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THE HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY OF
THE RUSSIAN WORKER-REVOLUTIONARIES OF
THE 1870s

(Two volumes)

Jeff R. Meadowcroft

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ABSTRACT

On the 10th of March 1877, the radical worker Pëtr Alekseev gave his speech at the ‘Trial of Fifty,’ contributing to the social-revolutionary movement one of the founding documents in Russia’s fledgling, working-class history. In the decades that followed, many others of the workers’ circles of the 1870s would compose and contribute their own stories to this revolutionary, ‘workers’ history.’ It was understood that, for workers to ‘speak for themselves’ was one step towards a workers’ revolution, carried out by and for the working people. The ‘workers’ voice’ had been borne by Alekseev in 1877, and was shared by worker-memoirists and other worker-writers through the early twentieth century. Individual workers were called represent, embody, testify to and speak for the mass, or the working-class as a whole. Thus, the notion of the ‘workers’ voice’ tied together the propaganda, the historiography, and the philosophy of the Russian social-revolutionary movement. A study of the ‘workers’ voice’ in history and historiography reveals the connections between these areas of revolutionary thought and practice, and provides a better understanding of the role of *individual* workers - as activists and as writers - in the Russian socialist movement.

Revolutionary historiography developed alongside and in concert with political theories of the social revolution, mass action, social law and social determination, individuality, and consciousness. For a small number of radical democrats-turned-‘rebels,’ anarchists, and social-revolutionaries – most, if not all, born into the educated elite, a few to the families of the high, landed nobility - adherence to the *narodnik* tenet that ‘the emancipation of the working class should be conquered by workers’ themselves’ made their own, committed or conscious choice of the ‘cause’ over the existing system of things marginal to the historical and social forces driving Russia towards revolution. The ‘going to the people’ movement was aimed at bringing ‘workers themselves’ into their movement. By developing certain working people into carriers of the socialist message, the movement hitherto limited to students, publicists, and the wayward sons and daughters of state officials, merchants and clergymen would become the ‘a working-class matter.’ Thus, a special place was allotted to the ‘self-educated’ or ‘self-developed’ workers who, like the self-styled ‘intelligentsia,’ were consciously committed, synthesising ‘consciousness’ with their own class experience and the social necessity behind it. The political and historical valorisation of the ‘workers’ voice’ extended this idea into the documentation and the history of the popular and workers’ movements. Just as the workers would have to ‘emancipate themselves,’ so too would they *speak for themselves* and *write their own history*. This history, it was thought, would eventually belong to the workers by right. Thus, historical writing and the documentation of a workers’ history, informed by judgments regarding individuality, society, class, history, and their relationships, became politically significant for the revolutionary movement as working people began to enter it and ‘speak for themselves.’

Late in the nineteenth century, the worker-revolutionaries of the 1870s began to write their own memoirs of events. Entering the documentary record as individuals, it was their task to testify to working-class experience. Thus, at the point where working people became ‘individuals’ for history and for future historians, marking themselves as different from the mass by leaving *their own* writings, and stories, and memoirs, they were also tied inextricably to a political viewpoint that identified every and any worker as practically identical. As political figures, ‘conscious’ radicals who had taken responsibility for their own actions, their lives were historically definite; as ‘working men,’ sharing in a victimhood that was common to millions, their lives were indefinite, unhistorical, alienated. In the attempt to explain one part of their lives by the other, in the juxtaposition of class experience with political experience, in the light of a political function that had workers become *witnesses* rather than *writers*, the worker-revolutionaries reproduced in their political and historical writings the class categories that their radicalism had contradicted. The awkward position of worker-*intelligent* – in one half unique, conscious, definite, historical, active, by the other: plural, instinctive, indefinite, and passive – was stamped into ‘workers’ writings.’

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Preface

On the 10th of March 1877, the radical worker Pëtr Alekseev gave his speech at the ‘Trial of Fifty,’ contributing to the social-revolutionary movement not only the heroic image of a worker’s commitment to the popular cause, but also one of the founding documents in Russia’s fledgling, working-class history. In the decades that followed, many others of the workers’ circles of the 1870s would compose and contribute their own stories to this revolutionary, ‘workers’ history.’ It was understood that, for workers to ‘speak for themselves’ was one step towards a workers’ revolution, carried out by and for the working people. The ‘workers’ voice’ had been borne by Alekseev in 1877, and was shared by worker-memoirists and other worker-writers through the early twentieth century. Individual workers were called upon to represent, embody, testify to and speak for the mass, or the working-class as a whole. Thus, the notion of the ‘workers’ voice’ ties together the propaganda, the historiography, and the philosophy of the Russian social-revolutionary movement. A study of the ‘workers’ voice’ in history and historiography reveals the connections between these areas of revolutionary thought and practice, and provides a better understanding of the role of *individual* workers - as activists and as writers - in the Russian socialist movement.

Revolutionary historiography developed alongside and in concert with political theories of the social revolution (*revoliutsiia*), mass action, social law and social determination, individuality, and consciousness. The question of the ‘role of the individual in history’ was a particularly difficult one for the self-consciously ‘upper class’ radicals of the 1860s and early 1870s, and later worked its way into the historical (especially autobiographical) writing published by the revolutionaries between the 1880s and the 1900s. For a small number of radical democrats-turned-‘rebels’ (*buntary*), anarchists, and social-revolutionaries – most, if not all, born into the educated elite, many to the families of the landed nobility - adherence to the *narodnik* tenet that ‘the emancipation of the working class should be conquered by workers’ themselves’ made their own, committed or conscious choice of the ‘cause’ over the existing system of things marginal to the historical and social forces driving Russia towards revolution. The ‘going to the people’ movement (*dvizhenie idti v narod; khozhdenie v narod*) was aimed at bringing ‘workers themselves’ (peasants and peasant-workers in the cities) into this movement. By developing

certain working people into carriers of the socialist message, the movement hitherto limited to students, publicists, and the wayward sons and daughters of state officials, merchants and clergymen would become a 'working-class matter' (*delo samogo rabocheho klassa*). Thus, a special place was allotted to the 'self-educated' or 'self-developed' workers who, like the self-styled 'intelligentsia,' were consciously committed, synthesising consciousness with their own class experience and the social necessity behind it. That the consciousness of the 'conscious worker' was an expression both of class experience or class interests (workers' conditions lead to radicalism) *and* an expression of individual self-development was a popular idea among socialist thinkers of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The political and historical valorisation of the 'workers' voice' extended this synthesis of necessity and contingency into the documentation and the history of the popular and workers' movements. Just as the workers would have to 'emancipate themselves,' so too would they *speak for themselves* and *write their own history*. This history, it was thought, would eventually 'belong to the workers by right.'¹ Thus, historical writing and the documentation of a workers' history, informed by judgements regarding individuality, society, class, history, and their relationships, became politically significant for the revolutionary movement as working people began to enter it and 'speak for themselves.'

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, revolutionaries were intimately involved in celebrating, mythologizing, documenting and describing their own history and that of the Russian working class. After Georgi Plekhanov's turn to Marxism in the 1880s and the publication in 1890-2 of his memoir, *Russkii rabochii v revoliutsionnom dvizhenii* (*The Russian Worker in the Revolutionary Movement*, hereafter *Russkii rabochii*), detailing the workers' role in the revolutionary movement, the wider social-revolutionary historiography turned its attention back to the radical workers of the 1870s. Autobiographers wrote their own accounts of 'going to the people' in 1871-4, in 1875, and 1876-9. Prominent activists and publicists (V. Burstev, V. Bazilevskii, P. Lavrov, Plekhanov) were involved in the collection of obscure and rare materials, as well as having others contribute pieces to the movement's growing archive. Late in the nineteenth century (sometime in the 1890s), the worker-revolutionaries of the 1870s began to write their own memoirs of events: Vasilli Gerasimov first (1891 or 1892), then a few veterans of the workers' group of *Narodnaia Volia*. Some were published (often, anonymously)

¹ G. V. Plekhanov, 'Predislovie k rechi Alekseeva,' *Sochineniia*, D. Riazanov (ed.), (24 vols.), (Moscow, 1923-27), vol 3, p. 11

before 1905 or very shortly after. Most were collected and published after 1917. The role allotted to Alekseev in 1877 – to embody the class suffering otherwise dispersed, fragmented and invisible and thereby make it visible – was then taken on by worker-writers as they looked back on their own lives as working people and as radicals. Entering the documentary record as individuals, it was their task to testify to working-class experience. Thus, at the point where working people became ‘individuals’ for history and for future historians, marking themselves as different from the mass by leaving *their own* writings, and stories, and memoirs, they were also tied inextricably to a political viewpoint that identified every and any worker as practically identical. As political figures - ‘conscious’ radicals who had taken responsibility for their own actions - their lives were historically definite; as ‘working men,’ sharing in a victimhood that was common to millions, their lives were indefinite, unhistorical, alienated. In the attempt to explain one part of their lives by the other, in the juxtaposition of class experience with political experience, in the light of a political function that had workers become *witnesses* rather than *writers*, the worker-revolutionaries reproduced in their political and historical writings the class categories that their radicalism had contradicted. The awkward position of worker-*intelligent* – in one half unique, conscious, definite, historical, active, by the other half plural, instinctive, indefinite, and passive – was stamped into the structure and content of ‘workers’ writings.’ It is, therefore, legitimate to talk about ‘(Russian) workers’ writings’ - not because there is any necessary connection between the form and content of a document or ‘text’ and the social class or class identity of its author, but because, in certain political and historical writings, authors identified as working class either looked upon and wrote about their own lives (or large parts of them) as if they were external to it, or looked upon their own memories as material for a ‘working-class history.’ In so far as workers wrote to ‘testify’ or act as historical witnesses, their individuality was only of the kind posited by writing or speaking. Thus, beneath disparate texts and across decades of separation, a common thread links one ‘worker’s voice’ to another: the notion of the workers’ right to speak for their class, which was itself an extension from doctrine to propaganda to history of the central tenet of social-revolutionary (including ‘Populist’ and ‘Marxist’) ideology from the 1860s to the 1920s. It is this connection that the following work explores.

This is not a history of the early, Russian worker-revolutionaries. Several fine histories of ‘going to the people’ movement of the 1870s and of the radical workers involved in it have

already been written in Russian and in English.² Instead, this work describes and explains the origins and development of social-revolutionary historiography in relation to the lives and writings of the radical workers of the 1870s, with special attention paid to the speech of Pëtr Alekseev in 1877 and the memoirs of his comrades from the workers' circles of 1872-4 and 1875-6. In the first chapter, I tell Alekseev's story, exploring the problem of workers' writings, and suggesting that a special kind of workers' individuality – that of the 'working class martyr' and the 'working-class witness' – was passed on from the specific political conjuncture of 1877-8 into the historiography of the revolutionary movement, of the Russian working class and, from there, into workers' own writings. In the second chapter, I examine the complex relations between *narodnik* ideology, autocratic power and the radicalisation of workers' circles in St. Petersburg and Moscow. The origins of the special 'workers' individuality' are traced to debates about *lichnost'* (personality; individuality) in the 1830s and 1840s, the turn of the radical *intelligenty* to the *narod* and to *social*-revolutionism (narodism) in the 1860s and 1870s, and the clash of the radical and workers' circles with the Russian government between 1874 and 1878. In the third and fourth chapters, I examine revolutionary historiography from 1876 to the 1917 revolutions, and historical accounts and analyses of the early worker-revolutionaries and their writings from 1917 to present. I show that, as the ideologically-charged notion of the martyr-witness has died away, it has been replaced with historical analyses that reproduce either the autocratic judgement that 'speaking workers' were not workers, or (in idealised form) the social-revolutionary identification of particular workers' representations of class with class itself. In the conclusions, I argue that workers' writings – including Alekseev's speech and the workers' memoirs analysed beforehand - can still be understood as *criticisms* of a class system, despite being composed within historiographical and ideological frameworks that valorised class.

² Venturi's account of the 'working-class movement' in the 1860s and 1870s in *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia*, translated by F. Haskell (London, 1960), is still one of the most detailed in the literature (see p.507-557). Venturi's analysis of 'going to the people' has served as a basic reference point for this author (see p. 469-708). Zelnik's two articles, 'Populists and Workers: The First Encounter between Populist Students and Industrial Workers in St. Petersburg, 1871-74,' *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Oct., 1972) and 'Workers and Intelligentsia in the 1870s: the Politics of Sociability,' *Workers and Intelligentsia in Late Imperial Russia: Realities, Representations, Reflections*, (Berkeley, 1999). R. Zelnik (ed.), give a detailed description and social analysis of 'going to the people' in the 1870s; Sh. M. Levin's 'Kruzhok chaikovtsev i propaganda sredi peterburgskikh rabochikh v nachale 1870-kh g.g,' *Katorga i Ssylka* 12/61, 1929, sets out the basic framework of events and personalities that would be built upon in Zelnik's articles; E. A. Korol'chuk's *Severnnyi Soiuz Russkikh Rabochikh i Revoliutsionnoe rabochee dvizhenie 70-kh godov XIX v. v Peterburge* (Leningrad, 1946) is still the best documented history of workers' radicalisation in St. Petersburg in the 1870s. B. S. Itenburg's *Dvizhenie revoliutsionnogo nardonichestva: kruzhki i 'khozhenie v narod' v 70-kh godov XIX veke* (Moscow, 1965) is the best existing account in Russia of the early waves of the 'going to the people' movement and its ideological roots.

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This thesis has been long in the making, and many people have helped me along the way. I must first acknowledge that the primary research for this thesis (including a year spent in Moscow) was made possible by a three-year stipend and a generous overseas research allowance from the Arts and Humanities Research Council. My supervisor, Geoff Swain, has been the voice of reason, sympathy and encouragement for over five years. He has been patient and understanding, and listened to more than his fair share of complaints and worries. He always believed in the thesis and its author, though there were many reasons to doubt both. It couldn't have been done without him. The thesis was conceived in 2004-5, while I was studying for an MPhil at CEES at Glasgow University. James D. White taught me the Russian revolutions, Marx, the Soviet Union, a way of doing history, and was always willing to chat about any of the above, or pretty much anything else. His influence is everywhere in what follows; I hope he doesn't mind. Thanks to Andrei Rogachevsky, who taught me to read Russian during the MPhil. While I was planning the thesis, Bob McKean and Iain Lauchlan, then at Stirling University, very kindly spent a day with me discussing Russian workers, Bolshevism, source materials, and other things. Their generosity and enthusiasm were an inspiration. At CEES, David Smith was extremely supportive of my application to the AHRC, and spent several months helping to prepare it. It was only with David's help that I managed to get funding or survive the process of applying for it. Thanks to Evan Mawdsley who, before his retirement from the Department of History at Glasgow, agreed to second-supervise the thesis. His help in the early stages was most useful. Thanks to Terry Cox at CEES for early first supervision of the thesis. Here was a much needed crash course in all the stuff I hadn't read yet, but should have, as well as a lesson in being realistic. Being realistic didn't stick, but the reading did. A big thank you must go to Maggie Baister at CEES who, despite never having any time, always makes time for people.

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Lastly, and most of all, my thanks and my love go to Katherine, Ewan and Lily. This is dedicated to them.

Author's declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature _____

Jeffrey R. Meadowcroft (30th September, 2011)

Abbreviations

I have made use of a large number of Soviet-era (and a few post-Soviet) documentary collections, references to which are, from the outset, abbreviated in the footnotes. If a documentary collection is mentioned in the main text, the short title of the book, volume, and series will be given first, followed by the standard abbreviation thereafter. For the reader's convenience, I have followed the informal, but now more or less conventional abbreviations used for the better-known collections (for instance, *RD*; *RN* and *KD*). These collections are also listed in the bibliography.

Agitatsionnaia Literatura: *Agitatsionnaia literatura russkikh revoliutsionnikh narodnikov: potaennie proizvedeniia 1873-1875 gg.*, V. G. Bazanov (ed.), (Leningrad, 1970).

Arkhiv ZiV/NV: *Arkhiv 'Zemli i Voli' i 'Narodnoi Voli'*, S. N. Valk (ed.), (Moscow, 1930).

GP 1: *Gosudarstvennyia Prestupleniia v Rossii v XIX veke, tom I: 1825-1876*, B. Bazilevskii (ed.), (St. Petersburg, [1906]).

GP 2: *Gosudarstvennyia Prestupleniia v Rossii v XIX veke, tom II: 1877*, B. Bazilevskii (ed.), (Rostov-on-Don, [1906]).

GP 3: *Gosudarstvennyia Prestupleniia v Rossii v XIX veke, tom III: Protsess 193-kh*, B. Bazilevskii (ed.), (St. Petersburg, [1906]).

KKR: *Konets Krepostnichestva v Rossii: Dokumenty, pis'ma, memuary, stat'i*, V. A. Fedorov (ed.), (Moscow, 1994).

KD: 1857-61: *Krest'ianskoe Dvizhenie v Rossii v 1857- Mai 1861: Sbornik dokumentov*, S. B. Okun' and K. V. Sivkov (eds.), (Moscow, 1963).

KD: 1861-69: *Krest'ianskoe Dvizhenie v Rossii v 1861-1869: Sbornik dokumentov*, L. M. Ivanov (ed.), (Moscow, 1964).

Lit. Partii NV: *Literatura Partii Narodnoi Voli*, B. Bazilevskii (ed.), (190- ?).

LGE: *Lavrov – gody emigratsii: Arkhivnye materialy v dvukh tomakh*, B. Sapir (ed.), vol. 2: *Ot Vpered! k gruppe starikh narodovol'tsev* (Dordrecht, 1974).

Materialy dlia istorii: *Materialy dlia istorii revolutsiionnago dvizheniia v Rossii v 60-kh gg: pervoe prelozhenie k sbornikam 'Gosudarstvennyia Prestupleniia v Rossii'*, B. Bazilevskii (ed.), (St. Petersburg, [1906]).

OKP: *Otmena Krespostnogo Prava: Doklady Ministrov vnytrennykh del o priozvednenii kres'ianskoi reformy 1861-1862*, S. N. Valk, G. M. Deich and V. M. Melamedovaia (eds.), (Moscow/ Leningrad, 1961).

- PRD:** *Pervaia rabochaia demonstratsiia v Rossii na Kazanskoi ploshadi v Peterburge (1870-1926)*, compiled by E. A. Korol'chuk, (Moscow/Leningrad, 1927).
- RD 2.i:** *Rabochee Dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke: sbornik dokumentov i materialov, tom II: 1861-1884, chast' I: 1861-1874*, A.M. Pankratova (ed.), (Moscow, 1950).
- RD 2.ii:** *Rabochee Dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke: sbornik dokumentov i materialov, tom II: 1861-1884, chast' II: 1875-1884*, A.M. Pankratova (ed.), (Moscow, 1950).
- RDSG:** *Rabochee Dvizhenie v semidestiatykh godov: sbornik arkhivnykh dokunmentov s vvodnoi stat'ei i dopolneniiami po literature* (E. A. Korol'chuk, ed.), (Leningrad, 1924).
- RN 1:** *Revoliutsionnoe Narodnichestvo 70-kh godov XIX veka, tom I: 1870-1875 gg.*, B. S. Itenburg (ed.), (Moscow, 1964).
- RRR:** *Revoliutsionnyi radikalizm v Rossii: vek deviatnadsyati*, E. L. Rudnitskaia (Moscow, 1997).
- RZh:** *Revoliutsionnaia zhurnalistika semidesiatikh godov XIX veka: pervoi prilozhenie k sbornikam 'Gosudarstvennyia Prestupleniia v Rossii v XIX veke'*, B. Bazilevskii (ed.), (Paris, 1905).
- SRT:** *Stanovlenie revoliutsionnikh traditsii peterskogo proletariata: poreformennyi period, 1861-1883*, A. N. Tsamutali (ed.), (Leningrad, 1987).
- VNP:** *V nachale puti: vospominaniia peterburgskikh rabochikh 1872-1897*, E. A. Korol'chuk (ed.), (Leningrad, 1975).
- Vp 2:** *Vpered 1873-1877: Materialy iz arkhiva Valeriana Nikolaevicha Smirnova*, B. Sapir (ed.), vol. 2: *dokumenty* (Dordrecht, 1976).
- ZSL:** *Za sto let, 1800-1896: sbornik po istorii politicheskikh i obshchestvennykh dvizhenii v Rossii*, V. Burtsev (comp.) and S. M. Kravchinskii (ed.), (London, 1897),

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1. Alekseev in Exile: The political-historical value of workers' writings

We are often surprised to meet in the flesh what we have always thought to be an abstraction... The painter is as much astonished to discover a sensibility akin to his own in a ploughman or a sailor, as we are when we come upon a delicacy of feeling worthy of our own refined sensibilities in the letter of a laundress...

- Marcel Proust, *Jean Santeuil*, p. 3

I. LETTERS FROM EXILE

In March, 1881 the worker-revolutionary and convicted state-criminal Pëtr Alekseev wrote from Siberian exile to his friend and former prison mate, P. S. Ivanovskii: 'I am sitting down to write this letter and now realise, miserably, that it is beyond my power to convey the impression Iakutsk has made upon me. Before I reached this place, before the backwoods even, and long before I met the Iakuts on the road here, my soul became heavy, I was plagued by torturous thoughts, and such questions that would break a man's head apart...My strength has left me, my energies have gone along with any light; hope has disappeared. I feel far from freedom and far from life. I haven't a single bright thought or feeling...I arrived on the Saturday and the next day was a holiday. It was early morning and the weather was clear and bright, with the sunlight playing outside. My comrade and I wrapped up as best we could and left the hut. We walked around, looking from one side to the other: wildfowl, hard scrub, and not a single living soul, the yurts were far away. It is an utterly empty place...But beautiful, very beautiful. I had the thought to go wandering, but I was soon bored of it. I returned to sit down and write a letter, but my mood was black and I pushed it away.'¹

Alekseev found himself on occasion imprisoned alongside old comrades (though guards had been ordered to keep him in isolation).² Later he was permitted to write in his cell, and to send letters to other exiles. Plagued by ailments and becoming resigned to his lack of freedom, he

¹ 'Pis'mo P. S. Ivanovskomu,' 21 March, 1885, N. S. Karzhanskii, *Moskovskii Tkach Petr Alekseev* (Moscow, 1954), p. 153-4.

² I. Bekker, 'Dolgushintsy v Novo-Bolgorodskoi tiur'me,' *Katorga i Ssylka*, no. 4 (33), 1927, p. 92; see also the Third Section report of 16 June, 1877, cited in Karzhanskii, p. 131.

worried most of all for his friends' health and strength. From Ivan Smirnov, one of St. Petersburg's first and most influential 'developed' workers (also arrested and sent to prison – though without trial - in 1878), Alekseev asked for 'uplifting news - word that your morale is strengthened, that you are stronger...that you are calm.'³ They had shared exile in Olenitskii guberniia, north of St. Petersburg, before Smirnov was moved on, in 1880, to Altsyrsk in Siberia.⁴ Alekseev was transferred from Novo-Belogorodskaia to Mtsensk political prison in the autumn of 1880. Then, in early 1881, shortly after the assassination of Aleksandr II, Alekseev was moved again, this time to Kara (now Khara-Aldan), Iakutsk *oblast*, eastern Siberia, already a regular dumping ground for political exiles. Kara was a hundred miles from Iakutsk, and beyond a comfortable walk even of Ust-Tatta, a hamlet on the riverbank where, in the Soviet period, a minor monument stood dedicated to Alekseev (a granite block with his head and torso emerging from it, apparently in reproduction of Alekseev's stand at the defendants' bench).⁵ Here, in exile, he seemed to recognise himself and his own young adulthood, before the workers' circles and the revolutionary movement of the early 1870s - the 'difficult road' he mentioned to Smirnov⁶ - had invested his life with a meaning beyond mindless, 'forced labour' (Alekseev, *Speech*, 10 March, 1877, Appx. A: 277).⁷ In moments of reflection (and now there were many), memories of his childhood lay themselves over the empty landscape like crude sketches on tracing paper. He wrote several times to Ivanovskii of his 'careless youth,' the mood of the 'festive holidays,'⁸ and the 'crowds of little boys and girls playing in the fields,'⁹ now notably absent. Scraping around in the black soil, noting a passing anxiety over the summer's poor haul of cabbage, surrounded and filled by emptiness (the word is used repeatedly), recurrent illnesses and the monotony of his suffering came to dominate Alekseev's thought.¹⁰ Nearby the Aldan River ran. In the spring and summer, 'on a few rare occasions, I see a half-naked Iakut, on a single, scrawny branch, floating across the lake, or another on the bank, catching very pathetic, very tiny fish. I would not be so sick in my heart,' Alekseev wrote, 'if,

³ 'Pis'mo I. T. Smirnovu,' 7 April, 1881, Karzhanskii, p. 151.

⁴ E. A. Korol'chuk, '*Severnyi Soiuz*,' (1945), p. 308.

⁵ A. V. Uroeva, *Velikoe prorochestvo russkogo rabochego-revoliutsionnera Petra Alekseeva* (Moscow, 1977), illustration facing p. 96. In Kara itself, near the site of Alekseev's yurt, an obelisk topped with a five-point star stood as a memorial to his time in exile (Ibid, rear illustrations section).

⁶ 'Pis'mo...Smirnovu,' 7 April, 1881, Karzhanskii, p. 151

⁷ All in-text references are to the Appendices (A-E) which follow the main text of the thesis. These are my own translations of Alekseev's speech, as well as of a selection of memoirs written by the worker-revolutionaries of the 1870s. In the text, a short title and date will be given on first reference to these documents, the appendix letter and page number thereafter. All page numbers refer to the second volume of this study. Full references to the original sources from which these translations were made are given in the Appendices.

⁸ 'Pis'mo...Ivanovskomu...', 21 March, 1885, Karzhanskii, p. 154.

⁹ 'Pis'mo...Ivanovskomu,' 7 July, 1885, *ibid*, p. 154.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 155.

after an entire life of anguish and hard labour, the people [*narod*] could live with a little humanity. And yet still they are thrown into the pigsty where, apart from the filth and stench, there is nothing.’¹¹ This was Alekseev’s last home in exile before he was murdered during a robbery in August 1891, in a wood a mile or so away from his yurt.¹²



1. The road to exile (*The Vladimirka Road*, I. Levitan, 1892)¹³

Without overt political aims, or any aims beyond the desire to convey or distract from immediate experience, the reflections of Alekseev’s letters contrast to the composed anger and radical energy of the speech for which he had become famous. Ostensibly, it was suffered experience or experience lived-through by Alekseev and those who shared his situation that concerned the speech, much as it did the exile letters of the 1880s and early 1890s. Of course, the aims and the effects of the speech were quite different. Alekseev’s ‘personal experience’ merged into images of Russia’s suffering, working people; the speech’s appeal to Alekseev’s history and class background was a political card played, with conscious skill, for political ends. Alekseev turned to Russia’s ruling elite and its ‘educated society’ in search of support, sympathy, understanding, or at least the acknowledgement that the workers’ condition

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² E. Pekarskii, ‘Rabochii Petr Alekseev (iz vospominaniia),’ *Byloe*, no. 19, 1922, p. 102-3.

¹³ ‘The Russian Art Gallery,’ online at: <http://www.russianartgallery.org/levitan/page2.htm>. Accessed 23 February, 2011.

deserved: 'We, the working millions, barely able to walk,' Alekseev said, 'are thrown to the whims of fate by our fathers and mothers. We are without education, because there are no schools, and scarcely a minute away from the forced labour with its meagre rewards...'

As ten year old boys we try to survive on the bit of bread allotted to us at work. What awaits us there? For a bit of black bread we are sold to the capitalists to do piece-work, placed under the gaze of the adults who train us with belts and sticks to do forced labour, hardly fed, wheezing from the dust and from the fetid air contaminated by a hundred diseases. We sleep where we drop, without bedding or a pillow under our heads, wrapped in rags, surrounded on all sides by every kind of parasite. In such circumstances the intellect becomes blunted and the moral senses, acquired during childhood, remain undeveloped. There is only one means of expression left to those who live [earn their day's bread] by manual labour, badly educated, isolated from any civilization, and forgotten by everyone. As children we, the workers, have to suffer under the capitalist yoke. What else are we supposed to feel towards the capitalists but hatred? Under such conditions, still young, we assume an apathy that allows us silently to endure the oppression brought by the capitalists, all the time with hatred in hearts.

The wages of the adult worker have hit rock-bottom: without a glimmer of conscience, the capitalists try by any means possible to take away his hard-earned kopek, considering it as an income. The capitalist puts the worker onto piecework, quite free to control every moment of the worker's day and all the work he is doing, even during those shifts for which he won't be paid. The workers bow before the capitalists whilst, with or without cause, they issue fines, terrified of being deprived of the hunk of bread that is all he has to show for seventeen hours' labour. Still, I won't describe all the abuses of the *fabrikanty* in detail – my words might seem inappropriate to those who don't care to know about the lives of workers and who don't see the Moscow workers who live under the power of the *fabrikanty*: Babkin, Guchkov, Butikov, Morozov and the rest....

Even the most pitiful state remains unobtainable for most workers. Seventeen hours of labour a day and you might only get 40 kopeks – it's disgusting. The prices of goods are high, but he has to divide his paltry wages between keeping his family alive and paying government taxes. No – in the present conditions of life the workers can't even satisfy the most basic human needs. For now, they are dying their slow starvation deaths, and with hardened hearts we'll watch them, until our tired hands are released from the yoke and can be held out freely to help our friends.

On the one hand this is strange, incomprehensible, and on the other: deplorable – especially now, when a man who, all his life, without fail, worked seventeen hour days for a bit of black bread, sits on the court bench, being judged.

I know something about the worker question of our brothers in the West. They differ from the Russians in many ways: there, the workers who spend every free minute and many a dark night in reading are not persecuted, as they are here. Quite the opposite. There, it is a matter of pride. They look at the Russian workers like slaves, like animals. And as how else could they see us?

Do *we* have any free time for such pursuits? Could the poor man be educated from childhood? Do we have books that are useful and accessible? From where are we supposed to learn?

Just cast your eyes over Russia popular literature. Nothing is more striking than examples of books published here for the '*narod*' ...Our people get the idea that reading is either sacred, or a distraction. I think everyone knows that in Russia the worker who reads

books will be persecuted. If he looks at a book that speaks of his situation – he’s already arrested. They’ll say right to his face: ‘Brother, you’re no worker: you read books.’ The strangest thing is: the irony of the words has been missed. In Russia, being a worker is the same as being an animal.

Gentlemen, do you really think that we, the workers - whom everyone thinks are deaf, blind, empty-headed and stupid - that we don’t know how we are cursed as idiots, idlers and drunkards? That the workers themselves would accept that they deserve this reputation? Do you really think we don’t see everywhere how others are getting rich and enjoying themselves by trampling all over us? That we can’t see or understand why we are judged so badly and from where our endless labours come from? How can others live it up without working? Where do they get their wealth from? Are we supposed to ignore the heavy burden of so-called ‘all estate’ conscription? Really, don’t we know how slowly and painfully the problems of the introduction of rural schools for the peasants were dealt with? We were supposed to think that it wasn’t possible to set them up? Really, wasn’t it miserable and hurtful to read in the papers false opinions about the hired working class? Those who have such opinions of the working people – that they feel nothing and understand nothing – are deeply mistaken. The working people, despite remaining in primitive conditions and receiving no education, look on these things as temporary evils, as it does on the government, holding onto its powers so tightly...One cannot expect anything from them.

We, the workers, wished and waited for the government to get out of its rut and provide for the peasants materially, not to place new burdens on us, to lift us out of our primitive state and take a few quick steps forward. But, alas! We look back with disappointment, and when we remind ourselves of that day, the 19th of February, a day unforgettable for the Russian people, a day when, with outstretched arms, full of joy and hope for the future, the people thanked the Tsar and the government...what do we realise? It was just a dream for us...

The peasant reform of February the 19th 1861, a reform with which we were ‘graced,’ even though it was a necessity, was not carried out for the people themselves, and did not provide for even the basic demands of the peasants. As before, we remain without even a bit of bread, with scraps of useless land, and we pass into the hands of the capitalists. If your witness – the steward of the Nosovyi factory – says that, apart from on holidays, all workers are under strict observation and cannot get through a single working day without being punished, and that all around them are a hundred such factories packed with the peasant people, living in the similar conditions – that means that we’re serfs!

If we have to ask the capitalist for a raise when he himself has [just] lowered the wages, and we’re accused of striking and exiled to Siberia – that means we’re serfs!

If we are forced by the capitalist to leave the factory and demand higher rates, because of a change in the quality of the materials or the because we are oppressed by fines and deductions, and we are accused of rioting, and forced to return to work at the end of the soldier’s bayonet, and some are called ringleaders and exiled to some distant region – that means we’re serfs!

If each of us alone can’t complain to the capitalist, and any offer to do so collectively is greeted with kicks and punches in the teeth by the first policeman we bump into on the street – that means we’re serfs!

It is obvious from all I’ve said that the Russian working people can only rely on themselves, and can’t expect any help from anyone else, except our youth *intelligenty*. They alone have offered a fraternal hand to us. They alone have shouted out, adding their voices to the cries of all the peasants of the Russian Empire. They alone sympathise [with

us] to the depths of their souls, knowing why such cries are heard everywhere and what they signify. They alone do not look on indifferently at the emaciated and oppressed peasant, groaning under the yoke of despotism. They alone, like good friends, extend a brotherly hand to us and, with sincere hearts, try to guide us out of this [hell] onto a more favourable path. They alone, not withdrawing their hands, will lead us, revealing to us any means of escape from this cunningly constructed snare, until the time when we lead ourselves independently towards the people's common good. They alone will accompany us, unswervingly, until the muscular arm of the million working people is raised and the yoke of despotism, guarded by soldiers' bayonets, blows away like ashes! (Alekseev, Appx. A: 277-81).

Surrounding himself with the passive mass of working millions, draping himself in the grey of the abstractions with which he described their victimhood, Alekseev's commitment and consciousness sparkled like a silver coin in the mud. Even if Alekseev's socialism made him the victim of autocratic power – a power guaranteeing him few rights as a peasant and worker, and fewer still as a political opponent – still he distinguished *himself* from the passivity that he ascribed to the Russian 'working millions' in the act of speaking. This act, demonstrating commitment, invited repression that was aimed at *him*, personally. The effect of Alekseev's stand was his exclusion from the 'working millions,' while for the Russian public, he and his worker comrades remained the playthings of the 'young *intelligenty*' and their foreign ideas.

Alekseev's class background helped the Russian autocracy save face. In its appeal to an essential naïveté perceived in the radicalism of peasant-workers, the social basis for the paternal rule of the Russian government was reinforced. But privately, Alekseev was subjected to a punishment that assumed *his* responsibility for *his* harmful actions and words. By that the government transformed what had been a limited, cultural phenomenon – the emergence in Russia of self-educated, sometimes radical, 'developed' workers – into a social fact. Social-revolutionaries had coined a term intended to capture the synthesis of 'experience' and 'knowledge,' of being and thought, which these workers were made to embody. The appearance of the worker-*intelligent* - thoughtfully rebellious, hardened by the necessity from which the upper-class revolutionaries had been both shielded and excluded - portended the self-emancipation of the Russian working-class. Many workers themselves embraced the notion, with all its practical consequences. The destruction of the revolutionary and workers' circles, the arrest, interrogation and prosecution of its leading personalities, the exile of those workers and peasants who remained committed despite all that, realised in negative form the term's synthesis of cultural difference and class position in a *physical* exclusion from the working-

class population, wedded uneasily to *symbolic* exclusion from the educated and responsible 'elite.' The actions of the autocracy revealed thereby the deep and almost mystical class prejudices that underpinned the *intelligentsia's* dream of the worker-*intelligent*, prejudices that reflected and reproduced in revolutionary doctrine the social system these workers had criticised by their very radicalism, and by their individual choices to remain committed to it.

Alekseev's life in documented history had begun - as for most of the Russian worker-revolutionaries of the 1870s - in confrontations with the autocracy. From September, 1873, the authorities had begun to discover the workers' secret (and illegal) mutual-aid circles and libraries, documenting in detail the workers' conversations, movements, the contents of their collections of books, and (with special care) their frequent meetings with students from the nearby Institutions of Higher Education: the University, the Medical-Surgical Academy and the Institute of Forestry. In the early 1870s, these agents - some specially recruited from amongst the lower classes - joined workers' circles and meetings (*skhodki*) and began to report on them, handing over their notes to handlers (detectives from the regular police, gendarme officers, or assistant procurators) at clandestine meetings. Their reports were filtered and rewritten through the official hierarchies before reaching high-level police and local government officials, the Ministers of Justice, Education, Internal Affairs, and the Tsar. Tsar Aleksandr II first met with Alekseev through Third Section reports at the beginning of 1874, during the early phase of police investigations into the 'going to the people' movement (*dvizhenie zhodit' v narod*).¹⁴ At this point no special significance would have attached to Alekseev's name, but news of propaganda conducted among the peasant-workers and their apparent receptivity to the message of the student radicals was already causing the Tsar and his officials concern.

Police investigations into the activities of the *Vserossiiskaia Sotsial'no-Revoliutsionnaia Organizatsiia* (*All-Russian Revolutionary Organisation*, hereafter: VSRO), to which Alekseev belonged in 1874-5, were separate from the earlier, wider investigations of the first waves of 'going to the people.' The initial leads were, however, similar in both enquiries. The Third Section already knew of connections between groups of radical *intelligenty* in Russia and the older generation of émigré revolutionaries, sheltered in relatively comfortable (often voluntary) exile in Paris, London, Zurich and Geneva. The groups clustered around Mikhail Bakunin and Pëtr Lavrov – the major figureheads of dissidence in the late 1860s and early 1870s –

¹⁴ 'Agenturnaia zapiska...o nelegal'nyi skhodke...u Petra Alekseeva,' 4 March, 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 438.

maintained links with Russian students abroad. In the students' attempts to produce literature for the circles in Russia, the older generation were throughout the 1870s still vital. Part of the VSRO's contingent of *intelligenty* – ex-medical students who had studied in Zurich before Aleksandr II ordered them to return home – worked with Lavrov to produce the well-known (though not always well-liked) journal, *Vpered!* (*Forward!*) in 1873-4; the VSRO's own journal, *Rabotnik* (*The Workman*), depended on the printing press and financial contributions of the Bakuninist circles in Zurich. Illegal transports of forbidden literature through the Polish protectorate and Finland to St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, connected the Russian circles materially to the émigré communities in Western Europe. In Russia itself, local police forces and gendarmes began to discover the material evidence of social-revolutionary activities in both the cities and the countryside, sometimes happening upon huge stashes of 'popular literature' concealed under floorboards, in barrels, behind cupboards, or (most often) being transported from the capitals to provincial centres, in briefcases or boxes, by the Russian 'youth' (*molodezh*).

The VSRO was undone at both ends. Chance arrests and successive 'raids' (*razgrom*: multiple seizures of known radicals, suspected radicals, and material evidence) at apartments in and around Moscow and Moscow *guberniia*, Kiev, Odessa, Ivanovo-Vosnesensk and Tula uncovered a number of circles, with serious conspiratorial intent, led (or at least founded) by *intelligenty* with known links to émigré-revolutionaries. The arrest of G. F. Zdanovich, one of the VSRO's Georgian *intelligenty*, in September, 1875¹⁵ turned up a set of 'Regulations,' referring to the VSRO by name, with passages detailing the duties and qualities of potential members of the 'communes' (*obshchiny* - the VSRO's local sections), as well as advice on conducting propaganda and agitation amongst the 'working people,' stating the aim of 'awakening a *bunt*' (peasant rebellion) and 'directing it toward a social revolution.'¹⁶ Zdanovich, waiting for a train when he was seized, was also carrying a packet containing a large collection of illegal works, probably destined for activists in another *obshchina* outside of Moscow. The popular publications and revolutionary journals were by 1875 familiar to the authorities, who nonetheless noted carefully the contents of such packages and stashes, paying particular attention to books or pamphlets that had not been recorded in previous raids. Most of the materials were reprints of stories (*skazki*) written by members or associates of the earlier,

¹⁵ See *RN* 1, p. 440, *ft.* 225.

¹⁶ 'Ustav Vserossiiskoi Sotsial'no-Revoliutsionnoi Organizatsii,' February, 1875, *RN* 1, p. 114-5, 121-2.

Petersburg circles, intended for partially literate readers or an illiterate audience, easily read by beginners or to a crowd by propagandists. There were also multiple copies of the first issue of the newspaper *Rabotnik* and various numbers of the ‘thick journal,’ *Vpered*, intended for the revolutionaries’ own use and for the use of radicalised workers (*rabochie*) deemed capable of reading them and trustworthy enough to distribute them. Alekseev had been one of these trusted workers, travelling from factory to plant to village around Moscow *guberniia*, taking up employment, talking to other working people, leaving reading materials, moving on again. Between November 1873 and March 1874 most of the St. Petersburg *chaikovtsy* circle, the *lavristy*, and other ‘independent’ propagandists had been searched, seized and arrested. Most of the existing workers’ circles in St. Petersburg were swept away with those of the radical ‘student’ *intelligenty*. The authorities failed to seize Alekseev. Having fled the city before the first rout, he went on to join the VSRO and the second wave of ‘going to the people’. By the summer of 1874, the movement’s northern and southern centres had shifted temporarily from the St. Petersburg and Kiev hotspots to the relative backwaters of Moscow and its textile factories. After months of agitation in and around Moscow, interspersed with trips home, Alekseev was finally picked up by the local police on the 3rd of April 1875, at the *Dom Korsaka* (‘House of Korsak’), a meeting point for the VRSO, along with clutch of radical intelligenty living under assumed names, the worker Semën Agapov, and a few others.¹⁷ His appearance at the ‘Trial of the Fifty,’ the first of the ‘Great Trials’ of 1877-8, followed two years later, after months of prison cells and repeated interrogations.¹⁸

After the trial of the *nechaevtsy* (Sergei Nechaev’s followers)¹⁹ - with its ill-judged policy of printing and publicising the proclamations and ideas of Nechaev’s *Narodnaia Rasprava*²⁰ - the social-revolutionaries were aware of the importance of the state trial as a public stage from which to defend and explain before the *narod* and to its potential sympathisers in ‘educated

¹⁷ Karzhanskii gives an account of the circumstances of the arrests (p. 63-5), and also includes the text of the official ‘Protokol’ of 3 April, 1875 in full (p. 65-66); see also the later official report of the investigation that led to the arrests, ‘Iz raporta politseimeistera Ivanovo-Vosnesenska Uspenskogo Vladimirskomu gubernatoru V. I. Strukovu ob arreste gruppy propagandistov-narodnikov,’ *RD* 2.ii, p. 30-6.

¹⁸ The Trials of the ‘50’ and the ‘193’ took place from February-March, 1877 and October, 1877 - January, 1878 respectively (see *GP* 2, p. 129-333 and *GP* 3, *passim*, for extracts from the stenographic records of these trials).

¹⁹ The trial took place between June 1 and Sept. 11, 1871. The stenographs of the indictment and sentences are reproduced in *GP* 1, p. 159-227; see also N. A. Troitskii, *Tsarskie sudy protiv revoliutsionnoi Rossii*, (Saratov, 1976), p. 121-140, for a detailed account of the trial.

²⁰ The text of *Narodnaia Rasprava*’s ideological credo, presented as the rules and regulations of the organisation, was published in full in *Pravitel’svennyi Vestnik* (nos. 155-206) (see *GP* 1, p. 182-186); see also J. W. Daly, ‘On the Significance of Emergency Legislation in Late Imperial Russia,’ *Slavic Review*, vol. 54, No. 3 (Autumn, 1995), p. 605.

society' (*obshchestvo*) the true character of their movement.²¹ It was not until early 1878 and the review of *Zemlia i Volia*'s temporary regulations that the principle of 'staying silent until one can speak in public' was formalised as the revolutionary's duty,²² but informally the principle already held in the early 1870s among the most committed radicals. With the 'Great Trials' of the 'Fifty' and the 'Hundred and Ninety-Three' the notion of the state trial as a front of struggle²³ and a means of spreading propaganda was, in the eyes of the social-revolutionaries, fully realised, the public stage used consciously by the defendants to 'win the sympathy of the educated public [for the cause], often with brilliant success.'²⁴ After the first waves of 'going to the people,' the routing of the workers' circles in St. Petersburg, and the state trials of 1877-8, the social-revolutionaries were more inclined to believe that this principle had been passed on to the *narod* itself. Alekseev's speech - the ascent of the *narod* to the full-throated, public declaration of its revolutionary convictions - was matched by Alekseev's behaviour behind the walls of the Third Section. He stubbornly refused to answer all but the most mundane questions upon his seizure, arrest and interrogation in Moscow in April 1875.²⁵ With Pëtr Alekseev's rejection of legal defence at the 'Trial of the Fifty,' immediate access to the public stage was extended to a 'representative of the *narod*,' and the social-revolutionary *intelligenty* were quick to take advantage of the propagandistic value offered by this event and by Alekseev's speech itself. The result for Alekseev, who was fully involved in the scheme from the outset, was more prison, then exile to eastern Siberia. On the 14th of March, 1877, four days after delivering his speech 'in self-defence' at the Trial of the Fifty, he was sentenced to ten years of hard labour for 'the distribution of forbidden works' and 'knowing participation in an illegal society.'²⁶

²¹ See, for instance, 'Obrashchenie M. D. Muravskogo i A. O. Lukashevicha k tovarishcham – soprotsessnikam o sozdanii sbornika po istorii revoliutsionnoi deiatel'nosti v pervoi polovine 1870-kh godov,' 28 October, 1877, *RN* 1, p. 367.

²² In the spring, 1878 (at the very end of the 'Trial of the 193'), a new point (*punkt*) was inserted into the provisional regulations composed in January, 1877: 'If a member of the central circle [*chlen osnovnogo kruzhki*] falls into the hands of the government along with clear evidence [of his activities], testimony must be refused throughout the preliminary investigations and the inquests; at the trial, the interests of the cause, not the individual, are paramount' (see Troitskii, *Tsarskie sudy*, p. 120).

²³ The phrase 'front of struggle' is from Troitskii, *ibid*, p. 114.

²⁴ R. Stites, 'Introduction' to V. Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, (DeKalb, 1991), xvi.

²⁵ See 'Protokol doprosa tkacha Petra Alekseeva v Moskovskom gubernskom zhandarmskom upravlenii maiorom korpousa zhandarmov Nischenkovym,' 7 April, 1875, *RD* 2.ii, p. 17; 'Donesenie nachal'nika Moskovskogo zhandarmского upravleniia I. V. Voeikova v III otdelenie o pokazaniiakh arestovannikh Dzhabidari, Agapova, Alekseeva o rasprostrannennii revoliutsionnoi literatury na fabrikakh,' 8 April, 1875, *ibid*, p. 18; see also the 'Protokol' of the search of the revolutionary *punkt*, at which Alekseev completely refused to give any information apart from his name (other workers did reveal a little more), reprinted in Karzhanskii, *Moskovskii Tkach*, p. 65-66.

²⁶ *GP* 2, p. 324-5.

Alekseev was the most prominent of the early worker-radicals to suffer doubly the hegemony of autocratic ideology and practice, reproduced as it was in the revolutionary movement that took possession of his story as much as by the laws and official proceedings that had him condemned. Born to a poor family of state serfs in the village of Novinsk, Smolensk *guberniia*, in January, 1849, Alekseev was to become the most famous ‘*muzhik*-revolutionary’ of the late nineteenth century, alongside Stepan Khalturin, Viktor Obnorskii and Pëtr Moiseenko one of the outstanding figures of the emergent workers’ intelligentsia of the 1870s,²⁷ and the most celebrated worker-orator in Russia’s revolutionary history. He achieved a renown far exceeding the shallow mark he left in contemporary documentary records. Leaving no memoir, Alekseev’s own writings consist of the speech (three or four pages) and the few exile letters only. Alekseev had kept a diary during the prison period of 1877-80, but it did not survive.²⁸ His comrades and political acquaintances were largely ignorant of the details of his early life before the movement.²⁹ Very few were present to witness his life in exile. None but his anonymous murderers were present at the moment of his death. The 1877 speech was enough, however, for Alekseev to be remembered. It had made of Alekseev an authentic voice of popular protest when it was usual for the *narod* to be spoken for by others. Unable as one to present themselves or their sufferings to the elite, apparently invisible and inaudible to Russian ‘educated society,’ the ‘working millions’ found a representative and a substitute in Alekseev’s voice and image.

Before the ‘Trial of the Fifty’ began, the government and the student-radicals were equally aware of the importance of its outcomes for the future fortunes of the social-revolutionary party. In its immediate aftermath, it was the speech of Alekseev which made the greatest impact upon the ‘intelligentsia-youth,’ who noted not only its political importance but also its historical novelty: ‘Until this time nothing like this has been said by anyone in...the presence of the court, before an audience of gendarmes and bureaucrats mixed with a significant contingent of the general public. The speech of Pëtr Alekseev is a truly important event in the history of the Russian people.’³⁰ This note appeared in the first printed version of Alekseev’s speech from April or May, 1877. Immediately on its delivery, the movement’s sympathisers were rushing to print the speech, expressing in adjoining notes their admiration for Alekseev, the *muzhik*,

²⁷ These are the only three worker-revolutionaries from the 1870s mentioned by name in the famous ‘Short Course’ on the history of the Communist Party: see *Istoriia Vsesoiuznoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii (bolshevikov): Kratkii Kurs: pod redaktsiei komissii TsK VKP/b/* [1938/1945], (Moscow, 2004), p. 9-10.

²⁸ Karzhanskii, p. 134-5.

²⁹ Pekarskii, ‘Rabochii Pëtr Alekseev,’ p. 84-85.

³⁰ In Averkiev and Kuznetsov’s notes to the first printed version of the speech, June 1877, cited in N. B. Panukhina, ‘K istorii rechi Petra Alekseeva,’ *Vestnik Moskovskogo Universitet*, No. 5, (Moscow, 1965), p. 83.

worker or ‘weaver,’ and his words at court. Very shortly after sentencing and the trial’s conclusion, Alekseev’s speech was being read by a select group within ‘educated society.’ That it found its way from the court room into the hands of Russia’s reading society was due to the efforts of sympathisers among the students and workers in St. Petersburg.³¹ The first printed version of Alekseev’s speech, dating from April or May 1877, was produced in a secret typography by a radical student, A. N. Averkiev, with the help of a sympathetic typesetter, N. A. Kuznetsov, and V. P. Molchanov, a worker from the Semiannikov factory, who provided them the equipment (crude, wooden machines, according to later police accounts) and movable type.³² By June, three pamphlet versions (with slight differences) had been printed and circulated in the capital,³³ two of which were sent on to the Russian revolutionary émigrés in Zurich to be reprinted in the journals *Rabotnik*, *Vpered!*, *Obshchee Delo* (*The Common Cause*) and *Nabat* (*The Tocsin*).³⁴ It was accompanied by a short biographical section noting that Alekseev had come from the ‘simple people’ (*prostoi narod*), had not received an education, but by tenacious work had managed to become ‘extremely well read.’³⁵ Alekseev was known even internationally. In April, alongside reports on a mining accident in Pontypridd, imports of beef, and horse racing in the Bois de Boulogne, the gentleman-readers of London’s *Pall Mall Gazette* were able to sample translated extracts from the ‘characteristic speech of the peasant Alekseyeff’ who had, according to their St. Petersburg correspondent, ‘occupied a very prominent place in the [socialist] conspiracy [of the Fifty].’³⁶ Immortalised in print, the Alekseev story carried far beyond the first flushes of excitement and praise. The fragmentary

³¹ A full list of publications of this speech until 1905 is included in S. S. Levina, ‘Novye dannye o publikatsii rechi Petra Alekseeva,’ *Arkhiograficheskii Ezhegodnik za 1973 g.* (Moscow, 1973), p. 85.

³² Panukhina, ‘K istorii rechi,’ p. 83, *ft.* 7.

³³ ‘Rech’, proizneseniia rabochim Petrom Alekseevym na sude pred Osobym Presutstviem Pravitel’stvuiushchego senata 10-go Marta 1877 goda (stenograficheskii otchet),’ now held by RSIA (formerly TsGIA SSSR), *f.* 1410, *op.* 1, *d.* 154, *ll.* 163-164); ‘Rech’, proizneseniia krest’iannom Smolenskoii gubernii Petrom Alekseevym na sude pred Osobym Presutstviem Pravitel’stvuiushchego senata 10-go Marta 1877 goda (stenograficheskii otchet),’ (now held by GARF, *f.* 109, 3-ia eksp., 1877, *d.* 144, *ch.* 270, *ll.* 596-598); ‘Rech’ rabochego Petra Alekseeva’, June 1877, St. Petersburg.

³⁴ The 1877 publications (besides the three ‘Petersburg’ versions) were: ‘Rech’ krest’ianina Smolenskoii gubernii Sychesvskogo uezda derevni Novinskoii Petra Alekseeva,’ *Rabotnik*, March 1877 (Geneva); ‘Rech’, proizneseniia krest’iannom Smolenskoii gubernii Petrom Alekseevym v Osobom Presutstvii Pravitel’stvuiushchego senata 10-go Marta 1877 goda,’ *Nabat*, 1877 (Geneva) (now held in GARF, *f.* 109, 3-ia eksp., 1877, *d.* 144, *ch.* 270, *l.* 70); ‘Rech’, proizneseniia krest’iannom Smolenskoii gubernii Petrom Alekseevym na sude pred Osobym Presutstviem Pravitel’stvuiushchego senata 10-go Marta 1877 goda (stenograficheskii otchet),’ *Obshchee delo*, no. 1, 9 May, 1877 (Geneva) p. 15; ‘Rech’ Petra Alekseevicha Alekseeva,’ *Vpered!*, vol. 5, section. 2, 1877 (Zurich) p. 13-15.

³⁵ See ‘Rech’ ... Petrom Alekseevym,’ *Nabat*, (Geneva, 1877); ‘Rech’ ... Petrom Alekseevym,’ *Obshchee delo*, no. 1, 9 May, 1877, (Geneva), p. 15; ‘Rech’ ... Alekseeva,’ *Vpered*, t. 5, razd. 2, 1877, (Zurich), p. 13-15.

³⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, Issue 3796, Friday, 20 April, 1877, p. 1488. On the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the Russian revolutionary movement, see M. J. Hughes, ‘British Opinion and Russian Terrorism in the 1880s,’ *European History Quarterly*, vol. 41 (April, 2011), p. 257.

evidence of his life and thought, the surfeit of value clinging to his machine-worn hands, and a decade lacking in popular figures of similar prominence, made Alekseev particularly vulnerable of such political appropriation. Through the 1880s and 1890s, disparate currents within the Russian revolutionary movement - committed to conflicting theories of social revolution but sharing the doctrine that the revolution should be the business of the 'working-class itself'³⁷ (what was called in Russia, at least by the mid-1870s, 'narodism')³⁸ - claimed Alekseev for their respective political heritages. The propagandistic value of his speech and past activities grew accordingly, as did the space allotted to him in a lengthening list of radical martyrs. Before even 1905, Alekseev had come to be recognised by all Russian socialists as one of the 'leading lights' of the Russian revolutionary movement of the 1870s, and a herald of the revolutions of the early twentieth century.³⁹ The quasi-religious foresight attributed to Alekseev once by V. I. Lenin proved popular, so that references to the 'great prophet' (*velikoe prorochestvo*) would appear in the Soviet historical textbooks until the late 1970s at least.⁴⁰

2. Mugshot (1): Alekseev at the time of the 'Trial of the Fifty'⁴¹



³⁷ A brief history of 'the principle of class self-emancipation,' with especial focus upon Marx's role in formulating it, and its relation to the International Working Men's Association, is given in H. Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, vol. 2: *The Politics of Social Classes* (New York, 1978), p. 147-65.

³⁸ J. D. White, *Karl Marx and the Intellectual Origins of Dialectical Materialism* (Basingstoke, 1996), p. 25-6; 310-49; see also R. Pipes, 'Narodnichestvo: A Semantic Enquiry,' *Slavic Review*, Vol. 30, No. 3, (September, 1964), p. 444-5

³⁹ V. I. Lenin, *Sochineniia*, 4th ed. (Moscow, 1947), vol. 6, p. 106.

⁴⁰ Ibid, v. 4, p. 377; *Istoriia Kommunisticheskii Partii Sovetskogo Soiuz*a (3rd ed.), B. N. Ponomarev, *et al* (Moscow, 1970), p. 17; Uroeva, *Velikoe prorochestvo*, p.3.

⁴¹ Karzhanskii, p. 87

It was Alekseev's dubious honour to achieve in his lifetime and in exile the kind of fame usually reserved for the movement's most prominent intellectuals and its revolutionary dead. Politically speaking, exile was already a death, one imposed by opponents and supporters alike: The autocratic state was the thumb holding Alekseev idle and useless. Revolutionary publicists were writing Alekseev's obituary while he was still alive, confirming only the significance of his *past* words and actions, cutting away depth and complexity from him until only a few phrases - or a single one - remained:⁴² '[when] the muscular arm of the working million is raised... the yoke of despotism, guarded by soldiers' bayonets, will blow away like ashes!' (Alekseev, Appx. A: 280). By the late 1880s, Alekseev himself was aware of the separation of his past, public life from his immediate, presently lived one. He was aware that his fame – centred on the 1877 speech – had made his own return to the Russian workers' movement impossible.⁴³ He was now irredeemably marked by officialdom as dangerous, too much a target for further surveillance and persecution. As long the Russian autocracy survived, the risk his presence might bring to a circle or organisation would surely outweigh any possible benefits. He was, in short, much more valuable to the movement as a political symbol or 'example' than as a living, breathing revolutionary. His mythic, public existence and his speech - vital respectively to the foundation of a Russian social-revolutionary tradition and the fledgling historical literature of the radical, working-class movement in Russia - preserved Alekseev as the angry, strong and simple voice of the 'working millions,' while his condemnation to exile and hard labour, on its declaration already mythologized by its victims for political ends, concealed Alekseev's unromantic decay in Siberian backwaters.

II. WORKER-REVOLUTIONARIES AND THE MASSES

For the social-revolutionaries Alekseev embodied and spoke for the working millions. In the hands of historians, he winds up instead as an exemplar of the exclusions affected, then suffered, by the early Russian worker-*intelligenty* from the working class. As the double-barrelled category represents lives lived on the margins of classes, the invention of a category helping to overcome the incomprehension that greeted their first forays into a culture that was not their own, Alekseev's story of alienation is reinforced by a history that finds significance in

⁴² Lenin, *Soch.* 3, p. 377; Iu. M. Steklov, *Bortsy za sotializm: ocherki iz istorii obshchestvennykh i revoliutsionnykh dvizhenii v Rossii* (Moscow, 1918), p. 129; *Istoriia Kommunisticheskii Partii*, p. 17; Uroeva, *Velikoe prorochestvo*, epigraph facing p. 1.

⁴³ Karzhanskii, p. 122.

his particularity only by relation to the categories that negate it (worker; worker-*intelligent*). This is the afterlife of the cultural and political distinction that first ‘hyphenated’ the lives of those first Russian workers radicalised in the 1870s and 1880s. ‘The first effect of propaganda among the workers,’ Franco Venturi wrote in *Roots of Revolution*, ‘was to separate the most gifted figures from the general mass and to create a small self-educated *élite*.’⁴⁴ The social and cultural history that followed, having by the late 1980s and 1990s become more interested in particular workers and peasants, confirmed Venturi’s conclusions regarding the early worker-revolutionaries. From the Emancipation of February, 1861 into the early 1890s, social-revolutionary thought and activity developed under conditions condemning worker-revolutionaries to the margins of established socio-cultural groupings and, from there, push them to the peripheries of Russia society. Interaction with the so-called ‘intelligentsia’ and its ideas had already pushed them to the edges of working-class life and culture through the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth.⁴⁵ The various terms used by historians to identify the ‘self-educated elite’ among the Russian working class of the late nineteenth century – ‘developed-worker,’ ‘worker-*intelligent*,’ ‘conscious worker’ – were gestures not only to the awkwardness of the worker-revolutionaries’ social position, but also to the social conditions that forced this awkwardness upon them. Education and self-education differentiated these men from their largely uneducated (or poorly educated) peers. While other workers were huddled around the few comfortably literate workmates reading the yellow press or modern, mass-produced folk tales, the workers’ ‘elite’ sunk into the works of J. S. Mill, H. Spencer, F. Lassalle, N. G. Chernyshevskii, textbooks on biology and chemistry, cosmology, poetry, obscure articles from the ‘democratic’ and ‘liberal’ presses. A sense of distinction from the social mainstream and the ‘masses’ was nurtured, in the early part of the 1870s, by small sections of the ‘propagandised’ working class. Exposure to radical ideas of various kinds and theoretical acceptance of such teachings tightened the circle further.

It was through this small minority of radical workers that the *intelligenty* hoped the political unity of the Russian working class (peasants, factory workers, soldiers) would be achieved. The radical-*intelligenty* had intended their early approaches to the *narod* as means both to instruct and to learn from it. Experience and education were supposed to flow in both directions.

⁴⁴ F. Venturi, *Roots*, p. 539.

⁴⁵ S. A. Smith, *Revolution and the People in Russia and China: A Comparative History* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 76-7; M. Steinberg, ‘The Injured and Insurgent Self: The Moral Imagination of Russia’s Lower Class Writers,’ *Workers and Intelligentsia in Late Imperial Russia*, R. Zelnik (ed.), (Berkeley, 1999), p. 310-1.

Though the early terms used to by *intelligenty* to describe those workers involved in the circles ('developed' or 'propagandised') implied the 'active' role of the *intelligenty* and the relative passivity or 'receptivity' of the workers in their relations, it was already given in social-revolutionary doctrine that the *narod's* *self*-development was the immediate aim of propaganda and agitation. Most 'real' workers and peasants apparently did not trust 'lordly types,' looking on them (mostly) with amusement, confusion, or fear. Dress-up and play-acting the factory worker or the travelling *muzhik* had been tried many times by the *intelligenty* themselves in the early 1870s, with mixed results. This was the practical reason for having workers *themselves* spread propaganda and agitate among their fellow workers, the identity of the propagandist and his audience thought to be the key to the movement's future successes among the masses. The *intelligenty* would concentrate their attentions on those who were immediately responsive, joining the popular message to the popular voice. Thus, such initial cultural and intellectual distinctions that were made between the 'developed workers' and the 'mass' of labouring people were affected under influence of doctrines that celebrated precisely the working-class backgrounds and the experience of oppression that tied the workers' elite to the 'working millions.' Instead of producing workers with the minds of educated radicals, however, propaganda discovered *intelligenty* in workers' clothing, as horrified as their tutors by the subservient and self-destructive mass culture the intelligentsia proper put down to the *narod's* brutalisation and oppression. The developed workers' withdrawal from 'popular culture' – drunkenness, fist-fights, domestic abuse, illiteracy, deference – came on the back of an education that associated these things with oppression, passive victimhood, and the collective ignorance that resulted. The consequent political puritanism of many a 'developed worker' exaggerated rather than lessened extant prejudices within the Russian working-class. It is true that the skilled and semi-skilled workers (*masterovye*) had taunted and abused the menial labourers (the so-called 'grey workers,' *serye*) long before the worker-*intelligent* dismissed them as country bumpkins; equally, these prejudices were challenged strongly by the radical idea of a unified 'lower' or 'working class.' But such prejudices were reinforced in practice as workers' circles tightened around their most committed members, and these workers' own perceptions of the peasantry and urban workforce were transformed. Hence, a tiny number of workers, possessed of the idea that they understood and might (for the time being) represent the interests of an entire class – many millions of workers and peasants – engaged in activities that marked them as different, alien – even dangerous – not only for the authorities, but also for other working people.

During the last decade of Aleksandr II's reign and the first part of Aleksandr III's, the revolutionary of lower-class origin was for the greater part of the urban and suburban workers a figure known not primarily at the workbench but through the newspapers and, more often, the rumour mill. Those who had encountered the revolutionary groups and their variegated membership reacted variously, depending on their prior exposure to radical ideas, the depth of their respect for religion and authority, the tact of the propagandist. The early disjuncture between words and deeds – not to mention the justified fear that unguarded words might have dire consequences even for a casual audience – kept the radical workers a minority and only a passing influence among the majority of workers and peasants. By the latter half of the 1870s a number of short-lived connections were made between circles of revolutionary workers and the broader 'workers' movement' in the cities. Supported by a smattering of professional revolutionaries, students and journalists, a number of radical workers took part in the strikes and protests of 1876-9. Such actions, risky enough for the *intelligenty* proper and sometimes (if indirectly) close to fatal for the material and spiritual lives of the workers, did have a disproportionate influence on the duration, scale and the 'tone' of these events. But even in St. Petersburg, Kiev, Odessa and Moscow, where manpower and materials were at their most concentrated, such activities were not enough to secure the worker-revolutionaries and their organisations' a permanent existence in either the factories or the cities' working-class quarters (south of the Nevskii Gate; in Vyborg; in parts of the Vasilevskii island district). A series of public events – Karakozov's unsuccessful attempt on Aleksandr II in 1867, the trials of Nechaev and the *nechaevtsy* between 1869 and 1871, the investigation and trials of social-revolutionary 'conspirators' and 'terrorists' in the late 1870s, the final, successful attempt which killed Aleksandr in March, 1881 – did bring to the attention of educated society, as to significant portions of the lower-class population, the existence of a radical 'tendency,' rooted in St. Petersburg, but with branches stretched somehow from numerous small villages in Russia's outlying regions, to the provincial capitals, to the emigrant havens in western Europe and America. The immediate result of such events, however, was to draw the *government's* attention to the less dramatic propaganda activities going on across the Empire and right under its own nose in the capital.

An official ideology linking criminal responsibility to class had students and émigrés, almost *a priori*, identified as the cause of workers' political criminality and as the guiding hand pushing

ordinary members of the 'simple people' towards seditious thoughts and acts. Investigation revealed everywhere their 'harmful influence' (*vrednoe vliianie*) upon the uneducated and gullible peasant mass. Many on the periphery of earliest workers' circles had been drawn in by students' promises of a free education (mathematics, reading and writing). They may have followed a brother, a workmate or 'countryman' (*zemliak*) to a meeting or lecture, browsed through a 'popular publication,' or sung a revolutionary song. Some caught up in state repression were connected even more tenuously to the circle's chief membership, by a relative, a relationship, or a single conversation. The *chaikovtsy* and *dolgushintsy*, between 1869 and 1874 the most stable clusters of radical *intelligenty* in St. Petersburg, had printed a number of 'popular works' (*narodnye izdaniia*) for the *narod*, and scattered them liberally across the countryside and the workers' quarters in the big cities. Many workers found themselves unexpectedly in possession of such forbidden materials. With mixed success, the government, once made aware of suspicious meetings and conversations amongst workers and peasants or (especially) between workers and wayward, usually younger, members of the educated elite, attempted to return the 'simple people' to the simpler forms of thought and life deemed appropriate to them.

Once seized and brought to the cells of the Third Department, with the material evidence of their 'harmful actions' laid out on the table in front of them, a very significant number chose to confess and repent, pleading ignorance or a momentary moral lapse: the 'open testimonies' given in such encounters provided the political police and their regular counterparts with a network of connections through books, letters, snatches of conversations or overheard comments: fragmentary evidence of an enormous, highly organised - in the latter sense largely imaginary - conspiracy against the Russian state. Others blankly refused to be interrogated, ending up in one or the other of the Tsar's fortresses and jails, languishing for months, then years, awaiting trial or just waiting. Some, like Diakov Smirnov and Semën Volkov, spent two or more years in prison, only to be released in 1875 or 1876, to return to propaganda, eventually to be rearrested and exiled in 1877 or 1878. It was in this later 'breathing space' of eighteen months to two years that such figures as Georgi Plekhanov, Nikolai Charushin, Vera Figner and others became heavily involved with the new, revolutionary organisation – Russia's second *Zemlia i Volia* (*Land and Freedom*, hereafter: ZiV) – and with its activities amongst the workers' circles in St. Petersburg and elsewhere. The eventual fate of these committed worker-radicals was exile or 'return home' under the continued surveillance of the authorities. They

were added to the earlier cohort of worker-revolutionaries – Vasilli Gerasimov, Diomid Aleksandrov, Pëtr Alekseev, Semën Agapov – who, alongside the revolutionaries of the upper classes, had already faced trial in 1876-8, receiving harsh sentences of five to ten years of hard labour or exile (*katorga*; *ssylka*). Alekseev's appearance at the 'Trial of the Fifty' in 1877, on the back of his involvement with the VSRO through 1874-5, therefore came at a time of apparent government vacillation. What would be the proper attitude of autocracy to radicals of the lower classes? What was the aim of punishing them? Should it be done publicly or privately? There were, in fact, procedures and precedents to follow in such cases, drawn from decades of encounters with disorder and criminality among the peasantry, and the government followed them as systematically as the new situation allowed. But since the situation *was* new, so too were the outcomes. One of them was officialdom's private recognition of the worker-*intelligent* as a type of political criminal not before encountered. The division of the 'redeemable' working men from the genuinely dangerous ones, made mostly by officials in interrogations rather than in the public encounters of the courtroom, was one part of this discovery. Suffice to say that Alekseev could not be 'redeemed' and returned to the 'mass' from which he had come. The speech was some proof of that, his refusal of legal defence and prior refusal to name names while in custody was more.

The opportunity to demonstrate 'commitment' to the cause was given in the workers' direct encounters with the government and its officials. Whatever distinctions these men had felt from the 'mass workers,' as yet unenlightened and uncommitted, and whatever attention had been brought to their thought and action by association with the students and other *intelligenty*, was magnified in these encounters. In a sense, the legal and investigative processes that led to their exile and imprisonment – the effort of government agents to understand and document the actions of these, *particular* workers, confirmed their status as *intelligenty* more definitively than the recognition granted by the intelligentsia to these workers' intellects and commitments. They were held personally responsible for their actions, in reflection of the responsibility they had taken for themselves, their thoughts and actions in the process of becoming politically conscious. Venturi was certainly correct to state that 'the first effect of propaganda among the workers was to separate the most gifted figures from the general mass and to create a small, self-educated *élite*.' More remarkable, though, is the extension of this effect far beyond mere cultural differentiation into the history and historiography of the Russian working class. The most obvious evidence of this is the intelligibility of Venturi's distinction between an 'elite' and

a 'mass.' His delicate and biographically-informed treatment of radicals from the educated classes, and a necessarily more abstract treatment of the workers, peasants and worker-*intelligenty*,⁴⁶ show the connection of self-education and *intelligent*-status to individuation that, at least conceptually, the members of the 'masses' necessarily lacked. In the series of exclusions that followed propaganda, self-education and radicalisation, worker-radicals were made individuals, with certain powers, certain responsibilities, and a certain distinct place in documented events and phenomena. Alekseev's defiant speech supplemented the effects of exclusion with a document, attributable to him, in some sense substantiating subjectively and actively the act of repression by which he had already been individuated objectively and passively. The marks of his singularity were then fixed in documentary form. Reproduced, distributed and consumed, contemporary and scholarly readers of the speech clock Alekseev's name, note his background and credentials, give his story alongside that of the workers movement. His status as a unique, historical figure was thus confirmed over and again by 'history.' Much the same can be said of the 1870s' few 'committed' worker revolutionaries – S. Volkov, D. Smirnov, D. Aleksandrov, V. Gerasimov, I. Bachin, P. Moiseenko, V. Obnorskii, S. Khalturin, etc. - whose individual lives and actions were documented by government officials and (later) by the *intelligenty* who had been acquainted with them during their politically active years or in exile. In the early 1890s, Plekhanov described in detail the 'leading lights' of the workers' milieu and their particular roles in fostering radicalism and revolutionary organisations within the Russian working-class; in the late 1890s, Pëtr Kropotkin's autobiography described in some detail his early activities among the *narod*, with stories of the characters, attitudes and actions of these particular working men. Many other such accounts were published in the very late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as older revolutionaries made efforts to recover for history the events, ideas and people whose meaning and even existence autocratic repression had either concealed or distorted. From the 1890s, but with greater ease after the October Revolution of 1917, many of the workers who were involved in the circles of the 1870s and 1880s began to write and have published their own historical accounts. Gerasimov's memoirs were written some time in the 1890s, and published in the historical journal, *Byloe (The Way Things Were)*, in 1907. In the 1920s and 1930s, D. Smirnov, D. Aleksandrov, S. Volkov and S. Peterson wrote their memoirs, which were quickly published (and republished) in Soviet historical journals, or as appendices to books, or as entries in documentary collections related to the workers' and revolutionary movements.

⁴⁶ Venturi, *Roots*, p. 507-57.

Encounters between working men and those people, or ideas, or powers which led them to think of themselves as individuals, assert themselves as individuals, and be recognised as singular figures by contemporaries, were very closely connected to the processes of documentation that preserved these particular men and their lives as ‘individual’ or ‘singular’ for historians. Every step in the movement towards individuation was also an act of differentiation from their class: the ‘self-educated elite’ were gradually separated off from the ‘general mass,’ as Venturi put it. In social and cultural terms, in workers’ circles of 1871-4, as yet free from government interference, they made themselves peripheral to the cultures and attitudes of the peasants and to most other working people around them, moving closer to the habits and pretensions of the students and the radical *intelligenty*. Government repression isolated self-educated workers and forcibly removed the ‘committed’ ones from their homes, families, and employment. Documentation that followed from these acts of differentiation and exclusion – including, eventually, the workers’ own accounts of their lives and experiences – made them further alien to the ‘mass.’ The distinction between the ‘individuated worker’ and ‘the general mass,’ though heavy with attachments to the ideologies of socialists and conservatives, is not merely a conceptual one. It is preserved as a *documentary* fact: the number of worker-writers may have been (as Mark Steinberg puts it) ‘impressive,’ but it was still only a tiny minority of the workers, peasants and peasant soldiers making up the vast majority of the Russian population in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴⁷ While literacy and reading were on the increase amongst the lower classes in the late nineteenth century, especially among the urban workers,⁴⁸ writing and documentation were still very much activities associated with, and confined to, very small numbers of educated working people and to Russia’s ‘higher-ups’ (*verkhi*): statesmen, mid-to-high level government officials, military figures, noblemen, industrialists, merchants, publicists, intellectuals, lecturers, tutors, students...⁴⁹ It is in relation to a ‘lower-class’ (we might call it a condition, following Alekseev) for whom the ability to write - let alone to write about oneself, or one’s history and experiences – was an alien activity, and an opportunity more

⁴⁷ Steinberg, ‘The Injured and Insurgent Self,’ p. 310.

⁴⁸ J. Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Culture, 1861-1917* (Princeton, 1985), p. 9-22.

⁴⁹ Y. Kotsonis, *Making Peasants Backward: Agricultural Cooperatives and the Agrarian Question in Russia, 1861-1914*, Basingstoke, 1999), p. 2-3; D. Moon, *Russian Peasants and Tsarist Legislation on the Eve of Reform: Interaction between the Peasants and Officialdom, 1825-1855* (London, 1992), p. 10, 19-20; C. D. Worobec, ‘Reflections on Customary Law and Post-reform Peasant Society’, *Russian Review*, vol. 44 (1985), p. 25; M. Confino, ‘Russian Customary Law and the Study of Peasant Mentalités’, *Russian Review*, vol. 44 (1985), p. 36; M. Perrie, ‘Folklore as Evidence of Peasant Mentalité: Social Attitudes and Values in Russian Popular Culture’, *Russian Review*, vol. 48, no. 2 (1989), p. 120-1.

or less completely denied, that the number of worker-writers is 'impressive,' which is to say: unexpected. While evidence related to the history of Russia's lower or working-classes is extremely rich, it is a documentary fact that most workers and peasants did not write memoirs, did not (by and large) document their own, particular lives, and that the vast majority exist for us, as historians, only by dint of common-sense inferences beyond the categories by which they found their place in the historical record. Most of all they appear as groups, as 'crowds,' 'workforces,' 'strikers,' 'skilled' or 'unskilled,' from this region or that. Even through the microscope, the historian of workers, of 'labour' or of the peasantry is confronted with a sea of abstraction, its surface occasionally broken by a name, a cursory description, a conversation. Politically and sociologically questionable Venturi's 'elite/mass' distinction might be: but there are always points at which the distinction imposes itself on historians as a relative limit of possible knowledge, the abstraction of the 'class,' 'mass,' 'crowd' therefore *given* in the documentary records by the abstraction with which the lives of peasants and workers were comprehended, described, and documented.

