a 'New Provisional Executive Committee' (NPEC) was formed, with two representatives each from PSR, Bolshevik and Menshevik factions, and five representatives from the Soviet of workers' deputies and professional unions.

The NPEC formed an armed militia, to defend public order by protecting the factories and key points around the town. The night of the 5th July saw a culmination of the threat to public order, with numerous reports of robberies and attempts on alcohol stores. The NPEC responded by sending out their members, accompanied by soldiers, for the defence of alcohol stores and other parts of the town. Their success in this defence was limited, because they had no automobiles at their disposal, so were not able to respond

soldiers in the early months of the revolution can be found in the memoirs of the captain of the 'Women's Battalion of death'; M. Botchkareva, *Yaskha: My Life as Peasant, Officer and Exile* (New York, 1919), pp. 139-153.

¹³⁵ V.E. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, (Moscow, 1977) vol. 34, p. 1.

with sufficient rapidity to the crisis.¹³⁶ Troops from Moscow were sent by the Provisional Government to control the situation in the town, and despite appeals by the Soviet of workers' deputies to these troops to stay outside the town in order to avoid bloodshed, the troops did eventually enter the town, and re-establish some sort of normality. The 62nd, and also the most active elements of the 182nd and 185th regiments were sent to the front on the 7th July. The NPEC, although ostensibly the leaders of this 'rising', actually sought to control the garrison's actions, and to prevent any further bloodshed. This is clear, both from its proclamations appealing for calm and total order in the garrison, and from consideration of its membership, which was dominated by moderate socialists. When the new Soviet of soldiers' deputies met on 7th July, its new president, the Bolshevik member of the Duma Bitker:

considered it his duty to report, that the work of those who entered the provisional committee, comrade members of the Soviet of soldiers' deputies Babakov, Ganchel and Shkrabii, succeeded in bringing peace in difficult conditions, for which the presidium of the Soviet expresses to them its total confidence.¹³⁷

This proclamation demonstrated Bolshevik gratitude towards the NPEC, which, given its moderate socialist membership, including the ubiquitous Ganchel, must have been a rare occurrence. Lenin's post-dated suggestion that the rising was of a revolutionary and proletarian nature was fantastic. The July rising was an example of soldier insubordination and unwillingness to fight, which sparked unrest among the town population, who were easily inflamed as a result of provisions shortages. The rising served, however, to demonstrate the rift between the soldiers and their moderate socialist leaders over the war. This helps to explain the PSR's dramatic loss of support in the latter part of 1917 among the garrison, and correspondingly the Bolsheviks' rise in support.

The attitude of Nizhnii Novgorod's garrison towards the Bolshevik seizure of power was initially ambiguous, although by the time of the Constituent Assembly elections, attitudes had crystallised in favour of the Bolsheviks. Part of the soldiers sided with the Bolsheviks during the first critical days after the October rising, but *Narod* emphasised that they were not in the majority. A handful of regiments supported for the Provisional Government, but 'amongst the vast mass of remaining soldiers an indeterminate mood

¹³⁶ D.A. Chugaev et al (ed.) *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v Iule 1917g. Iul'skii krizis* (Moscow, 1959), doc. no. 110, pp. 133-4, from the newspaper *International* (published Nizhnii Novgorod, 12th July 1917).

¹³⁷ *Narod*, no. 37, 8th July 1917, p. 4.

predominates.¹³⁸ Even those that were named as supporting the Provisional Government, like the 62nd Infantry reserve regiment, did not offer wholehearted support to the old administration. In its resolution of 28th October, it declared that it would carry out its duties, but only on condition that measures were taken for rapid conclusion of the war.¹³⁹ The Captain of the garrison, B.N. Zmiev, supported Ganchel, and openly condemned the Bolshevik seizure of power.¹⁴⁰ It is unlikely however that Zmiev's views represented the mood of the soldiers. Events in other *guberniias* suggest that the moderate socialist leaders elected earlier in 1917 were obsolete by late October.¹⁴¹ Ganchel reported that the growth of a pogrom mood in the military against officers had already been manifested in the beating of an officer in the 185th regiment, which suggests that senior military figures were unpopular by October. The Duma attempted to garner support within the garrison, by agitation against the Bolsheviks, and notifying the soldiers of the Duma's activities. Action was not taken on this, however, until 27th November, and it is unlikely given the national mood that such agitation would have provoked a positive response from the garrison.¹⁴² The political uncertainty witnessed among the soldiers is a demonstration of the soldiers' disenchantment with the political process which confused, and seemed to betray them.¹⁴³ Support for the PSR had failed to deliver peace and bread, with the result that this support dropped away among the volatile soldiery, whose demands were focused round their immediate survival in the desperate climate of 1917.

CONCLUSIONS

The administration of Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia* faced grave challenges in 1917, not least of which was the problem of feeding the *guberniia*. The provisions crisis was

¹³⁸ *Narod*, no. 89, 31st October 1917, p. 4.

¹³⁹ *Narod*, no. 87, 28th October 1917, p. 2.

¹⁴⁰ *Narod*, no. 92, 3rd November 1917, p. 3.

¹⁴¹ See O. Anweiler, *The Soviets: The Russian Workers', Peasants', and Soldiers' Councils 1905-1921* (New York, 1974), p. 143. Z. Galili, *The Menshevik Leaders in the Russian Revolution; Social Realities and Political Strategies* (Princeton, 1989), p. 203, pp. 295-6. For discussion of the shift to the left of workers in Petrograd, Moscow, Saratov and Smolensk see S. Smith, *Red Petrograd; Revolution in the Factories 1917-18* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 176-185; D. Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Regime, from the February Revolution to the July Days* (London, 1983), pp. 122-148; D. Koenker, *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution* (Princeton, 1981), p. 215. D. Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga; 1917 in Saratov* (Ithaca, 1986), pp. 201-203. M.C. Hickey, 'The Rise and Fall of Smolensk's Moderate Socialists: The Politics of Class and the Rhetoric of Crisis in 1917' in D.J. Raleigh(ed.), *Provincial Landscapes: Local Dimensions of Soviet Power, 1917-1953*. (Pittsburg, forthcoming in 2001)

¹⁴² GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 5, l. 127; Duma records, 3rd November 1917.

¹⁴³ See chapter 1, 'Inter-Party Mobility', pp. 44-5. Some commentators identified a watershed of soldier disenchantment with the regime in the failed Kornilov revolt of August 1917, which engendered mistrust of officers and increased impatience with the war. (G. Swain, *The Origins of the Russian Civil War* [London 1996], pp. 41-42.)

exacerbated by the movement of refugees, soldiers and workers into the *guberniia*, and by the haemorrhaging of peasants into the army. The dominance of the PSR in the Duma and the Soviets ensured that dual power did not exist in Nizhnii Novgorod, either formally or informally. The Town Duma displayed an eagerness to embrace other democratic organisations, and to ensure inclusiveness of the town's power structures. Despite an apparently apolitical climate, the Duma was in fact almost paralysed by party political divisions and by political naivety, which reflected the failings of the Provisional Government. Such divisions and naivety ultimately rendered resistance to the Bolshevik seizure of power impotent. The PSR leader of the Duma Ganchel was aware of the nature of the Bolshevik rising, and was willing to defend the February revolution, with armed force if necessary, from Bolshevik incursions. Such tactics required absolute unity and decisiveness of action from the Bolsheviks' opponents. This unity and decision was not found. Hostility towards the Kadets was too well developed by October to facilitate co-operation, despite the common ground between the liberals and moderate socialists. The Menshevik deputies' moderation and anxiety to preserve free and unsullied practice was unfortunately not mirrored by the Bolsheviks, who used exactly the methods the Mensheviks so reviled to establish their authority in the town. The more aggressive resistance to the Bolsheviks favoured by the PSR and NS deputies only served to accentuate the splits within the Duma. The Town Duma's demise in 1917 was tragic, replete with farcical idealism and missed opportunities of deputies who continued to debate housing planning applications while the Bolsheviks banged on their door, and whose commitment to shibboleths of political dogma overshadowed the political realities that engulfed them. The soldiers of Nizhnii Novgorod town were a dark reminder that ultimately political power lay with those who held the physical force to enforce it. The garrison reminded the citizens and politicians of the significance of the war in defining the course of 1917. Over three years, the tsarist regime had mustered some fourteen million men, armed them, and distributed them in the nation's large towns to await their terrible fate in the bloody trenches. The collapse of military discipline gave soldiers on the front and in the rear the opportunity to redirect their fate away from those trenches, and it is no surprise that they did so. The PSR, with its carefully thought out and principled position on continuation of the war, could not parley with such a force. The Bolsheviks' slight of hand in exchanging world war for civil war won them enough time to consolidate their power.

CHAPTER 5: GOVERNING THE VILLAGES

The themes which emerge in this assessment of rural administration in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* are echoed in reports on the national situation of rural administration in 1917. These themes are the absence of intelligentsia, the unwholesome influence of soldier orators, and the slowness of rural governmental organisations to form.¹ Rural unrest in the *guberniia* escalated steadily during 1917, reflecting national patterns.² Many members of the rural administration in 1917 were PSR members or sympathisers, and this account of the difficulties administrators faced in the villages reflects the problems these party men had in reconciling their party identity, such as it was, with the climate in the villages. The *guberniia* commissar, M.E. Sumgin, was a prominent PSR member, who was elected to the Constituent Assembly as PSR representative for Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*.³ The problems he faced in governing the *guberniia* required him to tread a line between practical needs of the moment, his commitment to PSR policy and to the Provisional Government he represented. This chapter demonstrates the increasing gap between the villages and the Provisional Government administration, manifested in peasant refusal to submit to the norms of behaviour expected by the new regime. Just as important as this breach between administrators and the population was the rift in policy which formed between the local administrative bodies, some of whom began to accommodate their constituents, and the Provisional Government which they purportedly represented. Political parties in the villages had to mould their local policy and action to the needs of the local population, or be bypassed altogether. The problems of administering the villages illuminates and accounts for the gap which developed between the PSR's local and national leadership, and demonstrates the creativity of officials within local government. If local leaders wished to retain their position within the community, they needed to carry out policy which reflected the demands of their constituents. The weaknesses of the PSR's land policy in 1917 left these local leaders with a stark choice between opposing their party or being swept aside by the people they professed to represent.

¹ R. Browder and A. Kerensky (ed.) *The Russian Provisional Government 1917; Documents*. (Stanford, 1961), vol. 1, doc. 223, pp. 244-6; part of a report compiled by the provincial section of the State Duma, based on reports of its field representatives for the first three months of the revolution.

² G. Gill, 'The Mainsprings of Peasant Action in 1917' *Soviet Studies* 30, 1978, pp. 76-7. G. Gill, *Peasants and Government in the Russian Revolution* (London, 1979), p. 189, Appendix II.

³ See *Narod*, no. 76, 11th October. Sumgin was placed third on the electoral list, indicating his seniority and popularity within the local party. Note that the first *guberniia* commissar, Demidov, was replaced early in 1917 by Sumgin.

THE COMMISSARS- RURAL CONTROL?

There are some limitations in the source materials used in this assessment of rural government and agrarian unrest. It is based on the reports of the *uezd* commissars to the *guberniia* commissar, and the *guberniia* commissar to the Provisional Government. At times these reports say as much about the reporter as about the events they describe. Frequent references to the 'dark' peasantry; their lack of political enlightenment and their drunkenness and disorganised behaviour are on one level a reflection of what the commissars witnessed in the *guberniia*.⁴ No doubt alcohol was a feature of the rural scene, much as it always had been in Russian village life.⁵ *Uezd* commissars repeatedly reported the peasantry's lack of political awareness. That the peasants were not showing political awareness of the type that commissars expected did not however mean that the peasantry were not showing any political awareness at all. They often did not show any respect for the rule of the administration, or for private property rights, but as other studies have shown,⁶ the peasantry had clearly defined local political agendas which they fulfilled with aplomb. The position of the commissars was, understandably, not a good one from which to evaluate such clear peasant agendas. The contemporary outsider described only chaotic seizure and violence, perhaps unwilling to contemplate the peasantry as a distinctive political force in its own right.

The rank of *guberniia* commissar, established by the Provisional Government, was in theory the highest authority within the *guberniia*. One can only approximate, however, to what extent this authority existed. It is easier to approximate the position of the *uezd*

⁴ O. Figes, in 'The Russian Revolution and its Language in the Villages' *Russian Review* 56, 1997, pp. 323-345, uses as one of his main sources a report compiled from information provided by local correspondents from the provinces. (*Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv* f. 1278, op. 10, d. 4) He does not at any point ask who these reporters were, or question particularly their interpretations of the villages. Based on what I have found, Figes' source may well have been written by the same type of men who became *uezd* commissars. Their insights are interesting, but not necessarily accurate reflections of motivations in the villages.

⁵ P. Herlihy, 'Joys of the Rus': Rites and Rituals of Russian Drinking', *Russian Review* 50, 1991, pp. 131-47; discusses the observations of various nineteenth century commentators on Russian drinking practices, particularly the transition from 'traditional' to 'modern' drinking habits, ritual drinking in the military and in the countryside, and the use of vodka as a payment for work (*pomoch*). G.E. Snow, 'Alcoholism in the Russian Military: The Public Sphere and the Temperance Discourse, 1883-1917', *Jahrbucher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 45, 1997, pp. 417-431; discusses ritualised drinking in the military. S. Smith, *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories 1917-1918* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 92-94; discusses the factory committees' campaigns against drunkenness.

⁶ See O. Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution 1917-1921* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 30-61; discusses the political organisations and activities of the Volga peasants. J. Channon, 'The Peasantry in the Revolutions of 1917', in E.R. Frankel et al. (ed.) *Revolution in Russia: Reassessments of 1917* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 110-117, provides a useful summary of the range of peasant organisations in 1917, while pp. 121-5 considers leadership and spontaneity in peasant behaviour and the rural revolution, and concludes that the consensus now is that the peasant movement was not wantonly destructive, but was organised by the peasants themselves.

commissars, a rank given to *uezd zemstvo* chairmen by the Provisional Government in the first days of revolution, in an attempt to establish authoritative local government.⁷ A report to the Provisional Government for the period March-May nationally, commented:

General discontent was aroused by the appointment of commissars from among the members of *guberniia* and *uezd [zemstvo]* boards. The chairmen of *uezd* boards have never enjoyed the confidence or good will of the people. Moreover, under the present system of popular elections, the idea of *appointment* did not fit in with the national understanding. It suspected in this practice an encroachment upon its liberties . . . the government very soon endeavoured to meet the people's wishes by encouraging them to propose their own candidates in place of those commissars who were unacceptable to them. Then began feverish re-elections. It must be pointed out here that where the commissars were not subjected to this test of re-election they are not trusted by the public. But even where the commissar in question is a person enjoying the confidence and good will of the people, he cannot supply all the needs of his area. The *uezd* commissars are particularly overworked.⁸

There is unfortunately no clear record of the number of *uezd* commissar re-elections which took place in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*. The magnitude of difficulties they faced, however, are adequately recorded in their reports to the *guberniia* commissar. The *guberniia* commissar reported to the *guberniia* executive committee in March 1917 that the organisation of *uezd* public committees was delayed all round the *uezd*, but that those that did exist represented all 'more or less known groups of the population', and was confident that the *guberniia* would eventually be covered with a whole network of committees.⁹ The *uezd* commissars were meant to report to the *guberniia* commissar weekly, but did not; the *guberniia* commissar complained about infrequency of reports.¹⁰ It should be noted that some *uezds* are under-represented in this survey, and some given more significance, according to the number and detail of reports submitted by the commissars. Extant reports, however, illustrate the diversity of local government, and the sometimes tenuous position of the individuals supposedly representing the highest point of *uezd* authority.

The level of regional organisation below *uezd* commissars and *uezd* executive committees was the *volost* committees, which the Provisional Government ordered were to be established in every *volost*, to provide for general *volost* administration in the interim period before *zemstvo* elections. Their membership was vaguely defined:

⁷ Browder and Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional*, vol. 1, p. 243, doc. 219; circular from the Minister of the Interior, 5th March 1917.

⁸ Browder and Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional*, vol. 1, p. 247, doc. 226; taken from report of the Provincial Section of the Temporary Committee of the state Duma, based on reports of its field representatives for the first three months of the revolution.

⁹ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 43, l. 1-2; report of the *guberniia* commissar P.A. Demidov to Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* executive committee about the situation in the *guberniia*. 21st March 1917.

¹⁰ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 24; letter of *guberniia* commissar, requesting weekly reports from *uezd* commissars on the situation in the *uezds*, undated.

When forming these committees, reliance should be put upon the existing *volost* food committees, on the co-operative organisations, [and] on the *volost* organisations for the protection of soldiers, or on the already elected *volost* committees, depending on which of these organisations, under the local conditions, are the more active and efficient and which inspire the greatest confidence from the population.¹¹

The forms of *volost* committees in Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia* were many and varied. Makarevskii *uezd* commissar reported in April that *volost* committees still did not exist in the *uezd*,¹² and this situation continued as late as September in many *volosts*. Those that did exist, however, had to juggle a plethora of roles, from local administration to control of the local militia.¹³ This report of the Vasil'skii *uezd* commissar gives an impression of the organisational difficulties the *uezd* commissars faced in setting up *volost* committees:

the reporter does not have information about the path of work in organising *volost* committees in the *uezd*, but considers that the poorly formed population undoubtedly hinders organisation of committees and unfavourably influences the activities of these public assemblies. In my role as *uezd* commissar, I understand that I must decide with the influence of the majority, even if this influence deviates from the point of view of norms of existing legislation, which is obsolete and inapplicable to the situation of the current moment.¹⁴

The *uezd* commissar identified one of the most serious conflicts within his role astutely; whether he was to fulfil his role in accordance with 'the influence of the majority', or with other requirements, whether they be outdated tsarist legislation, or arguably equally outdated Provisional Government legislation on private land ownership. He stated his decision to decide with his 'constituents', which highlights the weakness of *uezd* commissars as enforcers of central governmental will. Where the government's local representative placed the needs of his constituents before the needs of central government, and the requirements of government and population collided, he ceased to be an effective representative of the government and became instead a spokesperson for his constituents.

The situation in Vasil'skii *uezd* varied considerably from *volost* to *volost*. Troitskii *volost* confirmed the *uezd* commissar's gloomy view of the *volost* committees. There, the *volost* committee was not only permitting but actually participating in illegal activities. The local landowner was in 'a hopeless position', and had to petition the

¹¹ Browder and Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional*, vol. 1, p. 244, doc. 222; Circular from the *Zemstvo* section, ministry of the Interior, to *guberniia* commissars, March 20th 1917.

¹² GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 13, l. 155-9; protocol of the meeting of *uezd* commissars in Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia*. 10th-11th April 1917.

¹³ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 312; report from Lukoianovskii *uezd* commissar to *guberniia* commissar about the situation in the *uezd*, 23rd September 1917.

¹⁴ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 13, l. 155-9; protocol of the meeting of *uezd* commissars in Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia*. 10th-11th April 1917.

volost committee to return his plough and meadows. The *guberniia* commissar wrote a sharp reprimand to the Troitskii *volost* committee in an attempt to remedy their behaviour:

Both the Provisional Government and the Soviet of peasants' deputies clearly and persistently declared the inadmissibility of independent violent actions in relation to other people's property. The aim of the *volost* committees is to restrain and prevent similar seizure on the part of separate groups of the population with all its measures, and to clarify in their declarations the rights and legal duties of each. In this case, the *volost* committee not only did not take measures for the defence of lawful order, but they themselves were initiators in an inadmissible violation.¹⁵

Another report, however, also in April from Vasil'skii *uezd*, reported that Andreevskii *volost* committee was petitioning for greater use of the surrounding land, and enhanced wood cutting rights, but that there had been no attempts by the Andreevskii peasants to seize land.¹⁶ Here the *volost* committee was fulfilling its role of legitimising and limiting peasant direct action. A report from the Vasil'skii commissar in November, however, indicates that the control exercised by Andreevskii *volost* committee was not the norm in the *uezd*:

the current year is characterised by events accompanying accounts of living and dead inventories of the privately owned farms. Not all of these were successfully carried out peacefully; in several cases the population of nearby villages tried to carry a second account after the account of the *volost* land committee, and sometimes carried out self-willed requisition of grain, cattle, even property. The seized property was not successfully returned in some cases. The peasantry carried out more stormy action on Obolenskii's farm; the peasantry seized grain and cattle there (13/14 November). Cattle were returned by the current *volost* land administration and sold afterwards with goods in presence of a member of the *uezd* land committee, but the grain continued to lie in the general grain store close to the village.¹⁷

This account contradicts the picture in Andreevskii *volost*, since here the *volost* committee performed its official role of limiting peasant direct action, but was overlooked by the local peasants, who made their own reckoning of the situation.

The state of local government after the Bolshevik seizure of power varied considerably from *volost* to *volost*. In some areas the Provisional Government structures lasted for some months- the Bolsheviks themselves admitted that they did not have 'control' in the countryside.¹⁸ A report from Sergachskii *uezd* commissar at the end of December,

¹⁵ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 25, l. 281. Letter from *guberniia* commissar to Troitskii *volost* committee, opposing their actions. Undated, but *delo* dated 3 March-1 July 1917.

¹⁶ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 74-5. Report of Vasil'skii *uezd* commissar to *guberniia* commissar about the situation in the *uezd*, 29th May 1917.

¹⁷ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 15, l. 639-40. Report of Vasil'skii *uezd* commissar to *guberniia* commissar about the situation in the *uezd*, 27th November 1917.

¹⁸ P.A. Golub et al (ed.) *Velikaia Oktiabr'skaia Sotsialisticheskaia Revoliutsiia; Entsiklopediia* (Moscow, 1987), p. 336; offers dates for 'establishment of Soviet power' in the *uezds* of the *guberniia*. They range up to February 1918. I suspect that even these figures are overstating the fact- it is unlikely that the

however, painted a grim picture of the state of local government. He said that due to lack of funds, the *zemstvo* economy was in total disorder. After only a month of Bolshevik control, the schools and hospitals were closing.¹⁹ Given the disorder in Nizhnii Novgorod, and the financial crisis the *guberniia* was undergoing, this disorder may well have been the norm around the *guberniia*. The challenges of administering the villages, and controlling peasant action were not met any better by the Bolsheviks than they had been by the Provisional Government.

PSR LAND PROGRAMME

The most prominent issue in the countryside during 1917 was the question of land redistribution. This should have been the PSR's crowning moment, since the land question was the policy over which it had developed its reputation as a champion of the peasantry, and to which much of its theoretical might had been directed. The party's decision to await the convening of the Constituent Assembly for a full and fair resolution of the land question, and more importantly their failure to force the Provisional Government to take satisfactory interim measures, left the PSR impotent on its keynote issue. In addition to this, the party lacked clear and practicable policy lines on the land question. The bases for its proposals on land were land socialisation and support of the communal system of land tenure. The principle of land socialisation was introduced by Chernov to the First Party Congress in Imatra, Finland at the end of 1905.²⁰ Socialisation was a radical proposal. Instead of proposing transfer of land from one owner to another, as in nationalisation, where the state become the land's proprietor, this programme suggested the gradual socialisation of land, whereby land would have no owner, but its profit would be taken by those who worked it with their own hands. Chernov sought to enshrine the 'right to existence' in the land legislation, manifested in the 'right to work' and 'right to land' which were embodied in communal practice.²¹ Far from the peasant 'attachment to the land' being a symptom of petty bourgeois reactionary sentiments among the peasantry, Chernov interpreted this attachment as latent socialist feeling.²² He relied on these sentiments as Russia's route

Bolsheviks had much influence in rural affairs in much of the *guberniia*, except the military 'influence' wielded by the requisitioning Red Army.