Still, it is just as 'given' in the social category 'worker-*intelligent*' – a contemporary term appropriated later (at first, uncritically) by social historians – that men such as Alekseev, despite all exclusions undergone during and after their lifetimes, are still tied hand and foot to the 'mass' to which they had belonged, or the class to which they felt themselves ascribed and condemned. The intelligentsia valued them for a class position that could not alone be undone by self-education or by the appropriation of alien habits, gestures, and reading matter. Alekseev was valued for his ability to speak authentically for the labouring *narod*, from experience of a social position imposed; his exile, and the exile or imprisonment of other radical workers, were reminders to an audience of working people that the autocracy would not spare even the 'simple people,' driven to political crimes, from its repressions. The writings of workers - poems, stories, novels, letters, memoirs, political programmes, recorded speeches – had a special privilege of describing the working-class situation as first-hand experience. And this last privilege - one first ascribed contemporary to the emergence of the worker-*intelligent* in the 1870s, strengthened as more of them wrote their histories in the 1920s - was granted again by the Soviet historians and by their 'Western' counterparts in social, economic and socio-political history. Worker-writers, a great number of them radicals, the vast majority encouraged to write by encounters with people and ideas from outside the popular milieu, provided something that statistical, observational, and anecdotal evidence could not: the popular mass 'from within.'

Historians who look now at the doctrine of workers' self-emancipation as a museum piece, consigned to a past becoming distant and dusty, might judge the 'workers' right to speak' with an equal sense of distance and so with scepticism. The thread running from the privilege of speech through the historiography and history of the early worker-*intelligenty*, to the dreams and constructions of intellectuals that imagined them in abstraction before their role was made concrete, has frayed where the historians' self-doubt meets with the worker-writers' self-identification. Claims to 'be a worker' and to belong to, or represent, the 'working class' (or 'workers' estate,' or *narod*, or 'labouring people'), made reference to a social group by categories in which most of the groups' supposed members would not have recognised themselves. Into the early twentieth century, for instance, the term worker (*rabochii*) had connotations of unskilled labour and thus of the relative cultural poverty of the one it designated; the term 'class' (*klass*) was even among the educated elite not distinguished consistently from either 'estate' (*sosloviia*) or 'section of the population' until (arguably) after the revolutions of 1917; the term 'working class' (*rabochii klass*) could designate 'proletarians,' owning labour-power alone, or the peasantry in the countryside and the cities, or factory workers in particular; even 'proletarian,' with its apparently clear definition, was often used by radicals and radical workers similarly to 'working class,' denoting peasants with no land or small amounts of land, urban workers, peasant workers, soldiers, or synonymously with 'the simple people.' Social exclusion, including exclusion from a perceived mainstream of 'working-class culture,' was often precipitated, and the exaggerated, by the worker-revolutionaries' fidelity to a 'wider working-class' that, for most working people, existed neither experientially, culturally, nor conceptually. At best it was an abstraction; at worst an ideal entity with no connection to the people it categorised excepting 'the elite' of self-educated workers, placing themselves at its margins at the same moment as they created it and identified with it. Steinberg writes:

The cultural marginality of worker-writers within their class was often, paradoxically, a stimulus to collective identification with other workers and active involvement in the class struggle...[T]o become class conscious a worker did not need to be told that he was poor and exploited, which he already knew, but to acquire 'a knowledge of self that reveals to him a being dedicated to something else besides exploitation.' This subversive knowledge was most likely to be nurtured not in the depths of working class culture but at its margins, where everyday experiences of proletarian existence encountered ideas shaped in different settings and where aspiring and questioning workers were daily reminded of the social and political barriers around them...Many of these [workers] believed it was their duty to spread enlightenment and consciousness among other workers - echoing in a popular key

the moral debt to the people felt by educated, upper-class *intelligenty*. Equally important, these marginal workers (like marginal intellectuals) sought to erase the boundary that divided educated society from the ‘dark masses.’⁵⁰

It is Steinberg’s view, following that of Jacques Rancière (who is quoted in the passage),⁵¹ that their acquisition of ‘subversive knowledge’ and their consequent marginalisation placed the ‘aspiring and questioning’ workers in a *better* position to articulate or express the meaning of the working-class condition, whether by words or by actions, to contemporary audiences or to historians. Yet, critical distance from the concepts of ‘class,’ ‘class struggle,’ the ‘dark masses,’ and ‘consciousness’ draws into question not only the existence of the ‘class’ objectively and socially, but notions of ‘individuality’ and the ‘historical individual’ as well. Knowledge that class-consciousness and the concomitant belief in a unified class culture, class position, or class interest across the disparate groups covered by the term was predicated upon the ‘acquisition of subversive knowledge’ – practical and intellectual artefacts shaped and smuggled in from ‘different settings’ - reminds us that all these terms were *concepts*. The concepts of class, the mass, and individuality had been the meat and potatoes of elite philosophical, political and literary discourse for many decades before finding their way into workers’ writings. This is not to claim that class or individuality did not exist, conceptually, notionally, practically, within the wider workers and peasants’ milieus ‘before’ their interaction with other classes or with the radical intelligentsia. It is only that, in the case of the worker-*intelligenty*, the influence of those who thought themselves ‘outside’ the *narod* or the working class is so clear as to invite the conclusion that marginality was *produced*, rather than directly suffered, by worker-writers; that the ‘mass’ and the ‘class,’ defined by their deficiencies and their sufferings, were created in the act of self-identification; that the worker-*intelligenty* were no more ‘inside’ the working-class or mass than the *intelligenty*; that (therefore) they have no privilege or right to speak for the ‘class,’ and that such descriptions, judgements and images of working-class life that are found in workers’ writings have no privileged connection to the ‘class’ either.

III. MARTYRS AND WITNESSES

Steinberg argues, after Rancière, that the worker-writers’ difference, their ‘oddity,’ in fact serves from the margins to illuminate the experience of the class more brightly than a study of

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 311-2.

⁵¹ The quotation is from J. Rancière, *The Nights of Labor: The Workers’ Dream in Nineteenth Century France* (Philadelphia, 1989), p. 20.

the aimed the ‘depths of working-class culture.’⁵² Examination of Alekseev’s case shows that this idea too – like the workers’ ‘right to speak for themselves’ – was part of the revolutionary doctrine that influenced self-educated workers and their compositions from the 1870s to the 1920s and 1930s. Evidence suggests that ‘class consciousness’ and ‘workers’ speech’ were constituent elements in a special concept of *workers’ individuality*, formed in part by deduction from ideological tenets, through interactions between workers and *intelligenty*, and in part by political exigencies, i.e. the destruction of the workers’ circles in the period 1874-6. A passing comment of Walter Benjamin’s - that, in the Greek, the word ‘martyr’ also meant ‘witness’⁵³ – will be the starting point in explaining this idea and some of its historiographical consequences. Made in a review of Anna Seghers’ novel of working-class life, *Die Rettung (The Rescue)*, Benjamin’s discussion and the comment cited shed light on Alekseev’s ‘individuality,’ its significance to the Russia working-class movement, and its place in the working-class history of which his writings (his speech and letters) were a small part. *Die Rettung* depicts a mining village plagued by unemployment, showing the everyday lives of working men and their families transformed: their days of hard labour were broken up by evenings of the ‘the bliss of doing nothing’; unemployment gives the torment of ‘idleness without work’: ‘they are subjected to the passage of time like an incubus that impregnates them against their will. They do not give birth, but they have the eccentric desires of a pregnant woman.’⁵⁴ Benjamin discusses the representation of working-class experience and its difficulties. ‘Attempts by writers to report on the lives and living conditions of the proletariat’ (he begins) ‘have been hindered by prejudices impossible to overcome in one day.’

According to one of the most persistent of them, the proletarian is a ‘simple man of the people,’ contrasted not so much with the educated man as with the individuated member of a higher class. To see in the oppressed person a child of nature was the stock reaction of the rising bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century. After that class had triumphed, it ceased to contrast the oppressed, whose place it had now ceded to the proletariat, with feudal degeneracy, and henceforth set them in opposition to its own finely shaded bourgeois individuality. The form in which this was manifest was the bourgeois novel; its subject was the incalculable fate of the individual...⁵⁵

⁵² Steinberg, ‘The Injured and Insurgent Self,’ p. 310 and 312; Rancière, *Nights of Labor*, viii-ix.

⁵³ W. Benjamin, ‘A Chronicle of Germany’s Unemployed: Anna Seghers’ novel *Die Rettung*,’ *Selected Writings*, v. 4, 1938-40, H. Eiland and M. J. Jennings (ed.), translated by E. Jephcott and others (Cambridge, Mass., 2006), p. 129.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 127-8.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

In contrast, in an effort to represent working-class experience adequately, *Die Rettung* puts itself apart from the ‘general law of the novel...[Its] medium - the character’s fate - is absent.’⁵⁶ What, then, organises a novel that rejects ‘finely shaded bourgeois individuality,’ yet retains individuals and their experiences at its centre? The work contrasts reportage and theories of unemployment to the workers’ experiences of it, each abstract political or economic relation like ‘a root structure’ (‘...wherever the author gently lifts them from the ground, we find adhering to them the humus of private relationships: neighbourly, erotic, familial...’). Each anecdote or impression ‘reveals more about unemployment than any official inquiry could.’ In contrast to the ‘individuated member of a higher class’ and the ‘simple man of the people,’ hazy and indistinct, these characters are witnesses and martyrs: ‘They are martyrs in a very literal sense (martyr, in Greek, means ‘witness’). The report on them is a chronicle...The book is interspersed with many stories waiting for a *listener*.’⁵⁷ The martyr is a lightning rod for oppression aimed at victims the oppressor conceals. The shock of oppression concentrated upon one person lights up the individual for a moment, by only to reflect to his fellow victims and sympathisers suffering that is collective. Working-class suffering, softened for those outside by the abstraction of its victims, is apprehended better in the testimony of individuals whose experience is both of the class *and* personal. Seglers’ representation of individuals does not describe the ‘fate’ of a person around whom episodes and characters are arranged, the formation of a character and a plot at the centre rounded off in a neat ending: tragedy, fortune, death. The working-class witness, representing in himself a condition that has no ‘incalculable fate’ or end, calls also for emancipation or redemption.⁵⁸ The worker, as an ‘individual,’ is thus a political figure distinct from both ‘bourgeois individuals’ and the apocryphal ‘simple man of the people.’

In 1877 Alekseev was both a ‘martyr’ and a ‘witness.’ His position somewhere between the indistinct mass and the individuated ‘higher classes’ was immortalised in the speech by which both functions were fulfilled. A similar, impoverished individuality, bound to the functions of *representing*, *embodying* and *testifying* to working-class experience, was fixed in the hyphenated categories, ‘worker-*intelligent*,’ ‘developed worker,’ ‘conscious worker,’ that identified Alekseev, Smirnov, Aleksandrov, Gerasimov, Obnorskii and the others. Alekseev’s ascent from mass man to martyr-witness was rooted in the conflict between his movement and the autocracy. Resignation to personal catastrophe – the mark of the publicists-turned-radicals

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 129.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 128-9.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 132.

in the 1860s – became a strategy. Revolutionaries imprisoned and tried made themselves into martyrs. Reducing themselves to the universal power to testify, they also became ‘witnesses.’ The existence of a lower-class apparently invisible to the classes above, knowledge of its condition among radicals, and the central tenet of workers’ self-emancipation’ in combination suggested to the social-revolutionaries of the 1870s the ‘worker-orator,’ who would speak for his class, make those above conscious of it, and act as a witness to suffering that would otherwise sink into historical obscurity. Alekseev filled the empty space opened by the amalgamation of revolutionary practice and the doctrines of narodism. It was his function to be a martyr and a witness to the condition of the working-class, on the public stage inviting down upon himself autocratic repression in order to reveal, in microcosm, the wider class-repression that underpinned his particular trial and punishment. The success of this depended upon Alekseev’s ability to hold in balance his particular life with the class experience supposedly determining of his actions and his thought. The speech is written testament to Alekseev’s attempt, a ‘collective testimony’ possible of a personal or an impersonal reading, but in fact designed to falsify the distinction: ‘*We, the working millions...*’ (Alekseev, Appx. A: 277) This function and the balancing act necessary to it were thought up and executed at a specific moment and in a particular, political setting. Yet, in formulating and committing his speech to paper, Alekseev’s temporary embodiment of class experience was carried beyond the courtroom and its immediate audience, and transferred into the historiography of the Russian working-class. A contradiction between the situation that had made Alekseev the workers’ martyr-witness, and the moment in its performance that lit up the particular life within and behind his ‘collective testimony,’ was latent in the speech’s political function. Alekseev’s role as a witness implied a certain individual *presence* that now invites biographical questions, but did not and does not, by necessity, deliver the ‘substance’ that would allow this moment of the role to be ‘filled out’ and made concrete. Valorisation by publication and republication reproduced and revealed the tension across all of Alekseev’s writings and all documentation of his life. This was equally the position of the worker-revolutionaries who were called upon – or felt compelled – to preserve their experiences and stories for posterity in the decades after Alekseev.

Perhaps more than any other social group of the time, the worker-revolutionaries were in history haunted by the social and intellectual categories that had once classified them socially and economically. Thus, the same tension between particular workers and their class - between the particular experience, the common experience, and their historical or poetic representation -

is found in the historical studies that have drawn upon their writings in pursuit of the Russian working-class. That the term ‘workers’ writing’ is still immediately intelligible - even unremarkable - as an historiographical category is evidence of how the role of martyr-witness was taken on (or imposed upon) those men and women identified as ‘workers’ or ‘working class,’ particularly those who by documentation were able to preserve for history their own, particular lives. Workers’ historical writings, nominally autobiographical, were for a time treated by Soviet and social historians as Alekseev’s speech had been by his revolutionary contemporaries. Early historical studies reduced worker-writers to exemplars of an experience that, for being general to their class, could not really be theirs. Personal experience was documented as *testimony* to a social process and a history, the impersonal or universal moments of which were considered by historians to be primary. That this history was supposed to be the ‘workers’ own’ did not mean that past events, relations, struggles or experiences would be appropriated by workers by the act of giving testimony. ‘History,’ as the relations, events and people that now framed their own pasts, would not be transformed by these workers through writing or retelling into ‘personal experience,’ in the sense of the Russian *perezhivanie* (‘to live through’ and also ‘to leap over/overcome’). Individuality would be reduced in historical testimony to the fact of having knowledge regarding an abstract ‘class history’ whose moment of universality was emphasised. Valorisation of the ‘access’ of worker-writers to this abstraction through their *direct* experience of class oppression and class struggle was affirmative rather than critical of class categorisation. Individual stories, particular lives, subjective impressions and self-reflections - all nominally definitive of genres of historical writing in which the author and his or her ‘fate’ was central - were subsumed under the categories that workers readily offered in their writings: ‘We, the workers...,’ ‘I was a worker...,’ ‘I was born to a poor joiner....,’ etc (see Appx. A-D: 277, 281, 290). All such categories, mentioned almost in passing, further explanation apparently unnecessary, functioned as hallmarks of authenticity. Historians used these hallmarks to make judgements regarding the historical value of particular documents, the information they contained, and of their authors as ‘witnesses.’

Marxist-Leninism allowed the early worker-*intelligenty* both complete identity with, and significant distinction from, the Russian working class. Identified as the prototypical workers’ vanguard, their historical role as embodiments of the working-class experience and representatives of the working-class interest were underpinned by an ideology stretching back

into the 1830s and from there into the beginnings of the social-revolutionary movement in Russia. Soviet historical science was formed within a wider conceptual universe that reified social categories in its adherence to a ‘monism’ whose aim was to explain everything by a single principle, ‘from the elementary biological level right up to the level of human history.’⁵⁹ Engel’s extension of Marx’s work into the fields of natural science and, beyond its ‘limited,’ ‘bourgeois’ version, to Nature itself, linked the dialectic laws governing natural processes with the dialectical laws governing the developments in human history and society. In Hegelian fashion, Engels and his many followers in the European socialist movement (including Plekhanov and Lenin) identified the ‘finite’ with fleeting and superficial appearances of things viewed in isolation, the force within the birth, life and decay of things - their ‘becoming’ – then baptised as the material dialectic. Appropriating the Hegelian schema, Engels gave the semblance of materialism to an understanding of nature and society that was more or less idealist. Things in isolation (as ‘bourgeois scientific understanding’ saw them), when viewed dialectically (or ‘speculatively’), were seen as instances - the finite realisations - of an immanent, dialectical law. Now Hegel’s system was based around the notion that the concept of a thing, the thing as it was in thought, was its truth, and its material form a mere body inhabited by the Absolute in its inner compulsion to ‘realise itself.’ Thus, Hegel could argue consistently that grasping a thing (forming a *concept* of a thing; *abstracting* from its particular, finite form to comprehend its essence), and grasping it as an instance of a ‘law’ (in this case, the law-governed development of the Absolute) realised its truth by returning it to thought from which it was alienated. Engels, a confessed ‘materialist,’ giving primacy to the laws of matter, thus created a system in which ‘matter’ itself was split in two – an outer husk of finite appearances and an inner kernel of dialectical law. To grasp this law then revealed the truth about the material world, but only in the sense that law was already *there*, in things, and *could* be grasped by a mind attuned to the dialectic, but still existed independently of human thought. ‘Law,’ an abstraction formed in and by thought, became reality itself, and at exactly the point where it was made a marker of the development of ‘human consciousness.’ Thus, as Lucio Coletti has shown, Plekhanov and Lenin, following Engels, were able to copy passages wholesale from Hegel and tout them as both dialectical and materialist without turning the method, or the imagery, or the conceptual scheme informing either, ‘on their heads.’⁶⁰

⁵⁹ L. Coletti, ‘Introduction,’ K. Marx, *Early Writings* (London, 1975), p. 9; see also J. J. O’Rourke, *The Problem of Freedom in Marxist Thought: An Analysis of the Treatment of Human Freedom by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Contemporary Soviet Philosophy* (Dordrecht, 1874), p.1-2.

⁶⁰ L. Coletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, translated by L. Garner (London, 1979), p. 24-5.

Thus, Hegel's metaphor of the dialectic - the seed as 'in itself' (a flower potentially) and the blossoming flower as 'for itself' (realised and now in decay) - was readily applied to human affairs, even to the formation of *classes*. The formation of a workers' intelligentsia and a workers' Party that represented the interests of the working class was the class become 'for itself.' Prior to this, the class was only in-itself - a class only potentially. What this 'potency' might actually consist in was explained by the 'materialist dialectic': it was *both* the intellectuals' 'grasp' of a class interest or class position by means of concepts ('Marxism' as a theory) *and* an objective part of reality itself, whether 'grasped' or not. Thus, in 1902, Lenin argued in *Chto delat'?* (*What is to be Done?*) that the peasants, peasant-workers and hired labourers' machine-breaking, 'spontaneous' disorder, rioting, and reactive strike activity through the 1860s to the 1880s were the 'embryonic forms' of class struggle that would develop, under the guidance of intellectuals of the working and educated classes, into conscious, political forms of class struggle.⁶¹ The notion of the 'embryonic form' in Lenin's famous pamphlet demonstrates the contradiction of a system of thought in which consciousness was both necessary *and* epiphenomenal to human progress. Whether particular workers or poor peasants were *conscious* of the class meanings of their actions, they still *had* determinants in 'objective class conditions.' Consciousness of class would then be the objective, social process 'realising itself' in thought, through the intellectuals, the worker-*intelligenty*, and the workers' Party. Similarly, Plekhanov could argue that the practice of the pre-Marxist groups of the late 1870s and early 1880s were *correct*, reflecting the objective conditions of their time, but that their consciousness - their own rationalisation for their actions - was wrong, backward. Thought, Plekhanov claimed in his first 'Marxist' works of 1883-6, would take time to catch up to and bind itself with reality. The practical activities of the workers' movement of the 1870s - including the workers' circles in which Alekseev had taken part, and the key ideas of Alekseev's speech - were closer to expressing the true interests of the Russian working-class (and thus of Russian society as a whole) than the doctrines of the 'Populists.' Having been forged by direct experience of class oppression rather than 'abstract theory,' the actions and ideas of worker-revolutionaries and worker-*intelligenty* *could not help* but express the shared interests of their class, and thereby express and realise the 'laws' of social development in their own actions. A privilege of 'speech' (the role of witness) was recognised in workers at the same

⁶¹ Lenin, 'Chto delat'?', March, 1902, *Soch.* 5, p. 346-47/ *CW:* 5, p. 374-5.

time as the privilege of ‘experience’ formed a link between ‘material life’ and the choices, thoughts and behaviour of the ‘workers’ vanguard.’

Plekhanov’s early Marxist writings demonstrate the continuity of the social-revolutionary attitude to worker-*intelligenty* as harbingers of workers self-emancipation and, by extension of the basic tenet, of workers’ expression (including speeches, programmes, writings) as the authentic voice of social-revolutionism, from the decades immediately following the Emancipation to the process of the establishment of a ‘workers state’ between 1917 and 1928. The continuity of the central tenet held across the ideological boundaries that Plekhanov had helped establish in the early 1880s: from the mixed socialist-anarchist groups of the late 1860s and early 1870s, to the anarchistic and ‘populist’ groups of the late 1870s and 1880s, to the Marxists/Social Democrats (SDs) and Socialist-Revolutionaries (SRs) of the late nineteenth century and beyond. Plekhanov also provides a more explicit link between the speech of Alekseev as a foundational document of a ‘workers’ history’ and the collection and production of workers’ memoirs, related to the period 1869-1900, after the October Revolution. Though a few observational studies of the Russian working class had been published by radicals in the late 1860s – V. V. Bervi-Flerovskii’s *Polozhenie rabocheho Klassa v Rossii* (*The Condition of the Working Class in Russia*, 1869), for instance -and more were planned by circles in the early 1870s, Plekhanov’s was the first to write a detailed study of the revolutionary movement that specifically took the culture, the process of radicalisation, and the subsequent activities of *historical* worker-revolutionaries as its theme and focus: *Russkii rabochii* (see Appx. E for translated extracts). Shortly before its publication, Plekhanov had written a short introduction to Alekseev’s speech, then being republished by his *Osvobozhdenie Truda* (*Emancipation of Labour*, hereafter: OT) group. When Soviet historians came to study the period again in the 1920s, Plekhanov’s was still the best (and the most ‘sound’) text, its reference points and observations, if not already established as ‘definitive’ in the radical working class histories of the pre-revolutionary period, reproduced as a sort of canonical framework by which to approach workers’ radicalisation, the workers’ split from the ‘Populist’ intelligentsia, and the birth of Russian Marxism in the 1870s and 1880s. Moreover, when workers came to write or record their own memoirs of the period, it was partly against these reference points of Plekhanov’s. Diakov Smirnov, sought out by the journal *Krasnyi Letopis’* (*Red Chronicle*) to give his testimony, was asked specifically to comment upon the Plekhanov’s portrayal of him in *Russkii Rabochii*. Several other questions were derived from concerns that had figured heavily in

Plekhanov's memoir and in his early theoretical works: what was the relation of the radical workers to intelligentsia? What sort of things did the workers read in their circles? What sort of things did the workers wear? How did they relate to the rank-and-file workers, the peasantry, or the 'masses'? What kind of political activities were the workers involved in? What about the major intellectual figures of the time (Plekhanov, Natanson, Kropotkin, Kravchinskii)? The prominent worker-*intelligenty* of the late 1870s (Obnorskii; Khalturin)? The prominent workers' organisations of the time (Obnorskii and Khalturin's *Severnyi Soiuz Russkikh Rabochikh* [Northern Union of Russian Workers])? (see Smirnov, Appx. C: 286-89).

It can be seen from Smirnov's case that the imposition of ideas of working-class behaviour and working-class interests took place not only through the survival of the basic categories and sub-categories of social-revolutionary thought (*narod*; *intelligent*; worker; peasant, worker-*intelligent*), but also because descriptions and judgements of their own, *particular* actions, thoughts, and lives already existed as historical accounts, written by others. Smirnov's experience as a historical witness was an extension of the situation, going back to the 1860s and 1870s, in which concepts of universal, popular or working-class cultures, interests and behaviour had always-already been formulated by people who saw themselves as being outside the working-class milieu. Lenin had famously claimed in *Chto delat'* that socialism as a truly revolutionary doctrine had come from the mind of the educated class, and that revolutionary consciousness would obtain – at least at first – only among a special group of intellectuals and worker-intellectuals. Historically it is at least true that the early worker-revolutionaries (from the 1870s to the early 1890s) had no other choice but to depend on the writings, theories, and ideas brought to them from a culture self-consciously different from theirs, and from a different class. The notion of a unified working-class interest (i.e. the term *rabochii*; the particular way in which students, teachers and revolutionaries used the word *narod*) was based on the self-conscious sense of difference and isolation of the educated from the working people below: these were decidedly *political* terms, without any immediate comprehensibility for the people designated and categorised by them. It is also clear – and Alekseev is the first and best example of this – that a certain role had been defined, or a space left open, for certain 'special' working people long before such people had been encountered, concretely, by the educated classes. The worker-revolutionary or worker-*intelligent* were both *concepts* in a revolutionary doctrine before particular people (like Alekseev) were perceived to have filled the role in practice. It was with an image of a 'workers' elite' - knowledge thirsty, devoted, fearless, with direct experience

of oppression and exploitation - that the educated radicals of the *chaikovtsy*, *dolgushintsy* and *lavristy* clusters approached working men and women between 1871-3. Alekseev was not only understood as the embodiment of the ‘working millions,’ but also the realisation and fulfilment of a developed, socio-political category within revolutionary doctrine. The perception of him, therefore, as an ‘instance of a category’ - defined by the pre-existing concept that abstracted from his particular life and thoughts and actions – or as evidence of a social process or ‘law,’ was not only invited by his conscious decision to underplay his ‘biography,’ but also by the revolutionary doctrine whose belief-system makes this propagandistic tactic intelligible to us. Alekseev and his intelligentsia comrades actually *believed* in the ‘special privilege’ of the workingman to speak for his class, and therefore transformed class from an imposed condition to an essence or a value possessed by each and every worker (even if only a few had the opportunity and the will to make use of it). The worker-memoirists of the 1920s, writing about their activities in the 1870s and 1880s, were certainly not at the specific political conjuncture that faced the VSRO and Alekseev in 1876-7. Yet, the notion that these worker writers were realising a pre-determined historical role, set out by a process often understood to be inevitable, objective, and external to individual people, made them equally martyr-witnesses for their class and so instances of the categories of ‘worker’ and worker-*intelligent*. The special working-class individuality of Alekseev’s speech became the framework of workers’ writings, nominally directed and centred upon the author’s ‘self.’

Smirnov was confronted not only with an ‘historical science’ that needed his testimony to historical events, persons and relations already deemed to be significant, but also with specific texts in which the significance of certain events in his life and the life of ‘his class’ were consciously related to a broader ideology of history and a scheme of historical progress or movement. It was not only Plekhanov’s *Russkii Rabochii*, but also Pëtr Kropotkin’s memoirs, Vera Figner’s numerous autobiographical and memoir accounts, Sergei Kravchinskii’s historical writings, Vladimir Burtsev and Vladimir Basilevskii’s documentary collections from the 1880s, 1890s and 1900s, that had already portrayed the lives of *particular*, historical workers (Alekseev, Smirnov, Volkov, Mitrofanov, Obnorskii and Khalturin especially) and within a framework that took the tenets of social-revolutionism as givens. As much as these authors reflected on a past in which the idea of workers ‘doing things for themselves’ was key, they also courted the tensions, inherent in such theories, regarding the role and significance of individual actions or ‘consciousness’ and the wider historical process of which the individual

and his or her ‘consciousness’ were supposed to be part (whether as ‘reflection,’ ‘catalyst,’ or whatever). By offering their own, ‘subjective’ and ‘personal’ accounts of the historical events and relations in which they had been involved, they entered directly into an ideological and philosophical debate regarding true knowledge and its relation to experience (sensation; perception; spirit) that already went back centuries. In the 1860s and 1870s, the question of the ‘role of the individual in history,’ ‘in society’ or (especially) in a social-revolutionary movement defined by its adherence to the class as revolutionary subject, was revived as a tension between the moment of a doctrine that valorised ‘direct experience’ over theory (and thus the ‘primary source’ along with ‘action’) and the moment that associated the personal or individual perspective as hopelessly partial, provisional, and even ‘epiphenomenal’ to the real, driving forces of the historical process.

This was especially true of the Soviet ‘historical science’ of the 1920s and 1930s, then looking for the primary sources and the personal testimonies of history’s participants, while at the same time formulating programmes (not always consistent with each other) to establish historical research and historical explanation as scientific and objective. In this case the vacillation of the historians seems to have reflected the greater problem of the reification of categories – particularly, of class – as they were expressed in the policies of the government of a ‘workers’ state’ in construction. The reification of the categories of class – and especially of the terms ‘worker,’ ‘peasant,’ ‘bourgeois(ie)’ and ‘proletarian’ allowed Lenin and Stalin’s revolutionary governments a doctrinal legitimacy by appeal to the ‘working-class’ or ‘proletarian’ interest, while suppressing or destroying the independent activities and organisations of working people both in the cities and in the countryside.⁶² Yet, for all the attacks on trades unions, strikers, worker-oppositionists and non-Bolshevik factory cells, working-class support – still defined by the occupations or functions of those ascribed to the class – remained a key aim of Soviet policy in both the domestic and international arenas. It has been claimed that, in the 1920s and 1930s, the categories of class were in flux: students, officer-soldiers, former businessmen, ‘legal’ peasants and others deemed by birth ‘bourgeois’ or ‘petit-bourgeois’ hastened to demonstrate their ‘proletarian identity’ – understood as a cast of mind or political consciousness - by writing

⁶² For a short discussion, see Smith, *Revolution and the People*, p. 198-201. For detailed studies of the Bolsheviks and the Russian industrial workers after 1917, see K. Murphy, *Revolution and Counter-revolution: Class Struggle in a Moscow Metal Factory* (New York, 2001); S. Pirani, *The Russian Revolution in Retreat, 1920-24: Soviet workers and the new Communist elite* (New York, 2008); D. P. Koenker, *Republic of Labor: Russian Printers and Soviet Socialism, 1918–1930*. (Ithaca and London, 2005).

accounts of their own conversion-experiences and submitting them to the Party for analysis.⁶³ Yet, the fledgling Soviet historiography was deeply involved in efforts to collect and preserve the accounts of ‘workers’ and ‘proletarians,’ projects in which these terms were still very much understood as social *positions* and social *backgrounds*: a relation to production, a relation to the historical process, a relation to inescapable, objective economic and social structures. All of these were seen to have stamped a mark of class upon the knowledge, experiences, and ‘voices’ of workers and former workers. The ‘workers’ voice’ was not to be embodied only in its vanguard – the Party – but in those who possessed and preserved working-class experience in themselves as something once undergone, impressed upon them by ‘life itself.’

Soviet historians often had occasion to make cautionary gestures towards memoirs, letters, diaries and autobiographies. Since they were – inevitably - ‘subjective,’ without verification by other materials they were not to be trusted.⁶⁴ The caution rang hollow when Soviet historians were faced with workers’ descriptions of working-class experience: exploitation, suffering, degradation, overwork, and brutalisation. Where workers’ memories and descriptions of political events (meetings, publications, the membership of organisations, conversations) could often be compared to other accounts and so ‘corrected,’ where necessary, the evocation of class oppression neither required nor invited verification. As workers, their right to speak of the working-class condition was sacrosanct. More than that: working-class oppression was such that it was never really ‘personal,’ never really ‘subjective,’ or vulnerable to the tricks of memory and perspective, and so never really included in the cautionary gesture. In contrast, social and political historians have in recent years distanced themselves from the heavily politicised notion of the ‘workers’ right to speak for themselves.’ What remained of it in the social historians’ use and analysis of the relevant primary sources had to be reconciled with growing evidence of the heterogeneity and division everywhere apparent within the Russian working class, however defined. The writings of radical workers, at the margins of any conceivable, ‘mainstream’ working-class culture, were evidence of the views of radicals or revolutionaries who were also workers, or radicals who considered themselves to be representatives of a wider working-class interest, position, or culture. The study of particular workers’ biographies has tended to reduce the ‘primacy’ of the primary source from the class,

⁶³ On this theme, see I. Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh, 2000) and idem, *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge, MA., 2003).

⁶⁴ See, for instance, B. S. Golubtsov, *Memuary kak istochnik po istorii sovestskoi obshchestva* (Moscow, 1970), p. 3-4.

through the sub-culture or sub-category, to the particular author in question. The privilege (not to say credulity) afforded the primary source for its 'direct relation' to an event, a relationship, a person, or a thought remains only in attenuated form: *this* worker has the right to speak for *himself* – or, perhaps, these radical workers and worker-*intelligenty*, from *these* circles, or *this* decade, have the right to 'speak for themselves' (though, as historians, we needn't believe what they say). Interest in individual working people, their stories, ideas, and representations, undermines the categories by which such authors and their writings are approached.

Is there any justice, then, in talking of 'workers' writings,' in opposition to the writings of other social groups, or in terms of these writings' contents? Are the radical workers - by their commitment to revolutionary socialism historically marginal to the wider workers' and peasants' milieus – trustworthy witnesses to 'workers' experience' or 'class experience'? What is the relation between the writings of 'workers' and the working class to which they belonged, or thought themselves to belong? By an examination of the origins and development of a revolutionary historiography and the place of the 'workers' voice' (or worker's voices) in it, I hope to answer these questions. We begin with Alekseev initially.

2. Alekseev's Speech:

Social-revolutionaries, the autocracy, and the 'workers' voice,' 1830-92

When Alekseev gave his speech in March 1877, individual experience was already an important *category* of social-revolutionary thought. At points it was an explicitly defined concept. More often it was an underlying notion, informing and holding together the social-revolutionary categories of class (and 'estate'), revolution, freedom, thought and action. The category developed in relation to a political practice that ascribed *value* to experience, and particularly to class experience. The result was the 'class witness and martyr,' a position that Alekseev first filled. The roots of this position can be identified in intellectual and practical developments beginning decades before the emergence of the overtly social-revolutionary movements and the *narodnik* doctrine of 'workers' self-emancipation.' From the late 1830s, the question of the social and historical role of personality (*lichnost'*) was central to the political thought of prominent Russian intellectuals and their circles, coming to occupy, in turn, a key place in the doctrinal debates of the democratic and radical intelligentsia of the 1860s and 1870s. Devotion to the 'popular cause' and the concomitant belief in social change at the behest of the oppressed, as a mass, forced a decision as to the relation of the individual to the movement. The position eventually taken by the social-revolutionaries of the 1870s on the question of the role of the individual was closely linked to the philosophical and practical developments of three decades that had culminated in the formation, or 'coming to consciousness,' of some intellectuals as the intelligentsia. The debate over the *person* - the unique person and his or her relation to Reason or History or the movement - had once assumed the primacy of singularities, or historical uniqueness, almost *a priori*, the question being: how does a person obtain these things, and what relation does this bear to thought, reason, or history as an apparently extra-personal process? In contrast, the debate over the role of 'the individual' - of *any* individual - in history, already assumed the primacy of forces or laws outside of and authoritative in relation to historical singularities and, especially, unique persons. The splitting of *lichnost'* into its more and less abstract aspects did not, then, correspond to a division between a 'practical sphere,' with all its confusions and complexities (the event, local circumstances, the unique person) and a theory or set of abstractions used to simplify and explain these. It was, instead, a matter of

emphasis. The slight shift of emphasis from the unique personality to the abstract individual had long term consequences for the revolutionary movement and its self-conception, as well as for its self-written history and the documentation collected to facilitate its composition. Alekseev's making as Russia's first working-class 'martyr-witness' was situated at the point where the social-revolutionary movement's practical promotion of abstract individuality was brought to its logical end in a campaign of revolutionary terror and in the simultaneous impulse to self-documentation, both rooted in political failures of 1874-6 and the fear of personal and political annihilation that followed. This chapter traces developments in social-revolutionary ideology and practice to 1892.

I. INDIVIDUALITY, EXPERIENCE, CLASS (1830-78)

Transformation of the nominal dissidence of unofficial, intellectual activities among small groups of educated elites into self-conscious, social-revolutionary thought and activity took place under several influences, most importantly: the character of the autocratic regimes of Aleksandr I and Nikolai I; the cultural and political relations between Russia and Western Europe; and the development of relations between the major social groups within Russian society. Alienation from Nikolai I's regime amongst the sons and daughters of government officials and the landed nobility scattered a number of them abroad - to study, to wanderings from Paris to London to Berlin or - towards the end of the 1830s and the beginning of the 1840s - into imprisonment or internal exile, often on petit and barely substantiated charges of 'seditious thought.' The European-wide upheavals of 1838-9 and 1848 cemented opposition to the Russian autocracy within a small but significant section of the outcast elite, but nothing like the unity of radical thought found in the early 1860s yet obtained. What did give members of the early circles common grounds for discussion and action were, on the one hand, certain 'accursed questions' (the fate of Russia or the Russian nation; Russia's relation to the rest of Europe; the proper means of understanding the movement of history and its future path(s); the proper relationship between the intellectual and this movement), a certain shared stock of concepts with which answers were proffered, and a certain form of sociability - in other words, the 'circle' itself. The influence of German philosophy was evident in Russian intellectual life from the discussion circles of the late 1830s to the foundation of radical students' groups in the 1870s. The circles of the 1830s, breaking apart at the very end of the decade into recognisable

and antagonistic camps ('Slavophiles' and 'Westerners'), had found common inspiration in the post-Kantian idealisms of Fichte and Schiller, and the speculative philosophies of Schelling and Hegel. In contrast to the mutual displacements experienced by the philosopher-academics in Germany, their works found an enthusiastic and youthful Russian audience almost simultaneously. The result was a distillation of a variety of currents in disparate systems of thought, cultivated in the light of friendship and under the pressure of critical discussion.

Many of the same questions were being asked of Russian society in the 1860 and 1870s as had been in the late 1830s. Some of the concepts instrumental to the earlier circles' discussions also remained central to the later ones, partly because of the continuity of the social structures imposed and maintained by the Russian autocracy, partly because of a continuity of intellectual influences, and partly because the intelligentsia's mode of sociability and resistance – the 'circle' – remained both the preferable and the only viable one given the other two conditions. The Russian concept of '(self)-formation' (*samoobrazaovanie*; *samorazvitie*), having been central to German literary and philosophical discourse as *Bildung* ('formation'; 'education'; 'cultivation'),¹ served both as an intellectual keystone and a practical task for the Russian circles of these periods. In the 1830s and 1840s, the inclination was to emphasise the relation between the 'personality' – the unique, historical person, rather than the abstract, political-judicial 'individual' – and the movements of 'Reason' and 'the Spirit.' In both the German and Russian contexts, self-formation or self-education were closely linked to the philosophical term 'Individuality,' denoting the synthesis of the particular and the universal in the Concept, in Nature and in Society (the human world), the latter including individual people.² In its movement from the German to the Russian contexts, the specifically political form of 'Individuality' as a man's 'rising to the universal through culture'³ evolved into a concept comprehending both concrete 'personality' and abstract 'individuality' (*lichnost*).⁴ For Schiller

¹ H-G. Gadamar, *Truth and Method* (2nd ed.), translated by J. Wiensheimer and D. G. Marshall (London/ New York, 2004), p. 8-16; A. T. Peperzak, *Modern Freedom: Hegel's Legal, Moral and Political Philosophy* (Dordrecht, 2001), p. 206-7.

² White, *Karl Marx*, p. 73-4; D. Gray Carlson, *A Commentary on Hegel's Science of Logic* (Basingstoke, 2007), p. 429-30; Peperzak, *Modern Freedom*, p. 51-72,

³ Gadamar, *Truth and Method*, p. 11-2.

⁴ For existing definitions and discussions of *lichnost*, see D. Offord, "'Lichnost': Notions of Individual Identity," *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolutions, 1881-1940*, C. Kelly and D. Shepard (eds.), (Oxford, 1998), p. 15; A. Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism*, translated by H. Andrews-Rusiecka (Oxford, 1980), p. 94-5, 99-103; on *lichnost* in relation to workers, see Steinberg, "The Injured and Insurgent Self," p. 310; idem, 'Predstavlenie o "lichnost"' v srede rabochikh intelligentov,' *Rabochii i Intelligentsiia v epokhu reform i revoliutsii, 1961 – fevral' 1917 g.* (St. Petersburg, 1997), p. 96-97; Smith, *Revolution and the People*, p. 75-8.

and Goethe, it was the recognition of one's own formation by what appeared to be external that allowed externality ('Nature' or 'passion') to be appropriated and overcome. Self-conscious cultivation of oneself was, and would result in, the achievement of Individuality and the formation of a unique 'personality.' Hegel's philosophy, highly influential in the Russian circles of the 1830s,⁵ developed these themes. For Hegel, *Bildung* as a process was the recognition of the individual's duty to 'rise to the Universal': in other words, to realise consciously - with one's consciously-lived life - an otherwise abstract understanding of the Absolute's self-realisation through nature, history, and human thought ('Spirit'). Human Individuality would result from the conscious expression of an infinite truth that was, at once, greater than the finite world of human thought and powerless without its mediation. Thus, in Aleksandr Herzen's early works - synthesising Schiller and Hegel, while bashing them both hard against Russia's social reality - the role of the person was to express, first through self-conscious thought and latterly through active self-formation and effective action, the movements of Reason, actualising or realising them in human thought and in human history.⁶ The radicalism implied by Herzen's call to action was matched, in more abstract form, in Mikhail Bakunin's articles for the German democratic press. Bakunin's famous dialectic of the positive (the state) and the negative (the opposition) spoke of abstract forces working through persons: what marked the 'negative' side, in contrast to the doomed 'positive' that created it, was the possibility that its principle would survive the destructive drive which would bring the opposition to its end. It would be a creative as well as a destructive force. The creativity of the negative was already presaged by the conscious commitment and self-formation that the negative demanded of its adherents.⁷ The activities of the circles, so attentive to the diverse opinions and sensibilities of its members and the personal relations between them, could then be understood as fulfilling the task of self-formation in theory and in practice.

Aware, firstly, that the individual will was empowered only to the extent of its expression of and foundation in a universal, human interest and, secondly, increasingly aware of the failure of European intellectuals to truly *grasp* this universal interest and take it on as their own, the Russian intelligentsia turned to the *narod* as the agent of a *social* (popular) revolution. While

⁵ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, p 136-49; E. Acton, *Alexander Herzen and the role of the intellectual revolutionary* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 8-13.

⁶ A. Herzen, 'Dilettantism in Science' (April, 1842), *Selected Philosophical Works* (Moscow, 1956), p. 20-4, 45-6, 68-9. For an analysis of this work, see: Walicki, *History of Russian Thought*, p. 131-4.

⁷ M. Bakunin, 'The Reaction in Germany' [October, 1842], *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings*, A. Lehring (ed.), translated by S. Cox (London, 1973), p. 37-58; for an overview, see also Walicki, *History of Russian Thought*, p. 119-21.

the radical intelligentsia of the 1840s and 1850s retained the Decembrists and their plans for social reform as part of their intellectual and political heritage, they would eventually throw in their lot with the *narod*, 'the mass,' over the small circles of intellectuals to which they and their recent antecedents had belonged. The failure to achieve individual 'self-realisation' by means of thought was, by the 1840s, seen by many not as a personal failure, but as a social one. In the late 1840s, such future intellectual luminaries as Belinskii, Herzen and Bakunin (like Marx in the early 1840s) reasoned that self-education – the incorporation of oneself into the development of Reason – was chimerical if limited to thought. To turn away from the evident, material and spiritual suffering of the exploited and poor 'below' for the sake of self-realisation in an illusory realm of Reason: was this not (it was wondered) merely the intellectualised equivalent of the moral bankruptcy that had, in the first place, made the European ruling classes' material exploitation of the working poor possible, and for so long? Social change through action was necessary. The 'people,' 'working-class,' 'proletariat' became the force or the 'cause' that abstract Reason or 'the Absolute' had once been. The intellectual's embodiment and conscious expression of abstract Reason – an idealisation of the person – became the radical intelligentsia's *ideal* expression of popular, material suffering. 'What is to be done?' (*chto delat'?*) was the question fit to convey the dilemma of a group that defined itself by being marginal to the cause to which it was devoted. Their turn away from the educated elite and towards the *narod*, achieved in stages between the late 1840s and the late 1860s, coupled with the penetration of natural scientific discourse into socio-political thought in the late 1850s and 1860s, transformed the previously concrete concept of the person and his relation to history, emphasising its universal moment over the particular.

Though, in the late 1860s and early 1870s, friendship, positive freedom and love remained central to the moral codes of the radical circles, their political thought – especially regarding their own, particular roles in the social-revolution – tended to subsume the question of the role of the *person* under the more abstract question of the role of the *individual*. The practical result was the formation of organisations indifferent, or even antagonistic, to the accommodation of unique 'personalities.' Thus the description of the revolutionary given by Sergei Nechaev in his infamous *Rasprava (Catechism, 1868)*:

The revolutionary is a lost man; he has no interests of his own, no cause of his own, no feelings, no habits, no belongings; he does not even have a name. Everything in him is absorbed by a single, exclusive interest, a single thought, a single passion –revolution...

The revolutionary is a lost man; with no pity for the State and for the privileged and educated world in general, he must himself expect no pity. Everyday he must be prepared for death...Hard with himself, he must be hard with others. All the tender feelings of family life, of friendship, love, gratitude and even honour must be stifled in him by a single cold passion for the revolutionary cause. [Venturi/Haskell].⁸

The circles that followed Nechaev's *Narodnaia Rasprava* (*Popular Catechism*) formed in conscious opposition to Nechaev's methods. This did not, however, excise from the movement of the 1870s the underlying premise informing Nechaev's understanding of the character of the revolutionary. In short, it was the primacy of the movement, the cause, or of history itself, over the person. The purification of the individual of personality, and the corresponding sacrifice of personal expression or personal freedom – what Nechaev described in terms of a conscious self-sacrifice – was expressed elsewhere in terms of causation or power, with the relationship between the radical intelligentsia and the exploited *narod* a more concrete expression of the relative importance of the movement of history over the particular person. We find, at the 'Trial of the Hundred-and-Ninety-Three,' in the speech of Ippolit Myshkin, delivered to the court on the 15th of November 1877, the following characteristic statement:

Given the inevitability of an uprising, and the possibility of a favourable outcome for it, we have taken it upon ourselves to protect the *narod* from being tricked into supporting the bourgeoisie and its interests rather than their own, as they were in [Western] Europe. Such a goal can only be reached through the unification of all revolutionary elements, through influence on its two main currents: the first[, among the intelligentsia] – only recently founded but already showing signs of significant strength, the second current – broader, more powerful – the popular revolution. The aim of the movement of 1874 was the unification of these two revolutionary elements... Beginning in the 1860s, we were coming to understand that every revolutionary movement of the intelligentsia has a corresponding and parallel movement among the *narod* - the former is only an echo of the latter; the movement of the *narod* was a parallel stream, attempting to merge with the other against the centuries-old divisions created by other estates, the centuries-old chasm between one current and the other. The movement of the intelligentsia in the 1860s was an echo of the movement of the *narod*, itself a result of the illusory liberation from serfdom and its inability to satisfy the *narod*'s demands. In the decade following the Emancipation of the Serfs, persistent rumours about the lessening or abolition of redemption payments spread among the *narod*. These rumours formed the basis for a great unrest among the *narod*, which was echoed among the intelligentsia with the so-called Nechaev Affair. In the end, the *narod*'s terrible hardships, caused by enormous taxes, gave birth to an undercurrent of discontent, and this was reflected in the movement of 1874...⁹

⁸ Cited in Venturi, *Roots*, p. 365-6. For the original source, see *GP* 1, p. 183-4.

⁹ 'Rech' I. S. Myskina...', *RN* 1, p. 371-2. See also *GP* 3, p. 273.

Myshkin expressed, not only in the substance, but also by the tone and the manner of the delivery of his speech, the message of the primacy of the popular movement over that of the revolutionary *intelligenty*. Myshkin never denied that the radical intelligentsia were personally responsible for their actions, and indeed the speech itself was an appeal for young, educated people to join the movement - to make a *free* and *conscious* choice either for the oppressive state, or for the oppressed *narod*.¹⁰ What he *did* deny was the power of the individual to affect revolutionary change. The *intelligenty* would devote themselves to the cause, even sacrifice themselves for it, but it would still be the *narod* – an extra personal force – that would bring about social transformation. There was already, then, a space opening up between the *intelligent's* own sense of moral obligation to the revolutionary cause and the popular movement seen to be primary to it. This separation was secured in the formulation of a 'revolutionary etiquette,' setting out the proper use that might be made of trials and other such confrontations with the state: in other words, the contribution that could still be made to the cause when any particular person was unable to participate in it directly. The clear and wide communication of a message (propaganda) and the creation of revolutionary 'examples' (martyrdom; myth-making) were closely connected tasks. Neither assumed any special link between the 'personality' of a defendant, the message communicated, and their martyrdom. They were to be mouthpieces, refusing to account for their actions as the autocracy demanded. At most, the defendant would become the representative of a social group or category. Myshkin became a representative of, and an example to, the Russian intelligentsia and Russian educated society; Alekseev would become (firstly) a 'representative' of the *narod*, and then a first 'example' to other workers of a Russian worker-revolutionary. Later the two functions would merge into one another.

Something of the revolutionary 'etiquette' had been devised in theoretical form eight to ten years before the great trials of 1877-8. In the *Istoricheskie Pis'ma* (*Historical Letters*, 1868-70), Pëtr Lavrov (the foremost philosopher of the revolutionary movement of the 1860s) had set out

¹⁰ See 'Obrashchenie M. D. Muravskogo i A. O. Lukashovicha k tovarishcham – soprotsessnikam o sozdanii sbornika po istorii revoliutsionnoi deiatel'nosti v pervoi polovine 1870-kh godov,' 28 October, 1877, *RN* 1: 'Some of us, having spoken in court before, hoped to show what had taken place there in order to have a useful influence on the better part of society, especially on the young people, who might be ready to take their own, independent path. A well conducted trial *with our participation in it* would have the result that many young people would speed up their decision to take that path, a result that might not obtain without our active participation. For the honest, thinking youth, the political trial itself is a living example of the proper actions of the citizen, and the more definitely and courageously our cause is represented in any given trial, the greater the chances that the example made will be *properly understood* and will achieve the desired result' (p. 367).

his vision of revolutionary myth-making in an extended discussion of martyrdom and its role in furthering the cause:

A person taking up the fight against social institutions has only to express his ideas in such a way that they are understood: if they are true, he will not be alone. He will have comrades, men who share his ideas. They are unknown to him. They are scattered and unknown to one another...They feel alone and powerless before the evil which is crushing them. But they are everywhere, and the truer and more just the ideas, the more of them there are. This is a force which is invisible, intangible, not yet manifested in action. But it is already a force. For this force to be manifested in action, an example is needed...Vigorous, fanatical men are needed, who will risk everything and are prepared to sacrifice everything. Martyrs are needed whose legend will far outgrow their true worth and their actual service. Energy they never had will be attributed to them; the best ideas and best sentiments of their followers will be put in their mouths. They will become unattainable, impossible ideals for the crowd [*pred tolpoiu*]. But on the other hand, they will inspire thousands with the energy for the struggle [*bor'ba*]. [Scanlan, modified].¹¹

Lavrov understood martyrdom not only as a *positive* aspect of the 'struggle against social institutions,' but as a *necessary* one:

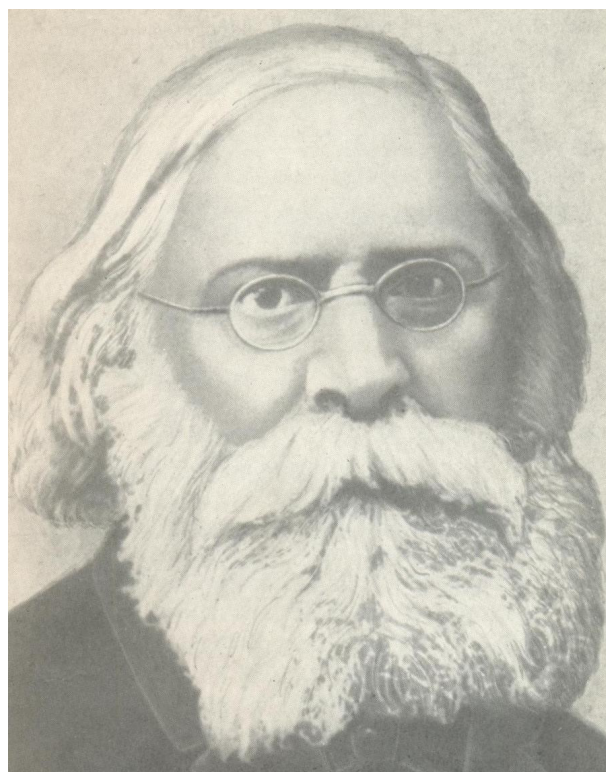
Suffering engenders thought in an individual; the thought is expressed and disseminated; here and there individuals with greater energy burst upon the scene; martyrs appear; their destruction augments the energy; the energy intensifies the struggle. All these things arise in inevitable succession, one after the other, like any other phenomenon of nature [Scanlan].¹²

Lavrov's explanation of the role of the individual in the historical process drew upon real events of the 1860s (Chernyshevskii and Mikhailov's exile in 1862-3, Nechaev's public trial and imprisonment in 1871), but made its point in abstraction from actual, historical people. The invocation of a natural-historical process larger than the individual was characteristic of the age. The making of revolutionary martyrs celebrated the individual's power in abstraction from the contingent (or inessential) qualities of actual people, the singularity of their lives, and the particular thoughts and events which had led them to martyrdom. 'Martyrs appear; their destruction augments the energy' - the statement revels in the scientific dismissal of sentimentality, remaining unmoved by the knowledge that this process would have to be *suffered*, and by *someone in particular*. The myths thus made would circle away from the personal aspects of the revolutionary movement. Like an artillery officer raining shells on a

¹¹ P. L. Lavrov, *Historical Letters*, translated by J. P. Scanlan (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1967), p. 171-2/
'Istoricheskii Pis'ma,' *Filosofia i Sotsiologiia: Izbrannye proizvedeniia v dvykh tomakh*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1965), p. 120-121.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 173/ p. 122.

town from a distant hilltop, individual actions and their consequences would separate, as if a decision made and its result were to be shrouded by the mist and rubble that action itself would kick up. Though the actions of these ‘selfless’ men and women would be necessary for history’s progress, their consciousness was reduced to a distant vantage point from which the consummation of historical law could be observed. With circular logic, the conceptual schema set out to guide the actions of ‘the individual’ drew hundreds of young people and the odd peasant and worker into a system of thought in which actions – their own actions - were understood as abstractly ‘individual,’ but not as ‘personal’: their meaning was not primarily found in the thoughts, feelings and experiences of those who undertook them.



3. Pëtr Lavrov¹³

In the 1870s, Alekseev and his contemporaries engaged in myth-making of this kind as an extension of their political activities among the students, workers and peasants. Alekseev’s speech was composed with myth-making in mind. The speeches at the ‘Trial of the Fifty’ were carefully prepared as ready-made propaganda pieces.¹⁴ The makeshift printing presses of

¹³ P. L. Lavrov, *Filosofia i Sotsiologiya: Izbrannye proizvedeniia v dvykh tomakh*, two volumes, I. S. Knizhnika-Vetrova (ed.), (Moscow, 1965), vol. 1, frontispiece.

¹⁴ I. S. Dzhabadari, ‘Protsess “50” (okonchanie),’ *Byloe*, no. 10 (1907), p. 193-4; R. Otto, ‘A Note on the Speech of Peter Alekseev,’ *Slavic Review*, 38, no. 4 (1979), p. 653.

revolutionaries and sympathisers in St Petersburg, having already fabricated tickets giving public access to the court hearings in February and March of 1877, were ready in May and June to prepare the first three pamphlet editions of the speeches.¹⁵ Later versions included both Alekseev's speech and that of Sofia Bardina, an ex-student and ex-émigré returned to Moscow to 'go to the *narod*' in 1875, then Alekseev's co-defendant at trial in early 1877. Bardina's speech was a demolition job of the official account of the revolutionary movement. She softened up the court with some minor legal objections, moved to a fine analysis of the contradictions of the state's case, and ended with a hard, rhetorical punch to the stomach:

I am convinced also that the day will come when even our torpid and lazy society will become ashamed that they allowed themselves to be chained for so long, that they hung their brothers, sisters and daughters only because they confessed their convictions freely! And then our deaths will be avenged...Oppress us, gentlemen – now you have the material strength, but we have moral force, the force of historical progress, the strength of ideas, and – alas! – one cannot detain the *idea* with bayonets!¹⁶

In contrast, Alekseev's speech presented a radical perspective on the Russian working class (the peasants and factory workers) and its suffering, speaking of the abuses of landlords, factory owners, the state and, finally, the prospect of a workers' revolution in Russia. All of this was presented as a sort of 'testimonial,' shaped and comprehended, of course, within radical thought, but still grounded in personal experience:

We, the working millions, barely able to walk, are thrown to the whims of fate by our fathers and mothers. We are without education, because there are no schools, and scarcely a minute away from the forced labour with its meagre rewards. As nine year old boys we try to survive on the bit of bread allotted to us at work. What awaits us there? For a bit of black bread we are sold to the capitalists to do piece-work, placed under the gaze of the adults who train us with belts and sticks to do forced labour, hardly fed, wheezing from the dust and from the fetid air contaminated by a hundred diseases. We sleep where we drop, without bedding or a pillow under our heads, wrapped in rags, surrounded on all sides by every kind of parasite. In such circumstances the intellect becomes blunted and the moral senses, acquired during childhood, remain undeveloped. There is only one means of expression left to those who live by manual labour, badly educated, isolated from any civilization, and forgotten by everyone. As children we, the workers, have to suffer under the capitalist yoke. What else are we supposed to feel towards the capitalists but hatred? Under such conditions, still young, we assume an apathy that allows us

¹⁵ N. B. Panukhina, 'K istorii rechi Petra Alekseeva,' *Vestnik Moskovskogo Universitet*, No. 5, (Moscow, 1965), p. 83-4; S. S. Levina, 'Novye dannye o publikatsii rechi Petra Alekseeva,' *Arkhiograficheskiy Ezhegodnik za 1973 g.* (Moscow, 1973), p. 82-4.

¹⁶ 'Rech' S. I. Bardinoi na zasedanii suda Osobogo prisustviia pravitel'stviuishego Senata ("prostess 50-ti")', 9 March, 1877, *RN* 1, p. 357.

silently to endure the oppression brought by the capitalists, all the time with hatred in hearts. (Alekseev, Appx. A: 277)

The speech ended with the memorable metaphor for workers' power unleashed: '[when] the muscular arm of the working million is raised...' (Alekseev, Appx. A: 280). The aim here was not to convey complexity within the lives of the 'working millions,' though the revolutionaries who 'went to the people' were increasingly aware of it. The radicalised workers and peasants within the movement understood that their own milieu comprised a hotchpotch of disparate groups; they were, anyhow, necessarily conscious of the knowledge, education, and radical intent that so far distinguished them from the rest. Yet, the unity of the working millions was flatly asserted, partly as a claim about a class existing as yet only in victimhood, partly as a call for the conscious realisation of this - so far merely passive - class unity. What gave Alekseev's descriptions of the 'working millions' a reality above mere political desire was this purely *negative* take on its 'unity.' Alekseev saw a conscious, collective act as something for the future. For now, the working class formed a unity only in suffering: nevertheless, it was real suffering with a unified source, and therefore the unity given by it was also real.

As the voice of the 'working millions,' Alekseev described its victimhood and, in the process, reduced himself to it. In delivering his speech, Alekseev made himself into an instrument of the cause. The substance of the document would be his testimony, a confirmation not of *his* existence and *his* contribution to the cause, but rather *an* act of self-sacrifice. To *his* self-sacrifice the movement of history would be indifferent: 'For this *force to be manifested in action*, an example is needed....Vigorous, fanatical men are needed, who will *risk everything* and are prepared to *sacrifice everything*. Martyrs are needed whose legend will *far outgrow their true worth* and their *actual service*' (emphases added).¹⁷ Bardina and Alekseev affected the fatalism that Lavrov saw as necessary to the growth of the anti-autocratic movement. Alekseev made it plain at the time that his speech had no aspirations to self-defence. By the same gesture he threw an accusation directly to the state: 'What use is self-defence to me? What use is it when everyone knows that in these kinds of cases the verdict is decided beforehand? These trials are little more than a farce. Defence or no defence, it makes no difference. I refuse it.'¹⁸ Before concluding her speech, Bardina told her judges defiantly: 'I, Messieurs judges, do not ask you for pity or leniency and in truth I do not want it. Persecute us as you will, but I am

¹⁷ Lavrov, *Historical Letters*, p. 172/ 'Istoricheskii Pis'ma,' *Filosofii i Sotsiologii*, 2, p. 121.

¹⁸ As cited in Plekhanov, 'Predislovie k rechi Alekseeva,' *Soch*, vol. 3, p. 112

deeply convinced that a movement as broad as this, having run for some years and apparently expressing the spirit of our time, cannot be halted by any repressive measures.’¹⁹ In both cases a force greater than themselves was invoked as a reason for self-sacrifice: in Alekseev’s case, pseudo-legal forms of state repression made *self*-defence futile. Instead his martyrdom would serve the greater, positive forces to which Bardina appealed – ‘the idea’ and ‘the movement.’ The upshot was the transformation of the staged performance of personal repentance, futile efforts at self-preservation, or petit acts of defiance, into grand, symbolic events. As ‘examples’ to follow they would act as sites upon which the ‘thinking people’ might focus their anger, and axes around which otherwise isolated individuals might circle towards one another; as voices of protest they would be bearers of the truth but not originators of it, since the movement was bigger and hardier than any single participant in it.

Yet, even as a cardboard cut-out – a typical *muzhik*, a typical worker – Alekseev, backlit by the state’s condemnation, would stand out from the ‘dark masses’ lurking in the shadows behind him. By virtue of *having* a public voice and a public presence he was still distinct enough from the ‘labourers’ to remain separate from them. Later, in radical propaganda, stripped of a personal history, the workers and peasants became a substitute for him, and he became in himself an entire *narod*. Yet, the process was not entirely outside of Alekseev’s control or alien to his own purposes. The mutual substitution of the man and the mass began with Alekseev’s own words at trial and, to an extent, this had been Alekseev’s intention. To Senator Peters, the failing ringmaster of increasingly noisy and disorganised proceedings, Alekseev had stated plainly: ‘I do not wish to talk about whether or not I was a revolutionary or if I did propaganda. I can only talk with regards to the workers being “led astray,” as the senator put it, “from the path of truth.” As a worker, I would like to describe this path, which no one could say is false, and show that there is no human force more powerful than the conditions in which the workers live. Why is it that people who are barely literate are drawn to [this path] and begin to conduct propaganda? In general, perhaps, it is dissatisfaction that leads them to it’ (Alekseev, Appx. A: 277, *ft.* 3). Peters’ demand that the defendant answer for *himself* and *his* particular actions - a recurring theme of his interventions into this speech and others – was deflected from the outset. What followed (the better known parts of the speech) continued in a similar vein, with Alekseev speaking not on his own behalf, but on behalf of the ‘working millions’: more accurately, *as* them:

¹⁹ ‘Rech’...Bardinoi,’ *RN* 1, p. 357.

Gentlemen, do you really think that we, the workers - whom everyone thinks are deaf, blind, empty-headed and stupid - that we don't know how we are cursed as idiots, idlers and drunkards? Do you really think that the workers themselves would accept that this reputation is deserved? Do you really think we don't see everywhere how others are getting rich and living in luxury by trampling all over us? That we can't see or understand why we are judged so badly and from where our endless labours come from?

(Appx. A: 278-9)

Alekseev's stance remained that of the 'we,' the 'working millions,' as the speech moved from a description of their working conditions to the recent, historical events which had turned many of his kind into factory workers, giving the peasants over from power of the landlords to that of the factory owners (*fabrikanty*). For Alekseev, the Emancipation of 1861 marked also a decisive change in the attitude of the labouring masses toward the Tsar and the autocracy in general: the myth of the Tsar's 'good intentions' was now being quietly discarded as, in the face of higher taxation and worsened living conditions, he sank in the estimation of the hitherto faithful peasantry:

We, the workers, wished and waited for the government to get out of its rut and provide for the peasants materially, not to place new burdens on us, to lift us out of our primitive state and take a few quick steps forward. But, alas! We look back with disappointment, and when we remind ourselves of that day, the 19th of February, a day unforgettable for the Russian people, a day when, with outstretched arms, full of joy and hope for the future, the people thanked the Tsar and the government...what do we realise? It was just a dream for us...The peasant reform of February the 19th 1861, a reform with which we were 'graced' - though it was a necessity - was not carried out for the *narod* themselves, and did not provide for even the basic demands of the peasants. As before, we remain without even a bit of bread, with scraps of useless land, and we pass into the hands of the capitalists... (Alekseev, Appx. A: 279)

Now, from the ideological perspective the attraction of Alekseev's speech for all Russian social-revolutionaries - including the early, so-called 'Populists' and the later, self-styled 'Marxists' (or social-democrats) - is obvious. Alekseev would use reference points and arguments common to both currents within the movement (the failure of the 1861 reforms, the growing consciousness of its failure among the labourers, their terrible and worsening conditions) to restate, in the end, the central doctrine of social-revolutionary thought and activity: 'It is obvious from all I've said that the Russian working people can only rely on themselves, and can't expect any help from anyone else, except our youth *intelligenty*' (Alekseev, Appx. A: 280). Much the same had been said by the *intelligenty* a hundred times

before in propaganda, polemic, and even the other speeches at ‘Trial of the Fifty.’ The great value of the speech came, then, not only from its claims, but from its *authenticity*: Alekseev was a worker and spoke *as* the ‘working millions.’ He thereby reaffirmed, not merely in words, but by the stance he took (his ‘plurality’) the basic contention, then directed toward Peters, that it would be the *conditions* of the workers as a whole, as well as their sense of disappointment with the 1861 reforms, and not the arbitrary decisions of individual *intelligenty* and the odd radicalised worker, which would drive the oppressed toward their self-emancipation.



4. ‘When the muscular arm of the working millions is raised....’ (G. V. Ivanovskii)²⁰

In that sense, Alekseev’s speech, like the theories of Mikhail Bakunin, Pëtr Lavrov and Georgi Plekhanov (amongst others), skirted between a deterministic explanation of the movement and the appeal to ‘consciousness’ and ‘freedom,’ supposing - in line with social-revolutionary doctrine - that the autocratic state’s overturn (a necessary condition for any improvement in the workers’ spiritual and material lives) would be a collective act of self-determination and, at the

²⁰ Karzhanskii, p. 113.

same time, an act determined by forces outside of the individual will. Alekseev, then, took the position appropriate to the ‘working millions’ as social-revolutionary ideology understood it: firstly, as objects of abuse in their working lives, at present passive, ‘suffering,’ but awakening gradually to their position and preparing to act in their own interests, without expecting help ‘from the outside’; secondly, as a collective united by suffering, sharing in it as an immediate experience, even reduced to suffering as ‘objects,’ and capable of being described in those terms from the ‘outside’ or the ‘inside,’ with the proviso that this situation was felt and *known*, from the ‘inside,’ to be unjust.

The act of delivering the speech sharply contradicted the speech’s own substantial claims. Alekseev, far from merging into the ‘working millions,’ only stamped more firmly his unique place in history. He thereby distinguished himself from the ‘silent’ and indistinct masses and from his own stance as ‘the we,’ the ‘working millions.’ That Alekseev was taken in socialist literature *for* these ‘working millions,’ his own childhood and workplace experiences made identical with those of the mass of workers and peasants, tells us more about the social-revolutionary concept of lower-class life and experience and the movement’s valorisation of the ‘workers’ voice’ than it could possibly tell us about the actual lives of workers and peasants in the 1860s and 1870s. The same could be said regarding the substance and form of Alekseev’s speech. Caught by the choice of determinism and freedom, Alekseev claimed that the conditions which made social revolution a *necessity* had also set him in particular, alongside the radical *intelligenty*, on the court bench. The causal relation between class conditions and revolution was made identical to the causal relation between class conditions and individual actions, that is: Alekseev’s own actions. This begs the question: What, if anything, was special about him? What was it that placed him, as a committed revolutionary, on the court bench, while other workers and peasants remained ‘apathetic,’ ‘enduring their conditions silently, all the time with hatred in [their] hearts’ (Alekseev, Appx. A: 277)? The historian might, in answering this question, find himself in unwitting agreement with Russian officialdom, whose explanation of Alekseev’s actions appealed, on the one hand, to mere accidents of character and, on the other, to the harmful influence of the ‘Russian youth’ and students on the behaviour of the ‘simple people’.²¹ Perhaps Alekseev’s affectation of the voice of the ‘working millions’ was convincing because he was *of* the ‘working mass,’ but, for all except the social-revolutionaries, this ‘of’ came into question as soon as Alekseev, standing up like a nail, made

²¹ See [S. Pahlen], ‘Iz “Zapiski ministra Iustitsii Gr. Palen,”’ [1877], *ZSL*, p. 114. See also *GP* 1, p. 625-6; *GP* 2, p. 426; *GP* 3, p. 9-12, 18-9, 283-4, etc.

of himself something more than the silent masses by claiming to speak for it and as it. He remained a *worker*, in his own estimation, in so far as his actions were determined or ‘necessary’; he became an intelligent in so far as his actions were freely taken, individual, and for both those reasons, remarkable. Thus Alekseev was a ‘worker-intelligent,’ not in the positive sense of being both ‘socially conscious’ and ‘working class,’ but in the negative sense of *claiming* to be one thing (a worker driven by necessity) and *being* an opposite thing (a committed revolutionary driven by thought, fully responsible for his own actions). As such, he was knocked down.

Both the positive and negative senses of this awkward position can be found in the memoir of Semën Volkov. Volkov was a skilled metal-worker of peasant origins who had already been radicalised by propaganda work in the 1860s, was involved in the same workers’ circles as Alekseev in the early 1870s, returned to the movement in 1875 after almost two years of detention, and was again arrested and imprisoned in October, 1876. His memoir, written in the early 1920s, mentions a characteristic interrogation by procurator Poskochin, ‘well-known for his liberal leanings,’ in the summer of 1877, just before the ‘Trial of the Hundred and Ninety-Three’ took place. ‘I want to ask you two questions,’ Poskochin said, having settled Volkov on a divan with an offer of cigarettes and conversation:

– you were from amongst the first rank of the Petersburg workers, earning a salary of 100 roubles a month...?’ I said, ‘Mr. Procurator, we aren’t so close that we can talk so openly.’

He answered, ‘[...] Your frankness will in no way worsen your position. You and your comrades – *intelligentnye* workers – do you have a definite aim in going to the working mass to propagandise?’ I answered that the aspiration to a higher organisation of the social system had impelled me to go to the *narod*. At this point he quite leapt out of his chair and said, ‘and *we too* have such aspirations, but we will only go by the way of evolution, whereas you are a revolutionary.’

The second question was this: ‘would there be a revolution in Russia?’, but I said to him, ‘Mr. Procurator, that is a very pernicious question.’ He said to me, ‘you are an experienced man in life, you have lived among all sorts of workers: *fabrichnye*, railway workers. Give me your impressions, if you will.’ I said assuredly that, taking into account intellectual and moral progress, and observing the growing dissatisfaction with the monarchist administration, that a revolution would have to take place in Russia. The procurator asked, ‘When will the revolution be?’ I said, ‘In fifty years time’ ... He thanked me for my honest explanations, called for the gendarme and ordered me to be sent to Petropavlovskii Fortress. (Volkov, *Autobiography*, 1924: Appx. B: 284-5)

Here, at least, Volkov's origins in the working class was recognised by Poskochin: though Volkov was seen to have a special position among the St. Petersburg workers, this did not affect the essential connection to them Poskochin presumed Volkov to have, nor the special understanding that such a connection was supposed to give him to the 'workers,' through direct (and wide ranging) experience of their living and working conditions. By inquiring after Volkov's thoughts on 'the revolution' of the future, Poskochin even accepted - temporarily - the notion that social upheaval was a necessity, somehow determined by a law beyond individual action. Yet, for both men, Volkov was already an outsider to the 'working millions': 'do you have a definite aim in *going to the working mass* to propagandise?' ...'The aspiration to a higher organisation of the social system had impelled me to *go to the people*'. The idea of 'going to the people,' so closely connected to the *intelligent's* own sense of being separate from the *narod*, was then joined awkwardly to Volkov's admitted status as an authoritative source of information on the Russian working class. Hence the positive sense of being a 'worker-*intelligent*,' in which Volkov was 'socially conscious' and responsible for his actions (an attribute usually ascribed to the intelligentsia), but also still essentially *of* the working class, and able to speak for it. Still, soon afterwards (Volkov noted a few lines later - and with some irony),

people began talking about the 'Trial of the 193.' We were called to the DPZ [House of Preliminary Detention], and there the accusations were delivered to us. We were told that we were undeveloped people, that we had been drawn into anti-governmental propaganda by the ill-intentioned intelligentsia, and twenty people were sentenced to administrative exile. I was one of the twenty. (Appx. B: 285)

Privately, Volkov could be treated as an '*intelligentnyi* worker,' valuable as a connection to the 'mass,' worthy of the respect due to a responsible (though criminal) *intelligent*. Publicly Volkov's actions were presented as 'unconscious,' determined by harmful influences from the 'outside.' Yet his punishment was akin to that handed out to the radical *intelligenty*, the educated people who should have known better. This was the 'negative' aspect of being a worker-*intelligent*: being treated as an 'outsider,' culpable for his actions, and so completely excluded from the 'working mass' (just like the *intelligenty* had been), but denied the public recognition by the authorities for having been responsible for his thoughts and actions (just as the 'mass workers' were).

Though the social position of worker-*intelligent* was closely connected to state confrontations with the workers' circles, the term 'worker-*intelligent*' and the positive synthesis implied by it had roots in social-revolutionary thought and practice. Importantly, the concept of the 'worker-*intelligent*' originated in the intelligentsia's thought about *its own role* in the revolution, and its own relationship to the *narod*. Narodism involved not only the (temporary) denial of any true significance to the individual, revolutionary act, but also the deferral of revolutionary agency as a whole from the freely chosen actions of individuals to 'historical laws,' or 'historical conditions,' or the 'objective situation' that confronted Russians, especially the Russian labouring people. In the 1870s, a growing perception of the divide within autocratic society was expressed through a supposedly 'popular' understanding of things. Society consisted of two great classes: on one side stood the *narod*, who worked the land and the machines but saw little reward for it, and on the other, the state (big landowners, petit officials and bureaucrats, the police, etc.), without labouring living in comparative luxury and holding the whip-hand over the labourers. In the late 1870s, even before the articulation of explicitly 'Marxist' ideas in Russia, these class analyses had become more sophisticated, taking in the formation of a proletariat, of a kulak class in the countryside, the role of the merchants and proprietors of small workshops, and so on. Yet from the outset the simple division between state and *narod* was complicated by the appearance of the 'radical *intelligenty*,' concurrent with the appearance of the question of *their* position vis-à-vis the central social antagonism in Russian society. The intelligentsia *qua* the radical minority within Russia's 'educated society,' that is, the intelligentsia as it was from the early 1860s onwards, was less a definite social group than an intellectual and moral question.²² This question presented itself all the more forcefully as 'narodism' became the

²² For critical introductory discussions of the intelligentsia, see M. Malia, 'What is the Intelligentsia?,' *The Russian Intelligentsia*, R. Pipes (ed.), New York, 1961), p. 1-15 and C. Read, *Religion, Revolution, and the Russian Intelligentsia, 1900-1912: The 'Vekhi' Debate and its Intellectual Background* (London, 1979), p. 1-3. Malia mentions the roots of the Russian *intelligentsia* (and the related *intelligent/intelligentka*) in the Latin *intelligentia* (intellect, intelligence); both authors mention its first use by the novelist Boborykin in the early 1860s and its immediate popularity, noting, however, that most authors have agreed that the intelligentsia's roots in Russia went back at least to the 1830s and 1840s.

Read also attempts here to define the intelligentsia: 'All intelligenty possessed a deep concern for the social question and some degree of identification with the poor and oppressed of Russia... The intelligent invariably had a critical and to some extent hostile attitude towards the government and in particular to its handling of the social question... It is necessary to add a third criterion: self-consciousness or articulation of the feeling of hostility. In most cases this quality presupposed an advanced formal education, but this in itself was not essential. Many commentators emphasised that a peasant unlettered peasant could be an intelligent if he possessed a reflective turn of mind and was able to express himself verbally... Thus one cannot assume that all intelligenty were university graduates or former students any more than one can use the opposite definition... This last sociological definition has been taken up in the Soviet Union but was not in the minds of any intelligent in the late nineteenth century' (p. 1-2). The emphasis on the moral-ideological origins of the *intelligent* is

strongest trend within the movement. Indeed, narodism itself, when explicitly formulated by S. Kravchinskii in the late 1870s, was a doctrine explaining *the role of the intelligentsia* in a revolution which (it had already been decided) would have to be ‘popular’ to be truly liberating - to truly *be* a revolution (*revoliutsiia*) and not a mere ‘overturn’ (*perevorot*)²³ limited to changes ‘at the top’:

Revolution is the business of the popular masses. History prepares them. Revolutionaries have no right to control anything. They can only be instruments of history, the means of expressing the aspirations of the *narod*. Their role consists in organising the *narod* in the name of its aspirations and demands, and to advance it in the struggle to bring them about; to facilitate and accelerate that revolutionary process, which, in accordance with the irresistible laws of history, is taking place at the present time. Outside that role they are nothing; within it they are one of the most powerful factors in history [White, modified].²⁴

In that sense, all revolutionary thought in the 1870s – the period of Alekseev’s radicalisation – began with a central doctrine of popular revolution which was almost always spoken of first as a ‘self-denying ordinance’ – in other words, as a doctrine nominally centred on the *narod*, but meaningful only from the perspective of the intelligentsia. Having accepted by the early 1870s that ‘historical conditions’ were the motive force of popular revolt and the basis of any future revolution, it remained to be understood exactly the significance of the conversion of young, educated people to the cause through a morality informed by ‘rationality.’ What was the meaning of the individual choices or ‘acts of freedom’ taken by the educated Russian youth in making a stance for the exploited *narod* against the state? In answering this question, the self-identified ‘*intelligent*’ and ‘workers’ threw themselves into a conflict – both practical and intellectual, it turned out – between the notion of class and the notion of the person. Though the mainstream of social-revolutionary thought in the 1870s began its explanations of the role of the *intelligent* and of the *narod* with the external conditions imposed by the state and its

correct, I think, but Read is mistaken and/or confuses the issue in the last few sentences. In the 1870s and 1880s, the words *intelligentsia* and *intelligent* were used with very clear connotations of class position and/or background both by those who identified themselves as *intelligent* and by those who historians would normally consider to be *intelligent* (according to the definition given above) but, for various reasons, did not consider themselves a part of it. Below, I show that education had become a defining feature of the concept of *intelligentsia* in the nineteenth century. Finally, the definition also neglects the fact the word *intelligentsia* began to have currency within *official* thought and documentation around the 1870s, and here the connection between being of the ‘educated *classes*,’ being radically hostile to the state, and being an *intelligent* was quite clear.

²³ See, for instance, ‘Programma “Zemli i Voli,”’ 1876-7, *Arkhiv ‘Zemli i Voli’ i ‘Narodnoi Voli’*, A. Vali (ed.), (Moscow, 1932) p. 53-4.

²⁴ [S. Kravchinskii], *Zemlia i Volia!*, no. 1, 25 Oct., 1877, *RZh*, p. 119-20; also cited and translated by White in *Karl Marx*, p. 299. This translation is almost identical to White’s.

supporters, the class categories seen initially *to follow* from these conditions ended up sinking down into the radical's actual *being* or *essence*, coming to be recognised as inescapable facts not only of social relations 'external' to individuals, but also of particular people's personal qualities and their particular 'senses of things.' Thus, the intelligentsia's notion of class was already by the 1860s facing in two opposite directions: toward an 'objective' account, in which the inner, spiritual or moral capacities were shared by all regardless of class, and were only suppressed by the imposition of class categories from the outside (by 'Russian conditions' or 'tsarism,' for instance); and oppositely, toward a particularistic account of social divisions which, perceiving some *essential* difference between people of different classes, born of their own histories or experiences or their characteristic 'formation' by class conditions, gave sovereignty to the thoughts and the actions of the 'mass of labouring people,' sidelining (at least in theory) the ideas and actions of members of other classes.

The 'going to the people' movement (*dvizhenie khodit' v narod*) was a means of bridging the chasm dividing the intellectual stream of the revolutionary movement from its basis in the *narod*. The path from the discussion circles of the 1840s and 1850s to the 'mad summer' of 1874 was a long and rough one; nevertheless, in retrospect, the movement towards narodism in this period can be identified in relation to a series of important developments in autocratic politics and the revolutionary responses to them. It was, firstly, the perceived failure of the 'educated classes,' including the liberals, radical democrats and the state's own Ministers and bureaucrats, to improve the lot of the peasants through reform that pushed a small part of the Russian youth and its mentors in the press towards a theory of revolution centred on the masses. Lessons from the Revolutions of 1789 and 1848, the 1861 Emancipation, the Decembrist uprising of 1825 and the circle life of the 1840s and 1850s had taught the minority of committed radicals that revolutions and revolts led by the bourgeoisie had not been carried out in the interests of the *narod* and, consequently, if genuine social change was to come to Russia or Europe as a whole, it could only come 'from below.'²⁵ The early 1860s saw the destruction of what remained of the radical press in Russia; the late 1860s the spectacle of individual acts carried out 'in the name of the *narod*,' but not by them. From the perspective of the early 1870s, as new circles of dissidents formed in Russia from fragments of the old, both Dmitri Karakozov's April, 1866 attempt on Aleksandr II and the manipulative, unprincipled

²⁵ GARF, 3-ti eksp., 1870, d. 120, ch. I (II), ll. 41 ob., 46-47; L. E. Shisko, 'Sergei Mikhailovich Kravchinskii i kruzhek chaikovstev' [1903], in S. M. Kravchinskii, *Gruzovaia tucha Rossii* (Moscow, 2007), p. 308-9.

revolutionism of Sergei Nechaev reflected the inevitable weaknesses of a movement limited to and focused upon isolated individuals and their actions.²⁶ Composed in the main of educated (or self-educated) men, originated of small circles of conspirators and their followers, such revolutionary groups were distant to the *narod* and spared barely a thought as to the future participation of the mass in the revolution supposed to belong to it. In this form, it was thought, the movement had proved all too vulnerable to the play of vanity and caprice, of the maladjusted and immoral personality, either descending into violent and empty rhetoric (Ishutin; Nechaev), or spending itself in amateurish acts of terrorism for a popular audience who were indifferent to them (Nechaev; Karakozov). Hence, the early 1860s' theoretical turn to the *narod* and the peasant axe, having given the movement the central axiom of popular *self-liberation*, was expressed in practice in the various stages of the 'going to the people' movement of 1869-81. At its inception and for years after, this was still, however - and quite self-consciously - a movement of the radical intelligentsia or of the 'best parts' of the 'educated classes,' driven by their desire for action, feeling their energies depleted in the empty gestures of writing, debating, and collecting books. From the late 1860s, however, the circles of students and others were always *oriented* towards the *narod* and the labouring people, and their efforts to educate themselves were similarly oriented towards gaining knowledge and experience of Russian *narod*: its everyday life, habits, customs, beliefs, and sufferings.

When the *chaikovtsy* and their sympathisers began to propagandise the factory workers in St. Petersburg in 1871, they did so as teachers of grammar and mathematics, slipping political economy and anti-governmental propaganda into the cracks of the official programme in a fashion increasingly alarming for other, less radical students and *intelligenty* involved with workers' schools.²⁷ Having spent some years involved in intellectual preparation, buying and importing illegal books to build up libraries, and writing their own reports on the situation of the Russian *narod*, elements of the students' movement in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kazan, Kiev and other cities broke away to form puritan communes of self-education alongside their tightly organised, radical discussion groups.²⁸ What distinguished these early, radical groups from the

²⁶ For a basic account of Nechaev, the *nechaevsty* and the Karakozov attempt, see Venturi, *Roots*, p. 331-88. For a recent account of the Karakozov affair, see C. Verhoeven, *The Odd Man Karakozov: Imperial Russia, Modernity and the Birth of Terrorism* (Ithaca/London, 2009); on the roots of Nechaev's thought and activity, see S. T. Cochrane's excellent book, *The Collaboration of Nechaev, Ogarev and Bakunin in 1869: Nechaev's early Years* (Giessen, 1977).

²⁷ S. Sinegub, 'Vospominaniia Chaikovtza,' [I] *Byloe*, Aug. 1906, p. 40-41.

²⁸ This breaking away is described in [N. Morozov?], 'Ocherk po istorii kruzha "chaikovtsev" (1869-1872 gg.),' *RN* 1, p. 204-205.

students' movement as a whole was the specific combination of revolutionary ideas and the desire to get closer to the people not only through books, but by prolonged and personal contact with them. Communes of a sort were a regular feature of Russian university life since students' social and material well-being (like most urban workers migrating from the villages to the industrial centres) was supported by and sometimes dependent on the *zemliachestva* - communities of students from the same province or town - that often served as natural centres for the formation of democratic and radical circles. Even 'going to the people' itself - as efforts to 'enlighten' and 'investigate' - had been a regular feature of the Russian democratic and liberal-constitutional (not to mention Slavophil) currents for at least a decade, and when the social-revolutionary groups made their own first attempts to meet with peasants and workers, they either took up positions in the countryside that had already been associated with mildly oppositional activities (as rural teachers, doctors, or village clerks), or built on philanthropic projects already put in motion in St. Petersburg.²⁹ But, it was believed, their forerunners had maintained a distance from the *narod* which the revolutionaries hoped to break down entirely.³⁰ A radical student, S. Gorushev, writing to his mother, asked that she

remember our Slavophiles and their attitude to the *narod*... They were always seen as lords and their intentions as lordly; in other words, they could never be trusted. And that's because Messieurs Slavophiles didn't go there to merge with the *narod* but to enlighten them, to preach to them from their pedestals; generally speaking they represented interests which were decidedly not those of the *narod* themselves.³¹

Any notion of standing above or in any way distinct from the mass of the *narod* would have to be overcome, both subjectively (the attitudes of the *intelligenty*) and objectively (the reactions of the workers and peasants to their teachings). Some students, either attached to an organisation (like S. Kravchinskii or A. Lukashevich) or acting independently, would dress in typical peasants' or workers' clothes and, with armfuls of illegal pamphlets and 'popular' books, set out into the countryside. Other students took the less immediate route of learning a trade (cobbling, blacksmithing, carpentry) and joined workshops or, alternatively, set up their

²⁹ See Sinegub, 'Vospominaniia Chaikovtza,' [I], p. 40-41, on the factory schools that he and some of the other *chaikovtsy* taught at in 1871-72. See also the paper of A. I. Livanov, 'Kakoe polozenie naibolee udobno dlia sblizheniia s narodom?,' (no later than 1 June, 1874), *RN* 1, p. 145-51 (esp. 150-1), with advice on which sorts of positions might be accessible to the student or ex-student revolutionaries either in the cities or in the villages. The author himself states that the surest way of obtaining the trust and belief of the peasants and workers was to take up a job on the land, in a *fabrika* or a *zavod* (p. 150). All other positions (clerk, *volost'* scribe, doctors and vets, workers in factory administration) would perpetuate that distance between the people and the intelligentsia which they aimed to eradicate (p. 151).

³⁰ Livanov, 'Kakoe polozenie...?', p. 149-150.

³¹ 'Iz pisem S. S. Golusheva materi,' 29 November, 1873, *RN* 1, p. 161.

own.³² Hence, the first worker-*intelligenty* – if that term is taken to mean the combination of the worker’s occupation and the intelligentsia’s social consciousness - were the radical *intelligenty* who ‘went to the people,’ not the peasants or workers they propagandised. The desire to ‘get close to’ and ‘merge with’ the *narod* was supposed to begin with the *intelligent*’s descent into popular life; the donning of the worker’s costume was only the first step in a process of self-development (*samorazvitie*) that was to be both politically and personally meaningful. The radical *intelligent*’s concern to make himself responsible for his own actions, regardless at first of the persistence of an immoral ‘order of things’ over and above his individual development, was ultimately tied to the social-revolutionary axiom of popular self-liberation and the destruction of the autocracy. Thus, the somewhat impersonal, tactical question of how best to ‘get close to’ the *narod* could be related back to basic criticisms of the existing political system, the starting point of which was the autocratic state’s treatment of the intellectual, his or her separation from the *narod* below, and what this state of affairs demonstrated about the nature of the Russian autocracy.

A. Lukashovich and A. Livanov presented the preference for manual labour among the peasants and workers as a convenient means of getting close to the people and organising them for the more or less distant ‘general uprising.’ ‘It is essential,’ Lukashovich wrote in August, 1874, ‘that every man learn a trade or some given occupation, and then scatter over a region where easy contact with his comrades is possible. In this way within two or three years all that region will be carried to a high pitch of revolutionary fervour and from it we will draw new energies for other regions,’³³ emphasising the broad, tactical aim of forming cells of radicalised peasants and workers, on the assumption that it was above all the *severance* of the great mass of labourers from social revolutionary ideas, and not their incomprehension or rejection of its ideals, that acted as the main obstacle to their realisation. Livanov was less interested in ‘revolutionary fervour’ and the spread of popular dissent than the *intelligenty*’s ability to propagandise effectively and easily. He filled in the details of just how such groups of radical peasant agitators might be formed in practice:

³² See Aptekman and Lukashovich’s testimonies on ‘going to the people’ as cited by Venturi, *Roots*, p. 502-503; see also Docs 59 and 61, *RN* 1, p. 317-18 and 321-325 respectively, for some police reports on workshops, artels and schools set up by the students P. I. Voinaralskii (in Saratov) and A. V. Iarstev (St. Petersburg) in late 1873 and 1874; see also *GP* 3, p. 6-7.

³³ See ‘Pis’ma A. O. Lukashovicha brat’iam P. P. i V. P. Verebrovskim,’ 25 August, 1874, *RN* 1, p. 262, and *GP* 3, p. 154; the latter is cited in Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, p. 503. The translation is Venturi’s/Haskell’s, slightly amended.

The most convenient, the most useful positions for getting close to the *narod*, and consequently, those most likely to bear fruit, of course, will be positions without any privilege – those of the field labourers, the *fabrichnye* and *zavodskie* peasant-workers, and craftsmen... Here it will be possible to gain the trust and goodwill of the workers, because the workers will look upon such a person as their brother, like a brother sharing with them in the hardships, the joys and the miseries of their banal, everyday lives.³⁴

Here, at least, the *intelligent*-agitator's taking on of a workers' life and his acceptance into their fraternity was the consequence of an action designed to make the message of rebellion more comprehensible and, perhaps, more palatable to the *narod*. The revolutionaries had learned from recent history how peasants and workers had reacted to those they saw as outsiders. Importantly, though, getting close to the *narod* and sharing in its 'labours, joys and miseries' was not just a means of spreading propaganda or acquainting themselves with the everyday life of the *narod*, but also a means to shed their own their 'lordly appearances' and, perhaps, their own 'lordly habits' as well:³⁵

To engage in physical and manual labour [*fizicheskim, muskul'nyim trudom*] and not receive a particularly great reward for it - for any person this has not only moral motives but also material ones, which are no less important. Working towards the destruction of the present and the realisation of a better future, man will gain not only the freedom of his own person and the freedom to do anything that does not contradict the social good, but he will also aspire to provide for himself materially, to satisfy himself materially.³⁶

For those students who 'went to the people' by joining factories, working the land, or setting up their own workshops (and this was a strong feature of its 1873-76 period), the desire to 'merge' with the *narod* was not simply a means of 'getting to know' them, or gaining their trust, or inciting revolt, but a first step towards creating a future society where manual and mental labours were shared by the entire social fraternity. It was a means for the individual *intelligent* to divest himself of his former, parasitical existence and take on a new, more independent (and, at the same time, more social) way of life, closer to that of the 'peasant-worker or craftsmen'

³⁴ Livanov, 'Kakoe polozenie...?', *RN* 1, p. 150.

³⁵ The concept of 'lordliness' is found much later in E. Serebriakov's *Obshchestvo Zelmia i Volia* (Geneva, 1894), part of the series issued by the *Gruppa Starykh narodovolstev* in the mid-1890s, *Materiala dlia istorii russkogo sotsial'no-revolitusionnago Dvizhenii* (no.4), when talking of the going to the people movement in 1874: '[P]eople did not group themselves around a commonly agreed plan but on the basis of personal sympathies and friendships; the general direction of all these groups was socialist. All recognised the need to throw off their lordly appearances [*barskuiu obolochku*] and, under the guise of simple workers, to go spread propaganda among the people' (p. 2-3).

³⁶ Livanov, 'Kakoe polozenie,' *RN* 1, p. 150; see also 'Iz pisem Golusheva...', *RN* 1, p. 161-2.

(as Livanov put it), but bearing now a different quality because, for the radical *intelligenty*, it was chosen and not imposed.

The very specific ways in which ‘going to the people’ became valuable for the radical *intelligenty* of the 1869-74 period contrast with the abstract conception of the suffering *narod* which initially motivated their commitment to the popular cause. Retrospectively, many of the *intelligenty* were to admit that their knowledge or concept of the *narod* had been extremely ‘hazy’ and ‘ill-defined.’³⁷ In this case, at least, contemporary evidence supports the memoirs of the revolutionaries. The very notion of ‘going to the people’ contained within it the contradiction between the intelligentsia’s self-assured grasp of the ‘popular interest’ (this had already been defined in 1861 by the veteran revolutionary publicist, Aleksandr Herzen, as ‘land and freedom’: *zemlia i volia*)³⁸ and awareness of their own ignorance³⁸ regarding the ‘real’ *narod* and its actual conditions. ‘Going to the people’ had a double meaning in so far as knowledge of the *narod* was concerned. It was understood, firstly, as a means of ‘awakening’ or ‘implanting’ a true consciousness of the popular ideal among the *narod* themselves³⁹: in this sense the movement aimed merely to confirm by their own actions the unity of interests they already ascribed to the abstract *narod* of their doctrines. Conversely, the movement was a means by which the *intelligenty* could transcend or at least substantiate what they themselves understood to be abstract, somewhat empty concepts of the *narod*. Whether the situation followed from the circles’ limitation to book learning about the *narod*, or was imposed by a lack of published information on the subjects which interested them (and these were many),⁴⁰ it remained a fact that the *intelligenty* tended to perceive their own revolutionary ideology as, somehow, ‘empty’: empty in the sense that ideas were necessary but not sufficient to produce meaningful social change; empty in the sense that the intelligentsia’s abstract understanding of the ‘popular interest’ was determined by the state system that divided the educated classes by a chasm from the labouring people. It was the ongoing exploitation by landlords, factory owners, contractors,

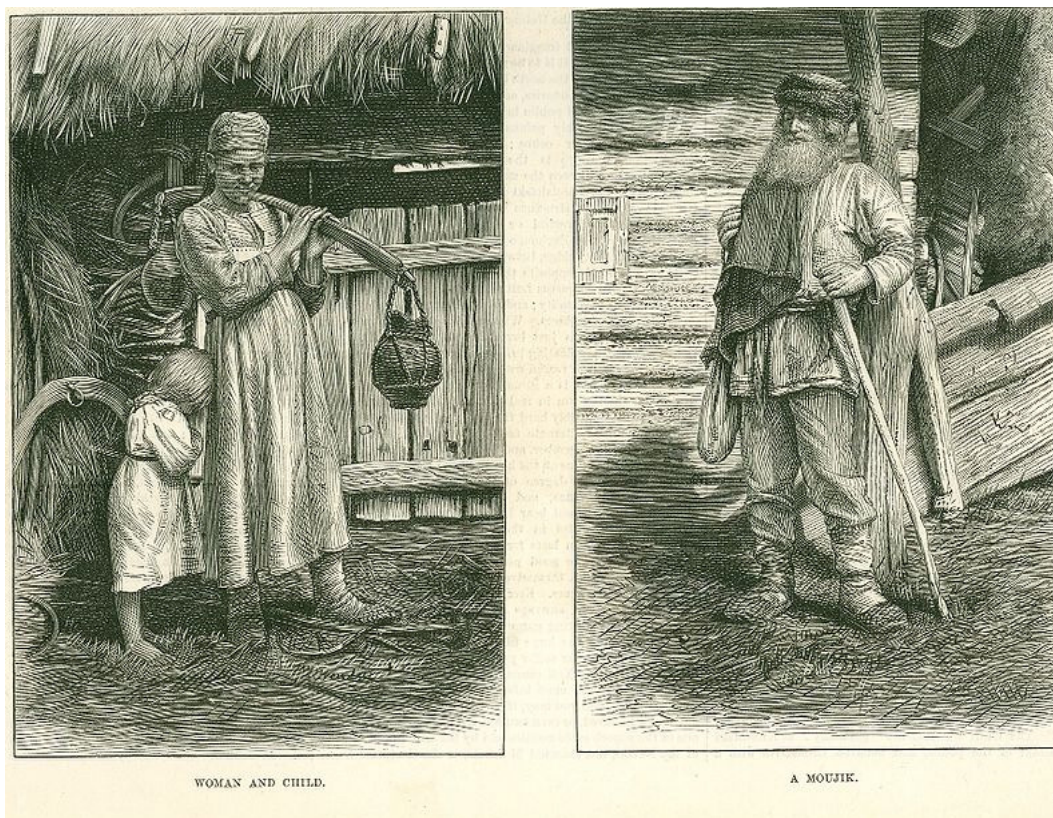
³⁷ The phrase is encountered often in the memoir literature. See, for example, [Morozov], ‘Ocherk...,’ *RN* 1, p. 208; Plekhanov, ‘Russkii Rabochii,’ *Soch.* 3, p. 127; V. I. Debogorii-Mokrievich, ‘Vospominaniia,’ (1894), p. 4, cited in P. L. Lavrov, *Narodniki-Propagandisty*, 1873-78 (St. Petersburg, 1907), p. 47.

³⁸ ‘Iskander’ [A. I. Herzen], ‘Ispolin prosypaetsia,’ (dated 22 October, 1861), *Kolokol*, no. 110, (November 1, 1861), available in *Kolokol: Gazeta A. I. Gertsen i N. P. Ogarev: vol’naia russkaia tipografiia, 1857-1867: London-Zheneva*, I. V. Nechkin (ed.), (Moscow, 1962), p. 918: column 1.

³⁹ ‘Revoliutsionnaia propaganda i agitatsiia,’ *RN* 1, p. 135-6; P. Kropotkin, ‘Dol’zhny li my zaniat’sia rassmotreniem ideala budushchego stroia?,’ November 1873, *ibid.*, p. 84-5; ‘Rech’ S. I. Bardinoi...,’ *RN* 1, p. 356-7.

⁴⁰ [N. Morozov] ‘Ocherk,’ *RN* 1, p. 220.

domestic masters and the state that made the intelligentsia's privileged, elevated view on the revolutionary process possible.



5. 'The Russian Peasants' (engraving by W. Goodman, c. 1885)⁴¹

What this viewpoint still lacked, over and above 'reason' and the 'conscious act,' was direct experience, what was often called in contemporary popular publications and, later, in memoirs, 'feeling' (*chuvstvo*), a capacity closely related to the 'heart' (*serd'tse*) or 'soul' (*dusha*). The workers' and peasants' viewpoint on exploitation and oppression was that of feeling ('intuition' or 'immediate experience'), a sort of primitive relation to historical necessity through desire; this contrasted sharply with the free, but still abstract conceptualisations and actions of the educated classes. Where the latter *reasoned* themselves towards the popular interest, the *narod* felt it in their bones, in 'life itself' (*samaia zhizn'*). The *intelligenty* hoped to assimilate feeling into the moral-rational structures of their own doctrines, at first by a personal choice of commitment, then by action, and later by allowing themselves to be assimilated to the *narod* entirely. The 'movement to the people' was an answer to the emptiness of revolutionary

⁴¹http://www.google.co.uk/imgres?imgurl=http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/5e/Russian2.jpg/300px-Russian2.jpg&imgrefurl=http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Goodman

ideology, releasing the *intelligenty* from the book and driving them to action, and by that drawing into the movement the *narod* itself.

In the second wave of ‘going to the people,’ members of the VSRO settled themselves among the *fabrichnyi* population in Moscow for two to three months without being discovered by the police.⁴² Though most students and the small group of ‘professional revolutionaries’ never managed to pass completely unnoticed among the workers and peasants with whom they lived and worked (who tended at least to recognise something strange in the new ‘workers,’ even if this strangeness was welcomed by some of them),⁴³ their knowledge of the people would seem to have transformed from its abstract and ‘rather hazy’ beginnings in books and articles to the a more mature and concrete basis in ‘personal experience.’

Even if for the revolutionaries, first-hand experience of manual labour was invested with its own moral and political significance, what it provided them in the end was a new position from which to understand and speak about the oppression of the *narod*. In the face of such oppression the moral correctness of their actions was ensured by reason, but the authority and human understanding of the ‘cost of progress’ and civilisation only came through participation in the people’s suffering.⁴⁴ Characteristically, B. Kaminskaia, one of the VSRO’s propagandists in the Moscow factories, wrote that ‘all the powers of the human imagination would be insufficient to conjure up a true picture of the truly horrible situation of the workers at the spinning factory’; what was needed was to see it and participate in it.⁴⁵ She later described the characteristic rhythms and tortures of everyday life at the Nosov factory in some detail:

At midnight the worker can barely keep himself on his feet. His hands work only automatically, his exhausted eyes closing for long stretches and then opening again, for a moment his head falls to his chest and it is only with difficulty is it kept upright. It is not surprising that in these conditions the worker often forgets to tighten the cloth and the machine rips the material. For any such breakage the worker pays a 25-30 kopek fine. But worse happens: if the fatigued worker does not notice the closeness of the machines he can lose a finger - just like that. The workers understand the dangers of exhaustion and use various means to defend themselves from it: chewing tobacco, splashing their faces with cold water, singing songs...If one of the workers curls himself in a corner and goes to

⁴² See Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, p. 531-5 and RN 1, p. 428-9, ft. 225, for introductions to this organisation.

⁴³ See, for instance, V. Figner, *Five Sisters: Women against the Tsar*, translated and edited by B. A. Engel and C. N. Rosenthal (London, 1975), p. 29-30.

⁴⁴ The ‘Cost of Progress’ is the title of the fourth of Lavrov’s *Historical Letters*, p. 129.

⁴⁵ Cited in *RDSG*, p. 9. No specific reference is given, but Korol’chuk states that Kaminskaia wrote this in a letter seized by the gendarmes at the time of her arrest. This letter is most likely to be found among the ‘material evidence’ collected and used by the state prosecutors during the ‘Trial of the Fifty.’

sleep, the supervisor will hit him in the ribs or smack him in the back with a stick and take him again to the machine, writing a long list of fines in his workbook...⁴⁶

Unlike the factory inspectors and factory administrative staff who later reported on the factory order, Kaminskaia was not physically or symbolically separated from the subject of her interest. She, like the other Geneva *'friche'* who made up a part of the VSRO (Bardina, Olga Liubatovich, Lidia Figner), was employed at the Moscow textiles factories, worked alongside the other employees, ate with them and lived with them in their dormitories, posing as an average cotton spinner of peasant origin. Their own experiences of labour (and, theoretically speaking, their descriptions of it) were not those of observers (like the inspectors), but of participants. With this in mind, and read without comparison to other descriptions, Kaminskaia's is that of someone who has felt and undergone the exhaustions and deprivations portrayed in it. The attention paid to the worker's physical state hints of something experienced at first hand, the small observations of bodily movement and position (which, of course, could easily have been noted by the outsider) made personal by reference to the workers' felt detachment from his own body ('...the hands move automatically...', '...his exhausted eyes close...').

But much as these particular *intelligentki* and other social-revolutionaries donned *narodnye* outfits and came up with fictional back-stories to support their temporary worker-peasant status, the intelligentsia had already taken on the supposed language of the *narod* in the pamphlets and propaganda works they wrote before they set off to the factories and the villages. Though many of these works took their structures and styles from the 'popular,' *liubochnaia* tales written and published in their hundreds for a growing audience of semi-literate and literate peasants and industrial workers,⁴⁷ others spoke from a position more overtly involved and emotional than that of Kaminskaia. Not openly autobiographical, but using the first-person perspective, proclamations like L. E. Shishko's *Chtoi-to, bratsy...*⁴⁸ ('A few words, brothers...', Spring, 1873) mixed book-knowledge of the *narod*,⁴⁹ their own experience of teaching and observing

⁴⁶ GARF, f. 112, 'Tom veshchestvennykh dokazatel'stvo po 'Protssessu 50,' cited in N. S. Karzhanskii, *Moskovskii Tkach Pëtr Alekseev*, (Moscow, 1954), p. 16-7.

⁴⁷ See Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read, passim*; D. Pearl, *Tales of Revolution: Workers and Propaganda Skazki in the late Nineteenth Century*, (Pittsburgh, 1998), p. 4-5; V. G. Bazanov, 'Khozhedenie v narod i knigi dlia naroda, 1873-75,' *Agitatsionnaia literatura russkikh revoliutionnikh narodnikov: potaennye proizvedeniia 1873-75 gg*, B. G. Bazanov (ed.), p. 41-4.

⁴⁸ The pamphlet, for lack of a title, is named after its opening sentences.

⁴⁹ For instance, Bervi-Flerovskii's *Polozhenie rabochego klassa v Rossii* was published in 1869 and was available to the students for some time in the early to mid 1870s. See Bervi-Flerovskii, *Izbranniye ekonomicheskie poizvedeniia v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1958); V. S. Itenburg, *Dvizhenie revolutisionnogo*

the workers in St. Petersburg in 1872-3, and their deep conviction that the Reforms of 1861 had made the life of the average *muzhik* impossibly hard:

There are many of us, brothers, in Holy Rus', great are the forces of the *muzhika*, the forces of the workers; and we work from dawn until dusk the whole year through, in the towns, in the cities and in the factories; we grow the rye and wheat, mine for gold, forge iron, weave linen, build stone houses and marble palaces, but we live in filthy huts and dogs' kennels and, brothers, we eat tree bark and the meagre chaffs, and we dress in cold, dirty *sermiagy*.⁵⁰ It is miserable for you to think of the peasants' life, of its hardships, and still sicker the heart becomes when you remember those who use our labour, our sweat and blood.⁵¹

With his appeals to fraternal ties among the peasants (not to mention the use of a pseudo-folk style and vocabulary), Shishko took for himself the role of exploited peasant as a means of 'waking' them to a suffering to which they had become all too familiar and so apathetically accepted as 'natural.'⁵² Accounts of suffering needed only to articulate and reveal to the peasants a truth that, deep down, they already recognised. But such popular appeals followed Gorkushev's advice not to 'preach from a pedestal.' From the mouths of lords, the truth about the *narod*'s suffering could only be nullified by the peasants' quite justified suspicion of 'outsiders.'

When placed beside Shishko's proclamation, Kaminskaia's description of the Nosov factory suddenly seems more 'objective,' drier, more technical. *Chtoi-to, bratsy* is an account not only of the peasants' hardships, but also of their miseries; an account not only of the maltreatment of the peasant, but also the 'sickness of his heart.' More than that, it aims not only to enumerate all the wrongs done to the peasants, but also to reveal those wrongs as the cause of the peasants' 'sick hearts.' Hence its actual content, what it reveals to the peasant audience, is broadly similar to the specific rhetoric employed, that is, its appeal to their feelings or 'inner life.' Kaminskaia, on the other hand, presents the description of the factory system without much overt reference

narodnichestva: narodnicheskie kruzhki i khozhedenie v narod v 70-kh godov XIX veke (Moscow, 1965), p. 92-99; Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, p. 498-499.

⁵⁰ Caftans made of coarse, undyed cloth.

⁵¹ 'Proklamatiistia L. E. Shishko "Chtoi-to bratsy..."', (Spring, 1873), *RN* 1, p. 124.

⁵² Plekhanov puts similar words into the mouth of a radical worker in his account of a *skhod* at his St. Petersburg apartment in 1876: "Really, doesn't every worker-revolutionary already know by *his own situation*," began a *buntar* [for Plekhanov, a Bakuninist-*intelligent-JRM*], 'that the boss is living on the worker's account? "He understands that it's hard, he sees that, but not as he should," - the workers stood their ground - "To many it seems that any other life isn't possible, that God made the world so that the worker would suffer. But you show them that another life is possible...then you have real revolutionaries"' (emphasis added): see Plekhanov, *Russkii rabochii*, Appx. E: 294.

to the soul of the worker: the account of the workers' actions is basically physical, not emotional. Kaminskaia still appeals to the feelings of her audience, but strives to achieve the readers' sympathy simply by presenting things 'as they really were.' If the workers' condition was intolerable, unjust and immoral then this had to be recognised by the audience. If the audience recognised the fact of injustice and immorality then that recognition had to be based on a universal sense or standard of morality that Kaminskaia was actively trying to 'bring out' of them.

Kaminskaia's account of the workers' situation, then, falls into a tradition of writing about the *narod* expressed most clearly and explicitly in P. Lavrov's 1873 *Vpered* programme. 'Precise facts,' Lavrov stated: ' - these are the foundation on which we hope to stand...The facts of Russian life will be collected in the main centres of that life, and commented on by people who are able to get close to its processes.'⁵³ The influence of positivism on the passage notwithstanding,⁵⁴ Lavrov manages to show here the importance of involvement and direct participation in the collection and relation of the facts of Russian life to its audience. The authority of Kaminskaia's description followed from its 'authenticity,' which in turn rested not upon any clear signs of 'commitment,' but on the detail and specificity of the description itself. Whilst this realism could only come through direct observation of and participation in the life of the Russian workers (being 'close to the processes of Russian life'), for revolutionary journalism this was simply a means to an end. If 'going to the people' and personal experience of the life of the *narod* represented the urge of individual *intelligenty* to change themselves, their subsequent descriptions of the *narod* became the appeal to the 'thinking people' whose morality and capacity for reason were still waiting to be exercised.⁵⁵ Even if the synthesis of feeling and knowledge remained central to the power of such accounts, the emphasis was transferred from the writer's experience to the readers' responses. Hence, even in the case where it seems the historian has a first-hand account – a more or less direct route into the personal experience or memory of the author – the account turns out to be directed not 'inward,' towards the individual, but 'outward,' towards society - specifically, that section of it still waiting to take a definite stand on the struggles between labour and the exploiters.⁵⁶ When the historian sees hints of 'personal experience' and 'participation' in Kaminskaia's description,

⁵³ P. L. Lavrov, 'Nasha programma,' *Vpered!*, v. 1, pt. 1, P. L. Lavrov (ed.), (Geneva, 1873), p. 2.

⁵⁴ On the influence of Comte and Spencer on Lavrov in the mid-1860s, see. P. Pomper, *Peter Lavrov and the Russian Revolutionary Movement* (Chicago/London, 1972), p. 66-7.

⁵⁵ Lavrov, 'Nashi programma,' p. 3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 3.

what they see is their own prior knowledge of her stint as a peasant-worker at the Nosov factory. The historians Karzhanskii and Korol'chuk both cite Kaminskaia's descriptions and comments alongside that of governmental statistics and inspectors reports on the urban workers, but extend only to Kaminskaia's evidence the biographical 'primer' which gives her account that authority of experience to which it only obliquely appeals itself.⁵⁷ The special notions of individuality and experience characteristic of the social revolutionary movement had, then, by 1874-5 already been revealed in the aims of 'going to the people' and in the sorts of documentation of the *narod* that was produced in the intelligentsia's contacts with them.

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In general the behaviour of certain elements of the student body in 1874-76 derives from an ideological position already being prepared by A. Herzen, M. Bakunin, N. Chernyshevskii and P. Lavrov from the 1840s onwards. Social revolutionaries' views on the place of the individual *intelligent* and on individual experience followed in the first place from that pre-existing (although not unthinkingly accepted) ideological position. The documents cited above and even the historical account given of the 'going to the people' movement indicate in the main an *attitude* on the part of the *intelligenty* towards real, personal interaction with the *narod*. But this does not necessarily give the historian an insight into the nature or importance of their *actual* experiences. What she confronts instead is the 'ideology of experience,' in more or less explicit forms. What then, were the outcomes of these encounters, of their experiences? Were the 'hazy' and 'ill-defined' images of popular suffering and popular culture revised, rejected, undermined?

Though the numbers of *intelligenty* and workers involved in the circles of 1871-4 was small, contemporaries perceived the successes of these activities to have been great. Before the largest, most disorganised waves of 'going to the people' took place in the summer of 1874 – the phase of the movement concentrated on the countryside, and considered a dismal failure by most historians⁵⁸ – the *chaikovtsy* groups in the north, centred on St. Petersburg, and the *buntary*

⁵⁷ Karzhanskii, *Moskovskii Tkach...*, p. 16-7; E. A. Korol'chuk, *Rabochee dvizhenie semidesiatikh godov: Sbornik archivnikh dokumentov...*, p. 9.

⁵⁸ See, for instance, A. Yarmolinsky, *Road to Revolution*, (New York, 1962), p. 186; Baron, *Plekhanov*, p. 14-15; J. E. Good and D. R. Jones, *Babushka: The Life of the Russian Revolutionary Ekaterina K. Breshko-Breshkovskaia*, (Newtonville, 1991), p. 50. For an overview of this attitude to the 'summer of 1874,' see D. Field, 'Peasants and Propagandists in the Russian Movement to the People of 1874,' *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (Sept., 1987), p. 416-17. Note that Field is concerned in this article to disprove some of the major claims of these

(‘rebels’) in the south (Odessa, Kiev) had already for two years been engaged in teaching, distributing books and pamphlets, and organising meetings amongst workers in the cities. Later, these activities became more overtly ‘propagandistic’ and ‘agitational,’ with a quite definite message repeated to the lower-class tutees in both the ‘north’ and ‘south.’ The basic message prepared for the *narod* assumed the identity of the peasantry with the ‘labouring *narod*,’ the latter term denoting the factory and plant workers in the cities as well as the rural labourers (peasants, *krest’ianstvo*) in the villages: the future society to be realised by the Russian *narod* would uphold the link – thought to originate in the popular mass itself - between labour and possession. Hence, the factories and the land would belong to (be possessed, if not ‘owned,’ by) those who actually *worked* them, *while* they worked them. Much was made later of the distinction between the better educated (skilled), more cultured ‘metal workers’ in the plants and the less skilled, more ‘peasant-like’ textiles workers in the factories, especially in memoir accounts and histories of the movement. The writings and activities of the *chaikovskii* circle between 1871 and 1874 suggest the distinctions were not as important then as they were to become later. The *intelligenty* approached the urban workers at first for the sake of convenience, without distinguishing much between the ‘city labourers’ and rural ones. Physically, the factories and plants (*fabriki* and *zavody*) were within easy reach of the *intelligenty* circles, concentrated in and around the universities and other higher education institutes, as were those artels already known to them. Efforts had already been made by radicals through the 1860s to set up or otherwise enter existing workers’ schools; the remnants of those establishments destroyed by state suppression in the early 1860s, as well as the ‘legitimate’ technical schools overseen by the government, provided good cover for those intending to form popular, socialist circles. The propaganda work of the *chaikovtsy*, overlapping with that of the *lavristy*, the *dolgushintsy*, and the *buntary* in the south, took in equally the *zavodskie* and the *fabrichnye*, with such well-known figures as A. Kropotkin, D. Klements, and Kravchinskii lecturing to groups of workers from the Patronnyi, Nobel’ and Berd engineering plants (*zavody*) as well as the Cheshire and Thornton textile and wool factories (*fabriki*). What the scholar R. Zelnik called the ‘ecumenical approach’ to the different circles (he specifically attributes this approach to Alekseev) was in fact the norm amongst the *intelligenty*, and became increasingly common among the workers through 1873-4.⁵⁹ That the circles had formed around the sub-categories of ‘factory’ and ‘plant,’ of skill and urbanity, was not due to any *a priori*

other authors, especially the claim that ‘going to the people’ failed in 1874 because of the indifference and/or opposition of the peasantry to the propagandists and their message (ibid, *passim*).

⁵⁹ Zelnik, ‘On the Eve,’ p. 47.

conceptual distinction made by the *intelligenty*. The widespread and well-documented prejudices of the skilled workers (model makers, draftsmen, machine operators, etc) toward the unskilled ‘country themselves bumpkins’ - usually directed to the more transient, recently migrated labourers in their own factories – seem not to have held in the light of their ‘political awakening.’ That the distinction held at all among the most radical workers can be explained by accidents of friendship and geography (workers tended to form and join circles with their workmates) and by the continuing influence of *zemliachestva* traditions (this latter especially among the textiles workers living in artels). Alekseev and others, around 1872 drawn into the circles by promises of free lessons in reading, writing and other subjects, having then taken the political message offered to them by their teachers, were equally welcome at the meetings of ‘metal workers’ and ‘textiles workers.’ Indeed, the first mention of Alekseev in the Pankratova documentary collection, *Rabochee dvizhenie v XIX veke*, was a secret agent’s report on a joint meeting of *all* the workers’ circles in St. Petersburg in late 1873, for which Alekseev had given temporary use of his apartment.⁶⁰

Thus, having ‘gone’ to the workers and peasants in Petersburg and elsewhere, having contacted and befriended these men and women, the radical *intelligenty* were still able, without any awareness of contradiction, to understand their own activities to be the ‘movement to *the people*,’ and not to any sub-group or sub-population. The continuity of the concept reinforced, in turn, the original and basic distinction made by the *intelligenty* between themselves and the ‘popular mass.’ The very force of the concept of the *narod*, assuming as it did the centrally important distinction between the educated classes ‘above’ and the labouring class ‘below,’ regurgitated without much thought by the *intelligenty* in popular publications, papers, regulations, letters, had the *intelligenty* treat the actual ‘workers’ and ‘peasants’ with whom they made contact as instances of the concept of the *narod* rather than as positive challenges to it. Divisions within the ‘labouring class’ were passed over as members of diverse groups entered circles in which such distinctions were (at least temporarily) made less meaningful by a radical programme intended to assert the fundamental unity of the ‘masses.’ The main lesson of the *intelligenty*’s ‘direct experience’ of the *narod* - a *narod* being formed, by the workers and the *intelligenty* both, according to the concept - was a restatement of the idea expressed by Livanov in 1874: to gain the trust of the *narod*, one would have to *be* them, to truly share in

⁶⁰ ‘Agenturnaia zapiska v III otdelenie o nelegal’nyi skhodke peterburgskikh rabockikh u Petra Alekseeva,’ 4th March, 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 438.

their ‘banal, everyday lives.’ The sort of passive unity of suffering ascribed to the *narod* by the *intelligenty* could not, in fact, be transcended by the intelligentsia’s attempt to ‘merge’ with it. Neither could direct experience of the *narod* help the educated radicals to expel their own guilty self-consciousness, their sense of being ‘lordly’ and, therefore, separate from the *narod*. The individual transcendence of an inherited and externally imposed class division had in fact proved impossible. Their experience of the *narod* was still not the ‘feeling’ of its oppression and of its interests (a ‘feeling’ or intuition over which the labourers would come to have a sort of monopoly). For that reason, despite prolonged and personal contact with the workers and peasants, they remained, by their own reckoning, external to the popular movement.

Their own doctrines had told them as much from the start. Since it was ‘historical conditions’ that would drive the *narod* to revolutionary action, and it was only through popular self-liberation that transcendence of class could be truly be achieved, it was inevitable that the radical *intelligent* remain part of the ‘educated class’ until such time as those distinctions became meaningless, e.g. with the overturn of the Russian autocracy. Commitment to the idea of shared, human capacities for reason, morality, and freedom (expressed most succinctly in Bervi-Floreenskii’s popular pamphlet of 1873, *Kak dol’zhno zhit’ po zakonu prirody i pravdy* – [‘We must live by the laws of nature and truth’])⁶¹ could not, in and of themselves, give the *intelligenty* the power to break through the class distinctions imposed upon them and the labourers: the *narod*, after all, still *needed* to work, whereas the *intelligenty*, having chosen to take up employment, could equally choose to leave.⁶² The workers and peasants had been raised in such conditions, in the realm of necessity, whereas the *intelligenty* had not. Their decision had been a free and conscious one: it could have been different. And, it was found, class distinctions went deeper: the characteristic habits and gestures and company kept by members of each class did not change at a stroke with the decision to ‘go to the people’: differences of mentality, thought, even perceived physical distinctions⁶³ continued, despite all efforts, to

⁶¹ V.V. Bervi-Flerovskii, ‘Kak dolzhno zhit’ po zokonu priordy i pravdy,’ [1873], *Agitatsionnaia literatura*, p. 86-95.

⁶² The transience of the radical intelligentsia’s presence was to become a cause for the mistrust and conflict that developed between the two groups, not only in the late nineteenth century, but also into the twentieth (especially after the 1905 revolution and the 1907 ‘reaction.’): see Zelnik, ‘On the Eve,’ p. 43-6; S. A. Smith, ‘Workers, the Intelligentsia and Social Democracy in St. Petersburg, 1895-1917,’ *Workers and Intelligentsia* (Zelnik, ed.), p. 187-8, 200-1; S. Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia: The Autobiography of Semën Ivanovich Kanatchikov*, translated by R. Zelnik (Stanford, 1986), p. 142-4.

⁶³ See, for instance, Vera Figner’s memoirs in *Five Sisters*: ‘It proved impossible for elegant young “ladies” dressed up as peasant girls not to attract attention in the miserable surroundings of the factory. Everything they did set them apart: their small, tender hands were unaccustomed to working, and ten or twelve hours of labour in

persist. Indeed, it was partly *because* the *intelligenty* were unusual figures in the workers' quarters and villages - partly because they offered to the 'working people' knowledge, conversation, and company that were remarkable - that anything much at all was achieved by early propaganda work. Donning 'popular' clothing and even working alongside the poor, *as workers*, were not and could not be sufficient to affect real, material change and to give to the *intelligenty* the 'feeling' of injustice and wrong that followed, materially, from really *being* a labourer.

The process was extended to the 'developed workers' as they began to take on the radical cause as their own. The concept of the *narod* or 'labouring class' or 'working class' began to structure their perceptions and thoughts, blurring the lines they and their co-workers had previously drawn between the 'skilled' and 'unskilled,' the urban and the rural, the temporary migrant and the permanent city resident. These distinctions were replaced by a new, apparently more fundamental one: on the one side, the 'developed workers,' active in organising their comrades and conducting propaganda; on the other, 'the masses' or the 'rank and file,' as yet unenlightened, the ready material of the handful of active, now conscious workers. In committing themselves to the *narod*, the radicalised workers reproduced both aspects of narodism as a concept, both in its revolutionary self-assurance (knowledge of the interests of the *narod*) and its self-doubt (the sense of not knowing 'the *narod*,' of knowing only the 'hazy image' of it, of waiting to fill the empty concept with something solid). The process can be seen positively, as the realisation of the idea of narodism: the worker-revolutionary or 'worker-*intelligent*,' educated but still part of the unenlightened mass, both a propagandist, a potential leader of local revolts, and a model of the future man, cured of the fracture between mind and matter. Yet, as Zelnik comments, that 'Russians felt compelled to invent special terms for them...such as *rabochaia intelligentsia* (worker intelligentsia) and, more awkward still, *intelligentnye rabochie* (intelligentsia workers) bears witness to the precariousness of their existence...at the margins of the intelligentsia [and] never fully separated from their working class identities.'⁶⁴ They were both 'inside' and 'outside' of the labouring class. For such workers, the real transcendence of their class position would mean leaving behind the workshops and the fields and become an 'intellectual' or 'revolutionary': in other words, severance from the material conditions and everyday experiences (the 'feeling') that was so

an unsanitary workshop – Kaminskaia, for example, had to work in filthy rags in a paper factory – exhausted them beyond their endurance' (p. 29).

⁶⁴ Zelnik, *Law and Disorder*, p. 225-6.

highly valued by the *intelligenty* proper. Indirectly, Alekseev identified this position in his speech, in reference to the exclusion of the ‘working millions’ from education and ‘civilisation’:

I think everyone knows that in Russia the worker who reads books will be persecuted. If he looks at a book that speaks of his situation – he’s already arrested. They’ll say straight into his face: ‘Brother, you’re no worker: you read books.’ The strangest thing is: the irony of the words has been missed. In Russia, being a worker is the same as being an animal. (Alekseev, Appx. A: 278)

This is as good an indication of any of the ‘precarious’ position in which the early, radicalised workers found themselves. Alekseev and his comrades were, in fact, the *personalisation* of the narodnik movement’s hitherto *intellectual* contradictions: on the one hand deferring to the material conditions of the mass and their collective power as agents of revolution, on the other, heavily involved in - and seemingly limited to – ‘revolutionary activities’ which only reinforced their separation from these ‘masses’: reading books, building libraries, distributing pamphlets, through reason and a well-articulated moral code becoming slowly conscious of the world around them. The line between Alekseev and the ‘working millions’ thickens: what appeared, on first sight, an authentic condemnation of oppression from within the working mass becomes an intellectual’s self-reinforcing and abstract imagining of oppression from the outside. He is now disgusted not only by *what happens* to the workers, but also the ‘working millions’ *themselves*, their ‘intellects blunted,’ feeling only hatred, living like slaves, animals, and knowing themselves as such: ‘Nothing is more striking than examples of books published here for the ‘*narod*’...Our people get the idea that reading is either sacred, or a distraction.’ (Alekseev, Appx. A: 278).

Education as a quality of the individual - not an essential aspect of the earlier concept of the ‘*intelligent*’⁶⁵ - became, from the mid-1860s, the primary mark of the revolutionary and social-revolutionary intelligentsia. Bakunin and Lavrov’s concepts of ‘exploitation’ and ‘debt to the *narod*’ established the possession of education (or ‘science,’ *nauka*) as one of the identifying characteristics of the ruling class as a whole, and the most important possession distinguishing the radicalised *intelligent* from the mass of the *narod*. To find the same ‘thirst for knowledge’ that energised the *intelligenty* among the workers and peasants was confirmation enough of the latter’s claims regarding the universal capacity for ‘conscious,’ in some sense ‘free,’ thought and action. Yet, according to Alekseev, among the workers themselves, reading and writing, the

⁶⁵ See Read, *Religion, Revolution, and the Russian Intelligentsia*, p. 1- 4.

outward signs of development or a more ‘conscious’ attitude toward one’s life, still served to separate and exclude educated people from the mass of the *narod*, whether they were from the ‘educated class’ or not: ‘Brother, you’re no worker: you read books’ (Ibid). It was, in fact, through reading, writing and even through political action that the ‘developed’ and radicalised workers like Alekseev were able to recognise themselves as more than just workers. The intelligentsia, however, could not help but see in their thirst for knowledge and their desire for truth evidence of a universal capacity for self-development: at precisely the point at which the ‘developed workers’ presented themselves to the *intelligenty* as unique people, the *intelligenty* tended to see in the workers confirmation of their own notions of the ‘popular mass’ and the ‘popular interest.’ Hence, when Sinegub remembered his time as a lecturer at the Zhdanov plant in 1871, and later, between 1871 and the summer of 1872, as a leader (in the pedagogical sense) of a workers’ circle, the retrospective irony with which he looked upon his own attitude to the ‘*narod*’ rubbed against his descriptions of the ‘same’ workers and peasants with whom he had met. The *a priori* categories of revolutionary doctrine, in Sinegub’s account intended to convey the *particular* qualities of the *particular* working men and women with whom he met, end up affirming those categories over and above the particular, despite Sinegub’s efforts to keep a distance from his past thought and activity. ‘For the young people of the time,’ Sinegub wrote,

the greatest task was the choice of an action that might have the greatest benefits for the *narod*, before which they – the *intelligent* youth – considered themselves non-paying debtors, buying their development at the price of the people’s suffering, and for whom one should lead a life dedicated to lessening their exploitation.⁶⁶

This, Sinegub remembered, was the ‘dream toward which all the young people of the time strived.’⁶⁷ Lively meetings were held in which the students ‘argued and shouted about serving the *narod*, the overthrow of autocracy, popular power and so on.’ Eventually they would form ‘communes’ (*kommuny*’ - Sinegub always placed the word in inverted commas), in the first place to facilitate their own self-development, and later as a means of organising to ‘go to the people,’ as Herzen and Bakunin had advised.⁶⁸ Once involved in giving lectures to the workers in St. Petersburg, Sinegub and his friend Stakhovskii found their lessons inevitably transformed into ‘propaganda,’ the aim of imparting a message to the worker-students characteristically mixed up with the intelligentsia’s desire to ‘know the *narod*’ and ‘learn from it’: ‘After lessons

⁶⁶ Sinegub, ‘Vospominannia Chaikovtza,’ [I], p. 40.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 39.

we would get into conversations with the workers about their everyday lives [*zhit'e - byt'e*], and talked about the injustices in the lives of the Russian people. We read them the books we had that related to the question of the bosses' attitude to the workers [*rabochim*].⁶⁹ A description of his friend Sebriannikov's meeting with a couple of *fabrichnye* confirms that the intelligentsia felt most comfortable in the company of workers who shared their own interest in books and learning:

Serebrennikov was walking in Aleksandrovskii Park and sat down on a bench next to a couple of lads – by appearance, *fabrichnye*. One of them was reading a dreadful little *liubochnyi* publication, *A Smile for a Rouble*, to the other. Listening to them reading, Serebrennikov could not bear it, and turning to the workers said: 'Surely you aren't interested in reading that rubbish?' The workers eagerly engaged him in conversation, starting with the fact that they were only semi-literate and didn't know how to get better, and then it turned out that they had long wanted to learn to improve their reading, but they had no means of doing so; they told him that 'students' sometimes taught workers for free, and so they dreamed of meeting a student, but so far they had not. Serebrennikov liked the workers: they were young, independent minded and, evidently, genuinely thirsty for education [*prosveshchenie*: enlightenment]. He suggested that they come to him twice a week on Saturday and Sunday and have lessons with him. The workers were extremely pleased with the suggestion – 'finally, God has sent us a student' – and on the next Saturday they came to Serebrennikov at the given address. Two of these workers – Shabulin and Abakumov – brought a third with them, a little older than them, more solid in character and mind. He would become quite well known later on, one of the most accomplished workers, Grigorii Krylov.⁷⁰

It was, incidentally, through this contact that Alekseev would eventually enter the workers' circles in St. Petersburg. And like Alekseev there were a few workers who would also be remembered specifically by sight or by name, perhaps because they became 'well-known later' amongst the revolutionaries and in workers' circles, or perhaps because they were on first meeting and thereafter genuinely 'memorable.' Yet, the dignity of a proper name allowed to the odd worker or peasant was no guarantee that their place in history would not dissolve into the wider milieu of which they were part; the case of the 'worker-revolutionary' (or the 'weaver') Alekseev is enough to demonstrate the weakness of 'particular' descriptions of the unique person or moment, or the proper name, against the power of social and political categories. And for every Grigorii Krylov or Pëtr Alekseev held up to an audience as empirical proof of the truth of the tenets of social-revolutionary practice and 'narodism' as a principle, a hundred others were deprived even of the impoverished identity with which these latter, 'well-known'

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 40-41.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 50-1.

workers were honoured. Sinegub, looking back, struggled to remember even the names of the workers he taught, though he was with them for many months as a teacher and propagandist, and after that, according to him, they had become his ‘true friends.’⁷¹ True friends were easily forgotten when it was the political relationship and not the personal one which retained its value for history. ‘Our conversations and our books,’ Sinegub wrote, ‘were a welcome nourishment for the soul [*zhelannoi dukhovnoi pishchei*], answering those questions of the soul which life itself presented to [these workers], or so it seemed to us.’⁷² If the comment seems meaty, open in its retrospective, and more concrete than the ‘hazy *narod*,’ suffice to remember the important place of ‘feeling’ and ‘the soul’ in social-revolutionary thought. Here was the sign of the peasant-workers’ special position in the movement, their central position *as* workers and peasants. Spiritual questions presented themselves to the ‘labouring class’ as *intuitions* rather than as concepts or fully-formed thoughts, and these intuitions were agitated by ‘life itself,’ this latter term a popular alternative to the more direct, but less self-evident, concept of ‘social determination.’

II. WORKERS, REVOLUTIONARIES, AND THE AUTOCRACY (1866-78)

As the revolutionaries struggled to integrate their ideas of individuality and experience with their actual experiences of individuals and ‘the *narod*,’ the tsarist authorities, led by the Third Section and its gendarme corps, mounted ever widening and ever more detailed investigations into the Empire’s most unruly and politically unreliable elements. The documented history of the ‘developed workers’ begins in the early 1870s with these investigations. Alekseev, Semën Volkov and the other circle workers’ first confrontations with the state were part of an investigation of ‘sedition’ stretching from St. Petersburg’s workers’ artels and factories to the capital’s University, Medical-Surgical Academy and Agricultural Institute (Volkov, Appx B: 282). Between November 1873 and March 1874 the *chaikovtsy* and the progandists that orbited around the circle were mostly seized by the police, questioned, then arrested.⁷³ The workers’ circles in Vasilevskii Island, Vyborg and Nevskii gate were destroyed along with the students’

⁷¹ Sinegub admits that he cannot remember their names: see Ibid, p. 41.

⁷² Ibid, p. 41.

⁷³ Being ‘seized’ (*zaderzhan(-a)*) or ‘brought in’ for questioning to a local police station or the offices of Third Section was not always accompanied by arrest (*arest*). Arrest would often take place only *after* the suspect had been held informally and interrogated several times by the authorities. It was often the case that worker-suspects – depending on their responses to interrogation – would be released shortly after questioning, without being subject to further questioning, arrest or individual surveillance by the police (see below).

and the radicals'. Volkov had occasion to describe three of his interrogations (*doprosy*)⁷⁴ by the state after he was first seized in March, 1874 (Volkov, Appx B: 281-2, 283-5).⁷⁵ It was during these interrogations that Volkov and the circle workers' *particular* lives were first marked as in some way historically significant. It is, therefore, in the mass of documents generated by the complex network of government institutions involved in these investigations (including the Third Section, its gendarmes and secret agents, local police forces under the direction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and civil and military courts under the direction of the Ministry of Justice)⁷⁶ that the radicalised elements of the Russian working class acquired, for the first time, their own (albeit rather strangled) 'voice' in the historical record. As the 'positive notion' of the workers' representative function and the workers' voice were being formulated by those who 'went to the people' (and the people they went to), the *negative* notion of the worker-*intelligent* – a figure at once self-determining and manipulated, responsible and irresponsible, of his class and different from it – developed from official attitudes to the 'working people' and the documentation of its radicalisation.

Responding to a perceived weakness in policing after Karakazov's attempt to assassinate Aleksandr II in 1866, over the next decade the tsarist government instituted measures to strengthen the Empire's security forces. In that year a special bureau concerned with thwarting terrorist plots was formed in St. Petersburg, and a couple of years later the corps of gendarmes were granted powers to investigate state crimes and punish those accused of them with further police observation, short prison sentences and administrative exile, all independently of the judiciary systems set in place by the reforms of 1864.⁷⁷ Much of the police activity of the 1860s

⁷⁴ The word *opros* ('questioning,' as opposed to 'interrogation') is sometimes used in the literature – for instance, in Sinigub's memoirs (see below) - but rarely in the official documentation of the gendarmes, Third Section or regular police.

⁷⁵ Volkov's apartment was searched by *Maïor* Kononov of the Gendarme Corp, 'under the observation of *prokurory*,' on the night of the 17/18 March, 1874 (see 'Dokladnaia zapiska III otdeleniia Aleksandru II ob obyskakh i doporsakh v sviazi s revoliutsionnoi propaganda sredi rabochikh Peterburga,' [18] March, 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 449). Volkov was questioned first on the 19th of March, and was subsequently arrested and held by the III Department until transferred to the 'House of Preliminary Detention' (*Dom Predvaritel'noi Zakliuchenii*) (see 'Doneseniie nachal'nika Peterburgskogo gubernskogo zhandarm'skogo upravleniia N. S. Birina nachalniku III otdeleniia P. A. Shubalovu ob arestakh uchastnikov revoliutsionnoi propagandy,' March 21, 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 462; Volkov, Appx. B: 8.

⁷⁶ On the Third Department: J. W. Daly, *The Watchful State: Security and Opposition in Russia, 1906-1917* (DeKalb, 2004), p. xi-xiii (for a rough overview); I. Lauchlan, 'The Okhrana: Security Policing in Late Imperial Russia,' *Late Imperial Russia: Problems and Prospects: Essays in Honour of R. B. McKean, I. D. Thatcher* (ed.), (Manchester, 2005), p. 44-6; on the Ministry of Internal Affairs: D. Orlovskii, 'High Officials in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 1855-1881,' *Russian Officialdom: The Bureaucratization of Russian Society from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, W. M. Pintner and D. K. Rowney (eds.), (London, 1980), p. 250-252.

⁷⁷ Daly, *Watchful State*, p. 3.

prefigured the repressive activities of the rest of the nineteenth century. Despite the post-Emancipation extension of reforms and the nominal liberalisation of certain institutions (particularly the university), paranoia about the harmful effects of alien philosophies from France and Germany, carried by malcontents like diseases into Russia to infect the Russian young, grew as perceived and actual threats to the existing order appeared in various forms: minor disorders among the peasants and students broke out with increasing regularity; secret circles were discovered; assassination attempts foiled. Some of the groups (like N. Ishutin's) had real terrorist intentions but hardly any supporters; others (like the earlier *Zemlia i Volia* group, in which both Chernyshevskii and Lavrov were participants) were multiplied many times in their strength and discipline by the imaginations of their investigators and prosecutors. Paranoia grew correspondingly, manifesting itself, on the one hand, in knee-jerk policies towards students' associations and the literature they obtained from Western Europe, and towards students' interactions with the 'lower classes' on the other.⁷⁸ From June 1869, provincial branches of the Third Department were charged with observing the students' interactions with the *narod* as they took their summer vacations at home.⁷⁹ In 1869, the Petersburg *gendarme* planted agents among the students of the Technical Institute, the Agricultural College and the Medical-Surgical Academy as disorders and unauthorised gatherings reached a new peak, manifesting in the main the student's own anger with changes of regulations regarding the institutions of higher education, the deteriorating material position of students from poorer backgrounds, and their inability to confront either problem in the context of strict, state control of extra-governmental 'association.'⁸⁰ Similar steps were taken as Moscow University played host to 'anti-governmental thinking' and 'sharp words against the Tsar' in December, 1870.⁸¹

⁷⁸ See Mezentsev's circular to the provincial branches of the III Department, 23 May, 1870, GARF, *f.* 109, 3-ti *eksp.*, 1870, *ed. kh.* 50, *l.* 2 (which uses the phrase 'lower classes').

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, *ll.* 2-2 *ob.* The original circular ordering the 'thorough observation...of the higher education students' interaction with the lower classes' dates from the 3 June, 1869 (*l.* 2). The file also contains responses from local *nachal'niki* to Mezentsev in St. Petersburg on the results of these observations (*ll.* 5-16).

⁸⁰ Morozov, 'Ocherk...', *RN I*, p. 203-5; see also GARF, *f.* 109, 3-ti *eksp.*, 1870, *ed. kh.* 52, (*ll.* 1-32) on the setting up a mutual-aid *kassy* in Novorossiiskii University and the government's heavy-handed response (*l.* 31-31 *ob.*) to a venture the arrested and exiled have claimed was 'non-political' in intent (*l.* 12-12 *ob.*).

⁸¹ See the 'Letter from the *nachal'nik* of the *gendarme*, Moskovskaia guberniia, to Mezentsev,' 14 December, 1870, GARF, *f.* 109, 3-ti *eksp.*, *ed. kh.* 96 (ch. 1), *l.* 40, on the planting of special agents among Moscow University students.



6. Tsar Aleksandr II

As revolutionary organisations of workers and students were being uncovered by police investigations in the 1871-76 period (the *dolgushintsy* in 1871, the *chaikovtsy* and *lavristy* in the winter 1873-4, the VRSO in 1875-6), the Third Department and other officials more readily drew connections between the revolutionaries' efforts at agitation and disorders among the peasantry (especially blaming the spread of rumours of land repartition among the rural populace)⁸² and the urban workers (blaming anti-governmental propaganda). But the notion of the 'outside influence' - especially that of the individual agitator or ringleader - had high-stock in the law courts and with the secret police even aside from the connections explicitly uncovered by them between radicalised students and the working population. The long-running concerns of the government about workers' poor living conditions, health problems and arbitrary treatment by contractors and factory administrators remained hidden from view in memoranda and letters circulated between *nachal'niki* of the gendarmes and police, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and Aleksandr II. In this private sphere of reports and memos, some officials analysed the relationship between the workers' socio-economic position and the

⁸² See, for example: 'Tsirkular III otdelenia gubernskim zhandarmskim upravleniem ob usilenii nadzor za studentami tekhnologicheskogo instituta, prokhodiaushchimi praktiki na fabrikakh i zavodakh,' 25 May, 1874, *SRT*, p. 150-1; see also 'Zapiski moskovskogo gubernatora A. A. Livena ministru vnutrennikh del o polozhenii rabochikh v Moskovskoi gubernii,' 24 November, 1874, *RD* 2.ii, p. 280-82; 306.

propensity to ‘walk out,’ complain about company policy, strike or ‘riot.’⁸³ But the willingness of the authorities to seriously consider the grievances of workers against their employers in each particular case, and even to take discreet action against obvious abuses of power by the latter, was always accompanied in the public sphere by the public use of the law against those individuals from among the workers whom it considered immediately ‘answerable’ (*otvetstvennyi*) for disorders.⁸⁴

The immediate root of this peculiar mixture of private concern and public condemnation lay in the reactions of Adjutant General Trepov to the textile workers’ strike at Petersburg’s Nevskii Novobumagapriadiil’naia *fabrika* (New Cotton-Spinning Factory, hereafter: Nevskii factory) in May, 1870.⁸⁵ On the 22nd of May some 63 workers struck at the factory having demanded remuneration for pay owed to them before the Easter holiday, which the factory administration insisted had already been paid to them, according to agreed procedures, though their *mal’chiki* assistants. Having chosen three representatives and had their requests written up by the local innkeeper, the workers approached the English foreman, a certain John Beck, who promptly refused their demand.⁸⁶ The resultant work stoppage led to the temporary halt in production in one department of the factory, employing 800 workers.⁸⁷ In the period between Trepov’s report of these facts to the Tsar (27th of May) and his later recommendations to him on the 30th of May, the police investigation into the causes of the strike was already over and the ‘ringleaders’ rounded up. These four were duly tried without a jury in the local *okrug* court, along with 52 other lesser offenders, in early June. The latter were given mild sentences of three days arrest; the ringleaders, having already served the short prison sentences of seven days during

⁸³ See for instance, ‘Article on the worker question, by the St. Petersburg Department for the [consideration of the] workers question,’ 3 July, 1871, GARF *f.* 109, 3-ti *eksp.*, 1870, *ed. kh.* 64, *ch.* 1.i, *l.* 92 – 92 *ob*; see also ‘Iz politicheskogo obzora kapitana korpusa zhandarmov Zav’ialov nachal’niku Vladimir. gubern. Zhandarmskogo uprav. P. E. Belovodskomu o polozhenii rabochikh i revoliutsionnoi propaganda v Shuiskom i Kovrovskom uездakh,’ 24 December, 1875, Doc. 16, *RD* 2.ii, p. 36 -43.

⁸⁴ See, for example, N. A. Treskin, ‘Volneniia rabochikh na moskovskoi tekstil’noi fabrike I. P. Bultikova v 1851,’ *Istoricheskie Zapiski*, no 7, 1940, p. 271, 273, after 1870: see *RD* 2.i, p. 252-3, 255, 257-9, 277.

⁸⁵ A detailed account of the strike, government and press reactions to it, and the hastily organized trial of the ringleaders is given in R. Zelnik, *Labor and Society in Tsarist Russia: The Factory Workers of St. Petersburg, 1855-1870*, (Stanford, 1971), p. 340 – 369. Some of the archival documents used here can be found in *RD* 2.i, Documents 81-86, p. 238-243.

⁸⁶ Zelnik, *Labor and Society*, p. 341.

⁸⁷ ‘Report of *nachal’nik* of St. Petersburg police Rurenov to Trepov,’ 27 May, 1870, GARF, *f.* 109, 3-ti *eksp.*, 1870, *ed. kh.* 64, *ch.* 1.i, *l.* 1; ‘Report of General Adjutant Trepov to Tsar Aleksandr II,’ 27 May, 1870, *ibid.*, II. 2-2 *ob.*

questioning and now left without work, were sent away from the capital back to their home regions at the behest of Trepov.⁸⁸

The views of Trepov contained in the May 27th report formed the institutional basis for much of police and gendarme policy towards workers' disorders over the next three or four years. Having observed no general disturbance among Petersburg's working population, Trepov concluded that the Nevskii strike was caused by 'a lack of consciousness among workers of their rights and duties,' which could be corrected by swift punishment of those responsible. He also hoped this would have 'beneficial effect' of discouraging such actions among the workers as a whole.⁸⁹ Hence a division was made by Trepov (reinforced by the difference between the *okrug* court's sentencing of the four ringleaders, on the one hand, and the other 52 strikers on the other), between those held *individually* responsible (having brought something alien into the worker population), those who had been dragged along with these ill-intentioned ringleaders, and the labouring population as a whole. That the first category were not simply scapegoats or 'examples' made, but genuinely considered *answerable* for disorders by the authorities, is shown by the manner in which Trepov's suggestion for close police surveillance of the workers was followed in regional police departments. In Moscow the police were given a 'free pass' to enter any factory they liked and observe the workforce at will;⁹⁰ the *nachal'nik* of the Moscow gendarmes noted that police would need to be 'on the spot' anyway (e.g. permanently at the factories and in the workers' quarters) if they were to identify quickly the potential and actual 'troublemakers' who might 'cause strikes.'⁹¹ Specific instructions sent in July to the *guberniia* police departments went so far as to detail the typical characteristics of probable troublemakers: 'those who express dissatisfaction with the management,' 'especially those who complain about wages,' '[those] who leave the factory with improper haste.'⁹²

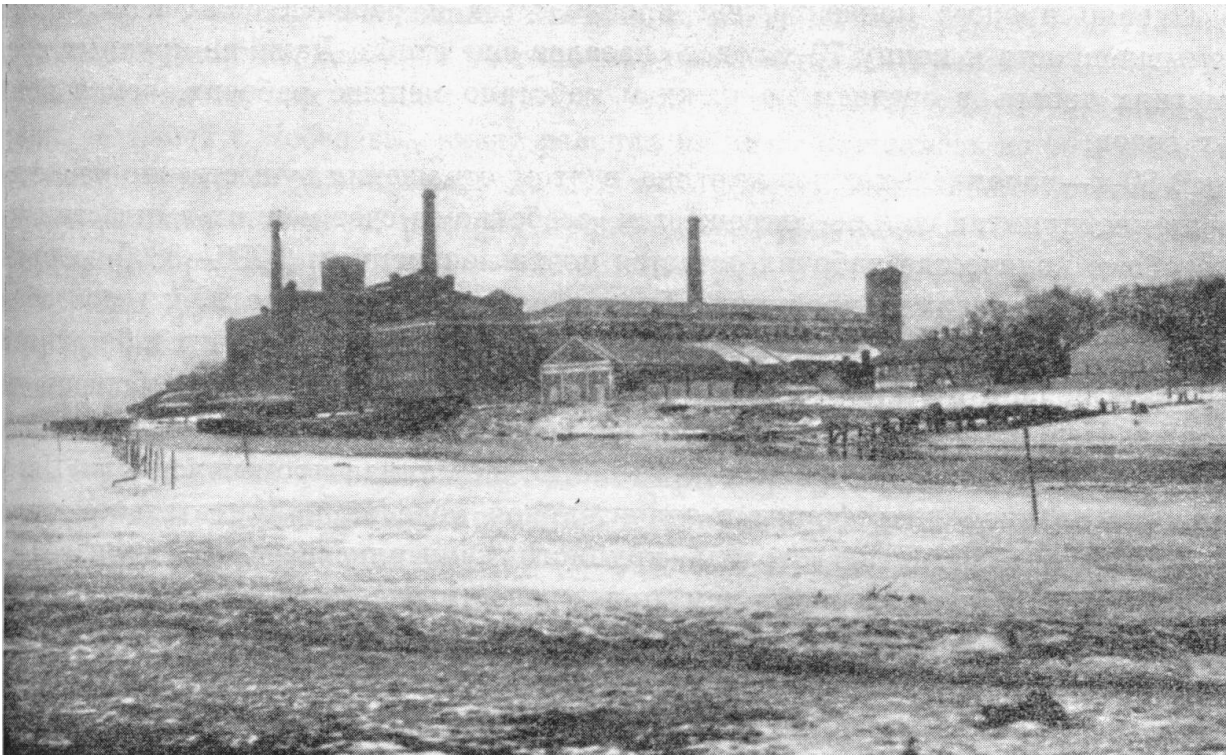
⁸⁸ 'Trepov...to Tsar,' 27 May, 1870, GARF f. 109, 3-ti *eksp.*, *ed. kh.* 64, *ch.* 1.i, *ll.* 2 *ob* -3; 'Report of Colonel Kukov to Trepov,' 13 June 1870, *ibid.*, *ll.* 5-5 *ob.*

⁸⁹ 'Report of Trepov to Tsar,' 27 May, 1870, *l.* 2 *ob.*

⁹⁰ 'Report from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the *nachal'nik* of the Moskovskaia *gub.* gendarme,' 21 July, 1870, GARF f. 109, 3-ti *eksp.*, 1870, *ed. kh.* 64, *ch.* 1.i, *l.* 25.

⁹¹ 'Letter of the *nachal'nik* of the Moskovskaia *gub.* gendarme to the Ministry of Internal Affairs,' 23 July, 1870, *ibid.*, *l.* 26 -26 *ob.* The *nachal'nik* is complaining that the 'police -*chinovniki*' are too familiar and friendly with the *fabrikanty*, which leaves the police open to manipulation. Hence 'on the spot' police presence would allow them to observe the *fabrikanty* as well as the workers, and stay familiar with both so as to better 'judge their moods.'

⁹² 'Instructions to local police on the observation of the worker population,' 23 July, 1870, GARF f. 109, 3-ti *eksp.*, 1870, *ed. kh.* 64, *ch.* 1.i, *l.* 28 *ob.*



7. Nevskii New Cotton-Spinning factory, St. Petersburg (1870s)⁹³

Fear of the possible influence of students over the urban workers was already noticeable in the early 1870s.⁹⁴ Yet the absence of evidence of outside agitation did not entail the wholesale abandonment of ‘bad apple’ explanations for the complexities of socio-economic explanation, but the simple transferral of ‘outsider’ status to those workers identified by the police as the ringleaders or instigators of unrest. If this status could not be conferred in terms of ‘estate difference,’ it was conferred in the act of disobedience itself, in bringing ‘forms of the expression of dissatisfaction alien to [Russian] soil’⁹⁵ to Russian factories, workshops and construction sites. Concern with relations between workers and their employers – especially the *fabrikanty* in the cities and towns – continued to appear in private,⁹⁶ but even these magnanimous (and still hidden) calls for the regulation of both sides of the worker/employer relationship took place within the context of increased police surveillance of the *fabrichnye* and the *zavodskie* populations, and their analyses were shot through with the logic of a public policy

⁹³ B. M. Kochakov *et al*, *Ocherki istorii Leningrada*, v. 2 (Leningrad, 1957), p. 111.

⁹⁴ See ‘Instructions to local police....,’ 23 July, 1870, GARF f. 109, 3-ti *eksp.*, 1870, *ed. kh.* 64, *ch.* 1.i., l. 28-29 *ob*, instructing police to pay special attention to workers’ relations with ‘students, seminarists, gymnasium students and other people who draw attention to themselves,’ and especially to students from St. Petersburg’s Technical Institute involved in ‘practical work’ at factories in their home regions and elsewhere during their summer vacations.

⁹⁵ ‘Article on the worker question,’ 3 July, 1870, *op. cit.*, l. 92 – 92 *ob*.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, l. 92 *ob* (on worker/employer relations). This same article talks of suspicions of agitation among the workers somehow connected to similar activity in the factories of Prussia’s south-eastern industrial region (95 - 95 *ob*).

meant not only to scare the mass of workers away from strikes, but also to identify the ‘ill-intentioned outsiders’ (aliens) who might try to ‘instigate strikes among the unconscious Russian workers’ and therefore avert disorder by eliminating its immediate causes.⁹⁷

Though the state’s domination of the labouring masses was a constant theme of social - revolutionary propaganda, for the early, ‘developed’ workers in St. Petersburg direct and personal confrontation with the state remained an abstract possibility not much accounted for in the conduct of their own highly illegal activities. Aleksei Peterson, one of Semën Volkov’s closest friends at the Vasil’ostrovsk district workers’ circle, observed in his memoirs that he had ‘hardly been touched by the police’ until the arrests of late 1873 and early 1874.⁹⁸ The state’s hesitancy vis-à-vis the criminal actions of the ‘common people’ gave the worker-*intelligenty* a breathing space hardly ever afforded to individuals within and around the periphery of the student body after 1866. Since the state’s investigations began with a view of the student-*intelligenty* as the true source of sedition within Russia, reports apparently documenting the active role of workers in ‘collectivist’ or ‘internationalist’ propaganda were acted upon only timidly. The state ideology of the ‘ringleader,’ still in the mid-1870s applied to factory disorders and cases of seditious ‘instigation,’⁹⁹ did not easily comprehend illegal activities involving the active roles both of *intelligenty* and of peasant-workers. To identify a peasant as a ringleader in such a case implied that he was responsible for thoughts and actions supposed quite alien to the ‘common people’ (especially atheist, anti-Tsarist, or regicidal sentiments, or the distribution of propaganda containing such sentiments), and hitherto attributable only to the harmful influence of members of the educated classes or other ‘outsiders’. Publicly, the state was never to recognise the full answerability (*otvetstvennost’*) of the workers alongside their *intelligenty*

⁹⁷ ‘Report of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the *nachal’niki* of regional police departments,’ 6 June, 1870, *Ibid*, l. 16.