¹⁹ *Narod*, no. 135, 29th December 1917, p. 4.

²⁰ For the conflicts at the first party conference over socialisation of land, see H. Immonen, *The Agrarian Program of the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party, 1900-1914* (Helsinki, 1989), pp. 97-100.

²¹ V. Chernov, 'K Agrarnomu voprosu', *Narodnyi vestnik* 2 (1906), pp. 16-17.

²² Chernov, 'Sotsializatsiia zemli i kooperatsiia v sel'skom khoziaistve' *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* 14 (1902).

to avoiding the triumph of capitalism in the Russian villages. The Stolypin reforms represented an enormous challenge to the PSR's basic programmatic formulations; their attempts to undermine Russian common land use practices struck at the heart of Chernov's vision of Russia's villages avoiding capitalism. The governmental measures threatened to dismantle the communal system far more quickly than organic development of capitalism could have done.²³ The PSR's official response was that the artificial dismantling of the communal system, even if successful, would not be able to dismantle the complex legal understandings and popular psychology that accompanied it. Even in the worst case, if 'ownership fanaticism' did come to grip the Russian peasantry, this still did not negate the possibility of introducing socialism to the villages. The principle of land holding in the villages was more important than who owned what.²⁴

The PSR were unprepared for the problems such high flown principles faced in 1917. Immonen claims that the PSR did not lack a concrete land policy, and that it is erroneous to lay blame on this for their failings in 1917.²⁵ While it is true that the party had made more solid land proposals than they are generally credited with in the run up to 1917, their theoretical and principled stand on land socialisation never attempted to tackle the tortuous issues facing Russia in organising a fundamental restructuring of land holding. The realities of equitable land redistribution were horribly complex, and could not easily be distilled into the sound bites of 'land and freedom' favoured by the PSR. The least contentious issue within the party was compensation for seized lands. The party's historical hard line on this issue did not shift at the Third Party Congress, and only three votes were cast in its favour.²⁶ The programme of land socialisation did not however acknowledge the fundamental collisions of interests which it would have provoked. Separators from the communes were persecuted mercilessly by the commune peasants in the agrarian revolution of 1917, and the party had to clarify its attitudes, both towards private landholding and towards the rights of communes to reabsorb private land. The PSR, anxious to avoid class divisions within the peasantry, merely

²³ See M. Perrie, *The Agrarian Policy of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party From its Origins Through the Revolution of 1905-1907* (Cambridge, 1976), p. 180. For a discussion of the PSR's views of the possible impact of the Stolypin land reform on communes, see Immonen, *The Agrarian Program*, pp. 132-135.

²⁴ Rakitnikov, one of the party's leading theorists on agrarian matters, made this point of view clear at the London party Conference in 1908. (See Immonen, *The Agrarian Program*, pp. 142-143.)

²⁵ Immonen, *The Agrarian Program*, p. 159.

²⁶ Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism. Promise and Default of the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries, February to October 1917* (New York, 1958), p. 214.

stated that separators' property which was not in excess of the average communal land allotment should stay in private hands.²⁷ Claims to national autonomy, as in the Ukraine, and regional autonomy, as in Siberia, were the first and by no means the least of obstacles to the proposal of a redistribution of land to all toilers. Each locality of Russia faced problems of this kind according to their local problems. In the Don, and other Cossack lands, the Cossacks were unwilling to give up their privileged landholding status and allow land redistribution. In the heavily overpopulated areas of black earth country, even total land redistribution would not have alleviated the fundamental land shortage problems. For redistribution to work, there had to be massive relocation of peasants from the overpopulated areas to Siberia, which had ample land holdings but few people. This in turn would be opposed by those established in Siberia who did not wish to see their own potential land stocks depleted by newcomers. In short, the prospect of socialisation, while theoretically attractive, was practically unworkable, particularly in the impatient quick-fix atmosphere of 1917.

Redistribution of land presented additional problems in 1917; the problem of persuading peasants to move to less populated areas in order to facilitate land reform was compounded by the move among recent Siberian settlers to return to European Russia in anticipation of land redistribution.²⁸ The other danger was that rumours of land redistribution would provoke a break up for the army, as peasant soldiers deserted en masse, in order to claim their allocation in the legendary 'black repartition'. The PSR's decision to leave all major legislative decisions to be decided by the Constituent Assembly meant that the failings and vagaries of their land programme were not exposed, but did not absolve the party altogether of setting policy on the land issue. A position had to be established on peasant seizure of land and on acceptable interim measures for landholding. These issues were political dynamite, since the party's direct involvement in coalition government virtually tied them to support the policies of the Provisional Government. Contrary to 1905 policy, in 1917 they opposed peasant seizure of land, since it went contrary to the notions of fair and equitable land redistribution. Radkey claims that this was a sign that the party had lost its old radicalism, and had slid to the right.²⁹ This is unfair, since the political context in 1917 had changed beyond all

²⁷ Radkey, *Agrarian Foes*, p. 214.

²⁸ Browder and Kerensky *The Russian Provisional Government*, p. 554, document 483; circular from the Ministry of the Interior warning recent Siberia settlers not to return to European Russia, June 20th 1917, which noted the urge among settlers beyond the Urals to return to European Russia.

²⁹ Radkey, *Agrarian Foes*, pp. 214-5.

recognition from the autocracy of 1905. The PSR presented a relatively radical proposal for the interim that the entire land fund should be managed by local land committees, which would ensure that land use was maximised, prevent depletion of the national land stock into private land funds, and allow the Constituent Assembly to finally resolve the land question.

Chernov's appointment as Minister for Agriculture in the first coalition government was very popular among the peasantry and raised expectations to wild heights.³⁰ The results of Chernov's appointment were disappointing. He carried the banner of social revolution alone in the new coalition government, and was totally isolated in his proposals. He had no experience of government, and himself admitted that though he was an able theoretician, he was an awful politician.³¹ Tsereteli recounted Chernov's inattention and disinterest during cabinet meetings, where he sometimes made notes for his next article.³² His two deputies, Nikolai Rakitnikov and Panteleimon Vikhliayev, were both very able men; Rakitnikov was a founder member of the party, and Vikhliayev was among the best agrarian brains in the country.³³ Chernov was to be thwarted persistently in his time as Minister for Agriculture, however, since his agenda was not supported by the rest of the coalition government. The local and regional committees were dominated by SRs, but the head land committee was united in its dislike for Chernov's perceived 'Zimmerwaldist' outlook. The other major mover in land policy was the Executive Committee of the All Russian Peasants' Soviet which was dominated by right of centre SRs.³⁴ These bodies did not support Chernov's initiatives in the Ministry of Agriculture, and obstructed his proposals.

The PSR's official stand on bridging measures for the land question until the convocation of the Constituent Assembly was that all land should pass into the hands of the land committees who would ensure its best use. This, however, had different implications for different groups. For the moderates within the party, it implied that landowners would retain judicial ownership of the land until decision of the question by the Constituent Assembly. Others interpreted the measure as a means to actually hand land over to the peasantry immediately and circumvent the procedures of the

³⁰ Radkey, *Agrarian Foes*, p. 183, p. 308.

³¹ V. Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution* (New Haven, 1936), pp. 397-8.

³² Radkey, *Agrarian Foes*, pp. 333-334.

³³ Radkey, *Agrarian Foes*, p. 245.

³⁴ Radkey, *Agrarian Foes*, p. 247.

Constituent Assembly.³⁵ Chernov himself recognised this conflict, but rightly acknowledged that only this concession to peasant demands for land could protect the land fund from serious erosion. He proposed three specific measures in his tenure as Minister for Agriculture; to suspend the Stolypin reforms and all land transactions, and to place all land in the hands of the local land committees. The Provisional Government was only willing to approve the suspension of the Stolypin reforms. The business community understandably opposed the suspension of land transactions, since these theoretically formed the basis of the monetary economy, and the Kadets, joined by Prince Lvov, blocked the measure in cabinet. Chernov rather underhandedly bypassed his cabinet colleagues and instructed the Minister for Justice Pereverzev to send a circular around the provinces asking notaries to withhold acknowledgement of land deals on 17th May. He was forced by cabinet to rescind this on 23rd June, which caused a great deal of confusion around the provinces as commands, counter commands and rumours swam around the overloaded systems of regional government. It was not until 12th July that a Kerensky sponsored bill was passed by the Provisional Government, which placed severe restrictions on land transactions.³⁶ Even then, this was resisted fiercely by the liberal press.³⁷

Chernov's third and most important proposal, to place all land in the hands of the land committees, was not even considered by the first coalition. His attempt to bypass the Provisional Government and to broaden the powers of the land committees regardless of Provisional Government policy certainly contributed to the confusion prevalent in the countryside,³⁸ though Prince Lvov's assertion that Chernov was responsible for the wilful and indiscriminate illegal acts being carried out by land committees was far fetched, and served only to reveal how little Lvov understood of the situation in the countryside.³⁹ There can be no doubt that the line held by the PSR and that pursued by the Provisional Government clearly diverged on land ownership; on behalf of the Provisional Government Rokitnikov stated that questions of ownership were to be left to the Constituent Assembly, while the PSR upheld the right of peasants to deprive

³⁵ Radkey, *Agrarian Foes*, pp. 246-249.

³⁶ Browder and Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional*, vol. 2, doc. 485, pp. 556-557; law of the Provisional Government, 12th July 1917.

³⁷ *Russkaia vedomosti*, no. 172, July 29th 1917, p. 1; editorial, commented that 'We regard this measure [the ban on land transactions] as one of most unsuccessful actions of the Provisional Government'.

³⁸ Browder and Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional*, vol. 2, doc. 487, pp. 558-562; Chernov's instructions to the land committees, issued on July 16th 1917, which authorised a significant strengthening of the land committees' powers. Doc. 488, pp. 562-563, published on July 17th, presents the response of Tsereteli, the minister of the Interior, which overruled Chernov's instructions.

³⁹ Radkey, *Agrarian Foes*, p. 258.

landowners of the material advantages of ownership. This position was a fair reflection of the radical land programme proposed by the PSR, which, practicable or not, was certainly supported by the majority of the Russian peasantry. Chernov was left hopelessly stranded as Minister for Agriculture within a government that refused to acknowledge his proposals. His exit from the Provisional Government after the August crisis enabled him to salvage his personal reputation as a champion for peasants' rights, but could not mask the difficulties faced by regional PSR representatives in reconciling his inaction while in government with the demands of their constituents.

PEASANT DIRECT ACTION

The failure of the PSR and the Provisional Government to keep in step with peasant demands for land caused the peasants to take direct action. This action, some of which was no doubt led by those professing to represent the PSR, can be used to illustrate the autonomous direction taken by villagers in 1917, regardless of the imprecations of central government or their favoured political party. The motivations and manifestations of such action facilitate an understanding of the essential breach between PSR central party policy in supporting the Provisional Government, and the actions of their 'supporters' in the villages. The pattern of action in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* which emerged shares characteristics shown in other regional and national studies of peasant direct action.⁴⁰ The local conditions which determined the form of peasant action were a far more powerful force in the villages than any political party could muster. Orlando Figes' work suggested that the language and vocabulary of the revolution was in some cases totally misunderstood by or incomprehensible to the Russian peasantry.⁴¹ Though observers did not suggest, as Figes does, that the peasants totally misunderstood the vocabulary of the revolution, in March and April agrarian disorder in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* was often put down to 'misunderstandings'. Observers commented that the peasantry lacked comprehension of the meanings and limitations of their new found revolutionary freedom.

⁴⁰ S.P. Melgunov, *The Bolshevik Seizure of Power* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 198-204; discusses how figures relating to peasant unrest are agreed. For a survey of the peasant movement of 1917, and the historiography surrounding it, see M. Perrie, 'The Peasants', in R. Service (ed.) *Society and Politics in the Russian Revolution* (London, 1992), pp. 12-34. Channon, 'The Peasantry', pp. 106-110 looks at the historiography of the peasant movement. A comprehensive treatment of the peasant movement between February and October 1917 is offered in Gill, *Peasants and Government*. A regional survey of rural revolution can be found in M.C. Hickey, 'Urban *Zemliachestva* and Rural Revolution: Petrograd and the Smolensk Countryside in 1917', *Soviet and Post Soviet Review* 23(3) 1996, pp. 150-156.

⁴¹ Figes, 'The Russian Revolution', pp. 324-5.

Vasil'skii *uezd* commissar TM Burushkin reported that in the *uezd* in general it was peaceful, but that the population, owing to their ignorance, are badly oriented in questions of their rights and laws and resort to such excesses, which have not been reduced in limits set out by the new renovated state structure. . .⁴²

Rapid transfer of society from despotism to free life was not absolutely understood by many people. People used the absence of organised power to further the interests of private reckonings, which created. . . a mass of petty conflict in interrelations of different classes of the population, manifested in all possible forms of public and private life, such as searches, insults in words and assaults, expulsion from flats and so on.⁴³

As 1917 progressed, however, it became increasingly clear that peasant activities displayed wanton disregard for decrees and imprecations from above, rather than just 'misunderstandings'.⁴⁴ The prevalent manifestation of the agrarian movement was wood cutting, which occurred on a massive scale. Though a quantitative analysis has not been made, a perfunctory survey of several thousand telegrams reporting agrarian unrest reveals that they referred mostly to the cutting of wood.⁴⁵ This clearly went on at an alarming scale, and far outnumbered any other form of peasant direct action in the *guberniia*. This colloquial interpretation is backed up by *uezd* commissar reports. As early as March 1917, arbitrary cutting of landowners' wood featured in *uezd* reports:⁴⁶

The mood of the population is in general satisfactory, with the exception of one *volost*, Bol'she-Polianskaia, where insubordination to the local state organisations and seizure of private property goes on. In several places rapacious wood cutting goes on. This cutting has mostly stopped thanks to the measures taken. The presidium of the *uezd* executive committee and the regional Soviet of Soldiers' deputies, as well as the commissariat, have all played a part in the cessation of agrarian excesses.⁴⁷

The agrarian movement is manifested in the arbitrary preparation of fuel due to mistaken understanding in the localities of the law about requisitions and the late organisation of committees for fuel and land. As a result of this, it has not been possible to acquire satisfactory fuel for winter by legal means.⁴⁸

⁴² GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 13, ll. 155-9; protocol of the meeting of *uezd* commissars in Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia*, 10th-11th April 1917.

⁴³ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, ll. 161-3; report from Sormovo *uezd* commissar, 15th June 1917.

⁴⁴ This term would seem to have been appropriated by sympathetic observers of village life, who sought to explain peasant action on their own terms.

⁴⁵ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 44, ll. 57-384- telegrams from the *uezds* to the *guberniia* commissar, reporting peasant unrest, almost all of which was manifested as woodcutting, in March and April 1917. GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 1-339- most of these pages are telegrams about peasant action for the period 1st June-25th July 1917. GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 23- telegrams and letters about agrarian risings (Seizure of land, wood cutting, cattle requisition), for the period 27th April-12th September 1917. GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, 480 pages included telegrams about reports on agrarian disorder. GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 42, 512 pages of writings about the risings of the peasantry against the Provisional Government. Most of these were reports of woodcutting. GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 45, 847 pages, writings about peasant seizure of land, 6th April-25th October 1917.

⁴⁶ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 6. Telegram from *guberniia* commissar Demidov to Ministry for Internal Affairs, 13th March 1917.

⁴⁷ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 312. Report from Lukoianovskii *uezd* commissar, 23rd September 1917.

⁴⁸ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 314. Report from Balakhninskii *uezd* commissar, October 1917.

The agrarian movement in the current time takes in an extensive area. Both in the *raions* of Dubemshiskoi *volost*, on the properties of Titei and Matveev, and in Chermukhinskii *volost*, on the property of Karmalina, wood cutting took on an epidemic character.⁴⁹

In Balakhninskii *uezd*, in April, the landowners were accused of fuelling the movement by themselves chopping wood without sufficient need, motivated by the desire to prevent wood from falling into the hands of the peasantry.⁵⁰ The *guberniia* commissar's report on the situation of the *guberniia* for the period August-September offered a more feasible explanation for the movement:

The agrarian movement manifests itself in arbitrary wood cutting on private landowners' dachas not excluding state wood dachas in the *guberniia*; the cutting of wood is carried out by the population partly with aims of preparation of firewood for winter, and in the majority of cases cut to take advantage of the high prices of wood.⁵¹

The Soviet of peasants' deputies clearly recognised the rural population's hunger for wood, and though wood seizure was not condoned, they proposed the establishment of fixed prices on woodland, and the power of requisition for *uezd* executive committees if private owners resisted such fixed prices.⁵² The Provisional Government's administrative bodies were unable to respond rapidly to the peasants' lead in these matters, as they were tied to central government policy. The *guberniia* commissar, PSR member Sumgin, clearly recognised the need for the new administration to move with peasant actions to some extent, in order to retain a semblance of legitimacy and control in the countryside. An undated, pre-October 1917 report from the *guberniia* commissar Sumgin to the Minister for Internal Affairs urged rapid reform of landholding:

In almost all *uezds* arbitrary cutting of privately owned woods goes on, and regional routs of *pomeshchiks*' property. With the aim to halt the self-willed strengthening of this new order, it is necessary that privately owned land be placed in the keeping of the land committees.⁵³

Sumgin's proposal echoed the one proposed by Chernov to the Provisional Government. Like Chernov, Sumgin was thwarted. Unlike Chernov and his fellow theorists in the Central Committee, however, Sumgin was directly responsible for maintaining order in the *guberniia*. By 23rd October 1917, the situation had got so out of control that the *guberniia* commissar took the measures he had proposed on his own initiative, in a desperate attempt to control seizure of land and wood:

⁴⁹ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 435. Report of Makarevskii *uezd* commissar, October 1917.

⁵⁰ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 13, l. 155-9; protocol of the meeting of *uezd* commissars in Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia*, 10th-11th April 1917.

⁵¹ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 43, l. 361, report from *guberniia* commissar to the Ministry of Internal Affairs on situation in the *guberniia*. Undated.

⁵² GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 13, l. 103. Excerpt from the decree of the Nizhegorodskaiia Soviet of peasants' deputies, 29th May 1917.

⁵³ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 299. Report from the Sormovo *uezd* commissar, 10th October 1917.

The anarchy which exists in most of the *guberniia* is manifested absolutely everywhere in the seizure of grain, cutting of wood continues along with arson of property. I am taking these measures, on the one hand actually transferring all land and woods to the keeping of the land committees to show the population the undoubted victories of the revolution, and on the other hand, using ranks of soldiers to cut short counter-revolutionary calls to burn and rob.⁵⁴

The Provisional Government's inability to respond to the developing crisis in the countryside with radical reform of landholding regulations meant that the seizure of wood and property had run out of control by October 1917. Had the government been more flexible and transferred property into the management of land committees, it could at least have maintained a semblance of legality and state legitimisation of peasant actions. There are indications that such legitimisation may have helped keep the peasantry under the umbrella of the state, rather than retracting entirely into a localised view of village life. Peasants demonstrated an enthusiasm to legitimise their actions in pseudo-legal forms,⁵⁵ and some incursions into private property were organised 'in the belief that such acts complied with the needs of the revolution.'⁵⁶ The peasants of Slobodskii *volost*, Nizhegorodskaia *uezd*, declared on the 15th September that they would not be paying their taxes because they were not permitted to sell grain, an allusion to Provisional Government fixed grain prices. A further justification for non-payment was given by soldiers' wives, who stated that since their husbands were away spilling their blood, the wives would not give any money to the state.⁵⁷ A report from Vasil'skii *uezd* in April commented on the careful list making and organisation that accompanied peasant demands and actions:

The population made up a list of private landowners' provision reserves, calculating according to them what they, the peasants, were to receive in their decree.⁵⁸

By November, the situation in Vasil'skii *uezd* had deteriorated. The *uezd* commissar stated that peasants who had seized cattle or grain presented documents, presumably forged, to the administration, about their 'purchase' of stolen goods, and certifying their payment of money to the owner. This reflects the peasants' enthusiasm for and faith in written certification,⁵⁹ as well as a continued desire to have their actions legitimised. Had the administration been more flexible, this enthusiasm for legitimisation had the

⁵⁴ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 445. Report of *guberniia* commissar Sumgin to Ministry of Internal Affairs, 23rd October 1917.

⁵⁵ See Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, p. 51.

⁵⁶ Hickey, 'Urban *Zemliachestva*', p. 151.

⁵⁷ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 45, l. 288. Report from Nizhegorodskaia *uezd* commissar, 15th September 1917.

⁵⁸ GANO, F. 1882, op. 1, d. 13, l. 155-9; protocol of the meeting of *uezd* commissars in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*, 10th-11th April 1917.

⁵⁹ See Figes, 'The Russian Revolution', pp. 325-6.

potential to allow the new administration to embrace the peasants. The PSR meanwhile, was shackled by its conformity to the Provisional Government. The only way for it to have seized initiative in the countryside would have been to withdraw support from the Provisional Government and instead offer its support and guidance to peasant initiatives. This was the course of action taken by those PSR local activists who continued to have influence in village life.

In the middle-Volga region, peasant direct action was more bitter where directed against separators from the commune than against gentry landowners.⁶⁰ Such attacks on separators were certainly a feature of Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*'s agrarian movement. This feature is one which was seized upon by Soviet historians as evidence of class delineations within the peasantry. This can be seen by the amount of attention paid by Soviet researchers to the *delo* documenting the union organised by peasants of Vasil'surskii and Kurmishskii *uezds*, for struggle with landowners and kulaks.⁶¹ Apart from this specific *delo*, there were a number of reports of commune attacks on separators:

In the village Vakharakh misunderstandings arose between commune peasants and separators. Interrelations are still not settled, and in my opinion there is no hope of a peaceful solution to their argument.⁶²

Separators from Makarevskii *uezd* came in person to the *Guberniia* meeting of *uezd* commissars, to complain about threats and violence against them by peasants from the commune.⁶³ Based on further reports, the administration was unable to protect separators adequately. By October, the *guberniia* commissar was reporting violence towards separators:

⁶⁰ O. Figes, 'Peasant Farmers and the Minority Groups of Rural Society: Peasant Egalitarianism and Village Social Relations During the Russian Revolution (1917-1921)' E. Kingston-Mann and T. Mixter (eds.) *Peasant Economy, Culture and Politics of European Russia 1800-1921* (Princeton, 1991), p. 384. Also, see Figes' article 'The Russian Peasant Community in the Agrarian Revolution, 1917-18' in R. Bartlett (ed.) *Land Commune and Peasant Community in Russia* (New York, 1990), p. 240.

⁶¹ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 15. (745 l.); Protocols and decrees of meetings of peasants of Vasil'surskii and Kurmishskii *uezds* about the organisation of a union for struggle with *pomeshchiks* and kulaks, and the letter of Kniagin Chegaev about this union. Reports of landowners about peasant seizure of their property. (4th May- 28th December 1917) Evidence of its interest to Soviet historians was the long list recording who had requested the document, compared to the other *dela* documenting peasant action, many of which had never before been requested.

⁶² GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 13, l. 155-9. Report from Semenovskii *uezd* commissar, at the meeting of *uezd* commissars in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*, 10th-11th April 1917. April 10th 1917.

⁶³ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 13, l. 155-9; protocol of the meeting of *uezd* commissars in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*, 10th-11th April 1917.

Regional peasants begin to persecute separators and buyers of land through the bank cruelly, destroying dwellings.⁶⁴

Attacks on separators confirmed the desire of village peasants to maintain traditional land-holding patterns, and to resist the changes of the last fifteen years.⁶⁵ A recurrent feature of accounts of peasant direct action in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* during 1917 are the reports of violence which accompanied it.⁶⁶ Gorky remarked that violence and mindless cruelty were integral parts of Russian peasant society.⁶⁷ Reports of peasant violence are difficult to assess clearly; the part of violence in peasant behaviour may have been over-reported, in the interests of sensationalist journalism, and because reports of peasant violence correlated with existing stereotypes of the 'dark' peasantry. The part of peasant violence however, particularly towards the administration, is an important indicator both of peasant dissatisfaction with the administration, and of the severe difficulties administrators faced in doing their jobs.

Vasil'skii *uezd* commissar gave an account of the peasants searching the court investigator's flat and confiscating his material evidence.⁶⁸ Direct action of this kind was echoed in different *uezds* around the *guberniia*. Ardatovskii *uezd* commissar reported that in Ardatov town:

On 3rd April of this year, a market was held in Ardatov town. A meeting was formed of the people who gathered from peasant villages. Under the influence of speeches of citizen AE Kurov, clearly directed to the undermining of authority and trust in individuals standing at the head of regional *uezd zemstva* and administration. . . a crowd was drawn of approximately 1000 people, some of whom were drunk, which showed up at the building of the regional *zemstvo* court and began to knock at the door, wishing to carry out stocktaking and searches. The situation was particularly threatening to safety because documents and sums of money were preserved in that building, as well as members of the *uezd zemstvo*. The captain of the regional garrison, *uezd* Military captain Colonel Nekhliudov, was compelled to send a command of

⁶⁴ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 445. Report of the *guberniia* commissar to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 23rd October 1917.

⁶⁵ J. Pallot, *Land Reform in Russia, 1906-1917. Peasant Responses to Stolypin's Project of Rural Transformation* (New York, 1999). Pallot assesses peasant resistance to the Stolypin reforms, and found their desire to maintain traditional landholding practices entirely rational. (ch. 3). Chapter 6 looks at peasant 'everyday forms of resistance' to the Stolypin reforms. Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, pp. 56-61, considered the movement of commune peasants against separators in the Volga region.

⁶⁶ Channon, 'The Peasantry', p. 122; commented that violent incidents characterised a minority of peasant actions, and violence was usually provoked by problems of immediate urgency, such as food supply crises. Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, p. 53, commented that it was extremely rare for landowners to be harmed during expropriations. G. Tan, 'Revolutionary Justice in the Ukrainian Village During 1917 and After' (Paper presented to BASEES conference, Cambridge, 2000) discussed the role of violence in peasant justice procedures, and intimated that such violence was an integral part of the villages' revolutionary experience (p. 2).

⁶⁷ M. Haynes, 'Maxim Gorky and the 'Zoological Anarchism' of the Russian Working Class' (Paper presented to the conference of the Study group on the Russian Revolution, Leeds, 1997), p. 8.

⁶⁸ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 13, l. 155-9; protocol of the meeting of *uezd* commissars in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*, 10th-11th April 1917.

soldiers from the 62nd infantry reserve regiment under the command of warrant officer Ivanov and forced the crowd, without the use of weapons, to . . . disperse. The court was sealed up.

On 8th April these very events were played out again, but the crowd went still further, forcing the *uezd* commissar to go to the meeting of the *uezd* executive committee. He was asked to free citizen Kurov, who was still imprisoned then. The argument of the commissar, that he was unable to do this, and that there was nothing to be done in this case was ignored. The crowd declared that the commissar was arrested and demanded that he be directed to the prison. . . the commissar sat in the prison office for 15 minutes, later by declaration of the executive committee soldiers of the regional garrison were not called. . . The captain of the garrison was again compelled to take decisive measures and with the help of a command of soldiers situated in the town of Ardatov on leave, freed the arrested commissar and restored order, again without weapons.⁶⁹

This situation is potent; the *uezd* commissar was not only unpopular, but actually arrested by the rural mob. Village *samosud* was brought to the town.⁷⁰ The discrediting of what sounded like orchestrated and well-organised peasant action by implications of drunkenness is an interesting facet of this report. Though some of the peasants may well have been drunk, in this context the reference could be interpreted as an attempt to trivialise and belittle the peasant organisation evident here. It was in the interests of the reporter, as *uezd* commissar and representative of official administration, to portray peasants acting against government as ‘dark’. This account however, far from portraying the peasants as a drunken mob, actually gives the impression of careful planning and organisation. Demonstrations against the provisions *Uprava* in Gorbatovskii *uezd* over four days in August were also well orchestrated. Participants in the demonstrations came from four different *volosts* and from Gorbatov town to protest outside the building of the Provisions *Uprava*:

The demands of the crowd were “Give us grain. You will make us starve.” The crowd would not accept explanations from members of the *Uprava*. A voice was heard from the crowd, cursing foully, and threatening members of the *Uprava* with murder. At that moment several members of the *Uprava* ran away. The president of the *Uprava* was seized by the crowd, with the intention of lynching him, but the commissar and armed soldiers persuaded the crowd to leave him untouched. He was then arrested by the militia, together with another *Uprava* member, Sokolov, who, on the way to the guardhouse, had his beard pulled by the crowd, and the key of the provisions warehouse taken. . .⁷¹

This occurrence had all the hallmarks of well-organised peasant action against an unpopular administration. Individuals came from different *volosts* in the *uezd* to participate in the protest, and the newspaper report noted that the crowd met at ten

⁶⁹ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 42, l. 124, from the Journal of the meeting of Ardatovskii Executive committee, 10th April 1917.

⁷⁰ Tan, ‘Revolutionary Justice in the Ukrainian Village’, pp. 14-15; recounted a remarkably similar incident in a Ukrainian village, where the peasants attacked a court official, imprisoned him and demanded that he be tried by a ‘people’s court’. Cossacks guarding a nearby sugar factory were required to restore order and protect the hapless official.

⁷¹ *Narod*, no. 61, 3rd September, p. 4.

o'clock in the morning for four consecutive mornings. The report also noted that the leaders of the crowd were participants in the pogroms of 1905, more evidence that this incident was not simply a reflex response to the provisions crisis, but an orchestrated protest. Such a scene, surely not isolated in the *guberniia*, demonstrates the threat of violence under which administrative staff had to work, and the careful organisation of peasant action.

Gorbatovskii *uezd* commissar reported on the undesirable make-up of the town executive committee, and demonstrated why the vague formulation offered by the Provisional Government was open to abuse:

the reporter declares that the best democratic part of the members of the town executive committee left, and that those remaining on the committee are primarily individuals who were close to the pogrom movement of 1905.⁷²

Further problems emerged in Balakhninskii *uezd*, where the town executive committee, organised on 3rd March in response to the fall of the tsarist administration, attempted and indeed apparently succeeded in overruling the *uezd* committee and *uezd* commissar.

Balakhninskii town mayor reported to the *guberniia* commissar:

the town committee, with its independent orders and its control of the town economy, and demands for use of that economy, carries disorganisation and dual power.⁷³

Vasil'skii *uezd* was reported to have similar problems with the town committee-

not answering to the needs of the current moment. . .it was reported to me that the arbitrary acts of a comparatively small group of townspeople giving peremptory orders to all the *uezd* was causing irritation amongst the peasant population.⁷⁴

The *guberniia*'s administration, where it was unpopular, faced accusations of Bonapartism and corruption, and threats and even acts of violence. The pressure peasants could place on local administration makes the problems of governing the villages clear. Administrators had to accommodate the needs of the local population in the villages if they were to continue at their posts.

The clergy in the villages were in a vexed position. Some reports regarded them as defenders of the old order, which left them open to attack in the charged atmosphere of 1917. There are also indications, however, that the local priest was revered in many villages. As well as often being of equivalent financial and social status as his

⁷² GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 13, l. 155-9; protocol of the meeting of *uezd* commissars in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*, 10th-11th April 1917.

⁷³ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 42, p. 54. Report from Balakhninskii town mayor to *guberniia* commissar, April 1917.

⁷⁴ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 43, l. 1-2. Report of *guberniia* commissar Demidov to *guberniia* executive committee, on situation in the *guberniia*, 21st March 1917.

parishioners, sustaining himself by working the land alongside them,⁷⁵ he played an important part in the life of the villages as minister to parishioners' spiritual needs. His literacy may also have made him an important figure in the village, particularly since by 1917 many of the young men, who were the best educated element of the villages, were away in the army. Attitudes towards the clergy were torn between the respect traditionally shown to churchmen and their place within the village community, and their links with the old regime.⁷⁶ This confused position is illustrative of the contradictory forces operating within the villages, and the diversity of local responses to challengers of tradition. These responses were largely above party politics, and were defined by the local situation.

Violence towards the clergy was reported widely around Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*; in April alone it was mentioned in Nizhegorodskii, Vasil'skii and Gorbatovskii *uezds*.⁷⁷ One motivation for this was the unpopularity of individuals representing the church. Grinevitskii, representative of the Soviet of workers' deputies, and later to become a Menshevik member of the Duma, stated that the removal of Archbishop Isakim, who 'did not enjoy respect among the population and clergy'⁷⁸ would restore the diocese to normal life- applications on this matter flooded into the *guberniia* executive committee. The problem with executing this replacement rapidly was that such appointments were made centrally in Petrograd, and examination of these matters was slow. Clearly, this problem was not resolved; on 31st August Archbishop Isakim returned to Nizhnii Novgorod, by order of the Holy Synod, which went against the expressed wishes of the population. The *guberniia* Soviet of peasants' deputies made a formal protest about Isakim's return.⁷⁹

Breshkovskaia identified corruption among the clergy as the central factor in their loss of respect, and dated this loss of respect to the end of the nineteenth century:

⁷⁵ See I.S. Belliustin, *Description of the Clergy in Rural Russia* (tr. and ed. G. Freeze) (New York, 1985), p. 126; 'the farmer-priest is just a peasant distinguished only by his literacy; otherwise he has a cast of thought, desires, aspirations, and even a way of life that are strictly peasant.' A wonderfully evocative photograph of monk-peasants from Nizhnii Novgorod prior to the revolution can be found in K. Fitzylton and T. Browning (ed.) *Before the Revolution; A view of Russia under the last Tsar* (Penguin, 1992), p. 173.

⁷⁶ See Figes, 'Peasant Farmers and the Minority Groups', pp. 395-398.

⁷⁷ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 13, l. 155-9; protocol of the meeting of *uezd* commissars in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*, 10th-11th April 1917.

⁷⁸ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 13, l. 155-9; protocol of the meeting of *uezd* commissars in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*, 10th-11th April 1917.

⁷⁹ *Narod*, no. 61, 3rd September 1917, p. 4.

The Russian peasantry never excuses greed or hypocrisy in its clergy and does not hesitate to criticise in irreverent language. The more obedient the clergy became to the civil authorities who regarded them as lower state officials, the wider became the gulf between them and the peasants.⁸⁰

Such analysis certainly offers some explanation for the irreverence displayed in some places towards the clergy, despite the reputed ‘godliness’ of the Russian peasantry.⁸¹ In Vasil’skii *uezd*, peasants of Pusskii-Moklokov village requested that their deacon be removed, specifically because he continued to support the old regime, and reminded the population of its duties to the former tsar. The *uezd* commissar declared himself satisfied with the deacon’s explanation that he had done this only out of habit, and actually had no feelings for the old regime, so he was allowed to stay.⁸² The deacon’s explanation is unconvincing, and it is hard to believe respect for his person could be regained when the peasants had gone so far as to petition for his removal. Though this evidence of individual unpopularity stimulating attacks on the clergy is compelling, many of the attacks on church property were clearly motivated by the provisions crisis and desire to acquire church-held land. In Arzamasskii *uezd*, the convent near Bonitaeva village had its cattle stolen and killed, but no attack was made on the nuns themselves, or their other property.⁸³

Despite the changing climate of 1917, many village priests continued to enjoy respect and even protection from their parishioners. In Troitskii village, Vasil’surskii *uezd*, the village *skhod* discussed their annual payment of 600 roubles to the church, which they considered was too high. The priest called in to clarify this ‘misunderstanding’, Avksentii Snovodskii, declared that the payment was used for birth certificates! The parishioners were understandably unimpressed by this explanation, and declared that whilst fifty roubles should be sufficient for payment of birth certificates, they did not know where the rest of their money went. The priest was clearly a respected figure in Troitskii. Discussion of the question reportedly confused the peasants, since *batiushka*

⁸⁰ E. K. Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs of the Russian Revolution* (Stanford, 1931), p. 315.

⁸¹ On the deep religiosity of the Russian peasantry, see Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs*, pp. 314-318. Though Breshkovskaia was no doubt guilty of romanticising the peasantry to some extent, she was nevertheless an astute observer, and spent part of her life in close contact with the peasantry. Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, pp. 149-50; comments that there is no real evidence that the religious attitudes of the peasantry weakened between 1917 and 1921, and that peasant risings against Soviet power in the villages were partly caused by Bolshevik attacks on the church. A. Okninsky, *Dva goda sredi krest’ian: Vidennoe, slushannoe, perezhitoe v Tambovskoi gubernii s noiabro 1918 goda do noiabro 1920 goda* (Massachusetts, 1986), p. 231; reported that there was an upsurge in churchgoing in his Tambov village between 1918-1920, and that the peasant-soldiers’ atheism, on their return from the army in 1917-18, was soon forgotten.

⁸² GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 74-5. Report of Vasil’skii *uezd* commissar about the situation in the *uezd*, 29th May 1917.

⁸³ *Narod*, no. 87, 28th October 1917, p. 4.

declared that the peasants did not have the right to alter the payment, and that they could not trust what they read in the newspapers. The *skhod* was concluded without resolution of the perplexing missing money.⁸⁴ That the question was left unresolved reflected the continuing high esteem the clergy enjoyed in Troitskii, but that it was discussed at all did not bode well for the *obrok*'s continued payment.

In Itmanov village, Sergachskii *uezd*, a Bolshevik named Popovkin called the village priest a bourgeois parasite, and incited a group of around thirty men to put an end to him. Discussions with the priest swayed the men in his favour, but the following day Popovkin went round the houses of the village collecting signatures for a petition against the priest. The events which followed provide a fascinating picture of the village priest's continued support in the villages, as well as demonstrating that women had the capacity to take on a leading role within the villages:

The population of Itmanov awoke- it was indignant at such intolerable behaviour from the Bolsheviks. The women were especially angry, since to them it seemed that the Bolsheviks wanted to close the churches. That evening almost all the women gathered at the village *skhod*, and stood up for the *batiushka* elder! They demanded the Bolsheviks, but there were only ten, and the remainder stayed on the outskirts in the secluded little town. The women shouted a lot. A voice rang out, 'Put Popovkin in the pond, he makes the whole *obshchestvo* indignant!' but even though there were a lot of women, they didn't actually do anything with the Bolsheviks. The men didn't lend a hand, and the Bolsheviks were freed. They left the crowd and went as if to go home, but returned to the flat of the priest, where they threatened him that in twenty-four hours he would find out about the Bolsheviks' business! Those women who had been at the *skhod* saw the Bolsheviks coming away from the priest's flat, and broke into a run, crying 'Save *batiushka*!'.

The Bolsheviks had already talked with the priest and gone out onto the street, where they met a crowd coming out of the *skhod*. They realised that the crowd was coming for them and resorted to cunning. They said to the women that they were called to the *batiushka* at the *skhod*, so that he could explain everything to them, and so that they were not agitated. There were rumours all around the village at this time that the Bolsheviks wanted the chance to murder! Men ran to the priest's house, and decided to kill the leading Bolshevik Popovkin.

But it was too late. The five Bolsheviks who remained went to a tea shop. A crowd of nearly 1000 men and women rushed there. Popovkin's well-wishers warned him, and in full view of the crowd he ran from the tea shop, followed by the other four Bolsheviks. The crowd went after them, but they had hidden and could not be found.⁸⁵

This evocative account demonstrates the high level of respect still afforded this village's priest, and the potential repercussions for those who agitated against the men of god. Such violence expressed against the Bolsheviks is reminiscent of pogrom behaviour. This is echoed more directly in reports of violence against Bolsheviks in the Presnia district of Moscow in the wake of the July days, where the Bolsheviks were "beaten like

⁸⁴ *Narod*, no. 69, 24th September 1917, p. 4.

⁸⁵ *Narod*, no. 109, 24th November 1917, p. 3.

Jews".⁸⁶ These accounts of the clergy's position in the villages illustrates both that violence against the clergy was not universal, and that those incidents which did occur were generally reflecting specific priests' failure to reflect the views of their parishioners. More importantly, these accounts reveal a village life which was divorced from political parties and central government. In these instances peasants responded to the challenges of 1917 without regard for the imprecations of political parties. For the PSR to take part in village life, its activists had to reflect the demands and desires of the peasantry.

POLICING THE COUNTRYSIDE

These accounts of peasant direct action clearly demonstrate that self-rule existed in parts of the countryside. What could the local administration do to combat the *samosud* of the villages? *Methods of maintaining order and preventing violent incidents in the countryside* were not effective in 1917. The inadequacy of the voluntary militias that were formed in 1917 to police the *uezds* became increasingly evident as 1917 progressed, and was manifested most obviously in the calls for military assistance all over the *guberniia*. These calls became widespread and persistent from September onwards. Sormovo⁸⁷ *uezd* commissar stated specifically the problems that creation of an effective militia faced:

The organisation of the militia went slowly because of a shortage of people free from military service . . . and it was only possible at all thanks to voluntary organisations of people's militia, who were provisionally . . . freed from their permanent duties for well known rewards. Militia exists at the current time in Sormovo in these forms; first, voluntary organised in the first days of revolution. . . the second is formed from hired individuals completely in my control. . . [administrative members described]. . . the number of militia is insufficient in comparison with the questions of life and the former composition of the police, but an increase of that number is not possible because of absence of means for militia maintenance.⁸⁸

Makarevskii *uezd* commissar pointed to further problems for the militia caused by lack of adequate funding:

The militia is very unstable in structure: militiamen are not provided with an allowance, and the dangers of a worrying existence and damage to health all lead to frequent changes in its personnel.⁸⁹

Even in August, Chistopolskii *volost* executive committee warned Semenovskii *uezd* commissar that disorder was threatened in many villages, and that the local militia could

⁸⁶ D. Koenker, *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution* (Princeton, 1981), p. 209.

⁸⁷ Sormovo *uezd* was dominated by the factories situated there, and they are dealt with separately in chapter 6. In this instance, however, the militia described is rural, and separate from that dealing with the factories, which organised their own guards.

⁸⁸ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 161-3. Report of Sormovo *uezd* commissar, June 1917.

⁸⁹ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 43, l. 365-6. Report of Makarevskii *uezd* commissar, October 1917.

not be relied upon.⁹⁰ In Lukoianovskii *uezd*, it was reported that the militia was still not fully organised by September, and that its activities were not noticeable.⁹¹ The inadequacies of militia organisations in the *guberniia* inevitably led to rising crime levels. In Nizhnii Novgorod town alone, 315 crimes were reported in May and June.⁹² This report from Nizhnii Novgorod Town Duma on 16th September added corruption to the militia's malaises:

. . . the numbers of robberies and thefts have risen to incredible dimensions. The population has been terrorised, and the militia was not only inactive, but refused to give help even when it was requested. Bribe taking has increased in comparison with the bribe taking of the former police. The *Uprava* must be provided with means to offer the militia proper wages and to take measures for the cessation of robberies.⁹³

By October, reports indicated the inadequacies of the militia more specifically, and the urgent need for soldiers if violence was to be avoided. Arzamasskii *uezd* commissar warned in October that if a regiment was not sent, pogroms would begin.⁹⁴ Makarevskii *uezd* suffered an epidemic of thefts and two major fires in October. The commissar there asked specifically for mounted divisions to be sent.⁹⁵ Public disorder would seem to be reaching its pinnacle with reports of armed resistance to the militia:

. . . there were two armed attacks on the militia during their attempts to halt the destruction arising in Liskov village. . . a nine year old boy was wounded in the hand. Thefts of more or less large dimensions both in Liskov and in villages occur almost daily. Total absence of mounted militia in the *uezd* is a fundamental inadequacy of measures for the struggle with crime and for defence of peace in the *uezd*.⁹⁶

These warnings and urgent requests for armed strength are a reflection of the growing inability of Provisional Government sponsored administrative bodies to uphold national policy in the localities. The administration did not have any restraints on peasant action and violence available, apart from the desperation clause of calling in the military.

SOLDIERS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

In April, it was decreed that parts of the garrison stationed in the *uezds* to help put down agrarian unrest were to return to Nizhnii Novgorod, since their presence was no longer

⁹⁰ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 270. Report of Chistopol'skii *volost* executive committee to Semenovskii *uezd* commissar, 16th August 1917.

⁹¹ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 312. Report from Lukoianovskii *uezd* commissar, 23rd September 1917.

⁹² GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 75. Report of the Captain of the militia to Nizhegorodskaja *guberniia* commissar about incidents and criminal occurrences around the *uezds*, 12th April- 14th October 1917.

⁹³ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 3, l. 35, from speech of E.O. Sam (NS faction) in the Duma, 16th September 1917.

⁹⁴ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 311. Report of Arzamasskii *uezd* commissar, 4th October 1917.

⁹⁵ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 435. Report of Makarevskii *uezd* commissar, 25th October 1917.

⁹⁶ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 43, l. 365-6. Report of Makarevskii *uezd* commissar, October 1917. G. Tan, 'Revolutionary Justice in the Ukraine', pp. 12-13, describes similar violent resistance to the militia in the Ukraine.

required.⁹⁷ This would seem to have been premature, since over and over in 1917, but particularly from September onwards, *uezd* commissars wrote increasingly desperate reports to the *guberniia* commissar on the need to have military force sent to the *uezd*, to protect landowners' wood and property, to prevent pogroms and to prevent attacks on the *uezd* administration. The attack on Ardatovskii *uezd* commissar in April was only limited by the intervention of soldiers, and Ardatovskii *uezd* commissar was quick to request more armed strength to prevent further incidents. In Makarevskii *uezd*, soldiers were used to protect property from peasant action in October.⁹⁸

Just as in other *guberniias* around the country, the role of deserting soldiers was significant in agitating in the countryside for various illegal activities. Some commentators have remarked that returning soldiers were the natural leaders of revolution in the countryside, and played a most significant role.⁹⁹ This is not the impression given of the situation in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*. A number of *uezd* commissar reports referred to the role of outsiders, whether soldiers or professional political propagandists, in stirring up trouble in the villages, but in no cases were the incoming soldiers credited with leading peasant action. Arzamasskii *uezd* commissar reported in April:

The peaceful mood of the population has changed for the worse recently, due to the arrival in the countryside of soldiers on leave, and the arrival of different kinds of orators, telling the peasants absolutely made-up stories about happenings in Russia, and in particular about the forms of prospective land division. Several demagogues make speeches to the peasants that are more extreme in spirit than those emanating from Lenin abroad.¹⁰⁰

This report provoked strong feelings from the town mayor Ganchel, who attended the *uezd* commissars' conference; he warned that the only way to combat such propagandists was with 'words and convictions'. He would not tolerate any limitations on freedom of speech. This echoed the attitudes of PSR's Central Committee, who refused to contemplate any restrictions on the extremist press. This was, ironically, in contrast to the attitude of the Bolsheviks whose rights they defended, one of whose first

⁹⁷ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 13, ll. 155-9; protocol of the meeting of *uezd* commissars in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*, 10th-11th April 1917.

⁹⁸ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 435. Report of Makarevskii *uezd* commissar, 25th October 1917.