⁹⁸ A. N. Peterson, ‘Iz pros’by grazhdanina Sovetskoi Respubliki Aleksei Nikolaevich Peterson v Sotsial’noe Obespechenie o pensii,’ *KiS*, 1924, no. 3, p. 226.

⁹⁹ There was some overlap between ‘instigation’ considered characteristic of the ‘common people’ (e.g. spreading rumours about, or commenting upon, the possible re-division [*peredel’* or *razdel’*] of the land) and the revolutionary propaganda being spread through ‘word-of-mouth’ or ‘popular books’ by *intelligenty* and worker-circles (what can be called ‘seditious instigation,’ though this term will not be found in the documents). Some correspondence between the ideas of the ‘instigators’ with the propagandists (especially notions that linked property rights to labour) could of course be expected given the aim of the social revolutionaries to ‘express’ the ‘unconscious or conscious ideals already held by the *narod*’ (see, for instance, Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, p. 214-7; ‘Rech’ S. I. Bardinoi na zasedanii suda Osobogo Prisuvtstviia Pravitel’stvuiushchego senata (protsess “50-ti”),’ *RN* 1, p. 356). Usually the distinction between ‘rumour spreading’ (simple ‘instigation’) and revolutionary propaganda was made on the basis of the use of the ‘popular books’ known to have been printed by the *dolgushinsty* (e.g. Bervi-Flerovskii’s ‘Kak dolzhen zhit’...’), the *chaikovtsy* (‘Chtoi-to, bratstsy...,’ ‘Skazka o chetvërtakh brat’iakh...’) and other groups, or the involvement of students already known or suspected of bearing radical (revolutionary, regicidal) sentiments (see below).

comrades for involvement in seditious, criminal activities. Privately, a certain ‘commitment’ to the cause was attributed to those workers who refused to accept the peasant status and concomitant leniency offered to them by the state. Hence, the awkward position of the worker-*intelligent* somewhere between the *narod* and the *intelligenty* proper was given the stamp of the tsarist administration in and through the investigations of ‘going to the people’ in 1873-6 and the trials of its main participants in 1876-8.

From September, 1873, the authorities had begun to discover the workers’ secret mutual-aid circles and libraries, documenting in detail the workers’ conversations, movements, the contents of their libraries, and (with special care) their frequent meetings with students from the nearby University, Medical-Surgical Academy and Institute of Forestry. In the early 1870s, the same agents joined workers’ circles and meetings (*skhodki*) and began to report on them, handing over their notes to handlers (detectives from the regular police, gendarme officers, or assistant procurators) at clandestine meetings. On the night of the 17th of March, two days before Volkov’s first formal arrest, a series of searches (*obyski*) were conducted by officers of the Corps of Gendarmes among workers and students suspected of involvement with illegal activities and organisations in St. Petersburg. The investigation of Volkov’s circle had begun in late January, 1874 when Osip Cheshire, owner of the Nikol’skaia Cotton Weaving manufactory (or ‘Cheshire factory’) on the Vyborg Side, informed *gradochal’nik* Trepov that ‘internationalist ideas’ were being ‘spread among the workers of his factory.’¹⁰⁰ A secret police investigation at the Cheshire factory discovered that, sometime in mid-January,¹⁰¹ the Cheshire worker M. Tarasov had informed his employer of his and his comrades’ meetings with a mixed group of students and workers at various bars (*traktiry*) in the city.¹⁰² Information garnered through Tarasov on the political conversations between himself and the propagandists was

¹⁰⁰ ‘Otnoshenie peterburgskogo gradochal’nika F. F. Trepova prokuroru sudebnoi palatu E. Ia. Fuks o propagande narodnikov sredi fabrichnikh i zavodskikh rabochikh,’ 27 January, 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 437.

¹⁰¹ Tarasov’s meeting with Cheshire or one of his subordinates probably took place between the 11th and the 25th of January, 1874. One of the student-propagandists with whom Tarasov and his co-workers at Cheshire, P. Aleksandrov and N. Kondrat’ev, had met - N. A. Charushin - was arrested on the 11 January, 1874, and Tarasov was informed of the arrest sometime later by another student, ‘Shishkov’ (see *ibid*, p. 438). Trepov’s report to *procurator* Fuks was dated the 27 March, and the ‘secret investigation’ revealing Tarasov as the source of Cheshire’s information was mentioned in that report (*ibid*, p. 437). Based on the evidence of Trepov’s actions in and around the time of the Nevskii strike in June, 1870, it would have taken the *gradochal’nik* at least one day to organise an investigation at the Cheshire factory and another to write and deliver his report to the procurator (see ‘Donesenie peterburgskogo ober-politsmeistera F. F. Trepov ministru vnutrennykh del A. E. Timashevu o stachke rabochikh Nevskoi bumagopriadel’noi fabriki,’ 26 May, 1870, *SRT*, p. 114 – 5).

¹⁰² On the ‘spies’ Tarasov, Aleksandrov and Kondrat’ev, see the records of D’iakov’s trial in *GP* 2, p. 583; V. Gerasimov, ‘Zhizn’ russkogo rabocheho pol’veka tomu nazad,’ *VNP*, p. 164-65; see also R. Zelnik’s excellent translation in *Law and Disorder*, p. 290 and especially his *ft.* 12, *ibid*.

characteristically hazy, but his confessions at least provided the authorities with a concrete link between the student-radicals and the labouring population, and further licence to extend their surveillance over the city's factories (beginning with the Cheshire) and its workers' quarters.¹⁰³ Volkov's circle of some seven or eight Patronnyi workers was temporarily broken up only months after Cheshire's report to Trepov. While Tarasov and his co-workers continued to participate in the small workers' circle at the Cheshire factory, police agents in other branches of St. Petersburg's workers' organisations collected and sent detailed information on the activities of their members in mid-to-late 1873 (especially on the *kassa* and library in which Volkov and his friend Diakov Smirnov had been heavily involved in organising), attending the *skhody* still being arranged by student-propagandists and workers themselves in the spring of 1874.¹⁰⁴ Having followed the threads provided by Tarasov into St Petersburg's factories and its University, Medical-Surgical Academy and Agricultural Institute, the gendarme arranged for raids on seven different locations around the city and personal searches of any suspects located there.¹⁰⁵ Eighteen people were searched on that night, thirteen of them workers.¹⁰⁶ Among the first to be seized and questioned between the 17-19th of March were the workers D. Prokhorov and I. Ivanov who, along with N. Charushin (under the pseudonym 'Appolonov'), had met with the informant Tarasov and his comrades several times over the winter of 1873-74 and given him illegal, 'popular publications' (*narodnye izdaniia*) to read.¹⁰⁷ Tarasov and his co-informers, N. Kondrat'ev and P. Aleksandrov, were themselves seized on the 21st of March, and all three gave

¹⁰³ 'Otnoshenie F. F. Trepova E. Ia. Fuks...', 27 January, 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 438; see also Korol'chuk, *VNP*, *ft.* 5 to Gerasimov's memoir, p. 384.

¹⁰⁴ See, for instance, 'Agenturnaia zapiski v III otdelenie...', 4 March, 1874, *RD* 2.i, 438-440; 'Zapiski o propangande sredi rabochikh...', March 15th, 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 441-448. In his memoirs, D. Smirnov asserts that his and Volkov's co-worker at the Patronnyi plant, Ivan Liliental', was one of the worker-spies in the employ of the police at this time, on the evidence that, upon his arrest in March, 'as the whole convoy tumbled out of the house, we noticed that our comrade Liliental' wasn't with us – he hadn't been arrested. Only later did we find out that this Liliental' had been our denouncer.' When D. Smirnov and Volkov returned to Patronnyi after their release in summer, 1874, Smirnov noted, 'we didn't find our former comrade Liliental' there' (Appx. C: 13). In the notes to D. Smirnov's memoir, Korol'chuk commented that Liliental' was indeed employed at the Patronnyi plant and involved in the workers' circles between 1872 and 1874, but that no archival information could be found to support Smirnov's claim. However, the police report of March the 15th, 1874 does not mention Liliental' as a member of the Vasil'evskii (Patronnyi plant) circle of workers alongside Volkov, D. Smirnov, the brothers Pëtr and Aleksei Peterson, and others (see 'Agenturnaia zapiski v III otdelenie...', March 12, 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 7). The list seems accurate in so far as it corresponds closely to a similar description given by the student A. Nizovkin on the same workers' groups in his March, 1875 statement to the gendarmes (see 'Iz zaiavleniia A. V. Nizovkina [prokuroru S.-Petersburgskoi sudebnoi palata] o propangande A. P. Vetitneva i V. S. Ivanovskogo sredi peterburgskikh rabochikh,' March 27th, 1875, *RN* 1, p. 250-1). Having listed the members of the Patronnyi group ('Peterson and company,' in his words), Nizovkin mentions that there were a few workers that he didn't know among them. The absence of Ivan Liliental's name in the March 12th report might indicate, then, that these notes were based on agent's reports taken and delivered to the police by him on the workers' *skhodki* he was still attending in early 1874.

¹⁰⁵ 'Dokladnaia zapiska III otdeleniia Aleksandru II...', March [18], 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 449-51.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 449-51; 'Agenturnaia zapiski v III otdelenie...', March, 4th, 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 438.

‘very open’ statements to the gendarmes. It was probably around this time that they were first brought into the employ of the police as ‘spies.’ During the remainder of 1874 an early 1875, all three continued to participate in the activities of the circle organised by V. M. D’iakov on the Vyborg Side whilst reporting to the police through a certain detective Nazarov.¹⁰⁸ In early 1875, with Tarasov’s help, the workers’ circle organised by the D’iakov was routed by the gendarmes, and its members – including the worker-*intelligenty* V. Gerasimov and D. Aleksandrov – placed on trial.¹⁰⁹

The searches in March 1874 uncovered the loosely scattered debris of a social–revolutionary movement still in its infancy: popular pamphlets and printed proclamations addressed to the ‘student youth’ and the *narod*; volumes of the works of Lassalle, Lavrov, Bakunin and Marx; histories of the peasant uprisings of Pugachëv and Razin; handwritten notes and the coded accounts of mutual-aid funds; photographic cards adorned with the image of Chernyshevskii.¹¹⁰ During their preliminary interrogations both workers and students, called in to account for their propinquity to the criminal objects, were again presented with the assorted ‘material evidences’ by the procurators and asked to ruminare and report at length on their contact with them. The extraordinary detail in which the Third Section, the gendarmes and the police recorded the movements of illegal literatures and criminal persons around the Russian Empire followed, in the last analysis, from the basic division made by the state between ‘ill-intentioned’ or ‘harmful’ persons and their unfortunate victims. Until early 1874, relatively few state officials questioned the notion that every kind of radical opposition, every kind of radical thought and, perhaps, all mass criminal activity was, in essence, ‘alien to the Russian way of life’ and therefore traceable to an external source. Of course, it still remained to be discovered through interrogations the *exact* relationship between the given criminal markers (literature, persons, illegal conversations) and the particular people and events being investigated at any given time. But so ingrained was the ideological perspective with which the state approached the radical-*intelligenty* and workers’ circles in late 1873 and early 1874, so rigid the framework for spotting and recording significant historical occurrences in observations, notes and official reports, that actual contact between the suspects and the state became less a means to verify concrete evidence than an opportunity to probe the suspect’s ‘moral character.’ The state’s interpretation

¹⁰⁸ Zelnik, *Law and Disorder*, ft. 14, p. 290.

¹⁰⁹ See Docs. 19-26, *RD* 2.ii, p. 60 on the investigation into D’iakov’s group; *GP* I, p. 318-345 on the trial of the group and Troitskii, *Tsarskie sudy*, p. 346, for a clear list of their sentences.

¹¹⁰ ‘Dokladnaia zapiska III otdeleniia Aleksandru II....,’ March [18], 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 449-50.

of peasant-workers' criminality took place, then, not at the level of historical action, but rather at the level of immediate reaction: in other words, the state rarely allowed that the history it had already documented was subject to more than superficial correction through the questioning of those involved in that history. Instead, a pre-documented story was presented to and imposed upon the suspects, with a view to extracting repentance from the probable victims of sedition (the peasants) and confession from the suspected, 'ill-intentioned' outsiders (the 'intelligently youth').

The observations of the workers' circles in secret agents' reports and their treatment during searches and interrogations extended (albeit provisionally) to the 'propagandised' workers the same leniency offered as a matter of course to the 'crowd' of peasants or workers in disorder; but, unlike peasant disorders, the opportunity for the worker's repentance and redemption was given to him *as an individual*, as one moment of the process of interrogation and re-interrogation. In peasant-workers' disorders (including industrial disorders), the election of the crowd's representatives served as a means for the state to identify and exclude the ringleaders from the crowd, the interrogation or interview an opportunity for the given authorities to convince those branded ringleaders of their answerability for the outbreak of protests, riots, walkouts, strikes or other acts of 'wilful' behaviour among the 'peasant workers.'¹¹¹ Interrogations of the workers in late 1873 and early 1874 retained this element of revelation *to* the interrogated, when the purely external signs of a workers' criminality, already known to the gendarmes and procurators through agents' reports, were 'revealed' as criminal to the worker-suspect. Yet a certain choice never offered to the peasant ringleaders obtained in the questioning of individual worker-suspects from the routed circles. In the same vein as Tsar Nikolai's marginal comments to Bakunin's *Confession*, it was understood that, 'if [the suspect] feels all the weight of his sins, then only a *pure*, complete confession, and not a *conditional* one, can be considered a confession [at all].'¹¹² For a worker-suspect arrested in late 1873 and early 1874, the interrogation was a means to reveal his true character as either an object of student influence (part of the peasant crowd) or the subject of propaganda (and therefore answerable for his actions). Hence, unlike the ringleader of a peasant disorder, already identified as something

¹¹¹ D. Moon, *The Russian Peasantry: the World the Peasants Made, 1600-1930*, (London/New York, 1999), p. 226; D. Field, 'Peasants and Propagandists in the Russian Movement to the People in 1874', *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 59, no. 3 (September, 1987); D. Field, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar*, (Boston and London), 1976, p. 209-212; Zelnik, *Labor and Society*, p. 363.

¹¹² M. Bakunin, *The Confessions of Mikhail Bakunin (with the marginal comments of Tsar Nicholas I)*, translated by R. C. Howes, (Ithaca/London, 1977), p. 33.

other than a 'simple peasant' in being singled out for punishment by the state, the worker-suspect brought to questioning in 1873-4 was in a position to *actively* portray himself as a passive object of external influence: to return himself to the peasant crowd. The 'pure, complete confession' documented not only the individual worker's repentance, but also showed that he still belonged, in his soul or essence, with the common people. It followed that the worker's *pokazanie* was rarely a 'revelation'¹¹³ except in that it offered the worker-suspect a chance to reveal to his questioners an inner belonging either with the common people or with the *intelligenty*-outsiders. 'Full and open testimonies' (*otkrovennoe pokazanie*) written by worker-suspects were, at one and the same time, gestures symbolising that the testifiers had been 'led astray' into criminality and, in their historical content, recognition of the state's own interpretation of the workers' past actions as driven by outside influences. The worker-suspect could in this way escape the answerability that marked those who did 'resist' or did 'commit themselves' to their own recorded (criminal) past. That the committed worker-*intelligent* would first appear only in this indirect or negative manner followed from the peculiar relationship in state investigations between the documentation of criminal activity and the interrogation of the individual suspect. Typically the interest of all state investigators, from the anonymous agents who reported on the workers' *skhodki* all the way up to the high officials like N. S. Birin and P. A. Shuvalov, were those events, people and objects which were understood immediately and directly to be criminal. From the state's perspective these markers of criminality did not need to be 'interpreted': it was just obvious that student *skhodki*, certain books and pamphlets (the *narodnye* publications), student-worker associations or circles, and even particular people (Herzen, Marx, Bakunin, Chernyshevskii, Belinskii, or Nechaev) were criminal by definition. The description of any event or set of events (meetings, statements, conversations), of any particular circle, or of any particular individual was structured around these definite markers of criminality and written into the ideological pattern by which these markers had been identified in the first place. Thus the remarkable homogeneity of state documentation and so too of the 'official historiography' that emerged from state investigations into sedition up to 1874.

Whatever their previous participation in the illegal activities of the St. Petersburg circles, these first arrests and interrogations represented a chance for the workers to recognise, confess to and repent from their crimes and divest themselves of answerability for them by embracing the

¹¹³ The word *pokazanie* ('testimony, statement') is derived of the root *kaz* ('showing, appearing'), closely related to the verbs 'to show, reveal' (*pokazat'-pokazyvat'*) and to 'speak, say' (*skazat'-govorit'*).

state's own notion of the 'common people' as victims of external influences. S. Vinogradov, for instance, had been described in a report to Aleksandr II as a 'fully developed person, considered to be one of the leaders' of the workers' circles (*'lichnost' vpolne razvitaia i chitaetsia odnim iz vozhakov'*).¹¹⁴ On his arrest he was already known as the cashier of the so-called 'resistance fund' (its papers were found on his arrest), as a well-read and 'sober' man heavily involved in acquiring books for the workers' library, and a close friend of the student A. Nizovkin.¹¹⁵ At his first questioning on March 17th he refused to admit any 'anti-governmental activities' and even denied any knowledge of the workers' library or the various funds in which he had been involved, and was arrested.¹¹⁶ At his second interrogation on the 22nd he proved willing to give an 'open testimony' to the gendarmes, 'fully conscious that the information given in his statement could be used in indictments against others involved in propaganda.'¹¹⁷ Vinogradov, unlike Volkov (who remained 'under lock and key' until February, 1876), was released shortly afterwards, and was subsequently able to travel abroad with another worker from the circle, K. A. Ivaniien.¹¹⁸ Similar leniency was shown to the worker-propagandist D. Prokhorov who, immediately after his seizure on the 17th, 'gave a most open statement' about his activities and was for that reason released shortly after.¹¹⁹

The state's treatment of any particular worker was determined by a complicated balancing of what the state already knew about that worker and what the worker was willing to admit under interrogation, rather than the extent of the workers' involvement in illegal activities *per se*. It was the workers' *response* to questioning and to the 'revealed truth' offered by the gendarmes and procurators on the workers' own (perhaps unwitting) criminality, and not open 'commitment,' that were judged by the interrogators in the first instance. The refusal to accept the enlightenment and compassion offered by the state provoked its representatives to withdraw the promise of leniency which initially accompanied the workers' ascription to the peasant estate (*krest'ianskoe soslovie*). Hence, Vinogradov and Volkov were arrested after their preliminary interrogations because both had lied about the participation in events the state had

¹¹⁴ 'Dokladnaia zapiska III otdeleniia Aleksandru II...', [18] March, 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 449.

¹¹⁵ 'Zapiski o propangande sredi rabochikh g. Peterburga i ob biblioteki i kass za Nevskoi zastavoi,' 15 March, 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 442, 443; 'Agenturnaia zapiski v III otdelennii o nelegal'nyi skhode peterburgskikh rabochikh u Petra Alekseeva,' 4 March, 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 440.

¹¹⁶ 'Doneseniie S. Birina P. A. Shubalovu...', 21 March, 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 461, 463

¹¹⁷ 'Donesenie N. S. Birina v III otdelenie...', 29 March, 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 473.

¹¹⁸ Korol'ckuk, *Severnyi Soiuz*, p. 297.

¹¹⁹ 'Dokladnaia zapiska III otdeleniia Aleksandru II...', [18] March, 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 449; 'Donesenie N. S. Birina v III otdelenie...', 29 March, 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 459.

already interpreted as harmful.¹²⁰ Vinogradov and Prokhorov were released shortly after giving their ‘open testimonies’ because they had chosen to accept the state’s view of the activities in which they had participated and the state’s view of them as ‘peasants.’ Volkov did note in his memoir that, having gone through the ‘ordeal of the St. Petersburg prisons’ in 1874-75 (Appx. B: 283), the workers who returned to the circles after their release had subsequently ‘dealt more manfully with arrests and were not scared of them’ (Appx. B: 284) but in March, 1874 arrest and interrogation often revealed a genuine fear of the state among even those very few workers who were considered ‘committed to the cause’ by the agents of the Third Department. Even Volkov’s own descriptions of his interrogations in 1874 do not show an open, revolutionary commitment, but a subterfuge designed to exploit the state’s own vacillation *vis-à-vis* the fledgling workers’ movement: appeals to the ambiguities of the law in describing the workers’ actions; concealment of the most radical and dangerous sides of workers’ activities; the admission of guilt ‘only where it was self-evident.’¹²¹ Still, in giving only a conditional confession, the worker-suspect revealed to the state the ‘wilful and stubborn’ mentality characteristic of the ‘ringleader’ in peasant disorders, but in the *content* of his thoughts and activities he revealed also a seditious and immoral soul, a criminality thus far considered typical only of the educated ‘outsiders.’ Hence, the active or ‘committed’ worker-*intelligent* made a first appearance in the documentation not openly declaring social-revolutionary or ‘internationalist’ convictions (as Pëtr Alekseev would do in 1877), but in so far as his behaviour, face-to-face with the gendarmes and procurators - his ‘conditional confession’ – was taken as a sign of inner commitment by the state.

Kropotkin was arrested on the 25th March, 1874, a week or so after Volkov, D. Smirnov, the Peterson brothers and most of the workers in the Vasil’ostrovsk circle had been searched and questioned, and some months after Sinegub and other *chaikovtsy* had been seized by the gendarmes.¹²² Under the assumed name of ‘Borodin,’ Kropotkin had by early 1874 acquired exactly the ‘notoriety in the workers’ quarters’ that he attributed retrospectively to those of S. Kravchinskii and D. Klements. The gendarmes too were well aware of ‘Borodin’s’ participation in propaganda among St. Petersburg’s ‘weavers and engineers’ - it was only left for them to

¹²⁰ ‘Doneseniie S. Birina P. A. Shubalovu...,’ 21 March, 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 461-2, 463.

¹²¹ Zelnik, *Law and Disorder*, p. 260.

¹²² ‘Donesenie nachal’nika peterburgskogo gubernskogo zhandarmskogo upravleniia N. S. Birina v III otdelenie o pokazaniiazh arestovannykh za revoliutsionnuiu propangandu sredi rabochikh Peterburga,’ 29 March, 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 473.

verify that Kropotkin and ‘Borodin’ were the same person.¹²³ As the gendarmes hesitated, Kropotkin continued his work in St. Petersburg almost alone (Serdiukov was also still at liberty), trying to save the organisation that had been built in the capital over the preceding two years, looking for others to maintain their printing press and their extensive correspondence with similar groups in Moscow, Kiev, Odessa and in the countryside. In January, 1874 the *chaikovtsy* ‘lost another settlement, [the] main stronghold for propaganda amongst the weavers,’ and by early March the ‘engineers’ had also been arrested.¹²⁴ By the time of his own arrest in late March, Kropotkin’s name (or his pseudonym) had begun to appear in the reports made by the gendarme on secret *skhodki* held among the workers, and in many of the testimonies and written statements made by workers and *intelligenty* to the gendarmes and assistant procurators at their interrogations.

The positive or ‘conscious’ moment of the worker’s act of resistance was not captured in the state’s purely negative interpretation of outward signs of ‘commitment.’ Hardly in a position to know what had actually happened during workers’ interrogations, the *intelligenty* understood the workers’ early release as proof that their own tactic of drawing blame upon themselves had been successful (as in the case of Sinegub and Stakhovskii),¹²⁵ while the workers’ prolonged imprisonment or exile was taken as a sign that the workers had resisted the gendarmes much as the *intelligenty* had done: with silence (as in Kropotkin’s case).¹²⁶ While the state’s treatment of the worker-suspect placed the already documented, external signs of criminality at the abeyance of the worker’s revealed ‘essence’ (an essence exposed when the suspect was faced with the ‘objective history’ of his own involvement in criminality), the *intelligenty* measured the external signs of workers’ commitment – the treatment of worker-suspects at the hands of the state – against the commitment they had previously seen or ‘felt’ in personal contact with their

¹²³ P. A. Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* [1898-99], translated by N. Walter, (New York, 1971), p. 334-5.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 331. The terms ‘weavers,’ ‘engineers,’ and ‘settlements’ used here are Kropotkin’s, who wrote his memoir first in English and then later in Russian (the memoir was first published in instalments as ‘The Autobiography of a Revolutionist’ in the journal *Atlantic Monthly*, between September 1888 and September, 1889: see *ibid*, Kropotkin’s ‘Note’ of 1899, p. xxii). Kropotkin evidently had some difficulty finding English equivalents for the Russian terms *fabrichnye* and *zavodskie* (‘workers of the *fabriki*’ or ‘of the *zavody*’), which would have been used in Russian documents and other memoirs related to ‘going to the people’ from the late nineteenth century onwards (and subsequently in most Soviet scholarship after 1920). ‘Settlements’ probably translates both *punkt* (a conspiratorial apartment) and *kommuna* (students’ and, later, revolutionaries’ communal apartments after 1871-2); the two functions would tend to separate – ‘for conspiratorial reasons’ – between the fall of the *chaikovskii* circle in 1874 and the *Vserossiiskaia Sotsial’no-Revoliutsionnaia Organizatsiia* in 1875 and the foundation of *Zemlia i Volia* in 1876.

¹²⁵ S. Sinegub, ‘Vospominaniia Chaikovtza [II],’ *Byloe*, Sept., 1906, p. 116.

¹²⁶ Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 328-9.

worker-pupils before the circles had been routed.¹²⁷ The ‘commitment’ of the peasants and workers around the time of the rout of 1873-74 was therefore seen not negatively, in their perceived refusal to accept the ‘peasant-worker’ status offered to them, but positively, as the conscious grasping of the popular (or proletarian) cause. Drawing on Bakunin’s notion of the ‘rebellious instinct’ of the *narod*, accounts of the workers’ circles of 1873-4 initially saw the workers’ ‘grasping of the popular cause’ as if it were a simple, almost mechanical reaction to their encounter with the explicitly revolutionary doctrines propounded by the *intelligenty*. But, since the workers they propagandised had been drawn into the circles to be educated (whether to acquire basic literacy or to master geometry, geography, chemistry or political economy), a desire for self-development or ‘higher culture’ among the workers, over and above - or perhaps even constituting - the ‘instinct to rebel,’ could not be denied. The awkward position of the ‘committed’ workers between the ‘critical thinking’ of the *intelligenty*-elite and ‘popular instinct’ to rebel was immediately apparent to the social- revolutionary *intelligenty*, themselves awkwardly placed between the thoughtless, self-satisfied *mentality* of ‘society’ and the collective culture of the idealised *obshchina* and *artel*. With the *chaikovskii* circle especially, the debate over the proper role of the *intelligent* – teacher of the *narod* or its student – was temporarily put to rest.¹²⁸ On the one hand, the moral capacities the *intelligenty* hoped to foster in themselves through genuine friendship and mutual trust were discovered already formed among the workers, for whom such moral capacities were ‘instinctively’ developed in everyday experience and revealed on contact with the *intelligenty*. On the other hand, practical experience of educating the workers taught the *intelligenty* that self-development was already a popular aspiration alongside the desire to be freed of excessive taxation, brutal state intrusion, and degrading conditions of labour and life. Henceforth ‘consciousness,’ understood as awareness and active use of one’s own capacity for critical thought and its eventual, practical application, could not be the preserve of the *intelligenty* proper. Rather than being a product of higher culture and education in and of themselves, ‘consciousness’ was understood to originate in the encounter between the elemental understanding of social injustice (the basis of moral culture) and the instinctive desire for freedom (including the freedom to think) common to the those *intelligenty*, peasants, workers, or anyone else already free of the self-serving culture of Russian

¹²⁷ On ‘feeling,’ see Sinegub, ‘Vospominaniia Chaikovtza [I],’ *Byloe*, Aug, 1906, p. 41.

¹²⁸ In a slightly different way, the attendees at the conference of *lavristy* in Paris (December 3-14, o.s.) noted that in practical activity the groups of *buntovshchiki* (e.g. Bakuninist ‘agitators’) had ended up being ‘propagandists’ (teachers, educators of the *narod*) despite their intention to ‘agitate’ (e.g. provoke immediate rebellion) among the *narod* (see ‘Protokol [zasedanii] s’ezda,’ 21 Nov./3 Dec.- 2/14 Dec., *Vp.* 2, p. 245; see also B. Sapir, *Vpered!: 1873-77*, (Dordrecht, 1970), p. 350-1).

‘society.’ Though the actual *experiences* which called forth these essentially human instincts were not initially shared by the *intelligenty* and the *narod* (the *intelligent*’s sense of debt and distance remained the starting point of the ‘going to the people’ movement), the founding of the workers’ circles had begun the process of filling the abstract categories of suffering, exploitation, popular desire and state domination with a concrete content, reducing this distance and the debt of the *intelligenty* along with it.

Workers’ ‘consciousness’ may have been a perceived reality within the circles, but it was still recognised that the moral and personal equality of the workers and *intelligenty* did not hold objectively. A worker’s commitment - the promise to face imprisonment, exile, the loss of one’s job or police surveillance with stubborn resistance and moral courage - was therefore valued more highly than the revolutionary commitment of any *intelligent*. The continued exclusion of the workers from the central circles of the *intelligenty* (the *chaikovtsy* circle in 1872-3 especially) should not be seen as the manifestation of lingering class- or ‘estate’- prejudice among the *intelligenty*,¹²⁹ especially given the evidence of the development of close friendships between the ‘students’ and other revolutionaries and some of the workers in the circles.¹³⁰ This exclusion was simply one means by which the *intelligenty* protected the workers from state punishments which, thanks to the objective division of the peasant-workers from members of other (higher) estates, could still be avoided by the lower classes. The *intelligenty*’s ‘taking of blame’ for criminal or otherwise suspicious activities during the interrogations of 1873-4 was another means to capitalise on this objective difference.¹³¹ Against the desire to shelter the workers was the recognition that the shared ‘commitment’ perceived by the *intelligenty* had shown itself in concrete experience of the state’s measures to crush illegal propaganda, particularly during interrogations.

¹²⁹ This seems to be the implication of Zelnik’s comment that the *chaikovtsy* ‘were so wary...of the notion of full-worker members [of their circle], that when a member did nominate a worker on one occasion, it “seemed like a revolution.” All but two of the students present rejected the proposal’ (see R. Zelnik, ‘Workers and Intelligentsia in the 1870s: the Politics of Sociability,’ *Workers and Intelligentsia in Late Imperial Russia: Realities, Representations, Reflections*, R. Zelnik (ed.), (Berkeley, 1997), p. 32.

¹³⁰ See, for instance, *ibid*, p. 32-34.

¹³¹ Sinegub, ‘Vospominaniia,’ (I), p. 113.



8. Pëtr Kropotkin¹³²

Though arrest and exile were viewed by the social-revolutionary *intelligenty* with a fatalism perhaps fitting for a movement born, in part, of the experience of forceful state intrusion into the institutes of higher education, they did not consider their own confrontations with the state to be especially significant in- and of-themselves. Even in the most personal encounters with the state and its numerous repressive apparatuses, their gaze was set not on the ‘higher authorities’ but on the revolutionary force which would destroy them: the *narod*. Self-denial and self-sacrifice were offered to the *narod* not because the *intelligenty* were inviting conflict with the state (the *intelligenty* did not believe it was in their power alone to overturn it), but because this was a step towards ‘repaying the debt’ to the *narod*, of making it possible for *narod* to rid itself of its exploiters and parasites. It was from the *narod* and others who might be in a position to aid it that recognition was sought by the social-revolutionary *intelligenty*. The interrogation and the testimony, generally hidden from the view of the ‘general public’ and from the *narod* itself, did not admit of this desire for ‘popular recognition,’ even if the principles of the *chaikovskii* circle still governed the behaviour of its members in the event of their arrest. While through successive decades Alekseev’s public declaration of ‘commitment’ was to socialists of all hues the most celebrated illustration of the transformation of the *narod*

¹³² A. J. Sack, *The Birth of Russian Democracy* (New York, 1918), p. 34.

(or the working class) from object of revolutionary activity to its subject, Alekseev's lack of deference to state power in the hidden sphere of interrogations and imprisonment served to demonstrate his assimilation to the moral principles already formulated by the revolutionary intelligentsia.

It was only after the first rout of the social-revolutionary and workers' circles in late 1873- early 1874 that the separation of the government's public and private understandings of 'sedition' - in other words, between policing procedures, judicial procedures and the state's comprehension of radical opposition - began to appear in the documentation. Having participated in an extensive investigation of 'going to the people' in 1874, ordered thousands of searches, seizures and arrests, and discovered ream after ream of illegal literature, certain high government officials observed with alarm that the radicalisation of the *intelligenty*-youth and the peasant-workers was a diffuse phenomenon rather than a centralised one, with roots not only in the acts of ill-intentioned individuals, but also in the support and sympathy of Russian 'society' and in the experiences of the labouring population.¹³³ Despite this, the state's aim remained the destruction of 'sedition' in all its forms. Neither public nor private reconsideration of the nature of radical opposition immediately challenged the historic *raison d'être* of tsarist policing and its investigative procedures. Neither could it immediately alter the procedures of the police and gendarmes, built up over decades, in which the immediate understanding of 'sedition,' the means of identifying the 'ill-willed' persons and their 'victims,' and official responses to both, tended to reinforce each other. Indeed, the rout of the workers' circles in 1874 was only the beginning of the wholesale destruction of the first wave of the 'going to the people' movement, an episode which would profoundly change the opinions of social-revolutionary *intelligenty* in the years that followed on the relative merits of various forms of organisation and the various means of disseminating social-revolutionary ideas.¹³⁴ The social (as opposed to individual or psychological) determinants recognised by the state - even if only in glimpses - to be at the root of sedition and labour unrest during the mid-1870s were obscured by the actions of the social-

¹³³ See, for instance, 'Donesenie tovarshcha glavnogo nachal'nika III otdeleniia N. V. Levasheva ministru vnetrennikh del A. E. Timashevu o rasprostraneni revoliutsionnikh idei sredi rabochikh i merakh presecheniia propagandy,' 7 May, 1874, *SRT*, p. 146; see also the report of Graf S. S. Pahlen, 'Iz zapiski ministra iustitsii gr. Palena,' *ZSL*, p. 113-123.

¹³⁴ An especially important development in this regard was the 'Tsikular' sent by Mark Natanson on his release from prison in 1875 (see *Vp.* 2, p. 182-5) to the journal *Vpered!*, in which the questions of propaganda and agitation, centralised organisation and conspiracy, religion and atheism were discussed in relation to the experiences of the first waves of 'going to the people.' Subsequent discussions along the lines set out by Natanson among social-revolutionaries both in Russia and abroad had a significant impact on the activities and programme of *Zemlia i Volia* on its foundation in 1876. This will be discussed in more detail below.

revolutionaries themselves in the latter half of the 1870s. The *intelligenty's* attempts to gear social-revolutionary activity to the practicalities of operating within and against the autocratic state led to the formation of conspiratorial and overtly terroristic organisations. The actions of such groups only reinforced the state's longstanding suspicion that 'sedition' was created and propagated by a tiny minority of 'ill-willed' individuals. The assassination of the Aleksandr II by members of the 'Executive Committee' of the NV on March 1st, 1881 was merely the culmination of a process of centralisation and depersonalisation within the revolutionary movement which would affect equally those workers who had been arrested in 1873-4 and were released to return to radical activities around the time of the foundation of *Zemlia i Volia* in 1876.

The temporary appearance of cracks in state ideology and procedure had impacts that carried well beyond the mid-1870s. The short-term effect was, however, that those peasant-workers identified in private as 'wilful' or 'conscious' revolutionaries were propelled onto the public stage of the state trial, alongside their radical-*intelligenty* comrades. The speech of Alekseev in 1877 and the responses of the state prosecutors to it revealed the contradictions between the moralistic notion of 'competence' and the state's radically authoritarian notion of 'answerability.'¹³⁵ The clash between two concepts of criminal responsibility found its early institutional expression in the state's conflict with the partially autonomous, partially reformed judicial system and their respective approaches to 'guilt determination.' In simple terms, the notion of 'competence' allowed that a criminal's responsibility for an act might be diminished by taking into account the circumstances or causes of that act, whereas the notion of answerability only allowed that a criminal might be redeemed and offered leniency through

¹³⁵ The words 'culpability' or 'responsibility' might have been used in place of 'competence' to translate *vmeniaemost'*, denoting (as G. Bhat writes) 'authorship of [a] crime, legal competence and the absence of all compelling exculpatory conditions' (see G. Bhat, 'The Moralization of Guilt in Late Imperial Russian Trial by Jury: the Early Reform Era,' *Law and History Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Spring, 1997), p. 88, *ft.* 40; see also p. 79-80). However, the Russian term *otvetstvennost'* translates not only 'answerability' (the English equivalent used in this work), but also 'responsibility' and 'culpability.' Bhat's preference for 'competence' follows, in the first place, from the fact that "'responsibility' has no specifically recognised place or function in technical legal vocabulary' (ibid), and in the second, because his aim was to show the distinction between the purely 'fact-finding' approach to guilt determination favoured by upper judicial officials and state procurators (ibid, p. 78, 91-92) and the 'law-finding' or *moral* understanding of guilt emphasised by defence councils and taken up by jurors (ibid, *passim*). Hence the determination of a level of 'competence' (*vmeniaemost'*) took into account not only the suspect's actions, but also the circumstances surrounding the criminal act attributed to him, including his 'state of mind.' On the other hand, the notion of 'answerability' (*otvetstvennost'* - the term found in documents relating to peasant-worker disturbances and their 'ringleaders' throughout the 1860-70s) understood guilt determination within the wider ideology of 'external influence' and individual responsibility, with a rather more simplistic (and stricter) division obtaining between the 'conscious criminality' of the 'instigator/ringleader' and the passive victimisation of the 'crowd.'

repentance or confession.¹³⁶ The conflict between the ‘competence’ and ‘answerability’ of peasant-workers in particular had already been exposed in the aftermath of the Nevskii strike in May-June, 1870, beginning with differing approaches of the court and the government to determining the guilt of the ‘ringleaders’ of the strike. Here, the procurator of the *okrug* court utilised the legal notion of ‘competence’ in prosecuting and sentencing the strikers, while the state opted to act in line with its own concept of ‘answerability’ in its treatment of the four suspected ringleaders. Since, in this case, the differing interpretations of the workers’ actions split (roughly) along institutional lines, with the retrospective testimony of witnesses or the immediate reports of police and other government officials functioning as evidence for the court and the government respectively, the contradiction appears only as one of differing institutional interpretations of an official ideology rather than as a result the internal inconsistency of the ideology itself. A close analysis of events, however, shows the fallacy of this interpretation.

It will be remembered that, on the 3rd of July, Trepov had asked permission of the Third Section to override the decision of the court to release the four worker-‘ringleaders’ without further imprisonment beyond the seven days of arrest they had already served.¹³⁷ The four men – S. Vladimirov, F. Petrov, B. Popatov and V. Akulov - were exiled from the capital shortly afterwards on Trepov’s orders. In the letter to Shuvalov in July, Trepov’s concern was with the possible influence that these particular men might wield on the labouring population of St. Petersburg if allowed to stay on there ‘without regular occupation,’¹³⁸ echoing his broader desire, expressed in a July report to Aleksandr II, to punish the ‘guilty parties’ involved in the Nevskii strike and ‘produce...a favourable impression upon the capital’s working mass as a whole.’¹³⁹ The important point in this case was not a contradiction between the intent of Trepov’s order and the actions of the court – after all, both the government and the court were treating the Nevskii case in terms of its threat to ‘public order’ in the city and not directly in

¹³⁶ The practical, procedural aspects of this distinction were noted by a certain defence attorney, Arsenev, in his closing speech at the ‘Fon-Zon’ case in April 1870: ‘...under our old laws, a personal confession was recognised as almost the only circumstance under which the possibility of being lenient to the defendant existed, and under which the defendant’s subsequent testimony could earn leniency. This situation stemmed from the old judicial procedure, in which all efforts were geared toward obtaining a confession...The new judicial system possesses one invaluable strength, which is that it confers the opportunity to judge not only according to the facts, but also according to the “individual”... If it becomes clear to you that the life of the given individual was conditioned independent of his criminal will...you may always deem him deserving of leniency, for part of his guilt must be attributed to the life circumstances into which he was thrust’ (*Sudebnyi Vestnik*, April 4, 1870, no. 91, p. 1, cited in Bhat, ‘The Moralisation of Guilt,’ p. 100).

¹³⁷ ‘Otnoshenie...P. A. Shubalovu o vysylke...,’ July 3rd, 1870, *RD* 2.i p. 241.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ ‘Doklad...F. F. Trepova Aleksandru II,’ May 27th, 1870, *RD* 2.i, p. 238.

terms of possible threats to private property.¹⁴⁰ What differed between the approach of the government and the court was the treatment of the suspected ‘ringleaders,’ the attention paid to the circumstances of the strike, and the attitude taken to the factory administrators in particular. At the trial, the prosecution had been unable to prove the leading role of the original six accused of instigating the strike, and so the court tried and sentenced them as mere ‘participants.’ The lenient sentencing of all fifty-eight participants was explained by ‘precisely the evidence of the factory administration’s culpability that the defence had presented in upholding the workers’ innocence.’¹⁴¹ In a sense, the court’s sentencing of the Nevskii workers gave legal form to the informal procedures of the government in cases of peasant-workers’ factory disorders, apportioning blame for disorders to the factory administrators and the instigators according to each particular case, while protecting the vast ‘crowd’ of workers from the machinations of both. But, during the June trial of the Nevskii strikers, the ideologically motivated belief in the *answerability* of the suspected ringleaders for the strike was temporarily held in check, since it was necessary for the prosecution to produce detailed evidence that those identified by preliminary government investigation as ‘ringleaders’ or ‘instigators’ had indeed played some unique and personal part in provoking unrest at the factory. That they were unable to do so is revealing of the relationship between the *post factum* evidence provided by testimony and the court’s interpretation of criminal actions and legal culpability.

Though, in theory, the 1864 judicial reforms had created a system in which ‘class considerations [were] virtually eliminated,’¹⁴² from a certain perspective the court’s decisions regarding the strikers reinforced the state’s belief in the naïveté of the working mass or peasant crowd. It was only that, in this case, those identified by Kozlov as ringleaders during his ‘on the spot’ investigation at Nevskii on May 25th were considered to be part of this ‘labouring mass’ and were not understood to have played any ‘special role’ in the provoking the strike. Since ‘most of the defendants, being illiterate and uneducated, were unaware that they were acting illegally,’¹⁴³ they were treated as ‘competent’ (or legally culpable) only to the extent appropriate to poorly educated and – in terms of the illegality of their actions - ignorant peasant-workers. Class survived in this judgement not because of any *a priori* stance taken by the court as regards the peasant-workers’ legal estate and their inner belonging with the ‘common people,’

¹⁴⁰ See Zelnik, *Labor and Society*, p. 361-2.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 362.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, p. 353.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 362-3; see also p. 359-60.

but because poor education (the workers' inability to read the regulations posted at the factory) and ignorance of the law, especially the laws regarding strikes, disorders and conspiracies, were determined by circumstances beyond the workers' control. The court found in favour of the prosecution's argument that the Nevskii workers had indeed conspired together ('combined,' or gone on strike) to demand higher wages and therefore subjected the defendants to punishment under the 1358th Article of the 1866 Criminal Code which forbid such 'conspiracy.' Yet, the evidence and charges of conspiracy did not themselves allow of a strict division and differentiation of sentences between the suspected 'ringleaders' and the other defendants. The testimony of the witnesses at the trial confirmed that the six singled out as possible instigators were no more aware (and had no greater chance of being aware) than the rest of the workers of the regulations regarding the 'Industrial Code' which had been so roundly ignored both by the factory administration and their employees before the strike took place.

The requirement for direct and concrete evidence of a worker's role as 'instigator' was easily bypassed by the police and gendarmes in their immediate observation, investigation and suppression of peasant-workers' disorders (as in the case of Kozlov's investigation in June 1870, and in numerous cases of labour unrest and strikes in the years that followed), and it was again bypassed by Trepov's order to exile the four suspected ringleaders in July, 1870. Trepov's order, made in response to Tsar Aleksandr's comment that the ringleaders' sentences were 'extremely light,'¹⁴⁴ not only made of the hitherto *ad hoc* ideology of 'external influence' an official government policy: for the sake of 'public order' and the 'mood of the labouring population,' the government deigned to ignore the broader circumstances (the actions of the factory administration) and personal backgrounds (especially the level of education and the 'legal awareness' of the suspects) which the court had judged such important factors in determining the peasant-workers' 'competence' and their eventual sentences. The court's judgement that the nature of the actions of individual workers and the extent of their culpability could only be determined through investigation of the workers' situation was overridden by the government's notion of answerability. For the court there was still a distinction to be made between the moral judgment of a crime and the judgement of a suspected criminal. The examination of the conditions or circumstances of the crime – in other words, of the intentions of the suspected criminal, the moral justice of his thoughts and actions, and the evidence of wilful law-breaking – were all vital to understanding the 'competence' or true culpability of the

¹⁴⁴ 'Doklad...A. A. Kozlova Aleksandru II...', June 13th, 1870, *RD* 2:i, p. 240.

suspects, even if they were accused of acts (such as ‘instigating’ strikes) that, in themselves, pointed towards intentional or ‘conscious’ criminality. For the state, however, the outward signs of conscious criminality were alone enough to incriminate the suspected ringleader, since it was the outward manifestation of consciousness that challenged the state’s authority, irrespective of the peasant-worker’s actual awareness of the illegality of his actions. Thus, the remarkable formulation of the state’s views on peasant-workers’ disorders (in particular, of strikes) found in the circular of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the *gubernatory*, dated July 6, 1870:

The strike at the Nevskii Cotton-Spinning plant provoked His Majesty’s interest, and it pleased him to charge me with ordering the local *gubernatory* to place the *fabrichnye* and *zavodskie* populations under strict and permanent observation, especially over any troublemakers who might exercise a damaging influence over the crowd, because, without a doubt, strikes among the workers must have their ultimate origin in the influence of people who hope to bring to the workers a means of expressing dissatisfaction quite alien to our soil, with the aim of sowing discord and inciting disorder and agitation.¹⁴⁵

Those who articulated the dissatisfaction of the peasant-workers were held to be answerable for any unrest or break in public order that occurred in relation to that articulation, whether or not the government recognised the grievances and dissatisfaction of ‘the crowd’ as justified by circumstances. The state refused to openly recognise that peasant-workers could be driven by their own conditions to *voice dissatisfaction* with those conditions, or that peasant-workers could be driven to *oppose actively* those conditions, without the instigation of some distinct and dangerous individual influence. After July 1870, the government’s means of pre-empting and smothering significant outbreaks of industrial disputes had, then, temporarily suppressed any further embarrassing conflicts between the reformed judicial system and the state in the field of labour unrest.¹⁴⁶ The Ministry of Internal Affairs’ circular established the legally arbitrary (though ideologically consistent) decision made by Trepov and Shubalov as regards the Nevskii ‘ringleaders’ as the imperial administration’s official policy. The circular clearly reinstated the dominance of the state and its policing procedures over the quasi-autonomous judicial system, instructing the provincial gendarmes and police that, ‘on first news of a strike at a factory, the matter should not be passed over into the court system, but instead a police investigation should be mounted to discover the main ringleaders among the *fabrichnye*, and that they should be sent (without further permission from the Ministry of Internal Affairs being required) to the

¹⁴⁵ ‘Tsirkular No. 1906...,’ July 6, 1870, *RD* 2.i, p. 242-3.

¹⁴⁶ As Zelnik puts it, ‘the judicial reforms [of 1864-6] had failed to prevent the government returning to its favourite method: administrative exile for the “instigators” of labour unrest’ (*Labor and Society*, p. 363).

following *gubernii...*'.¹⁴⁷ By placing investigative powers solely in the hands of the police and gendarmes, the state effectively shifted all powers of guilt determination to the rank-and-file representatives of state authority. Yet state ideology had already determined that outside agitators were the cause - the 'ultimate origin' - of strikes. Henceforth investigation of the causes of disorders, state responses to those disorders, and the trial and punishment of those responsible for disorders would be inseparable since placed in the hands of a single class of state officials.

From the government perspective, the 'Great Trials' of the 'Fifty' and the 'Hundred-and Ninety Three' (1877-8) were a natural extension of the gendarme-led investigations of the previous decade or so, as well as the culmination of the three years of detailed investigation by local police forces and secret agents in Moscow. Though deterrence by judicial means remained an element of the government's somewhat haphazard (yet generally effective) response to the rise of 'sedition' (*kramola*), it can be viewed as a side-effect of the real driving force of its repressive practices: to cleanse society of ideas and behaviours 'alien to Russian soil',¹⁴⁸ in some cases by their physical removal, in others by confession, repentance, or at least the recognition of guilt on the part of the wrongdoer. The treatment of the worker-*intelligenty* during the state trials of 1877-8 differed significantly from the (mainly) extra-judicial responses of the government to peasant unrest and workers' disorders after 1870. Successive counter-reforms from 1866 (the Karakozov attempt) onwards¹⁴⁹ had made the judicial procedures pertaining to the prosecution of state criminals closely cohere with the investigative procedures of the Third Section, gendarmes and regular police and, since developments in the management and suppression of labour unrest in the early 1870s had allowed the state to circumvent the post-reform judicial system altogether, in both cases the *institutional* bases (especially the troublesome provision for trial by jury)¹⁵⁰ for the conceptual and procedural conflict over guilt determination seemed to have been removed. But the conceptual conflict between competence

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 243.

¹⁴⁸ The specific phrase comes from the circular from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the *nachal'niki* of the *gubernii*, 6 June, 1870, GARF f. 109, III *eksp.*, 1870, d. 64.i, l. 16. This document, written in the aftermath of the Nevskii strike of May, 1870, will be discussed at greater length below.

¹⁴⁹ For an overview of the 'counter-reforms' of this period see Daly, 'The Significance of Emergency Legislation,' p. 604-606.

¹⁵⁰ This provision was later to severely damage the state's campaign against 'sedition' and the rise of revolutionary terror when Vera Zasulich, Trepov's attempted assassin, was found not guilty by the jury at the conclusion of her trial in March, 1878. (A detailed account of the trial is given in J. Bergman, 'Vera Zasulich, the shooting of Trepov and the growth of political terrorism in Russia,' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 4, no. 1 (January, 1980), p. 31-43. Bhat's analysis of the Zasulich trial (see 'The Moralisation of Guilt,' p. 110-2) closely follows Bergman's).

and answerability was already latent within the state's preferred approach to incidents of labour unrest and disorder, quite irrespective of the institutional conflict between the courts and the state.

It will be seen that the notions of 'competence' and 'answerability' corresponded roughly to the state-imposed division between the peasant-worker 'crowd' and the 'ill-willed' ringleaders. The state was generally sympathetic to the peasant crowd precisely because its representatives were willing to take into account the wider circumstances or causes of peasants' nominally criminal actions, including 'ignorance' and 'naïveté,' poor living conditions, and their treatment at the hands of landowners and *fabrikanty*. The possibility of the peasant-crowd's immediate redemption from criminal status was one moment of the 'on the spot' state investigation which determined their identity as a part of that peasant-worker estate, the same investigation determining also the status of other individuals as 'ill-willed' people, answerable to the state for their 'intentionally' criminal actions. Thus, in so far as determining the guilt of the fledgling group of worker-*intelligenty* was concerned, the state had placed itself in a difficult position, having both to acknowledge and to deny the importance of the circumstances of the workers' crimes or, in other words, simultaneously recognising *and* denying the peasant-worker status of the worker-*intelligenty*. In an inverted reflection of the state's attitudes to disorders in the cities, where the public treatment of the ringleader contrasted to the more impartial, private mediation between the proprietors or factory administrators and the crowd or mass of workers, in private the state acknowledged the existence of the *intelligentnyi*-worker, conscious of and answerable for his crimes, while publicly workers were still treated either as the passive objects of the influence of the *intelligenty* proper. Volkov noted in his memoirs that, despite being seen by their interrogators as committed worker-revolutionaries, 'we [workers] were told that we were undeveloped people [and] that we had been drawn into anti-governmental propaganda by the ill-intentioned intelligentsia' (Smirnov, Appx. B: 285). The contrast Volkov noted in the *Autobiography* between the amiable, unexpectedly human conversation conducted with procurator Poskochin and the dismissive and paternalistic statements made by such figures as Trepov, Pahlen and procurator Peters to the Russian 'public' made personal and biographical the state's general attempt to wholly and essentially separate sedition from labour unrest in Russia.

It remained for worker-defendants and their *intelligenty* comrades at the state trials to reassert in speeches the causal link between the peasant-workers' conditions and the conscious entry of workers, peasants and students into the social-revolutionary movement. The overlap between the notion of 'social determination'¹⁵¹ and that of 'competence' is strikingly evident in the relevant documents. In a highly complex murder case held in April 1870 (this unrelated to 'sedition' or state crime),¹⁵² the defence attorney Arsenev appealed to the jury to acquit his defendant, M. Ivanov, arguing that,

if it becomes clear to you that the life of a given individual was conditioned independent of his criminal will, that the very circumstances under which he was placed denied him the opportunity to develop properly, then you may always deem him deserving of leniency, for a part of his guilt must be attributed to the life circumstances into which he is thrust.¹⁵³

The recognition of the particularity of each crime and of each suspected criminal was deeply interwoven with the moral appeal made by defence attorneys to the conscience (*sovest'*) of the jurors.¹⁵⁴ In this case it was obvious to prosecutors, the defence council and, evidently, the jurors as well that Ivanov was deeply implicated in the murder of the victim (a retired court-counsellor, N. K. Fon-Zon), in concealing his body, and in covering up the crime. Thus, Arsenev's appeal spoke to the moral consciousness of the jury over and above the 'facts,' asking them to recognise Ivanov's diminished competence by taking into account his wretched upbringing and the moral depravation which had resulted from it.¹⁵⁵ A similar appeal was made to jurors by the councillor P. A. Aleksandrov at the infamous trial of Vera Zasulich in March, 1878. As J. Bergman writes,

¹⁵¹ Bhat mentions (incidentally) that 'a spur to the gradual nineteenth century transformation of the French social and penal system was the impact of French-inspired social determinism on the ideological battles within the international legal community in the 1880s and the 1890' ('Moralisation of Guilt,' p. 84-85). It is only noted here that a weak concept of 'social determinism' (to be distinguished from the stronger variant referred to by Bhat above, is already contained in the 'elusive category of "moral facts"' (the defendant's psychology, motivations, social circumstances, and so on)' (ibid, p. 82). See also, on the relationship between *lichnost'* and European, especially French, intellectual movements, M. Steinberg, *Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity and the Sacred in Russia, 1910-25*, (Ithaca, 2002), p. 65; on the concepts of *lichnost'* and 'social determination' among the Russian *intelligenty* of the 1840s-1860s (especially A. Herzen, V. Belinskii and T. Granovskii), D. Offord, 'Lichnost': Notions of Individual Identity,' *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution: 1881-1940*, C. Kelly and D. Shepard (eds.), (Oxford, 1998), p. 17-19.

¹⁵² Bhat, 'The Moralisation of Guilt,' p. 99.

¹⁵³ *Sudebnyi Vestnik*, April 4, 1870, no. 91, p. 1, cited in Bhat, 'The Moralisation of Guilt,' p. 100.

¹⁵⁴ On the importance of judging a criminal 'according to one's conscience' (*po sovesti*), see C. A. Frierson, "'I must always answer to the law...': Rules and Responses in the Reformed *Volost'* Court,' *SEER*, vol. 75, No. 2 (April, 1997), p. 314-315; Bergman, 'Vera Zasulich,' p. 40; Bhat, 'The Moralisation of Guilt,' p. 84-85, 87.

¹⁵⁵ Bhat, 'The Moralisation of Guilt,' p. 101.

Aleksandrov's oratory convinced the [jurors] to judge [Zasulich's] character, as distinct from her actions. Recounting the hardships she had endured in her life, describing Zasulich in terms so laudatory that she easily acquired the aura of martyrdom, Aleksandrov appealed to the emotions rather than to the minds of the jurors...¹⁵⁶

In his closing speech Aleksandrov – like Arsenev – at first bypassed the question of the criminality of the act itself (Zasulich's attempt on the life of Trepov) by drawing attention to Zasulich's own moral suffering, her 'broken and crushed life' hardly liable to correction through further punishment at the hands of the state.¹⁵⁷ Unlike Arsenev, however, Aleksandrov indirectly defended the *intentions* of the criminal act itself and thereby brought into question the justice of the state's treatment of Zasulich, Bogoliubov and other political prisoners.¹⁵⁸ 'However sombrely one looks at this deed,' Aleksandrov concluded, 'in the motives themselves it is impossible not to see an honest and noble impulse.'¹⁵⁹ The role played by defence attorneys such as Arsenev and Aleksandrov in promoting the notion of 'competence' was taken up in a quite direct way by worker defendants like Alekseev and Agapov in their speeches of self-defence. Significantly Alekseev's speech of March, 1877 began with the call to reconsider the state's notion that 'the workers were led astray [by the *intelligenty*] from the path of truth,' Alekseev arguing that it was the workers' very conditions which prepared them to accept the teachings of revolutionary propaganda (Appx. A: 278, *ft.* 2).

Fed through the social-revolutionary doctrine of popular self-emancipation, bashed against the ideologies of the autocratic state, the appeal to 'individual experience' was transferred to and thereby magnified in the search for, and use of, the authentic 'popular voice.' Alekseev and his comrades were by 1877 well aware of the political value of court oratory generally, but were doubly aware of the value a *workers'* speech would have for a social-revolutionary movement committed to workers' self-emancipation. There was, consequently, an intention amongst revolutionaries of Alekseev's time to use the class background of the orator as an amplifier of the message, as a means to augment the political significance of certain statements and ideas with the aura of the authentic surrounding the popular author and speaker. The direct or primary

¹⁵⁶ Bergman, 'Vera Zasulich,' p. 36.

¹⁵⁷ From P. A. Aleksandrov's closing speech at Zasulich's trial, 31st March, 1878, in M. N. Glagol, 'Protsess pervaiia russkoi terrosistki,' *Golos minuvshego*, Nos. 7-9 (July-September, 1918), p. 157 (cited in Bergman, 'Vera Zasulich,' p. 39).

¹⁵⁸ Bergman observes: '[the trial] was nothing more nor less than the judgement of two individuals, Zasulich and Trepov, one of them resoundingly acquitted, the other, in effect, condemned in absentia' ('Vera Zasulich,' p. 35).

¹⁵⁹ From Glagol, 'Protsess...', p. 157 (cited in Bergman, 'Vera Zasulich,' p. 39).

relation between the speaker and his class was integral to the claims Alekseev made regarding working-class life and the workers' experience of things. The political substance of Alekseev's speech, purporting to describe the suffering of the 'working millions' directly, drew its credibility from Alekseev's claim to be an ordinary worker, to have seen and felt that social position at first hand. From class experience and the authenticity his voice acquired by it, Alekseev would seize the authority to speak for, and *as*, the 'working millions.' It was not the unique insights offered by the person that were valorised in the speech, but the act of making known a truth already shared silently by millions – a capacity to suffer and to speak that were more or less deemed universal to the class. Alekseev was the bearer of a common class experience: he witnessed it, testified to it, and suffered a particular fate for it. But his 'particular experiences,' his particular route to the defendant's bench, was not emphasised. Since it was part of the approach of the autocratic state to hold individuals responsible for their 'conscious actions,' and to be lenient towards those who were unconscious (and therefore, not 'individuals,' it remained for worker-defendants and their *intelligent* comrades at the state trials to reassert in speeches the causal link between the peasant-workers' conditions and the conscious entry of workers, peasants and students into the social-revolutionary movement. Thus, in spite of the autobiographical connotations of Alekseev's 'first-hand testimony,' in all but the appeal to this first hand experience, what was genuinely first-hand and personal, was repressed by a near simultaneous appeal to his experience's commonality:

Even the most pitiful state remains unobtainable for most workers. *Seventeen hours of labour a day and you might only get 40 kopeks* – it's disgusting. The prices of goods are high, but he has to divide his paltry wages between keeping his family alive and paying government taxes ... On the one hand it's strange, incomprehensible, on the other: deplorable – especially now, when a man who, all his life, without fail, *worked seventeen hour days for a bit of black bread*, sits on the court bench, being judged.

(Appx. A: 278, emphases added)

The relation of Alekseev the person, with his own history, thought, and experience, to the 'worker' Alekseev, the prophet and martyr-witness, was therefore a peculiar one. Clearly it was important, and necessary, that the workers' sufferings be embodied and presented by a real working person. But the speech's propagandistic appeal to Alekseev's status and experience made what was 'personal' universal: his experience was identical to those of the 'working millions' and, in that sense, existed objectively and independently of him. Further, the speech reduced the lives and the common experiences of the 'working millions' to 'what was done to

them.’ Thus, in the speech, workers’ experience was identified with what was external to each and all of them - not with the biography or the life of this or that ‘worker’ or ‘peasant,’ nor with this or that worker’s particular experience of, or thoughts about, or reactions to the abuses, poverty and forced labour and powerlessness imposed by others, but the simple fact that it was suffered by them all equally and existed in abstraction from particular people. So what kind of experience was the ‘workers’ experience’? It was expected that an audience of workers and peasants recognise, if not themselves, then at least their condition, in Alekseev. It was not a matter of ‘sympathy’ between persons, or self-pity reflected through the ‘man on stage,’ but of becoming conscious of the impoverishment of one’s own particular life by a condition that made *particular*, ‘working people’ irrelevant, the experience of *being* the class as viewed by others and thus *not being oneself*:

Gentlemen, do you really think that we, the workers - whom everyone thinks are deaf, blind, empty-headed and stupid - that we don’t know how we are cursed as idiots, idlers and drunkards? That the workers themselves would accept that they deserve this reputation? Do you really think we don’t see everywhere how others are getting rich and enjoying themselves by trampling all over us? (Appx. A: 279).

Imposed in the first place by the elites - ‘those who don’t care to know about the lives of workers and who don’t see [them living] under the power of the *fabrikanty*’ (Appx. A: 278) - this condition in turn made those same elites quite indifferent to the existence of particular people behind the social categories of class or ‘estate.’ Alekseev’s position as martyr-witness was then designed in imitation of the working-class condition: in both cases, the individual was ‘necessary’ as a carrier of knowledge, as the bearer of a social category, as the owner of labour-power, even, but this in itself did not necessitate the recognition of the unique personality beneath. Now, Alekseev’s speech had clear political ends, inclusive of the particular representation given there of the working-class condition. Alekseev’s relation to his ‘status’ and ‘experience’ followed from both. He reached the conclusion that the workers, having recognised their condition and its causes, would recognise also a way out of that condition through the action of the class to which they belonged. Passivity and anonymity would give way in revolutionary action to the collective power of the class. Escape would not come through the actions of particular persons resisting or escaping from their conditions: the class would be the subject of social change, not the person. Thus, the indifference to particular workers, decried then appropriated by Alekseev, would be reproduced in the socio-political consciousness of

working people recognising their class, their ‘condition,’ as primary, and themselves and their particular thoughts and actions as secondary to, or merely expressive of that condition.

The centrality of the notion of the ‘workers’ right to speak’ was demonstrated more openly on the 15th of November, 1877, when Myshkin was given the chance to defend himself before the court’s accusations of state crime. It was the intention of Senator Peters (again the ringmaster of the enormous state trial, and Myshkin’s interlocutor) to direct Myshkin to the question of his own responsibility for criminal acts. Myshkin’s initial stance mirrored rather than imitated Alekseev’s. Tried as an educated man, Myshkin would give the ‘objective account’ of the revolutionary and popular movements, downplaying his own role. But instead of replacing a personal view with the plural, everyman presence affected by Alekseev, Myshkin was to give the view from nowhere, informed, firstly, by the idea that a universal standard of morality underpinned the *intelligent’s* sense of injustice regarding the exploitation of the *narod*, and by the more threatening prophesy – informed by theory - that revolution by the hand of the *narod* was inevitable. Peters’ interventions, however, drove Myshkin to break this objective stance to look back upon himself and his background in the attempt to speak not only about the *narod*, but also for it. This time, in unconscious imitation of Alekseev, the turn towards the personal was accompanied by a description of the experiences that *forced* workers and peasants to radicalism. Thus, as personal experience came into view, it was replaced by the image of a class experience that had negated freedom, deprived working people of responsibility for their own actions, and so pulled away from underneath the historical individuality that ‘freedom’ and ‘responsibility’ signified.

Drawing on the example already given by Alekseev some months earlier, the defendants at the ‘Trial of the 193’ took as their aim the publicity and explanation their ideas to Russia’s still frustratingly neutral ‘society.’ As much was stated openly by Myshkin (a convinced social-revolutionary and the *chaikovtsy’s* elected typographer before his arrest) during the course of his speech, much to the chagrin of the judge, Senator Peters:¹⁶⁰

Myshkin: [...] Everyone knows that society can babble as much as it likes about trifling matters, but the serious aspects of life are at least systematically repressed even when they are not systematically forbidden from public discussion. As regard the uprisings of the 1860s....

Peters: We don’t need examples...

¹⁶⁰ GP 3, p. 1.

Myshkin: If the court doubts the veracity of my explanation then I will refrain from giving examples...

Peters: The court doesn't believe anything of your explanation to be true. The court listens because it wants to hear something related to the charges levelled at you...

Myshkin: Then examples are extremely important...

Peters: You can talk of the circumstances of your own activities, but not give examples.

Myshkin: At present society only knows that a trial is taking place, that judgment is being given on representatives of the revolutionary party, but it might seem to them that the movement has no solid ground beneath it and no connections to the people. This might be assumed because these occurrences will be hidden from them, though there is no lack of them...¹⁶¹

The social-revolutionaries continued to believe for some years to come that it was only a deficit of knowledge that stopped the 'advanced elements' of society from making the inevitable step towards a more just society and the repayment of their own, personal debt to the exploited. Even if 'society' at large balked at social revolution and feared the form that this settling of debts might actually take, for the radical intelligentsia themselves the most important thing was to present the choice and thereby liberate the privileged from their excuses of ignorance. Later commentators sympathetic to the cause insisted that the speech of Myshkin, their elected mouthpiece, had to a great extent achieved this purpose, despite the challenges faced in delivering it:

Turning to the court, [Myshkin] threw in their face those words that would create such an impression on the advanced part of Russian society, especially among those young people who were still only preparing to step onto the path that Myshkin had already taken before he was seized and placed on the bench: 'This is no trial, this is pure farce, or something even worse, more repulsive, more shameful than a whore-house. There, women sacrifice their bodies out of need; here, from baseness and servility, for rank and salary, senators sacrifice the lives of others, sacrifice truth and justice, sacrifice everything that is dearest to mankind.'¹⁶²

Myshkin's words had come at the end of a long, fragmented speech, obviously planned in detail but constantly interrupted by the judge and the (sometimes sympathetic) interjections of the jury.¹⁶³ Even if there was no expectation on the court's part that the defendant would crumble and confess to his crimes (as so many others had during the police investigations leading up to the trial), Senator Peters did at least attempt to clip and prune Myshkin's speech into something like a proper defence. But Myshkin's speech was planned as a social history of the revolutionary movement, partly as an attempt to draw further attention to the hidden sufferings

¹⁶¹ 'Rech Myshkina,' *GP* 3, p. 273.

¹⁶² M. Popov, 'K biografii Ippolita Nikiticha Myshkina (iz vospominanii),' *Byloe*, Feb., 1907, p. 252. See *GP* 3, p. 310.

¹⁶³ See Myshkin's speech as printed in *RN* 1, p. 383.

of the Russian peasantry, partly as an explanation of the actions carried out by the revolutionary intelligentsia in the name of the *narod*. Like Alekseev some eight months previously, Myshkin had never intended to justify or confess the individual motives that had driven him to criminal activities. Myshkin had become the representative of all those standing trial, who in turn took upon themselves the mantle of representing the revolutionary intelligentsia.¹⁶⁴ Consequently Myshkin's words cut quite across the court's intention to make him answerable for *his* crimes. 'In the 1860s,' Myshkin explained,

we were beginning to understand the fact that every revolutionary movement of the intelligentsia has a corresponding and parallel movement among the people. The former is only an echo of the latter. The movement of the people was a parallel stream, attempting to merge with the other against the centuries-old divisions created by estate system, the centuries-old chasm existing between one current and the other. The movement of the intelligentsia in the 1860s was an echo of the movement of the people, itself a result of the illusory liberation from serfdom and its inability to satisfy the people's demands. During the decade after the emancipation of the serfs, persistent rumours about the lessening or abolition of redemption payments spread among the people. These rumours formed the basis for a great unrest among the people, which was echoed among the intelligentsia with the so called Nechaev Affair. In the end, the people's terrible hardships, caused by enormous taxes, gave birth to an undercurrent of discontent, and this was reflected in the movement of 1874.¹⁶⁵

Myshkin's ideas were, then, already at odds with the tendency of court procedure (and the reasoning manifest in the judge's own interventions) to reduce criminal actions to individuals and their particular choices. For Myshkin even the specific actions of individual *intelligenty* were nothing more than the 'echo' or the 'reflection' of the social movement which drove them and to which they sometimes consciously attached themselves. For Alekseev too it had not been individual choice or the actions of the intelligentsia that drove the revolutionaries, but the force of the workers' socio-economic circumstances. But Alekseev managed to stick to the social explanation over the individual one more firmly than Myshkin. Myshkin was caught out by the intervention of the judge as he continued to recount the history of the movement:

Myshkin: [...] A new popular life began on the 19th of February [1861], with all its inevitable consequences: the struggle between labour and capital; the peasant reform served as glaring proof of its own inability to improve the lot of the people. And truly we saw that the people had been brought to an extreme poverty by it, to suffering starvation, and really it wasn't necessary to be steeped in radicalism to grasp the real meaning of the

¹⁶⁴ See E. Serebriakov, *Obshestvo "Zemlia i Volia: Materiala dlia istorii russkogo sotsial'no-revolitusionnago Dvizhenii* (no.4), p. 35-36; *RN* 1, ft. 243, p. 430-431, on the circumstances by which Myshkin became the sole representative of the 193 defendants.

¹⁶⁵ 'Rech' Myshkina,' *GP* 3, p. 272.

reforms for the mass of liberated peasants, who came face to face with the representatives of state power and who were convinced that their glorious freedom was a spiteful trick.

Peters: You talk of the peasants, but you are not their representative. Only they themselves can know and judge their situation.

Myshkin: But I must elucidate this aspect of the problem, because only then will it be possible to understand what I'm talking about. I am the son of a peasant-serf and soldier, I witnessed the liberation of the serfs, and not only am I not grateful for this reform, I have even become one of its open opponents. Therefore as a consequence of my birth, my upbringing, my feelings, which tie me to the people, I have the right to delve into this aspect of the problem in some detail.¹⁶⁶

A tacit agreement now obtained between the defendant and the prosecutor on the 'rights' of the peasantry 'to judge their own situation.' Peters denied that Myshkin could be the representative of peasantry. Myshkin responded by making himself a part of it. Though Myshkin's speech had aimed to draw attention away from the issue of the *intelligenty's* personal responsibility and towards the socio-economic determinants of their actions, his reaction to Peters' challenge was an appeal to his own individual history and, more generally, to the same sovereignty of personal experience appealed to by Peters. From there on in Myshkin found his individual history and responsibility harder to avoid:

Myshkin: [...] I have the right to delve into this aspect of the problem in some detail. It was not difficult to convince the people that the much exalted liberation of the peasants had in the end meant one thing - the transfer of a 20 million strong peasant population from being lackeys of the landowners to slaves of the state and the bureaucracy...

Peters: I must repeat – all this talk of the peasants I consider out of place and irrelevant to the matter...

Myshkin: I am describing the precise reasons which forced me...perhaps my view is mistaken, but I declare that for these reasons I was forced to become a part of the revolutionary party...¹⁶⁷

The prosecutor's challenge to Myshkin was duplicitous. Peters' notion that only the peasants could speak for themselves did indeed tie into the broader direction of the trial's procedures (revolving around the question of a given individual's culpability for those crimes mentioned in the indictment); yet during Alekseev's speech the very same Senator Peters objected to his description of the hardships of the workers and peasants on the grounds that they had 'no bearing on the defence' and 'nothing to do with the matter at hand,' (Appx. A: 277-80 and footnotes): that is, whether or not the accusations of participation in propaganda activities and

¹⁶⁶ 'Rech' Myshkina,' *GP* 3, p. 275.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

membership in a secret organisation would be admitted by the defendant.¹⁶⁸ Myshkin's own view of the problem was, in a sense, correct. Peters may have mentioned the possibility and right of the peasantry to speak for themselves and judge their own situation, but for a variety of reasons they would never be able to do so:

...these *buntovshchiki*, who were put down by the force of the army, have never been brought to the defendant's box to talk about the *bunt*, and even talking about its possibility is considered more criminal than even the *bunt* itself. This might seem absurd - yet the absurdity makes sense. The representatives of the forces of the people might well tell the court something more substantial, something less acceptable to the government and more instructive for the people. Therefore their mouths are gagged and not a word can be uttered to the court...¹⁶⁹

Myshkin's reasoning that the state, already worried about the potential side-effects of publicising the ideas of state criminals, would never allow the radical peasants and workers themselves to appear and testify to their convictions was repeated in slightly different form some years later by Plekhanov, this time with regards to the trial of participants in the Kazan Square demonstration of December, 1876.¹⁷⁰ For Plekhanov this was a matter not only of keeping the worker's movement hidden from Russian society, but also an element of the state's self-deception, a refusal 'to entertain the thought that there could be such convinced "rebels" (*buntovshchiki*) among the workers as there were among the "intelligentsia."¹⁷¹ In this case it was not the peasant-workers' *absence* from court that aroused suspicion but their treatment at the hands of the prosecutors: a mixture of scolding and rehabilitation which implied the state's denial of the 'common people's' ability to think for themselves or even be held responsible for their own actions. The notion of the common man 'speaking for himself' was a contradiction, since those peasants and workers who did speak of their convictions were no longer treated as part of the 'benighted mass' of the simple, basically good, but gullible peasants,¹⁷² instead becoming individual 'state criminals' with the same culpability as the *intelligenty*. What is more interesting is the counter-claim made by Myshkin and the logic underlying it. 'I am the son of a peasant-serf and soldier,' Myshkin said, '[and] *as a consequence of my birth, my upbringing,*

¹⁶⁸ GP 2, p. 175-76. The general indictment (*Obvitel'nyi Akt*) is included here after some of the fine details of the accusations and their discovery by the police and gendarme are described (p. 128-175). See also RN 1, p. 350-352, for an extract from the indictment with useful footnotes included.

¹⁶⁹ 'Rech' Myshkina...', GP 3, p. 275.

¹⁷⁰ G. Plekhanov, 'Russkii rabochii v revoliutsionnom dvizhenii,' *Soch.* 3, p. 154.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² See D. Moon, *Russian Peasants and Tsarist Legislation on the Eve of reform: Interaction between the Peasants and Officialdom, 1825-1855*, (London, 1992), p. 3; D. Field, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar* (London, 1976), p. 213.

my feelings, which tie me to the people, I have the right to delve into this aspect of the problem in some detail.'

From the intellectual point of view, Myshkin's endorsement of peasant sovereignty over its own 'representation' fits with the general tenor of the social-revolutionary ideology to which he was an adherent and contributor. The rejection of legal means to social change, of Nechaev's methods of making revolution, and the desire to 'merge' with the *narod* were all linked for the *intelligenty* to the self-denying principle of the first rule of the International. And so in all the intelligentsia's political speeches from 1877-8 the role of the *intelligenty* was played down, not as an attempt by the defendants to avoid punishment or deny responsibility for their actions, but to show that these actions and their own roles were not those of 'making a revolution' but of *making it possible for the narod to rebel and overturn the existing system*. Like Myshkin's speech, Sofia Bardina's 'self-defence' at the 'Trial of the 50' minimised the importance of the actions of individuals (including her own) and hence made the development of the conflict between the state and the *narod* the decisive principle of the social revolution:

I am as little guilty of undermining the state as of anything else. Generally I think it is impossible for one person to undermine the state by their own efforts alone. If the state collapses then it will do so because it already contains the seed of its own collapse...of course, if the present state keeps its people in political, economic and intellectual slavery, if its enormous unpaid taxes, its capitalist exploitation of the workers and other abnormal economic and political aspects bring it to destitution, disease and crime, then, of course, I would say that the state was taking itself to its own death. But isolated individuals could not be guilty of it and it is not for that reason that they are bitterly persecuted...I am guilty of inciting revolt, but I never incited the *narod* to revolt immediately and nor could I have - I dare say that the revolution can only be the result of a whole series of historical conditions and not of the desires of isolated individuals.¹⁷³

Despite the debates over the proper attitude of the intelligentsia to the *narod*, centred on the works of Lavrov, Bakunin and Tkachëv during the first half of the 1870s, the social revolutionaries of those years shared the idea not only that the revolution would have to be made by the people themselves, but also that the peasants and workers already had some feeling or 'sense' of the injustice of the system in which they lived. The *intelligenty* could, then, help articulate and explain that sense which the *narod* already had, or as Bardina put it, bring them to 'consciousness':

¹⁷³ 'Rech' S. I. Bardinoi...', *RN* 1, p. 355.