⁹⁹ For a discussion of the leading role returning and deserting soldiers played in the villages, see Figes, 'Peasant Farmers and the Minority Groups', pp. 393-5; Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War*, pp. 144-147, also discusses the leading role of returning soldiers in the villages, and suggests that they played a part in escalating violence in the villages. Tan, 'Revolutionary Justice in the Ukraine', pp. 18-19, considers soldiers to have played a significant role in the execution of *samosud* in the villages, and that soldiers brutalised by their wartime experiences were a significant factor in the escalation of peasant violence.

¹⁰⁰ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 13, ll. 155-9; protocol of the meeting of *uezd* commissars in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*, 10th-11th April 1917.

acts on seizing power in October was to close down ‘undesirable’ publications. Besides, the *guberniia* administration had no force available to enforce such limitations. As Ganchel suggested, only ‘words and convictions’ could be mobilised to damp the flames of incendiary propaganda. A further report from Arzamasskii *uezd* commissar for the situation in the month of May revealed that inflammatory speeches continued to be made by soldier-deserters:

Arriving soldiers and deserters call most of all for disorder, subordination, and more assured self-willedness.¹⁰¹

The murder of a man in Arzamasskii *uezd* in early October was attributed to the arrival of ‘a soldier on leave, seemingly a Bolshevik, who had agitated the people.’¹⁰² A *guberniia* commissar report for March stated that in Makatelama, four soldiers with Browning revolvers took away the arms of the forest guard.¹⁰³ The influx of heavily armed and politically inflamed men into the *guberniia* threatened public safety as well as spreading radical political ideas. The armed returnees were not always welcomed in the villages. Some commissars noted that soldiers’ participation in the village councils and committees was unpopular, and requests had been made to have soldiers exempt from participation in *skhods*, because ‘they curse, fight and do not allow business to be done.’¹⁰⁴ As a response to this problem, the commissar sent out 500 copies of a decree ordering that all soldiers arriving for leave be listed, and that they be told about their duties and obligations:

soldier delegates must do justice, and assist in the carrying out of life on the new foundations of freedom. Conscious delegates are especially necessary.¹⁰⁵

Although the peasant soldiers were undoubtedly natural leaders in 1917, this evidence suggests that they did not necessarily take a leading role up until October 1917 in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*. The traditional structures of seniority within the villages, and villagers’ caution about accepting outsider influence diminished the soldiers’ role. Welcome or not, the soldiers asserted themselves with increasing force however, as their numbers increased when the Bolshevik demobilisation began, and they swept aside the protests of their elders. To associate them closely with the Bolshevik party perhaps overrates their relations with that party; the political support of soldiers in 1917 was a

¹⁰¹ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 111. Report of Arzamasskii *uezd* commissar, 15th June 1917.

¹⁰² GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 311. Report of Arzamasskii *uezd* commissar, 4th October 1917.

¹⁰³ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 43, l. 1-2. Report of *guberniia* commissar Demidov to Nizhegorodskaia Executive Committee about the situation in the *guberniia*, 21st March 1917.

¹⁰⁴ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 111. Report of Arzamasskii *uezd* commissar, 15th June 1917.

¹⁰⁵ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 111. Report of Arzamasskii *uezd* commissar, 15th June 1917.

fleeting thing, predicated on support for immediate peace, and very little else. The soldiers were a dangerous and destabilising force in the countryside.

THE MISSING INTELLIGENTSIA

Reports documenting peasant activities in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* reveal that the intelligentsia, and to a large extent political parties, were absent in accounts of village life. This absence gives further illumination to the nature of the support given to the PSR in the Constituent Assembly elections, and the social background of the party's activists in the villages. Despite the low profile reportedly taken by the PSR, along with other political parties, in the villages, turnout to the Constituent Assembly elections was respectable and peasants cast their votes largely for PSR candidates. This corroborates the assertion in chapter two that symbolism and associations played a large part in the PSR's electoral success. The absence of intelligentsia in village life confirms that the PSR members active in the villages came from the party's *trudiashchiisia* members, and not its better educated intelligentsia representatives. One can cite the withdrawal of intelligentsia from village life as a further factor in the breakdown of the PSR's organisation in the countryside. The party's most active and educated members withdrew, leaving the field for often more radical individuals who may well have been less well drilled in party policy. The absence of intelligentsia in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* accords with the national picture:

The peasants avoid electing representatives of the intelligentsia- this has been particularly noticeable lately. As time goes on, they become more and more convinced that the intelligentsia has no place among them; that they must manage their own affairs without interference. Owing to the complete absence of educated people (even members of credit societies are boycotted), complete disorganisation and lack of system are very prevalent. . .it should also be borne in mind that almost the entire village intelligentsia left the villages during the first days of the revolution...¹⁰⁶

Reports from Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* corroborate this problem of a shortage of 'third element' suitable for public work:

great shortages of people suitable for public work in the *uezd*, in connection with the darkness of the general mass of the population, is an enormous impediment to the reasonable construction of life in the *uezd* on new foundations.¹⁰⁷

A PSR newspaper report from Penza *guberniia* in August confirms that this problem was not restricted to one *guberniia*; an appeal to the intelligentsia warned of

¹⁰⁶ Browder and Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional*, vol. 1, doc. 223, p. 245; March-May 1917, from a report of the temporary committee of the state Duma's field representatives.

¹⁰⁷ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 74-5. Vasil'skii *uezd* commissar report, March-April 1917.

'*Oblomovshchina!*'¹⁰⁸ In Studenets village, Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia*, the peasants complained that the intelligentsia in the village did not tell them anything, and this was why they were excluded from village life.¹⁰⁹ Another report from Vasil'skii *uezd*, Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia*, in September, however, suggested that the problem was not only that the intelligentsia shied away from their role in public life, but that the peasantry refused to offer them a role. During the *volost zemstvo* elections carried out in Anan'enka village, pre-electoral meetings held by intelligentsia were boycotted, and the local intelligentsia, including teachers, were pointedly excluded by the peasants from electoral lists. The reporter commented that as a result of this exclusion, the peasants had deprived themselves of their natural leaders. Many serious errors in electoral procedure occurred, with the result that the elections would probably be declared void.¹¹⁰

Teachers formed one of the PSR's strongest support groups among the intelligentsia, particularly among women activists.¹¹¹ Their contribution to village life was not as full or as influential as might have been expected. Teachers' responsibility to 'organise' the villages had been expressed by 'progressive elements' since the 1870s.¹¹² Furthermore, teachers had been singled out as having civic duties towards the villagers, to educate them in the combat of 'the internal enemy: ignorance, drunkenness, poverty and the stagnation of peasant life.'¹¹³ The 'civic duties' of teachers were to take on new importance in 1917. From April 1917, the socialist press appealed in emotive terms to village teachers, that they should do their duty, and deflect the dark forces in the villages from obstructing the course of revolution.¹¹⁴ These appeals echoed the language of pre-revolutionary appeals to teachers to become involved in community life. Such appeals were not, it seems a success in 1917; they were repeated throughout the year.¹¹⁵ The *uezd* commissar reports singled out teachers specifically for their lack of participation:

¹⁰⁸ *Sotsialist revoliutsioner*, no. 5, 27-28th August. *Oblomovshchina* was of course a reference to the state of profound apathy and inaction suffered by the led character of Ivan Goncharov's novel *Oblomov* (London, 1954).

¹⁰⁹ GARF, f. 9591, op. 1, d. 19, l. 11; report on the 1st May celebrations, published in *Narod*, no.'s 5-6.

¹¹⁰ *Narod*, no. 65, 13th September, p. 2.

¹¹¹ See chart 3.ii, p. 94.

¹¹² See S. Seregny, 'Co-operatives. The Politics of Education and Professional Identities in Russia, 1908-1917', *Russian Review* 55, 1996, pp. 567-90.

¹¹³ See Seregny, 'Co-operatives', p. 571.

¹¹⁴ *Narod*, no. 1, April 11th 1917, p. 1. Such reports were mirrored in other *guberniias*; see, for example, 'O narodnom uchitele', in *Narodnaia gazeta (Chernozem)*, no. 38, 7th September 1917.

¹¹⁵ See, for example, *Narod*, no. 66, 17th September, *Narod*, no. 70, 27th September, *Narod*, no. 94, 5th November 1917, p. 4.

In general it is peaceful in the *volost*. But it would be preferable if the intelligentsia would clarify the current political position to the people, as this would help the peacefulness of minds. Local teaching personnel still do not undertake anything in this direction.¹¹⁶

The affinity between rural teachers and the PSR was such that the All Russian Teachers' Union was associated almost exclusively with the PSR.¹¹⁷ Some explanations can be found for the withdrawal of teachers, who were generally considered to have taken a leading role in the villages prior to the February revolution. National reports suggested that teachers, especially women, had been kept away from the peasants by the old regime, so that in 1917 they had no points of contact with them, and lacked any authority.¹¹⁸ An editorial in *Narod* confirmed this report that the origins of the problem lay with the tsarist government who had prevented teachers from becoming popular in the villages. The experience of 1905 broke these restrictions, and allowed productive links between the villagers and the teachers to form, but the subsequent tsarist repression left peasants feeling that teachers were not willing to fight. The problem was two-way; peasants did not trust the teachers, and the teachers were made more wary by the lack of trust.¹¹⁹ One representative of the intelligentsia wrote a plaintive article in August, stating that he did not understand his rejection by the people he sought to serve. He reported that 'the people said, "We don't need the intelligentsia."¹²⁰ An account from Makarevskii *uezd* in October confirms that this individual's experience was replicated all over Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*:

In general, the conscious and intelligent part of the population wishes to leave all public work thanks to the harshly mistrustful attitude of the population, since they are faced with unmerited insults, frequent threats and general disorder. . .¹²¹

Given this withdrawal of the PSR's best educated members from the villages, and perhaps from public life altogether, the complaints of shortages of party workers, intelligentsia, and party-propagandists at the Nizhegorodskaia second PSR conference in May 1917 were entirely to be expected. Even groups which reported rapid growth of the party organisation like Nizhegorodskaia *uezd* organisation, made specific requests

¹¹⁶ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 42, l. 506. Letter from Seimenskii Captain of defence, to the *Guberniia* commissar, 29th April 1917.

¹¹⁷ C. Ruane, *Gender, Class and the Professionalisation of Russian City Teachers 1860-1914*. (Pittsburgh, 1994), p. 144.

¹¹⁸ Browder and Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional*, vol. 1, doc. 223, p. 245. Note, however, that the role of women teachers in the villages prior to 1917 may well have been denigrated by male teachers who felt their job security threatened by the women. (Ruane, *Gender, Class*, p. 65ff.)

¹¹⁹ P. Popova, 'Peasantry and Teachers', *Narod*, no. 70, 27th September 1917, p. 2. This article was also published in the national newspaper *Zemlia i volia*. See chapter 3, 'Categories of Women's Party Work', pp. 99-100.

¹²⁰ *Narod*, no. 55, 20th August 1917.

¹²¹ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 43, l. 365-6. Report of Makarevskii *uezd* commissar about the situation in the *uezd*, 8th October 1917.

that orators be sent.¹²² This shortage of party workers despite the apparent success of the party clearly indicates that the intelligentsia were slow to come forward for party work. The conference presented a fairly positive picture of party activity around the *guberniia*, with around 8,000 members reported by three different *uezd* organisations, and reading rooms and orator schools set up around the *guberniia*.¹²³ In the *guberniia* overall however, reports on any political party activity within the villages are at most sparse. Though political propaganda was carried out in the villages, especially by the PSR, this did not necessarily have an impact on public organisation. The peasantry used political propagandists to provide the information they wanted, and to clarify their already existing ideas. They did not necessarily accept or act upon any information offered that was not in accordance with their existing beliefs.¹²⁴ The picture of public organisation in the villages painted by the *uezd* commissars was almost uniformly negative:

Activities of public organisations and political parties develop weakly. It is possible to say this especially of the development of national, religious and professional movements.¹²⁵

Public organisations are not at all efficient. . . due to the mistrustful attitude of the population towards them. Political groups in the *uezd* do not have any activities going on, since all group activities. . . are expressed by ongoing elections both in the *volost zemstvo* and for *zemstvo* representative, but apart from that there are currently no organisations.¹²⁶

Public organisations work very poorly. A strong antipathy to their work has been observed, and the population refuse almost totally to offer any support; frequently even hostility is manifested to it (especially to committees). The activity of political groups is also not significant. Only in the Vetluzhskii part of the *uezd* is good organisation of pre-election campaigns manifested for elections of the head of the *uezd zemstvo* meeting. This campaign was successful for the peasants' union, jointly with the SR Party, or at least loyally sympathising with the PSR, though even the SR Party, and others, have no correct organisations in the *uezd*.¹²⁷

Such reports indicate that the peasantry in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* were to a certain extent insulated from the political tumult surrounding them, and, when challenged by a rapidly changing status quo, looked inwards to their own traditional forms of organisation. The reasons for this response, and for the failure of political parties' attempts to 'educate' the villages, are complex. Breshkovskaia commented that the 1905 revolution in the countryside was a 'high point in the struggle for freedom.'¹²⁸ This may well have been so, but its repercussions for the peasantry were very harsh. Peasant land seizure and radical actions in that period resulted in terrible punitive expeditions by the

¹²² *Narod*, no. 17, 24th May 1917, p. 3.

¹²³ *Narod*, no. 17, 24th May 1917, p. 3.

¹²⁴ See chapter 2, 'Propaganda in the Villages', pp. 71-75.

¹²⁵ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 314. Report of Balakhninskii *uezd* commissar, October 1917.

¹²⁶ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 435. Report of Makarevskii *uezd* commissar, 25th October 1917.

¹²⁷ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 43, l. 365. report of Makarevskii *uezd* commissar, 12th October 1917.

¹²⁸ Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs*, p. 286.

tsarist police and army, with whole villages destroyed, men and boys flogged and hung, and ringleaders sent to Siberia.¹²⁹ The popular perception was that the intelligentsia, having encouraged peasant radicalism, did not support them to the end, but backed out and left the peasants to suffer the consequences. A meeting held by the Sormovo PSR group in July 1916 was attended by some passing peasants, who listened with interest, but declared that the revolutionaries could achieve nothing, and that the whip would come again to restore order, as it had in 1905.¹³⁰ This sentiment reflected a deep seated mistrust of political parties, and the outside agents who came to promote them.

The intelligentsia was not of course entirely excluded from the villages in 1917. Work on local leadership has shown that those who were local and of working stock were selected by peasants as their political representatives, regardless of their education level. A spell in prison or exile brought about by participation in local radical activity contributed to the individual's good standing in the village generally speaking. Women and those without close local connections, however, were often excluded from involvement in village public life.¹³¹ In this rejection of the intelligentsia, we can see a breach forming between the PSR's local activists, many of whom were local, and *trudishchiisia*, and the party's largely intelligentsia leadership. As the villages looked inwards and closed ranks in response to the tumultuous events of 1917, the local activists moved with them, and accordingly became progressively more isolated and even alienated from PSR leadership. The absence of intelligentsia did not, as some contemporary sources suggested, indicate that the peasants were not organised; rather, they organised according to local needs, and utilised those individuals who could help them in their chosen path. This is particularly evident when looking at the course of peasant direct action in 1917.

CONCLUSIONS

The essential insularity of the villages is highlighted by this study of rural government. Though the problems such insularity posed administrators were not exclusive to the PSR, they are important to understand if one is to grasp the problems the PSR faced.

¹²⁹ Nearly 60,000 political detainees were executed, sentenced to penal servitude or exiled without trial between 1906 and 1909, Stolypin's first three years as prime minister. Stolypin's association with these repressions was such that the hangman's noose was known colloquially as 'Stolypin's necktie' and the railway carts that took 'politicals' to Siberia 'Stolypin carriages'. (O. Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924* [London 1996], p. 221, p. 224)

¹³⁰ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, l. 87. Writings of Magergut, member of the Sormovo PSR group, about the group's activities April 1916 – April 1917.

¹³¹ See chapter 1, 'Selection of Local Leadership', pp. 47-52.

The rural administration established by the Provisional Government was caught between two stools in 1917; if it carried out the policies of the Provisional Government, it risked being ignored or even attacked by the peasant communities where these policies were unpopular. If it promulgated the policies favoured by the local peasantry, it would oppose the Provisional Government, which it sought to represent. The rejection of the intelligentsia by peasant communities is symptomatic of the increasing isolation of the villages, and was particularly important in the PSR's organisational weaknesses in 1917; their more senior activists were denied a role in the villages, and their place as taken by the local leaders profiled in chapter two. The predominance of women among teachers operated as an additional factor which effectively excluded some of the PSR's most active members from village life. As the peasantry looked inwards in 1917, the party's local activists either went with the peasantry and thus increased the distance between themselves and the central party organisation, or they risked being completely sidelined within village life. These problems can be projected onto the difficulties faced by the PSR's intelligentsia leaders in 1917; if their leadership was to be accepted they were compelled to present a picture of PSR policy which accorded with peasant desires and demands. The autonomy of the villages was not to be breached by external leadership.

Accounts of peasant action demonstrate that in order to survive, elements of the Provisional Government sponsored local administration took an active part in peasant direct action. Though accounts of peasant violence may well have been sensationalised by reporters, they remain an important indicator of peasants' active resistance to the regime where they considered that it was not serving their needs adequately. The clergy's confused role in the villages is demonstrated by the mixed response to the men of the cloth after the revolution, and is an embodiment of the conflict between old and new that faced the villages in 1917. The soldiers also had a mixed role in 1917; on the one hand, they provided the only physical support available to the Provisional Government administration in the countryside; on the other, they undermined traditional power structures within the villages, and brought the brutalisation of the front line back to their villages.

The escalating disorder and violence in the countryside left the administrators of the villages with some stark choices. As Vasil'skii *uezd* commissar had observed,¹³² the commissars had to make a decision between enjoying the confidence of the people they professed to represent, or sticking with the norms of existing legislation accepted by the Provisional Government, particularly in the field of respect for private property. It was this decision by which local administration stood or fell. Similarly, for local party activists the decrees of the party had to take second place to popular opinion in the villages if local leaders and administrators were to continue to enjoy support and respect among the local community.

¹³² GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 13, ll. 155-9; protocol of the meeting of *uezd* commissars in Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia*, 10th-11th April 1917.

CHAPTER 6: NIZHNII WORKERS- A CASE STUDY OF SORMOVO

The factory workers' community of Nizhnii Novgorod is represented by this micro-study of the Sormovo workers. In Sormovo the PSR enjoyed continued dominance within a stratum of the population which, nationally, shifted support away from moderate socialist groups and towards the Bolsheviks in the course of 1917.¹ In Sormovo, though the PSR did lose some support to the Bolsheviks, particularly after September 1917, they continued to enjoy significant levels of support. This is in contrast to Petrograd, where by July 1917 Bolsheviks dominated the factory committees.² Conditions within Sormovo factories were not exceptional compared to other Russian industrial centres. The pressures of factory closures, threat of food shortages and job instability operated in Sormovo as much as anywhere else, resulting in strike action and worker radicalism. A rift existed between the aspirations and priorities of workers and leaders, and this was exacerbated by the failures of coalition politics and controlled labour activism. Though the radicalism of the vibrantly left-wing Sormovo PSR organisation ensured their continued support from large numbers of workers,³ the inability of any democratic system to tackle the key issues of job instability, inflation and food shortages meant that workers returned to traditional methods of struggle with the factory administration.

The Sormovo workers provide a paradoxical example of the relationship of the PSR with its supporters. Chapters one and two have shown that the political party was to a certain extent defined by the party's supporters, and this organic development of the PSR as it responded to its supporters in 1917 is exemplified in Sormovo. On the other hand, though, study of workers' demands and behaviour reveal that a gulf developed

¹ See Z. Galili, *The Menshevik Leaders in the Russian Revolution; Social Realities and Political Strategies* (Princeton, 1989), p. 203, pp. 295-6. For discussion of the shift to the left of workers in Petrograd, see S. Smith, *Red Petrograd; Revolution in the factories 1917-18* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 176-185; D. Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Regime, from the February Revolution to the July Days* (London, 1983), pp. 122-148. For analysis of the Bolsheviks' rise of influence among the Moscow workers, see D. Koenker, *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution* (Princeton, 1981), pp. 187-227. M.C.Hickey, 'Big Strike in a Small City: The Smolensk Metalworkers' Strike and Dynamics of Labour Conflict in 1917' (Paper presented to Study Group on the Russian Revolution conference, Durham, 2000), esp. pp. 18-24, details the collapse of moderate socialist support in Smolensk. D. Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga. 1917 in Saratov* (Ithaca, 1986), pp. 216, 267; comments on Bolshevik working class support in Saratov, and its growth in 1917.

² P.H. Avrich, 'Russian Factory Committees in 1917', *Jahrbucher fur Geschichte Osteuropas* 11, 1963, pp. 165-6.

³ This assessment of Sormovo worker confirms Raleigh's observation of the October revolution in Saratov; 'the October revolution was not so much a Bolshevik revolution as a triumph of all radical groups that had broken decisively with all those elements that supported further coalition with the bourgeoisie- Bolsheviks, Left SRs, SR Maximalists, Menshevik Internationalists, and anarchists.' Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga*, p. 323.)

between the party and its supporters. The chapter starts by outlining the factory conditions which radicalised the workforce. As with the peasantry in the villages, the crises faced by factory workers promoted their radicalisation. In the factories, however, political parties formed an organic part of worker organisation, which meant that political competition played a key role in factory life. The second part of the chapter starts with a summary of the PSR's policy towards the factories, and an outline of the Sormovo PSR group's dominance in Sormovo. The PSR's successes of attracting a mass membership and significant funds were however outweighed by their calamitous policies in the Soviet after the Bolshevik seizure of power, where they handed power to the Bolsheviks without a struggle. The final part of this chapter studies elemental worker behaviour, and suggests that like the peasants in the villages and the soldiers in the garrisons, at a basic level workers pursued their own agenda without regard to the imprecations of the political parties that professed to represent them. Despite the ensnaring dances of the socialist parties, Russia's *trudishchiisia* took their own line in 1917.

The Sormovo district was of key significance in the events of 1917, both in Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia*, and in Russia as a whole. Events there serve as an example of worker militancy within the defence industry and the pressures such militancy placed upon the state. Situated on the outskirts of Nizhnii Novgorod town, Sormovo encapsulated a large network of factories, brought under the management of the joint share company 'Sormovo', whose central administration was based in Petrograd. It was founded in 1849, and in 1917 employed around 25,000 workers.⁴ Its main manufacturing products were ironwork, steel, and mechanical parts; for the duration of the war its production was almost entirely military, and its orders placed by the state.⁵ Sormovo had a proud tradition of revolutionary activity, dating back to the events of 1905, when workers from Sormovo factories erected a barricade in resistance to tsarist troops, and some 60 workers were killed. The memorial to this barricade still stands; it was used by the Soviet regime as a symbol of proletarian struggle, led of course, by a vanguard of Bolsheviks.⁶ This is ironic, since the political climate in Sormovo, both in

⁴ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 5, l. 69; telegram to the Minister of Labour from the director of Sormovo factories, 26th July 1917, cites 25,000 workers.

⁵ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 22, l. 318; letter from central administration of Sormovo factories in Petrograd, to the director of Sormovo factories, 23rd May 1917. GANO f. 442, op. 1, d. 5, l. 69; telegram to the Minister of Labour from the director of Sormovo factories, 26th July 1917.

⁶ See A. Bezrukov, *Sormovo (1848-1908); Ocherki, k 20-letiiu 1905 goda* (Nizhnii Novgorod, 1925), pp. 56-134, A. Belozеров, *Zapiski po rabochemu dvizheniiu Nizhegorodskogo kraia* (Nizhnii Novgorod,

1905 and in 1917, was dominated by the PSR, which had a strong and vibrant organisation in Sormovo, far outstripping the other socialist parties for much of 1917; one fifth of the Sormovo workers were members of the Sormovo PSR organisation by June 1917.⁷ Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* as a whole was well endowed with PSR organisations, and the Sormovo organisation was recognised as the strongest in the *guberniia*.⁸ There are indications that the Sormovo organisation was large even by national standards.

Public organisation went on rapidly in Sormovo after the February revolution. The Sormovo *uezd* commissar reported to the *guberniia* commissar on the 1st June that:

Public strength has been organised quickly in Sormovo. . . a provisional executive committee made up of workers and employees of the Sormovo office of the Nizhegorodskaia Soviet of workers' deputies has existed since the first days of revolution; the Sormovo committee of public safety and order was formed afterwards, made up of Sormovo workers', employees' and residents' representatives, which manages the running of Sormovo *raion*.⁹

The organisations representing the Sormovo workers had clear political delineations, in contrast to other public bodies within Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*. In the documentation of life in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* already considered, lack of political affiliations is notable. Sormovo's highly politicised nature in 1917 is demonstrated by the pointed inclusion of representatives of separate socialist parties in various factory committees, and the careful notation of individuals' political affiliations in written documentation. The Sormovo workers were offered political choices, and made clear political decisions. The predominance of metalworking trades within the Sormovo factories gives an indication of the skill levels and permanence of a proportion of the workforce.¹⁰ Von Laue's comments about workers' continued links with the villages where they often

1926), A. E. Preobrazhenskii (ed.) *1905 god v Nizhegorodskoi gubernii; Sbornik statei* (Nizhnii Novgorod, 1931) particularly pp. 105-9, V.T. Illarionov (ed.) *Materiali po istorii Revoliutsionnoe Dvizhenie*, volume 1 (Nizhnii Novgorod, 1920), pp. 105-67.

⁷ This calculation is based upon an estimate of 5000 workers being members in June 1917, out of an estimated worker population of 25,000. (M.D. Smuchebnikov et al. (ed.) *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v Mai-Iiune 1917g. Iiunskaiia demonstratsiia* [Moscow, 1959] p. 119.)

⁸ 'The Sormovo organisation is situated in better conditions. . .there is money, many members (3000), courses for propagandists exist, but all the same there is felt to be an insufficiency of [party] workers. There are few intelligentsia.' (From a report at the second Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* Meeting of the PSR, 21st May 1917, as reported in *Narod*, no. 17, p. 3.

⁹ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 162; report of Sormovo *uezd* commissar about the situation in Sormovo, 15th June 1917.

¹⁰ H.H. Hogan, *Forging Revolution: Metalworkers, Managers and the State in St. Petersburg 1890-1914* (Bloomington, 1993); provides a detailed study of the Petersburg metalworkers. She comments that metalworkers were distinguished from workers in other sectors by a number of characteristics, namely literacy, skill, income and a higher degree of permanence in the city than other city workers. (p. 16) See also Galili, *The Menshevik Leaders*, p. 18 (footnote 9), Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Regime*, pp. 11-23, Smith, *Red Petrograd*, pp. 27-32.

originated¹¹ applied less to those in metalworking, which required high levels of skill, and therefore higher levels of education. Skilled workers tended to be better paid and enjoyed greater job security,¹² thus providing a useful model of a worker group that fulfilled Bolshevik requirements of ‘consciousness’ and political awareness. The Bolshevik definition of consciousness was largely circular however; a worker was conscious if he supported Bolshevik ideology, and unconscious if he did not.¹³ For much of 1917, these workers selected PSR members as their representatives. A number of historians have investigated the PSR’s strong support among workers prior to 1917.¹⁴ Sormovo provides a further seam of evidence of PSR support among workers in 1917.¹⁵ PSR support in the Sormovo factories was not a case of ‘peasants in the factory’ voting for the party which they identified with representing their primarily rural agenda. The Sormovo PSR organisation clearly addressed itself to an established urban workforce, with no need for recourse to the primal peasant cry ‘Land and Freedom!’

There is a risk of coarse generalisations when trying to refer to the nature of a 25,000 strong workforce. A large factory complex like Sormovo encompassed a wide range of different trades and working conditions:

A large engineering works is like a world in miniature. Some factories contain up to 200 different workshops. Large factories are usually broken up into several divisions...Working conditions are by no means the same in different workshops.¹⁶

This heterogeneity of the factories casts some light on the differentiations within the working population.¹⁷ No analysis of voting pattern and behaviour divisions within the

¹¹ T.H. Von Laue, ‘Russian Peasants in the Factory 1892-1904’, *Journal of Economic History* 1961, pp. 61-80.

¹² D.P. Koenker, W.G. Rosenberg, ‘Skilled Workers and the Strike Movement in Revolutionary Russia’, *Journal of Social History* 19(4) 1986, pp. 607.

¹³ A superb example of this ‘catch 22’ definition can be found in L.G. Protasov, ‘K istorii bor’bi eserov za armiiu v 1917g.’ in K.V. Gusev (ed.) *Neproletarskie partii Rossii v trekh revoliutsiiakh. Sbornik statei.* (Moscow, 1989), p. 175; Protasov’s argument focuses on the lack of proletarian consciousness of parts of the army, which caused them to vote for *melko-burzhuznyi* parties.

¹⁴ See chapter 2, p. 56, footnote 10.

¹⁵ For analysis of the strength of PSR support among Petrograd workers in the early months of 1917, see M. Melancon, ‘Soldiers, Peasant Soldiers, and Peasant Workers and their Organisations in Petrograd: Ground Level Revolution During the Early Months of 1917’, *Soviet and Post Soviet Review* 23(3) 1996, pp. 181-189.

¹⁶ P. Timofeev, ‘Chem zhivet zavodskii rabochii’, *Russkoe bogatstvo* (1906), pp. 4-5.

¹⁷ Smith, *Red Petrograd*, p. 46, commented of the heterogeneity within the metalworking industry, ‘there were almost 300 different occupations within (metal) industry, and rates (of pay) for the job differed between factories’. V. Bonnell, *Roots of Rebellion: Workers’ Politics and Organisations in St. Petersburg and Moscow 1900-1914* (Berkeley 1983), pp. 57-62; discusses the role of skill ‘hierarchies’ in stratifying the workforce. Mandel, *Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Regime*, pp. 9-33; discusses the delineations between skilled and unskilled workers. Koenker and Rosenberg go further, and categorise workers as skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled. (Koenker and Rosenberg, ‘Skilled Workers and the Strike Movement’, pp. 605-29) Such divisions are inevitably somewhat artificial, and can never adequately reflect the diversity of workforce occupations.

workforce has been attempted, despite the clarifications such an analysis may yield. Rather, a broader picture of events in Sormovo is presented here, which is necessary before more intra-worker study is attempted. This broad approach leads to difficulties in assessing, for example, worker behaviour, which in all likelihood was determined at least as much by individual background of each worker as by the factory-wide factors that are established here.

CRISIS IN THE FACTORIES

The crises and confrontations in the Sormovo factories during 1917 bear witness to the stormy environment of the factories, and the enormous psychological pressure brought to bear on the workforce by job instability and food shortages. Like all industrial enterprises in 1917,¹⁸ the administration of the Sormovo factories faced formidable obstacles in continuing production. Problems of transport and supply of raw materials were compounded by the barrage of worker and employee demands unleashed by the February revolution. Hostility and mistrust between workers and administration had been the norm prior to 1917,¹⁹ and the revolution only exacerbated this relationship. This excerpt from a telegram dated 20th November 1917 sums up the problems the administration had faced in the preceding ten months:

Latest events place a range of insurmountable obstacles upon continued work in industrial enterprises. The transport system is collapsing, there are increasing difficulties in receiving raw materials and fuel. . .the established system of goods exchange is destroyed. All systems of credit have been suspended. The use of promissory notes and receipts in the banks, and all other types of bank credit is not available at all to industrial enterprises. There are no advances on orders from the state, which may halt receipt of working means for the enterprise. Even on fulfilled orders, there are delays in receiving payment. Finally, the banks have stopped issuing money, which deprives us of the possibility to carry out trade-industry operations.

In addition to all this, there have been great increases in the past year on prices of all materials and on labour costs, which means we need more money. The latest events not only deprived our industry of working means, but also withheld confirmation of new prices on our wares, even on government commissions. Our existing prices are unprofitable, and put our industry face to face with total bankruptcy. Finally our factories have to declare the halting of work even on important war orders.

By the above named considerations, and the fact that the industry will no longer be able to pay workers, employees and suppliers, the administration considers that carrying out further

¹⁸ See P. Flenley, 'Industrial Relations and the Economic Crisis of 1917', *Revolutionary Russia* 4(2) 1991, pp. 184-209; Galili, *The Menshevik Leaders*, pp. 357-379; H. Phillips, '“A Bad Business”- the February Revolution in Tver', *Soviet and Post Soviet Review* 23(3) 1996, pp. 122-127 - describes the grievous conditions faced by industrial workers in Tver.

¹⁹ Z. Galili, 'Workers, Industrialists, and the Menshevik Mediators; Labour Conflicts in Petrograd 1917', *Russian History* 16, 1989, p. 240.

business on the former basis to be impossible, and asks you to report about the closure of factories on 10th December 1917 and about the cessation of pay discussions with all workers.²⁰

This declaration of the factories' closure was the culmination of tensions between the administration and workers and employees that had beset 1917. Radicalisation of the workers was more effectively engendered by threats of factory closure than any socialist party's propaganda-education programme. The factory administration announced on 1st September that the factory was to be closed on 15th September. Though this closure did not take place, it was declared again on 20th November that the factory would close on 10th December. The magnitude of effect such a closure would have had on the region cannot be underestimated; some 80,000 people depended on the Sormovo factories for their livelihood.²¹ It is hardly surprising that the workers' movement became progressively more radical in the light of such threats; there was no viable alternative to worker control over industry when the administration threatened to close the whole establishment. There was concerted and organised worker response to the threat of factory closure. A plenary meeting was held on 3rd September 1917, at which all democratic and socialist organisations of Sormovo were present. This plenary meeting declared the inadmissibility of the factory's closure, citing the importance of such industry to the war effort as well as its importance as an employer. It was decided to petition the Provisional Government to transfer the factory into the hands of the state, and to take the company to court for 'sabotage' if they demanded extortionate payment. A collection of measures was also passed unanimously, which proposed means to transfer the factory smoothly into state hands.²² The *guberniia* commissar was present at this meeting; he supported the plenary meeting's position in this telegram to the Minister of Trade and Industry:

Administration of Sormovo factories reports the total closure of the factory. Consider it absolutely necessary to keep work going in Sormovo factories for the current winter. As well as the public-political significance of necessity of production, closure will make 80,000 people without means for life.²³

²⁰ GANO, f. 442, op. op. 1, d. 22, l. 659-661. Statement from the Sormovo factory administration to director of the Sormovo factories, 20th November 1917.

²¹ This figure was cited by Sormovo *raion* plenary meeting, and was produced by including the families of the 25,000 Sormovo workers in the reckoning. (*Narod*, no. 62, 6th September 1917, p. 3.)

²² *Narod*, no. 62, 6th September 1917, p. 3. These included the working out of the factory's administration in case of sequestration, cutting the number of administrative and technical personnel, calls to workers to continue peacefully without taking pay-raises, and the sending of representatives to the Moscow factory meeting and the Nizhegorodskaia Soviet of workers' deputies. Incidentally, the proposal of state control of industry, and accusations of owner 'sabotage' accorded absolutely with the official Menshevik and PSR positions on responses to the crisis in Russian industry. (Smith, *Red Petrograd*, pp. 151-2.)

²³ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 22, l. 15; telegram of *guberniia* commissar Sumgin to the Minister for Trade and Industry, 10th September 1917.

Just as in the villages, PSR supporters like Sumgin were forced to make a decision between watching the administration collapse around them, or propose and even take measures which were not authorised by the PSR or by the Provisional Government. Given the parlous state of the *guberniia* administration's finances, neither the Duma nor the *guberniia* commissar were able to give financial assistance to Sormovo. Though it has not been possible to assess the economic viability of the Sormovo factories, the closure certainly fitted in with the national pattern of closures; between March and September 1917, 799 enterprises closed with the loss of 165,372 jobs.²⁴ The enormities of problems faced by the factory administration in continuing production have already been outlined. The reasons behind closure offered by the administration, though understandably dwelling on the financial and material difficulties faced by the factories, tended to emphasise the place in the problems of worker and employee demands and behaviour, and to offer alternatives to closure if workers and employees were willing to compromise. A declaration of factory closure on 10th December proposed that a meeting be held between administration and worker and employee representatives, in order to prolong production in the factory:

In view of the gravely serious situation, we ask you to take all measures to quickly form a meeting, in order to carry out work continuously and with total intensity, and for the continuation of work to be planned in the course of the next weeks. The administration does not have faith in success of affairs, but it does however consider it necessary to try to continue factories' activity, even if only partially, on the basis of productive work with friendly agreement of administration, employees and workers, with the common aim of some sort of living through this difficult time. That is why the following conditions are necessary:

- 1/ cessation of political struggle within factories and non-assumption of violence and terrorist acts in relation to employees and administration.
- 2/ confirmation of new prices for orders agreed conclusively by the administrative commission.
- 3/ revival of normal work of banks and supplies of factories with means from the state.

If the talks' basic points are agreed, do not refuse to work out, at this very meeting, and with absolute urgency, a plan to continue work in separate shops, with a number of workers and employees remaining in work. In conclusion the administration permits itself once again to declare that the continuation of business is possible only by extraordinary efforts of all participants and by agreed and steady submission of personal interests to business.²⁵

This document indicates that the proposal to close the factories was less a proposal borne of dire financial necessity, and more a tool utilised as leverage on the workforce by the administration. Stress of the factories' administration on the importance of co-

²⁴ G.G. Gill, 'The Role of the Countryside in Russia; A Short Note'. *Sbornik* 37(2) 1976, p. 45.

²⁵ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 22, l. 659-661; report from Sormovo factory administration to the director of Sormovo factories on 'the current situation', 20th November 1917.

operation by workers and employees reflected the line taken by the Provisional Government.²⁶

The closure proposed by factory administration was not the only threat to the factories. Almost as pressing was the impact of demobilisation which both workers' organisations and factory administration knew was imminent.²⁷ This would in effect deliver a dual blow to the Sormovo factories, since their production, predominated by war needs, would have to be dramatically transformed to supply peace time requirements, and attempts would have to be made to accommodate the returning demobilised soldiers. Even in June, regulations were established categorising which ranks of workers were to be laid off first in case of need.²⁸ This indicated the pressure felt on jobs even before demobilisation. The Nizhnii Novgorod Town Duma discussed at length the seemingly unavoidable problem of large scale unemployment in the region, and made plans to establish a labour exchange.²⁹ The Bolsheviks' seizure of power in October 1917 and promise to deliver peace made the problem all the more pressing. A factory circular issued on 21st December 1917 to managers of the shops and offices dealt with the return to the factory of soldiers from the front:

It is proposed that soldiers returning from the front be given the option of returning to the work with which they were occupied before, and where this is impossible, to be offered other suitable work in other shops of the factory where there is a need. If there are no free places, soldiers can have a place made available by agreement of the shop commission with the administrative shop.³⁰

This suggestion was either naive or merely a placatory measure directed towards soldier bodies. Posts for returning soldiers would simply not be available unless the existing workforce was displaced. This was clearly not a prospect workers' organisations were willing to entertain. Workers and employees were aware of their precarious job security, and this was a significant factor in radicalisation of workers.

²⁶ 'The minister [of labour] will strive wholeheartedly to satisfy, as much as possible, the needs of the workers. He hopes, however, for vigorous co-operation on their part.' (*Zhurnaly*, March 7th 1917) in R. Browder and A. Kerensky (ed.) *The Russian Provisional Government 1917; documents*. (Stanford, 1961), vol. 2, doc. 620, pp. 710-711.

²⁷ See also GANO, f. 27, op. 4, ll. 43-4; Duma records, 12th October 1917, for discussion in the Town Duma of the problems of demobilisation.

²⁸ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 10, l. 393; circular note to shop and section captains in the Sormovo factory, from the director of the factory, 16th June 1917.

²⁹ GANO, f. 27, op. 1, d. 3, l. 97; Duma records, 29th September 1917.

³⁰ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 9, l. 320. Announcement from the director of the Sormovo factories S. Khrenikov.

PSR 'ORTHODOXY'³¹ IN SORMOVO

What was the PSR's response to this crisis in the factories? Although strong connections had been established between the PSR and worker communities, the PSR's policies on the worker question were neither so clear nor so radical as those proposed for resolution of the land question. In 1917, proposals on factory legislation were not significantly altered from the party's 1905 programme, which had made far reaching proposals on labour protection, encompassing an eight hour day, protection for children and women, strict labour safety and state insurance for all aspects of workers' lives.³² Contentiously, the programme did not propose nationalisation of factories. This was a major inconsistency of the PSR programme; while recognising the benefits of public ownership of land, it did not acknowledge the need to reproduce in the factories the egalitarianism and anti-capitalist values it espoused in the villages. It is unfair, however, to berate the PSR for failing to stretch their vision of non-capitalist living in the villages, which was frankly optimistic, to the factories where capitalism had so clearly taken hold. The party's policy makers can however be criticised for their failure to adapt to the new conditions and opportunities presented by 1917 in the factories. Their apparently far reaching proposals on labour protection dating from 1905 were made obsolete by the rapid establishment of a whole range of such legislation on the back of the February revolution.³³ Instead of attempting to embrace worker radicalism with calls for nationalisation of factories, or at least radical state intervention in the factories, the SR leaders clung to the coattails of their Menshevik coalition partners, who adhered to the shibboleth that the February revolution was bourgeois in nature, and as such could not embrace socialist radicalism.³⁴ The Mensheviks' principled opposition to worker control and the freedom to strike, along with their interpretation of the causes of labour conflict, resulted in them losing much of their support to the Bolsheviks in the course of 1917.³⁵ The PSR, having failed to establish an alternative viewpoint, shared their fate in many factories, and were ousted from the workers' soviets and committees. The

³¹ By 'orthodoxy', is meant widely recognised PSR policy endorsed by the party's Central Committee.

³² See First PSR programme, in V.V. Shelokhaev et al. (ed.) *Programmy politicheskikh partii Rossii konets XIX-XX vv.* (Moscow, 1995), pp. 144-145.

³³ The most prominent of these was the eight hour day, which was proscribed on Petrograd factories on 10th March, and taken up by factories across Russia, although the Provisional Government never universally legally implemented the eight hour day. (See Browder and Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional*, vol. 2, doc. 622, p. 712; the agreement of working conditions in Petrograd.)

³⁴ See O. Radkey, *Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism. Promise and Default of the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries from February to October 1917* (New York, 1958), pp. 136-7, on the Mensheviks' leadership of the PSR delegates in the Soviet of soldiers' and workers' deputies; pp. 465-8, for a scathing assessment of the PSR's dependence on the Mensheviks on policy issues in 1917.

³⁵ See Galili, *The Menshevik Leaders*, pp. 215, 296, 327.

Sormovo PSR group's success in avoiding this fate originated in their sound basis among the Sormovo workers, and in their willingness to subvert the orthodoxy of the PSR Central Committee into a radical formula which was more acceptable to the people they professed to represent. Like PSR groups in the villages, the Sormovo PSR group showed itself able to metamorphose, and to present a picture of itself which reflected the needs of its supporters.

Though the PSR had been active in Sormovo at various times since 1905,³⁶ a group renewed agitation activity in April 1916. This date was inauspicious, as the police carried out extensive searches and arrests in an attempt to eradicate any revolutionary cells prior to the 1st May, when there had been demonstrations in 1915. The newly formed PSR cell, however, consisting of Magergut, Pavel Stroev, and Maria Kashmenskaia, succeeded in producing and distributing 150 copies of a leaflet, of a Zimmerwaldist character, around the shops and work benches of the Sormovo factories. A group meeting on 8th May 1916 decided to resume party activities. The arrival at around this time of Dmitrii Tiurikov in Sormovo, under the pseudonym Petr Skoropospeshnov³⁷ was an inspiration for the Sormovo PSR group. Magergut described Tiurikov thus:

An old, experienced party worker, who was an excellent propagandist, a good orator, having definite knowledge, he easily composed different leaflet-proclamations, he seemed for the Sormovo group a precious find. With his arrival the group was enlivened, felt firm ground under its feet.³⁸

Tiurikov figured prominently in Sormovo events during 1917 as a popular and significant figure amongst the workers and within the PSR. He was selected by the Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* PSR Conference as delegate to the fourth national party congress in October,³⁹ and was elected to the Constituent Assembly as PSR member for Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*.⁴⁰ Though almost nothing is known of Tiurikov personally,⁴¹ his prolific production of leaflets and lively participation in *guberniia* conferences and factory meetings ensured that his political opinions have been

³⁶ The Sormovo PSR organisation had 'existed, almost without a break, since its actions on 20th February 1905'. (GARF, f. 9591, op. 1, d. 19, l. 1; report of Sormovo PSR committee, 1st March 1917.)

³⁷ Throughout my work I refer to him as Tiurikov only, even if his pseudonym, Skoropospeshnov, has been used (as it often is) in sources.

³⁸ RGASPI, f. 274, op.1, d. 26, l. 85; writings of Magergut.

³⁹ *Narod*, no. 79, p. 3, reported as part of the proceedings of the fourth Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* conference, 15th and 16th October 1917.

⁴⁰ *Narod*, no. 117, December 5th 1917, p. 4, reports Tiurikov's election to the Constituent Assembly.

⁴¹ The only reference to him which alludes to his background, is in the Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* Soviet of peasants' deputies newspaper, *Zemlia i volia*, which described him as 'a peasant worker in the Sormovo factories' (*Zemlia i volia*, no. 23, 24th August 1917, p. 1).

preserved. These provide a clear insight into the character of the Sormovo PSR group. He did not support the Provisional Government, even after socialists entered on 5th May:

In a prolonged speech Tiurikov reported, that it was impossible to trust the Provisional Government, since socialists entered into it in smaller numbers than representatives of the bourgeoisie. . . entry of socialists into government does not change the fundamentally bourgeois character of activities of government, and only the total victory of democracy can create a governing power in proportion to this victory, which is more responsive to the interests of the working classes.⁴²

Tiurikov's attitude towards the war was unabashedly internationalist,⁴³ and on land and on workers' control of industry his political tenor was to the extreme left of the PSR. This delineation is confirmed by his public identification with the left PSR in November 1917.⁴⁴ The radicalism of the Sormovo PSR organisation did not extend so far as Maximalist programmes, however. Though they decided to organise a terrorist group in July 1916, led by the ubiquitous Tiurikov, it is clear that the activities of this group were a total failure. Generally, the Sormovo PSR group opposed violent extremism, as when it vetoed the suggestion to expropriate money from factory funds for typography needs.⁴⁵ Magergut claimed that the small Maximalist cell established in 1916 was completely removed by the 'orthodox' PSR group,⁴⁶ although the Maximalists' small but lively support in 1917 would indicate that this was not so. Maximalists obtained representation on a range of factory committees throughout 1917, indicating that they continued to enjoy some degree of support.⁴⁷ The Maximalist presence in Sormovo, even if accepted to be a minority group, gives an indication of the levels of extremism in some quarters of the factories.

Tiurikov's brand of PSR politics was certainly representative of the left of the party. It was not however approved by the party's Central Committee, which was dominated by moderates and defencists, who had approved the PSR's participation in the Provisional Government. As has been suggested in chapter one, a prominent individual within the

⁴² *Narod*, no. 18, p. 3, as reported in the second Nizhegorodskaia guberniia PSR Conference, 21st May 1917, and continued in *Narod*, no. 19, p. 3.