I...belonged to the ranks of those known among the youth as peaceful propagandists. Their task is to bring to the consciousness of the people ideals of a better and more just social system or to reveal to them the ideals that already exist in them unconsciously.¹⁷⁴

Hence Myshkin's reference to the sovereignty of the peasant voice was a logical extension of the central tenets of social revolutionary ideology: that by dint of belonging to the exploited people one has some innate *feeling* of injustice or wrong that can at most be articulated, but never possessed (or implanted) by the intelligentsia. In fact, for Myshkin, 'articulation' included both literal speech and the whole activity of the radical intelligentsia, since he made the very particular revolutionary activities of Nechaev a simple reflection or 'echo' of the post-Reform peasant movement, and the 'going to the people' movement of 1874 a reflection of the undercurrent of discontent among the peasants caused by 'the people's terrible hardships' and 'enormous taxes.'¹⁷⁵ Taking this ideology to its logical conclusion, even Myshkin's appeal to *his own* peasant background involved no particular contradiction with the ideas he propounded. Taking an initial stance before the court as representative of the *intelligenty*, Myshkin stringently refused to explain or justify *his* crimes distinct from his explanation of the emergence of the entire movement of the intelligentsia parallel to that of the *narod*. Taking a further stance as a peasant (or an *intelligent* of peasant background) when challenged by Senator Peters on those terms, Myshkin was suddenly able to return to himself as an individual, to return to his own feelings and his ties to the *narod*, in order to justify his belonging to the 'revolutionary party.' Contradiction remains, however, in Myshkin's switch from the *intelligent* to that of the peasantry or the *narod*. Did Myshkin consider himself mainly an *intelligent*, his actions determined by movements of the *narod* below, or a peasant, the actual subject of the social revolutionary movement?

Perhaps here the blurred lines between the ideological categories of '*intelligent*' and 'peasant' and Myshkin the real, historical figure become more defined. Confronted by such evidence, and with the additional knowledge that Myshkin had indeed been the son of peasant soldier (a circumstance which had given him a path into education and out of the peasantry),¹⁷⁶ an historian with a penchant for psychological explanation might interpret Myshkin's reaction to Peters as a manifestation of some 'class sensitivity,' perhaps with its roots in his real transition from the ranks of the peasantry to the intelligentsia. This 'sensitivity' could only have been

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 356.

¹⁷⁵ GP 3, p. 272.

¹⁷⁶ 'Iz zaiavleniia I. N. Myshkina tovarishchu ober-prokurora Senata V. A. Zhelekhovskomu,' 16th November, 1876, RN 1, p. 181-185.

sharpened by his adherence to an ideology which idealized the peasantry as much as it deplored the conditions in which they lived. During his public speech, Myshkin had tried hard to place himself, as a social revolutionary, only within the approved, depersonalized history of the emergence of the intelligentsia movement. But in a ‘confession’ written in prison in November, 1876, the class difference he felt between himself and his student comrades appeared more clearly.¹⁷⁷ In these ‘confessions’ Myshkin certainly did not desert the socio-economic base which had served to explain the actions of the *intelligenty* in his speech; but, like Alekseev (and other workers) he now wrote about the compulsion of circumstances from the vantage point of the lower class.

Myshkin’s ‘confessions’ begin with a grievance against the arguments of the 24th of May circular of the Ministry of Education, which had been distributed shortly after the appearance of the official report on propaganda activities written by Graf Pahlen, the Minister of Justice.¹⁷⁸ Much as the gendarme interrogator had refused to entertain Myshkin’s explanations of his actions, calling them ‘irrelevant’ to the matter at hand (Myshkin’s criminal activities), the circular had systematically excluded Myshkin’s story from its analysis by concentrating on the role of the student body and of illegal books.¹⁷⁹ But, Myshkin said, he did not belong to the student youth; he was the son of a peasant soldier. It had not been the influence of dangerous books that turned him to criminal activities: books only had an influence, Myshkin argued, when they were scattered on fertile soil. Neither was it any personal lack of wealth that made him a devotee of the cause: as a trained typographer he had managed to earn some 5000 roubles in a single year of work, and anyway, the cause had cost him dearly in material terms. Instead, he understood his turn to the revolutionary cause to be the result of his own upbringing:

[As a child I was surrounded] by stories of the bitter, unhappy life of the peasants, about the bloodthirsty punishments of the landowners, about the limitless cruelties of the warlords. Early childhood, carrying with it all the attributes of poverty, was in itself the first impression, the raw material, from which ran my understanding of all human relationships.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ It should be noted that the term ‘class’ is preferred by Myshkin over that of estate, although his usage of either term differs according to the context. See *GP* 3, p. 272; ‘Iz zaiavleniia Myshkina...,’ *RN* 1, p.182.

¹⁷⁸ Extracts from Pahlen’s report can be found as ‘Iz zapiski ministra iustitsii gr. Palena,’ in *ZSL*, p. 113-23.

¹⁷⁹ ‘Iz zaiavleniia Myshkina...,’ *RN* 1, p. 181. Pahlen’s report mentions Myshkin specifically as the movement’s main typographer in Moscow, linking the spread of anti-governmental views to the dissemination of foreign literature especially: see ‘Iz zapiski Palena...,’ *ZSL*, p. 113 and p. 114-5.

¹⁸⁰ ‘Iz zaiavleniia Myshkina...,’ *RN* 1, p. 182.

From an early age he had recognized the basic division of society into two classes: those who ‘work and suffer’ and those who ‘live from the fruits of others’ labour.’ His experience of the education system had taught him to hate the system of power which rewarded the lazy, dim-witted sons of the rich while other more talented and industrious boys (like himself) were excluded on the grounds that they lacked the necessary ‘culture’ for further training.¹⁸¹ Entering the military for a stint of two years (during which time he was increasingly engaged in haphazard attempts at self-education), Myshkin became convinced that ‘the more moral and the more developed a soldier was in his grasp of human values, the more likely he was to end up getting arrested.’¹⁸² The final straw had been his experience of the rural *zemstva*, where he had personally witnessed the already confused peasant delegates tricked by the noblemen who dominated those institutions, had seen the consequences of government resistance to the publication of reliable sources of information on the peasantry, and had been personally denied the chance to publish his own research on the condition of soldiers and peasants by the censors who considered it ‘harmful.’¹⁸³ Hence ‘the whole of life,’ Myshkin wrote, ‘forced me onto the path of revolution.’¹⁸⁴

It is interesting that almost this exact phrase crops up in post-revolutionary memoir by the Diakov Smirnov as he gives his account of setting up a fund and a library in 1872 or 1873. ‘30 people met that day’ (he writes in his memoir), ‘[and] I kicked off with a proposal to engage in self-education and to form our own library and self-help fund. Life itself was at every step pushing us toward this’ (Appx. C: 287). But the sense of Myshkin’s statement (and Smirnov’s) was already contained in Alekseev’s notion that ‘there could be no force more powerful than the condition of the workers itself.’ Indeed the whole of Alekseev’s speech can be seen not only as a description of the workers’ victimhood under the tsarist and capitalist systems, but also a portrayal of a working population being forced to react to that victimhood in a certain way:

The prices of goods are high, but [the worker] has still *has to divide his paltry wages* between keeping the family alive and paying the government’s taxes... As children we, the workers, *have to suffer* under the capitalist yoke. ...If we *are forced by the capitalist* to leave the factory and demand higher rates...and we are accused of rioting, *and forced to return to work* at the end of a bayonet...that means we’re serfs!... Badly educated, isolated from all civilisation and forgotten by everyone, there is *only one means of*

¹⁸¹ Ibid, p. 182; p. 183-184.

¹⁸² Ibid, p. 185.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p. 187-188.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 182.

expression left to those who earn their daily bread by manual labour...*What else are we supposed to feel* towards the capitalists but hatred? (Appx. A: 277-80, emphases added).

There were levels of compulsion. Workers' victimhood forced them to feel hatred for the capitalists; systematic exploitation by the state, landlord and *fabrikant* forced the worker to live in poverty; but when these experiences were subjected to critical thought, the worker was forced to see escape from this 'cunningly constructed snare' in social revolution (Appx. A: 279). The speech of Alekseev's fellow worker-propagandist Semën Agapov emphasised the role of thought in the workers' actions; the same sense that the thinking worker somehow lacked the choice to do otherwise than become a revolutionary is clearly present:

I am a worker. From my youth I lived at the *fabriki* and *zavody*...it is of course plain enough that I wanted to find some means to escape my unimaginable situation. I thought a lot about the means of bettering the lives of the workers and in the end I became a propagandist. The goal of my propaganda was to prepare the workers for social revolution, without which, I think, no improvements can be made in our situation.¹⁸⁵

Like the *intelligenty*, those workers who spoke at the trials emphasised the disappointments of the Reforms of 1861, the disillusionment of the workers and peasants with the dream of liberation from above, and the retreat of the *narod* to (almost) complete self-reliance, coming to the conclusion that the only means of escape left was social-revolution by their own hand. Much as the workers' feelings and actions were determined in his everyday life by the treatment meted out to him by capitalists and landlords, the labouring *narod* as a whole would be forced to make revolution in order to improve its conditions. Individual workers felt themselves forced to become propagandists-revolutionaries not only by the power of their own reason but by circumstances themselves.

In Myshkin's history of the 'revolutionary party' *determination* of actions by the movement of the *narod* is a constant element, but the notion of being *compelled*, as an individual, to act in a certain way (in this case, to join an illegal revolutionary party) is much clearer when he talks as a 'peasant' (either in the speech or in the 'confessions') than as a 'detached' *intelligent*. The broad idea that the intellectual-revolutionary movement of the intelligentsia was a reflection of popular unrest leaves the actual process by which this took place rather ill-defined. As a movement of *intelligenty* we presume for now that Myshkin imagined this process in the most obvious way: that 'thinking people' - revolutionaries (Nechaev) and social-revolutionaries (the

¹⁸⁵ GP 2, p. 333-334; Agapov's short speech is also cited in N. S. Karzhanskii, *Moskovskii Tkach Pëtr Alekseev*, (Moscow, 1954), p. 102-3.

movement of 1872-74) - became aware of the conditions of the people and then *chose* to take certain actions on its behalf. And, in a sense, the very purpose of speech giving - the appeal to the advanced parts of Russian 'society' – seems to testify to a belief in the *intelligentsia's* freedom to choose: either to accept the state's portrayal of events and reject the revolutionary path, or to listen to the ideas propounded in the speeches and then take the necessary steps.¹⁸⁶ The peasant Myshkin was not in such a position. Brought up in poverty, confronted by forces he was unable to control (the education system, the military, the *zemstva*, the censorship board), every new experience of powerlessness and discrimination compelled him towards the 'path of revolution.'

With Myshkin's 'confessions' in hand, then, an understanding of Myshkin's speech and his differing roles in it seems within reach. The speech itself began as a detached, historical view of the intelligentsia movement in which Myshkin participated, planned as a means of persuading the sympathetic but as yet undecided *intelligentsia*-youth to join the revolutionary party. As Myshkin said, society's view of the revolutionary movement was heavily influenced by the government's official explanation, in which the actions of the *intelligentsia* were decoupled from the popular movement the state kept hidden from view. If they could understand that the basic struggle was not that of the government with isolated individuals but the centuries-old conflict between the labouring people and the state, then perhaps they would grasp their own historical role in that movement as educated, reasoning people. Clearly the radical intelligentsia never denied their own freedom to accept or reject revolutionary action; neither did they deny their moral responsibility for those actions. But for the intelligentsia a purely personal explanation of motives and compulsions other than those of the reason of the movement itself would have played into the hands of the state, whose prosecutors placed in view exactly such isolated individuals, their motives and their personal, 'moral constitution' whilst concealing everything else.

This prepared, 'objective' view was of course detached from the biographies of *all* the defendants. But for Myshkin (as revealed by his confrontation with Peters at the trial, but even more so by his prison 'confessions') it was detached in a different way. The entire logic of the trials had imposed upon Myshkin the status of 'student propagandist,' which he saw and declared to be erroneous. It is no surprise, then, that when challenged by Peters, Myshkin

¹⁸⁶ Myshkin also notes the possible effects of the Ministry of Education's 26 May circular at the beginning of his 'November Confessions': *Iz zaiavleniia Myshkina...*, RN 1, p. 181.

reverted to his own experiences, to the account given in his own ‘confessions,’ which had (after all) been written only months before. For him, the path to revolutionary activity had not been through the compulsions of reason and morality (in and of themselves), but by direct and personal experience of the poverty and destitution of peasant life. The radical *intelligenty* proper had viewed the ‘going to the people’ movement partly as a means of ‘getting to know’ the *narod* and partly as a means of redemption before them, their decision to join the cause of the labouring population based not on direct experience of it, but on the strength of the arguments of books and leaflets that, since the 1860s, had already urged such a step. Myshkin, oppositely, had been driven by each new experience of his own class position to strip away the fat from a fundamental ‘understanding of human relationships’ that had been with him since childhood. With his expulsion from school he gave up on his dream of becoming a teacher. On his entry into the military he gave up on the idea of ‘human values’ chosen and exercised independent of the state. After his encounter with the *zemstva* and the censorship boards he gave up on legal means of aiding the *narod*. Each real experience determined the development of Myshkin’s thinking.

Hence from this perspective Myshkin’s detached stance at the trial seems little more than play-acting. A history of the movement that down-played individual motives was appropriate to the students since this was a means of countering the state’s reduction of ‘going to the people’ to the moral degradation of particular individuals. Myshkin accepted the tactical expedience of such a stance in a situation where he had been elected to represent not the *narod*, as such, but his (mainly student or ex-student) comrades, even if privately he understood his own actions not as an ‘echo’ of a more basic, popular movement, mediated through reason and morality, but as directly determined by his own experience of the popular movement itself. But should the historian consider the ‘confessions’ of Myshkin apart from the political conflict from which *they* emerged? Like the political speeches of the ‘Big Trials,’ the Myshkin’s ‘confessions’ took up the struggle with the tsarist state in writing when other revolutionary activities were barred to him. The stance taken in Myshkin’s private ‘confessions’ was as much determined by pre-existing state attitudes to criminality as his public speech would be a few months later. And Myshkin’s ostensibly more ‘personal’ prison writings had their own, explicitly *political* purpose, similar (if not identical) to that of the speech itself:

Right now the proper task of the prosecutors is, of course, to give an explanation of the reasons which cause certain people to act criminally, but because of some strange

misunderstanding none of the people who questioned me ever put the question to me: what was it that caused you to join the ranks of those who acted against the existing state system? Quite the opposite: even when I made known to the gendarme captain Sokolov my willingness to explain the step-by-step development of my anti-governmental ideas, he answered that such a confession was unnecessary and that he only needed facts indicative of the criminality of myself and my accomplices. I suppose the question remains open to the court. But from the circular...of the 24th of May 1875, parts of which I became acquainted with only recently, I saw that the higher powers had already set out a definite view on the reasons for the foundation and the successes of revolutionary propaganda in the 37 *gubernii*, and that this view had already come to the attention of society. Therefore in view of the hope, expressed by our journalists, that the prosecutors might turn their special attention to the elucidation of the causes of these depressing (in the opinion of some) or most pleasing (in the opinion of others) events, I now consider myself morally bound to explain those circumstances which made of me a political criminal.¹⁸⁷

If the very purpose of Myshkin's 'confession' was social and political, and the stance taken in it sanctioned by social revolutionary ideology, is there any justification for seeing its actual content as more 'authentic' than that of his speech? His detached stance can only be called 'play acting' *if* it is supposed that Myshkin's true sense of identity – his 'true experiences' as an individual – were accounted for elsewhere, giving the historian some ground upon which to make the distinction between an 'authentic' and an 'affected' self-representation.

Myshkin tells us that he was compelled by circumstances to take up the path of revolution; but such an account was common to all those who, accepting their criminal status, appeared before the courts self-consciously as 'workers' or 'peasants' rather than as *intelligenty*. Still more, in Bardina's speech, the actions of *narod* were understood as the result of the state's actions, not of the choices of individuals: 'if the present state keeps its people in political, economic and intellectual slavery, if its enormous unpaid taxes, its capitalist exploitation of the workers and other abnormal economic and political aspects bring it to destitution, disease and crime, then, of course, I would say that the state was taking itself to its own death.'¹⁸⁸ The 'personal experience' of this or that worker or peasant was determined by the present political and economic system and eventually their actions and 'reactions' would be too: the state contained the 'seeds of its own collapse' in its treatment of the populace. Having been 'brought to consciousness' of their own revolutionary ideals, the now radical peasant-workers could not help but look back and see their 'formative experiences' as so many minor steps towards the future social revolution and a manifestation of the movement of Russian history. If the radical

¹⁸⁷ 'Iz zaiavleniia Myshkina...', *RN* 1, p. 181.

¹⁸⁸ 'Rech' S. I. Bardinoi...', *RN* 1, p. 355.

workers and peasants were distinguished from the great mass of the *narod* then it was not in making the choice to join the ‘social revolutionary party’ (in and of itself), but in their retroactive understanding of the *necessity* of each action taken by them at the behest of the social system:

To properly understand my crimes, it is necessary to know the most important moments of my life, the moments which defined my character, my convictions, and the direction of my activities...What I became in the end was no more than the fruit ripened on soil prepared long before my own birth, fertilised with the blood and sweat of my peasant forebears...and sown by that great cultivator, life...¹⁸⁹

The ‘confessions’ themselves are supposed to be about Myshkin’s ‘thinking’ (after all, he said that he wanted to explain not only how he became a ‘state criminal,’ but also the ‘step-by-step development’ of his ‘anti-governmental ideas’). Yet, with such a strong argument put forward for the determined nature of his actions, the historian has to wonder what could be left for Myshkin as a ‘reasoning’ and ‘responsible’ individual. The particularity of Myshkin’s story is undermined by social determination, ‘by life itself,’ each moment or episode nothing more than a link in a chain imposed upon them by an ideology which *intends* to show experience as no more than a manifestation of some huge, impersonal social process. And this tension of individuality with class was to haunt workers’ memoirs and other writings long after the political conjuncture of 1877-8, carried through more superficial ideological divisions of the 1880s and 1890s on the back of the social revolutionaries’ central belief: ‘workers’ self-emancipation.’

III. RUSSIAN MARXISM AND CLASS EXPERIENCE (1878-92)

Later revolutionary thinkers were convinced that ‘going to the people’ had completely undermined its own conceptual presuppositions, making necessary another approach to the theory and practice of social revolution in Russia. Coming to this conclusion by theoretical study and by ‘practical experience’ of the workers’ movement, the earliest self-defined ‘Marxist’ groups turned their attention from the working *narod* as a whole to the urban proletariat. Attacks on the older position began with a criticism of the concept of the *narod*. Contact with this so-called ‘class’ or ‘estate’ (*soslovie*), existing as a unified body neither

¹⁸⁹ ‘Iz zaiavleniia Myshkina...,’ *RN* 1, p. 182.

legally nor socially, had revealed not a potential, revolutionary force, but a variety of groups and sub-groups, including a growing proletariat in the cities, defined by the wage-labour in which it was engaged and its growing distance from rural labour and the land. That, into the late 1870s and 1880s, the social-revolutionaries of the ZiV, NV and *Chërnyi Peredel'* (*Black Repartition*, ChP) groups continued to spout nonsense about the 'labouring *narod*,' the revolutionary role of the peasantry, the importance of the more 'peasant-like' workers, etc., only served to show the relative theoretical backwardness of the greater part of the Russian revolutionary movement, already overtaken by events, by the thought and practice of Russian proletarians in St. Petersburg, Kiev, Moscow, and by the theoretically-inclined Marxist groups in Geneva. At least, this was the argument of Plekhanov's early theoretical-polemical works, *Sotsializm i politicheskaia bor'ba* (*Socialism and the Political Struggle*, 1883, hereafter: *Sotsializm*), the later, larger *Nashi raznoglasiiia* (*Our Differences*, 1885 hereafter, *Nashi*),¹⁹⁰ as well as his memoir-cum-confession of 'going to the people' as a '*narodnik*' in 1876-9, *Russkii Rabochii*.¹⁹¹ What can be seen from these works is that Plekhanov reproduced, on a variety of levels, exactly the same contradictions that had dogged the early social-revolutionary intelligentsia as regards its own role in the 'workers' revolution.'

'Marxism,' as Plekhanov and his followers understood it, did not differ from earlier doctrines in so far as the central tenet of *narodism* was concerned. Plekhanov admitted this on the first page of *Sotsializm* in 1883: 'The desire to work *among the narod* and for the *narod*, the certitude that the "emancipation of the working class must be carried out *by the working class itself*" – this *practical* tendency of our *narodism* is as dear to me now as before.'¹⁹² Like those earlier social-revolutionaries oriented to the 'hazy *narod*,' perhaps with an anarchistic or anti-political bent, the Russian Marxists continued to privilege the 'working-class' role in the social revolutionary movement, both in its existence *as a class* (genuine revolutions would only be achieved through the actions of *classes*, not individuals), and in terms of individuals belonging to that class (particular workers were to have a special role in making the revolution, from which members

¹⁹⁰ Plekhanov, 'Sotsializm i Politicheskaia Bor'ba,' [1883], *Izbrannye Filosoficheskie Proizvedeniia* (5 vols.), E. S. Kots, et al (eds.), (Moscow, 1956), vol. 1, p. 51-112/ 'Socialism and the Political Struggle,' *Selected Philosophical Works* (5 vols.), (Moscow, 1974-81), vol. 1, p. 49-106; idem, 'Nashi raznoglasiiia,' *IFP* 1, p. 115-357/ 'Our Differences,' [1885] *SPW* 1, p. 107-352.

¹⁹¹ For translated extracts from sections I, II and II of *Russkii rabochii*, see Appx. E: 17-30. The full text in Russian can be found in G. V. Plekhanov, *Sochineniia*, D. Riazanov (ed.), (24 vols.), (Moscow, 1923-27), vol. 3, p. 122-213.

¹⁹² Plekhanov, 'Sotsializm...', *IFP* 1, p. 51. In the *SPW* translation, the key phrase, '*osvobozhdeniia rabochego klassa dol'zhno byt delom samogo rabochego klassa*,' is rendered as: 'the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves' ('Socialism and the Political Struggle,' *SPW* 1, p. 49).

of the educated class or radical intelligentsia would be excluded). Yet, through his writings, Plekhanov also continued to defend the sovereignty of direct experience that was so characteristic of the ‘going to the people’ movement in its early stages: that is, a distinction between the ‘hazy concept’ and the ‘concrete experience’ that had no necessary dependence on a theory of class or class action. This was especially true of *Russkii rabochii*, one of a series of works published by the OT group in the early 1890s, which was addressed especially to Russia’s ‘developed workers’ or ‘worker intelligentsia.’

At this time, the radical worker-*intelligent*’s privilege of being both ‘in and of the working people’ was expressed most directly as a tactical consideration, and in this sense is reminiscent of the earliest, overt concepts of the worker-*intelligent* to be found in the social-revolutionary literature in the 1870s. Yet, as in these earlier works, the vague notion of a class *essence* – the mark of class clinging both to the radical workers and the educated, radical *intelligent* above and beyond any shared, human capacities – remained beneath, making the more directly expressed tactical considerations intelligible to contemporary readers. Aksel’rod, a member of the OT group, in the pamphlet *Zadachi Rabochei Intelligentsii v Rossii* (*The Tasks of The Worker Intelligentsia in Russia*, 1890-3, hereafter: *Zadachi*), wrote: ‘the worker socialists, the workers’ “intelligentsia”...holds in its hands the business of awakening the exploited and powerless Russian mass’¹⁹³ -

This workers’ intelligentsia, having already come into existence and continuing now to emerge, must take upon itself the task of explaining to the labouring classes in Russia the causes of their oppression; upon it rests the obligation to bring these classes in to the ranks of the international army which now wages its war, without rest, for the liberation of the workers of the whole world. Of course, socialists of the educated classes have devoted all their strength to helping our vanguard workers in their popular-revolutionary activity. But the vanguard workers, by their conditions, occupations and interests, are in direct and immediate contact with the popular mass...¹⁹⁴

This emphasises, firstly, the educated classes’ ‘distance’ from the labouring classes and the radical workers’ relative closeness to it in terms of ‘conditions, occupations and interests.’ Aksel’rod’s concept of the worker-*intelligent* seems to follow, then, from practical considerations: *you*, the committed, socialist workers, are ‘in and among the labouring class,’

¹⁹³ P. Aksel’rod, ‘Pis’mo k sotsialistam-rabochim: vmesto predisloviia,’ *Zadachi rabochei intelligentsia v Rossii* [originally published in 1890], 2nd ed. (Geneva, 1893), p. iv.

¹⁹⁴ Aksel’rod, *Zadachi*, p. 2.

while *we*, the ‘educated class,’ are not: hence the task of spreading the message falls inevitably to you. This was not, however, an issue of mere contact with the ‘labouring classes.’ The worker-*intelligent’s* ‘immediate contact with the labouring population’ meant more than just living among the labourers. It was about *being* a worker. Despite having (as Aksel’rod put it) ‘a more conscious attitude to social questions than his million-strong mass of workmates’ (*obrazoval’sia...luidei, sbosobnikh gorazdo soznatel’nee otnosit’sia k obshchestvennym voprosam, chem millionnaia massa ikh sobrat’ev po rabote*), the worker was still a worker, and a part of the mass with which he was compared and to which he compared himself.¹⁹⁵ The position of the ‘educated class’ remains ambiguous in Aksel’rod’s work. The workers’ intelligentsia is said to have ‘come into existence,’ ‘emerged’ (*narodivshaiasia i narozhdaiushchaiasia*) or ‘formed [itself]’ (*obrazoval’sia*), giving the impression that this was an impersonal process determined by ‘life itself.’ Elsewhere, however, Aksel’rod admits that it had been under both the influence of working conditions *and* of the propaganda and agitation of the radical *intelligenty* that the conscious or developed element within the labouring class had ‘come into being.’¹⁹⁶ The efforts of his own group of ‘educated’ radicals (Plekhanov, Vera Zasulich, Lev Deutsch) to give the Russian social-democratic workers’ movement, through literature produced in Geneva, the theoretical basis and clarity of position it lacked, evidence their continuing belief in the necessity of the educated classes’ participation in the business of the workers’ intelligentsia in Russia.

Plekhanov’s solution was to cast the ‘educated classes’ as helpers or ‘handmaidens,’ and not (as Kravchinskii phrased it in 1878) as ‘catalysts’ of a popular movement. Having made the distinction in *Sotsializm* between the practical and the theoretical aspects of narodism (proposing to correct these errors himself with the aid of Marx and Engels’ works), Plekhanov was able to argue that this was necessarily the role of the intelligentsia, that this could be proved historically, and that all attempts to be more than assistants to workers’ self-liberation had proved futile or damaging. Writing of the second wave of ‘going to the people’ in 1875-6, Plekhanov noted that,

in general, the contemporary intelligentsia-revolutionary lecturers didn’t get on especially well, mainly because they knew very little. Even what they *did* know they hadn’t understood correctly. They were more useful to the workers as good, committed youths,

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

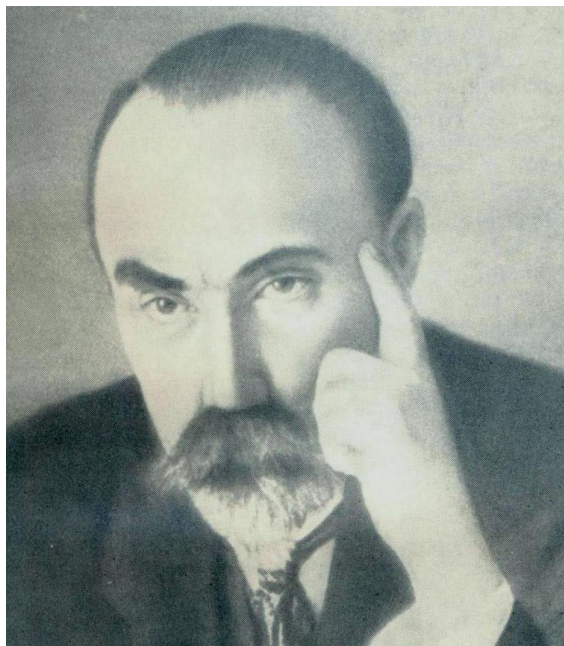
¹⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 7-8, p. 10-11.

who could get them illegal books, make them passports, and organise suitable apartments for secret meetings: in other words, as teachers of ‘conspiracy.’ They would push, awaken and attract the workers by their liveliness, by their selflessness and by their unlimited capacity for ‘self-denial.’ Although many, the more developed workers in particular, were sometimes sceptical about the ‘*intelligenty*,’ they could not have done without that inconspicuous, ‘conspiratorial’ factor. Under the influence of [Stepan] Khalturin and his close comrades, the Petersburg workers’ movement through the course of time became genuinely the cause of the workers themselves. But Khalturin was always being forced to return to the *intelligenty* for help in one and the other practical matter.

(Appx. E: 301)

The developed workers were instrumental in correcting the mistaken, outsiders’ notions promoted by the *intelligenty*, would exclude and struggle against trends harmful to their interests and, moreover, were often more developed than the *intelligenty* who helped them. And here we find Plekhanov appealing to an underlying notion of class not dissimilar to that of the early social-revolutionary *intelligenty*. At the centre of Plekhanov’s understanding of the workers’ intellectual development was the notion of ‘life itself’ as their teacher. The difference between the radical workers and the *intelligenty* was the practical experience they gained from everyday struggle, which eventually grew into a genuine understanding of their own interests.¹⁹⁷

9. Georgi Plekhanov¹⁹⁸



¹⁹⁷ *Russkii rabochii* is saturated with examples of the workers’ ‘practical road’ to understanding (which is often contrasted to the *intelligenty*’s more abstract or dogmatic worldview), presented in more or less subtle ways. See, for example, Appx. E: 20, 22, 25-28, 32, etc. Another particularly clear example is in the account of the strike at the New Cotton-Spinning Factory in March, 1878 and the attempts of workers to negotiate with the police and local government (see Plekhanov, ‘*Russkii rabochii*,’ *Soch.* 3, p. 171-82).

¹⁹⁸ G. V. Plekhanov, *Filosofsko-literaturnoe nasledie G. V. Plekhanova* (Moscow, 1973), vol. 1, p. 8-10.

Those born to the role of ‘worker’ were marked by the conditions in which they lived. ‘The young workers, I noticed, were far more independent than their counterparts from the upper classes. Life itself by its severity forced these children from an early age into the struggle for existence, leaving a particular resourcefulness and hardening on those who had managed to avoid a premature death. I knew a thirteen year old boy, an orphan, who, working in Gabaroi Gavan at the MacFerson plant, lived quite alone without, it seemed, feeling the slightest need for any kind of help from the outside’ (Appx. E: 290). ‘Life’ for Plekhanov was the dynamic, urban life that, along with its numerous hardships and injustices, also offered the worker - especially the kind of worker who might find himself attracted to self-education - both an experience of real community and a school of critical thought. The city and the factory had their own peculiar powers to alter those who lived and worked in them. Plekhanov began by making a rather strict division between the two types of worker with whom he came in contact during his stint as a propagandist for ZiV: the *fabrichnye* (‘workers of the factories [*fabriki*]’) and the *zavodskie* (‘workers of the mills/plants [*zavody*]’), a division which roughly followed the more basic division made by Plekhanov between the ‘peasantry’ and the ‘workers’: ‘The *fabrichnyi* worked more (12-14 hours) and was paid less (18-25 roubles) than the *zavodskii*. He wore a cotton-print shirt and a peasant’s knee length overcoat [*podovka*], which the *zavodskie* would joke about. He didn’t get the chance to rent his own apartment or room, and so lived in a common *artel*’. He had much stronger connections with the village than the *zavodskii* worker did. He knew and read much less than the *zavodskii*, and in general he was closer to the peasantry’ (Appx. E: 298-9). Still, Plekhanov portrayed the *fabrichnye/zavodskie* division not as an absolute one, but as a marker of the particular worker’s development alongside, and in unison with, the development of society and ‘reason’ (see Appx. E: 305):

The *zavodskii* worker placed himself somewhere between the *intelligenty* and the *fabrichnye*; the *fabrichnye* somewhere between the peasants and the *zavodskie* workers. Whether any particular *fabrichnyi* was more similar in his conceptions to the peasant or to the *zavodskii* depended on how long he had lived in the city. If he had just arrived from the countryside, he would remain for some time a genuine peasant. He was there not only because of the economic attraction of the city, but because of the heavy taxation and the lack of land which drove him there. He saw his stay in the city as temporary; at most it was a highly unpleasant necessity. But, little by little, he fell under the influence of urban living. Unbeknownst to him, he would begin to acquire the habits and the outlook of the townsman. Having worked in the city for some years, he became uncomfortable in the village and didn’t want to return there, especially if he had managed to acquaint himself with ‘intellectual’ people, and if he had gotten interested in books. I knew *fabrichnye* who, being forced to go back home for a while, went there as if into exile, and – like the

*zavodskii B...n*¹⁹⁹ – were driven away by the decidedly cold and unfriendly attitude of the villagers. The cause of this was always the same: village manners and customs had become something mysterious to them; for an even *slightly* developed person, the village order would become incomprehensible. And the more talented the worker, the more he thought and studied in the city, then the quicker and more decisively was he cut off from the village. The *fabricnyi*, having taken part in the revolutionary movement for a few years, could not tolerate living more than a few months there (Appx. E: 298).

Clearly, Plekhanov understood the intellectual and political development of the worker-intelligentsia proper (e.g. the radical workers with whom he mainly associated) to be a result of their greater exposure to books, to other intellectual workers, and their greater access to education both through legal and illegal channels (Appx. E: 300). Yet this higher development of the worker rested upon the broader and more fundamental transformative power of the city and the factory that had its effects on the peasant-worker and the city-born proletarian alike, breaking them off from the ‘patriarchal system’ of the village, its habits and customs, endowing certain of them with an independence and a capacity for critical thought quite unknown to their rural relatives.²⁰⁰ And in principle the radical worker-*intelligent* who comprised the main subject matter of *Russkii Rabochii* were only at the very end of a process which led from the repetitive, thoughtless and circular lives of the peasants to the vibrant, reasoned and progressive lives open to the *intelligent* proper.²⁰¹

Plekhanov tied together the two ends of his argument – the necessary, political tasks of the working class and the workers’ route to revolution through experience - with a reference to the foundation of the *Severnyi soiuz russkikh rabochikh* (Northern Union of Russian Workers, hereafter: *Severnyi Soiuz*) in the winter of 1878-79. Its programme contained ‘minimum demands,’ including the rights of free speech, press and association: ‘The historian of the future will note the fact that in the ’seventies,’ Plekhanov wrote, ‘the demand for political freedom appeared in the *worker programme earlier than in the programmes of the revolutionary*

¹⁹⁹ Plekhanov here refers to the worker I. A. Bachin, one of the most outspoken of the workers who criticised and demanded workers’ independence from the social-revolutionary intelligentsia.

²⁰⁰ Plekhanov, describing a particular worker-*intelligent* in St. Petersburg (a certain ‘G--’), noted that he ‘had hardly even a single characteristic that the ‘intelligentsia’ liked to attribute to “the people.” There were no remnants of *peasant spontaneity* in him; neither was there *that peasant desire to live and think always as one has lived and thought before*’ (Appx. E: 20, emphasis mine).

²⁰¹ A similar analysis is given of Plekhanov’s typologies in R. Zelnik, ‘On the Eve,’ p. 29-33. It should be noted (as Zelnik does, p. 30-1) that Plekhanov did not mean to suggest a linear movement from peasant through *fabricnyi* to *zavodskii* to radical worker. This is fairly obvious from the quotation itself, seen as Plekhanov is talking precisely about *fabricnye* who had become alienated from the village precisely because of their involvement in revolutionary activities.

intelligentsia. This demand brought the Northern Union of Russian Workers closer to the Western European workers' parties, giving it a *social democratic tint*.²⁰² Plekhanov would use Alekseev's speech as support this overtly 'politicised' narodism, thereby securing a *symbol* of the working class and an *entire* working class for the fledgling Marxist tradition in Russia. He donated a short introduction and a commentary to Alekseev's speech in 1889, which was then being reprinted by the OT group in Geneva as a propaganda leaflet.²⁰³ 'The speech is brief,' Plekhanov said,

but let the workers read it, and they will find in these few words a great deal worth thinking about. Of course it is true that the speech is not artfully composed. If the speech fell into the hands of some 'proper' writer who follows all the 'rules,' they would find a lot of faults in it. 'It should start with this,' he would say, 'continue with that, the middle part should go here, and the end should go like this...' But it isn't *how* Pëtr Alekseev said it that matters, it's *what* he said.²⁰⁴

Implicit in the passage was Plekhanov's idea that the simple worker Alekseev had managed to give something to the working class that could not have been provided them by their 'intelligentsia' mentors (for the 'Marxist' Plekhanov, the word intelligentsia was always uttered ironically).²⁰⁵ It was *what* Alekseev said that mattered, and what he said, Plekhanov argued, was deeply relevant to his own campaign against the Russian *intelligenty* that presently ignored the cause of the Russian working-class. Plekhanov began with Alekseev's statement that 'the Russian working people can rely on no-one but themselves,' adding that

millions of workers in Western Europe came to the same conclusion long before. When the International Workingmen's Association was founded in 1864, the regulations said above all that 'the liberation of the workers must be conquered by the workers themselves.' The workers can rely neither on the government, nor on the upper classes (noblemen, tradesmen, etc.), because neither the government nor the upper classes, living on the workers' account, will ever do anything for them.²⁰⁶

Neglecting to mention the contribution of the 'intelligentsia' to the founding of the International and the drafting of its regulations, Plekhanov went on to argue that the most important thing for

²⁰² Ibid, p. 186.

²⁰³ 'Rech P. A. Alekseeva' (with introduction by Plekhanov), printed at the typography of *Gruppa Osvobozhdeniia Truda* (Geneva, 1889), 13 pages; see also N. V. Nevskii, 'Gruppa Osvobozhdenie Truda v periode 1883-1894,' *Istoriko-Revoliutsionnyi Sbornik*, vol. 2, (Leningrad, 1924), p. 28 and p. 30-31, on the history and publications of *The Workers' Library* and *The Library of Contemporary Socialism*.

²⁰⁴ G. V. Plekhanov, 'Predislovie k rechi Alekseeva,' *Soch.* 3, p. 112.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 115, 116. See also 'Predislovie k chetyrëm recham rabochikh,' *Soch.* 3, p. 207, and Appx. E: 27, 29, 31, 34, 35, etc.

²⁰⁶ Plekhanov, 'Predislovie k rechi Alekseeva,' *Soch.* 3, p. 113.

the Western workers had been the political rights of free association, assembly, the press, and their freedom to elect representatives:

In all the Western countries the advancement of the cause depends to a large extent on the elected deputies who meet in the capitals and comprise the Legislative Assembly...but who are the true representatives of the working class? In the first place, their own brother workers. In Western Europe the Legislative Assemblies already feature elected working-class deputies who will not bow and scrape before the 'gentlemen' who gather there. So it will be, in due course, with our Russian workers.²⁰⁷

Much as the workers could only depend on themselves to overturn the present system, it was only the workers themselves who could represent the interests or speak in the name of the working class. And this lesson was all the more important for the Russian working-class at a time when the *intelligenty* were forgetting about the workers, criticising them for their stupidity and poor education, or even denying their existence as a class.²⁰⁸ It was for that reason that the speech was reprinted. Here was a genuine worker, the 'predecessor' of the radical workers of the following decades,²⁰⁹ talking not only 'about the difficult situation of his comrades, the Russian workers,' but also about their means of escaping it.²¹⁰ The basic revolutionary principle that Alekseev had already recognised in 1877 – workers' self-reliance – applied not only to actions (political representation, the revolution itself) but also to true 'representation' of the working-class. Alekseev's speech was included by Plekhanov in a group of writings over which the Russian workers, by dint of their class, had the 'rights of possession': 'we publish this speech for the Russian workers. By rights it belongs to them.'²¹¹ Plekhanov's own *Russkii Rabochii* was also said to 'belong by rights' to those workers who were now 'continuing the work of the revolutionaries of the 'seventies.'²¹²

Russkii rabochii reinforced implicitly (in form) what Plekhanov set out to argue explicitly (in substance) with his polemical works: that conceptual or theoretical understanding was secondary to, and reflective of, material life. Marxism itself was understood as the intellectual product of a part of the educated class 'comprehending the laws of history' conceptually, and 'allying themselves to the only revolutionary class' in response; ultimately it was the movement

²⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 114.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 115.

²⁰⁹ Plekhanov, 'Litsam, poiznesshim rechi na sobraniiakh peterburgskikh rabochikh... [Predislovie ko pervomu izdaniiu vospominanii Plekhanova "Russkii rabochii v revoliutsionnom dvizhenii"]', *Soch.* 3, p. 121.

²¹⁰ Plekhanov, 'Predislovie k rechi Alekseeva,' *Soch.* 3, p. 113.

²¹¹ Ibid, p. 112.

²¹² Plekhanov, 'Litsam, poiznesshim rechi...', *Soch.* 3, p. 121.

of history itself (the transformation of the society with the movement from one mode of production to another) that made this comprehension possible and continued to underpin it. The working-class movement, Plekhanov discovered, was able to *intuit* the hard-won, ‘scientific’ results of theory more directly: by dint of its experience of material conditions and the workers’ feeling for their own interests. Thus, between brute material life and historical law, the objective result of socially productive activity, and the conscious comprehension of these laws, more or less confined to the educated classes, Plekhanov discovered ‘class experience.’ Alekseev and the *Severnyi Soiuz* were dramatic examples of workers’ intuition of truth and their capacity to speak and act ‘correctly,’ in line with history’s impersonal laws, by instinct. It has already been shown that Plekhanov attributed a special role to workers in the workers’ revolution: this special role embraced both representation of the working class (including the act of speaking for them) and of acting in its interests. In both cases it was ‘class being’ – the fact of being part of the working class, experiencing working-class conditions, and sharing its interests – that explain this privilege.

Russkii rabochii, however, seems to extend the privileges of *direct* experience also to the *intelligently* or, more accurately, to himself as a ‘former *intelligent*.’ This work – written ‘according to personal memories,’ as Plekhanov put it – appealed to direct experience as a means of distinguishing its claims (both historical and general) regarding the Russian working class: in Zelnik’s words, *Russkii rabochii* ‘derives its credibility from its self-presentation as autobiography, with its social typology projected as a reflection *of* as well as a reflection *on* the author’s past experience.’²¹³ In that sense Plekhanov’s writing partook in exactly the fetish of experience that the ‘going to the people’ movement had originally expressed. Plekhanov used this fetish – now (temporarily) detached from class privilege – to show how ‘going to the people’ had undermined itself. What gives this formal, second order argument some consistency with Plekhanov’s other works – *Sotsializm* and *Nashi Raznoglasiia* being grounded quite unashamedly in theory – was its retrospective orientation. Plekhanov was able to look back at his own experiences of ‘going to the people’ from the perspective provided by Marxism, giving him distance from his own past mistakes, as well as a framework within which to interpret the workers movement (and his own memories of it) ‘correctly.’ What this retrospective view showed, in his own case as well as in those of the other *intelligently* of the time, was that the workers were necessarily ‘ahead’ of the *intelligently*, and that it was only through the framework

²¹³ Zelnik, ‘On the Eve’, p. 30.

of *theory* – the educated classes’ route to truth – that the latter could really ‘comprehend’ the movement. Thus Plekhanov’s argument in *Sotsializm*, viz., that the terrorism of *NV* expressed *in practice* the necessity of political action against the autocracy (a conclusion already reached by the *Severnyi Soiuz* in 1878-9), but the *intelligenty* of *NV* were not yet able (in 1883) to *comprehend* it (much as the *Severnyi Soiuz* had expressed their advanced, political demands but only in a ‘populist’ form or language).

* * *

It is this light, then, that Alekseev’s statement at the ‘Trial of the Fifty’ should be seen: ‘As a worker, I would like to...show that there is no human force more powerful than the conditions in which the workers live’ (Alekseev, Appx. A: 277, *ft.* 1). Ideologically, Alekseev’s speech stood halfway between the ‘turn to the *narod*’ of the early 1860s, and Plekhanov’s literary ‘turn to the worker-*intelligenty*’ in the 1890s. In terms of its content, the speech was possible of various interpretations. It was ambiguous enough to accommodate the ‘anarchistic’ or purely social-revolutionary viewpoint of the 1870s, oriented toward the ‘labouring class’ of peasants and peasant workers as the agent of uprising, as well as the Marxist viewpoint, centred on Russian capitalism, the emerging proletariat, and the promotion of a political revolution. What was common to both doctrines (and many shades of opinion between) was ‘narodism.’ This found the value of Alekseev’s speech not primarily in *what Alekseev said*, as Plekhanov claimed (it had been said by the radical *intelligenty* many times before), but the fact that *he said it* - that it came from the horse’s mouth, so to speak. Narodism as an underlying notion, expressed in the concept of ‘workers’ self-liberation,’ contained a whole host of related notions regarding knowledge and its origins as well as class and its limitations. Alekseev’s speech served to draw out these underlying notions in celebrations of its simple truths, its authenticity guaranteed by Alekseev’s background and his lived experience of oppression and exploitation.

Historically, then, Alekseev embodied and documented not the ‘conditions of the working millions,’ nor quite the viewpoint of the intelligentsia on it, but the contradictory position and thought of the worker-*intelligent*, thinking himself halfway between the material conditions of his life which *forced* him to act, and the consciousness that allowed him to see beyond his conditions and act *against* them. The very concept of the worker-*intelligent* was closely linked to social-revolutionary doctrine and its underlying categories. Alekseev’s thought about himself

placed him not only outside the ‘working millions,’ but also outside *himself* as a particular individual, outside his own life, which was made as abstract and distant as the radical intelligentsia’s abstract concepts and images of the *narod*. To say, then, that ‘his famous speech is as concise a statement of the *values of a radical worker* as can be found in the literature,’²¹⁴ given the close connection of these ‘values’ to the theory of the social revolutionaries and their propagandistic presentation of them to the Russian lower classes, is only to confirm Alekseev’s intellectual ascent from the personal experiences evoked by his speech to an overt ‘ideology of experience,’ with the category of class at its centre. Alekseev’s ‘radical values’ propelled him above the other, ‘mass’ workers, making him a target for arrest, trial, and exile; his responsibility for criminal actions was recognised historically with the official stamp of exile, an act of exclusion carried out for the good of the other workers and the security of the state. Yet, his radical values anchored him firmly into the ‘material conditions’ that, for the social revolutionaries, determined the collective actions the Russian labouring class and at times were seen virtually to constitute it. At the moment when he was held to be responsible for his own actions, his radical values convinced him to shed that responsibility onto the merely external or objective conditions of his and all the others’ working, suffered lives:

We sleep where we drop, without bedding or a pillow under our heads, wrapped in rags, surrounded on all sides by every kind of parasite. *In such circumstances* the intellect becomes blunted and the moral senses, acquired during childhood, remain undeveloped. There is *only one means of expression* left to those who live [earn their day’s bread] by manual labour, badly educated, isolated from any civilization, and forgotten by everyone. As children we, the workers, *have to suffer* under the capitalist yoke. *What else are we supposed to feel towards the capitalists but hatred...?*

If we *have to ask the capitalist* for a raise when he himself has [just] lowered the wages, and we’re accused of striking and exiled to Siberia – that means we’re serfs!

If we are *forced by the capitalist* to leave the factory and demand higher rates, because of a change in the quality of the materials or the because we are oppressed by fines and deductions, and we are accused of rioting, and *forced to return to work* at the end of the soldier’s bayonet, and *some are called ringleaders and exiled to some distant region* – that means we’re serfs!

If each of us alone *can’t complain* to the capitalist, and any offer to do so collectively is greeted with kicks and punches in the teeth by the first policeman we bump into on the street – that means we’re serfs! (Alekseev, Appx. A: 277; 280, emphases added)

Understood as the ‘statement of the values of a radical worker,’ Alekseev’s speech gives us, then, only notions or categories: a notion of the ‘labouring millions,’ whose only ‘real’ unity was to be *imagined* by outsiders as something unified; an autobiographical stance which folded

²¹⁴ Zelnik, ‘On the Eve,’ p. 46.

Alekseev into his own abstract, outside (and outsiders’) view of the ‘working millions,’ making of him a mere instance of a category: a ‘witness’ rather than an actor; a martyr whose suffering was symbolic, rather than a victimised individual who suffered personally because of social categorisation. The publication and republication of his speech, the Soviet-era hagiography praising his earthy virtues, the overarching sense that his activity had somehow grown from the soil and shit and factory smoke to which he, just like all the others, had been subjected, reproduced the alienation from particular experience and life that Alekseev himself had set in motion in March, 1877.

3. Alekseev's Letters: Historiography and the workers' voice (1875-1930)

Alekseev's was a public speech with overt propagandistic purposes, its portrayal of the author and its representation of the 'working millions' determined in part by the social-revolutionary doctrine to which Alekseev subscribed, and in part by the conflict of its earliest circles and organisations (the *chaikovtsy*, the VSRO) with the autocratic state and its representatives. While, for political reasons, the speech made reference to Alekseev himself as the embodiment of working-class suffering, it was not his individual life that was documented there: rather, it was his life lived as the object of abuse, as part and an exemplar of his class. If the brutally simplified images of popular existence were not enough, the political conjuncture and knowledge of narodism's influence caution against a straight reading of the speech as autobiographical. There exist also Alekseev's letters from exile, giving us Alekseev as an *intelligent* behind his *muzhik* mask. No sign of the self-effacing and affected 'workers' voice' is to be found in the letters. They are personal and reflective, turning attention to an inner life where thoughts were burdensome, natural desolation was transformed into psychic emptiness, and writing had become some sort of escapism – the one activity left to him in a world of imposed idleness. If the letters are now read in terms of a political life known - most of all - through the speech and its afterlife, critical distance from the 'workers' voice' offered by the latter allows the baggage of social-revolutionary mythology and Alekseev's martyrdom to be hauled away. Yet both are documents of a life that was politicised in history and remains so for historiography and historians. The apparent 'baggage' of the political speech and radical activities are imminently present in the letters in the simple fact of their preservation and publication: that they can now be looked over by historians whose route to them is almost necessarily by way of the 1877 speech and thus Alekseev's moment as a witness for his class. Would there be any interest for historians in these personal reflections if it were not for Alekseev's established fame as worker-orator and Russia's first recognised worker-*intelligent*?

The foundation of the mythical image of Alekseev took place through the publication and distribution of the speech. But it was the careful *preservation* and *publication* of Alekseev's speech that transformed the intention to mythical status into an historical reality. It will be

allowed (for the present) that the actual *content* of Alekseev's letters, as well as his original impulses to write them, can be separated sharply from the political aims of the speech, its publication, and its use as a propaganda piece by social-revolutionary groups (including the NV and OT groups, the various Russian social-democratic and Marxist groups of the 1880s and 1890s (the SDs) and the Socialist-Revolutionaries). Still, these groups were involved in collecting and preserving materials and documents from recent pasts considered politically and/or historically valuable, whether this value was judged in terms of particular strains of social-revolutionism or, alternatively, in terms of the revolutionary, popular, and workers' movements more generally. By the early 1890s, when the OT group and the remnants of NV were republishing Alekseev's speech, it was already an *historical* document, and part of the 'heritage' of the Russian socialist movement. In the same decade, memoirs, programmes, official memos, and private letters were being collected in order to shed light on a recent past that was proving difficult for new students of the cause to recover. Alekseev's letters were preserved by groups that tended to identify the documentation of history with their political aims. By the same gesture, and for the sake of its future successes, the movements' present and its past were being connected together by revolutionary-historical journals and revolutionary-historical accounts. That Alekseev's letters survive, then, is a political fact, regardless of any 'mythic aura' that might now hang over them and obscure their content and meaning. It remains to be seen, however, exactly what the preservation and publication of such documents *meant*, politically and historiographically, for Alekseev's contemporaries and followers. Were historical writing and the documentation of Alekseev's particular life and activity caught up in the myth created by the speech? How did contemporary revolutionary historiography square the private, reflective Alekseev of the letters with the radical, 'plural' Alekseev of the speech? More generally, did the politically informed '*workers' voice*' have the same status for social-revolutionary ideology and practice as the voices of *particular* workers?

Many of Alekseev's working-class comrades, the veterans of the St. Petersburg and Moscow workers' circles of 1872-74 and 1875-8, began to leave their own accounts of their lives in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Like Alekseev's speech and letters, these writings (mostly, short memoirs, along with a few longer autobiographies) were collected, preserved and published by revolutionary groups. 'Worker's voices' became an important part of a political-historiographical project closely connected to the doctrine of workers' self-emancipation, and so connected also to the notion of the 'workers' right to speak for themselves.' The relevance of

the question of a particular ‘worker-individuality’ - the function of martyr and witness taken up by Alekseev in the speech - to the study of workers’ memoirs and autobiographies is clear. But such writings are not so obviously influenced by a political conjuncture or so clearly charged by doctrine as Alekseev’s speech; neither do they seem to be as distant to political purpose, or the conscious effort to find the meaning of an individual life through political struggles, as Alekseev’s letters. Did involvement in social-revolutionary historiography influence the way worker-*memoirists* wrote about history and about themselves, or this so much baggage that can be tossed aside in favour of the ‘self,’ ‘social identity,’ the particular worker and his intellect? This chapter hopes to address these questions by examining the birth, development and the influence of revolutionary historiography in relation to the ‘workers’ voice’ between 1875 and 1930.

I. ORIGINS OF SOCIAL-REVOLUTIONARY HISTORIOGRAPHY (1875-8)

Social-revolutionary historiography was founded at the same political conjuncture that shaped Alekseev and Myshkin’s speeches. It has already been seen that these speeches were, in part, reactions to the ‘official history’ of the ‘going to the people’ movement being put forward in the period 1875-7, in particular by the Ministry of Education and the Minister of Justice, Pahlen. Where Pahlen’s history pointed to the influence of foreigners and émigrés to account for the radicalisation of the Russian youth, claiming as well the limited influence of both groups on the peasantry and other working people, Myshkin had argued instead the social determination of the actions of working people, claiming that the movements of the intelligentsia ‘above’ were mere reflections of the popular movements ‘below.’ While Pahlen explained the radical commitments of a small number of workers by the harmful influence of the ‘youth,’ Alekseev pointed to the terrible living conditions that had led some workers – and would eventually force the entire working class - to accept these teachings. Beneath the public face of social-revolutionary oratory, a hidden counter-history, related to the open one, was also being written. Myshkin’s confessions of 1876 were the founding document of the revolutionary historiography of ‘going to the people.’ The ‘confessions’ mixed overt doctrinal statements with autobiography, biography and objective historical description in reaction to the official history, thereby creating a text whose characteristics were shared by much of the historical literature to follow. The tensions between the free choice of the young people and their movements’ ‘reflection’ of the

popular movement below, between individuality as self-determination and class as the external force driving working-class radicalisation, were passed into revolutionary historiography wholesale. That part of Alekseev's role as martyr-witness, demanding the balance of individual presence with the collective voice, was not limited to working people or their writings. A movement that saw its own writings as documents, and themselves as witnesses to a bigger history, necessarily encountered difficulties in its attitudes to its authors and their individual contributions, both as activists and as writers.

What distinguishes Myshkin's memoir from the speeches is not political intention: both the speech and the confessions had explicitly political aims to counter the government's take on the social-revolutionary movement for the sake of the understanding of Russian 'educated society' and the public as a whole. Instead, it is the desire to counter an 'official history' that had already documented the lives of *particular people*, had use these individuals as evidence of this or that explanation or proposition, and backed it up with pedantically detailed investigations and reports on conversations, minor events, meetings, literature, etc. Alekseev had spoken to give an image of the Russian *working class* as thoughtful and active (as opposed to the official notion of their essential passivity and *naïveté*); the official view was only personal to Alekseev in so far as he was part of these 'working millions.' His plurality in part reflected the plurality and indifference imposed by social classification. Myshkin's 'confessions,' in contrast, responded to an official history that mentioned him *by name*, and documented his particular activities as 'revolutionary typographer' between 1871-4. The confessions were, therefore, both a defence of the *movement* as a whole and the *self-defence* absent - for political reasons - from his 1878 speech. If the speeches 'depersonalised' the actions of those prosecuted, the memoir promised to draw attention back to individuals and their actions. This double-movement, represented by Myshkin's confessions and the two parts of his speech, pointing at once towards *and* away from individuals - was mirrored by developments within the revolutionary organisations forming on the 'outside,' in the aftermath of the routs, in 1875-6.

The experience of the destruction of the first *narodnik* circles - for some personal, for others a lesson learned at a distance - was then being taken into account in plans to reconstitute and reorganise what was left of the earlier circles into a more unified, stronger, more capable revolutionary network. The 1875 'Tsirkular' ('circular') by Mark Natanson, sent to a number of circles in Russia and abroad, including the editors of *Vperëd* in London (still, at this point,

headed by Lavrov), was particularly important in this regard. Natanson, in 1868-9 a founder of St. Petersburg University's student group and its library, which later developed into the *chaikovskii* circle,¹ had just then been released from prison, having served time (along with V. Zasluch) from the early 1870s onwards in connection with the 'Nechaev affair.' Natanson particularly had been opposed to Nechaev's methods in 1868-9, and was wrongly fingered by the Third Section as a sympathiser of the *nechaevtsy*. It was Natanson's influence over the circles of 1869-70 that had the *chaikovtsy* reject Nechaev's approach to revolution: party programmes, violent rhetoric, elaborate rituals and conspiratorial methods, centralised power, individual leadership of any kind. Yet now, in 1875, Natanson turned back to look at the rout of the *chaikovtsy*, the *dolgushintsy*, the *buntary* in the south, the workers' circles, with a view to recovering for 'the cause' some of the methods pioneered by Nechaev and the circles of the late 1860s. Much of the latter half of the 'Tsirkular' focused on old issues of 'propaganda and agitation,' the attitudes of the *narodniki* to religious teaching and its use among the *narod*, and the possibility that propaganda materials should exaggerate or lie in order to achieve the movement's aims.² More important than the tactical and moral issues of 'going to the people,' however, was the attempt to understand the causes of the destruction of the earlier circles and ways to avoid its repetition. One cause was a lack of unity: each of the small circles has had to 'take up *all* the functions of revolutionary activity independent of the others,' resulting in a massive 'waste of energy' and a movement only characterised by its 'limitations.'³ The separation of circles had bred mistrust and division, weakening the movement. What, then, had been the cause of division in the first place? The circles, Natanson argued, had formed around 'personal ties of sympathy' rather than doctrines: it was not the ideology of 'the cause' which created divisions, but the fact that these were circles of friends, family, *zemliaki*, tending towards isolation despite almost complete agreement with the other circles.⁴ 'But now,' Natanson went on,

The system of circles has discovered its own inadequacies and, on the other hand, the socialist party has behind it a certain extended period of activity, allowing it to pick out those people best suited to certain tasks and those wishing to do them. The unity based on personal sympathy should be replaced by unification around *the cause itself*.⁵

¹ Morozov, 'Ocherk...', *RN* 1, p. 210-3.

² 'Tsirkular o soedinenii kruzhekov,' Spring-Summer, 1875, *Vp.* 2, p. 182-3; 185.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 180-1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

Natanson, the federalist and arch-Bakunist,⁶ was then arguing for a *single, party programme* and a single organisation, putting forward the possibility that this would be *centralised*, with its leadership determining the roles of members, and with a much more developed conspiratorial culture.⁷ Russian conditions demanded that the personal and ‘sympathetic’ bases that had left the *chaikovtsy* circle and others isolated, small and vulnerable should be discarded or at least dampened. They would be replaced by an organisation with a central programme, regulations, strict vetting of new members, code names, false names, false papers, separation of sections under central direction, a division of labour organised by the centre, and all the other conspiratorial trappings state officials had perceived everywhere in the activities of ‘going to the people’ (and for which they had prosecuted hundreds). *Narodnaia Volia*, founded in 1879 after the split of *Zemlia i Volia* (in part over the issue of terrorism and its use by revolutionaries), was famously praised by Plekhanov and later by Lenin for pioneering just such a centralised organisation. But by 1877 and 1878, *Zemlia i Volia* was already a conspiratorial organisation with the features suggested or argued for by Natanson in 1875. This is shown clearly in Plekhanov’s description of ZiV’s relations with the workers’ circles after 1876, and the return of some of the ‘veterans’ (Smirnov, Volkov) from prison:

The members of the organisation who were entrusted with the leadership of ‘workers’ matters’ (they were always few in number, at the most 4 or 5 people), were told to form a special circle from the young revolutionaries. These circles, properly speaking, did not belong to the *Zemlia i Volia* organisation, but since they were under the influence of its members, they could not but work in the spirit of its programme. Here is how these circles set up connections with workers: Given that, thanks to the propaganda of 1873-74, there were already quite a few revolutionaries in the workers milieu, the task of the *zemlevol'tsy* and their young assistants was, above all, to bring these already prepared people into the organisation. The ‘elders,’ for the greater part already experienced revolutionary-workers, uniting themselves with some reliable newcomers, comprised the core of the Petersburg workers’ organisation, with whom the intelligentsia mainly communicated. We could rely on those people absolutely: to be scared of being handed over [to the police] by them would have been absurd. None the less, understanding that ‘that butter doesn’t spoil the kasha’ [better too much than too little], and that caution was always required where secret revolutionary matters were concerned, even when it might seem quite superfluous, the *zemlevol'tsy* didn’t tell the experienced workers their addresses or their names (that is, the names under which they were listed by the police). I add that they never approached even a single worker under their own names: The address of a *zemlevolets* was usually fictitious, the name under which he lived - even within the organisation itself - was usually only known to a very few people: for instance, those involved in the same area of work as him. People engaged in other specialities had to be satisfied meeting him in a

⁶ ‘[Pis’mo] V. N. Smirnov - P. Kh. Idelson,’ 25 December, 1875, *Vp.* 2, p. 191.

⁷ ‘Tsikular...,’ *Vp.* 2, p. 181, 184.

‘conspiratorial’ flat, where general *shkody* would take place. The duty of leading the local workers circles, founded in one or the other part of Petersburg, fell to a central, specially selected workers’ group. The intelligentsia didn’t interfere with the local groups, limiting themselves to providing books, helping to run meetings at secret apartments, and so on. Every local circle took responsibility for attracting new members. They were told that other circles existed in Petersburg, but only the central core of workers knew exactly what kind of circles and where they were. This central group would hold a general meeting every Sunday. The revolutionary *intelligenty* served as propagandists at the local circle meetings. Because they were only known by their false names, if some spy had managed to get into the meeting, then he could only report back that a Fedorich or an Anton or Dedushka had ‘shaken the floorboards’ at a certain place and a certain time; where to look for this Fedorich or Anton or Dedushka remained a mystery. Following these men on the street was not so easy, because they could resort to special measures: in sight of the open courtyards and the cabbies, he would make a sudden turn into a place where there were no other cabs, get onboard, and inevitably the man following on foot would be left behind, etc., etc. Using such precautions, we were able to carry on with our work even during the riskiest periods, when those revolutionaries who didn’t belong to organisations (‘nihilists,’ as our jargon had it) fell into the hands of the vigilant police in droves due to the most petit trifles (Plekhanov, Appx. E: 303)

Thus, the ZiV was divided into two parts: a small, core group who knew each other personally, were tied together by long association (and ‘sympathy’), and accepted new members only reluctantly; and a peripheral ring of small circles, groups and a few individuals connected up by conspiratorial relations. The workers’ circles, for the most part on the periphery of both the ZiV and NV, were entrusted to veterans, whose relations with the shifting pattern of members was analogous to that of the ‘centre’ and its hanging branches. The worker Diakov Smirnov put it simply:

Around us it was all new people. Some of the workers from the Borisovskii *fabrika* (on the 8th line, between the river and Malyi Prospekt), who had at another time ‘gone to the people,’ apparently in Tverskaia guberniia. Two of them came back and then came to us – I don’t know about the rest. Of all the people who visited us we knew very few by their surnames (Smirnov, Appx. C: 288).

In that sense, the unification of the revolutionary organisation around ‘the cause itself,’ replacing the *chaikovtsy*’s synthesis of ‘self-formation’ and ‘political activism’ through ‘personal ties of sympathy,’ produced a tightening of the ‘central core’ and the friendships and loves that held them together, while creating a sort of atomisation everywhere else. Regulations of the ZiV and the NV, drawing on the experience gained from the trials of the late 1860s and the ‘Great Trials’ of 1877-8, set out in detail the theory and practice of ‘self-sacrifice,’ which was demanded of *all* members and associates. In a crisis, the personal ties holding the centre

together would fall away, protecting the ‘core’ group (in all but name, the leadership) and leaving for the public and official eye only the political martyr: the voice of ‘the cause.’

Still, it is well known that, from 1876 onwards, the ZiV group was considering ‘terror’ as a possible, useful tactic for the Russian socialists. Kravchinskii’s assassination of Mezentsev, and Zasulich’s (unsuccessful) attempt on Trepov, encouraged the terroristic inclinations of the ZiV, a factor leading in part to its split and the foundation of NV. Terrorism itself had the opposite effect than ‘conspiratorial culture.’ On the one side of the struggle and the other, terrorist acts highlighted the individual, individual choices, actions, powers, freedoms, and personalities. Where the public self-sacrifice of the *intelligent* and worker-orators posited the abstract individuality of martyrdom (the voice of the cause; the voice of the workers), terror resuscitated the other side of *lichnost’*: the *unique person*, the *hero*. It is no surprise that this aspect of the NV’s activities became the best known, the most infamous, the most mythologized, in Russia and abroad, through the late 1870s to the early 1890s. Protestations as to the limited role of terror (especially by Kravchinskii and other members of the ZiV), or the ‘symbolic’ role of terroristic acts (the attempt to downplay personality and heroism in favour of ‘the cause’) could not dim the spotlight that necessarily fell on pistol wielding, bomb-throwing fanatics and their uniformed, blood-spattered targets. ‘Myth-making’ was already by the mid-1870s part of the intention of the behaviour and speech-making of the revolutionaries on trial. The same can be said of the terrorist campaigns of ZiV and NV in the late 1870s and early 1880s.⁸ The pursuit of Aleksandr II by small groups of conspirators, leading eventually to the Tsar’s death in a bomb blast in March, 1881, was confirmation of the symbolic, rather than the actual, powers of individuals on both sides of the struggle. The power attributed to the Tsar was mystical rather than real: it was perfectly clear to NV that the exploitation of the working people was only possible through the state system (including the bureaucracy, the landed nobility and the capitalist class created by the state).⁹ Its ideology was sustained not only by officialdom’s patronage systems and corruptions, but also by the passivity of a population grown used to its abuses. As before, the *narod* blamed the local officials for these abuses as Aleksandr, now the ‘Tsar-liberator,’ floated above criticism in the pristine space provided by mutual ignorance.¹⁰ His death was to awaken the *narod* from their apathetic slumbers; the inevitable public sacrifice

⁸ L. E. Patyk, ‘Remembering “The Terrorism”’: Sergei Stepiak-Kravchinskii’s *Underground Russia*,’ *Slavic Review*, vol. 68, no. 4 (Winter, 2009), p. 760-1, 765-6.

⁹ ‘Programma Iсполnitel’ nago komiteta’ and [Mikhailovskii], ‘Politicheskie pis’ma sotisalista,’ *Narodnaia Volia*, god.2, no.3, 1 January, 1880, in *Lit. Partii NV*: 1, p. 107-8 and 112-3.

¹⁰ ‘Peterburg, 20 Sentiabr,’ *Narodnaia Volia*, god. 1, no. 1, 1 October, 1879, *Lit. Partii NV*, p. 40-1.

of his assassins would be an enduring example of what could be done – even in conflict with the autocrat himself – by the young and seemingly powerless radicals. The continuity of the *movement* - it was thought - could be counted upon, since it transcended the efforts of individual revolutionaries, whether students, workers or peasants.¹¹ Yet, it was still through individuals that the movement had to express itself: *muzhik* leaders in the villages were needed to exploit the bitter, yet still diffuse, dissatisfaction of the millions of peasants; worker-leaders (at the head of public protests, strikes, and violent, urban revolts) were needed to unify the peasant-workers in the centres of state power; underground revolutionaries were needed to protect the *narod* from the worst abuses of autocracy – by terror and assassination, if needs be.¹² In the short term, it was hoped, the revolutionaries might at least fracture the mythical aura of power surrounding the distant and divine Tsar, exploiting the *narod*'s age-old distrust of local state officials and administrators – a distrust now proved rational by experience of the privation and repression that followed the famine of the mid 1870s, the war against Turkey in the mid-1870s, and (of course) the 'Great Trials' of the socialist organisations of 1877-8. Revolutionary historiography, then, took *this* attitude to historical figures and thus to 'individuals in history' into itself as well as the depersonalised self-defence of the 'Great Trials' and conspiracy. Alongside Myshkin and Alekseev's martyr witnesses and the many memoirists that took on the role, there were also Kravchinskii's *Profiles* and a slew of political adventure stories, with core members – exiled, executed, emigrated – the central characters.

As the struggle with the autocracy intensified in the last of the 1870s and the beginning of the 1880s, radicals became increasingly aware of the fragility of their organisations and the individual members who joined them. This was a movement whose belief in its own historical importance and fears of personal oblivion had, by the late 1870s, merged into a potent 'historical consciousness,' partly under repeated experience of state surveillance, arrest, detention, and trial, and partly under the influence of a strain of revolutionism that had long combined a longing for action with frequent, guilty returns to the written word. The confinement imposed upon the radicals and revolutionaries offered historical literature as a last means of struggle. For these men and women, most of whom (until the very late 1870s at least) were born into the Russian 'educated classes' (and were highly aware of the fact), writing had

¹¹ 'Programma Iсполnitel'nago komiteta,' *ibid*, p. 107.

¹² 'My friends, I do not wish to die...but I tell myself, if there is no other way to socialism than across our dead bodies, then let our blood be spilt to redeem mankind' (see 'Pis'mo Vittenberg k tovarishcham,' dated 10 August, 1879, *Nardonaia Volia*, god. 1, no. 1, 1 October, 1879, *Lit. Partii NV*, p. 8.

ceased to be anything more than an instrument of their political purposes. In both the literary and political senses, the movement of the 1870s followed the example of Chernyshevskii - practically-minded, self-disciplined, scientific, distant, now speaking to an audience of thousands - over those of Herzen, Bakunin and the men of their generation, whose writings until the end evoked the friendly circles and philosophical-poetic discourse of the 1840s and 1850s. In contrast to the memoirs of Herzen or Annenkov, the preservation of personal experience was increasingly perceived as *historically*, rather than ‘personally’ (or ‘aesthetically’), valuable. This particular form of ‘historical consciousness’ tightened its hold on the movement through the late 1870s and 1880s. The collection and preservation of documents became more careful and deliberate. In the mid 1880s, Peter Lavrov, running the *NV* press in Paris, began to collect his own library of illegal journals and wrote letters to friends in request of accounts of historical events not yet discussed by such literature, in part to aid his own research on the recent history of the movement, but also with awareness of the importance of such materials for future generations of revolutionaries and historians.¹³ Even earlier, in the late 1870s, Nikolai Morozov, veteran of the *chaikovtsy* circle and a member of ZiV executive committee, began to preserve important documents (regulations, programmes, issues of the ZiV newspaper, etc.), leaving the haul for safekeeping with a liberal sympathiser in a large briefcase.¹⁴ In the late 1870s and early 1880s, when forced to flee arrest after the abortive attempt on Aleksandr II, Morozov, like Lavrov, began his own research and writing on the ‘going to the people’ movement, and asked those who had been involved in it to send their own accounts to him in letters and memoirs. Many responded to such requests.¹⁵ Autobiographical, biographical and memoir writing flourished in the late 1870s, as previously active revolutionaries were reduced by the authorities to idle contemplation. Some of those arrested and then tried in 1877-8 began to write memoirs or histories of their own experiences while still in prison. Under both Nicholas I and Aleksandr II, books and materials were generally available to exiles and to prisoners, depending on good behaviour (though letters would be opened and read as a matter of course; papers would often be checked or confiscated without warning). In the 1850s, Mikhail Bakunin had spent his jail

¹³ P. L. Lavrov, *Narodniki-Propagandisty*, p. 3-4; ‘L. B. Golden’burg –P.L. Lavrovu,’ 8 August, 1894 and ‘L. B. Golden’burg-P. L. Lavrovu,’ 24 October, 1894, *LGE*, p. 252-4 and 256; ‘Vyderzhki iz vospominaniia S. A. Podelinskogo,’ c. 1880, *Vp.* 2, p. 52-4.

¹⁴ N. Morozov, ‘Neskol’ko slov ob archive “Zemlia i Volia” i “Narodnaia Volia” (pis’mo v redaktsiiu sbornika),’ *Arkhiv ZiV/NV*, p. 34-7.

¹⁵ [Morozov] ‘Ocherk...,’ *RN* 1, p. 202-42.

sentence learning mathematics, writing long letters and composing his ‘confessions’;¹⁶ Nikolai Chernyshevskii wrote his autobiography and maintained extensive correspondence during his exile from 1862 through the 1870s;¹⁷ Lavrov wrote several learned articles and the *Istoricheskie Pis'ma* during his exile in the late 1860s.¹⁸ In early 1877, Alekseev and his comrades had written and edited their speeches together between court sessions.¹⁹ And, in the autumn of 1877, awaiting the start of the ‘Trial of the 193,’ the defendants A. Lukashevich and M. Muravskii made plans for a revolutionary-historical collection, to consist, mainly, of memoir materials written by their imprisoned comrades.²⁰ Such specially written pieces as the latter examples were tailored equally to the immediate purposes of the cause and the more distant, more pedantic demands of ‘future historians.’²¹

Government repression of the early radical and workers’ circles had broken numerous and close friendships. Alekseev’s comrades, condemned to the same scattershot exile that had taken numerous political criminals to Russia’s backwoods, perhaps preserved Alekseev’s letters for themselves as reminders of a friend who, by his own testimony, was by then quite lost to himself as well as to the revolutionary movement. Yet, the passage of letters, memoirs, notes and programmes from the pockets of the castrate-revolutionaries to the archives and journals of socialist parties was typically short. Developments in the latter half of the 1870s determined that a fledgling, historical literature would take the task of restoring to the movement retrospectively the personal attachments and ‘inner life’ that, under pressure of state repression, had been concealed or otherwise excised from revolutionary groups then active. Having learnt from the failures of the first ‘going to the people’ of 1872-5, revolutionary groups in the second half of the 1870s set to developing and formulating a ‘conspiratorial culture’ of anonymity and commitment, designed to protect the movement from secret agents, seizures, searches and arrests, and protect organisations when arrests and interrogations did take place. In the radical

¹⁶ See Bakunin, ‘Ispoved,’ as well as the many letters he sent to his parents and sisters from Petropavlovsk (between Feb., 1852 and Feb., 1854) and Shisselburg (May, 1854 - February, 1857), in *Soch.* 4, p. 98-207 and p. 209-247, respectively.

¹⁷ N. G. Chernyshevskii, ‘Avtobiografiia’ and ‘Vospominaniia,’ in *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenie*, B. P. Koz'min (ed.), (Moscow, 1939), vol. 1, p. 566-781.

¹⁸ See J. P. Scanlan, ‘An Intellectual Biography,’ in Lavrov, *Historical Letters*, p. 35-8.

¹⁹ Dzhabadari, ‘Protsess “50” (okonchanie),’ p. 193-4.

²⁰ ‘Obrashchenie M. D. Muravskogo i A. O. Lukashevicha k tovarishcham-soprotsessnikom o szdanii sbornika po istorii revoliutsionnoi deiatel'nosti v pervoi polovine 1870 – kh godov,’ 28 October, 1877 and ‘Zapiski III otdeleniia s.i.e.v.i. o nelegal'nyoi deiatel'nost' podsudnikh protsess “193-kh” v dome prevaritel'noi zakliuchenii,’ 30 November, 1877, *RN*: 1, p. 367-9 and p. 392-99.