⁴³ GARF, f. 9591c, op. 1, d. 11, l. 4; Tiurikov expresses his opinion during discussion of the protocols of the first Nizhegorodskaia guberniia PSR conference, 23rd April 1917. Incidentally, the views expressed at the conference ranged from moderately to extremely internationalist, with no representatives of the defencist wing of the party speaking out.

⁴⁴ *Narod*, no. 107, 21st November 1917, p. 2.

⁴⁵ RGASPI, f. 274, op.1, d. 26, l. 93; writings of Magergut.

⁴⁶ RGASPI, f. 274, op.1, d. 26, l. 91; writings of Magergut.

⁴⁷ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 7, l. 120; protocol of the organising committee for elections to Soviet, 3rd July 1917. For a very unflattering assessment of the Maximalist PSR groups and their activities prior to 1917, see A. Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill; Revolutionary Terrorism in Russia 1894-1917* (Princeton, 1993), pp. 72-75.

local organisation could embody what the PSR meant to those voters. To Sormovo workers, supporting the PSR meant supporting Tiurikov personally, and the radical and relatively confrontational politics that Tiurikov promulgated. In this way preconceptions both of the PSR and its supporters were muddled; lack of a clearly promulgated central party line and the flexibility within the party that Chernov was so proud of enabled the party image in the localities to reflect the priorities of its local activists.

The nature of underground work compounded the localism and lack of unity within the PSR. Prior to the February revolution, despite repeated attempts by the Sormovo PSR group, links were not established with other PSR groups, whether in the centre or in neighbouring provinces, which left them isolated and adrift from central party policy. The group operated in physically difficult conditions, with their larger meetings taking place in remote outdoors locations. This meant that much of the participants' time was spent struggling through mud and swamp, or ice and snow depending on the season, to meeting destinations.⁴⁸ Such hardships, however, along with the rigour of underground secrecy, brought the group close comradely feelings, which Magergut felt began to recede after the February revolution.⁴⁹ Such nostalgia indicates that the PSR group may well have become rather too accustomed to its successful underground existence, and reluctant to metamorphose into a legal revolutionary organisation. Individual action and the secrecy necessitated by underground activity were not conducive to producing party members liable to promulgate central party policy obediently. The difficulties for party discipline caused by the nature of underground work was generally recognised as a threat:

The PSR differs in psychology and history from other Russian socialist parties, in that it has always given a massive significance to the influence of individual initiative of the conscious minority, living by the people's will. . . One element of the party's membership has worked in energetic concrete actions, spilling blood and flesh for the people. What can party discipline be for these active party members, in so far as they have carried out individual work, personal initiative, private risings?⁵⁰

The difficulty of establishing any sort of PSR 'party line' in Sormovo was due in part to the self-importance of the Sormovo PSR group. The Nizhnii Novgorod Soviet of soldiers' deputies somehow obtained all copies of a leaflet that the Sormovo PSR group produced in March 1917, and refused to allow its distribution, because its attitude towards the Provisional Government and other, unspecified, issues was unacceptable,

⁴⁸ RGASPI, f. 274, op.1, d. 26, l. 105; writings of Magergut.

⁴⁹ RGASPI, f. 274, op.1, d. 26, l. 110; writings of Magergut.

⁵⁰ *Delo naroda*, no. 78, 18th June 1917, p. 1.

and were not accurate reflections of central party policy. The Soviet of soldiers' deputies was led by Vladimir Ganchel, the PSR member who became town mayor. Ganchel's centre-right position within the PSR ensured that his views were not compatible with Tiurikov's. The confiscation of the leaflets provoked an indignant response from the Sormovo PSR, as this excerpt from the lengthy response indicates:

. . . the Sormovo PSR organisation is one of the oldest socialist organisations in the area, and has existed almost without a break since 20th February 1905. It is recognised by all the party conferences, and documents in the organisation's records confirm this. At present it enjoys great influence amongst the people, especially amongst the Sormovo workers, whom it has recently served no less than the Social Democrat organisation. We demand acknowledgement of the organisation's public significance and its political strength from everyone. Fourth, the intervention of the Soviet of soldiers' deputies in the organisation's competence, and its pressure on the organisation including the withholding of the organisation's published declarations is unconditionally declared inadmissible. The Sormovo PSR group is a revolutionary-socialist organisation renowned for its selfless struggle for the great ideals of brotherhood, equality and freedom, and it considers that the Soviet of soldiers' deputies is acting in direct violation of principle.⁵¹

The question of party orthodoxy raised here demonstrates the difficulties the PSR Central Committee had in attempting to establish a party line. As the Sormovo organisation so explicitly stated above, it regarded itself, and may well have been regarded by many others, as a significant force in Sormovo, and a body enabled to promulgate official PSR policy. Its prevalence within Sormovo made the Sormovo PSR organisation's statements of party policy difficult to challenge, even for those individuals like Ganchel whose tenor was closer to the PSR's Central Committee orthodoxy.

THE SORMOVO STRIKE

The general strike called in Sormovo between 20th June and 8th July 1917 was called and controlled by the workers' moderate socialist leaders, and appears to have been an example of the controlled striking that the PSR's Central Committee was willing to endorse. Though the strike apparently achieved its aims, in fact it was unable to combat the major issues facing the Sormovo workers, of job instability and material want. This paradoxical 'failure despite success' extended the growing rift between workers and the political parties which professed to represent them. The Sormovo strike provides an example of the moderate socialists' willingness to embrace worker activism, without recognising that such activism threatened the state and that it could only serve to

⁵¹ GARF, f. 9591, op. 1, d. 19, l. 1; Report of Sormovo PSR committee, 1st March 1917.

inflame the workers, since worker activism did not have an impact on the factories' essential problems.

General awareness of job insecurity made the general strike an all the more impressive example of the apparent authority that the factory's democratic bodies, headed by the PSR group, wielded over the workforce. Usually, where workers felt that their jobs were insecure, as in the case of Petrograd's unskilled workers, they were more reluctant to strike.⁵² The Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet sought to legitimise and thus control strike movement. This control would enable strikes theoretically at least to be a powerful strategy for workers without necessarily threatening the fabric of society.⁵³ Soviet control over striking to transform the strike into a tool of an organised and conscious labour movement can be seen in the elaborate planning and care which the Sormovo factory striking committee, backed by the local Soviet, enacted in orchestrating the Sormovo strike. Major difficulties arose despite these ostensibly responsible control mechanisms over strikes however, where there was a clash between the interests of the workers and the state. Despite the administration's willingness to fulfil workers' economic demands, the strike went on. The Provisional Government and Petrograd Soviet's enthusiasm for co-operation of the workforce with the state and factory administration was not played out satisfactorily in Sormovo.

Where the Sormovo strike differed from the pattern of striking in a well studied area like Petrograd was that the strike from its inception was not primarily over economic demands, since the factory administration expressed itself willing to fulfil these, but over the additional conditions which the administration placed upon the workforce. This concentration on work control issues, rather than just wages and hours, was mirrored in the September strike of Smolensk metalworkers.⁵⁴ Ironically, the Sormovo strike was closed primarily on political grounds, an able demonstration of the paradoxical capacity of the labour movement to both threaten and support the Provisional Government.⁵⁵

⁵² Koenker, Rosenberg, 'Skilled Workers and the Strike', p. 626.

⁵³ W.G. Rosenberg, 'Understanding Strikes in Revolutionary Russia', *Russian History* 16, 1989, p. 271. Galili, *The Menshevik Leaders*, tackles the essential problem of reconciling financial and worker demands, pp. 69-114, and the problems strikes and worker radicalism faced the coalition government, pp. 203-254.

⁵⁴ Hickey, 'Big Strike in a Small City', p. 9, p. 18.

⁵⁵ The difficulties of categorising a strike as 'political' or 'economic', are however, considerable. Such delineations refer to worker demands, but not to their motivations. Smith suggested that it took a certain level of political consciousness to become involved in any kind of strike in wartime. (Smith, *Red Petrograd*, p. 49).

The documentation gives the impression that the Sormovo office of Soviet of workers' deputies had definitive authority over the Sormovo workers. It was their declaration on 9th March 1917, for example, which called off the strike which had gone on during the February revolution.⁵⁶ The June strike was organised and co-ordinated from its inception by the Sormovo office of the Soviet of workers' deputies. On 21st March 1917 the order was given to create shop commissions to establish worker and employee demands:

Comrades! The workers of Sormovo factories are in an urgently unsatisfactory economic situation. This obliges us to rapidly organise planned struggle for raising the material and spiritual levels of the workers. With this aim the Sormovo section of the Soviet of workers' deputies urgently calls on you, comrades, urgently to enter into the organisation of SHOP COMMISSIONS, through comrade representatives and the elected Soviet of workers' deputies. This commission will gather all materials pertaining to the conditions of working labour, and explaining general workers' needs, and will work out desired changes both in working pay, and in relations of all orders of factory life, affecting the interests of the workers.⁵⁷

A response to the demands formulated by the shop commissions was offered by the factory administration at the end of May, which expressed a willingness to fulfil workers' wage demands, on condition that no further demands were made, and working conditions were regularised.⁵⁸ These conditions were not accepted by worker and employee representatives. They issued an ultimatum on 4th June, which concluded that:

In order to make an end to this unworthy game, we workers and employees of Sormovo factory under threat of STRIKES demand satisfaction of our presented demands WITHOUT ANY CONDITIONS from the side of the joint share company "Sormovo" within a six day period...⁵⁹

Preparations for the strike began in earnest on 17th June, when the strike committee which had been formed discussed the organisation of the strike. From its inception, the strike was intended to avoid being a destructive measure:

The following resolution of comrade Obriadchikov⁶⁰ was unanimously passed: taking into account the fundamental differences of the internal relations between labour and capital, and the exceptional conditions of the current time, the strike committee has changed the established views in the carrying out of strikes, finding it necessary to preserve the productivity and integrity of the factory, since it has responsibilities towards the state for the future. Measures for the organisation of strikes will be worked out especially by the striking committee. In the

⁵⁶ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 7, l. 8; note from the Sormovo Soviet of workers' deputies that the strike is cancelled, 9th March 1917.

⁵⁷ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 7, l. 31. From the Sormovo section of the Soviet of workers' deputies, 21st March 1917.

⁵⁸ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 5, l. 43-46; report of administration of Sormovo factories to the director of Sormovo factories about the talks underway with representatives of the shop administration and elected workers' representatives, 23rd - 24th May 1917.

⁵⁹ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 8, l. 32; ultimatum of Sormovo workers and employees to factory administration, 4th June 1917.

⁶⁰ Iakov P. Obriadchikov was a fitter-mechanic in the factories, and a native of Nizhnii Novgorod. A member of the PSR since 1903, he was among the PSR Sormovo group's most active members after his return from Irkutsk exile in 1917. (Biographical information from *Politkatorzhan*, p. 451.)

present time practical measures will be worked out which allow the right and healthy carrying out of strikes.⁶¹

Detailed measures followed on the creation of a militia for defence of the factory, provisions to continue the movement of necessary rail traffic, and other areas, like water and electric sections, which were to be kept operating for the public good.⁶²

Determination to prevent disruption in public life extended even to an early form of *subbotniki*; workers were requested to go to the unloading section in their free time to assist in the unloading of wagons, which would otherwise create backlogs.⁶³ These measures to run the strike with the minimum of disruption to public life were successful, as evidenced by the Sormovo *uezd* commissar's report:

The strike flows peacefully. From the first day of the strike to the current time, part of the electric station for lighting the factories and public buildings, and also the water tower, works without a break.⁶⁴

Workers were paid during the strike. The striking committee established a commission for the payment of workers and employees,⁶⁵ and on 3rd July it was decreed by the strike committee that workers would be paid for the first half of June, and employees for the month of June.⁶⁶ It is not entirely clear how these payments were financed. *Narod* ran appeals for donations to a fund for striking workers, and the Sormovo PSR organisation records the issue of 1278 roubles in aid, a relatively small sum, during July 1917.⁶⁷

The reasons offered for the ending of the strike were manifold, but encompassed not only the promised satisfaction of worker and employee demands, but also response to national concerns. The explanation offered by the strike committee below demonstrates the determination of the democratic organisations to consider national priorities:

1/ Taking into consideration the industrial and economic disorder of the country, in connection with the disorder of transport, insufficiency of fuel, raw materials and other products, necessary for normal production, consumption and in general for the life of the state:

2/ taking into consideration the importance of production of enterprises, such as the Sormovo factories in industry and life of the country and the damage this stoppage incurs on the state, army, and population;

3/ taking into consideration the circular of the main military-technical administration from 23rd June received through the director of the factories only on 7th July, in which the war minister

⁶¹ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 9, l. 74. Protocol of factory meeting, 17th June 1917.

⁶² See also GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 9, l. 90; Protocol of factory elders' meeting, 18th June 1917. Similar measures were taken by the strike committee in Smolensk in September, which asked that tram and electrical workers remain on the job, partly out of concern for public safety. (Hickey, 'Big Strike in a Small City', p. 18.)

⁶³ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 10, l. 436; Sormovo workers' decree, 8th July 1917.

⁶⁴ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 119; Sormovo *uezd* commissar report, 26th June 1917.

⁶⁵ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 9, l. 90; Protocol of strike committee, 18th June 1917.

⁶⁶ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 8, l. 97; Protocol no. 12 of strike committee, 3rd July 1917.

⁶⁷ *Narod*, no. 47, 2nd August 1917, p. 4, in column 'Sormovo life'.

appealed to all factory administration, factory committees, and citizen workers and employees with a request to put all their strength for the greater success of preparation of goods of war needs of the army in connection with the massive outlay of them for the coming offensive;

4/ taking into consideration talks with administration of the joint share company "Sormovo" and the minister of labour about satisfaction of the presented demands of workers and employees;

5/ taking into consideration the declaration to the administrative commission by the representative of the minister of labour- comrade DOPATKIN, central Moscow factory meeting- comrade VEDERNIKOV, and department for defence- com. USPENSKII, which stated that the prolongation of the strike to this day laid moral responsibility on workers and employees and categorically definitely declared, that all decisive measures for the total satisfaction of the presented demands of the workers and employees would be taken. . . WE, WORKERS AND EMPLOYEES OF SORMOVSKII FACTORIES DECLARE TO CEASE THE STRIKE AND TO GO TO WORK ON 8TH JULY. FOR WORK OF THE GOVERNING COMMISSION FOR SATISFACTION OF DEMANDS BY THE MINISTER OF LABOUR IS GIVEN A TERM OF ONE MONTH.⁶⁸

The order of reasons for ending the strike is significant. Foremost were national considerations, and Kerensky's appeal. This indicates that, for the moderate socialist leaders of the strike movement at least, national political considerations were regarded with almost the same importance as local economic considerations. This can be posited as a factor contributing to the drift of some PSR supporters towards Bolshevism in 1917, as the Bolsheviks showed themselves willing to ignore national interest, and instead to 'play to the crowd' with empty but popular sloganeering. Some comparisons can be drawn with the strike held in July 1916 prompted by proclamations and demands, of a primarily economic nature, put together by PSR members and Bolsheviks. Some 20,000 workers came out on strike on 26th and 27th July 1916, but when the administration posted notices to return to work on 27th July, threatening factory closure and military call-up for strikers, the strike collapsed:

The majority of workers were newly arrived [*prishlye*], who worked in the factory solely because they were glad of military deferment, returned to work.⁶⁹

The success of the 1917 strike, in contrast to the failure of 1916, was ensured not by any newly awakened consciousness of the *prishlye*, but by the efficiency and wealth of the democratic organisations, predominated by the PSR, which ensured that the workers received means for support during the strike, and applied concerted but responsible pressure on the government and the factory administration. The failure of strikes and conciliation which drew Petrograd workers in increasing numbers towards Bolshevism in the latter part of 1917 was not mirrored in Sormovo.⁷⁰ The June/July strike succeeded

⁶⁸ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 8, l. 103-4; factory administration declaration, 7th July 1917.

⁶⁹ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 26, p. 89; Writings of Magergut.

⁷⁰ See footnote 1 for references of this, and also H. Phillips on support for the Bolsheviks in Tver in 1917, 'The Heartland Turns Red: The Bolshevik Seizure of Power in Tver' (Unpublished article).

in winning its economic demands without subscribing to any restrictions on future worker activism. These successes were pyrrhic, however. Despite the apparent success of the controlled strike strategy, job security and workers' living conditions did not improve. This inability of controlled worker activism to make any impact on the crisis within Russian industry offers some explanation for the increasing support for the Bolsheviks in Sormovo. The reasons for the strike's conclusion indicate that despite the relative radicalism of the Sormovo PSR group, and its responsiveness to the needs of its supporters, their leaders espoused lofty ideals of national interest which were not compatible with the more straightforward material demands of the workforce.

PSR SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN 1917

The Sormovo PSR group garnered a broad support base, played a significant role in the governing of Sormovo, and became the strongest PSR group in the *guberniia*. *Okhrana* records show that all individuals associated with the Nizhnii Novgorod town PSR, including Vera Zasluch, were minutely observed and systematically removed in this pre-revolutionary period.⁷¹ It is testimony to the success of the Sormovo PSR organisation that its activities were not reported by the *Okhrana* in any way.⁷² Despite its underground strength, and its massive support and influence in 1917, the Sormovo PSR group was unable to resist the Bolshevik seizure of power in October. The record of the Sormovo group illustrates the harsh truth of 1917 that mass support was not enough to win political power. Mass support had to be supplemented with tenacious tactics to hang onto political power, and the Sormovo PSR group, for all its strengths, was unable to muster this tenacity.

Tiurikov reported at the first Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* PSR conference in April on the activities of the Sormovo organisation:

In my opinion, the Sormovo organisation surpasses all other organisations in strength of influence, spreading its actions to the bounds of Sormovo, in the *uezd*. Also, it has representatives in the Soviet of workers' deputies executive committee, and in the committee of public safety.⁷³

This portrayal of the Sormovo PSR group taking on broad roles within the government of the province is supported by other documentation. In March 1917 a declaration by

⁷¹ GANO, f. 918, op. 8, d. 561, ll. 1-141; police records of secret surveillance of PSR members in Nizhnii Novgorod, 1st January – 31st December 1916. GANO, f. 2, op. 7, d. 396, ll. 1-65; list of 'political unreliaables' registered in Nizhnii Novgorod, 20th March 1914.

⁷² GANO, f. 2, op. 7, d. 629, l. 1; report on the arrest of Tiurikov in connection with illegal literature, 4th February 1917.

⁷³ GARF, f. 9591c, op. 1, d. 11, l. 3-4; Protocols of the first Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* PSR conference, 23rd – 24th April 1917. (incomplete)

the Sormovo PSR demanded the prohibition of participation by former tsarist officials in the new militias.⁷⁴ Their activities around the area give an indication of the organisation acting as revolutionary enforcers, as well as educators. This report of their actions in Smol'kii village, Semenovskii *uezd*, published in the Moscow newspaper *Zemlia i volia* demonstrates this:

After his speech a member of the administration of Smol'kovskii Bank, comrade O.Ia Evstigneev, called on peasants not to listen to the Provisional government. "Our situation and victory, he said, is fragile. All this is stirred up by Jews. Kerensky, Scheidze, Rodzyanko are Jews, Nizhegorodskaia newspapers- Jews and others of this sort." The peasants were not roused; a voice rang out "arrest him". But he retained his freedom and won several devotees. The Sormovo PSR committee has sent a comrade to the general-*volost* in Smol'ki village. The comrade is commissioned to take measures with the help of the regional peasant militia should they be required.⁷⁵

It is clear that the Sormovo PSR organisation took on a role way beyond its status as a party political organisation; it involved itself in the 'defence of the revolution' in the most literal sense, weeding out this apparent counter-revolutionary in their midst.

The Sormovo PSR organisation took an office on 10th March, and a number of prominent members returned from their places of exile and hiding, thus swelling the ranks of party activists. The party's propaganda campaigns in the preceding year enabled them to build on their member base rapidly.⁷⁶ Membership numbers had reached 1,500 by April 1917.⁷⁷ These numbers were to escalate with astonishing speed in 1917, to 3,000 in May, and 5,000 in June. A useful source confirming the party's strength is its financial records, some of which were published monthly, in some detail, in the Nizhnii Novgorod PSR newspaper *Narod*. The tables below offer a summarised version of these accounts.

The sums involved here are significant. To offer some comparison, the PSR organisation in Balakhninskii *uezd*, another major industrial centre in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*, recorded a turnover for the month of September 1917 of around 800 roubles,⁷⁸ in contrast to the turnover of the Sormovo PSR organisation for September 1917 of nearly 11,000 roubles. The PSR organisation in Kanavin, the other major industrial suburb of Nizhnii Novgorod underwent a financial crisis in September 1917.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ GARF, f. 9591, op. 1, d. 19, l. 12; letter of Sormovo PSR organisation to *Narod*, 19th April 1917.

⁷⁵ GARF, f. 9591, on. 1, d. 19, l. 3; letter of Sormovo PSR organisation to *Zemlia i volia*, a Moscow PSR publication, undated.

⁷⁶ For a description of this activity, see chapter 2, 'Propaganda in the Factories', pp. 75-79.

⁷⁷ RGASPI, f. 274, op.1, d. 26, l. 112; writings of Magergut.

⁷⁸ *Narod*, no. 92, 3rd November 1917, p. 4.

⁷⁹ *Narod*, no. 63, 8th September 1917.

TABLE 6.I: A SUMMARY OF 1917 INCOME OF SORMOVO PSR ORGANISATION (IN ROUBLES)

| Known months | Member Fees | Lectures and literature sales | Donations to organisation | Donations for literature to front | Total income |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| March | 1154.30 | 189.77 | | | 1495.90 |
| May | 2947.61 | 975.70 | 3030.31 | 5776.27 | 12,729.84 |
| July | | | 3566.55 | 925.83 | 5874.73 |
| August | 1753.02 | | 104.81 | | 1857.83 |
| September | 1680.57 | | 808.75 | | 2490.12 |
| ALL | 7535.5 | 1165.47 | 7510.42 | 6702.10 | 24448.42 |
| % of total income | 30.8 | 4.8 | 30.7 | 27.4 | 100 |

TABLE 6.II: A SUMMARY OF 1917 OUTGOINGS OF SORMOVO PSR ORGANISATION (IN ROUBLES)

| | office, postal and travel | literature costs | Literature to front | sent to gub. PSR committee | Other | Total outgoing |
|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| March | 231.07 | 155.35 | | | 41.05 | 466.71 |
| May | 811.06 | 215.93 | 1650 | 736.20 | 4366.20 ⁸⁰ | 9214.26 |
| July | 427.83 | 577.05 | 1092.86 | 345 | 3280 ⁸¹ | 4100.73 |
| August | 308.43 | 369.48 | 200 | 440 | 1500 ⁸² | 3162.91 |
| September | 485.04 | 581.10 | 2487 | | | 4543.47 |
| ALL | 2263.43 | 1898.91 | 5429.86 | 1521.20 | 9187.25 | 21488.08 |
| % of total spending | 10.5 | 8.8 | 25.2 | 7 | 42.8 | 100 |

(Note: the percentage figures offered do not add up to 100%, because the figures presented here include only the most significant areas of income and spending.)

The figures have not been adjusted to allow for the rampant inflation of 1917. A conservative national price index produced by M.P. Kokhn estimated that if the index of prices in 1913 was equal to 100, by 1916 it was at 221, and by the end of 1917 had

⁸⁰ This sum was spent on the purchase of a 25% share in the newspaper *Narod*.

⁸¹ This sum includes 1278r. issued in aid, presumably to workers, and 1900r. spent on the purchase of a typographic machine and typesetting.

⁸² 1500r. was lent to the Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* PSR committee.

reached 512.⁸³ Inflation and prices varied regionally, but Kokhn's figures allow one to estimate that inflation ran at around 230% in 1917. Use of this estimate shows that by September 1917, the organisation's income had not dropped significantly, and that even taking inflation into consideration, its expenditure increased dramatically in the course of 1917. This confirms that the group's support did not drop off dramatically.

While the large income received from members' dues and joining fees is to be expected given the huge membership of the group, the size of donations to the party is surprisingly high. Monthly accounts included the source of these donations, usually cited by factory shop. The inclusion of a separate column of donations for literature to be sent to the front is necessitated by the specification of this use for money in the accounts. This literature may have been a characteristically altruistic PSR gesture, or an attempt to propagandise the *frontoviki* who would soon return to their former occupations in the Sormovo factories. Central party records of contributions to the party coffers from regional organisations include an entry on Sormovo, which in July gave the largest sum of any of the contributors, which included *guberniia* organisations and even Moscow.⁸⁴

The depth of the PSR's organisational strength and support in Sormovo indicated by its activities in the twelve months up to April 1917 was unsurprisingly carried into political dominance for much of 1917. This is acknowledged even by Soviet accounts which generally prefer to discount PSR support altogether.⁸⁵ In the elections of 28th July 1917 to the Nizhegorodskaia Soviet of workers' deputies, of Sormovo's fifty allotted representatives, the PSR won thirty-eight seats, the Mensheviks six, Bolsheviks four, Maximalists one, and Union of Technicians one.⁸⁶ Support for the PSR did leach to the Bolsheviks in the course of 1917, but not to the extent that was seen in Petrograd. The PSR retained major support in Sormovo at least until 1918.⁸⁷ Despite the Bolsheviks' massive gains in the September elections, however, when they won twenty-three seats, they still did not hold a majority within the Sormovo section of the Soviet of workers'

⁸³ M.P. Kokhn, *Russkie indeksy tsen* (Moscow, 1926), p. 18.

⁸⁴ *Partiniia izvestiia*, no. 3, 19th October 1917, p. 54.

⁸⁵ M.D. Smuchebnikov et al (ed.) *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v mai-iiune 1917g. Iiunskaiia demonstratsiia*. (Moscow, 1959), p. 119. The report of the Bolshevik Vorob'ev at the plenary meeting of Moscow Oblast RSDRP (b) 28th-29th June, acknowledged that the SRs were by far the strongest organisation in Sormovo, with some 5000 members. This contrasted with Bolshevik party membership of around 900.

⁸⁶ *Narod*, no. 45, 28th July 1917, l. 4, in section 'Sormovo Life'.

⁸⁷ RGASPI, f. 274, op. 1, d. 5, l. 33; Report of Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia* PSR group, undated, but definitely written after the Brest-Litovsk agreement. Proclaims continuing strong support for the PSR in Sormovo, with nineteen of the 38 Soviet places going to the PSR.

deputies; the PSR won sixteen seats, and the Mensheviks five seats. Seven delegates from the parties were also given seats in the Soviet, and of these the PSR held three, the Mensheviks three and the Bolsheviks only one.⁸⁸ Bolshevik dominance in the Soviet after the October events in Petrograd was however assured by the PSR and Menshevik decision to abstain from Soviet voting and to decline participation in the presidium and executive committee. The PSR Central Committee had decided to withdraw from the Soviets on the grounds that they were class controlled and did not represent democracy, but this was a disastrous tactical blunder. Gotz later described the boycotts of the Soviets as suicidal.⁸⁹

In Sormovo, the results of these tactics were nothing short of catastrophic: by abstaining on key votes, the SRs and Mensheviks handed the Bolsheviks dominance within the Soviets without obstruction. Had they continued to participate in the Soviets, the Bolsheviks would have been forced either into actions against the Soviets, or complicity in 'anti-Soviet' administration.⁹⁰ As it was, the general factory meeting (*obshchezavodskii sobranie*) voted on 26th October to accept the Bolshevik revolution. This was the culmination of PSR inability to obstruct the Bolsheviks effectively, despite their continued support in the factories. This continued support in contrast to other large worker conurbations like Moscow may be attributed at least in part to the anti-coalition position posited by the Sormovo PSR group, which enabled them to avoid association with the failing and unpopular Provisional Government.⁹¹

WORKER BEHAVIOUR

Despite the apparent support for the PSR, a clear rift developed between the aspirations of workers and their leaders. This was demonstrated by the difficulties faced in maintaining worker discipline during 1917. This issue rather undermines the concept of the PSR as a successful educating force within the Sormovo workforce.⁹² A gulf existed between the ideals of worker behaviour aspired to by the PSR, in common with other

⁸⁸ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 7, l. 166; List of members of the Sormovo Soviet of workers' deputies, undated but included in September documents. No explanation was given, incidentally, for the erratic allocation of party seats.

⁸⁹ A. Gotz, 'Uchreditel'noe sobranie i s'ezd sovetov', *Delo naroda*, no. 243, 29th December 1917.

⁹⁰ *Narod*, no. 102, 15th November 1917, p. 3; offers an excellent example of the problems that the PSR could have, but did not, pose the Bolsheviks. In a meeting of the Sormovo office of Soviet of workers' deputies, on 9th November 1917, of the 38 members who attended, 22 abstained, leaving the Bolsheviks in a definite minority.

⁹¹ Koenker attributes the shift in party loyalty from SR and Menshevik to Bolshevik among Moscow workers in the course of 1917 primarily to the deteriorating economic situation which was attributed by workers to the failing coalition government. (Koenker, *Moscow Workers*, p. 219.)

⁹² See chapter 2, 'Propaganda in the Factories', p. 80.

democratic organisations, and the actual actions of the workers. On the provisions question, and on other worker demands, the Sormovo office of Soviet of workers' deputies and factory committees sought to satisfy worker and employee needs within the context of the requirements of the state. Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia*'s provisions crisis has already been remarked upon. Within this context, the feeding of 25,000 workers faced the administration of the Sormovo factories with a daunting problem, even prior to the revolution. On 13th March it was reported that the Sormovo factories had reserves altogether for three days, and that the situation in the factory was critical.⁹³ This problem was not set to improve in the course of 1917. It would seem that the Sormovo factories had rather more success in acquiring grain than other areas of the *guberniia*. A long report on unloading arrangements for grain delivered to the factory suggests Sormovo was relatively well supplied:

At the end of navigation⁹⁴ we have accumulated on the barges in the boat yard more than 150,000 *puds* of flour, rye and oats. In the town severe shortages of produce are felt. We had 27,000 *puds* of flour stolen and we are threatened with the theft of a still more significant amount of produce, gathered by us with massive expenditure of energy and money from different places along the Volga, Kama, and the river Belii. All measures were taken for the rapid unloading of the barges at once in order to lay down produce in our stores, where they were less threatened by seizure. . .⁹⁵

The anxiety betrayed here about protection of the supplies from theft indicates that the factories' success in obtaining supplies provoked resentment from other quarters in the *guberniia*, and rumours about Sormovo food reserves. On 17th October 1917 the Sormovo administration received a telegram from the Minister of Industry which noted that it was not acceptable to retain grain reserves while other areas suffered, and that requisitions would be made if necessary. The response to this telegram denied the existence of grain reserves:

In this telegram are echoes of malicious rumours that have been disseminated about non-existent reserves in Sormovo- I, in my duty as a citizen, report promptly to the military with this telegram: I categorically declare that the legends about provisions reserves of Sormovo factories do not have any foundation: not one *pud* of flour and not one *pud* of grain is currently in the factory storehouses. . .⁹⁶

Such exchanges illustrate growing tension between the factory and town populations. The rumours certainly had some foundation, and were, on the basis of the above report,

⁹³ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 25, l. 115; telegram sent by director of Sormovo factories Khrenikov, to *guberniia* commissar, 13th March 1917.

⁹⁴ the 'navigation' referred to is the ability to move produce by river, which was curtailed by the onset of winter.

⁹⁵ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 7, l. 173-5; report from the director of Sormovo factories to the Sormovo office of the Soviet of workers' deputies, 15th December 1917.

⁹⁶ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 9, l. 226; telegram to the commissar for defence from the director of Sormovo factories, 17th October 1917.

circulating widely. Reductions in workers' rations announced in August 1917⁹⁷ clearly provoked resentment among the workforce. This resentment was no doubt fuelled by rumours of large factory reserves. The factory provisions committee was forced to issue a statement explaining why they were unable to increase workers' rations:

In view of letters and verbal applications demanding increases of the shops' provisions norms received both from individuals and from factory sections, the factory provisions committee, reviewing these applications, answers comrade workers and employees with the following. . . the provisions crisis afflicts not only those who live in Sormovo, but those from all over the Russian state. . . Comrades, you know the situation Russia is faced with, about which many write in all the newspapers. To increase your rations would set you against other comrade citizens. Bread norms cannot be raised, since we are bound to submit to the orders of the Minister of provisions. . . the committee is taking all possible measures for the prevention of hunger, since this is in your interests. Your demands, and also active risings, are no help to Russia's provisions' sickness.⁹⁸

This indicates both the persistence of worker demands for increased rations, and anxiety of the factory administration that workers should operate in the state's best interests. Even if Sormovo did in fact have adequate supplies, the insecurity about future food supplies was probably as much of a destabilising force among workers as food shortages themselves. Requests for worker moderation, rumours of Sormovo grain reserves, and measures taken to prevent theft of Sormovo grain all indicate tension between the Sormovo workers and other residents of the *guberniia*. An account from Vasil'skii *uezd* reported that food supplies destined for the factories were detained in the villages.⁹⁹ Peasant hostility towards workers was not limited to food supply issues. In Ardatovskii *uezd*, peasants refused to allow the factory to requisition a tractor, which the factory administration deemed absolutely essential for the continued running of the plant.¹⁰⁰ Vasil'skii *uezd* commissar reported general peasant hostility towards workers:

In the village Vstras the *volost* committee decreed that all workers liable to military duty were to be sent to the front, and that the declaration would be carried out when the factory closed as it inevitably would.¹⁰¹

The organised, controlled, disciplined workforce, whose needs and demands were expressed and satisfied through the medium of their new democratic organisations was shown to be wanting when assessing the factories' response to the food crisis. The

⁹⁷ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 9, l. 175; decree to Sormovo workers and employees from director of Sormovo factories, 1st September 1917.

⁹⁸ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 9, ll. 234-5; Appeal of the Sormovo provisions committee to Sormovo workers and employees, 3rd October 1917. (document damaged and incomplete)

⁹⁹ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, ll. 74-5; report of Vasil'skii *uezd* commissar, 29th May 1917.

¹⁰⁰ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 22, l. 107; telegram from Bogorodskii reporting the tractor problem to the *guberniia* commissar, 11th August, and on reverse, telegram from *guberniia* commissar to Uspenskii *volost* committee, demanding that the situation be remedied, 15th August 1917.

¹⁰¹ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 13, ll. 155-9; meeting of Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia uezd* commissars, 23rd – 24th April.

emphasis on organisation and control, which dominated sources available for factory activities in 1917, is shown to be slightly misplaced. The new democratic organisations were not an unqualified success in transforming worker behaviour. The Sormovo PSR group's perceptions and aims did not match those of the people it purported to represent, and this can be identified as a key part of their failure to restrain the worker movement. The gap which developed between the usually responsive party and its supporters was dangerous as it weakened the party, but inevitable given the Sormovo PSR group's essentially altruistic ideals. The Bolsheviks presented an alternative for the Sormovo workers, but were no more successful in fulfilling the aims of those workers. Self interest, which plays an integral role in any political decision, was shaped by the material want and emotional uncertainty of 1917 into an ever narrower definition. The PSR's local leaders were unable to maintain a secure place as *the vanguard of the trudiashchiisia*, despite their flexibility and responsiveness. The much lauded consciousness of the Sormovo workforce was overplayed by the democratic organisations, and the Bolsheviks, so anxious to represent them.

The Soviet of workers' deputies statement to workers and employees on 12th March 1917 makes it clear that tensions existed within the factory:

Comrades. In view of the degree of friction existing between workers and employees on one side, and representatives of factory administration on the other, relations between these two sides could give rise to severe forms of aggravation and lead to grave complications. The Sormovo section of the Soviet of workers' deputies proposes to comrade workers and employees to refrain from independent, personal or group influences on the persons of factory administration...¹⁰²

The resignation note of the director of the factories, dated 26th July 1917, presented a searing indictment of the state of the factory and of worker discipline. The retiring director offered a vision of factory life which did not accord with that offered by Soviet and factory committee records:

In view of violence upon technical personnel, mass refusal of personnel employees to carry out their duties, constant meetings in working time of sections of the craftsmen's profession, it follows that there is total disorganisation of work. Reconciliation chambers are practically ignored. I demand that the most energetic measures be rapidly taken in order that the guilty do not get away with their unlawfulness. I give a week's notice to the Minister of Labour and from 1st August I consider myself free from occupied duties, since I do not wish to participate in chaos. Four months of workers' power together with regional workers' organisations does not guarantee positive results.¹⁰³

¹⁰² GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 7, l. 13; announcement from Sormovo section of the Soviet of workers' deputies, to workers and employees of Sormovo factories, 12th March 1917.

¹⁰³ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 5, l. 116; telegram from director of Sormovo factories to Ministry of Labour, 26th July 1917.

A report from the Sormovo *uezd* commissar in June indicated that this ‘friction’ did not dissipate in the first three months of revolution, and linked the disorder specifically to the *prishlye* section of the workforce:

The abrupt transfer from enslaved workers to free citizens, and the lack of organisation formed in the first days of events amongst the part of the workers arrived from the villages and not having been to the school of political and economic struggle, allowed the venting of all malice, which is why many disorganised risings, for different reasons, against representatives of factory administration, have been observed.¹⁰⁴

His reference to the ‘school of political and economic struggle’ is an excellent comment on the kind of propaganda-education work the PSR had been involved in. It’s allusion to lack of organisation also recall the belief apparently common among observers of the villages that peasant direct action was the disorganised result of ‘misunderstandings’, and not a clear move against the administration. This may well have been wishful thinking. The concerted lateness and absenteeism of workers and employees remarked upon by factory administration just before the revolution on 3rd February 1917¹⁰⁵ was a problem that continued to dog both factory administration and Soviet after the revolution. The Sormovo section of the Soviet of workers’ deputies was compelled to issue appeals to workers and employees not to shirk their duties. The language recollects the sort of combination of orders and rather pleading evocation to duty seen in Provisional Government appeals in this period:

Comrade workers and employees! Lately, bourgeois gazettes have strengthened the dissemination of rumours among soldiers at the front that factory workers do not work, with the intention of weakening the army and of leaving it without supplies. These rumours arouse soldiers against workers and thus weaken and damage the revolutionary strength of Russia. In the aims of gathering a single union of the working class and the revolutionary army and refutation of these slanders on the working class, Sormovo office of the Soviet of workers’ deputies turn to you, comrades, with warm calls:

DO NOT BRING DAMAGE OF SUPPLY PRODUCTION TO THE FACTORY WITH ARBITRARY ABSENCES, DEMONSTRATE THAT YOU UNDERSTAND ALL REPONSIBILITIES OF YOUR WORK IN THE FACTORY, SHOW INFLUENCE ON YOUR UNCONCIOUS COMRADES WHO ARBITRARILY STOP WORK IN THE FACTORY WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT CAUSE.¹⁰⁶

Attempts to differentiate between ‘conscious’ and ‘unconscious’ workers, as shown here, could be regarded as a mechanism for drawing greater civil discipline from the workforce by shaming those who did not subscribe to the new codes of practice. There

¹⁰⁴ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 161-3; Sormovo *uezd* commissar’s report on events in the *uezd* March-June 1917.

¹⁰⁵ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 10, l. 60; circular from director of Sormovo factories to all captains of shops and sections, 3rd February 1917.

¹⁰⁶ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 7, l. 91; declaration of the Sormovo section of the Soviet of workers’ deputies to Sormovo workers and employees, 15th April 1917.

are indications, however, that traditional modes of behaviour continued within worker and employee circles, despite new found democratic rights, and of course the obligations that such rights entailed. References to the reading of newspapers and private conversations within working hours¹⁰⁷ may be indicative of political consciousness among the workers. It also, however, demonstrated the incompatibility of such worker consciousness with the requirements of factory administration. Need for the militia 'to take the most decisive measures for the cessation of the sale of secret spirit drinks and drunkenness, card playing and other things'¹⁰⁸ is less ambiguous than references to reading and conversation, and implied that the behaviour of workers was not being shaped by political consciousness in all areas of life.¹⁰⁹ A report of the Sormovo *uezd* commissar made public order problems clear:

The ongoing events of the first days of the revolution interested people strongly, and neither drunkenness nor heated card playing was observed. In the current time however, this unfortunate phenomenon develops strongly, and threatens public peace. . .¹¹⁰

Such references to 'undesirable' behaviour are generally very limited in 'democratic' sources. The exception to this sanitisation of worker behaviour was the treatment of an occurrence of *samosud* that took place on 25th July 1917. *Samosud* occurred in factories all over Russia; amongst the workers of Petrograd in 1917 'violent and unrehearsed incidents were not uncommon'.¹¹¹ This incident involved a craftsman of the shell manufacturing shop, Bikov, who was wheel barrowed through the factory by a group of workers from the shell shop.¹¹² Though this is not emphasised, it would appear that

¹⁰⁷ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 9, p. 33; extract from a protocol of the united meeting of employees, 10th April 1917. Such behaviour was no doubt the norm among many factory workers. References to workers who 'spent their time conversing, reading newspapers and so on'" were made of Smolensk workers in early Spring 1918. (Hickey, 'Big Strike in a Small City', p. 27.)

¹⁰⁸ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 9, l. 74; protocol of factory meeting, 17th June 1917.

¹⁰⁹ A remarkably similar statement was made by the workers' control commission of the Morozov textile factory in Tver; "We demand an end to drunkenness, debauchery, the use of foul language, depravity and especially gambling and other repulsive habits which remain in the population." (Phillips, 'The Heartland Turns Red', p. 6.) In Petrograd, concern was voiced in a range of forums including the Petrograd Soviet of soldiers' and workers' deputies about the waves of drunkenness among workers, and factory committees proposed high fines for gambling and drunkenness. (Smith, *Red Petrograd*, pp. 92-4.)

¹¹⁰ GANO, f. 1882, op. 1, d. 28, l. 161-3; Sormovo *uezd* commissar's report on events in the *uezd* March-June 1917.

¹¹¹ S. Smith, 'The factory Committees in 1917'(Editor's Introduction) *Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia i fabzavkomu*, (London, 1983) p. xix.

¹¹² Wheel barrowing, where the unpopular individual concerned was placed in a wheelbarrow and taken out of the factory, was the traditional workers' method of ritual humiliation. On its importance as worker protest, see S. Smith, *Red Petrograd*, pp. 56-7. On its frequency, and indeed *Samosud* practices generally, see V. Bonnell (ed.) *The Russian Worker: Life and Labor Under the Tsarist Regime* (California, 1983), p. 108. Its form varied from the milder, where the individual concerned was simply removed from the property, to the more unpleasant, where the victim might be dumped in a pond or beaten. At the Putilov works, in the early days of the February revolution, '40 administrators were removed in the course of three days, many in wheelbarrows.' (D. Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and*

similar incidents went on in other shops as a result of this outbreak. All ‘democratic’ forces took this very seriously; it was very heavily covered by *Narod*,¹¹³ and an inquest commission was formed to bring the perpetrators to justice. The inquest commission included representatives from all the socialist parties, the Sormovo office of the Soviet of workers’ deputies, the general factory committee, and a government commission from the Ministry of Labour.¹¹⁴ *Samosud* and the stern reaction of democratic forces to it highlights the struggle for attempts to ‘awaken’ the Sormovo workers in the face of their continued use of traditional work place practices and evasions. The radicalism of the Sormovo PSR organisation, and its flexibility in interpretation of PSR Central Committee policy did not stretch to accommodation of these traditional worker practices.

CONCLUSIONS

The Sormovo PSR organisation was a powerful force in 1917, as is evidenced by its high levels of support and its involvement in democratic organisations at all levels in Sormovo. Its political profile was shaped both by the radical left-wing views of its most prominent member, Tiurikov, and by the demands of its pre-revolutionary underground organisation. The need for utmost secrecy combined with almost total isolation from other PSR groups gave the organisation a tight-knit and insular mentality. The radical left tenor of the Sormovo PSR organisation, which promulgated policies not favoured by the PSR’s Central Committee, ensured their continued support from workers whose political affiliations became progressively more radical in the course of 1917.

This study demonstrates the difficulties in trying to establish a single coherent definition of what PSR membership entailed. The localism and personalisation of Sormovo politics provided the Sormovo PSR organisation with the scope to develop a political character which did not reflect central party policy. This offers one explanation for the quandary of continued PSR support nationally despite the unpopularity of the coalition politics the central party espoused. Though the PSR did lose significant support in

the Fall of the Old Regime, p. 97) See also the memoir of the Bolshevik worker S. Kanatchikov; *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia; The Autobiography of Semion Ivanovich Kanatchikov* (tr. and ed. R. Zelnik) (Stanford, 1986), p. 237.

¹¹³ For an example of the sort of coverage this received, see *Narod*, no. 48, p. 4, in the section ‘Sormovo Life’, with the headline ‘The wheelbarrow again’.

¹¹⁴ GANO, f. 442, op. 1, d. 10, l. 505; appeal to Sormovo workers and employees signed by Sormovo section of the Soviet of workers’ deputies, the general-factory meeting, the Sormovo PSR committee, the Sormovo RSDRP (Bolshevik and Menshevik) committee and the governing commission of the Minister of labour, 26th July 1917.

Sormovo to the Bolsheviks in the course of 1917, they continued to constitute the most popular political party even after the October coup. Their loss of influence within the political processes of the factories can be attributed specifically to the decision taken to abstain from democratic organisations which had a Bolshevik presence as a protest. This 'protest' was to cost the Sormovo PSR organisation dear, since it gave the Bolsheviks time to consolidate their force, and to suppress the Sormovo PSR organisation.

The pressures faced by Sormovo workers in the course of 1917 were common, in many respects, to pressures faced by workers all over the country. Sormovo workers' activism did not produce the instantaneous political response, however, that Petrograd workers could engender, and this is reflected in the concentration within Sormovo politics on local issues, rather than on national ones. Revolution enabled workers to voice their demands more clearly, but did not cause them to prioritise political aims. The increased radicalisation and move to the left within the Sormovo workers can be explained by the pressure placed on them by fears of factory closure, job losses and food shortages. *Samosud* and worker insubordination and evasions demonstrates the continuation of traditional worker modes of behaviour independent of the new democratic organisations which proliferated in 1917. One can speculate that the democratic organisations were not successful in representing worker demands and aspirations, as their tenor was tempered by consciousness and requirement to be responsible to the new revolutionary Russian state and its needs.

Final Conclusions

This thesis has addressed some of the paradoxes inherent in the PSR's massive grassroots support despite continued support for the unpopular policies of the Provisional Government, and the failure of this massive support base to mobilise concertedly against the Bolshevik seizure of power. This work challenges our basic understandings of the political party as an institution, and what support for political parties signified. This challenge has profound implications for our understanding of 1917, so much of which is tied into an explanation for the shifting fortunes of the political parties, and the relative significance of grassroots politics in the context of profound social and economic crisis. Radkey's work concentrated on the PSR's Central Committee and on the high politics of 1917, and indicated that the failings of Chernov and other party leaders were decisive in the party's ultimate failure in 1917. This study of grassroots politics finds that although some crucial mistakes were made in 1917 by the party leadership, ultimately the party's fundamental structure, and its supporters' attitudes towards the party left it severely weakened as a national political force. These fundamentals were beyond the reach of the party's leadership.