²¹ Lavrov, ‘Vzglaid na proshedshee i nastoiashche russkoi sotsial'no-revoliutsionnoi dvizhenii,’ *LGE* 2, p. 510; idem, *Narodniki-Propagandisty*, p. 3-4; Plekhanov, ‘Russkii Rabochii,’ *Soch.* 3, p. 186.

journals of 1877-9, only émigré correspondents and those already imprisoned or exiled retained their own names. Contemporary documentation of the ZiV (1876-9) and NV (1879 onwards) organisations give little indication of the friendships, loves, and antipathies that coloured their underground existence; much the same can be said of the *chaikovtsy* and *dolgushintsy* circles of the period 1869-74. Biography, as such, belonged only to the movement's émigrés and its dead. When experience *was* 'restored' to the movement it was, however, most often within the framework of a revolutionary, historical consciousness. Talk of love and friendship, admiration, heroism, fear, a friend's clothes or gait or characteristic gestures, a sense of failure or loss or excitement, tended to submerge themselves within the overt markers of the literature's primary, documentary function: lists of those who attended a particular meeting or 'congress'; the exact addresses of such meetings or 'conspiratorial apartments' (*punkty*); attempts precisely to date or ascribe to an author an idea or doctrine; exhaustive catalogues of reading materials, full reproductions of contemporary proclamations or programmes...Experience came back to the movement retrospectively, not in the form of *perezhivanie* - as something 'lived through,' or suffered, and then appropriated by the person through its retelling - but as *opyt*, as *useful* experience, as part of a growing literature of revolutionary pedagogy.

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There were precedents for both the documentary aspect and the autobiographical (or 'memoir') writings that constituted the new, social-revolutionary historiography. The confrontation with the autocracy had already been a catalyst to the development of a documentary tradition and a related, but still separate, autobiographical one *within* the revolutionary movement. In the 1870s, however, the routs and trials of convinced social-revolutionaries allowed the 'open' autobiographical tradition and the more or less hidden history of documentation to merge together. The revolutionary press of 1878-9, its leading publications ZiV's paper *Zemlia i Volia*, the Bakuninist *Nachalo*, and the émigré papers *Obshchee delo* and *Nabat*, took on from Lavrov's *Vperëd* a documentary function closely related to its reportage of current events within the Russian circles and parties. Though it was no party's organ, *Vperëd* was still being published in 1878, having become more popular after its 'thick journal' was supplemented by a weekly newspaper. Its reporting on the 'Great Trials' through 1877 and 1878, aided by materials sent from Russia to Geneva (including Alekseev's speech, Bardina's, and excerpts from the stenographed proceedings of the Trials of the 'Fifty' and the 'One Hundred and Ninety

Three') had the intention not only to inform readers in Russia and abroad of events as they took place, but also to preserve and document events and the actions of individual defendants for posterity. Lavrov, *Vrepëd*'s chief editor and one of the main contributors to its 'thick journal' through 1873-7, had been a keen historian of the European and Russian socialist movements, extending his interest in European intellectual history from the Greeks to Descartes, Kant, Hegel and Feuerbach,²² and had stamped this interest upon the wider movement of the 1870s by the publication of his best-read and most admired work, the *Istoricheskie Pis'ma*, in 1868-9.²³ *Vrepëd*'s first three issues in 1873, 1874 and 1875 contained a very detailed, serial study of the development of socialist and communist thought in France, Germany and Britain from the Enlightenment to the mid-nineteenth century, written by Lavrov himself;²⁴ other articles took up the history of the International Association of Working Men,²⁵ and a more or less mystified version of the history of Russian, its *narod*, and the transformation of ancient Russia into a modern, autocratic state.²⁶ Its idealised vision of a time before the Tsars and their hangers-on proved popular, and turned up in slightly cruder forms in other revolutionary publications, notably in the NV's *Raboचाia Gazeta* in 1880.²⁷ The growth of the revolutionary movement within Russia, particularly the first wave of 'going to the people,' its end in searches, arrests and imprisonment, added to the abstractions of the *Istoricheskie Pis'ma* and the theoretic and studious historical studies of *Vrepëd* articles letters and reports on current events within Russia itself. Reports on censorship policy, midnight seizures of 'young people' and workers, raids, and arrests became especially prominent in *Vrepëd*'s newspaper, and so came to fill the pages of *Zemlia i Volia* and *Nachalo* in 1878-9 as well. Such reporting achieved, in a state of fragmentation, dispersal, and stretched over months, what the speeches and the martyrdom of defendants at the 'Great Trials' aimed to have in single, bright flashes. In documenting events and so making its own history, the ZiV was extending the impulses of 'going to the people' (the desire for concrete knowledge, experience), as well as its mythmaking at the trials, while

²² See Lavrov's works from the period 1858-60, 'Gegelizm' (1858) and 'Prakticheskii filosofiiia Gegelia' (1860), *Filosofiiia i sotsiologiiia*, p. 43-175.

²³ On this work and its reception, see S. F. Kovalik, 'Revoliutsionnoe dvizheniie semides'iat' ykh godov,' *Revoliutionery 1870-kh godov*, V. N. Ginev (ed.), (Leningrad, 1986), p. 151; see also Pomper, *Peter Lavrov*, p. 85-93.

²⁴ [P. L. Lavrov], 'Iz istorii sotsial'nykh uchenii,' *Vperëd*, vol. 1 1873, p. 60-110; 'Iz istorii sotsial'nykh uchenii (prodolzhenie),' *Vperëd*, vol. 3, 1874 (London), p. 45-119.

²⁵ [V. N. Smirnov], 'Ocherk razvitii mezhdunaronoii assotsiatsiia rabochikh,' *Vperëd*, vol. 1 (1873), p. 110-177, and *Vperëd*, vol. 2 (1974), p. 74 -121.

²⁶ [P. L. Lavrov], 'Schët russkogo naroda,' *Vrerëd*, vol. 1 (1873), p. 27-59.

²⁷ 'There was once beautiful time in Russia: the fields and forests were free and open, of the rivers and the seas there was only one boss - the Russian *narod*. Neither Tsar nor bureaucrats, nor landowners, nor lying priests - none of these were known then. We made our own laws. We protected our own country, without soldiers': *Raboचाia Gazeta*, god. 1, no. 1, 15 December, 1880, *Lit. Partii NV*, p. 251-2.

tailoring both to recent developments in the activities and the means of organising the party: they pointed to the workings of a state system that was being driven, by necessity, to its own destruction, while also preserving and making ‘public’ (in so far as was possible for an illegal journal) an alternative history of the movement. The names and biographies of the autocracy’s victims saved them and their circles from the obscurity of exile and jail; the appearance of lists of such victims in the pages of the revolutionary press signalled the breadth of a movement - not by ‘theories’ of class interest and support, but by actual documentation of things that had actually happened. Thus, while much of the reporting of 1878-9 appears on first sight to be a running commentary on the failures of the socialists and the ‘youth,’ ultimately the sacrifices of so many individuals (from the minor indignities of house-searches to actual and permanent loss of freedom) were salutary to the aims of the movement’s conscious representatives.

The revolutionary press were also able, in the late 1870s, to obtain and publish internal, government documents (memoranda, circulars, secret reports) and comment upon them. Between 1878 and 1881, the ZiV and NV had their own agent, N. V. Kletochnikov, serving with the Third Section, who was able to warn the party, through his handler, Mikhailov, of impending arrests and raids, inform them of the movements of certain high-ranking officials, as well as keep a stash of secret documents in a small cupboard near to his desk.²⁸ This, perhaps, accounts for the appearance in *Zemlia i Volia* of internal government papers from the recent past of the movement and its repression.²⁹ It may have been that other, informal sympathisers of the revolutionary party, in the service of the government, had passed documents and other information to the ZiV and the NV, continuing a tradition going back to Herzen’s *Kolokol* of the authorities being undermined from the inside.³⁰ Moreover, almost from the beginning of their publication such organs as *Zemlia i Volia* and *Nachalo* were receiving information from activists in workers’ circles and in the countryside, as well as from those engaged in propaganda work, and those acting as pure ‘correspondents’ in the cities. Thus, between March 1878 and February 1879, both *Zemlia i Volia* and *Nachalo* published detailed information on the strikes at

²⁸ A. Pribyleva-Korba, ‘Pamiati dorogogo druga Nikolaia Vasil’evich Kletochnikov,’ *Arkhiv ZiV/NV*, p. 39-40.

²⁹ See, for instance, *Zemlia i Volia*, 20 February, 1879, no. 4, *RZh*, p. 384-5 and *ibid*, 8 April, 1879, no. 5, *RZh*, p. 420-26, in which documents by Mezentsev, the Head of the Third Section, from mid-to-late 1877, as well as by other officials were published, with short commentaries. See also *Nachalo*, March, 1878, no. 1, *RZh*, p. 15-17, and *ibid*, April, 1878, no. 3, p. 68, who published internal documents from the local government regarding propaganda, propaganda materials, etc.

³⁰ Note that in Pahlen’s circular, the sheer breadth of the ‘going to the people’ movement was in part blamed on the parents of youths (especially those in government service) who were too lenient, or had even been sympathetic to, the aims of their ‘children’ and charges (see [Pahlen], ‘Zapiski Pahlen...,’ *ZSL*, p. 119-20).

various textiles factories then taking place in St. Petersburg;³¹ smaller bits of news regarding the workers' movement in Petersburg and Moscow continued to filter up from activists on the ground to the revolutionary press. *Vpered's* newspaper was also a major reporter on strikes and other disturbances among the workers and peasants in the period 1877-8. This was significant for several reasons: it demonstrated to readers that, despite the routs and trials and government cautions sent to factory owners and local police, the socialists were still able to get 'their people' in with the workers and so to the central force of the revolutionary movement; since official and 'free press' reportage on strikes had been extremely limited after the Nevskii strike of 1870 and the ensuing panic among the conservative papers, these reports also had an important documentary function. Like the many arrests and searches going on around the empire, the authorities treatment of working people, and the reasons for the workers' 'rebellion' against their bosses, would remain hidden from the view of a potential, wider public and, moreover, would be lost to history, without such documentation. It was, finally, beneficial for activists and sympathisers to be acquainted with the 'concrete reality' of life in Russia, since it was only the exposure to facts - concrete facts - that allowed revolutionary thought to develop away from its starting point in abstractions and towards a better understanding of its own principles and tasks.³²

The documentary function of the revolutionary press - both a social critique in support of principles and the concrete, sometimes personalising, underbelly that gave weight (facts, experience, even 'humanity') to abstract theories - was taken up much more overtly by an historiographical project that aimed to publish rare and obscure materials. This project was founded in the early 1880s³³ by activists close to the NV, expanded in the late 1890s and 1900s under the wing of the NV's various successors, and joined by both the 'legal' and 'underground' SDs at the same time. V. Bazilevskii (a.k.a. Bogucharskii), by the late 1890s a 'legal Marxist' in the manner of Tugan-Baranovskii or Struve, the author of a now classic (then,

³¹ See *Zemlia i Volia*, 2 November, 1878, no. 2, *RZh*, p. 232-3; *ibid*, February, 1879, no. 4, *RZh*, p. 344-58; *Nachalo*, March, 1878, no. 1, *RZh*, p. 117-24,

³² The opening editorial statement of *Nachalo* ran: 'Our organ, as a journal, will not primarily concern itself with theoretical questions, but with a critique of the existing social system and the bringing to light of the facts of contemporary life from the perspective of socialist principles' (*Nachalo*, March, 1878, no. 1, *RZh*, p. 1-2). This echoes the statement of the first issue of *Vpered* from 1873: 'Precise facts - these are the foundation on which we hope to stand...The facts of Russian life will be collected in the main centres of that life, and commented on by people who are able to get close to its processes' ('Nasha programma,' *Vpered!*, v. 1, (1873), p. 2.).

³³ The first overtly 'historical' collection was the *Kalendar Narodnoi Voli* (1883), part of which is reprinted in *Narodnaia Volia v dokumenty i vospominaniakh*, A. V. Iakimova-Dikovskaia and M. F. Frolenko (eds.), (Moscow, 1930).

controversial) history of ‘going to the people’ and the social-revolutionary movement that followed, *Aktivnoe Narodnichestvo semides’iat’ykh godov* (*The Narodnik Movement of the 1870s*, Moscow, 1912), along with V. Burtsev (the famous spyhunter, the denouncer of ‘Asef,’ and an independent revolutionary)³⁴ and Kravchinskii, was able in the 1890s and early 1900s to put together a number of documentary collections, including *Za Sto Let* (1897), the *Gosudarstvennoe Prestuplenie* (1906) series and its supplementary volumes (*Materialy dlia istorii*, 1906), and compendiums of the revolutionary press from the 1870s and 1880s (*Revoliutsionnye Zhurnalistiki*, 1905, and *Literatura Partii Narodnoi Voli*, 1906). Burtsev was also instrumental to the creation of the best-known historical journal of the pre-1917 period, *Byloe*, conceived (according to Burtsev) while in a prison cell in London in 1897.³⁵ Though technically independent of the SRs, the journal was originally attached to and funded by the ‘populist party,’ and thus took part in a struggle with the SDs, correcting what was considered to be the flaws in the Marxist version of Russian revolutionary history.³⁶ The apparent ‘party’ aims of the journal were in some sense linked to its wider task:

Byloe is devoted to the study of the history of the revolutionary and social movements: our task is to tell the readers *what was* and how it was... We wish especially to acquaint our readers with the struggle of 1878-81, of which our present movement has only the weakest knowledge. This ignorance can only lead to mistakes...The experiences [*opyta*] of the revolutionary movements of the past might now serve as a guiding light for the future.³⁷

Similar sentiments regarding the importance for the thought and practice of ‘all thinking Russian people’ are to be found in the editorial statements of the *GP* series and of *Za Sto Let*.³⁸ Significantly, the latter (published 1897, planned and compiled with help of the Russian Free Press in London from 1895 onwards) declared itself a ‘non-party’ publication and appealed to all its readers, conscious of the ‘essential need’ for historical materials on the movement, to make them available for publication, when and where possible.³⁹ They commented that, with tight censorship in Russia and a lack of funding abroad, historical materials were being left in private archives, unavailable either to ‘experts and specialists’ or to the wider movement. Here, then, the notion of historical publications as being both practically useful to social-

³⁴ See N. Schleisner, *Undercover Agents in the Russian Revolutionary Movement: the SR Party* (Basingstoke, 1988), p. x, 29; see also V. Burtsev, *V pogone za provokatorami* [1928] (Moscow, 1989).

³⁵ V. Burtsev, *Bor’ba za svobodnuiu Rossiiu* (Berlin, 1933), p. 144-6, 147, 150; see also ‘Golosa revoliutsii,’ *Byloe*, 1926, no. 2 (Moscow), p. 4-5.

³⁶ Burtsev, *Bor’ba*, p. 149-50.

³⁷ ‘Ot redakterei zhurnala Byloe,’ *Byloe*, 1900, no. 1 (London), p. 59-60

³⁸ See *GP* 1, i-ii; ‘Predisloviia izdatelei,’ *ZSL*, [i] (no page numbers marked).

³⁹ ‘Predisloviia...,’ *ZSL*, ii.

revolutionaries *generally* ('...[past] experience might shine a light on the future...'), as well as to *historians* of the movement ('experts and specialists') were given equal weight. Each of these publications had the express intention of continuing what the revolutionary press had aimed to do in the late 1870s and 1880s: preserving revolutionary experience for the future, making facts available to activists and thinkers as a bolster to their principles, concepts, and categories, demonstrating (after the fact) the human cost of the movement, the reason behind government repression and the actual people victimised by it. Bazilevskii's collections wore on their sleeve the intentions that Lavrov would (only a little later) claim for his *Narodniki-Propagandisty* in 1907, viz., of providing not a *history* as it might be possible in the future, with historians distant, in some way estranged from the past in the way its 'participant-historians' could not be, but the *materials* for such a history. And though on page after page of stenographic records of trials and bits of government newspapers, it was expected that the prominent figures of a movement dimly remembered would return to the memory of the revolutionary movement, neither Bazilevskii nor Kravchinskii *knew* what use might be made of the information they had collected. Neither its practical nor its historical significance were given by the editors' in an open interpretation. It was, however, assumed to be *there*, waiting to be brought out by a future, 'objective' history. *Byloe*, filling its pages with detailed chronologies, lists of historically important places, and official documents, balanced out its documentary function with a selection of materials related specifically to the movements' most renowned heroes: the assassins of Aleksandr II above all, but also the more obscure figures – then behind the scenes – who by death or exile had earned an individual place in the historical record.⁴⁰ It was also in *Byloe* that the self-made histories of individuals – memoir materials, preserved letters, remembrances of friends, etc, were first published in bulk, giving us the historical writings of Sinegub, Dzhabidari, Lukashevich, Kropotkin, Figner, and others.

Autobiographical and memoir writing had some models and precedents in the recent history of the revolutionary movement. These traditions, rich but fragmented, were passed along to the revolutionary convicts and would-be memoirists of 1877-8 by a number of channels. There were *models* of autobiography; there were *conceptual links* between individuality and writing that linked the circles of the 1870s to their predecessors in the 1840s and '50s; there were also

⁴⁰ In the first issue of *Byloe*, the editors asked specifically for readers to send whatever materials they might have towards 'biographies of Zheliabov, Perovskaia, Khalturin, Sukhanov, A. Mikhailov, V. Figner, Bogdanovich, Lopatin, Stepniak [Kravchinskii], Nechaev, Tkachev,' which is to say, a greater part very closely connected (and most directly involved in) the highpoint of revolutionary terror in 1879-81. ('Ot redakterei...', *Byloe*, 1900, no. 1, p. 62).

shared *conditions* of writings that produced in each similar characteristics. All the influences were linked, and played a role in shaping the eventual form and the content of revolutionaries' memoirs and other writings. There were a few extant models of autobiography by Russian revolutionaries by the 1870s. Aleksandr Herzen's *Byloe i Dumoe (My Past and Thoughts)*,⁴¹ his earlier *S togo berega (From the Other Shore)*⁴² belong to this category. Whether or not particular memoirists in the 1870s had actually *read* these works is difficult to say. Herzen had become less popular and his writings had fallen out of fashion by the 1870s; Lavrov, Bakunin and Chernyshevskii were 'theirs' in a way that Herzen had been for democrats and radicals in the 1850s. There were, of course, models of memoir writings that had influenced Herzen himself. One thinks especially of Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit (Truth and Poetry)*⁴³ and the associated genre of the *Bildungsroman*⁴⁴ that Goethe in part created, drawing on the notions of self-cultivation and self-development important to German literature and philosophy in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The circles of the 1870s had inherited a certain literary taste from its predecessors in the 1830s and 1840s. Chernyshevskii and Dobroliubov, idealised by the *chaikovtsy* as much as by the ZiV (who mounted several attempts to rescue him from exile), kept alive an interest in aesthetics and ethics when the rise of the scientific attitude in the 1860s threatened to bury it. It has been shown that the notions of self-formation (*samoobrazovanie*) and self-development (*samorazvitie*) were still important parts of the intellectual and practical world of the social-revolutionary circles in the early 1870s. Herzen's *Byloe i Dumoe* and Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* are connected not only through *direct* influence, but also through the shared concept and a shared culture of *Bildung* or self-formation, which passed from Goethe's age through Schiller and Hegel into the Russian intellectual circles of the 1830s and 1840s. Though these concepts and the means of realising them had been altered radically by social-revolutionary doctrine and the 'turn to the *narod*' – self-reliance through physical labour having been added to the classical concept of *Bildung* (a striving for personal wholeness by a conscious duty to principle) – it is clear that the *chaikovtsy* and the *dolgushintsy* especially were still deeply set within a political-moral culture that celebrated the *particular person*. Thus, the observation of one historian of the movement - Morozov, around 1880 - regarding the early aims of the *chaikovtsy*: 'Their aim was to...move closer to one

⁴¹ A. I. Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts: The Memoirs of Alexander Herzen*, translated by C. Garnett and H. Higgins, (London, 1974).

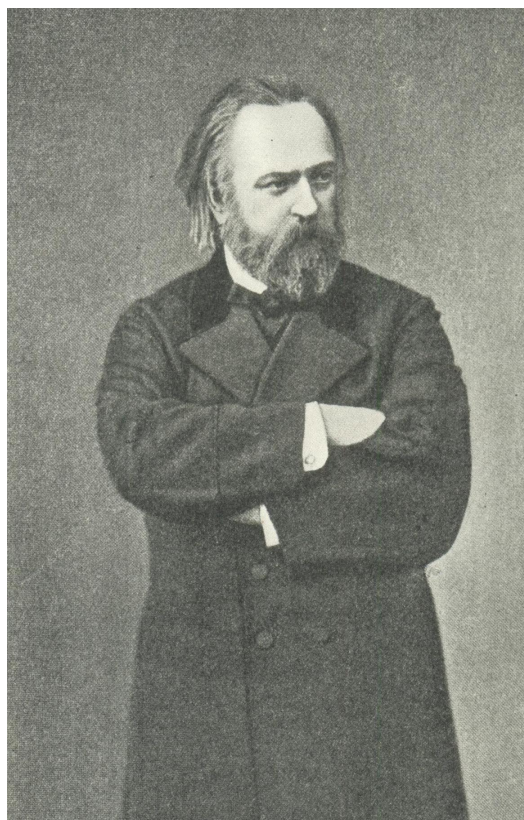
⁴² Idem, 'S togo berega' (1850), *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow, 1986), p. 3-117.

⁴³ J. W. von Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit* [1811-33], (Frankfurt am Main, 1975); *The Autobiography of Goethe: Truth and Poetry: form my own life*, translate by J. Oxenford (London, 1881).

⁴⁴ Idem, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* [1795-9], (Stuttgart, 2000); *Wilhelm Meisters' apprenticeship*, translated by E. A. Blackall (New York, 1989).

another on the basis of personal sympathy and in general, to get to know each other, so that later, joint activities would not fall through because of mistrust and misunderstandings.’⁴⁵ The synthesis of ‘duty’ and ‘principle’ with the knowledge and formation of personalities is reasonably clear in this passage. The transformation affected in the notion of *samoobrazavanie* from the 1830s to the 1870s is also obvious: personal sympathy and understanding (the knowledge of particular people’s strengths and weaknesses) was ultimately a means to an end, a means to fulfil one’s duties to the ‘cause.’ Should the personality be buried beneath the social laws that commitment reflected? Or should the person and his consciousness and commitment be celebrated precisely as models of a future, free society of mutual recognition? The problem was expressed in a variety of ways after the routs and during the Great Trials. Personal sympathy was rejected as a basis for the organisation of a revolutionary party: the anonymity and indifference of conspiratorial culture would replace it. Yet, at the same time, the ‘greats’ of the movement – Chernyshevskii, Dobroliubov, even Nechaev – as well and a new crop of martyrs, were being lauded for their heroism, for their particular self-sacrifices.

10. Aleksandr Herzen⁴⁶



⁴⁵ [Morozov], ‘Ocherk...,’ *RN* 1, p. 219.

⁴⁶ Sack, *Birth of Russian Democracy*, p. 35.

What the revolutionaries of the 1870s shared with the literary and philosophical circles of the 1830s, through the concept of self-formation, was not a particular way of thinking about and writing about particular individuals, but a dilemma: the relation between the personality and circumstance, or nature and society (social laws, people, events, contingency). Goethe had his own take on the question of their relation, and worked his way out of the puzzle by his writing. He had been influenced heavily⁴⁷ by a reading of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which (put crudely) the philosopher had argued that knowledge of the world was formed in the interaction of innate categories of sensation and understanding with the external world. The world was 'formed' by the categories of thought and sensation as much as the world of things and relations imposed itself upon the human mind from the outside. Thus, in Kant, there was a tension between the 'external world' and what could possibly be known about it 'through' a priori structures of the mind, between the actions of the subject and the existence of objects. Kant's philosophy aimed to explain the possibility of knowledge in general; Goethe, in contrast, made the interaction and conflict of the inner nature and the outer world (or personality and surroundings) a matter of the *specific, unique* person, with specific and unique natures, conflicts, and experiences. Thus, in the novel *Wilhelm Meisters' Wanderjahre* (1795-6), the main character functioned as 'a centre of a configuration around which everything else finds its orbit.'⁴⁸ As Schiller, an admirer of the novel and its most famous critic, wrote: 'Wilhelm...is the most necessary, but not the most important character...everything happens around him and to him, but not wholly because of him.'⁴⁹ The characters in the *Bildungsroman* would not develop, as scientific theories of the day were arguing,⁵⁰ according to some pre-ordained internal nature or by the pressure of external, social or natural laws; the plot was the movement towards the central character's 'formation' between particular situations, events, conditions, and other people, and the inner 'potential' of the particular person's nature.⁵¹ Goethe's own *Dichtung und Wahrheit* opened with the metaphor of the seed and the cultivation that would make it 'what it was.' The growth of the seed was not *necessary*, and its particular way of growing and blossoming would depend on the particular way it was cultivated; however, no amount of cultivation would make the seed of an oak tree issue an orchid.⁵² Necessity and contingency – the inner and the outer worlds – were therefore connected together, organically, in a process of

⁴⁷ M. Minden, *The German Bildungsroman: Incest and Influence* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 18.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 17.

⁴⁹ Cited in *ibid*, p. 17.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 16, 18.

⁵¹ M. Swales, *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse* (Princeton, 1978), 6; 17.

⁵² Goethe, *Truth and Poetry* (1989), p. i.

‘cultivation’ or ‘formation.’ Since self-reflection and self-representation were a part of the way in which a personality was formed, Goethe’s own autobiography was not just a document or a representation of ‘how Goethe became Goethe,’ but also a constituent and an *active* moment in Goethe’s own formation.

In Herzen’s work, the lines dividing external circumstance and personality were sharper, more antagonistic, than either *Wilhelm Meisters’* ‘formation’ or in Goethe’s autobiographical works. Goethe’s were set in realms of relative placidity, Herzen’s *Byloe i Dumoe* was from the outset a record of violent shocks, traumas, and events that seemed to break through whatever calm he or those who surrounded him had been able to establish. The story opens with his nanny’s tales of Napoleon and the burning of Moscow, moving through the circles of the 1830s, arrest, a first exile on measly charges, the Revolutions of 1848 – seen at first hand – bitter disappointments; emigration, a turn to Russia and the *narod*.⁵³ In the last case, Herzen expressed individually a conflict of principles and desires that would be characteristic of the radical thought of the 1860s and 1870s: calling for a peasant *bunt*, violent and unforgiving, he was aware that the little civilisation that he and a few others had made for themselves in autocratic Russia might also be swept away.⁵⁴ If, in the 1870s, self-sacrifice was raised to a principle – written into regulations and guidebooks for would-be revolutionaries⁵⁵ – for Herzen it was important to keep the outcomes and the aims of such sacrifices in mind. Individual happiness - not in the abstract sense of universal equality or universal justice, but in the concrete sense of his freedom, and the freedom of his comrades and friends – had to be preserved, even against the readiness of so many young people to downplay their own individuality for the sake of principle, and thus downplay the importance of concrete, individual freedoms in general. In the flight from the abstractions of his younger self (he tended to look upon his earlier years with a mixed sense of amusement, embarrassment, and melancholy), he was resistant to making ‘the cause,’ and any social law thought to be behind it, the be all and end all of his own activities. And the same followed for his autobiographical writings. Schiller’s description of *Wilhelm Meisters’* fits nicely to Herzen’s *Byloe i Dumoe*: Herzen is indeed at the centre, as an organising principle, a perspective, and as a personality, and it is indeed his ‘formation’ that concerns the work and ties its various episodes together, but it is also the interplay of unexpected events, details, shocks – actual experiences - that the book is concerned to describe. Thus the characteristic feature of the

⁵³ Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, *passim*.

⁵⁴ Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, p. 208-9.

⁵⁵ Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker*, p. 117.

memoir literature of the Russian revolutionaries – the central character being the most necessary, but not the most important; both the ‘principle’ that organises a story and a mere witness to the events suffered, then described – was already in Herzen’s autobiographical works, in its own, idiosyncratic form.

It cannot be forgotten that Herzen and his contemporaries wrote their memoirs and autobiographies under the pressure of political repression and persecution. Prison and exile mark the writings of Herzen as much as those of the social-revolutionary memoirists, and it is even possible to say that Herzen was an ‘exile writer’- he writes in number of ways from the outside of what he thinks himself to belong: Russia, revolutionary doctrine, the socialist movement. In that sense, Herzen was already afflicted by the dilemma of Russian social-revolutionism: what role should be played by individuals in a movement whose central tenet is the powerlessness of isolated individuals, and moreover, the relative marginality of intellectuals to its development? What distinguished Herzen and his works from the later social revolutionary historiography was the relative emphasis placed upon the ‘political’ and ‘historical’ meanings of their actions and their writings. Whereas, for Herzen, the historical value (knowledge preserved) and the political value (the pedagogical function; the ‘moral’) were incidental to his autobiographical writing, since it was his story and his experiences that were made central, for the revolutionary historiography of the late 1870s, historical and political values were primary, and the individual – even the conscious, freely committed individual activist and author – was the bearer of a certain function, a duty imposed by political exigency and by the cause itself. Thus, approaching the question of preserving for the movement the experiences of ‘going to the people,’ the memoir form presented itself as appropriate, but in circumstances and within a doctrine that tended to emphasise the audience over the author, the repeatable moment of experience over its unique and once-occurrent moment. Revolutionary memoirs were, then composed to be ‘useful’: personal experience was preserved for the sake of others (as lessons learned and shared); personal sacrifice was to be represented in such a way as to persuade and garner sympathy for a movement that still needed more resources, more money, more members, and simple recognition from the ‘educated public’ and its youthful element.

In 1877, while in prison awaiting the conclusion of the ‘Trial of the Fifty’ the defendants planned a collection of documents (including memoirs, profiles, and vignettes), that would bring together materials explaining the Trial, its causes, the events that had led up to it, and its

proceedings. The proposed *sbornik* (collection) would include ‘speeches, stories, proclamations,’ and have an explanatory introduction that would place these disparate materials in some sort of context, explaining their connections and their meaning. According to Lukashevich and Muravskii, the *sbornik* was ‘necessary to attract followers to their side,’ since the sympathy of their audience – Russian ‘society’⁵⁶ – would only be gained through ‘knowledge of what actually happened.’⁵⁷ They added that the *sbornik* would be ‘a gift to the tradition that follows us’: only with ‘detailed and accurate’ accounts of ‘going to the people’ and its suppression would ‘mistakes be corrected in the future.’ By using such material, the ‘tradition to follow’ would benefit with more realistic, informed, and practical programmes of action.⁵⁸ Hence, the political and the historical goals of the *sbornik* were merged together. Circumstances had taken away the voice of most of the defendants: Myshkin would speak for all of them, since the others had refused to stand on the first day of proceedings. What was left for the public consumption, then were only ‘the materials from our own testimonies to the police,’ the evidence given by witnesses, and the ‘official history’ that tied them together.⁵⁹ It was against this ‘history’ that Myshkin’s speech and his confessions were directed. Both the immediate political aims and the long term, historical aims therefore fit together. The defendants would become witnesses to their own actions and to the state’s repression by adding their stories and experiences to a counter-history that was made public by Bardina, Zdanovich, Alekseev, and Myshkin in 1877-8.

What sort of materials did this planned *sbornik* produce? The prison administration, reporting in this case to the Third Department, caught wind of the plan only a couple of days after Lukashevich and Muravskii’s note was circulated, bringing the work inside the prison to a halt.⁶⁰ But Lukashevich and many other of the defendants did go on to write memoirs of going to the people: Lukashevich’s *V narod!*, first published in *Byloe* in 1907,⁶¹ was based on the notes he had made while in prison between 1875 and 1878. Read in the context of the *sbornik* note, with the longer, less immediate traditions of revolutionary autobiography (Herzen and his relation to Goethe; *Bildung* and *samoobrazovanie*) kept in mind, Lukashevich’s memoir demonstrates the continuing tension between the desire to ‘grasp’ experiences for political and

⁵⁶ ‘Obrashchenie M. D. Muravskogo i A. O. Lukashevicha...,’ *RN* 1, p. 367.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 368-9.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 369.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 367-8.

⁶⁰ *Zapiski III otdeleniia...o nelegal’nyoi deiatel’nost’ podsudnikh protsess “193-kh...”* *RN* 1, p. 392-3.

⁶¹ *Byloe*, no. 3, 1907; it was republished in *Krasnaia Letopis’*, no.2, 1926, and then again in *Revoliustionery 1870-kh godov*. It is the latter version that I have used below.

historical ends – for the sake of something external to the author, and the desire to grasp and assimilate experiences for the sake of the individual and his or her ‘formation.’ There is, then, a mixture of useful experience (*opyt*) and lived experience (*perezhivanie*) in the memoir. These are ‘moments’ that are given in the writing itself; but one can be emphasised at the expense of the other. Read as ‘personal identity,’ the ‘useful’ moment and the political-historiographical context are lost; read (or used) as documentation, the political and historical significance of ‘lived experience’ is obscured. The ‘political baggage’ of circumstance and doctrine can be placed to one side, but this takes away from the writing its intention and thus a part of its meaning.

Lukashevich tells the story of how he entered the *chaikovtsy* circle in 1873, recording his impressions of its members, detailing the plans and the practical activities of the group, then his journey into the countryside around March-June, 1874 with his friend, D. A. Aitov. From the point of view of Lukashevich’s own actions, two events were key: his acceptance into the *chaikovskii* circle, and the arrest and suicide of one of the circle’s younger members, V. A. Bogolomov. Aitov, Bogolomov and Lukashevich had during 1873 worked together in a blacksmiths’ workshop that they had set up in Kherson, along the lines set out a few years before in Chernyshevskii’s novel, *Chto delat’* (*What is to be Done?*).⁶² He had been recommended to the circle in Petersburg by F. B. Volkhovskii, meeting shortly afterwards with N. Charushin, and attending a few informal meetings at one of the circle’s communal apartments (he does not specify). Here he was first introduced to the circle’s propaganda activities among the workers on the Vyborg side, Nevskii gate and on Vasil’evskii Island, witness to ‘the spirited way in which the [propagandists] spoke of their successes to their comrades, having brought in new recruits from among the *fabrichnye* and *zavodskie* workers.’⁶³ Around 1872-3 (Lukashevich writes), several of those later to be the circle’s most prominent members were just joining up, notably, Kravchinskii in 1872, and his friend from the Mikhailovskii artillery school, L. Shishko, in the spring of 1873. After a short spell at home, returned to the Kherson circle were he has begun his ‘self-development’ in late 1871 and early 1872, Lukashevich was finally introduced to ‘Borodin,’ ‘marked out from the rest of the crowd by his long beard... His great mind and unusual goodness felt through his deep, piercing

⁶² Lukashevich, ‘V narod!’, *Revoliutsionnery 70-kh godov*, p. 139, 141.

⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 138.

eyes.⁶⁴ ‘Borodin’ turned out to be Kropotkin, a veteran of the socialist movement in Europe, a former member of the International, and ‘more radical than most of our so-called comrades in the movement.’⁶⁵ The meeting with Borodin signalled a change in Lukashevich’s status for the other *chaikovtsy*. Kuprianov was at Lukashevich’s flat one night, arguing about practical work among the *narod*, when ‘with the tender smile I liked so much,’ informed Lukashevich that he was now a full member of the circle: ‘I still remember this as the happiest day of my past [revolutionary] career.’⁶⁶

Lukashevich’s memoirs are not a simple, mechanical relation of facts: they are not just a ‘document.’ In so far as the ‘counter-history’ was aimed at humanising and making concrete the ‘going to the people’ movement for outsiders, the descriptions of his friends, their gestures, and appearances, was more than the added colour of first-hand experience: reflecting the place of personal sympathy in the historical *chaikovtsy* circle, Lukashevich’s story indulges in ‘reminiscences’ of the most personal kind. The two moments of the memoir – its political function and its self-directed, personal one – are closely connected. The arrest and suicide of Bogolomov in the early part of 1874 has the same split orientation: ‘I experienced his arrest as a deeply personal despair,’⁶⁷ Lukashevich writes, but within this despair there were two thoughts: on the one hand, fear that arrest loomed over all the *chaikovtsy* and over him in particular; on the other, that Bogolomov had ‘missed the real activities’ then in preparation.⁶⁸ For all its ‘deeply personal’ meaning, this arrest and suicide is related to a political position vis-à-vis the autocracy, and the political tasks then ready to be realised. This is emphasised when Lukashevich, almost off-handedly, comments that Bogolomov had been ‘the first victim, or at least, one of the first victims’: that is to say, of autocratic repression.⁶⁹ Though Lukashevich did not discuss the aims and the programmes of the *chaikovskii* circle in any great detail (this could be left to other, contemporary documents), the suicide was made to be a reminder to the audience of the (moral, political) reasoning behind the circle’s activities and its very existence. It was also the catalyst for Lukashevich and five others, paired up ‘according to existing friendships,’⁷⁰ to head out into the countryside: Usachev and Fomin to Kostromskaia *guberniia*,

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 139.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 139-40.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 140-1.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 141.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 141-2.

Teplov and Nefedov to Nizhegorodskaia, and Lukashevich and Aitov to Vladimirskaia.⁷¹ The immediate cause of their ‘going to the people,’ the suicide, described as an indirect criticism of the authorities against which they were struggling, also became the explanation for Lukashevich’s own, particular actions, and of those of his close friends.

Lukashevich’s account of ‘going to the people’ is part ‘confession’ (with the requisite distance maintained between the present and past ‘selves’), and part the revelation of *opyt*. Like Sinegub and Figner especially, Lukashevich looks upon his own, first trips and his own past actions – youthful, naïve, ‘green’ – with the distance granted by experience already assimilated. As in the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, Lukashevich’s personality is seen in its formation in the meeting point of external circumstances with his own aims and desires. He makes ‘individual shortcomings, the false starts and wrong choices...the driving force’ of the story.⁷² Going to the people was already rooted in a sense of failure – in the consciousness of the distance between concepts or images of the *narod* and its concrete reality; thus, in showing the meeting point between one and the other in formative experiences (mistakes, the acquisition of practical knowledge, etc.), both the *chaikovtsy*’s goal of self-formation for the sake of the cause, and the social-revolutionary goal of transforming abstract knowledge into the concrete of experience were both fulfilled by the memoir and by its relation of ‘useful experience.’ Lukashevich writes that, almost immediately upon leaving St. Petersburg, travelling through Klin to Dmitrov, he and Aitov were faced with the problem of what to do over the Easter period: neither had been raised in the Orthodox church, and thus the prospect of having to engage, in their disguises, in ‘unknown and alien religious customs,’ was not a pleasant one. They were petrified by the possibility that they would be recognised as ‘dressed-up students’: an immediate difficulty was the timing and location of their ‘transformation.’ At what point should they don their disguises? On the train? On the wander between the station and the villages? The wrong choice might raise suspicions among the ‘dark worker mass,’ by which they were now surrounded.⁷³

Having wondered out from Dmitrov to make their way from village to village, they finally arranged to stay in a peasant hut overnight. But only with difficulty: ‘We realised that

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 142.

⁷² Minden, *The German Bildungsroman*, p. 5; see also, Swales, *The German Bildungsroman*, p. 3.

⁷³ Lukashevich, ‘V narod,’ *Revoliutsionnery 70-kh godov*, p. 141.

“passersby” were taken in only suspiciously, and were taken in only after detailed conversations about their route and their purposes.’⁷⁴ They had not accounted for language either:

When we heard the question *ch'i budete?* [whose is that?] for the first time, we simply didn't understand, as if it had been said in a foreign language. The word *ch'i* seemed so strange, like some hangover from the times of serfdom, when, I suppose, it would have been natural to ask of a peasant, *ch'i oni?* [whose is he?].⁷⁵

‘Merging with the people’ (*sliianiia s narodom*) turned out to be more difficult than they had expected. In Petersburg ‘we had imagined,’ Lukashevich reflected, ‘that we need only desire work, and work would appear all by itself. But there, on the spot, work turned out to be difficult to find.’⁷⁶ As they travelled home from their first sojourn into the countryside, Lukashevich and Aitov pondered the questions of their own ‘moral order.’ The abstract phrase denoted in fact a discussion of their diet as propagandists. Could they eat what the peasants could not afford to, or simply wouldn't? The earlier question of shedding a privileged existence turned into the practical question of going about undetected.

With Lukashevich's 1877 *sbornik* in mind, the practical aspects of the memoir - the ‘gift’ given to the ‘tradition to follow’ (consisting of their ability to avoid certain mistakes and errors), is quite obvious. When placed next to the *sbornik* notes, Lukashevich's impressionistic account is virtually a guide book to ‘going to the people.’ Being ardent was one thing; planning for the details of such an endeavour was another. Even to know to plan for certain problems came only with experience. Documentation of these experiences – whatever the personal meaning for the author, or for the involved reader who had also participated, or for the many figures and personalities acknowledged in such works – would make the next wave of the movement more successful. Ultimately, what was personal would make the revolutionaries more sympathetic to their chosen audience: thus, as in P. A. Aleksandrov's's defence of Zasluch, the personal traits and circumstances of an action, the person ‘behind’ the act, was emphasised over the act itself. Kravchinskii, as ‘Stepniak’ an early historian of the movement, combined a strong and direct critique of Russian society and state with detailed, even intrusively personal accounts of the

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 144.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 144-5.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 145. See also ‘Pis'mo Lukashevicha brat'aimi P. P. i V. P. Serebrovskim,’ 25 August, 1874, *RN* 1, p. 262.

people who fought it: Zasulich was mortified by Kravchinskii's profile of her in *Podpol'naia Rossiia*, (*Underground Russia*),⁷⁷ but apparently it had the desired effect:

Smirnov had some connections with students, who now and then would visit our apartment...On one occasion one of them brought us the book *Underground Russia*, by Stepniak. Much of it was incomprehensible to us, especially the theoretical discussions, but some of the individual stories, the episodes from revolutionary life, and the characterisations made a powerful impression on us. It was all so terrible and frightening, yet at the same time we wanted to suffer for the common cause, to sacrifice ourselves in the same way as the heroes described in the book.⁷⁸

Personal sympathy inspired the desire to sacrifice oneself for the cause,' to suffer, and become an individual for history. But in history the individual became a means to inspire a 'sacrifice' whose underlying rationale came from a doctrine that marginalised 'individuals.' Whereas, in Kravchinskii's writings, the representation of certain individuals was designed with certain, political effects in mind, it was often the case both in memoirs and in the revolutionary press that the significance of a person, an event, or of a particular historical fact was not entirely exhausted by the use to which it was put by an author, the reasons for including it, or the intention of a writer serving a principle of one kind or another. Lukashovich's memoir was concerned with historical precision: the detail was there not only to add 'reality' through the colour and weight of concrete descriptions, but because it *could have been* historically significant. The tendency to list names, books, attendees at meetings, exact addresses of meetings, exact dates of events, was in part related to redeeming the revolutionary figures who had been slandered by the official history, and in part by the belief that such information would or could be useful to later generations of active revolutionaries and to historians. (Ironically, such details became the means by which memoirists' accounts were judged for reliability and truth...against the 'standard' of the official documentation archived by the authorities.) Storytelling, analysis and the collection of materials (usually 'rare,' or 'obscure,' or 'difficult to obtain') were often jumbled together. The nominal self-direction and self-reflection of autobiographical writing was then usurped by the more amorphous memoir form and its characteristic attitude to the author and the individual: that of *witness*.

⁷⁷ Stepniak [Kravchinskii], *Pod'polnaia Rossiia* (London, 1893); on Zasulich's reaction to the profile, see Patyk, L. E. 'Remembering "The Terrorism,"' p. 771.

⁷⁸ Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker*, p. 90-1.



11. Nikolai Morozov⁷⁹

Since the first attempts at ‘objective’ histories were by men who had participated in the movement and the events described, and since the authors of revolutionary memoirs were often reduced to ‘centres’ around which facts, observations and other bits of (possibly) useful stuff would orbit, the overlap of overt historiography with ‘personal memory’ was very great. In this regard, it is indicative that the first example of a history of the *chaikovskii* circle – the unattributed ‘Ocherk istorii kruzhka “Chaikovtsev”’ from c.1880, probably written by N. Morozov, was the subject of a debate between two Soviet historians, I. G. Liashenko and N. A. Troitskii, in which Troitskii claimed the ‘history’ was in fact the memoir of N. Chaikovskii himself, merely *collected* by Morozov (who was then researching a work on the movement of the 1870s). Liashenko argued instead that the ‘Ocherk’ was in fact a research essay by Morozov, i.e. a collection of notes and sketches towards an ‘objective’ history of the *chaikovskii* circle.⁸⁰ One can see the difficulties. The ‘Ocherk’ contains deeply personal

⁷⁹ Sack, *Birth of Russian Democracy*, p. 47.

⁸⁰ I. G. Liashenko, ‘Ob avtorstve i istorii sozdaniia rukopisi “Ocherk istorii kruzhka “Chaikovets,”’ *Istoriia SSSR*, no. 4, 1965, p. 145-50; I. G. Liashenko and N. A. Troitskii, ‘Versiia trebuet utochnenii (ob avtorstve rukopisi “Ocherk istorii kruzhka “Chaikovets”),’ *Istoriia SSSR*, no. 5, 1968, p. 129-35.

judgements regarding the major personalities in the circle – especially Natanson and Aleksandrov, (co-founders of the 1869 circle), on the Southern *buntary*,⁸¹ as well as long lists of reading materials used,⁸² the main members of the circle at various stages of its development,⁸³ details of monies collected and spent,⁸⁴ and other factual observations described so dryly as to evoke a police report rather than a ‘history’ or a ‘memoir.’ Yet, it was characteristic of memoir materials of the time to switch from narrative to documentary styles, from the personal to the political to the historical; it was also characteristic of ‘objective’ historical writings to break the affected distance from their objects by inclusion of overtly subjective judgements.

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The conjuncture of 1877-8, informed by changes in the organisation of the movement and the confrontation of the circles with the autocracy, put the tensions most noticeable in Alekseev and Myshkin’s speeches and memoir into the form and the content of the materials of the new revolutionary historiography. The conflict of individuality and social law or class is more notable in the speeches, and especially in Alekseev’s, since in describing himself he was also directly describing socially determined actions and the *class*. Memoirs themselves, written into the space between political-propagandistic tasks, personal aims, and a historical function, then merged these aspects together to create narratives and description in which the author was sometimes the *subject* (it was emphasised that this was the author’s own story), and sometimes the *witness* to a story (or set of stories). That this same tension was a feature of the *Bildungsroman* tradition and of Herzen’s own, special take on it, means that, superficially, and when removed from its political-historical contexts, the immediate and long-term functions of these texts disappear to leave them in Herzen’s tradition of ‘writing about the self.’ What is then missed is that the ‘self’ was usually, if not always, secondary to these functions – a means to political and historiographical ends. With an historiographical project that aimed to collect and distribute useful experiences, it was necessarily the abstract side of individuality – found in the desire for a sympathy that would prove the universality of moral values, and in the notion that particular, past experiences, once assimilated, could be reapplied or learned from in future situations – that were being emphasised by these authors.

⁸¹ [Morozov], ‘Ocherk,’ *RN* 1, p. 241, 215-6.

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 226-7.

⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 216, 219-20, 223.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 223.

What this meant for the ‘worker-writers’ - indeed, the very validity of the categorisation of writings in this way – will be seen shortly. Certainly it was the case that Alekseev’s role as ‘class-witness’ was carried through revolutionary historiography, becoming a model for worker writers. What distinguished the memoirists of the post-1917 period (Smirnov, Volkov, Aleksandrov, Peterson) were two things: a/ their relations to their class as historical actors and b/ the history to which they were responding. As for the revolutionaries of 1877-8, an official history – mostly hidden in internal, government documents, occasionally allowed to see a little light – already existed before they came to write about themselves and their own histories; but a revolutionary historiography predated their writings also, most by thirty years or more. Several accounts within this historiography had already dealt with these particular workers specifically. The ways in which workers were described, and allowed to enter the social-revolutionary historiography, drew from its origins in the late 1870s, but added political divisions and polemics into the mix.

II. PARTY POLITICS, HISTORIOGRAPHY, AND WORKER-REVOLUTIONARIES

Though the basic conception underlying the social-revolutionary historiographical project was shared by all its fractions – and this followed from their common adherence to narodism as workers’ self-emancipation – the recollection, collection and narration of ‘useful experience’ was noticeably affected by the division of the movement into fractions, and then into adversarial parties, through the 1880s and 1890s. What was to be taught to aspiring revolutionaries, the choice of what might inspire others, still wavering, to join them, was strongly influenced by developments within the social-revolutionary movement around the time of Aleksandr II’s death. The movement had, of course, been split many times over the course 1870s. Few of these splits between groups were quite as meaningful to the organisations and circles within Russia as they were to the émigrés revolutionaries who generally initiated and sustained them in their own circles and their literature.⁸⁵ Notably, from propagandistic to

⁸⁵ The disagreements between Lavrov and Bakunin in the late 1860s, and between Lavrov and Tkachëv in the early to mid-1870s, are good examples of splits that were expressed (and recorded) in terms of principles or tactics theoretical, but often underpinned by disputes over resources (libraries, journals, money), supporters and authority within the émigré communities in Zurich, Geneva, Paris, etc. This is not to say that such differences were always *unimportant* to the circles and groups within Russia (the practical consequences for them could be quite severe), only that the relatively detailed documentation of polemic and disagreement between intellectuals

philosophical works, and even in relatively private documents such as letters and diaries, a strong consensus on historical reference points can be seen across the entire movement, at least until the late 1870s. Hence, in the works of Herzen, Chernyshevskii, Pisarev, Bakunin (both before and after his imprisonment in the 1850s), Lavrov, Tkachëv, and in the social-revolutionary journalism of 1861-81, there are similar references to (and interpretations of) the popular revolts of Sten'ka Razin (1670-1) and Emel'ka Pugachëv (1773-5), the French Revolution and its Napoleonic downturn, the Decembrist uprising of 1825, and (most importantly) the peasant reforms of 1861. The break-up of ZiV into two groups – the 'terroristic' NV and 'narodnik' ChP in June, 1879, and the transformation of the intellectual core of the ChP into the overtly 'Marxist' OT group at the beginning of the 1880s, did have noticeable consequences for the documentary and narrative historiography of the revolutionary movement. Plekhanov's *Russkii rabochii* is a case in point. OT, from the mid-1880s to the early 1890s struggling to make and maintain contact with social-democratic and workers' groups still in Russia, began to tailor its publications to the immediate tasks it had set out, on the basis of its social-democratic positions, for the Russian working class and, especially, its forward, conscious element, the worker-*intelligenty*. Part of the work of the OT was, then, the translation of classic socialist (Marxist) works, a task undertaken in the main by Plekhanov and Zasulich, yielding the *Communist Manifesto* in 1883, along with a number of works by Engels and the German social-democrats. Besides this was the creation of a specific *workers'* literature – written by, attributable to, or otherwise directly related to the Russian workers involved in the revolutionary movement. Alekseev's speech was part of this literature, as was Plekhanov's *Russkii Rabochii*.

During the 1880s the NV and the OT group were willing to work together to produce materials in part historical, in part propagandistic in nature, based on a recognised and stated identity of interests, and a coincidence of 'audience' among the peasants and workers. Thus the 'Socialist Library' was originally a joint project, headed by Plekhanov and Lavrov through the early 1880s. Many of the same materials were being published by the NV and OT group independently of each other: the speeches of 1877-8 (Alekseev; Bardina, Zdanovich, Myshkin) being a case in point. However, with Plekhanov and the OT's self-definition as 'Marxists,' and

outside Russia (articles, programmes and their drafts, letters, diaries) and the necessarily lighter (internal or 'self'-) documentation of the harassed organisations within Russia distorts the historians' view of things from the outset, as well as the memoirist's retrospective view of 'how things were' in the movement they themselves participated in.

the concomitant definition of the NV, its successors and some economists as ‘Populist’ (*narodniki*), party ideologies, programmes and (particularly) the *exact* identity of Russia’s revolutionary subject began in the mid-1880s to have concrete effects on the attitude of these groups to workers and thus to the description and analysis of the history of the early worker-revolutionaries of the 1870s.⁸⁶ It was by 1885 Plekhanov’s contention that the NV was a peasant-oriented party, with little or no interest in the urban, industrial proletariat, rejecting (in theory) the political struggle, bourgeois political freedoms, and placing its hopes for socialism in the communal landholding and communal culture of the Russian peasantry. This was contrasted to the overtly political stance of the OT, a ‘Marxist’ (or social-democratic) group, whose claim was that Russian socialism would only be reached now by way of capitalism and the struggle of the workers, through their ‘workers’ party,’ with the autocracy, for the sake of the political freedoms that would make socialist revolution a real possible in the future. In a series of weighty pamphlets, Plekhanov, Aksel’rod, Zasluchich and Lev Deich – the major figures in the OT, all drawn from the failed, ultra-‘*narodnik*’ ChP of 1879-81 – argued that the NV’s theories had fallen behind its practice, and that the Marxist OT could correct this imbalance. Plekhanov’s arguments in support of this position appealed to ‘revolutionary experience,’ in three different senses: firstly, *Russkii rabochii*’s personal, retrospective representation of his own experience of ‘going to the people’ with the ZiV in 1876-9, with special attention paid to the urban workers and revolutionaries; secondly, the historical experience of the Russian workers in their struggle with the autocracy, a struggle that pointed towards the *political* revolution that the NV had rejected ‘in principle,’ but taken up themselves, in a limited way, in practice, and thirdly: the idea that social development, moving according to certain laws, pushed ahead of ‘consciousness,’ but would eventually correct it. Plekhanov made himself and

⁸⁶ In so far as Plekhanov’s *terminology* is concerned, the division of ‘Marxism’ from ‘Populism,’ at least in the 1880s, was highly misleading. In 1883, Plekhanov’s own definition of narodism as a ‘practical tendency’ (a revolution for and by the working class; workers’ self-emancipation) showed that the central tenet of narodism was still shared by the social-revolutionary movement as a whole, including the OT’s ‘Marxists’ (Plekhanov, ‘Sotsializm,’ *IFP*, 51/ *SPW*, p. 49). It was claimed by one scholar that, in the 1880s and even the 1890s, self-declared Marxists in Russia were also ‘proud to call themselves *narodniki*,’ and given Plekhanov’s own definition, this makes sense (see White, *Karl Marx*, p. 25); the division of ‘Marxists’ and ‘Populists’ would not have done for contemporary audiences (at least initially). Moreover, Plekhanov’s own writings as a member of the ZiV and as the leader of ChP – heavily influenced by Marx’s writings– demonstrated the formative influence of Marx and his major, published works (*The Civil War in France* and *Capital* vol. I especially) on the young people and intellectuals involved in ‘going to the people’ in 1869-75, the ZiV, and the NV between 1875 and the early 1880s (see Plekhanov, *Soch.* 1). The NV’s successors, the Socialist-Revolutionary party, through their historical journal, *Byloe*, republished the NV’s letters to Marx and précised Marx’s attitudes to the NV again before the 1905 revolution, apparently with the same aims in mind: the ‘master’ was being used against his too-fervent disciples (see *Byloe*, 1900, no. 1 London), p. 23-6).

his OT group the mouthpieces of a material process (the creation of a proletariat; the development of capitalism in Russia) ‘becoming conscious of itself’ through their agency.

Plekhanov’s historical views and memories merged with his ideas about ‘instinct,’ ‘experience,’ and the movements of ‘reason.’ In the first *concrete* history of the Russian workers’ movement (and certainly the first overt contribution to the historiography of the Russian worker-*intelligenty*), the overlap between ‘useful experience’ and present political tasks was great. What was added to this amalgamation of ‘history’ and ‘action’ was an ideology which specifically valorised the experiences and the actions of workers by means of historical writing. The ‘historical consciousness’ Plekhanov and the OT had inherited from the movement of the 1870s was then tailored to overtly propagandistic and polemical goals. Some years after the political trials of the mid-1870s, Plekhanov was waging war with the editors of *Vestnik Narodnoi Voli* (‘Herald of the People’s Will,’ hereafter *VNV*), utilising his own distinction between the ‘Marxist’ worldview and that of the ‘subjective sociology’ of P. Lavrov and L. Tikhomirov in one of his most famous works, *Nashi raznoglasiia* (‘Our Differences,’ 1885, hereafter *Nashi*) to offer an explanation of the interaction between the ‘individual’ and ‘society’:

The Russian intellectual had to take an intense interest in the question of the role of the individual in history. Much has been written on this cursed question...and yet Russian public figures are still often incapable even of distinguishing the sphere of the *necessary* from that of the *desirable*...For us the desirable arises from the necessary and in no case replaces it in our arguments. For us the freedom of the individual consists in the knowledge of the laws of nature – including, incidentally, the laws of history – and the ability to *submit* to those laws, that is, incidentally, to *combine them in the most favourable manner* [emphasis in original].⁸⁷

So focused was Plekhanov’s polemic on that other ‘accursed question’ of the future of capitalism in Russia (which is traced in *Nashi* through Herzen and Chernyshevskii to Bakunin and Tkachëv) that for the historian it is habitual to see the relationship of social determination to individual action outlined in it as nothing more than an appeal to the ‘dialectic’ (the ‘laws of nature’ and ‘history,’ as Plekhanov puts it) – that is, to see the problem in terms of abstract ideas.⁸⁸ And since Plekhanov’s ‘Marxist’ arguments in the 1880s were specifically borne of a polemical campaign that aimed to sever the earlier Russian revolutionary tradition from the

⁸⁷ Plekhanov, ‘Nashi raznoglasiia’ [1884-5], *IFP*, p. 135-136 / ‘Our Differences,’ *SPW*, p. 128.

⁸⁸ See *ibid*, *IFP*, p. 136-169/ *SPW*, p. 129-161

influence of ‘scientific socialism’ (as well as distance Plekhanov himself from the revolutionary tradition he still belonged to),⁸⁹ it is all too easy to associate the radical ideas and actions of the early social revolutionaries with a sort of subjective, volunteerist ‘abuses’ outlined by Plekhanov in *Nashi* and the hugely influential *K voprosy o razvitii monisticheskogo vzgliada na istorii* (‘The Development of the Monist View of History,’ 1895, hereafter *K Voprosy*).⁹⁰ But the debate over the role of the individual is clearly present in the political speeches already cited above and, contra Plekhanov, what is found among the writings of social revolutionaries in the mid 1870s, at least, is not pure ‘volunteerism,’ but a strong emphasis on the idea that the individual’s actions are *determined* in one way or another by the social and economic conditions - the movements - of the *narod*. If Plekhanov hoped to distinguish his ‘Marxism’ from the ‘narodism’ of the 1860s and 1870s by appeal to the ‘laws of history’ and the dialectic of nature, then a glance at Lavrov’s *Historical Letters*, a work based around the argument between historical laws and the role of the ‘critically thinking individual,’ is enough to show how unsatisfying this attempt was. Lavrov’s own discussion of science, for instance, speaks of a philosophical worldview not unlike Plekhanov’s:

Many thinkers have noted the intellectual progress man made in coming to see himself as only one among the countless products of the laws of the external world in their unchanging application, whereas formerly he had pictured himself as the centre of all existence – in making the transition, in other words, from a subjective to an objective view of himself and of nature. True, this was extremely important progress, without which science would have been impossible and the development of mankind inconceivable; but it was only the first step. A second step inevitably followed: the study of the unchanging laws of the external world *in its objectivity* in order to attain the sort of human condition which would be recognized subjectively as the best and most just. And at this point the great law divined by Hegel, which seems to apply in so many spheres of human consciousness, was borne out: a third step, apparently a return to the first, in fact resolved the contradiction between the first and the second. Man again became the centre of the entire world, but this time the centre of the world not as it exists in itself, but as it is comprehended by man, conquered by his thought, and turned towards his aims [emphasis in original].⁹¹

On the theoretical level, the conflict between social and historical laws and the actions of individual people had already been tackled at length by social revolutionary *intelligenty*, whose

⁸⁹ White, *Karl Marx*, p. 5, 13-14, 25-27, 310-327 and especially (on ‘subjective sociology’) p. 328 – 333; see also Colletti’s ‘Introduction’ to Marx, *Early Writings*, p. 8-14 (with more emphasis on Plekhanov’s understanding of Marx and Hegel through the later works of F. Engels).

⁹⁰ See Plekhanov, ‘K voprosy o razvitii monisticheskogo vzgliada na istorii,’ *IFP* 1, 507-730/ ‘The Development of the Monist View of History,’ *SPW* 1, p. 480 – 697.

⁹¹ P. Lavrov, ‘The Natural Sciences and History (first letter),’ *Historical Letters*, p. 81-83.

philosophical grounding in Hegelian ‘logic’ gave their works an affinity to Marx’s studies on capitalism, even if only through a shared intellectual tradition and not by direct influence.⁹² If a contradiction remained between individual freedom and social compulsion in these works (and the oft-met statements that ‘every thinking person agrees...’ or every ‘honest person must...’ in intellectuals’ declarations to the *intelligent*-youth are indications of it too),⁹³ then it remained equally in Plekhanov’s ‘Marxist’ formulation (‘freedom consists in submission’), not to mention in the ‘confessions’ of Myshkin and speech of Bardina. The conflict between individual action and social determination manifested itself in the propagandistic and historical writings of the social revolutionaries (including radical workers and peasants). The historian’s interest in the ideals and abstractions of the émigré revolutionary elite may bring to light the intricacies of the pan-historical schemas of the Lavrovs and Plekhanovs alike, but in that same light the revolutionary historian’s appeal to social determination becomes nothing more than a gesture to ‘social context.’ For instance, the opening passage of N. Rubanovich’s *Inostrannaia pressa i russkoe dvizhenie* (‘The Foreign Press and the Russian Movement,’ 1893) will, for historians, have a familiar ring to it:

The history of the revolutionary movement in Russia, beginning with the Decembrists to the *Narodnaia Volia* period inclusive, e.g. up until our own time, can only be understood in connection with the with socio-economic conditions of the Russian *narod* in general, and with the intellectual history of Russian society in particular.⁹⁴

In itself the passage contains little more than the injunction to pay attention to the relationship between intellectual and social life: to understand what the revolutionaries were actually talking about, or where they came from. But the following words indicate a firmer connection between

⁹² This is *not* to suggest that Marx’s works did not have a direct influence on the social revolutionaries and democratic dissidents of the 1860s and 1870s. On the one hand, though N. G. Chernyshevskii had not been familiar with Marx’s work in the 1860s, his works were commented upon favourably by Marx in *Capital* vol. I, indicating some sort of ‘intellectual affinity’ between the men independent of actual contact (Chernyshevskii was an ex-Hegelian and Feuerbachian when he wrote his most influential articles and commentaries on political economy in the 1860s) (see K. Marx, 1873 ‘Postface’ to the second edition of *Capital*, p. 98; on the other hand, there is ample evidence of the direct and, again *contra* Plekhanov, not entirely negative, influence of Marx on the ideas of Bakunin, Tkachëv, and Lavrov in the mid 1860s and early 1870s in precisely the area of the ‘laws of history’ and socio-economic determination. A good discussion of the philosophical and practical relationship between Marx and the Russians is given in White, *Karl Marx*, especially chapter five, ‘Marx and the Russians’ (p. 211-280) and chapter 6, ‘Engels’ (p. 281-295).

⁹³ See, for example, P. Tkachëv, ‘Bibliograficheskii listok: “Politicheskie i obshchestvennye teorii XVI veke”; “Prudon i Lui Blan,” Soch. Zhukovskogo, 1866’ [*Russkoe Slovo*, Dec. no. 12, 1865], *Sochineniia v dvuzh tomakh*, (Moscow, 1975-6), v. 1, p. 100; Lavrov, ‘Nasha programma,’ p. 3; Lavrov, *Historical Letters*, p. 79; M. Bakunin, ‘Appendix A,’ *Statism and Anarchy* [1873], M. S. Shatz (trans.), (Cambridge, 1990), p. 199-201.

⁹⁴ N. Rubanovich, *Inostrannaia pressa i russkoe dvizhenie*, no. XVI of the series *Materialy dlia Istorii russkago sotsialno-revolitusionago dvizhenie* (published by the *Gruppa Starykh Narodovol’tsev*, Geneva, 1893), p. 1.

the revolutionary movement and the social system, one more akin to that outlined in Myshkin and Bardina's speeches:

Only then will it be possible to see it as it actually was: an attempt to articulate the political and social needs of Russian life, to bring the Russian *narod* out of its political tutelage and onto the open road of history. Only then will our intelligentsia's assimilation of western ideas, its boundless desire to 'merge with the *narod*' and its struggle with the autocracy in the name of socialism appear not as flashes across the surface of popular life, but as signs of Russia's growth, as organic elements with which her future is inextricably linked.⁹⁵

The particular actions of revolutionaries were seen by Rubanovich as appearances or 'symptoms' (*priznaki*) of something more essential below; the revolutionary movement attempted to 'formulate' or articulate this socio-political 'growth of Russia.' And so follows the story of how the 'Western press' (especially German, French and Italian newspapers, whether liberal or 'left') became aware that the 'nihilist' groups were something more than the 'materialistic sects' known to them through Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*.⁹⁶ Just as the tsarist state and parts of Russian 'society' had misunderstood the revolutionary movement as a 'flash across the surface of popular life' (although trying to account for the occasional successes of its propaganda among the peasants and urban workers), for anyone on the 'outside' of it – especially those already attuned to the reasoning of 'conservative-liberals' and reactionaries – the movement could not but seem, at least at first, idealistic, disconnected from life, and representative of nothing but its own internal constitution. But the attention garnered in the German press by V. Zasluch's attempt on St. Petersburg's Governor, Trepov, her subsequent trial and acquittal, and Marx's later endorsement of the activities of *Narodnaia Volia* in a preface to the Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, were only the most obvious signs of a growing understanding among 'outsiders' of the 'organic links' between Russia's revolutionary groups and the demands and needs of its *narod*.⁹⁷

The marks of the later political thought of '*narod*-oriented,' social-revolutionary groups (as opposed to 'proletarian-oriented,' social-democratic ones) in the 1890s are clearly discernable in Rubanovich's book and in the series of historical works, printed by the *Gruppa starykh narodovol'tsev* ('The Group of Old *Narodovol'tsy*') to which it belonged. Historically, what

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 1-2.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 2-3.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 4-11.

was valued of the movement of the 1870s were those signs of a growing awareness of the importance of the political struggle, especially those terrorist actions of Zasulich and Kravchinskii under the aegis of *Zemlia i Volia*, which were interpreted as precursors to the tendencies of the *Narodnaia Volia* party (founded in 1879). Rubanovich's reference to the Decembrists in the same breath as *Narodnaia Volia* was also indicative of a recovery of a greater revolutionary tradition immediately noticeable in V. Burtsev's historical journal *Byloe*, and this around the time when social democrats were reflecting upon their 'heritage' in a rather less positive way.⁹⁸ The particular positions taken by rival groups in Russia during the 1880s, '90s and beyond *vis-à-vis* the revolutionary tradition should not be allowed to obscure the unity of their mode of historical thinking. If the subject of the revolution (whether proletariat or *narod*) was identified differently by different groups, this did not effect its status *as* subject of the movement over and above the intelligentsia's more minor role in it. It did not change the fact that the development of the intellectual aspect of the movement were seen to be determined, in more or less complicated ways, by the basic struggle between the exploited producers and other, parasitic social elements (the state, the landowners, or the capitalists), or the underlying narodism of all the groups encompassed by 'Russian socialism' in the late 1880s and 1890s. Neither did it change the fact that their appeals to experience referred back to this basic principle of social determination. Both camps were always concerned to show the fallacy of the other's tactics, and the major means of doing so was to demonstrate the abstract, theoretical or idealistic character of the opposition's thinking. In practical terms this translated into an attack on the intelligentsia's disconnection from 'Russian social conditions' or 'Russian life.' Indeed, a greater part of Plekhanov's own polemic with the '*narodniki*' was waged as if it were the struggle between the 'dialectical materialism' of his own group and the 'idealism' of Lavrov, Mikhailovskii and Vorontsov ('V.V.'), a tactic that was greatly strengthened by an appeal to the supposedly analogous struggle of Marx and Engels in *The Holy Family* (1845) with the self-titled 'critical critics' (especially the brothers Bauer).⁹⁹ Of course the debate between 'materialism' and 'idealism' was only a particular, historical expression of the debate over the more basic relationship between being and thought which, for Plekhanov, had its social

⁹⁸ See for instance, Lenin, 'Ot kakogo nasledstva my otkazyvaemsia?,' *Soch.* 2, p. 459-501/ *CW* 2, p. 491-535. It should be noted that the essence of the first section of Plekhanov's *Sotsializm*, and the first chapter of *Nashi*, was the simultaneous renunciation and recovery of the revolutionary traditions of the 1860s and 1870.

⁹⁹ White, *Karl Marx*, p. 325-327; White cites from Plekhanov's notes to F. Engels' *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (Geneva, 1892): 'We should note that the abstract radicalism recalls in many respects our Russian "subjective method in sociology"...it would be very interesting and instructive to devote an article to drawing a parallel between the arguments advanced by Edgar Bauer...against Hegel, on the one hand, and the objections raised by N. Mikhailovskii against Spencer, on the other' (see Plekhanov, *Soch.* 8, p. 376).

expression in the determination of social consciousness by the economic structures of a society.¹⁰⁰ Even if the ‘Populist’ opposition were less inclined to invoke the history of philosophy in their attacks on Plekhanov and *Osvobozhdenie Truda*, the principle remained the same: the intellectuals were lagging behind ‘Russian social life,’ which both parties believed would eventually ‘correct’ the mistaken tendencies of the other.¹⁰¹

Plekhanov, however, put the party’s differing choices of ‘revolutionary subject’ in the foreground. From this point of view, the baptism of the NV and its successors (the *Starye narodvol’tsy*, the SRs, and a number of Russian economists and political commentators) as ‘Populists’ – *narodniki* – had a immediate or intuitive meaning (orientation toward the *narod*, the peasantry) that overshadowed and eventually obscured the overtly formulated and shared definition of the period 1878-83 (‘working-class self-emancipation’). The attack on the NV in the mid-to-late 1880s, on Mikhailovskii, Vorontsov and Daniel’son in the late 1880s and 1890s, and on the SRs thereafter, was in part an attack on the concept of the *narod*, which, for Plekhanov, had become synonymous with the Russian peasantry and its traditional, communal culture, whether in the cities and factories, or (more often) in the villages. The distinction thus made between ‘peasant-oriented *narodism*’ and ‘proletarian-oriented Marxism’ was, for Plekhanov, extremely sharp. According to Plekhanov, this distinction could be shown in historical analysis of the origins and development of the NV’s (or SR’s) positions. The place of the ‘worker’ (*rabochii*) and the ‘working- class’ was, of course, self-evident to Plekhanov also. The factory workforce may have *begun* their lives as peasants, but city life would turn them eventually into ‘workers.’ That *he* could look back on his ‘going to the people’ and see, in the distinctions made between different kinds of workers (the *fabrichnye*, the *zavodskie*, the *serye*, the *studenty*, the *franty*) - not least by the workers themselves - a clear pattern of historical progress, indicated Marxism’s better grasp of economic and social law, and the confusion of the parties and the currents to which he had once belonged. The *narod* was not the working-class in Russia, and neither were the peasants - in their steadily fragmenting *obshchiny*, flung towards

¹⁰⁰ In *Sotsializm*, Plekhanov cites approvingly the relevant passage from Marx’s *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* [London, 1859]. See Plekhanov, *Sotsializm*, IFP 1, p. 69-71/ SPW 1, p. 66-68.

¹⁰¹ See Plekhanov, *Nashi*: ‘It is to be expected that other, progressive elements of the “Narodnaia Volia party” will at last raise their voices and that the revolutionary movement within that party will proceed as it always has done everywhere, i.e. *from below*’ (IFP 1, p. 130/ SPW 1, p. 123).

the city in increasing numbers - the primary, revolutionary force to be relied upon by Russian socialists in the future.¹⁰²

The 'peasant orientation' of the *narodniki*, as Plekhanov saw it, has to be set against the history of a movement that, for over a decade, treated populations of working people in the cities as the *primary* audience for its propaganda and its agitation activities – primary both in the sense of the *first* audience, as well as the *most important*. That the early social-revolutionary circles – the *dolgushintsy*, the *chaikovtsy*, the *lavristy* and the *buntary* in the south – did not make hard and fast distinctions between the *narod* in the city and in the countryside (though the terms 'worker' and peasant' were used in this fashion by the circles in Russia) has already been established. Their reasons for approaching first the workers in the 'factories and plants' before heading out into the countryside have already been discussed. Now, it cannot be denied that the radical democrats and the early social-revolutionary movement after them were fascinated by the peasant *obshchina*, by the *artel*, and other popular, communal forms of life, hoping that the culture evidenced by them would serve as a basis for a Russian socialist society different in its development than that of (already capitalist) Western Europe. On the other hand, the identification of the concerns of the founders and successive prominent figures of 'Russian socialism' – with the works of Herzen, Ogarev, Chernyshevskii, and Dobroliubov between 1850 and 1863 – all heavily concerned with the question of the *obshchina* in its moral, economic and philosophical aspects, does obscure developments in the doctrines of radicals in the late 1860s and early 1870s. These developments meant that Russian communal *landholding* and communal *agriculture* were considerably less important to the circles of the *intelligenty* in the early 1870s than had usually been supposed. Though these communal forms of life were mentioned very often in the circle's programmes, doctrinal statements, in letters, and in conversations (such as they were recorded in official reports and in memoir materials), in fact from 1872 to 1874, the necessity of the transfer of the 'factories and plants' (*fabriki i zavody*) into the hands of those who worked them - the workers or the *narod* – was mentioned just as often by propagandists. Evidence of conversations between active propagandists and the workers in St. Petersburg and Moscow show that the connection posited between *labour* and *ownership* was highlighted for this audience in terms of the *ownership of factories, workshops and their produce*, whether this audience considered was considered to consist of peasants,

¹⁰² On Plekhanov's views of the *obshchina* in relation to the development of capitalism in Russia, and his views on the tasks of the Russian socialists, see, 'Nashi...', *IFP* 1, p. 221-68 and p. 347-67 respectively (*SPW* 1, p. 218-66 and p. 344-65). See also 'Sotsializm...', *IFP* 1, p. 51-53/ *SPW* 1, p. 49-51.

workers, or some combination). Propaganda materials highlighted the injustice of the exploitation of labourers – that is, *producers* – as much as the injustices of land holding, the existence of big seigniorial estates, and a possible (forcible) ‘repartition’ (*peredel’*). Many of the early revolutionary journals (especially, but not only, *Vperëd*) and the active propagandists in Russia spoke of the conflict between ‘capital and labour’ as an established fact in Russian society, not a situation possible of evasion by means of the *obshchina*. Responding in her 1877 speech to the accusation that the VSRO had attacked fundamental rights to private property, Bardina stated that she had ‘never denied [the right to] property.’

...On the contrary I take the liberty of thinking that I *defended* property, for I recognise that each man has the right to the property which results from his own productive labour, and that every man must be the absolute master of his own labour and its product. So is it I who undermines the rights of property, or the *fabrikant* who pays the worker for one third of his working day and keeps the other two thirds for himself? Or the speculator who plays the stock market, tears apart a thousand families, enriches himself on their account and produces absolutely nothing? Neither I nor any of the other propagandists preached communism. We only stood up for the right of every worker to the product of his labour. The question of the distribution of those products – whether they are returned to common ownership or remain private property – is none of our business. We did not take up the solving this problem and neither could we solve it, bearing in mind that such a system might only be realised in the distant future and that the details can only be worked out in practical activity.¹⁰³

The major social criticism mounted by the circles and organisations of the early 1870s was related to the *exploitation of producers* in Russia: those who *worked* or *produced* were not the owners of the products of their labour. The socialist and anarchist society they desired would be based on the principle that those who laboured would have complete rights of property over the products of their labour, whether this was agricultural, industrial or any other kind of produce.¹⁰⁴ Thus, although the *chaikovtsy* and others did idealise the *obshchina* and the *artel* as communal institutions (believing that the Russian *narod* would of its own volition create socialism and communal property), though the city workers *were* treated as ‘peasants,’ it was not the relation of the peasant to the land or a traditional peasant landholding that was being lauded here specifically, but rather the exploitation suffered by *all* producers in Russia, who were by *culture* and *behaviour* ‘peasant-like’ in a peculiarly Russian way. It was Russian peasant or (‘popular’) culture that was supposed to make the *narod*, in its various guises and locations, receptive to the message of a bottom-up, close-knit, ‘federal’ socialist system with its

¹⁰³ ‘Rech’ Bardinoi...,’ *RN* 1, p. 354.

¹⁰⁴ See *Narodnicheskaia ekonomicheskaia literatura: izbrannye proizvedeniia*, (Moscow, 1958), p. 120, 238-9

concrete (rather than abstract) freedoms guaranteed by communities of family, friends, and fellow working people.