To ordinary villagers and factory workers, politics was less about clearly delineated programmes and policies, and more about broad ideological sweeps, which were predicated more by image than by policy content. The PSR's image was therefore critical to their high levels of support in 1917. The foundations of the PSR's popular image were abstract rather than solidly policy based, and lay with the imprecise slogans and symbols which associated the party indelibly with traditional peasant aspirations. A single party orthodoxy, that is, a universally recognised vision of what the party was represented, was not apparent. Rather, the PSR's party orthodoxy was flexible in 1917, and reflected the needs and aspirations of its supporters. This flexibility enabled the PSR to appeal to a wide range of individuals, with disparate aims and aspirations. Such elucidation of the PSR's place in popular consciousness demonstrates the depth and importance of political party support, and suggests that the failure of the PSR's supporters to mobilise concertedly against the Bolshevik regime lay partly in their basic conception of what support of a political party entailed. For ordinary working people, the political party was perceived as a receptacle and implementer of popular demands. It was not a 'precious' institution to be defended, but rather a vehicle for popular sentiment.

The most important theme to emerge from this study was the localism of politics, especially in the countryside, and the importance of local leaders over national leaders in defining the party's aims and objectives. The selection of these local leaders by their peers was determined primarily by their local background and occupational category. *Trudiashchiisia*, that is, people who carried out manual labour to sustain themselves, were accepted by peasant and worker communities as their representatives. Local leaders played a key role in the defining of party orthodoxy in the localities, and personified the PSR for local supporters. Political complexity was swept aside by localism and class affiliations. Peasant use of *samosud* and violence within their communities demonstrated that the villages became progressively more insular and looked within themselves for solutions to the problems and challenges they faced in 1917. This rejection of 'outsiders' and heightening of insularity in village life is important in understanding the autonomous direction taken by many rural communities in the course of 1917, and explains the crisis in governing the villages.

This selection of working local people to be political leaders in the villages had a massive impact on the effectiveness of PSR organisation. The intelligentsia generally, and women in particular, were excluded from village life. Work on the make-up of party membership has shown that the intelligentsia generally and women in particular made up a large part of the PSR's active party workers prior to 1917. These educated individuals, who were perhaps best placed to promulgate PSR politics, were excluded from village life. This exclusion enabled the lower ranks of the party's activists, who may not have played such an active role in the party prior to 1917, and who certainly were not as well versed in the party's theoretical standpoints, to take a leading role in defining the party's policy and image in the villages. This ensured that the PSR was responsive to the needs of its mass support and represented popular political positions, but increasingly distanced the party from the policies which were pursued by its leaders in Petrograd. Splits within the party nationally and in regional organisations enabled the party to embrace an even wider span of popular opinion, and further blurred any understanding of what party 'orthodoxy' might be. The villages compounded their isolation from the national political process by their exclusion of 'outsiders', whilst at the same time pursuing their own political agenda. Despite the significance of the political party in 1917's political life, many of those best placed to represent the party in the villages were systematically excluded and replaced by those individuals who best represented local understandings of the role of the political party.

Coalition politics failed to resolve key issues for the most politically powerful and vocal groups in society, factory workers and soldiers. For the soldiers, the key issue was progress towards peace and demobilisation, while for workers the issues lay in working conditions and job security. The political party was an institution of key importance in the garrisons and the factories during 1917. Many workers and soldiers chose the PSR to be their representative at the outset of revolution, but the inability of political rhetoric to address workers' and soldiers' key issues left them feeling alienated from the political process generally and the PSR in particular. This disenfranchisement of soldiers and workers was enormously damaging for the cause of coalition politics, and was central in the Bolsheviks' eventual success in seizing power. The soldiers supported the Bolsheviks as the party which offered peace, but did not necessarily embrace Bolshevik formulae of state power.

Could the moderate socialist coalitionists have blunted the failings of political rhetoric with more tangible improvements for workers and soldiers? Options for the coalition government on honourable peace were limited, but some concessions to the spirit of anti-war feeling may have appeased the resentful soldiers and rallied the socialist party faithful. Coalition with the Constitutional Democrat Party ultimately crippled the moderate socialists by tying them to a dogged defence of private property. More radical interim measures on the land question, by effectively transferring all land into the hands of land committees, and proposals for state acquisition of factories threatened with closure, could conceivably have salvaged some credibility for the moderate socialists. Severance of ties with the Constitutional Democrat Party would have strengthened the moderate socialists' popular position further. The failure of the Nizhnii Novgorod moderate socialists to operate effectively as a coalition force, even when faced with a challenge for power from the Bolsheviks and an atmosphere of rising panic in the *guberniia*, indicates however that their political inexperience and gauche clutching to party dogma crippled them as effective political allies despite their many shared goals.

This study makes a significant contribution to the existing literature on 1917. It is the first study to be devoted to grassroots PSR politics during 1917, and demonstrates that political possibilities were structured in 1917 by popular movements, whilst highlighting the importance of popular understandings of the revolution and of political systems. Far from an elite few conducting the path of the revolution, the small group of intellectuals who dominated the high political scene of 1917 had their political alternatives dictated by the desires and demands of ordinary workers, soldiers and

peasants. This thesis's regional focus on Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia* forms an important contribution to current historiography on the path of revolution in the provinces.¹

Though in many respects following in the path set by Donald Raleigh's pioneering study of Saratov during 1917, the focus on the PSR within Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia* ensures that the Bolshevik-centric view of Raleigh's work is avoided.² The ways in which local individuals responded to the developing situation in 1917, and the ways in which issues were prioritised in Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia* present a peephole into that year of revolution, which was removed yet inextricably connected with the events in Russia's capitals.

A massive range of further avenues of study are opened up by this thesis. Firstly, the material available on how political parties were perceived in 1917 was only scratched by this study. In depth analysis of ordinary people's understandings of political parties and systems will provide a solid foundation on which to consider political activity in 1917. Study of a larger sample of membership groups, concentrating on Constituent Assembly candidates and deputies in the workers', soldiers' and peasants' Soviets will enable more definitive comment to be made of the social background and temper of PSR local leadership, and a better understanding formed of the divisions within the party. Consideration here of the role of prison and exile in forming members' political attitudes asked many more questions than it could answer. An extensive survey of political prisoners and their experiences of community and labour in prison and exile will provide a fascinating insight into the mentality of local political leaders in 1917. In Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia*, an exploration of the interactions between workers, soldiers, peasants and townspeople in 1917 will deepen the picture so far presented of the province's life and problems in 1917. Finally, studies of neighbouring provinces and comparative assessment of these provinces will enable a much richer and more complete perspective to be found of the politics of provincial Russia in 1917.

¹ See O. Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution* (Oxford, 1989) and D. Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga: 1917 in Saratov* (New York, 1986). A number of articles have been published more recently dealing with revolution in the provinces; H. Phillips on Tver, M. Hickey on Smolensk, A. Khalid on Turkestan, R.A. Pierce on Tashkent, and E-M. Stolberg on Siberia.

² Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga*. Mike Hickey's recent work on Smolensk has also focused on moderate socialist activity during 1917. See M. Hickey, 'The Rise and Fall of Smolensk's Moderate Socialists: The Politics of Class and the Rhetoric of Crisis in 1917' in D.J. Raleigh (ed.), *Provincial Landscapes: Local Dimensions of Soviet Power, 1917-1953* (Pittsburg, forthcoming in 2001)

Appendices

APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY OF RUSSIAN TERMS USED.

Geographical divisions. (largest to smallest)

Raion - region, used in former SSSR as designation of administrative division.

Guberniia- province

Uezd - administrative unit.

Volost - Smallest administrative division in tsarist Russia.

Political Institutions mentioned

State Duma- The elected lower house of Russian parliament, which was elected four times by a restricted franchise between 1906 and 1917.

Provisional Government – Interim government formed on 3rd March from members of the fourth State Duma. It was reformed four times, on 5th May, 25th July, 1st September, and 25th September.

Soviets – ‘Councils’ which were formed at a range of levels in Russian society, primarily among soldiers, peasants and workers. In many towns the soldiers’ and workers’ Soviets sat together. They were elected by direct democracy, and many changed in constitution repeatedly through 1917. The most prominent of the Soviets was the Petrograd Soviet of workers’ and soldiers’ deputies.

Town Duma –Prior to 1917, these town Dumas were elected councils which existed in medium sized and large towns. In 1917, they were re-elected on democratic principles, and played a large part in administering the towns.

Constituent Assembly- Russia’s first democratically elected assembly. Elections began on 12th November 1917, and it convened on 5th January 1918. It was dissolved by Lenin after only one day.

Democratic Conference This met between 14th and 22nd September 1917, and was established in the wake of the Kornilov affair.

Preparliament – A representative body established by Kerensky in order to give the third coalition government in September and October 1917 some degree of legitimacy. It opened on 7th October, and aimed to provide a constitutional check on the coalition government until the Constituent Assembly was formed. Its final session recorded a vote of no confidence in Kerensky’s government, but was consigned to irrelevance by the Bolshevik seizure of power on 25th October 1917.

Velikii Krestianskii Soiuz – ‘Great Peasants’ Union’, set up at the initiative of a congress of peasant delegates held in Moscow in May 1905. The union first met on 31st July 1905, and was attended by delegates from 22 *guberniia*. A second congress was held in November 1905, with 187 delegates. It demanded radical land reform, and supported peasant direct action. It was suppressed in 1906, though its political aspirations were represented by the Trudovik and SR delegates in the State Duma.

Vserossiskii Tsentralnyi Ispol’nitelnyi Komitet Sovietov - All Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets, which sat from June up till the Bolshevik seizure of power on 25th October 1917, with the role of co-ordinating and directing the functioning of all branches of the Soviet systems which came into being after the February revolution.

Vserossiskii Sobor - All Russian Council.

Obshchiizavodskii sobranie – General factory meeting, which included representatives from all shops and sections of the factory, including employees' sections, and the political parties.

Stavka – army headquarters

Obshchestvo- commune, association, society, company. In the context of village life, refers to the communal land holding and living association which dominated many villages' economic and social life.

Skhod- gathering, assembly; particularly used in connection with village meetings which made communal decisions.

Zemstvo- elective district council, a body established in 1864 by the administrative reforms of Alexander II, and which the Provisional Government tried to use as a basis for democratically elected local government in the countryside. Existed at *volost* and *uezd* levels.

Uprava- Control, office, board, administration.

Miscellaneous

'*Edinstvo*' - 'unity' (the name taken by the united Social Democrat group)

Batiushka- father (used as affectionate mode of address to priest)

Batrak - farm labourer

Frontoviki - front line soldier

Katorga- hard labour prison term

Khozheniie v Narod- 'Going to the People'; phrase used to describe the attempts of 1870's populists to live among the peasantry, and to educate and propagandise them.

Narodnik- populist

Obrok - quit rent

Okhrana - Tsarist secret police

Pomeshchik - Landowner

Pomoch - mutual aid afforded one another by villagers.

Prishlyi - 'Just arrived', used to describe town or factory workers who had recently come from the countryside, or more generally for those workers who maintained close links with their village and were unskilled. Considered to be the antithesis of the skilled conscious worker which was described in social democratic parlance as proletariat.

Pud - Russian measure of weight, equivalent to 16.38 kilograms.

Samosud- mob law; the pseudo legal decisions enforced by violence or threats of violence, seen in the Russian countryside, towns, and factories in 1917.

Trudiashchiisia - Literally, working people. Referred to those, like peasants and factory workers, who sustained themselves with their own labour, and did not employ others.

Zemlia I Volia – 'Land and Freedom', a secret society formed in 1876 by Mark Natanson, one of the PSR's founder members, and A.D. Mikhailov. This society aimed

to prepare a peasant rising against the government by means of propaganda and terror. The terrorist group *Narodnaia Volia* ('People's Will') split from it in 1879. *Narodnaia Volia* was active between 1879 and 1881, and assassinated a number of government figures, including Alexander II. Many of its participants became PSR members.

Zemliachestva - Association of individuals from the same geographical area, often formed in factories in big capital cities, but also in prisons.

APPENDIX 2: CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY ELECTION RESULTS.Constituent Assembly Election Results, by *guberniia* (% of participants)¹

| <i>Guberniia</i> | PSR | Bolshevik | Menshevik | Other socialist | Kadet | other non socialist | Muslim | Other nationalist |
|------------------|-----|-----------|-----------|-----------------|-------|---------------------|--------|-------------------|
| Nizhegorodskaiia | 54 | 23 | 1 | 0.5 | 6 | 11 | | |
| Tambov | 71 | 20.5 | 2 | 0.5 | 4 | 1 | 0.5 | |
| Penza | 81 | 9 | 1 | 1 | 4 | | 5 | |
| Simbirsk | 64 | 13 | 1 | 8 | 3 | | 10.5 | |
| Kazan | 30 | 6 | 0.5 | 1.5 | 4 | 2 | 29.5 | 26 |

Constituent Assembly Election Results, by town (% of participants)²

| Town | PSR | Bolshevik | Kadet |
|------------------|-----|-----------|-------|
| Nizhnii Novgorod | 14 | 23 | 32 |
| Tambov | 17 | 28 | 27 |
| Penza | 48 | 16 | 25 |
| Simbirsk | 36 | 19 | 21 |
| Kazan | 21 | 26 | 25 |

Constituent Assembly Election Results, by garrison (% of participants)³

| Garrison | PSR | Bolshevik | Kadet |
|------------------|-----|-----------|-------|
| Nizhnii Novgorod | 21 | 67 | 7 |
| Tambov | 20 | 68 | 4 |
| Penza | 48 | 15 | 25 |
| Simbirsk | 55 | 29 | 2 |
| Kazan | 36 | 40 | 6 |

¹ Statistics from O Radkey, *Russia Goes to the Polls* (Ithaca, 1989).

² Statistics from P.A. Golub et al. (ed.) *Velikaia Oktiabr'skaia Sotsialisticheskaia Revoliutsiia-Entsiklopediia* (Moscow, 1987), p. 550. These figures are unfortunately rather simplified- the inclusion of only three parties in the reckoning means that in Kazan, for example, where Radkey's more detailed figures demonstrate significant support for Muslim and Nationalist parties, the figures are not particularly revealing.

³ Statistics from Golub, *Velikaia Oktiabr'skaia*, p. 550. (See footnote two). Note too that Radkey was unable to offer any separate statistics on garrison voting behaviour. The source for these statistics needs verification.

APPENDIX 3: PSR SONG

As copied from *Simbirskaiia narodnaia gazeta*, no. 25, 2nd July 1917, p. 4
(Dual text is provided so as not to prejudice the reader by my uncouth translation.)

| | |
|--|--|
| Schaste Naroda- Zemlia i svoboda, | Happiness of the people is land and freedom, |
| Vsia dlia Naroda i cherez narod! | All for the people and by the people! |
| Schaste ne svalitsia k nam s nesvobodna, | Happiness will not come to you without freedom |
| Tol'ko s borboi eto schaste priidet. | Only with struggle will this happiness come. |
| S vernoj goriachei v velikoe delo, | With true passion in this great business, |
| Radi kotorago vse otdadit, | Joy will be given to all those, |
| Druzno po-prezhnemu, bor'bo i smelu, | Struggling as before with comradeship and courage, |
| Budet borot'sia poka pobedit'. | There will be struggle then victory. |

Chorus

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Zemliu i voliu, | Land and freedom, |
| Ravnuio doliu, | Equal shares, |
| Brat'iam edinoi sem'i trudovoi | A united brotherhood of labouring family, |
| Zemliu i voliu, | Land and freedom, |
| Slavnuio doliu, | Glorious shares |
| Mui otvoiuem upornoi borboi. | We will win with persistent struggle. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Vsekh, kto stradaet v tiskakh kapitala, | All who suffer in the clutches of capital, |
| Vsekh, kogo davit proklatii kuliak, | All who are choked by damned kulaks, |
| Mui prizivaem na put ideala, | We call on the ideal path, |
| Gde chelovek cheloveku ne vrag. | Where men are not enemies. |
| Bol'noe bratstvo, semia trudovaia, | Sick brotherhood, labouring family, |
| Vot chelovechestva budushii stroi. | There will be mankind in the future state. |
| Vsekh v etu družnuio semiu szivaia, | All will be united in this comradesly family, |
| Mui prizivaem idti za soboi. | We call on you to go for yourself. |

(Chorus repeats)

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Sbrosiv tiazheloe igo tsarizma, | Throwing off the heavy yoke of tsarism, |
| Mui ne svorotim na otdikh-prival, | We won't turn aside in rest, |
| Blizko vidneetsia sotsializma, | Socialism comes close, |
| V zhizne pretvorenni sviatoi ideal. | Put this bright ideal into practice. |
| Brat'ia, ne dolgo idti ostaetsia, | Brothers, there is not long to wait, |
| Tol'ko ostalsia odin perekhod. | Only one transition remains. |
| Pomnite: schaste v bor'be obretetsia | Understand: Happiness will be got in struggle |
| Druzno zhe, bratia, vpered i vpered! | Comradely, brothers, forward and forward! |

(Chorus repeats)

APPENDIX 4: LIST OF *POLITKATORZHAN* OCCUPATIONS, BY CATEGORY.

NB. These categorisations are difficult in places, and can certainly be questioned, since the very act of categorisation makes a value judgement upon the occupation; who is to say whether a masseur, for example, is a skilled worker, an unskilled worker or a white collar worker? Ultimately, I do not defend all my value judgements unreservedly here, but all the categories have been maintained consistently, which is the main consideration for comparative purposes.

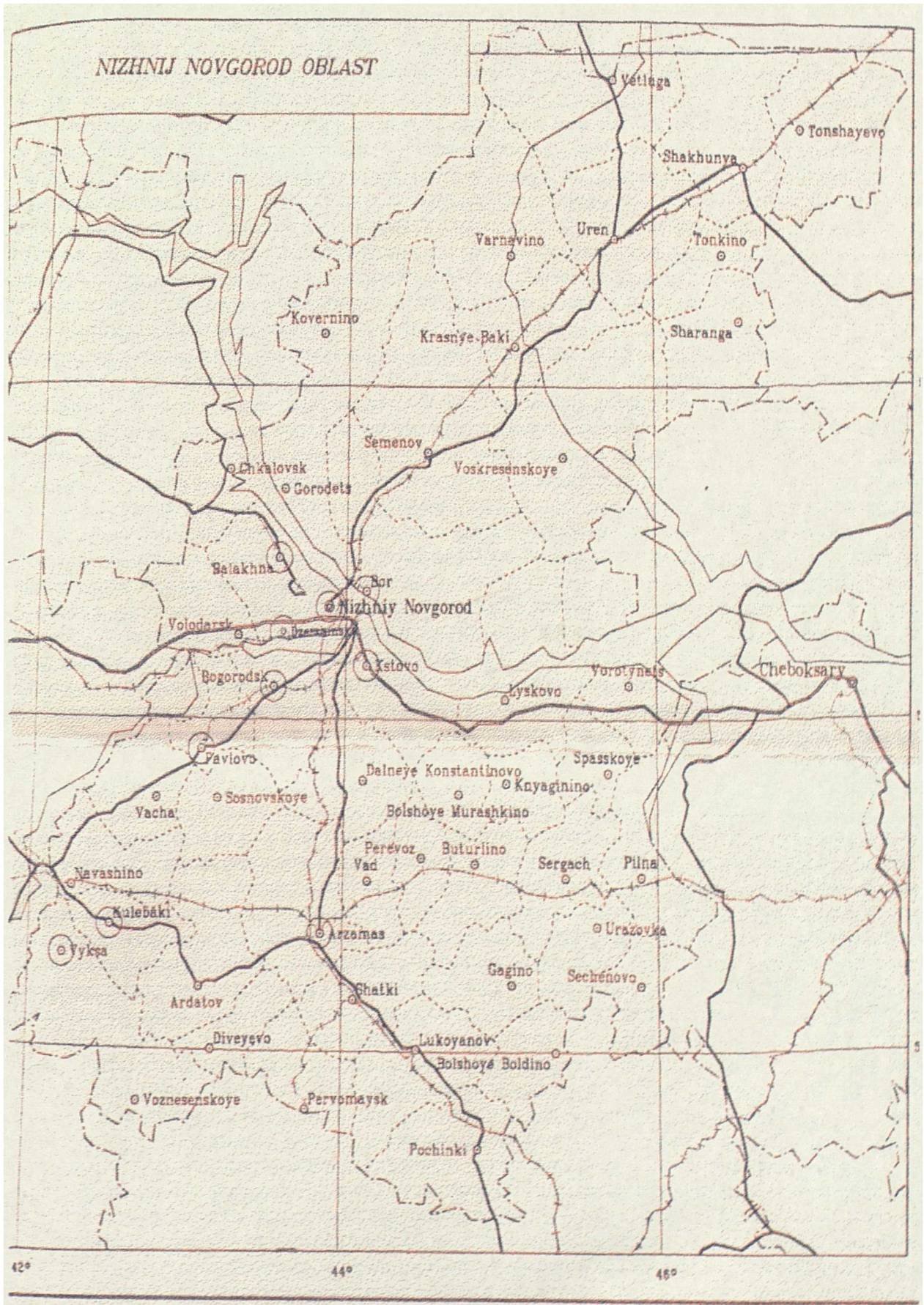
| | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| <u>Clergy</u> | Singer | Tailor |
| Deacon | Small landowner | Tanner |
| Priest | Technician | Telegrapher |
| | Trader | Turner |
| | Writer | Typesetter |
| | | Watchmaker |
| <u>Education</u> | <u>Peasant</u> | Weaver |
| Lecturer | Batrak | |
| Teacher | Fisherman | <u>Unskilled worker</u> |
| | Herdsman | Cabbie |
| <u>Medical</u> | Peasant | Carter |
| Dentist | | Coachman |
| Doctor | <u>Skilled worker</u> | Docker |
| Medical assistant | Baker | Greaser |
| Midwife | Blacksmith | Miner |
| | Builder | Porter |
| <u>Merchant</u> | Carpenter | Stoker |
| Junk dealer | Carver | Washerwoman |
| Merchant | Chimney sweep | Watchman |
| | Cook | Worker |
| <u>Military</u> | Cooper | |
| Admiral | Craftsman | <u>White collar</u> |
| Captain | Decorator | Accountant |
| Cossack | Dressmaker | Agronomist |
| Officer | Electrician | Arbitrator |
| Soldier | Fitter | Bookbinder |
| | Foreman | Clerk |
| <u>Nobility</u> | Forester | Copyist |
| Landowner | Foundry man | Employee |
| | Gardener | Estate manager |
| <u>Other Intelligentsia</u> | Joiner | Land manager |
| Artist | Machinist | Masseur |
| Attorney | Mason | Photograph re-toucher |
| Chemist | Mechanic | Scribe |
| Conductor | Metal worker | Statistician |
| Draughtsman | Milliner | |
| Engineer | Painter | |
| Judge | Pattern maker | |
| Jurist | Plasterer | |
| Land surveyor | Printer | |
| Librarian | Roofer | |
| Literary man | Saddler | |
| Mayor | Sailor | |
| Musician | Shoemaker | |
| Navigator | Stove repairer | |
| Pharmacist | | |

APPENDIX 5. MAP OF EUROPEAN RUSSIA



APPENDIX 6: MAP OF NIZHEGORODSKAIA GUBERNIIA

(taken from *Russian Regional Atlas* (Washington, Moscow, 1998), p. 136



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