Thus, the *narodnik* tenet - transported along with illegal literature from Western Europe - that the 'working class' (*rabochii klass*) should emancipate itself would have been immediately intelligible to the early Russian social-revolutionaries, who identified the 'working-class' with the labouring *narod*. The term 'worker' (*rabochii*) was, at least by the mid 1870s, used to denote working people in the cities, the term 'peasant' (*krest'ianin*) kept for the labourers in the countryside. In that sense, there was some logic to Plekhanov's use of the terms 'working-class' and 'worker' as synonymous with 'proletariat' and 'proletarian': city born, wage workers, or former peasants cut off from the land. No doubt some of the *chaikovtsy*, the VSRO as an organisation, and the core members of ZiV recognised by the mid-1870s a certain cultural distinction of some of the workers – the *zavodskie* they met in the circles, for instance – from the peasant 'masses,' the VSRO and ZiV recognising also, and from the outset, the special place of the city workers in the second and third waves of 'going to the people.' Yet such judgements of distinction and of the role of *workers* came from prolonged contact and engagement with the workforces at the 'factories and plants': all the more significant social-revolutionary organisations after 1871-2 mentioned the 'workers' in their programmes of action and in their plans for the socialist society of the future. The VRSO had determined that it would go to the *workers* rather than any other sub-group of the *narod*,¹⁰⁵ and to that end set up *intelligenty* and the worker-propagandists like Alekseev and Agapov in a number of textiles, paper, and food-producing factories as well as a few metalworking workshops in the city.¹⁰⁶ The ZiV went to enormous lengths to make and maintain contact with the reconstituted workers circles of 1876-9 (this was, after all, Plekhanov's 'going to the people'). The NV had a special workers' section - with its own regulations, funds, and its own organ (the *Rabochaia gazeta* [*Workers' Newspaper*]) - the activities of which were geared towards the needs of the city workers in particular. This is not to deny that, amongst some groups of radical workers of the 1870s, the sense of distinction between themselves and the 'peasantry' (and a growing sense of distance from the radical intelligenty of the time) was not real. But it is clear that, historically, Plekhanov's polemics with 'peasant-oriented' and 'Populist' groups of the 1870s and 1880s were misleading, taking little or no account (despite his own claims) of the distance between

¹⁰⁵ Figner, *Five Sisters*, p. 28.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 28-31.

practice an theory, placing a massive emphasis on the cultural and strictly economic definitions of peasant life (rurality and landowning) that were, in fact, much less important to the ‘going to the people’ movement and its central groups than they had been twenty or twenty-five years before, when ‘Russian socialism’ had been founded and developed by Herzen, Ogarev, Bakunin and others. Tracing the development of narodism as a creed, Plekhanov’s *Sotsializm* – the first part of which can be read as an early intellectual history of Russian socialism – placed enormous weight upon the line Herzen – Bakunin – Chernyshevskii.¹⁰⁷ He paid great deal of attention to the influence of the European proto-anarchists and anarchists of the 1830s and ‘40s like Proudhon¹⁰⁸ at the expense of their influence by the liberal-constitutional and radical-democratic strains of thought (this including Marx and Engels’ early works) upon them; he put emphasis on articles and statements related to the peasant *obshchina* and the notion of ‘Russian exceptionalism,’¹⁰⁹ without saying much about developments in the 1860s and early 1870s (particularly, the influence of Lassalle and of the Paris Commune) that significantly altered the character of Russian revolutionary groups in that period. Thus, in *Russkii rabochii*, Plekhanov mentioned that the *lavristy* were distinguished by their respect for the German social-democrats and their teaching of its principles in the circles of the late 1870s,¹¹⁰ without mentioning that lecturers from the *chaikovtsy* circle – including Kropotkin and Plekhanov’s close friend, Kravchinskii - had taught workers’ circles about the German SDs, about the International, and about the conditions of the workers they had met in Switzerland, Poland and France;¹¹¹ he spoke of the neglect of political economy by the ‘narodnik’ ZiV,¹¹² without mentioning that political economy – including Chernyshevskii’s translation of J. S. Mill’s *Foundations of Political Economy*¹¹³ and, after 1873, Marx’s *Capital* (vol. I), were taught at the workers’ circles also.¹¹⁴

Recent research by the social and political historians of the NV, its successors in the 1890s, and the SRs, has shown that the traditional notion of these parties as ‘peasant-oriented’ are quite

¹⁰⁷ Plekhanov, ‘Nashi...,’ *IFP* 1, p. 136-63 / *SPW* 1 p. 138-67.

¹⁰⁸ Idem, ‘Sotsializm...,’ *IFP* 1, p. 58-60 / *SPW* 1, p. 56-8.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, *IFP* 1, p. 51, 66 / *SPW* 1, p. 50, 64.

¹¹⁰ Plekhanov, Appx. E: 25-6.

¹¹¹ Smirnov, Appx. C: 11-12, 14; ‘Zapiski o propagande sredi rabochikh...,’ 15 March, 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 444-6; Korol’chuk, *Severnyi Soiuz*, p. 36-7; 40-1, 48-50.

¹¹² Plekhanov, Appx. E: 25.

¹¹³ Two copies of Chernyshevskii’s ‘Zapiski’ were in the St. Petersburg workers’ circles’ own library in 1874, along with LAVORV’s (‘Mirtov’s’) *Istoricheskie Pis’ma* (1 copy) and Flerovskii’s *Polozheniia rabochego klassa* (1 copy) (see ‘Zapiski o propagande sredi rabochikh...,’ 15 March, 1874, *RD* 2.i, p. 444.

¹¹⁴ Smirnov, Appx. C: 14; Korol’chuk, *Severnyi Soiuz*, p. 49-50.

mistaken, particularly with regards to the practical activities of these organisations.¹¹⁵ Even if Plekhanov's class division of the 'peasantry' from the 'workers' and the 'working class' (the intuitively accepted one) is allowed to stand, evidence of the practical work of these groups with working people in the cities, as well as the character of their propaganda materials in the 1880s and 1890s, demonstrates a 'Populist' tendency with a great interest in the city workers as an audience for their message, a Marxian-inflected understanding of political economy to rival the development of workers' courses by the SDs,¹¹⁶ which led them to view peasants *and* workers – like the early social-revolutionary groups before them – as *producers* with a certain, national culture (the *narod*) rather than as petit landowners or (just) as 'communal landowners and workers.' If the charge of the 'Russian exceptionalism' of the ZiV and the NV rings true, then the notion that its *basis* was in a strict economic or moral distinction between peasants and proletarians as *classes* simply does not.

Social-revolutionary historiography bears traces of a struggle by the 'narodniki' and then, after 1900, by the SRs to reclaim for themselves politically (and for the ZiV and NV, historically) the city workers as a natural constituency from the Marxist groups and the Russian SDs in the 1890s and 1900s. *Byloe* devoted many of its pages to historical accounts of 'going to the people,' with a special emphasis on going to the *workers* in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Odessa, Kiev, and other major centres of propaganda activity. The first issue of *Byloe* in 1900 reproduced translated extracts from Kropotkin's *Memoirs*, published originally in English in 1899, which dealt specifically with his propaganda activities as a member of the *chaikovskii*

¹¹⁵ On the NV and its relationship with urban workers, see D. Pearl, 'Educating workers for Revolution: Populist propaganda in St. Petersburg, 1879-1882,' *Russian History/Histoire Russe*, 15, no. 2-4 (1988), p. 255-84; idem, 'From Worker to Revolutionary: the Making of Worker Narodovol'tsy,' *Russian History/Histoire Russe*, 23, no. 1-4, (1996), p. 11-26. On the SRs and their attitudes to workers/the 'industrial proletariat,' see N. Schleifman, *Undercover Agents*, p. 4-6; M. Perrie, 'Introduction,' *Protokoly pervogo s"ezda Partii Sotzialistov-Revolyutsionnerov, 1906* (New York/London, 1983), x-xi; xxvi-xxviii; M. Melancon, *Socialist Revolutionaries and the Russian Anti-War Movement, 1914-17* (Columbus, 1990), p. 1, 9-10, and idem, 'The Socialist Revolutionary Party, 1902-1907,' *Histoire Russe*, vol. 12, No. 1, (1985).

¹¹⁶ In 1886 and again in 1894, NV and its successor, the *Gruppa narodovol'tsev*, published a small booklet called *Tsar Golod*, based on a lecture on political economy given by A. N. Bakh, a member of the NV, to an audience of young people in Kazan, in 1883. This booklet, intended for workers (*rabochie*) to read for themselves, or used in guided reading by a propagandist, was reprinted by the SRs (see *Tsar-Golod*, (Petersburg, 1907) - editors' note). The book was clearly influenced by Marx's critique of political economy (or at least some version of it), section five and six dealing with 'Surplus Value' and 'Wages,' section seven examining the 'capitalist economy' and going on to compare it (section eight) to the 'Socialist economy' of the future. (For a discussion of this book, see D. L. Pearl, 'Political Economy for Workers: A. N. Bakh's Tsar-Golod,' *Slavic Review*, vol. 50, no 4 (Winter, 1991), p. 768-78.) Note that, around the same time of the first publication of *Tsar-Golod*, a few social democrats in workers' circles were also teaching courses in political economy. A. Bogdanov, a propagandist and teacher in Tula in the mid to late 1890s, eventually wrote his own course, which was first published in 1897, and became the basis for several republications thereafter (see A. Bogdanoff, *A Short Course of Economic Science*, translated by J. Finsberg (London, 1923), i.)

circle, with the workers' circles of 1872-4, e.g. the circles in which Alekseev, Smirnov, Volkov, the Petersons, Ivan Smirnov, Mitrofanov and others had been involved.¹¹⁷ Though the memoir discussed at length such 'quintessential' *narodnik* topics as the *obshchina*, the formation of the intelligentsia, reactions of the educated elite to the Emancipation in 1861, the question of constitutionalism and political representation, and various important figures from the 'heroic' era of the NV (Perovskaia, Zheliabov and Kravchinskii especially), it was the long section on the 'weavers and engineers' that was chosen for republication. In January 1906, Burtsev himself wrote a short article on the formation and the historical significance of the *Severnyi Soiuz* and its leading figures, V. Obnorskii and S. Khalturin, reprinting its programme of 1879 along with several other documents written by workers of the 1870s.¹¹⁸ In response to the SDs' own publication of the first workers' memoirs of the 1880s,¹¹⁹ the SRs began the publication of these works. It was in *Byloe*, in 1906, that the earliest *written*, radical worker's memoir – that of V. Gerasimov, 'Pitomet vospitatel'nogo doma' ('Child of the Foundling Home'), was published.¹²⁰ In the same year, the memoirs of V. S. Pankratov, a worker *narodovol'tsy* in the early 1880s, were also put into print.¹²¹ Several anonymously written examples also came out between the outbreak of war in 1914 and the February revolution, including reprints of the SD earlier versions.¹²² Still, by the late 1890s, the SRs were responding to a critique of themselves and their policies whose roots were in the polemics of the 1880s. Lenin's attacks on 'Populist economists' and the 'Friends of the People'¹²³ went little beyond those of his mentor and the Russian Marxism's then highly regarded, veteran leaders – Plekhanov and Aksel'rod.¹²⁴ And, by the time most accounts of the 1870s' propaganda among the St. Petersburg workers were published, Plekhanov's *Russkii rabochii* had already established as a framework of reference

¹¹⁷ 'Propaganda sredi peterburgskikh rabochikh v nachale semides'iat'ikh godov,' *Byloe*, no. 1, 1900, p. 31-36.

¹¹⁸ [Burtsev], 'Severni Soiuz ruskikh rabochikh (stranitsa iz istorii rabachego dvizheniia v Rossii),' *Byloe*, no.1, 1906, p. 174 – 87.

¹¹⁹ The earliest example I have found is *Iz rabochego dzizheniia za Nevskii zastavoi (iz vospominaniia starogo rabochego)* ([Izdanie Souiza Russkikh Sotsial-demokratov], Geneva, 1900). Note that histories of Social Democracy and of the Russian socialist movement were being written by social-democrats shortly after this, around 1904-6, demonstrating a desire among the RSDLP's fractions to understand and document its own history, for political reasons (see I. D. Thatcher, 'The first histories of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party, 1904-6,' *Slavic and East European Review*, vol. 85, no. 4 (October, 2007), p. 724-752. On the 'polemical' nature of these histories, see p 752).

¹²⁰ *Byloe*, no. 4, 1906.

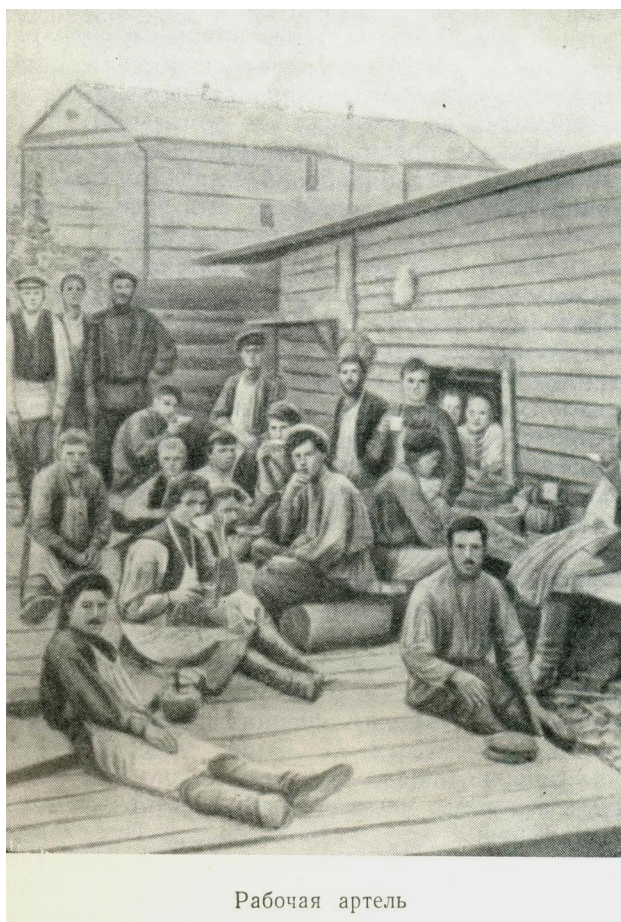
¹²¹ 'Iz deiatel'nost sredi rabochikh, 1880-84,' *Byloe*, no. 3, 1906; this was reprinted in *Rabochee Dvizhenie v Rossii v opisaniu samikh rabochikh* (Moscow, 1933), p. 46-107.

¹²² The 'Vospominaniia starogo rabochego' was reprinted in *Istorii revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia v Rossii*, L. E. Shishko (ed.) (Petrograd 1916), reprinted in *Narodnaia Volia v dokumenty*, p. 168-9.

¹²³ Lenin, 'Chto takoe "Druz'ia naroda" i kak oni voiuut protiv sotsial-demokratov,' (1894) and 'Ekonomicheskoe soderzhanie narodnichestvo i kritika ego v knige G. Struve,' (1894-5), *Soch.* 1, p. 113-331 and 315-494/ CW 1, p. 129-326 and p. 333-500.

¹²⁴ See Baron, *Plekhanov*, p. 188-9, 211-14.

and debate many of the themes, events, personalities to which later memoirists, historians and worker-writers responded to and often accepted in writing their own accounts.



12. Workers' artel, late nineteenth century¹²⁵

Several descriptions of the workers and the workers' circles of 1872-9 were left apart from Plekhanov's *Russkii rabochii*. Sinegub, Kropotkin, Figner, Shishko, Charushin, and many others devoted passages to the propaganda and agitation among the workers in St. Petersburg and Moscow, some giving quite lengthy accounts of their meetings, their programmes, the response of certain workers to their reading, to socialism, to interrogations and arrests.¹²⁶ Kropotkin and Sinegub's memoirs, in particular, mirrored Plekhanov's in drawing attention to the sub-groups within the urban workers' milieu – the *fabrichnye* and *zavodskie* especially – and making certain retrospective moral and political judgements based on these sub-divisions

¹²⁵ P. Kabanov *et al*, *Ocherki istorii rossiiskogo proletariata (1861-1917)* (Moscow, 1963), p. 19.

¹²⁶ Sinegub's memoirs have already been mentioned; see also Kropotkin's *Memoirs*, p. 325-30; L. E. Shisko, 'Sergei Mikhailovich Kravchinskii i kruzhok chaikovstev,' [1903], S. M. Kravchinskii, *Gruzovaia tucha Rossii* (Moscow, 2007), p. 311-22; N. A. Charushin, *O dalekom proshlom: iz vospominaniia o revoliutsionnom dvizhenii 70-kh godov XIX veke* (Moscow, 1973), p. 124-33; 141-149; 170-74, 194-8, 220-27.

Do these accounts reveal the sort of ‘*narodnik* biases’ and misunderstandings of which Plekhanov accused the ZiV and its predecessors? Here the ideological split between ‘Marxists’ and ‘Populists’ has obscured the intentions of writers, on both sides of the divide, well into recent historical analyses. It is, first of all, usually in relation to the conceptualisations of social development and historical laws set out in ‘Marxist’ works, beginning with Plekhanov’s, by which historians have understood other memoir accounts.¹²⁷ Read in the light of Plekhanov’s major works, the differing descriptions of the *fabrichnye-zavodskie* split offered by the social-democrats and social-revolutionaries’ works seem to be underpinned by a common association of the *fabrichnye* with the ‘peasantry’ and the *zavodskie* with a working-class of a ‘western European’ kind. From this point of view the concrete, historical account of the workers’ movement offered by Plekhanov in *Russkii rabochii* is understood as little more than an extension of his earlier, more theoretically inclined polemics, a translation of ideology into memory and ‘science’ into confession. As Zelnik wrote in ‘On the Eve,’

this oft-cited work derives its credibility from its self-presentation as autobiography, with its social typology projected as a reflection *of* as well as a reflection *on* the author’s past experience. ...History was preparing ‘new social forces’ that would destroy tsarism, Plekhanov told his readers, and ‘the most powerful force’ was the proletariat. In order to tie this thesis to the polemic with populism, Plekhanov built an analytical structure, dressed in the garb of memory that paired peasants with populists and workers with Marxists.¹²⁸

Familiarity with the post-revolutionary, Soviet prejudice towards the ‘urban, industrial proletariat’ causes Plekhanov’s use of those categories, especially as presented in the *Russkii rabochii*, to be understood largely in terms of a preformed understanding of ‘Marxism’: specifically, a ‘Marxism’ which uses exactly those same categories with exactly the same prejudices toward the ‘urban, industrial proletariat.’ Historians – Zelnik among them – perpetuated Plekhanov’s own notion that the so-called ‘*narodniki*’ (‘populists,’ social-

¹²⁷ In ‘On the Eve...,’ Zelnik identifies the hold of the ‘Bolshevik metanarrative’ ‘that ends the story with triumph of an advanced, conscious proletariat, dominating and leading a benighted peasantry’ over Soviet historiography (p. 29), but proceeds to treat the opposition between the ‘Marxists’ and social-revolutionaries (like Kropotkin) much as Plekhanov himself had done in *Nashi* and *Russkii rabochii* especially, the ‘Marxists’ simply privileging the more proletarian workers, the social-revolutionaries privileging the more peasant-like workers (p. 33-34). The assumption is that the difference between ‘peasants’ and ‘proletarians,’ or ‘peasants’ and ‘workers’ was as clear to the social-revolutionaries when they ‘went to the people’ and when they recalled these experiences retrospectively as it was to Plekhanov when he wrote his polemics against the ‘*narodniki*’ in the 1880s and *Russkii rabochii* in the 1890s.

¹²⁸ Zelnik, ‘On the Eve’, p. 30.

revolutionaries) could be opposed ideologically (if not always practically)¹²⁹ to the ‘Marxist’ SDs because of their greater sympathies towards the ‘backward’ peasantry and their village-oriented mentality. Yet, acceptance of the Plekhanovite definitions of the proletarian and peasant conditions obscures the otherwise obvious fact that the social-revolutionaries in the 1870s understood a peasant to be a *type of worker*, and not the other way around. Such misunderstandings make their frequent use of Marxian-inflected terms as ‘surplus value’ and ‘wage-labour’ and their celebration of ‘proletarian’ organisations like the International and the Paris Commune if not incomprehensible, then at least highly contradictory. Moreover, Plekhanov’s association of the terms ‘peasant’ and ‘proletarian’ with rural and urban life respectively went far beyond what Marx’s concept of a proletarian implied *necessarily* in terms of social relations, the condition of wage-labour itself overwhelmed in Plekhanov’s treatment by the contingent quality of ‘urbanity.’¹³⁰ In *Russkii rabochii*, Plekhanov emphasised the *cultural* aspects of the ‘proletarianisation’ of a workforce drawn largely from the villages, in the main still legally a part of the *krest’ianstvo*, attempting to describe the individual peasant-worker’s lived experience of the ‘inevitable historical movement’ of Russian society from a ‘narrow patriarchal order’ to an order based on the ‘reason’ (*rassudochnost’*; *rasudka*) (Appx. E: 305). Having grasped already Russia’s movement towards capitalism and the future political role of the Russian proletariat, still in its formative stages, the *zavodskie* and *fabrichnye* became for Plekhanov the intermediate social categories of a social system breaking itself apart from within:

¹²⁹ It should be noted, once more, that Plekhanov argued in *Sotsializm* that the revolutionaries’ experiences of failures and setbacks among the *narod* during the first few waves of ‘going to the people’ (1872-4, 1874-5 and – led by *Zemlia i Volia* - in 1876-79) had driven them towards a policy of *political* struggle under the banner of *Narodnaia Volia* similar in practical terms to that advocated by the *Osvobozhdenie Truda* group in the 1880s. It only remained for the social-revolutionary party to tally its practice to a theory which explained it adequately, e.g. Marxism, as Plekhanov understood it (see ‘Sotsializm,’ *IFP* 1, p. 65-66 / *SPW* 1, p. 62-63).

¹³⁰ See on this point, for instance, K. Marx, ‘Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts’ [1844], *Early Writings*: ‘The distinction between capital and land, between profit and ground rent, and the distinction between both and wages, industry, agriculture, and immovable and movable private property, is not one which is grounded in the nature of things, it is a historical distinction, a fixed moment in the development of the opposition between capital and labour...As a special kind of work, as an essential, important and life-encompassing distinction, this distinction between industry and agriculture survives only as long as industry (town life) is developing in opposition to landed property (aristocratic feudal life) and continues to bear the feudal characteristics of its opposite in the form of monopoly, crafts, guilds...Given these forms, labour continues to have an apparently social meaning, the meaning of genuine community, and has not yet reached the stage of indifference towards its content and of complete being-for-itself, i.e. of abstraction from all other being and hence of liberated capital...’ (p. 337-338), which is to say; the development of alienated labour through the circulation of money and commodity production eventually erases distinctions of certain ‘kinds of labour’ by making real labour more and more adequate to the abstraction implied in exchange value and value (money). Though this passage lends authority to the direction of *Marxist* thought regarding Russia in the late nineteenth century (Lenin’s *Razvitie kapitalizma v Rossii*), it still undermines the excessive emphasis Plekhanov places on the urban/rural distinction - and the reification of the proletarian/peasant distinction that goes along with it - in his major works (see below).

The *zavodskii* worker placed himself somewhere between the *intelligenty* and the *fabrichnye*; the *fabrichnye* somewhere between the peasants and the *zavodskie* workers. Whether any particular *fabrichnyi* was more similar in his conceptions to the peasant or to the *zavodskii* depended on how long he had lived in the city. If he had just arrived from the countryside, he would remain for some time a genuine peasant. He was there not only because of the economic attraction of the city, but because of the heavy taxation and the lack of land which drove him there. He saw his stay in the city as temporary; at most it was a highly unpleasant necessity. But, little by little, he fell under the influence of urban living. Unbeknownst to him, he would begin to acquire the habits and the outlook of the townsman. (Appx. E: 299).

Underlying Plekhanov's concrete take on the transition from peasant to proletarian in *Russkii rabochii* was the analysis of the differing 'economic' relationships encountered in peasant and proletarian life. The alienation of the town worker from the village and the 'manners and customs' of his peasant relatives and friends was an unfortunate, personal aspect of the change between different forms of production, forms which Plekhanov understood to underpin and produce those differing cultures:

The old system of natural economy is giving place to commodity production and thereby opening up an enormous home market for large scale industry. The patriarchal, communal forms of land tenure are rapidly disintegrating, the village commune is being transformed into a mere means of enslaving the peasant population to the state and in many localities it is also an instrument for the exploitation of the poor by the rich. At the same time, binding to the land the interests of an enormous section of the producers, it hinders their intellectual and political development by limiting their outlook to the narrow bounds of village traditions...the main bulwark of absolutism is precisely the political indifference and intellectual backwardness of the peasantry...¹³¹

While programmatic statements such as this intended to show the deeper, economic basis of cultural difference and cultural change, even here the association of progress with urban life and backwardness with 'the village' dominated over other possible aspects of the peasant/proletarian distinction. In *Nashi* Plekhanov made efforts to demonstrate not only the real growth in Russia of a workforce living solely upon wage labour, but also the process whereby the peasant was cut off from the land of the disintegrating village commune and compelled to sell his or her labour,¹³² but *Russkii rabochii* eschewed this 'scientific' understanding of proletarian status and tied the proletarian/peasant distinction firmly to the

¹³¹ G. Plekhanov, 'Vtoroi proekt programmy russkikh sotsial-demokratov' [1887], *IFP* 1, p. 378/ *SPW* 1, p. 359; see also 'Programma sotsial-demokraticeskoi gruppy "Osvobozhdenie Truda"' [1883], *IFP* 1, p. 372/ *SPW* 1, p. 355.

¹³² G. Plekhanov, 'Nashi....', *IFP* 1, p. 259-68 / *SPW* 1, p. 244-252.

cities and the villages themselves ('whether any particular *fabrichnyi* was more similar in his conceptions to the peasant or to the *zavodskii* depended on how long he had lived in the city....'). It was primarily through the contrast of the *mentality* of 'urban life' to the 'limited and narrow outlook' of rural (or 'village') traditions that Plekhanov understood the proletarian/peasant divide as a concrete social phenomenon, rather than through examination of differing 'forms of production.' While theoretically Plekhanov's 'Marxist' analyses of Russian economic development allowed for the category of 'rural proletarian,' this new social group was understood only as transitional – indeed, only in relation to the polarized opposites of progressive culture, with the *intelligenty* at its pinnacle ('the *zavodskii* worker placed himself somewhere between the *intelligenty* and the *fabrichnye*; the *fabrichnye* somewhere between the peasants and the *zavodskie* workers....'), and the peasants' limited, thoughtless and village-bound outlook on life ('...for an even *slightly* developed person, the village order would become incomprehensible. And the more capable the worker, the more he thought and studied in the city, then the quicker and more decisively was he cut off from the village...').

In his *Memoirs*, Kropotkin wrote that his 'happiest hours' were spent in the company of the 'weavers and the workers in the cotton factories.'¹³³ Besides praising their curiosity, concentration and enthusiasm for learning, Kropotkin paid tribute to their immense 'bravery' and 'courage.'¹³⁴ Once convinced of the truth of the socialistic teachings the *intelligenty* offered them (Kropotkin observed), the weavers were already prepared to sacrifice themselves for the cause; it was only left to the *intelligenty* 'to moderate their zeal.'¹³⁵ Kropotkin, a prince, a respected geographer, still admitted without question to the soirees and evening parties of educated 'society,' in his memoirs contrasted the attitudes of the privileged strata to those of the weavers:

The previous evening I had been in choice company. Inspiring, noble words were spoken that night about the citizen's duties, the well-being of the country, and the like. But underneath all the thrilling speeches one note sounded: how could each of the speakers preserve his own well-being? Yet no-one had the courage to say, frankly and openly, that he was ready to do only that which would not endanger his own dovecote...I returned home, seized with a sudden sense of sadness amid all this talk.

Next morning I went to one of our weavers' meetings...the audience consisted mostly of middle aged people. They were intensely interested. They asked me questions, all to

¹³³ Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 327.

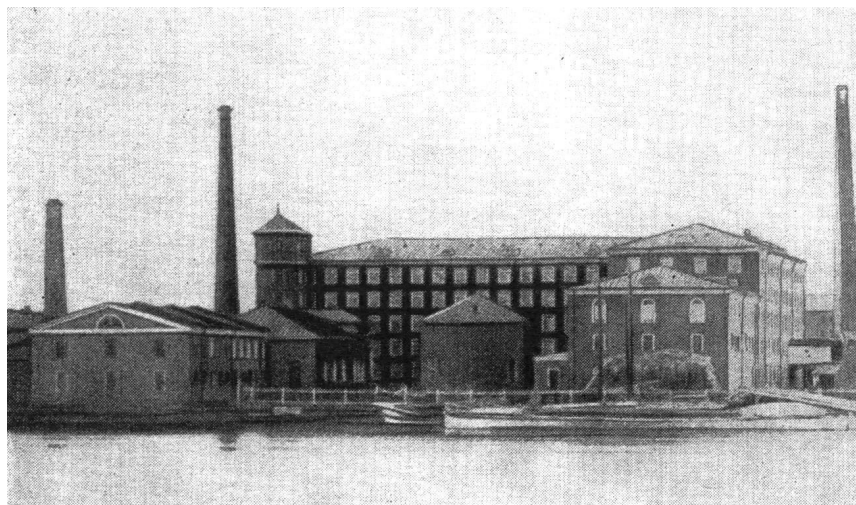
¹³⁴ In the Houghton/Mifflin edition of Kropotkin's *Memoirs* (1899), the thematic title at the head of the relevant pages is 'Courage of the Workers': see *ibid*, p. 328-29.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 326-327.

the point, about the minute details of the working men's unions, the aims of the International and its chances of success. And then there came questions about what could be done in Russia and the prospects of our propaganda. I never minimized the dangers of our agitation... 'We shall probably be sent to Siberia, one of these days, and you... will be kept for long months in prison for having listened to us.' This gloomy prospect did not frighten them. 'After all, there are men in Siberia too, not just bears.' 'Where men are living others can live.' 'The devil is not as terrible as they paint him.' 'If you are afraid of wolves, don't go in the wood,' they said as we parted.¹³⁶

As if to prove the correctness of these immediate, personal judgments, Kropotkin noted several times in the *Memoirs* that the 'weavers and engineers' to whom he had lectured in 1873 had 'behaved very well' upon their arrest and interrogation in March, revealing little or nothing about their contacts with the 'students' or the *chaikovskii* circle in general.¹³⁷ This view was echoed by Sinegub with regard to the workers at the Maksvell factory - 'his workers' - seized by the gendarmes in November, 1873.¹³⁸

13. Maksvell factory, St. Petersburg (1870s)¹³⁹



Though, historically, the response of this or that detainee to interrogation could not have been predicted on the basis of a prior 'commitment to the cause' or involvement with a given circle's

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 328-29. This is also the excerpt from the *Memoir* translated and printed in the first issue of *Byloe* ('Propaganda sredi Peterburgskikh rabochikh v nachale semidesiatikh godov,' *Byloe*, no. 1, 1900, p 31-36. For the quotation cited above, see p. 35-36).

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. 329 and 337.

¹³⁸ S. Sinegub, 'Vospominaniia Chaikovtza [II],' p. 117. For an overview of the statements made by the Maksvell workers who had been Sinegub's pupils until November, 1873, written by Petersburg's *nachal'nik* of the Corps of Gendarmes N. S. Birin, see 'Iz doneseniiia nachal'nika peterburgskogo gubernskogo zhandarm'skogo upravleniia N. S. Birina v III otdelenie o pokazaniakh rabochikh, poseshchavskikh vechernie zaniatiiia S. Sineguba,' November 23, 1873, *RD* 2.i, p. 425-26.

¹³⁹ M. G. Skorodnikov, '*Rabochii*': *Ocherk istorii Oktiabr'skoi Revoliutstii priadil'no-tkatskoi fabрики 'Rabochii'* (Leningrad, 1971), p. 17.

activities, in the memoir literature the *a posteriori* knowledge of a comrade's stubborn resistance at interrogation became the basis for judging his 'moral character,' or rather, attestation to the intuitive past judgments of the memoirist on the 'moral character' of his comrades.¹⁴⁰ Hence the retrospective endorsement of the workers' 'bravery' before the state was both a validation of the founding principles of the social-revolutionary movement and a signal that the workers had become something more than the 'object' of propaganda. Both Kropotkin and Sinegub presented the workers' resistance at questioning as, in the first place, a manifestation of the *personal* sympathy that their teaching and lecturing had generated over and above class differences. 'I was transferred to the Petropavlovsk Fortress, and evidently, so were Stakhovskii and Tikhomirov, who my workers had not once mentioned in their statements, though the workers knew them well and studied with them, just as they had with me,' Sinegub wrote, his workers having offered protection to the *intelligenty* where it was still possible. Kropotkin noted similarly that, 'when...several of [the workers] were arrested, they nearly all behaved bravely, *sheltering us* and *betraying no one*' (emphases added).¹⁴¹ The personal motives perceived in the workers' actions by Sinegub and Kropotkin were a retrospective validation of the principles of the *chaikovskii* circle - that the revolutionary organisation should be based on ties of friendship, mutual trust and moral cultivation - and allowed that the workers too were capable of upholding such principles. Hence, as Sinegub wrote, by the time of their arrest, some of the workers had become their 'true friends,'¹⁴² the regular contacts between them having reduced the great distance the *intelligenty* felt divided them from the 'common people.'¹⁴³ The social-revolutionary impulse towards self-assimilation to the people's 'way of life' is revealed in Kropotkin's comparison of 'society' and the weavers' meeting. His explanation of the necessity of donning 'a cotton shirt, peasant high-top boots, and a sheepskin' in order to avoid arousing the suspicions of the police, his being 'lost among the other peasants' and 'joking with them,' has something more than conspiratorial culture about it. He conveyed not only the simplicity and honesty of the weaver's life, but also his own growing sense of being more at ease in peasant garb and with the weavers than with educated, liberal 'society.' Kropotkin's story, then, touches on the alienation of the noble and *raznochintsy* revolutionaries from the 'society' with which they (in both the cultural- and legal senses) were still identified. While the objective distinction between the workers and the *intelligenty* was acknowledged

¹⁴⁰ See, for instance, Kropotkin's story about the interrogation of Poliakov in March, 1874 (Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 338-340).

¹⁴¹ Sinegub, 'Vospominaniia [II],' p. 117; Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 329.

¹⁴² Sinegub, 'Vospominaniia Chaikovtza [I]', *Byloe*, Aug, 1906, p. 41.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 40; Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 327.

(...‘we shall probably be sent to Siberia...and you...will be kept for long months in prison *for having listened to us*’ [latter emphases added]), Kropotkin’s perceived ‘belonging’ among the workers (and the sympathy both he and Sinegub believed the workers felt for them personally) made him believe in an identity of ‘commitment’ between the weavers and themselves that was only partially borne out by the weavers’ responses to direct contact with the state.

Rather different was Kropotkin’s view of the engineers, ‘most of them employed in a state factory in the artillery department’¹⁴⁴ (among them Volkov, D. Smirnov, and the Peterson brothers - though Kropotkin does not name them). That Kropotkin’s sympathies ‘went especially towards the weavers’¹⁴⁵ and that a more critical attitude was taken to the engineers can, of course, be related to the ideological preferences of the early social-revolutionaries towards the ‘peasantry.’¹⁴⁶ But the cultural aspect of the differentiation between the *fabrichnye* (Kropotkin’s ‘weavers,’ cotton workers) and the *zavodskie* (the ‘engineers’), its relation to ‘commitment,’ and indeed the very meaning of the social-revolutionary terminology of ‘peasants and workers’ has been obscured by an acceptance of later use of these categories in social-democratic and Soviet historiography. Kropotkin, for his part, noted in his *Memoirs* the distinctions between the weavers (*fabrichnye*) and the engineers (*zavodskie*), his observation of the weavers’ and cotton workers’ continued ties to the village tinged by the apparently opposite prejudice to Plekhanov’s:

There are many thousands of [*fabrichnye*] in St. Petersburg, who work there during the winter, and return for the three summer months to their native villages to cultivate the land. Half peasants and half town-workers, they had generally retained the social spirit of the Russian villages... [On the other hand, the *zavodskie*] are pretty well paid in St. Petersburg, and those who were not married were fairly well-off. They soon became quite familiar with the current radical and socialist literature – Buckle, Lassalle, Mill, Draper, Spielhagen, were familiar names to them; and in their aspect, these engineers differed little from students...

Our hopes...that these young men would grow into ardent propagandists amidst less privileged classes of workers were not fully realised. In a free country they would have the habitual speakers at public meetings; but, like the privileged workers of the watch trade in Geneva, they treated the mass of the factory hands with a sort of contempt...¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Kropotkin, *ibid*, p. 325.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 326.

¹⁴⁶ As, for instance, M. Share does in *The Central Workers’ Circle of St. Petersburg, 1889-1894: A Case Study of the “Workers’ Intelligentsia,”* (New York/London, 1987), p. 53-54.

¹⁴⁷ Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 325-6.

The connection between the different ‘forms of production’ and the cultural differences between the *fabricnye* and *zavodskie*, as indicated by Plekhanov, certainly appeared in Kropotkin’s *Memoirs*, but his description of the seasonal migration of the *fabricnye* placed far more emphasis on the ‘social spirit’ of the villages than on their continued involvement in ‘cultivating the land.’ His criticism of the *zavodskie* emphasises less the issue of their better living conditions in St. Petersburg than the cultural character of their self-development. What seems to have irked Kropotkin was not the engineers’ attraction to education *per se* (since his praise for the weavers mentioned their great thirst for knowledge, their intense interest in the *intelligenty*’s lectures),¹⁴⁸ but the lack of a desire to *practice* the doctrines about which they read so avidly in socialist literature: ‘...they treated the mass of factory hands with a sort of contempt, and were in no haste to become martyrs to the socialist cause.’¹⁴⁹ Oppositely, among the ‘weavers,’

the movement spread like wildfire. We had to restrain the zeal of our new friends, otherwise they would have brought to our lodgings hundreds at a time...they listened [to us] eagerly, and then came the question: ‘what can we do in Russia?’ ‘Agitate, organise,’ was our reply...and we read them a popular story of the French Revolution, an adaptation of Erkmann-Chatrian’s *Histoire d’un Paysan*. Everyone admired M. Chovel, who went as a propagandist through the villages, distributing prohibited books, and all burned to follow in his footsteps.¹⁵⁰

In his *Memoirs*, Sinegub had more explicitly drew attention to the ‘social spirit’ of the *fabricnye* - to what the *intelligenty* understood it to be - and demonstrated implicitly its relation to the *chaikovskii* circle’s doctrines of self-development and personal relations:

All these people were closely connected to the village and did everything so that life in the village would be improved; all the sorrows and joys of the village they considered their own sorrows and joys. The city was a temporary port of call for them, one stop on the road of life, and its end point and the place they all wanted to be was the village. I got very close to the men of the *artel*, stayed overnight with them, spent my holidays with them from morning until nightfall and, in general, was deeply impressed by their remarkable moral purity, brought with them from the depths of the villages of Tverskaia and Novgorodskaiia. Sincerity, truthfulness, honesty and a search for truth that came from their very souls – those were the moral features of the *fabricnye* milieu in those days.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 328-329.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 325.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 326-7.

¹⁵¹ Sinegub, ‘Vospominaniia...I,’ p. 50-1.

While the interest of the *fabricnyye* in self-development coincided with that of social-revolutionary *intelligenty*, the search for enlightenment driven by a ‘moral purity’ which allowed for the cultivation of the instinctive understanding of social injustice, the commitment of the *zavodskie* was merely abstract, even empty, and in that sense mirrored the ‘inspiring and noble’ speeches of educated ‘society’: ‘underneath...one note sounded: how could each...preserve his own well-being.’¹⁵² Though the *chaikovtsy* initially approached the *zavodskie* just as they had the *fabricnyye* – as producers cut off from the products of their labour – the politically active *zavodskie* had taken on the culture and the attendant *impractical* and self-serving pseudo-commitment of ‘society,’ from which the social revolutionary *intelligenty* hoped to distance themselves in and through contact with the *narod*. Like students and others from privileged backgrounds, the engineers would need a more concrete and direct experience of state domination in order to imbue their abstract ideas of rebellion or revolution with a real content: ‘it was only after they had been arrested and kept three or four years in prison for having dared to *think* as socialists,’ Kropotkin said, ‘and had sounded the full depth of Russian absolutism, that several of [the engineers] developed into ardent propagandists, chiefly of a political revolution,’ emphasising not only the importance of direct experience of state repression for the full commitment of the workers, but also - implicitly – the distinction between socialism practiced and socialism merely ‘thought’ by the workers.¹⁵³

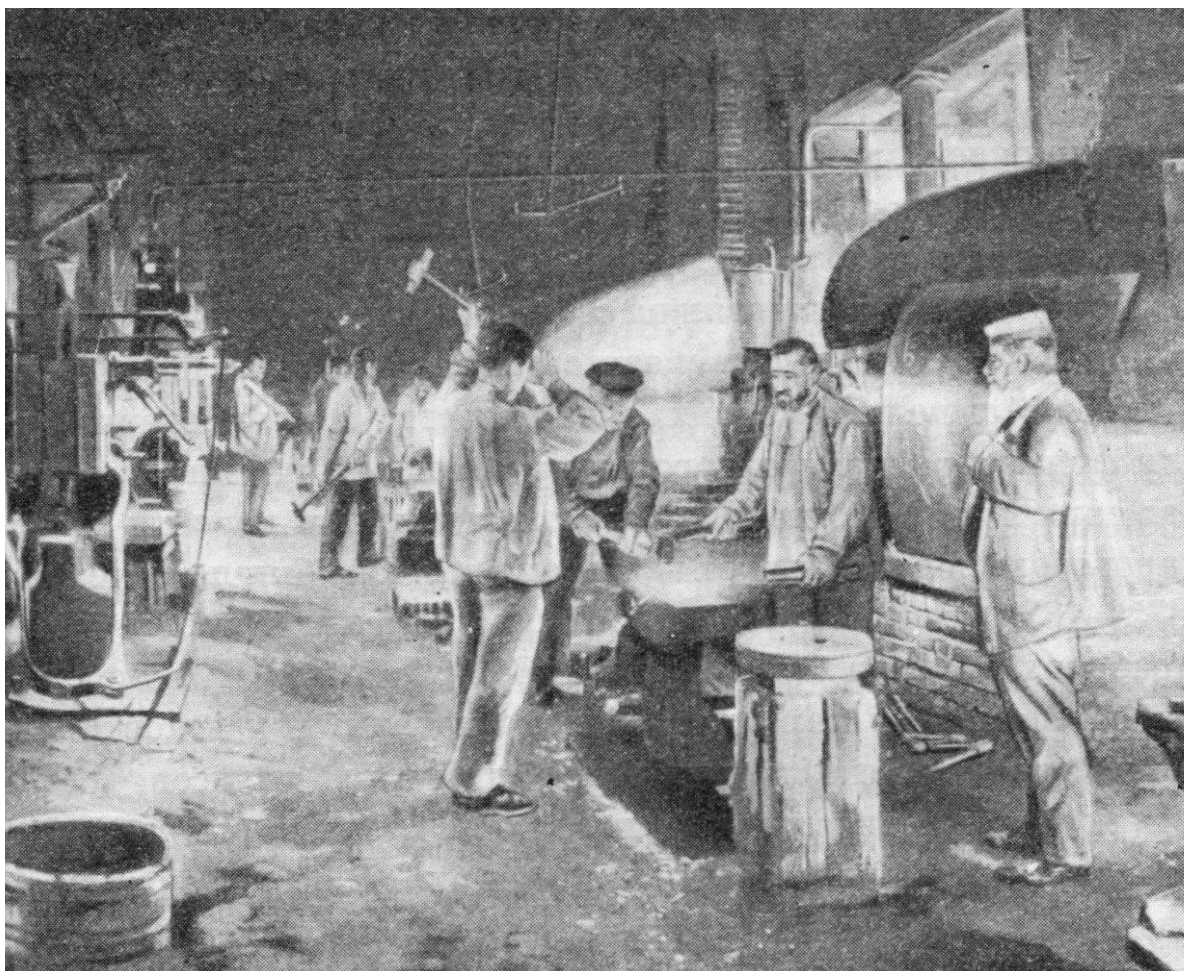
Now, it was not incidental that Kropotkin associated the delayed commitment of the engineers with the propaganda of a ‘political revolution,’ nor that Kropotkin associated the attitude of the politically active ‘engineers’ with the meetings and conversations that he had with the ‘privileged’ workers in Switzerland.¹⁵⁴ But the significance of Kropotkin’s comparison between the Geneva watchmakers and St. Petersburg’s socialist ‘engineers’ is easily missed if they are taken as a manifestation of some dogmatic, ‘*narodnik*’ prejudice towards the ‘peasantry’ and away from the ‘proletariat.’ Again, it was the moral, cultural and personal aspects of workers’ organisation, not a simple ‘economic relation’ or ‘property relation,’ that Kropotkin emphasised in drawing his distinctions between different groups of socialist workers in the West. According to Kropotkin, it was from such *practical* distinctions that lessons were drawn about the ‘political’ and ‘non-political’ socialisms that he encountered within different sections of the

¹⁵² Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 328.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 326.

¹⁵⁴ See Kropotkin’s account of his familiarisation with the ideas of the International, with its sections in Zurich and Geneva, and his stay with the ‘rebellious’ watchmakers of the Jura Federation in Neuchâtel, 1872: *ibid*, p. 268-287.

International in Switzerland, rather than from a theoretical or intellectual bias towards Bakuninist anarchism. Further, it was the social-revolutionary principle of workers' self-determination and the *intelligenty's* tendency to celebrate the practical or popular roots of socialism and its anarchist tendency – the true core of narodism as a revolutionary doctrine – that shines through in Kropotkin's descriptions of the western European and, particularly, the Swiss workers' movements.



14. Blacksmith's workshop at the Nobel' factory, St. Petersburg (1880s)¹⁵⁵

Kropotkin's aforementioned prejudices against the purely intellectual, theoretical or (even) 'middle-class' aspects of the socialist movement, and the existing organisation of its worker-participants through the International, are prevalent in his discussions of the Swiss workers' movement much as in the account of propaganda work among the Russian 'weavers and engineers.' It was a mistake, Kropotkin said, to believe that the workers movement could be

¹⁵⁵ Kochakov, *Ocherki istorii Leningrada*, p. 103.

understood fully through the ideas propounded by the ‘learned makers of sociological theories,’¹⁵⁶ or to believe that socialism was above all an intellectual or theoretical movement. The practical contribution of the intellectuals and the ‘middle-classes’ to the socialist-workers’ movement had been minimal through the entire existence of the International,¹⁵⁷ a truth Kropotkin had grasped in his encounters with the workers’ organisations in Geneva:

I saw how eager the workers were to gain instruction, and despairingly few were those who volunteered to aid them. I saw how much the toiling masses needed to be helped by men possessed of education and leisure, in their endeavours to spread and develop the organisation; but few were those came to assist without the intention of making political capital out of this very helplessness of the people...I felt more acutely than ever how cowardly are the educated men who hesitate to put their education, their knowledge, their energy at the service of those who are much in need [of it].¹⁵⁸

Kropotkin’s urge to ‘cast in his lot’ with the workers was strengthened by his sense that the workers too were aware of the problematic relationship between themselves and the ‘middle class’ socialists. In a phrase that echoes the sentiments of certain Russian worker-*intelligenty*, Kropotkin has a ‘stonemason friend’ of the Geneva section of the International say: ““we accept their services for now...but when the revolution comes, our first move will be to throw them all overboard.””¹⁵⁹ As in the case of the Russian ‘weavers and engineers,’ Kropotkin was distressed by those tendencies within the Swiss workers’ movement that stifled the autonomous, practical, ‘living’ development of socialism by workers themselves. Particular reproach was preserved for the middle-class leaders of the Geneva section, who (Kropotkin felt) had manipulated the workers’ organisation for their own political ends. In one case he suspected that construction workers’ quite reasonable plan to mount a strike had been sidelined by a certain lawyer, ‘Monsieur A,’ and another leader of the movement, Nikolai Utin,¹⁶⁰ in order to secure ‘A’s’ chances of success at a forthcoming election.¹⁶¹ But the this manipulation of the workers’ movement by the middle class socialists and liberal pseudo-socialists was understood as an extension of the parasitical relationship of the intellectual or theoretical socialists to the everyday, practical activities of the workers. It was from the latter that the socialist movement

¹⁵⁶ Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p 275.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 272, 276.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 278.

¹⁵⁹ Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 279.

¹⁶⁰ ‘Nicolas Ootin’ in the original (*ibid*, p. 276 – 280).

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 279-80.

was born and which continued to constitute its lifeblood. Talking of the development of the International among Europe's workers, Kropotkin wrote that:

...all sorts of partial solutions to the great social question...were brought before the different 'sections' of the association, and then before the local, regional, national, and international congresses, and eagerly discussed...The amount of intelligent things said at these congresses, and of scientifically correct, deeply thought over ideas being circulated – all being the results of the *collective* thought of the workers - has never been fully appreciated; there is no exaggeration in saying that all the schemes of social reconstruction currently in vogue under the name of 'scientific socialism' or 'anarchism' has their origins in the discussions and reports of the different congresses of the International Association. The few educated men who joined the movement have only put into theoretical shape the criticisms and the aspirations which were expressed in the sections, and subsequently in the congresses, by the workers themselves.¹⁶²

Therefore, 'he who seeks information about socialism finds in books little of what he requires most. They contain theories or arguments in favour of socialist aspirations, but they give little idea how the workers accept socialist ideals, and how the latter could put them into practice.'¹⁶³ Much better to read through the vast newspaper press of the workers movement or, preferably, to live among and speak to the workers themselves, in order to 'follow the movement from the inside and know the workers' view of it.'¹⁶⁴ In this way Kropotkin believed he was able to grasp the popular origin and core of those theories derived from and developed in practice and experience by committed worker-socialists all over Europe.¹⁶⁵

It is clear enough that Kropotkin's prejudices, like those of Bakunin, were towards the practical contributions and the meaningful sacrifices made to the socialist movement by the *workers themselves*, over and above the purely theoretical or sometimes harmful efforts of middle-class or intellectual 'outsiders.'¹⁶⁶ Unlike Bakunin, Kropotkin refrained from highlighting any important distinctions between peasants, peasant-workers and urbanised or skilled workers in his account. As in much social-revolutionary propaganda from the 1870s, Kropotkin's understanding of the forcible separation of the 'producers' from the wealth they created took in equally the peasants' separation from the products of the land and the urban worker's separation from the products of his labour in the factories. This can be seen in Kropotkin's description of

¹⁶² Ibid, p. 272.

¹⁶³ Ibid, p. 275.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 275-6.

¹⁶⁵ On the 'commitment' of the worker-members of the International, see *ibid*, p. 277 – 278.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 277.

the Italian sections of the International, who ‘were called upon to make their own revolution – to take the land for the peasants and the factories for the workers themselves, and to abolish the repressive centralised organisation of the state, whose historical mission always was to protect and to maintain the exploitation of man by man.’¹⁶⁷ It should be noted also that Kropotkin made little distinction in his account between workers of different trades, the western European equivalents of ‘weavers and engineers,’ only celebrating the fact that the International had allowed ‘the jealousies and prejudices which had existed between the privileged trades (the watchmakers and the jewellers) and the rougher trades (the weavers and so on)’ to begin to disappear.¹⁶⁸ He lauded above all the growing belief among the workers that, ‘of all the divisions which exist in modern society, by far the most important is that between the owners of capital and those who come into the world penniless, and are doomed to remain the producers of wealth for the favoured few.’¹⁶⁹

Kropotkin’s memoirs then demonstrate something of the social-revolutionary doctrine *vis-à-vis* the city workers and the peasantry, hitherto obscured by the Marxist ‘class distinctions’ formulated by Plekhanov and repeated by Lenin through the 1880s and 1890s. The reprinting of extracts for Kropotkin’s work in *Byloe* – with the descriptions of *zavodskie* and *fabrichnye* divorced from the background in the author’s experience of divisions within the Western working class and its socialist and anarchist organisations – would have in fact strengthened the Plekhanovite understanding of the *narodnik* tendency by highlighting, from a different angle, the same associations of *zavodskie* with ‘urban modernity’ and *fabrichnye* with ‘traditional, peasant culture.’ What is also obscured is the probable influence of Plekhanov’s account on Kropotkin’s, Sinogub’s and others with regards to this sub-division of the city workers. It is probable that the lines were significantly sharpened by confrontation with the account given in *Russkii rabochii*, where the distinctions *were* hard and fast and *did* have obvious links to the ‘Marxist’ position that Plekhanov was working out for himself in the 1880s, and backing up with ‘experience’ in the 1890s. It is clear that Kropotkin, and certainly *Byloe*, were appealing to ‘experience’ through historical documentation, placing themselves within the same social-revolutionary, historiographical tradition to which Plekhanov’s *Russkii Rabochii* belonged. The moral and theoretical positions of each tendency or group were being backed up by reference to real, historical events and figures, by authors who had participated in them: *not* for the sake of

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 273.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

'history' but in order to strengthen, from without, a shared political position (*narodism*, in the original sense). History and experience were necessary for *narodism*, since in any form its basic proposition was that theory itself was secondary. However – and as is made clear by Plekhanov and Kropotkin's heavy use of the categories and sub-categories in their 'memoirs' – the concrete and historical experience related by revolutionaries was always circling back to the political position, the theory, the view of history as a law governed process. The relation of *useful* and *repeatable* experience (*opyt'*) emphasised in turn the abstract individual rather than the concrete person. Authors were the *bearers* of experiences that supported political positions; they were witnesses to processes and events whose meaning and significance might be *grasped* by individuals, but did not centre upon them *as* individual subjects or writers.

III. WORKERS' WRITINGS (1917-30)

Social-revolutionary doctrine struggled with the question of the role of the individual in the movement; this tension entered into the historiography of the movement that appeared in the late 1880s and developed, through party politics and under political pressures, through the rest of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Alekseev's speech had been a founding document of this historiography. But Alekseev's role, however much it had been transferred into the historical writings of the *intelligenty* belonging to the movement, remained a special one because of his class, and because of the special 'witness' he became by dint of class. Where useful experience was transmitted to future revolutionaries by abstraction from the particular stories that carried it, Alekseev's experience was different: it was both personal and of the class, particular and abstract, prior to any representation. Hence, where the intention to document and to pass on useful stuff to the movement in the writings of *intelligenty* can now be put to one side in favour of a psychological reading or an examination of social identity through the *individual* representation of the self, with Alekseev and his speech the 'self' was only present to the extent that it *had to be*: necessarily the experience of class was borne by individuals but, intending as well as thinking of himself as the embodiment of the 'millions,' individuality remained only nominal, without substance, ahistorical. The *workers'* experience and *this* worker's were identified as one. Yet Alekseev's necessary, *individual* presence imposes the question of his life and role. Thus, there was a conflict between the *workers' experience* represented and the *particular worker* who represented and embodied it. Revolutionary historiography, in imposing the task of witness upon worker memoirists, while giving them in the same models of writing a

sense of the value of the individual experience and the individual life, reproduced the tension in Alekseev's speech in the later, retrospective and historical writings of the worker-revolutionaries of the 1870s. The awkward position of the worker-*intelligent*, in his experiences and position 'of his class,' yet against classification and its suppression of individuality by self-assertion and consciousness, manifested itself again in the overlap between the *workers' voice* and the *voices of particular workers*. In the first, the authority of the witness was based entirely on class, and individuality was only nominal. In the second, the category and the substance categorised were separated: it was possible for the assertion of individuality and the grasping of personal experience through writing to contradict the implication that the working class and its members were interchangeable. Even in the nominal individuality of the 'class witness' there was a critical element: that this worker's life or speech or actions could be identified as such implied the distance and conflict between external, social classification and the thoughts, actions and the very existence of the particular, historical people who were classified. The extent to which this critical element could be emphasised by 'worker writers' depended in part on their categorisation or self-categorisation as 'working-class writers' or 'worker-intelligently.' And this, in turn, depended on the extent to which they had already been identified as workers, worker-intelligently, *zavodskie*, *fabrichnye* – with all that those terms implied regarding their individuality, their radical commitments, and the foundations of consciousness and radical belief in social processes – in other historical accounts.

After October, 1917, when surviving Imperial archives were opened to historians and to some former revolutionaries of the 1870s and 1880s, the overlap between the documentation of history and the revelation of experience reached its logical conclusion, with former members of *Narodnaia Volia* in particular appealing to a mixture of official documentation, extant memoir writing and their own collections of materials to support, correct or 'add perspective' to the fallible and limited memories of the individual, now judged according to their reliability and historical accuracy, as well as the colour they might lend to objective accounts and those of other contemporaries – above all government officials – who had been outside of the movement.¹⁷⁰ Interest in the early histories of the revolutionary and workers' movements was

¹⁷⁰ It is particularly true of Charushin's memoir, *O dalekom proshlom*, which cites and references extant accounts of the various episodes in which Charushin himself was involved. The section on the *chaikovtsy* and the propaganda work among the Petersburg workers had references and discussions of the memoirs of Kropotkin and Singeub, published some twenty years before Chaurushin's memoir. In certain cases, he was able to consult archival material (see his discussion of the worker Tarasov and his role in the routs of 1874 and 1875). Charushin was also in contact with the historian Sh. M. Levin through the 1920s and, like Lavrov's

marked after the October Revolution. Soviet historical science did more than collect and analyse documents. The idea that emancipation should be the business of the ‘working class itself’ was, then, reiterated and rephrased for an era in which the workers’ state was an established fact and a proletarian culture a going concern: the workers’ movement would need its *own* history, spoken in its own voice and written in its own words. Individual workers, sought out in order to give testimony to their own past, would then contribute to a wider political project in which not only power but also history would be re-appropriated. In opposition to the bourgeois historiography with its fixation on political and cultural elites, equally alien to the autobiographical traditions of a bourgeoisie inclined to treat its personal history as private property – a material sentiment to be inherited alongside the family business and the silverware – the history of the Russian working class would be a collective enterprise with collective ends. The establishment of the ‘Commission on the History of the October Revolution and the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik),’ or ‘Istpart,’ in August, 1920, under the direction of M.S. Ol’minskii, M.N. Pokrovskii, V.V. Adoratskii and V. I. Nevskii, extended and systematized the urge, notable within the early revolutionary movement, to take possession of recent historical events through the preservation and production of historical documents. Several historical journals were set up by leading Soviet historians in the 1920s, some of which would survive into the 1940s and 1950s: *Krasnyi Archiv* (under Pokrovskii’s direction until his death in 1932)¹⁷¹ and *Istoricheskii Archiv* had a documentary emphasis and a broad coverage of revolutionary history; *Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia*, its successor *Istoriik-Marksist*, and the sister publication *Krasnaia Letopis’* (organ of the Leningrad section of Istpart) contained historical articles concerned, in the main, with the period 1890-1917. Writings by working-class people were sought out and republished, or directly requested through the press and recorded from speech at specially arranged meetings (*vchera-vstrecha*).¹⁷² In 1925, workers and others took part in a large meeting for participants of the 1905 Revolution; in 1927, a similar event collected materials from participants of the October Revolution.¹⁷³ Istpart’s activities in this

correspondents in the 1880s and 1890s, was asked to comment on specific events and personalities that were either obscure or lost in extant memoirs materials, the press, or in archival documents (Charushin, *O dalekom proshlom*, p. 283-98; see also Sh. M. Levin’s essay, which drew on Chrushin’s answers, ‘K kharakteriski ideologii “chaikovtsev”’, *ibid*, p. 299-395). Note that the verification of one’s own memories of particular events, speeches, conversations, etc. by extant sources was not limited to those testifying to distant, personal experiences. Trotsky apparently consulted Sukhanov’s *Zapiski* while writing his *History of the Russian Revolution* (see I. Getzler, *Chronicler of the Russian Revolution* (New York, 2001), p. 68.

¹⁷¹ L. Rubinchek ‘The Red Archives. A Review Article,’ *American Slavic and East European Review*, Vol. 6, No. 3/4 (Dec., 1947), p. 159-71.

¹⁷² Golubtsov, *Memuary kak istochnik*, p. 9.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 10.

direction also stretched to the early workers' movement of the 1870s to the 1890s. In the preface to the collection *VNP*, E. A. Korol'chuk mentions how, in January, 1923, a meeting was held at Moscow University with old worker-revolutionaries from the time of the *Soiuz bor'by*: at first they simply chatted together across a modest meal and some drinks; some of the notes taken at this meeting by Istpart's activists were then turned into memoirs.¹⁷⁴ Similar events were held across the country, some with Istpart at the helm (most after 1925 would be under their direction), others organised by parallel, historical and social groups. It was in this way that Diomid Aleksandrov, co-worker and friend of Gerasimov and one time member of the Diakov circle (1874-5), 'at a meeting of the Yakutsk Branch of the Society for Political Exiles at the beginning of March 1925,' was able to record his memories of revolutionary activities in the 1870s (Appx. C: 290, *ft.* 1).

In 1921, Istpart compiled and published a collection of memoirs related to the underground social-democratic and 'populist' workers' groups of the late 1880s and 1890s, including the stories of the workers K. Norinskii and V. A. Shelgunov. In the introduction to *Ot gruppy Blagoeva k soiuzu bor'by*, Ol'minskii, himself a former metal worker and an 'Old Bolshevik,' turned 'to the old workers with a long history of participation in the movement':

I simply draw attention to the fact that neither Norinskii, nor Bogdanov, nor Shelgunov were ever 'writers.' Indeed, Norinskii had never written a word for publication before this. And Shelgunov not only did not write, but *could not* have written [earlier]; he went blind many years before. He told his stories, and they were written down. Such stories are interesting and extremely important. Therefore, not a single worker should say: 'I cannot write my memoirs, because I have never written before.' If you are blind or lame, but able to talk, then ask a friend to write down your story for you. Anything that has been written or recorded can be sent to Istpart (the Commission on the History of the Party) in Moscow, Vozddvizhenka, Vaganovskii *pereulok*, No. 8.¹⁷⁵

The immediate aim of the collection was to document and to draw attention to a decade in the workers' movement that had been neglected by party historians and by activists alike. Though the 1880s were understood as the years in which the theoretical ground for Russian Marxism was put down by the founders, associations with the terrorist campaigns of the last few years of the 1870s, their culmination in Aleksandr II's assassination in 1881, and the onset of autocratic reaction, overshadowed the small scale but still important activities of workers and their circles

¹⁷⁴ Korol'chuk, 'Ot sostavitelia,' *VNP*, p. 9.

¹⁷⁵ *Ot gruppy Blagoeva k soiuzu bor'by (1886-1894): Stati i vospomnaniia*, M. N. Ol'minskii (ed.), (Rostov-on-Don, 1921), p. 6.

with the apparent resignation to ‘small deeds’ amongst the socialist intelligentsia.¹⁷⁶ In that sense, the aims of *Ot gruppy* were comparable to those of *Byloe* in its first incarnation under Burtsev: to inform people of a forgotten or only dimly understood part of their own history. Yet, Ol’minskii’s call for workers’ stories and workers’ memoirs was not related to this specific goal. It was a general call for ‘class witnesses.’ The call was made according to a social category: Ol’minskii was not asking for the accounts of anyone on the workers’ movement, but on workers’ *own* accounts of it, ‘from the inside.’ He took no account of whether his audience wanted to write or tell their stories, if they had the inclination or the capacity to do one or the other: it was not the workers’ themselves that were important, but the events, the struggles, the people from the past to which they might ‘testify.’ In other words, Ol’minskii was asking workers to contribute to a *working-class history* which was external to them, and to which they had a ‘duty’: ‘Such stories are interesting and *extremely important*....’

A similar appeal to the workers’ historical consciousness was made – probably at the behest of Istpart – through the newspaper *Trud*, the organ of the All-Russian Committee for Trade Unions, in March, 1921. In an article entitled ‘Know your history!’ (*‘Nado znat’ svoiu istoriiu!*’), worker readers were encouraged to start telling their stories, on the back of an agreement between the unions and the new (historical) ‘Commission’ to ‘cooperate fully in the collection of materials on the history of the trade union movement.’¹⁷⁷ ‘Comrades, don’t hesitate,’ the article ran. ‘Quickly get on with collecting materials. Write about your memories of your activities in the past and the life of the unions. Write about your current work also.’¹⁷⁸ For *Trud* it was clear that the Russian workers’ experiences and history had a meaning much greater than a history made in abstraction for real life. History had a contemporary, political role to play:

These materials do not only have historical significance. The unions of Soviet Russia have accumulated a great wealth of experience in revolution, which is now being repeated by the workers in Western Europe. We must collect this experience and preserve it.¹⁷⁹

What had been the relatively modest goal of the pre-revolutionary historiography – to collect and distribute ‘useful experience’ for the sake of new activists, as yet still learning the ropes, and for ‘a tradition to follow,’ who might find significance in historical materials that

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 1-2.

¹⁷⁷ *Trud: ezhednevnaia gazeta vseros. tsentr professional’nykh soiuzov*, no. 12 (Friday, 4 March, 1921), p. 2, c. 2.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

contemporaries had not second-guessed in composing them, had become for the victorious, revolutionary historiography an internationally significant exercise in documentation. The underlying notion – that personal and particular experience bore on any number of situations, could be repeated, could be learned, that mistakes could thus be avoided – was the same. The abstraction involved between the relation of personal or particular experiences and their audience was however, now much greater. The idea that history could be grasped or appropriated by workers' themselves was also here, but devoid of any direct relation to individuals and *their* own histories. The notion of autobiographical and memoir writing as somehow *personally formative*, as a means to take possession of, and overcome, experience, was replaced by a self-conscious 'writing for history.' If there was a *workers' history*, then it would belong to each and every worker; if there were experiences to be related of working life and working class organisation, then they also belonged to each and every worker. The category of class, hand in hand with a notion of history as something 'witnessed,' not made, by individuals, made workers external to their own experiences.

The political significance of the 'workers' voice' did not have to be mediated through the 'international class-struggle.' *Trud* not only committed to help collect materials in the 1920s, but also published in their pages the memoirs of workers. In 8 March, 1921 - International Women's Day and the anniversary of outbreak of the February Revolution - the memoir of a 'workeress' (*rabotnitsa*), 'Kazakova,' who had been employed through 1914-17 in the textiles factories in Serpukhov and St. Petersburg (the Maraev, then the Cheshire, factories), and actively engaged throughout the war in organising workers' medical insurance funds, with setting up a workers' journal, and with agitation among her fellow workers.¹⁸⁰ The publication of such workers' memoirs on days considered significant to the course of the revolution had the effect of demonstrating in a concrete way that these events, potentially alienating and impersonal because of their enormous complexity, as well as the hammered-in message of the revolution's 'world-historical importance,' were constituted by the actions of particular people; it was also salutary to show that these events now 'belonged' to the workers themselves, the imposition of 'significant dates' and anniversaries through the press and by the Party notwithstanding. But it was also politically important in a more immediate way to emphasise the role of *working* women in the revolution and, thus, the primacy of *class* over any other category: when it was still considered that 'women' (especially unskilled or semi-skilled,

¹⁸⁰ *Trud*, no. 15 (Tuesday, 8 March, 1921), p. 3.

working women in textiles, food production, and domestic service) were the backward element (*otstalnyi sloi*) in the new, Soviet system, it was important to show again the capacity already demonstrated by working women to organise, propagandise and agitate, both among their own 'sub-group' (such as it was), as well as in the wider milieu of soldiers, sailors and working people.¹⁸¹ Kazakova's judgement that the female workers at Cheshire were 'too unconscious' to get seriously involved in the preparations for International Women's Day in 1917, added to her comment about setting up and writing a workers' paper in 1915 or 1916, confirm that Kazakova was a worker-*intelligent*, and that with 'political consciousness' obtained, it was class, not sex, that mattered. Thus, there were immediate political intentions behind the publication of this piece in *Trud*. In the case of the worker Dmitri Kondrat'ev - whose memoir was published in *Trud* in two parts in the few weeks after Kazakova's had come out - the political intent was even more obvious.¹⁸² Kondrat'ev set out to describe his experiences of a peasant childhood, employment in the mines at El'tigetskaia, and the harsh working routine forced upon working people by its manager and owners: all workers took two shifts in the day, working for 16 hours or more; if they stopped work for a breather they were fined 5 roubles; if they got sick, their pay was cut by two-thirds. Living in large, communal halls in barracks, there were no facilities to wash oneself or one's clothes... Kondrat'ev commented pointedly at the end of the second part of his memoir:

I'm not writing to entertain you, but to force those who've managed to forget about the past to remember what it was actually like. Some people say to me: 'Isn't it just the same now as it was back then?' I answer them straight: 'No, it was much worse then!' ...Nowadays, we may have shortages, yes...but back then, the rich man with all his luxuries stood by as my family starved to death.¹⁸³

Among the daily reports of shortages in oil, gas, salt, the news of the outbreak of a cholera epidemic and of famine through the spring and summer of 1921, it was the 'workers' voice' that was wheeled out to have the readers remember the progress made for *their* class, despite everything. And Kondrat'ev's role was not only to remind them, but to remind them in the *workers' voice*, giving the rather underwhelming message of 'relative improvement' all the authenticity of class experience and past suffering that it could bear. It was not the voice of an 'ex-miner': Kondrat'ev's profession was incidental except in that it put him in the working class, and thus gave him the authority to speak. And sympathy was expected with his message

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² *Trud*, no. 23 (Friday, 18 March, 1921), p. 2-3 and no. 37 (Tuesday, 5 April, 1921), p. 3, c. 5-7.

¹⁸³ *Trud*, no. 37, *ibid*, p. 3, c. 7.

on *that* basis - on the basis of a suffering that had been shared by all those belonging to his social category. The possibility that working people had experienced these conditions and changes *differently* – suggested by the very details that Kondrat'ev himself provides about his job, his working routine – is suppressed. If working people or particular workers did not recognise the truth in what Kondrat'ev was saying (Kondrat'ev says), then they have simply forgotten. His memoir would remind them.

There is, in a comparison of Kazakova and Kondrat'ev's memoirs, and even in the movement of each author between descriptions of a life belonging to *them* and the life belonging to the *class* as a whole, a hint of what it meant politically for workers such as Aleksandrov, Smirnov, and Volkov to become 'witnesses' to their history. Their history was, after all, the history of working-class *experience*, a history of the working-class *movement*, and a history of their particular lives. This is clear in both cases cited above. In Kondrat'ev's memoir, the three parts of working-class life were spliced together: what distinguished the author here from the other workers was not his particular employment (it was only an exemplar of working-class labour), nor his memory of his family's 'starvation' (it was only an exemplar of working-class suffering), but the fact of speaking about these things and drawing the correct political conclusions from them: that the workers' revolution had made things better for the workers. In that sense, Kondrat'ev was the 'conscious' worker to his audiences backwardness. In Kazakova's case, the division of the mass from the individual – of the author from the milieu and the movement she described – was confirmed not just by the bare fact of 'speaking,' but also in the particular way in which she and other workers were described. The 'unconscious' women at Cheshire remain as grey in representation as their contemporary nicknames would have had them for the skilled and the developed workers. Kazakova is, in contrast, a subject - she plans a paper for the workers; she agitates; she acts beyond her classification and becomes individual. There is division of an individuated political life from the mass experience of class, a worker or peasant's childhood, the everyday routine of life at the workshop or in the workers' quarters – is often found in workers' memoirs. Thus, the old clash between the 'worker' and the 'intelligent' – of the generality of the experience of labour, hardship, oppression, with the consciousness and resistance that affirmed individuality – is internalised across and within workers' historical and political writings.

The contrast between Alekseev's speech and his letters is, for instance, quite clear. Through the letters, the 'inner life' of feeling, lived experience, and memory, eschewed in favour of largely objective observations in the 'workers' speech,' shoulders its way back into Alekseev's story. There, 'being a worker,' 'being part of the working class,' is an addition largely alien to the text, its presence determined by prior knowledge of Alekseev's history and background. In correspondence with a select group of friends and comrades (Ivan Smirnov, a fellow worker in exile; Pëtr Ivanovskii, a fellow *intelligent* in exile), Alekseev's right to dwell on *his own* suffering – boredom, frustration, impotence, hatred, a 'sickened heart' and a broken head – is not in question. There are none of those indications, common in the writings of working men and women, of doubt in the value (of whatever kind) of self-reflection or the relation of experiences deemed only personally significant.¹⁸⁴ Even *within* the speech, however, there are small gestures to this intuitive distinction of an individuated, political life against the generality of an everyday, working life. Where Alekseev's descriptions of childhood, the workday, housing, wages depression, and abusive class relations become personal to Alekseev only in that his voice is lent to their articulation, gestures to a different life – a life of night-time reading, curiosity, passion, friendship, and the formative experience affirmative of individuality – come with a rare, explicit self-reference: Alekseev's 'we' (*my*) is for a moment replaced by an 'I' (*Ia*):

I know something about the worker question of our brothers in the West. They differ from the Russians in many ways: there, the workers who spend every free minute and many a dark night in reading are not persecuted, as they are here. Quite the opposite. There, it is a matter of pride. They look at the Russian workers like slaves, like animals. And as how else could they see us? Do *we* have any free time for such pursuits? ... Do we have books that are useful and accessible? ... I think everyone knows that in Russia the worker who reads books will be persecuted... (Appx. A: 278)

The passage points more directly to Alekseev's own life as a revolutionary and a worker-*intelligent* (and so his distinction from the 'working millions') than anything else in the speech. Analogous distinctions of relative generality and individuality are found in the memoirs and autobiographies of the early worker-radicals. Testimonies to politically active lives are detailed and historically precise, filled with descriptions of meetings and conversations, personalities, lists of reading materials, dates of arrest and imprisonment. The auratic function of self-identification by class is confirmed in the perfunctory description of childhood and actual

¹⁸⁴ Zelnik, *Law and Disorder*, p. 223.

labour: the confirmation of a social position once occupied endows testimony with the historical value due to the privileged ‘witness at first-hand,’ the aura of class then washing through narratives and memories that indicate, more than anything, the desire to *escape* labour by passing over it quickly. Diomid Aleksandrov summed up ‘labour’ itself with a single phrase -

At eleven years of age I arrived from Finland at the Kreenholm manufactory, close to Narva, where I myself was transformed into a machine, having to work everyday for 14 hours. (Aleksandrov, Appx. D: 290).

- the factories at Kreenholm and, later, St. Petersburg mentioned only in relation to his radical activities. Pëtr Moiseenko, active in the workers’ circles from the late 1870s to the mid-1880s, began his full-length autobiography thus:

I must begin my memoirs from that moment when illegal pamphlets first fell into my hands: *A Story of Four Brothers; The Cunning Trick; Tale of a Penny; Revolutionary Songs*. This moment marked the beginning of my awakening from religious beliefs. I worked at the Zimina factory [in Zuevo] as a weaver. I often went to the neighbouring factory of Savvy Morozov in Orekhevo in order to pick up books from Morozov’s library: Fennimore Cooper and the like. And then my comrade, another weaver..., came back from Nizhnii with illegal stuff from the Nizhegorodskaia fair. When my comrades and I began to read over it, we couldn’t believe our eyes. What *is* this? Could these books be telling the truth...?¹⁸⁵

As if a life worth recalling began only with the illegal pamphlet. And it is Moiseenko’s political life that constitutes the bulk of his story. Of course, work as exploitation and work as it was connected to workers’ cultures are mentioned, either in collective terms (wages in this or that factory; fines and deductions; workers’ responses to fines, etc.) or in general terms (wage levels and deductions as part of a ‘class experience’). But this is an extension of a story in which work-life and being a worker are already perceived as political facts: that Moiseenko looks upon them as such reinforces the fact that his sense of historical individuality – the sense that his story was worth telling – was tied to his self-perception as a politicised worker, and thus his perception of the working class and work itself in political terms. Work as a productive activity, a skill, a personally formative experience, is almost never discussed. The same can be said of most workers’ memoirs. The majority of the worker-*intelligenty* of the 1870s and 1880s seemed to have no interest in retrieving for an audience of historians, or for ‘posterity,’ details of work

¹⁸⁵ P. A. Moiseenko, *Vospominaniia starogo revoliutsionnera* (Moscow, 1966), p. 15.

and a work routine apparently so boring, so repetitive, that it was better to face arrest and exile than give up the 'other life' that made it bearable, and their *own* lives meaningful.

There were a few exceptions. Semën Kanatchikov – born a peasant, a migrant to Moscow, then metalworker, then Social-Democrat and Bolshevik *intelligent* - spoke most eloquently and passionately of the personally formative influences of the work process - especially, of how he became a qualified metalworker and the kinds of tasks involved in pattern-making. *Moia Zhizn'* (*My Life*) gives to production itself the colour and density of lived experience where other workers give categories (a occupation, a factory name, a skill level). He would fashion knickknacks after hour with the workshop's tools, feeling *his* powers and sense of self-possession grow with the deftness of his hands; he walked around the factory's departments, following the production of a machine from pattern to model to casting to assembly and painting;¹⁸⁶ 'I began to be gripped by the poetry of the large metal factory, with its mighty metallic roar, the puffing of its steam-driven machines, its columns of high pipes, its rising clouds of black smoke, which sullied the clear blue sky....'¹⁸⁷ Can or should such experiences, grasped by Kanatchikov, remembered and made into personal experiences by representation that was self-consciously poetic, be used as evidence of the wider experiences the working class in general, or of skilled workers, or just skilled metalworkers 'in particular'? Like Kanatchikov a decade later, D. Smirnov, Volkov and the Peterson brothers had been skilled machinists at the Patronnyi plant in St. Petersburg; Gerasimov, Aleksandrov, Alekseev and Moiseenko had all been weavers, a position that required relatively high-levels of skill in comparison to spinning, carding, dying, washing, and of course the menial tasks of cleaning, brushing up, and minor repairs (clearing jams, etc.) carried out by child assistants. Isn't it reasonable to make inferences from Kanatchikov's experience of learning and mastering a trade to those of other workers, and other worker-*intelligenty*? In the absence of these men's own descriptions of labour as production or labour processes as personally formative, such inferences are doubly offensive, both to Kanatchikov's singularity and to the purpose and historical sense of other worker-memoirists. The individuality that Kanatchikov found in the development and mastery of manual skill would be cheated away by the identification of his representation of his work experience with the experiences of skilled-workers as a 'sub-category.' Experience Kanatchikov had made his own by poetic appropriation (*perezzhivanie*) would become, by

¹⁸⁶ Kanatchikov, *Radical Worker*, p. 19-20, 50-1, 65.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 51.

inference, repeated or repeatable experience (*opyt*). Denial of the concrete absence of similar memories and descriptions in the writings of, say, Diakov Smirnov, or the speech of Pëtr Alekseev would cheat *us* of what was historically, politically and personally significant *for them*.

For these particular workers, work was seen from the ‘outside’: little or no personal significance was attached to it. Since they were, in these passages, speaking in the ‘workers’ voice’ – confirming their own social class as well as the class nature of their experience - individuality was here reduced to ‘speaking’ and its being recorded. The political lives of the worker-revolutionaries are given much more definite, detailed form. In this part of their lives individuality is secured in a series of connections to events, personalities, and other reference points. This is not, however, a turn to an inner life (as in Alekseev’s letters) or even a description of events and experiences as formative (as in Kanatchikov). Aside from a few small passages (Volkov’s description of arrests and the workers’ reactions to them; one of his descriptions of a disorder at a railway depot; a certain ‘confessional’ quality in Aleksandrov’s descriptions of his dreams of setting up cannon on the Nikolaevskii Bridge in order to bomb the Winter Palace). The accounts given by these men are still shaped by reference points that were equally ‘outside’ of their own memories, in other historical accounts, memoirs, and (in one case) in the questions that were specifically asked by an historical journal.

With Smirnov, the determination of the structure and the content of his memoir by the demands of others is very much on the surface. Korol’chuk notes that ‘the memoir [was] a response to a set of written questions’ that were given to Smirnov at a evening meeting by a the journal *Krasnaia Letopis’* (who went on to publish the memoir in 1928), and that ‘this accounts for its fragmentary character.’¹⁸⁸ Thus, Smirnov comments upon the personalities more or less known to the historians of the 1920s, either through Plekhanov’s account (in so far as the workers’ circles were concerned) or though an enormous and growing memoir literature related to the 1870s:

Aleksei Peterson, Semen Volkov, Lilienthal’ and I lived in one apartment on the corner of the 6th line and Srednyi Prospekt, in a stone building on the second floor, occupying two rooms.

¹⁸⁸ Korol’chuk, *VNP*, p. 381, ft. 1 to ‘D. N. Smirnov.’

Victor Pavlovich Obnorskii was a comrade of mine. We worked with him in the same instrument-making workshop. He wasn't a member of our circle didn't come to the *skhody* on the Vyborg Side. I might say a few words about our circle at this point: it consisted of me, Semen Kuz'mich Volkov, Aleksei Nikolaevich Peterson and Liliental' (I forget his first name). The circle didn't have any name...

Prince P. A. Kropotkin came a few times to our *skhody*, where the workers from the Nobel and Lessner factories and some of the *fabrichnye* went. The *skhody* met on the Vyborg Side, I remember, on the second floor of a dilapidated wooden house on Astrakhanskaia Street, in the apartment (I think) of a certain Davidchikov.

I only saw Kravchinskii once at the *skhody*, or maybe twice. He was already living 'illegally' then and was terrified of being denounced. (Appx. C: 286-8)

It is also clear in Smirnov that the documentary moment in social-revolutionary historiography – the preservation of useful experience – has been transformed in the passage from an active revolutionary movement to one in which the value of knowledge was judged, on the one hand, in terms of an ongoing historical project to recover events leading up to the revolution, and on the other, according to the class of the witness in question. Smirnov is extremely careful with the details of addresses, dates, earnings, and the people with whom he had contact. Historical value attached to such information, not necessarily because it could *only* be provided by Smirnov (much of what he says was already recorded in police and Third Department reports on the 1872-3 *skhodki*, on the students from the University and Medical-Surgical Academy, etc.), but by the fact that *he* – a worker and direct participant – was adding to such information his signature, and along with it the aura of class that followed from his self-identification as a worker. Much the same can be said of Volkov's account of the circle. Again, the details provided are precise, but do not exclusively belong to Volkov (they have been recorded elsewhere before); he structures the account of the workers' circles around personalities and events that were already 'canonical': in this case, the *Severnyi Soiuz* and its founders, Obnorskii and Khalturin; the entry (or re-entry) of Natanson, Kravchinskii, and Plekhanov into propaganda activities between 1874 and 1876; Nizovkin's treachery at the 'Trial of the 193'; prison and exile (see Appx. B: 282, 284).

Here the closest analogy, or the most obvious predecessor, to the form taken by these workers' memoirs is neither the nineteenth century, 'bourgeois' autobiography, nor Herzen's tale of formation and experience, nor even the revolutionary, *intelligent*-memoirists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but the *pokazaniia* recorded by the gendarmes and the

police. In ordinary circumstances, the *pokazaniia* had been demanded only of those working people (peasants or workers) considered responsible or ‘answerable’ for their actions and their influence upon the crowd. In the case of the worker *intelligenty* on their arrest in 1874 or ’75, the normal routine had been slightly upset: the committed were those who admitted nothing; the ‘irresponsible ones’ would confess everything and return themselves to the ‘mass’ from which they were supposed to have come. Yet, in either case, the structure of the *pokazaniia* was determined by a confrontation of the ‘seized’ or arrested worker (or whoever) with the documentation of their actions already held by the authorities. Their deification by estate (*krest’ianin*; *meshchanin*) and by occupation determined the social class to which they belonged and their ideal ‘answerability’: the working class, lower class or *narod* understood in their normal state to be manipulated, passive, instinctive, without the capacity to assert themselves, and thus deprived of the markers of personality; the aristocrat or professor ideally answerable for all their actions, since educated, in a position of authority and responsibility, capable of self-assertion, and therefore individual; the students and other young people of the upper classes placed somewhere between. Thus, the escape of so many working people from prison and trial by the ‘open testimony,’ and the confusion wrought by the lying, falsification, or tight-lipped serenity of certain workers - the committed ones - who were understood both to be ‘manipulated’ and ‘conscious,’ both of their class and excluded from it by self-assertion.

In the 1920s, certain workers were pressed, and other willingly offered, their testimonies to the history in which they had participated. From the beginnings of the social-revolutionary movement, the ‘workers’ voice’ had had a special role to play, and this special role - of witness to class experience - was then extended to the worker-memoirists. Yet, instead of an act of grasping history for themselves (as Kanatchikov had done), and bound by doctrines that associated the workers’ movement with *necessity*, the worker-memoirists were left to *document* a history that could not be possessed individually either in its strictly working-class aspect, or even in the realm of political activity by which they had tried to escape classification in the 1870s and 1880s. Their ‘voices’ - whether as the ‘workers’ voice’ of Alekseev’s speech, the plural embodied in the individual, or as the voices of individual people condemned to the working-class - were valuable precisely because they were workers. It was history and documentation, not identity, the self, or individuality, that concerned these memoirs. The memoirs were *contributions to a working-class history*, and were intended as such. And in that sense *their* history, accessible through them as individuals, was not theirs.

4. Alekseev in History:

Historians, the working-class, and worker's voices (1917 - present)

Alekseev's representation of the experience of the 'working millions' is political to the core. As an historical source it might, therefore, come under question from several angles. It is apparently too personal, too emotive and too closely linked to his political life to be treated as straight reportage on the imposed, objective social position of his 'class.' Yet, Alekseev's thought is so closely intertwined with the doctrines of the intelligentsia proper, and so obviously moulded by its immediate political context, that it hardly makes sense to treat it instead as 'subjective,' 'personal,' or autobiographical. Whether by the colouring of his own experiences as a worker-revolutionary, or by the influences that had Alekseev describe himself and the 'workers' by the loaded categories of revolutionary doctrine, the workers' speech 'from within' gave a vision of working-class life and experience quite as abstract as the simplified messages of suffering and unity propagated 'from without' by the intelligentsia. Dismissed as propaganda or reduced to Alekseev's particular 'worldview,' his writings are severed from the social group – perhaps real, perhaps conjured into being by the radicalised gaze of the outsider – that it was intended to represent and serve. Scepticism toward Alekseev's writings breeds scepticism towards his concepts: What were these 'working millions'? Or the 'hired working class'? The moral tone of Alekseev's condemnation, drawing overtly on such slippery notions as exploitation, oppression, disgust, and implicitly on the even more problematic notion of authority by direct (or subjective) experience, seem to reproduce the offense of uncritical, social classification the speech had aimed to criticise. Appeal to 'class experience' above and beyond observation and understanding of class relations and class cultures made class an *essential*, rather than contingent, quality of Alekseev's character, experience, and social being. Humanisation of the 'millions' by Alekseev's physical presence, his embodiment of their suffering, and the emotive language, do not obscure the fact that, here, the workers and peasants were abstractions: it was by an appeal to their 'class identity' - an abstract category perceived 'in them' and imposed upon them, that it was hoped support would be won and, eventually, revolution would be made.

That Alekseev's speech was politically motivated was acknowledged both by Soviet historians and by their English-speaking counterparts. This did not, however, dissuade either group in their pursuit, by way of the speech, of Alekseev's particular life and experiences, or indeed of the thought and experience of Russian worker-revolutionaries, or of the experience of the Russian working-class generally. Alekseev's speech has been used as evidence in all three kinds of enquiry. The speech has taken the place of the absent memoir or autobiography: its claim to describe Russian working-class life from Alekseev's perspective suggests this approach. It has been seen as a concise statement of the thought of radicalised workers in the 1870s: a 'political view' of autocratic society and the Russian workers, to be sure, but still 'belonging' to a worker, composed by him, and in that (limited) sense, authentic. It has been read as an authentic account of the working-class 'experience of things,' with more or less handwringing over the relationship between 'experiences' and 'things,' depending on particular historians' inclinations. The difficult question of the 'accuracy' and also the 'authenticity' of the speech's autobiographical content - that is, the relationship between Alekseev's personal experience, his radical consciousness, and the 'working millions' he describes - has clearly presented itself to historians time and again. As yet, however, it has found no satisfactory answer. More often than not, warnings about the political nature of this and other such texts have been mere gestures. By adopting a narrow view of the 'political,' or by employing a relativist view of (the representation of) personal experience, historians have sidestepped the problem even while gesturing to it vigorously.

I. SOVIET HISTORIANS

Soviet historians understood Alekseev's life and speech with the basic propositions of Marxism-Leninism vis-à-vis the revolutionary process, the role of the party, and the early Russian working-class movement acting as an anchoring-point for textual comparison and historical explanation. To the 'conscious workers' a special role in fostering the wider 'class consciousness' of their fellows, in furthering the aims of their class (eventually through the workers' party), and in representing the experience and interests of their class from 'the inside,' was attributed. Alekseev was for them the prototype of the conscious, social-democratic worker, his speech confirmation of a form of class-consciousness despite the apparent 'narodism' (for Leninists, 'peasantism') of some of his statements and ideas. Scholarly writings

on Alekseev's speech did place great importance on the identification and separation of sound and unsound ideological elements in it: 'Populism' (apolitical, peasant-oriented socialism) of the Bakuninist or Lavrist kinds; German social-democracy (F. Lassalle's works), or the embryonic forms of ideas later to be found in Russian Marxism, for instance.¹ Since the labels 'worker,' 'peasant,' '*narod*,' 'capitalist' and 'state' had apparently self-evident meanings from the perspective of these analyses, little or nothing was done to explain Alekseev's use of (particularly, his *self*-attribution to) these social categories, except in so far as this overlapped with the question of his ideological leanings.² The relationship between Alekseev's descriptions of the lives of the 'working millions' and the 'real' labourers (or peasants, or working class) was not even formulated, let alone investigated. The 'materialist approach' dictated that historians begin with 'objective' accounts of working-class conditions, then add colour through personal testimonies (of workers, revolutionaries, factory inspectors, etc), before linking the (now self-evident) suffering of the working class to the birth of the workers' movement.³ The speech was treated as a personal account of class oppression, of which Soviet historians could find plentiful, 'objective' evidence. This schema applied especially to the larger studies of Alekseev's life. The upshot was an account in which Alekseev's childhood was read through the speech's description of the 'workers' childhood'; his working life and its privations read through the speech's account of hellish Moscow factories and the sacrifice of the Russian peasantry to them.⁴ Alekseev became identical with his speech and the working class it described, since his account of suffering and lower-class exploitation was already deemed to correspond to the 'objective account' already offered by Soviet historians. Any 'errors' in Alekseev's view were identified with the early 'Populist' ideology in which, historically, he found it necessary to express those truths he *did* already possess regarding the Russian working class and its 'historic task': in other words, 'particular experience' was only a distortion of objective reality in so far as it deviated from a true understanding of social relations. These truths were not at all dependent on personal experiences, though they arrived necessarily through the 'subject.' As Plekhanov, the 'father of Russian Marxism,'⁵ had said in 1895, 'the

¹ N. B. Panukhina, 'K istorii rechi...', p. 84-5; Levina, 'Novye dannye...', p. 81-2.

² Levina, *ibid*, p. 81.

³ See, for example, E. A. Korol'chuk's introduction to *Rabochee Dvizhenie v semidestiatykh godov: sbornik arkhivnykh dokumentov s vvodnoi stat'ei i dopolnениami po literature* (E. A. Korol'chuk, ed.), (Leningrad, 1924), p. 5-20.

⁴ Karzhanskii, p. 15-19; B. Ia. Gokhstand, 'K biografii P. A. Alekseeva,' *Sovetskie Arkhivy*, no. 4, 1974, p. 104, c. 1; A. V. Uroeva, *Velikoe prorochestvo*.

⁵ S. H. Baron, *Plekhanov: The Father of Russian Marxism* (Stanford, 1963); Coletti, 'Introduction,' *Marx, Early Writings*, p. 8-9.

views of men are always subjective, since to have views of one kind or another is one of the qualities of the *subject*. What are objective are...the *relations*...which are expressed in those views. The criterion of truth lies not in me, but in the relations which exist outside me. Those views are true which correctly present those relations; those views are mistaken which distort them.’⁶ Alekseev’s view, focused quite directly on ‘social relationships,’ without the mediation of events, particular people, and so on, could be treated as true in so far as it confirmed what the ideology of the historian already said about the period in which Alekseev lived and ‘the movement of history’ more generally. By emphasising the parts of his worldview supposedly rooted in his experiences as a worker, Soviet historians (following Plekhanov, Lenin, Theodor Dan, and others) were able to separate off what was authentically ‘of the class’ and forward looking from what was made backward looking and mistaken under the influence of well-meaning but muddled radicals of other classes. His consciousness was then purged of any doctrinal or ideological substance: it was just consciousness of being part of a class and the intuitive knowledge of its causes:

Gentlemen, do you really think we don’t see everywhere how others are getting rich and enjoying themselves by trampling all over us? That we can’t see or understand why we are judged so badly and from where our endless labours come from? How can others live it up without working? Where do they get their wealth from? (Appx. A: 278).

The truths he spoke grew like flowers from horse muck: they were rooted in class oppression, not the doctrines of its more educated opponents. Those parts of Alekseev’s thought perhaps cultivated by the educated elites, or by a self-education that put Alekseev closer to them, were allowed to brown, as class itself was identified the main catalyst of workers’ radicalism and Alekseev an early example of its power. The primary distinction between Alekseev and the ‘masses’ – his self-education, his conscious revolutionism, his entry into the historical record by dint of these distinctions – were chalked up to the contingencies of time and place: ‘the [worker] who is more developed...only shows, to the less developed, an image of his own future.’⁷ What was left was Alekseev as *any and every worker*, the part of him determined by social necessity. If Alekseev was special, he was so for having spoken, and little more. If the speech of such a ‘typical worker’ or ‘typical *muzhik*’ could be read as autobiographical, then by dint of the author’s typicality - his exemplary position *vis-à-vis* his social group - it could

⁶ Plekhanov, ‘The Development...,’ *SPW* 1, p. 640/ ‘K voprosy...,’ *IFP* 1, p. 671.

⁷ K. Marx, preface to the first edition of *Capital*, v. 1, translated by B. Fowkes, p. 91. The original quotation has to do with ‘industrially developed countries,’ their less developed neighbours, and the ways in which laws worked themselves out or ‘won through with iron necessity.’

equally be read as a biography of the class. It could not be denied, however that Alekseev suffered personally for speaking, despite only exemplifying - in his political activities, his self-education, and his commitment - what was possible for his class outside of the collective act of revolution. Thus an awkward balance was set up between Alekseev's particular experiences and actions and the everyday lives of working people. What the speech lacked in its autobiographical aspect or 'moment' would be made up for in objective documentation of the peasants and workers' lives, and by continued research into Alekseev's particular life and thought. Other documented episodes of his life, along with the few thoughts and impressions left in his personal letters, became politically and historically significant in that light. The gaps left by the speech's stylised 'collective autobiography' were filled in and substantiated with details drawn from such documents.

Memoirists, after the 1880s able to publish their stories in journals and papers run by the revolutionary groups in Russia and abroad, recorded their impressions of Alekseev's character, intellect and actions.⁸ Though not all of these accounts were especially flattering (a few cast doubt on his intellect, and one at least on his authorship of the famous speech),⁹ still all were composed with Alekseev's public image and his place in the pantheon already established facts. If negative judgements had any force it was in their contradiction to the overwhelmingly positive value that Alekseev and his speech by then possessed. Most accounts merely added to the chorus of praise, with an underlying intent to make the hero and martyr more human. This took the form of presenting him in conversation; in his apartment with comrades; in his yurt in exile; cooking; reading; thinking, etc.¹⁰ The political logic of Alekseev's martyrdom was not challenged especially by such colour as these descriptions lent him. It was, after all, Alekseev's normality and, latterly, his innocent suffering as a 'simple peasant-worker' that gave the speech its power, its authenticity, and subsequently caught the attention of the revolutionary movement. Soviet historians, bound by an ideology similar to that of Alekseev's early admirers and drawing on the accounts left by his acquaintances, could hardly do more. Later, mostly in the early Soviet period, Alekseev became the subject of numerous biographies, some more or

⁸ See, for instance, F. Volkhovskii, *Russkii tkach Petr Alekseev* (Moscow, 1906); I. I. Mainov, *Petr Alekseevich Alekseev* (Moscow, 1924); N. Tsvilenev, *Revoliutsionner-rabochii P. Alekseev* (Moscow, 1928).

⁹ In his memoir, Pekarskii discusses G. Osmoslovskii's negative view of Alekseev as a 'mediocrity' ('Rabochii Petr Alekseev...', p. 100). My attention was drawn to this originally by the discussion in R. Otto, 'A Note on the Speech of Peter Alekseev,' *Slavic Review*, 38, no. 4 (1979), p. 651.

¹⁰ This is discussed in more detail below.

less scholarly and well-researched,¹¹ others an indulgence in the taste – notable after Lenin’s death - for historical melodrama.¹² Though much light was thrown on Alekseev’s life by these authors, much more remained obscured and forgotten. Soviet historians’ combined use of memoir sources with the official documentation provided by the police, gendarmes, the Ministries of Justice and Internal Affairs, and the Third Section (the secret police) gave at least a variety of perspectives and reasonable detail on the his years as a politically active worker and his time in exile. Attention to the earliest memoir accounts yielded descriptions of Alekseev’s path from St. Petersburg’s early worker-circles in 1871-4 through the VSRO and the propaganda work of 1874-5, to arrest, the Tsar’s prisons, and the ‘Trial of the Fifty’ in 1876-7. Still, most if not all of his life before the workers’ circles – even before his first arrest and the encounters with the VRSO – was undocumented and would remain so. His working life appeared in memoirs accounts in relation to propaganda among the workers. How he came to be a weaver, how he and when he left Novinsk for the city, how he came to be live in St. Petersburg: the details can be inferred from patterns noted in the memoirs of other workers and contemporary analyses of the peasants and ‘hired labourers,’ but Alekseev’s particular experience, including the development of his thought and the reasons behind his radicalism, are not recorded., his time as a ‘simple’ peasant and peasant-worker was destined always to be murky by comparison the relative detail available regarding his life after the mid-1870s, documented as if was by officialdom, by revolutionaries and by Alekseev himself. Political activity with all its consequences drew around Alekseev a steadily thickening circle, distinguishing him from the ‘masses’ and their repetitive, largely undocumented lives, as well as from his own early years as part of the ‘mass.’ The distinction between the mass of peasant-workers and the educated radicals - the particular lives contained within the first social category utterly obscure relative to the second - was then internalised in the division between Alekseev’s political life and everything that had come before.

Efforts were made to recover his earlier years. In 1922, researchers attached to the Smolensk newspaper *Rabochii Put’* travelled to Novinsk in order to collect from the town’s older

¹¹ L. I. Ostrover, *Petr Alekseev* (Moscow, 1957); Karzhanskii, *Moskovskii Tkach* (1954), Uroeva, *Velikoe prorochestvo* (1977).

¹² See, for instance, M. Mishev, *Stepan Khalturin i Petr Alekseev* (Moscow, 1928); I. Sverchkov (ed.), ‘*Russkii revoliutsionnery’: kniga dlia iunikh chitatelei*, Part 2 (Moscow, 1927); P. Rozhin, *Korifei rabocheho dvizheniia: ocherk o ydaiushchemmsia rabochim-revoliutsionnere P. A. Alekseeva* (Moscow, 1961).

residents any reminiscences or impressions of the young Alekseev they could find.¹³ Indeed the residents remembered, but the returns on the trip were apparently few. Alekseev was nothing special, they said. He was strong and well-built even as a boy. He went in for all sorts of games and played with the other children.¹⁴ The biographer N. S. Karzhanskii, who mentions this investigation, then devotes another five pages or so to Alekseev's life before the workers' circles. Like other memoirists, mostly of the educated class, Karzhanskii's knowledge of Alekseev's particular life as a peasant and worker is derived from Alekseev's speech. While earlier authors had reprinted the speech in full in place of any commentary on his youth or labour – as if its relation to Alekseev's life was self-evident – Karzhanskii intersperses his chapter with quotations from the speech as well as evidence drawn from scholarly histories of the Russian working-class.¹⁵ Statistical evidence of wage levels and working hours mixed with observations of poor sanitation in factories add the weight of objectivity to Alekseev's stories of exploitation and filth. Alekseev's representation of the 'working millions' adds weight to objective evidence, statistics, the observations of outsiders, by lending it the voice of the 'worker himself.' Thus, Alekseev's particular life was merged with that of the 'working millions': the Russian working class as it was forming in the 1860s and 1870s. Alienation by political self-sacrifice, latent in the substance of his speech, seized upon by the movement, was here realised in scholarly form. While Alekseev's particular story and particular experiences underpinned what authenticity and legitimacy his words gave to evidence of working-class experience less immediate and more objective, it was the objective knowledge of working-class experience that confirmed Alekseev's representation of the class from 'inside,' and so the generality of his life and experience as a 'typical worker' that were given value.

Soviet historians' use of Alekseev's letters assumed the self-evidence of their 'personal meaning' and their political importance. Since the two aspects were melded together in the speech, it is no surprise they should remain so with the letters. When they were republished in 1954 (as appendices to Karzhanskii's biography), no commentary or explanation was given by the author. Even in retelling the story of Alekseev's time in exile, the letters were not referenced; neither were they drawn upon as evidence of Alekseev's earlier life as a *muzhik* (though he speaks of his childhood), or of his particular experiences as a worker or worker-

¹³ 'Na rodine Petra Alekseeva,' *Rabochii Put'*, no. 26 (29 June 1922), Smolensk, cited by Karzhanskii in *Moskovskii tkach*, p. 15.

¹⁴ Karzhanskii, *ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15-20. The subtitle of the chapter ('*s khleba doloi na zarobotka*') is taken from Alekseev's speech (see Appx. A: 2).

revolutionary (though he speaks of the conditions of the *narod*), or of his (late) political consciousness and the impact of exile upon it (though he talks of humanity and freedom). In so far as his exile was concerned, Karzhanskii's preference was for the memoirs of other revolutionaries and fellow exiles – S. Kovalik, E. Pekarskii and I. I. Mainov. Their descriptions of Alekseev's appearance, character and his life in exile (at least those cited) placed him somewhere between the 'typical *muzhik*' whose image became useful to social-revolutionary propaganda after the late 1870s, and the well-read, intelligent, and thoughtful man described in the memoirs of friends and acquaintances from the circles of the 1870s.



15. Mugshot (2): Alekseev at the time of his departure into Siberian exile, early 1881¹⁶

In a memoir of 1922, Mainov, who later published a full biography of Alekseev,¹⁷ remembered meetings with Alekseev between 1888 and 1891: 'He looked like a typical Russian *muzhik*, lean but big and muscular - "he was all in the chest," as the peasants would say –with dark, slightly shaggy hair and an almost jet-black beard, a dark complexion, with heavy, coarse features...his expression was serious, introspective, his voice was of a deep timbre and strong (in a choir he

¹⁶ Karzhanskii, p. 129.

¹⁷ I. I. Mainov, *Petr Alekseevich Alekseev* (Moscow, 1924).

would sing second tenor). One would think on seeing him: here's a *muzhik*, a "serious" man, someone you don't mess around with.'¹⁸ 'Strength,' the 'strong voice,' his 'coarse features,' the 'typical muzhik' – Mainov's affectionate, direct description of the man dissolves, through its concepts, into the symbol of which Alekseev was made and images drawn from revolutionary propaganda. The word *muzhik*, a favourite of social-revolutionary theory and populist pamphlets alike, was too loaded a term even by the 1870s (and certainly by the 1920s!) to be used in innocent evocation of memory or past perceptions. The repeated references to Alekseev's build, alongside the slight sense of threat he seemed to evoke by his appearance and expression alone, cast Alekseev as the embodiment of the social-revolutionary image of the *muzhik*: moral and thoughtful, yes; coarse on occasion, perhaps, but chiefly, not to be messed with: '[when] the muscular arm of the working million is raised... the yoke of despotism, guarded by soldiers' bayonets, will blow away like ashes!' (Alekseev, Appx. A: 280). Pekarskii's description from 1922 gives Alekseev in his everyday exile's life, pottering around his yurt (made for him by the Iakuts) and, perhaps, further removed from the well-known images to which Mainov's descriptions seem, inevitably, to refer the reader. 'Alekseev's yurt was divided into two,' Pekarskii wrote,

the smaller part served as a sort of hallway near the entrance, the other bigger part was for Alekseev to live in. There was a traditional Russian fireplace. Petrukh, a true Russian, could never turn down a bit of sour bread, and was baking some for himself. Both parts of the yurt were a picture of cleanliness and order. The walls were scrubbed clean, and the fireplace - quite large – lit the yurt warmly. In the sacred corner, where Orthodox believers put their icons, a few books were lying on shelves...'¹⁹

But it is difficult to think of a story for which Russian socialists could have been more grateful. Not only was Alekseev the model of civilisation and development: here was a common labourer who, having educated himself, had replaced his Orthodox icons with books...! This is not to say that Mainov and Pekarskii's descriptions are 'false'; nor is it to suggest that these authors, writing in the 1920s, had ideological expediency or the compatibility of their accounts with older ones in mind. Their descriptions – especially in their correspondence with other memoir sources as regards Alekseev's appearance and bearing – reveal something of the content - the imagery - of the social-revolutionary concept of the *muzhik* and the later, social-democratic mutation of it. He was already a symbolic figure in *being* the *narod* that the *intelligenty* sought

¹⁸ Karzhanskii, *Moskovskii tkach*, p. 140.

¹⁹ Pekarskii, p. 103/ Karzhanskii, p. 139.

to awaken, agitate and develop. His speech was ideologically ambiguous (he was not a professed 'Bakuninist' or 'Lavrist' or follower of the German social-democrats, though clearly he knew of all these currents in the movement): for socialists of all hues it was a summation of what was absolutely and self-evidently true with respect to the autocratic state, the police, the capitalists, the Emancipation of 1861, and the suffering of the 'working millions.' It confirmed to anarchists, terrorists and Marxists alike the correctness of their own theories and tactics, and did so in the voice and through the person of the ideal, radicalised 'working man.' In a traditional peasant shirt, slightly dishevelled but romantically so, with a worldly sort of intelligence born of material experience, energized by a streak of aggression, but rational, well-read, grounded, Alekseev realised and 'summed up' the concept.

II. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL HISTORIANS

The Italian historian Franco Venturi devoted a couple of pages to Alekseev's life and his speech in his classic account of the social-revolutionary movement, *Roots of Revolution* (1960).²⁰ The work is justly celebrated for its style and scholarship.²¹ Both in the attention paid to memoir sources and in the finely-detailed descriptions and nuanced judgements of their lives, Venturi's personal sympathy for those involved in the movement is evident. His treatment of Alekseev is similarly warm, lucid, and human. This does not alter the fact of the paucity of documentary evidence of Alekseev's life. Venturi acknowledges the limits placed on a study of Alekseev's thought but - as in the Soviet account - the identity of the speech with Alekseev's actual life and experience is assumed:

He was the son of a family of poor peasants...Since boyhood he had worked as a weaver in a factory. He had learned to read and write on his own at the age of sixteen or seventeen. For a time he had been in contact with the [student radicals] in St. Petersburg....He had gone to work in Moscow...and devoted himself to intensive propaganda in the factories. His own experiences and those of his family confirmed what they explained to him about the relations between peasants and workers. A small, strong man, he was full of warm and loyal gratitude for the intellectuals who had shown him the way to fight and, at the same time, had ample faith in himself and in his working class comrades. Lack of documents prevents us from further entering into the mind of this obviously exceptional man. *But all his life is summed up in the speech which he made to*

²⁰ Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, p. 534-5.

²¹ See I. Berlin's 'Introduction' in *ibid*, p. vii-viii; A. Gerschenkron, 'Franco Venturi on Russian Populism: a review article,' *The American Historical Review*, vol. 78, no. 4 (Oct. 1973), p. 969-86.

the tribunal. He spoke of the hard working conditions which did not allow ‘the satisfaction of the most basic human needs’...[emphasis added]²²

The similarities between Alekseev’s speech and Venturi’s account are obvious: the semi-biographical structure, the merging of Alekseev’s experience with that of ‘the millions,’ even the peculiarly evocative ambiguity of the descriptions of suffering, and the relation between these, correspond closely across both texts. As with the Soviet authors, a certain self-evidence surrounds Alekseev’s life and recorded thought. The difference is merely that in Venturi, this self-evidence is *seen to be shaped* by the modesty, simplicity and directness of Alekseev’s speech: its quality of apparent ‘self-evidence’ is admitted to frustrate the effort of interpretation rather than making it superfluous. After describing Alekseev’s road into exile, Venturi references Alekseev’s letters to Ivanovskii in 1880, but not as a means of understanding his ‘thought.’ Rather, the letters serve as a convenient conclusion to Alekseev’s story, taking on strong overtones of the tragic in the absence of an interpretation distinct from Venturi’s own storytelling.²³

Reginald Zelnik’s article, ‘On the Eve’ (1994), states the intention to try to ‘capture [the] particular experience’ of early revolutionary workers of the 1870s and 1880s, acknowledging, first of all, that the rigid use of political categories such as ‘peasant’ and ‘proletarian’ – categories often part of the past, conceptual world of Russian intellectuals and workers themselves and so written into the documentary records – has obstructed previous efforts to capture the ‘Russian worker’s experience.’²⁴ The article proceeds to unravel some of the political and social aspects of the ‘peasant-proletarian’ dichotomy, noting particularly its role in the memoir accounts of P. Kropotkin (active in St. Petersburg’s worker circles in the early 1870s; later known as a theorist of anarchism), G. Plekhanov’s works, and the autocracy’s

²² Ibid, p. 534.

²³ The story Venturi tells is ‘melancholic’ in so far as Alekseev’s life begins and ends with suffering of an avoidable kind, and that his attempt to break free to those conditions lead to his death in exile - a death, moreover, offensive in its meaninglessness. Venturi writes that Alekseev ‘was condemned to ten years’ hard labour...In a letter he speaks of “the terrible road that fate demands should be trodden by all honest people” and he explains that this horrible fate was “incarnate in the members of our powerful government.” One day he was killed in a wood by tramps or brigands. This was probably pure accident’ (Ibid, p. 535). But it is also ‘tragic’ in the sense that, firstly, it was the very effort to evade his unhappy fate that ultimately brought Alekseev to it, and secondly, because Alekseev was in some sense aware that his efforts are quixotic. The ‘tragic’ is, in fact, a recurring theme in Venturi’s work, and this is in part dictated by the object rather than stylistic concerns; elsewhere he draws upon evidence found in contemporary documents to examine the tragic ‘mentalities’ of his subjects (cf. the opening pages of Venturi’s description of N. G. Chernshevskii’s life and thought, p. 129-30). The tragic interpretation of Alekseev’s life remains implicit, however, having passed over into a matter of style and storytelling and not appearing as overt ‘analysis.’

²⁴ Zelnik, ‘On the Eve,’ p. 28.

official reports on the urban working class from the 1870s.²⁵ His approach to ‘complicating’ these categories and the stories that had been built up around them²⁶ was a detailed examination of the lives of those worker-revolutionaries (‘worker-*intelligenty*’; ‘politicised workers’)²⁷ who left memoir materials or, at least, enough trace of themselves in documents to merit a reconstruction of ‘[their] moral history’ as individuals.²⁸

It would be expected, given the stated aims of the article, that Zelnik’s study of workers’ memoirs would extend directly the critique of (narrowly) political categories already begun in the first part of the piece. Zelnik does not in fact do this. Instead his analysis examines recurrent themes within workers’ writings (childhood, the workplace, ‘conversion experiences,’ relations with the intelligentsia), any indications of their own senses of ‘identity’ (in terms of the proletarian/peasant dichotomy, especially) and reconstructs the psychology of the characters actually *presented* in these writings. Little distinction is made between the worker’s life as represented in a document – whether a memoir, autobiography, or speech – and the life of its author. The question of the intentions behind these writings (political, personal or otherwise) is not broached. Hence, the account given of Alekseev’s ‘particular experience,’ in spite of the attention Zelnik’s pays to the use of political categories in the works of intellectuals and historians, repeats Venturi’s: Alekseev’s life and ‘experience’ are identified with the speech he gave. The opening description of Alekseev’s life quite closely follows the substance of the speech, even reproducing some of its characteristic sentence structures:

Alekseev was a simple peasant through and through, a *muzhik* born in both origins and appearance...[he led] the life of a typical peasant boy until the age of nine. Then, like most of the village boys...Peter was sent to work a weaving mill near Moscow, where he lived in an *artel*’ of *zemliaki*. Without formal education he taught himself to read...by the age of sixteen...²⁹

Zelnik does not mention that some of this information comes directly from the speech, having no source independent of it (cf. Alekseev’s statements at trial: ‘We are without education, because there are no schools, and scarcely a minute away from the forced labour with its meagre rewards. As nine year old boys we try to survive on the bit of bread allotted to us at

²⁵ Ibid, p. 30-4.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 27.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 34-5.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 46.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 46-7.

work.’ (Appx. A: 277). He goes on to ‘summarize those passages [of the speech] that directly address the theme of experience, values self-awareness, and their relation to the peasant-workers’ youth,’ sticking very closely to Alekseev’s structure and wording.³⁰ Zelnik’s main conclusions from this summary and analysis are that Alekseev created a series of group identities through the ‘emphatic use of the word “we.”’³¹ Alekseev’s ‘we’ referred (firstly) to the ‘working millions’ mentioned at the beginning of the speech, then the peasantry (*krest’ianstvo*) as a whole, the former serfs (*krespostnye*) and, finally, the factory workers (*fabrichnye*).³² In this, Zelnik develops an idea used elsewhere in the article, with regards to the worker-memoirist, Vasilii Gerasimov, and mentioned in other published papers and chapters as well (also related to Gerasimov and his memoir).³³ In so far as Gerasimov is concerned, these ‘group identities’ are first treated as facts of historical representation, with Zelnik paying great attention to the way in which the memoirs of workers were ‘constructed,’ and possible influences upon that process of remembering and writing. He mentions that Gerasimov’s identity was formed (in his writing) before any ‘model’ of a politicised workers’ memoir - or any example of a worker-*intelligent* - was available for Gerasimov to ‘adhere to.’³⁴ Gerasimov was, then, both in his life and in his reminiscences, ‘before class’: in other words, his writing was detached from the sort of categories that Zelnik believed had influence upon later worker-*intelligenty* and their memoirs. Gerasimov’s sense of group identity began with his fellow *pitomtsy* - orphaned children taken in by at the foundling home where Gerasimov spent the first years of his life – rather than the socio-economic and political categories (*rabochie, krest’ian’e, fabrichnye, zavodskie...*) that would obsess writers, such as Kropotkin and Plekhanov, in the late nineteenth century.³⁵ Here, the narrowness of Zelnik’s notion of ‘political influence’ – he specifically mentions ‘Marxist worldviews’ several times in several different places – is evident. Further, in drawing on the analysis of Gerasimov’s memoir to explain Alekseev’s speech, Zelnik ignores the political context of the speech and the possibility of the politicisation of Alekseev’s stated ‘identity’ in that document; only Alekseev’s ‘paean’ to the student-*intelligenty* is cast as a possible addition or suggestion of his intelligentsia co-defendants – a claim that reduces political influences upon the speech to the direct intervention of non-worker

³⁰ Ibid, p. 47.

³¹ Ibid, p. 36; 48. Zelnik’s source for this idea is R. Koselleck, ‘Begriffsgeschichte and Social History,’ *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, translated by K. Tribe (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), p. 83.

³² Ibid, p. 47-49.

³³ See Zelnik, ‘Before Class: The Fostering of a Worker Revolutionary, the Construction of his Memoir,’ *Russian History/Histoire Russe*, 20, no. 1-43 (1993) and idem, *Law and Disorder*, p. 223-69.

³⁴ Zelnik, *Law and Disorder*, p. 224.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 228, 231-5.

‘outsiders’ in its composition.³⁶ The issue of the use of categories is therefore sidelined, though it is supposed to be at the very centre of the article’s investigations. Indeed, in the case of both Alekseev’s speech and of Gerasimov’s memoir, Zelnik’s subtle examinations of contemporary political concepts and the possibility of the ‘categorical’ determination of these documents’ structures and substantive statements are cut off just as he enters into the direct, social-psychological interpretation and reconstruction of the authors’ presented ‘selves.’ When it comes to the substance of these works, Zelnik apparently *has to* take the worker-authors at their word. This is the case with his interpretation of Alekseev’s speech.

Zelnik’s psychological reconstructions of workers’ particular experiences are nuanced in their interpretations and sensitive to details in workers’ writings, benefiting from Zelnik’s wide knowledge of the Russian workers’ milieu and movement. Yet psychological reconstruction always begs the historiographical question, especially regarding the document’s possible political aims. If these questions are not suggested by historians’ reminders of the Soviet state’s ‘use and abuse’ of history and memory after 1917, then Zelnik’s own juxtaposition of Alekseev’s overtly propagandistic speech with less obviously ‘mediated’ workers’ memoirs provide a push in that direction. One can then only follow Zelnik’s approach and admire its detail and erudition by a suspension of disbelief - by bracketing all the difficult historiographical questions with which he himself flirts. Zelnik knew - perhaps more than any other scholar in the field - of the possible intellectual influences and political pressures felt by workers in their lives and in their writings about their lives; he was aware of the circumstances of the writing and delivery of Alekseev’s speech also. One of the works he references in relation to these circumstances is Robert Otto’s ‘Note on the Speech of Peter Alekseev’ (1979).³⁷ Otto deals more directly with the question of Alekseev’s relationship to the speech, inquiring particularly into its composition and the circumstances of its delivery and publication. The issue of the speech’s ‘authenticity’ - in the double sense of Alekseev’s authorship of it and

³⁶ Idem, ‘On the Eve,’ p. 48: ‘In the last part of the speech, the one most likely to have had non-worker input, Alekseev introduces a new motif: the responsiveness and loyalty of the intelligentsia youth to the ‘working [millions].’ Notice that Zelnik talks about ‘non-worker input’ rather than ‘outside input’ *per se*. Zelnik claims that he is concerned to undermine simplistic views of workers’ experience sustained by crude, ideological concepts or categories (e.g. of ‘Populism,’ ‘Marxism’), implying that the notion of the ‘worker’ might be identified, so to speak, ‘bottom up’ – from the ‘workers’ own words’ – and in relation to their own sense of worker identity (or their own statements regarding their sense of identity). Zelnik acknowledges that the term ‘worker’ is one of those categories. Yet, his use of the term ‘worker’ suggests, not only that its meaning is known from *outside* of the texts he is reading, but also that its can be used – in the absence of other evidence - to identify which ideas and statements came (or might come) from a ‘worker,’ and which did (or could) not.

³⁷ Otto, ‘A Note...’ Zelnik’s reference: ‘On the Eve,’ p. 47, *ft.* 42.

its correspondence to his actual experience - is the central theme of Otto's 'Note'. This line of enquiry was provoked by Adam Ulam's accusations of false attribution, fabrication and/or doctoring of workers' speeches.³⁸ Ulam's claims regarding Alekseev's speech (that he could not have written it because it was 'too polished,' and that other 'workers' speeches' were fabricated by the radical *intelligenty*)³⁹ turn out to be ill-informed. Otto makes use of the copious memoir sources on the activities these circles to prove Ulam wrong (at least in the case of Alekseev's speech). He touches briefly upon the notion of 'authenticity' in establishing Alekseev's authorship of the speech, e.g., on the relationship between Alekseev's experience of 'being working class' and his representation of it: 'the autobiographical references that occur throughout the speech -' (Otto writes) 'the references to factory employment at an early age, lack of educational opportunities, and the lengths to which the factory workers must go to obtain good reading material - all point to Alekseev's contribution on a personal and passionate level'⁴⁰ - in other words, his authorship of the document is evidenced by its authenticity, its connection to Alekseev's direct experience of working class life and his 'being a worker.' Yet, only a page earlier, Otto had noted in some detail the testimony of I. S. Dzhabadari (a radical, former student and co-defendant at the 'Trial of the Fifty') regarding the choice of Alekseev to speak at the trial: 'the imprisoned intellectuals of the group....decided to exploit the opportunity of the accused to address the court and the public by having them hear the speech from the mouth of a worker...[T]hey agreed that this worker should be a member of [their] group and possess a strong character, persistent energy and...a powerful voice. Their choice was Alekseev.'⁴¹ Besides any doubts it might cast on the claims Alekseev makes regarding the Russian working class, or the possible ideological influence exerted by the 'intellectuals' here, Dzhabadari's account suggests another way in which the representation of 'experience' was moulded by political categories. It suggests that authenticity itself was an important category - though not necessarily a well-defined concept - of revolutionary thought. If Dzhabadari's account is to be trusted, then clearly some political or propagandistic value was perceived in Alekseev's 'being a worker.' It suggests further that the 'autobiographical reference' - a

³⁸ Otto, 'A Note,' p. 650.

³⁹ A. Ulam, *In the Name of the People* (New York, 1977), p. 256.

⁴⁰ Otto, 'A Note,' p. 653.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 652; Dzhabadari, 'Protsess "50" (okonchanie),' p. 193-4. Otto's account is substantial accurate in this passage. Earlier, however, Otto writes: 'Dzhabadari maintained that Alekseev's speech was the product of a collective effort among the imprisoned members of the Moskvich group [to which Alekseev belonged],' which is slightly more ambiguous than the original account. Dzhabadari claims that the *initiative* for the speech was provided collectively (he says nothing about intellectuals in particular here), that it was written by Alekseev according to themes decided collectively, then corrected for style and language errors. The speech actually delivered was, then, substantially Alekseev's own work.

seemingly ‘passionate and personal contribution’ to a document – no more proves the content’s origins in ‘personal experience’ than a mere claim that this is so. The very choice of Alekseev to *write* and *deliver* the speech constituted such a claim. The choice was based on a well-defined doctrine: that the workers’ movement should be spoken for by ‘a worker.’ The presentation of the message in terms of ‘experience’ or an individual’s ‘passionate involvement’ with the suffering might have followed equally from this doctrine. What is it that will persuade others to join the popular cause? Who had the right to speak for the *narod*, or the peasants, or the workers? Would the audience for the speech find something especially remarkable in its delivery by a worker? Would they lose some sort of legitimacy if they claimed to speak for the *narod* but were not evidently a part of it? These are the sort of questions that exercised the minds of Alekseev and his colleagues before the ‘Trial of the Fifty.’ That they did so already brings Otto’s approach to the attribution of Alekseev’s speech to Alekseev into doubt, since, in this case the ‘logic’ of Otto’s thought overlaps with that the logic that underpinned the composition and delivery of the document he is analysing.

This invites, at least, greater thought regarding the means by which ‘experience’ was represented by workers, and to what end this was done. It was suggested earlier that Russian revolutionaries ‘had’ ‘particular experience’ as a *category of their political thought* in much the same way that they ‘had’ the concepts of ‘class’ and ‘revolution,’ or ‘knowledge’ and ‘ignorance,’ or (indeed) ‘workers,’ ‘peasants,’ ‘intelligentsia.’ What would it actually mean, then, to grasp the ‘particular experiences’ of these workers, and how then would the historian’s account of this relate to the categories with which, at least initially, he approaches them and by which his subjects express themselves? The danger is that knowledge of ‘particular experience’ as a category of thought might undermine the very attempt to grasp and thereby understand workers’ ‘particular experiences,’ and even deprive the historian of the distinction between a living experience of things (perception, intuition, feeling, the formation of concepts, memory) and such categories of thought as might influence or shape these in writing. Indeed, the very notion of ‘capturing’ the ‘particular experience of workers’ or ‘worker-revolutionaries’ begins to look contradictory. What we seem to capture – and Zelnik’s ‘On the Eve,’ as well as earlier articles of his in the same vein,⁴² are evidence of this - is not *experience itself*, particular or otherwise - but the representation of experience through categories and concepts. If the

⁴² See Zelnik’s earlier studies of workers’ autobiographies, ‘Russian Bebels: An Introduction to the Memoirs of the Russian Workers Semen Kanatchikov and Matvei Fisher, Part I,’ *Russian Review*, Vol. 35, No. 3, (Jul. 1976) and ‘Part II,’ *Russian Review*, Vol. 35, No. 4, (Oct. 1976).

representation of experience is *itself* particular – if Gerasimov and Alekseev identify themselves differently, in reference to different groups which they themselves *create* by ‘the emphatic use of the word “we,”’ or by some other linguistic or conceptual or, basically, representational device - what legitimacy can there be in the examination of ‘workers’ as a group? After all, at least as far as Alekseev is concerned, being a worker was a *claim* to some privilege of speaking for and representing the experiences of other workers; this document, read so often as autobiographical – an account of Alekseev’s story – was composed with the transcendence of Alekseev’s personal experiences as its main aim. His concern was not with himself, but with the ‘working millions.’ Even assuming it to be a real rather than an ideal unity, this ‘working millions,’ in all its fullness and expansiveness - quite beyond the individual’s direct, personal experience - was nothing if not conceptual, categorical and imaginary. And similar can be said of Alekseev’s reduction of these ‘working millions’ to ‘victimhood’ (as Zelnik puts it) and, indeed, their reduction to the bare fact of ‘being labourers,’ thus in turn bringing into doubt the notion of the working millions’ ‘unity’ anywhere but in Alekseev’s imagination and the revolutionaries abstract, political categories. Are we, then, really capturing ‘particular experience’ in our interpretation of Alekseev’s speech? Is such a thing possible in historical studies of the ‘worker-revolutionaries’ or the Russian ‘working class’?

The opposition set up by Zelnik between the categories used to understand workers’ history and ‘our efforts to capture [the] particular experience’ of workers or peasant-workers (or whoever) derives from the notion that *any* ‘category’ or ‘concept’ is able to grasp more than the particular and, moreover, will inevitably gesture over its shoulder to this ‘more’ - whatever it happens to be - even in the act of ‘capturing’ and ‘representing’ the particular. Zelnik’s complaint is that categorical dichotomies such as ‘peasant and proletarian’ have found their legitimacy in ideological needs, not the primary evidence. He proposes that a look at workers’ own stories will at least complicate these larger stories and help challenge cruder analyses based on equally crude categories. Some of these cruder categories could then be discarded, while others would remain as useful (but always provisional) instruments of historical analysis. So, Zelnik’s actual project – distinct from his description of it – is not to ‘capture particular experience,’ but to use particular stories to aid the construction of better, ‘non-ideological’ categories. Now, most authors would admit that the use of any or all categories or concepts implies participation in a discourse or system of thought that is shared by historians and the historical figures they study. Few enquire into the possible ideological or political determinants of the historian’s own most

basic categories of thought: the document or 'primary source'; its reliability; its authorship; its perspective, 'representations' and their various modes; the relation of all these to truth-claims about social groups, people, events, the authors themselves. These questions were tackled by revolutionary thinkers and activists in late nineteenth century Russia. They were involved in creating a documentary base, writing narrative histories of their own movement; they thought deeply about their own historical knowledge and its relation to their political ideas and aims. Hence, historians share common historical categories, both epistemological and ontological, with the subjects of their researches. Without grasping this, the question of 'particular experience' and its relationship to political thought in workers' lives and workers' writings must be obscured entirely.

Political mediation goes far deeper into the substance and form of Alekseev's speech than any of these scholars would allow. The logic of the speech's composition and delivery are mimicked time and again by the historians who have analysed it. Otto's proofs of Alekseev's authorship are the technical and self-conscious form of the identity that Venturi and the Soviet authors assumed between Alekseev's speech and his life or 'experience.' These reproduce the sorts of political judgements about legitimacy, authenticity and class already made by the defendants at the 'Trial of the Fifty' as regards Alekseev and his speech. Further, judgements regarding the text's politicisation - Ulam's 'fabrication by intellectuals,' or Zelnik's 'input of non-workers' - begin with the underlying notion of a discernable, 'outside influence' or 'alien addition' to the document. The distinction between an 'inside' and 'outside' of a class can be found, well-articulated, in the writings of Russian social-revolutionary groups in the 1870s. The intelligentsia's sense of being, by dint of a privileged birth or an education, 'outside' of the *narod*, became the doctrinal core of revolutionary thought in the early 1860s, influencing the radical circles' activities immensely. The 'going to the people' movement of the early and mid-1870s, and the efforts of radical circles through the 1860s to the 1880s to avoid the imposition of their own, outsiders' beliefs about popular interests onto the *narod* or lower classes, were both responses of to a very strong and persistent sense of being on the 'outside.' The theme persists beyond the 1870s and 1880s and the great 'movements to the *narod*' of those decades, finding an important place in Russian Marxist thought. I will only remind the reader of the important passage in Lenin's *Chto delat'?* (*What is to be Done?*, 1902) regarding the necessity – historical or 'logical,' depending on the historian's interpretation - of Social Democratic

consciousness being brought to the working-class ‘from without,’ from the outside (*izvne*).⁴³ Whatever the intellectual origins of Lenin’s statements regarding working-class consciousness, the metaphor of ‘inside’ and ‘outside,’ applied to the relations between classes (the ‘educated’ and working classes, in Lenin’s words) and members of these classes (intellectuals and workers) can be seen to underpin them. This implies the continuity of an idea across the factional (and fractional) boundaries of the time and, indeed, across several decades of revolutionary thought and practice. What does this mean for the historians’ view of Alekseev’s speech, utilising as they do the notion of ‘outside influence’ in concert with a strong (but ill-defined) notion of class or social status? Either the distinction between ‘workers’ and ‘*intelligenty*’ (or intellectuals) has not been consciously broached – a great oversight where the notion of politicisation or ‘outside influence’ is so closely linked to that of class – or, alternately, the cruder, ideologically-driven categories of revolutionary and historical thought have been rejected only to be reinstated through an unquestioned, perhaps even intuitive, sense of ‘what belongs’ to a worker’s thought and what does not, i.e. a relatively *open* judgement of authenticity based on a *hidden* (or ill-defined) notion of class.

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While historians who have studied Alekseev’s life and speech have been almost as credulous as Alekseev’s contemporary audience as regards the connection between his ‘particular experience’ and the content of the speech, they have been far less willing to see Alekseev’s descriptions of the ‘working millions’ as indicative of ‘working class’ experience. Here the ‘Soviet’ and ‘Western’ views diverge significantly. While the Soviet perspective identified Alekseev’s speech and experience with the objective suffering of the Russian peasant-workers and the nascent, urban working-class, English-speaking authors have more readily identified Alekseev and others like him as different from the class, as ‘worker-revolutionaries,’ ‘politicised-workers,’ or ‘worker-*intelligenty*.’⁴⁴ Mark Steinberg spoke of the marginality of such figures to the lives and cultures of the broader ‘workers’ milieu’ in Russia.⁴⁵ ‘Such workers,’ Zelnik added, ‘might be construed as a belonging at once to a sub-species of the

⁴³ Lenin, ‘Chto delat’?’, *Soch.*: 5, p. 347/ ‘What is to be Done?’, *CW*: 5, p. 375.

⁴⁴ Zelnik, *Law and Disorder*, p. 223-5.

⁴⁵ M. Steinberg, ‘The Injured and Insurgent Self: The Moral Imagination of Russia’s Lower Class Writers,’ *Workers and Intelligentsia in Late Imperial Russia*, Zelnik (ed.), (Berkeley, 1999), p. 311-2.

species “intelligentsia” and a sub-species of the species “worker.”⁴⁶ Evidently, what has drawn the interest of some historians has been the question of the relationship between the Russian working class and the intelligentsia who courted its members. The question of the politicisation of workers’ *writings* or *documented* views - an area where historians have been rather credulous of the workers’ own claims about themselves (their ‘identities’) - overlaps and, indeed, is posterior to the much broader question of the influence of the radical intelligentsia and revolutionary parties on workers’ (or working class) thought and behaviour – where historians have been much more sceptical. The source of this scepticism was a new confrontation, from the late 1960s onwards, with empirical evidence regarding working-class activities – whether as organisers of mutual aid or insurance funds, of trade unions, or party cells, or cultural clubs – which undermined older, Western preoccupations with *theories* of party/class relations, and disproved the Soviet claims regarding relations between the workers and Lenin’s fraction of the Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party, e.g. with Bolshevism.

In the late 1970s, English-speaking social historians began with the task of overturning, by empirical means, what they understood as the ‘mythological’ treatment of Russia’s revolutionary history in Soviet works – in particular, the Marxist-Leninist story of the proletarian ‘road to October’ – along with the crude, political-historical viewpoint on the workers’ role in the revolutions held by ‘liberal-Western’ historians. In the first place, social historians (Diane Koenker, Victoria Bonnell, Heather Hogan, Steve A. Smith, David Mandel, Rex Wade, Zelnik, and others),⁴⁷ and a number of intellectual-political historians interested in

⁴⁶ Zelnik, *Law and Disorder*, p. 225.

⁴⁷ D. P. Koenker, ‘The Evolution of Party Consciousness in 1917: The Case of the Moscow Workers,’ *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 30, (January 1978), *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution* (Princeton, 1982); with W. G. Rosenberg, *Strikes and Revolution in Russia 1917* (Princeton, 1989); V. E. Bonnell, *The Russian Worker: Life and Labour under the Tsarist Regime*, (Berkeley, 1983) and *Roots of Rebellion: Workers’ Politics and Organizations in St. Petersburg and Moscow, 1900-1914* (Berkeley, 1983); H. Hogan, ‘Industrial Rationalisation and the Roots of Labour Militancy in the St. Petersburg Metalworking Industry, 1901-1914,’ *Russian Review*, Vol. 42, No. 2, (April, 1983) and *Forging Revolution: Metalworkers, Managers, and the State in St. Petersburg, 1890-1914* (Bloomington/Indianapolis, 1993); S. A. Smith, ‘Craft Consciousness, Class Consciousness: Petrograd, 1917,’ *History Workshop Journal*, No. 11, (Spring, 1981), *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories 1917-1918* (Cambridge, 1983), ‘The Social Meanings of Swearing: Workers and Bad Language in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia,’ *Past and Present*, No. 160 (August, 1998); D. Mandel, *Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Regime: From the February Revolution to the July Days* (London, 1983) and *Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power: From the July Days 1917 to July 1918* (London, 1984); R. A. Wade, *Red Guards and Workers’ Militias in the Russian Revolution* (Stanford, 1984); Zelnik, *Labor and Society in Tsarist Russia: the Factory Workers of St. Petersburg, 1855-1870* (Stanford, 1971) and idem (ed.), *Workers and Intelligentsia in Late Imperial Russia: Realities, Representations, Reflections* (Berkeley, 1999); see also D. H. Kaiser, *The Workers’ Revolution in Russia, 1917: The View from Below*, (Cambridge, 1987); W. G. Rosenberg ‘Workers’ Control in the Russian Revolution,’ *History Workshop Journal*, No. 5, (Spring, 1978); L. H. Siegelbaum and R. G. Suny (eds.), *Making Workers Soviet: Power, Class and Identity*, (Ithaca, 1994); M. Steinberg, ‘Workers on

the workers' movement (Leopold Haimson, Robert McKean, Geoffrey Swain)⁴⁸ offered new interpretations of the Imperial, late Imperial and revolutionary periods based on copious published and archival documentary materials previously ignored or otherwise 'misinterpreted' by other historians.⁴⁹ There was also an intention to explore the 'working-class view' of the revolutions, giving over a space in which the Russian workers might speak, as it were, 'in their own voices,' without the mediation of intellectuals, revolutionary socialist parties, businessmen, landowners, or the state. Autobiographies, memoirs, letters and other documents written by workers, ex-workers and others who had had direct contact with the working-class milieu (journalists, factory inspectors, certain party propagandists and teachers, liberal-democratic activists and statisticians) were drawn upon in both these aspects. In the first place we find, for instance, D. Koenker complaining in *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution* (1982) about the unsystematic use of published workers' memoirs and the stated intention to correct this tendency in Soviet historiography.⁵⁰ In the second aspect, workers' memoir sources and documents founded on direct observation of the working class were to be used (as Bonnell writes in *The Russian Worker*, 1983) to 'illustrate the complex and varied contemporary perceptions of the workers' milieu as well as the diversity of experiences and conditions within the labouring population.'⁵¹ What is obvious in both aspects is a posited distinction between a more or less ideological approach to the Russian working class, informed by crude (ideologically motivated or formed) categories, and the empirical evidence actually available to historians: greater empirical evidence would allow these historians' works to supersede the old, mythical or ideological treatments both in terms of their treatment of the objective working class (however defined) and their appreciation of workers' subjectivity.⁵²

the Cross: Religious Imagination in the Writings of Russian Workers, 1910-1924,' *Russian Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2, (April, 1994); idem, 'The Injured and Insurgent Self,' etc.

⁴⁸ L. Haimson, 'The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905-1917, Part I,' *Slavic Review*, Vol. 23, No. 4, (Dec. 1964); and 'The Problem of Social Identities in Early Twentieth Century Russia,' *Slavic Review*, Vol. 47, No. 1, (1988); G. Swain, *Russian Social Democracy and the Legal Labour Movement, 1906-14* (London, 1983); R. McKean, *St Petersburg between the Revolutions: Workers and Revolutionaries, June 1907-February, 1917* (New Haven/London, 1990).

⁴⁹ For critical overviews of this literature, see: R. G. Suny, 'Revision and Retreat in the Historiography of the Russian Revolution,' *Russian Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2, (April, 1994) and S. A. Smith, 'Writing the History of the Russian Revolution after the Fall of Communism,' *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 4, (1994).

⁵⁰ Koenker, *Moscow Workers*, p. 6.

⁵¹ Bonnell, 'Introduction,' *Russian Worker*, p. 30.

⁵² This is, incidentally, what Steve A. Smith referred to as the 'pseudo-conceptual underpinning' of the literature. There was, Smith writes, 'a common desire to explore aspects of the Russian Revolution that had been deemed unworthy of attention by advocates of a totalitarian model and to get away from ideologically driven generalities.' However, 'much of the energy of Western scholarship derived from debunking the myths of Soviet historiography. In intellectual terms this was always a rather low cost option, but it provided work that was largely empirical in character with a pseudo-conceptual underpinning.' ('Writing the History of the Russian Revolution,' p. 564; 566).

A clear finding of this research was the heterogeneity, diversity and complexity of the Russian working class, with ‘urban workers’ divided (or divisible) along lines of occupation, skill and income, gender, ethnicity/legal nationality and legal estate. In contrast to the Soviet preoccupation with metal workers and hired labourers in heavy-industrial plants with high concentrations of workers⁵³ - tendencies notable in Marxist historiography from the 1890s onwards⁵⁴ – the social historians found a working-class occupied in a great variety of industries: textiles production and other light industries (food, tobacco, chemicals), construction, domestic and other service industries (household servants, cleaners, clerks, shop assistants) and outwork.⁵⁵ Where post-revolutionary propaganda had made the blacksmith or skilled machine-operator the poster-boy of working-class revolt,⁵⁶ social historians found the Soviet’s vanguard wrought by divisions of skill and status, age, and political affiliations.⁵⁷ Where unity of interests and intention seemed to hold among such workers, often it was explicitly in opposition to the established revolutionary parties and their preferred ideological and tactical positions.⁵⁸ Moreover, at no point was the worker’s ‘class consciousness’ reached in the manner that, for instance, Plekhanov or Lenin had suggested it would be – through the breaking of workers’ ties to the countryside, the concentration of labourers in larger and larger factories, greater exploitation and a keener awareness of it, etc, etc. Instead, at different conjunctures between the late nineteenth century and the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, workers’ consciousness of class was both facilitated and hindered by other forms of identification: with a particular occupation or skill (‘craft consciousness’),⁵⁹ with a place of work (‘factory patriotism’),⁶⁰ with a neighbourhood, or native village, or countrymen (*zemliaki*) with whom common

⁵³ See, for instance, A. M. Pankratova, ‘Voleniia rabochikh v krespostnoi Rossii pervoi poloviny XIX v.,’ (1951), *Rabochii klass Rossii: Izbrannye trudy* (Moscow, 1983), p. 369-70; E. A. Korol’chuk, *Severnyi Soiuz Russkikh Rabochikh i Revoliutsionnoe rabochee dvizhenie 70-kh godov XIX v. v Peterburge* (Leningrad, 1946), p. 17-28; M. C. Volin, et al (eds.), *Rabochii Klass Rossii ot zarozhdeniya do nachala XX v.* (Moscow, 1983).

⁵⁴ See G. Plekhanov, ‘Russkii rabochii v revoliusionnom dvizhenii: po lichnim vospominaniiam’ (1892), *Soch.* 3, p. 121-213. On Plekhanov’s part in the Russian Marxist’s emphasis upon the metal workers/*zavodskie*, see Zelnik, ‘On the Eve,’ p. 30-32 and Hogan, *Forging Revolution*, p. 17-8.

⁵⁵ Koenker, *Moscow Workers*, p. 21-42; Bonnell, *Roots of Rebellion*, p. 20-42; Mandel, *Petrograd Workers and the Fall*, p. 9-43 (on political culture in relation to skill); p. 44-60 (on the composition of the Petrograd working class before 1917).

⁵⁶ Quite literally: see V. E. Bonnell, ‘The Representation of Women in Early Soviet Art,’ *Russian Review*, Vol. 50, No.3, (1991) and ‘The Peasant Women in Stalinist Political Art of the 1930s,’ *American Historical Review*, Vol. 98, No. 1, (Feb, 1993); Koenker and Rosenberg, *Strikes and Revolution*, p. 34.

⁵⁷ Smith, *Red Petrograd*, p. 27-30, 109, 257; Hogan, *Forging Revolution*, p. 23-4, 36-40, 131-5.

⁵⁸ Swain, *Russian Social Democracy, passim*; McKean, *St Petersburg*, p. xii-xiv; 45-6; 53-62, 77-79.

⁵⁹ W. G. Rosenberg ‘Workers’ Control in the Russian Revolution,’ *History Workshop Journal*, No. 5, (Spring, 1978); S. A. Smith, ‘Craft Consciousness, Class Consciousness: Petrograd, 1917,’ *History Workshop Journal*, No. 11, (Spring, 1981); Bonnell, *Roots of Rebellion*, p. 6-7; 150-1.

⁶⁰ Bonnell, *ibid*, p. 150; Hogan, *Forging Revolution*, p. 36-38, 128-30.

accommodation (an *artel*) or a place of work was shared,⁶¹ with one's country,⁶² or with one's religion.⁶³ Those workers' memoirs and other accounts from *within* the working class added to the objective indicators of sub-class divisions the workers' own representations of urban and suburban life, with comments on the everyday relations between different kinds of workers in different workplaces.⁶⁴

The long-term consequence of the insistence on the diversity of workers' identities and the concomitant insistence on the role of workers' subjectivity in the ferment and consolidation of class and revolutionary consciousnesses was, finally, scepticism towards the entire notion of an *objective* 'working class' within which diversity could or should be identified. Note that it had been the aim of the social-historical school to reintroduce the socio-economic factor into explanations of the Revolutions and the related processes of organisation, education, and revolt, without wandering into the crudities offered by latter-day Soviet historians, thus correcting the tendencies of earlier Western historiography to explain these by reference to the 'elite' and to particular personalities, ideas or ideologies supposedly originated by them. From the outset, two different concepts of class were operative in these studies: one more or less related to an objective, socio-economic reality (with connections to the production and distribution of wealth and the division of labour, on the one hand, and relations of power and authority on the other); the other related to cultural and intellectual groups or formations within the objectively identifiable working class (the 'conscious workers,' in their own terms).⁶⁵ The result of the empirical work of the 1970s and 1980s was the merging of these concepts of class together. By the early 1990s, 'subjective' representations of class and/or workers' own subjective class identities were as important in explanations of the Revolutions as socio-economic or material-structural explanations had been a decade before. Hence, in *Strikes and Revolution* (1989), we find Koenker and Rosenberg wondering whether the 'very periodization of revolutionary

⁶¹ Zelnik, *Labor and Society*, p. 220-5; R. E. Johnson, *Peasant and Proletarian: the Working Class of Moscow in the late nineteenth century* (Leicester, 1979), p. 162.

⁶² H. F. Jahn, 'Patriots or Proletarians? Russian Workers and the First World War,' *Workers and Intelligentsia in Late Imperial Russia: Realities, Representations, Reflections*, R. Zelnik (ed.), (Berkeley, 1999), p. 330-43; Koenker and Rosenberg, *Strikes and Revolution*, p. 44-5.

⁶³ G. D. Suhr, 'Petersburg's First Mass Labor Organisation: The Assembly of Russian Workers and Farther Gapon Part I,' *Russian Review*, vol. 40, no. 3 (July, 1981) and 'Part II,' *Russian Review*, vol. 40, no. 4, (Oct., 1981); see also P. Herrlinger, 'Orthodoxy and the Experience of Factory life in St Petersburg,' and S. L. Firsov, 'Workers and the Orthodox Church in Early Twentieth-Century Russia,' both in *New Labor History: Worker Identity and Experience in Russia, 1840-1918* (Bloomington, 2002), M. Melancon, and A. Pate, (eds.), p. 35-63 and p. 65-76, respectively.

⁶⁴ See Bonnell, 'Introduction' to *The Russian Worker*, p. 1-34; Zelnik, 'Introduction' to Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia*, p. xviii – xxi; xxvi.

⁶⁵ Koenker, *Moscow Workers*, p. 8-10.

change [in 1917] might be set at least in part in terms of the moments when the balance between sectional, class and national identities shifted.’ They go on to suggest that ‘for many workers, the very act of participating in strikes was a means of identifying with a broader collective based firmly on the relationship to the means of production.’⁶⁶ In the introduction to the collection *Workers and Intelligentsia* (1999), Zelnik wrote that,

whereas the concept “working class,” used as an objective description of a definite social group with measurable characteristics, independent of its state of mind, is highly problematic...“working class” as a way of expressing, on the one hand, important aspects of workers’ subjectivity – their attitudes, mentalities, cultural values, and self-representations and on the other, the intelligentsia’s beliefs about and representations of workers is an indispensable concept for the student of Russian society.⁶⁷

Now, the preference for the term ‘workers’ over ‘working class’ may shovel away some of the most obtrusive garbage accumulated, over a century of political and academic debate, by the latter term. Yet, in so far as the basic questions of *reference* and of *categorisation* are concerned, little changes with this shift. The terms ‘worker’ and ‘workers’ have connotations of social position, social function, relations of power, relations of production, just as the term ‘working class’ did when it was permissible for the historian to use it. In Imperial and late-Imperial Russia, these terms could be, and often were, used synonymously. If the formation of a social group or class is so dependent on the social activity of ‘social categorisation and class labelling’,⁶⁸ and the use of the term ‘working class’ is ‘highly problematic as an objective description...independent of its state of mind,’ then what justifies the historians’ use of the term ‘worker’? Its ‘heuristic value’? This would have some legitimacy if the term had come under scrutiny in the light of documentary evidence, or showed itself vulnerable to modification as an historiographical concept (an historian’s tool). Instead, the term seems to denote a social group defined from some unarticulated *sense* or *intuition* of the social divisions within autocratic and revolutionary societies. Since it is an a priori intuition, apparently not possible of empirical verification or falsification, it survives beyond any ‘heuristic function’ that might be claimed for it (i.e. identification of a source base; a framework for understanding the ‘representations’ of self-identified social groups, etc). Has a systematic difference between workers’ representations of things as opposed to other, intuitively defined social groups been identified? Most efforts

⁶⁶ *Strikes and Revolution*, p. 221.

⁶⁷ ‘Introduction,’ *Workers and Intelligentsia*, p. 2.

⁶⁸ W. G. Rosenberg, ‘Identities, Power and Social Interactions in Revolutionary Russia,’ *Slavic Review*, vol. 47, no. 1 (1988), p. 22.

have gone into demonstrating the *diversity* of representations amongst workers or within the working class; the political unity of the workers at various conjunctures in 1905, or from the summer of 1917, is now explained not only by ‘shared experience’ or socio-economic conditions, but by the penetration or appropriation of certain social categories into the (intuitively defined) workers’ milieu, i.e. by a shared sense of identity. Again, class identity is relegated (or ‘raised up’) to the ideal - a *mentality*, a state of mind, or an identity - that has no necessary connections with the ‘objective’ social positions that the historian still, surreptitiously, makes use in reference to ‘the workers.’ The separation of workers’ representations of their own lives and experience from those of the revolutionary parties, the radical intelligentsia and the state is insisted upon. Yet, little or no comment is made upon contemporaries’ *sense* of these social divisions, which (it seems) was just as intuitive as the historians’. In fact, there has been no sustained effort to compare worker and intelligentsia representations of experience, of particular events (i.e. a strike or ‘the Revolution’), or of these groups’ use of concepts or categories, in concert with an effort to actually *define* these groups other than intuitively. Collections of memoirs and other documentary materials on ‘the Russian workers’ (Bonnell’s *The Russian Worker*, or Steinberg’s *Voices of the Revolution*, for instance)⁶⁹ show great overlaps in the content, form and categories of workers’, peasants’ and others’ representations of experiences, people, groups and events, as well as the great variations within ‘workers’ writings.’ Which aspect is emphasised seems to be a rather arbitrary affair, determined by the particular interests and whims of the historian.

The objective notion of a ‘working class,’ or classes in general, survives beneath the ‘social identity paradigm’ which contradicts it: partly because some objective notion of class is *necessary* in order to grasp the character of autocratic society, of Russian revolutionary society and the change from one to the other; partly because it is this notion that makes the search for ‘representations’ within the intuitively-identified social group of ‘workers’ – however disparate these turn out to be - *intelligible*. To ‘represent’ means to ‘present again’ to someone (through language, concepts, signs, rituals, etc.) something that is *presenting itself* or *has already presented itself*. To talk about ‘workers’ representations’ means to define this presented ‘something’ as the fact of actually *being a worker* and *having workers’ experience*. This does not mean that representations are thought to be *determined* by this ‘being’ or these

⁶⁹ M. D. Steinberg, *Voices of Revolution, 1917*, documents translated by M. Schwartz; M. D. Steinberg, Z. Peregudova, and L. Tiutiunnik (eds.), (New Haven/London, 2001).

‘experiences.’ It *does* mean that the historian’s identification of social groups is more than a heuristic device. It is a statement about the way things actually *were* for particular historical actors in this particular society, irrespective of their representations of it or their ‘state of mind.’ So, there is no question for Zelnik that Plekhanov and Kropotkin were members of the Russian educated class, and that Alekseev, Vasilli Gerasimov, Pëtr Moiseenko and the others were workers, despite the fact that both groups shared an intimate knowledge of the workers’ milieu, and despite their writings sharing many of the same categories across the class boundary.⁷⁰ Similarly, in Bonnell’s collection *The Russian Worker*, there is no question that Semën Kanatchikov and Ivan Timofeev were workers and that Fedor Pavlov (a professional engineer) and E. A. Oliunina (an ex-student and independent scholar) were part of the educated class.⁷¹ What is obvious in Bonnell’s case (it holds for Zelnik’s also, though he obscures it) is that the intuitive notion of class does not begin and end with experience *per se*. In all the cases mentioned here – Kropotkin, Plekhanov, Pavlov, Oliunina (and many more could be mentioned) – the authors in question had been ‘among the workers,’ either as revolutionaries, as ‘non-worker’ employees, as researchers, and had seen or experienced the factory, the workshop, workers’ housing, the *traktir*, and so on, first-hand. Their writings also purport to speak from the point of view of having seen these places and the working people in them, and having felt what it was like to actually be there. Indeed, many revolutionaries of the 1870s, in their search for the ‘real’ *narod*, and in aid of their efforts to propagandise the workers, took up employment in factories or workshops and lived there, as workers, for months at a time. Sofia Bardina, Alekseev’s co-defendant at the ‘Trial of Fifty,’ spent six months amongst the unskilled women workers of Moscow’s textile factories, and wrote evocatively of the conditions she found there, *as a worker*, in letters sent to her comrades. So, the difference between them and the workers proper was not the absence of a ‘direct experience’ of working conditions or workers’ life. It was the absence of *necessity* in that experience. The ‘workers’ were people who *had to* do certain things (work!), who *had to* experience (go through) certain things, and who were in relations with other people that they *could not* change at will. It was not, then, the deafness from the whirring of the machine, the dust filled air, or the threatening birch rod held in threat that made ‘the worker,’ but his inability to escape these things.

⁷⁰ Zelnik, ‘On the Eve,’ p. 30-33.

⁷¹ Bonnell, *The Russian Worker*, p. 30-4.

This explains why Zelnik was able to juxtapose such different writings – an obvious propaganda piece from 1877 (Alekseev’s speech), a twenty page memoir from the 1880s (Gerasimov’s), a ten page reply to a Soviet historical journal’s questionnaire from 1924 (D. N. Smirnov’s memoir), and a full-length autobiography, written sometime after 1907, published in the 1930s (Kanatchikov’s) – under the same labels: *workers’* writings; *workers’* identities, *workers’* experiences. Zelnik does not argue that these men’s representations of their own lives and the workers’ milieu follow *necessarily* from ‘being workers’ in the objective sense - nor would we expect him too. Since the underlying notion of class necessity is repressed in the pursuit of the particular, the two different strands of Zelnik’s approach never meet and, in fact, end up contradicting each other. This situation has been prepared by the general transformation of social history from the late 1970s to the present. It can be seen in many other works also. The repression of the concept of class as an objective description also determines that the question of the relationship of workers’ representations to experiences cannot even be posed, since what originally ‘presents itself’ in order later to be ‘presented again,’ in documents, cannot be mentioned.

What complicates the matter is the specific relationship between these writings - as the writings of *worker-revolutionaries* - to the workers (or the lower classes) in general on the one hand, and the intelligentsia on the other. What, if anything, gives the worker-revolutionary or worker-*intelligent* the privilege of speaking for the Russian ‘workers’ or Russian working class over an above the intelligentsia? What gives them the privilege of being able to ‘speak for themselves’ without the routine incredulity that writings of the intelligentsia attract, both in relation to their personal experiences and to their views of the workers? Do empirical findings show the unity of representations that might confirm the workers’ identity as against that of the intelligentsia? Are they free (or relatively free) of the ideological and categorical biases that authors identify everywhere in the writings of the intelligentsia about the workers? We might expect that the ‘workers’ would speak at length about their working lives, and hence secure for themselves, through the actual content of their writings, a connection to the broader workers’ milieu and to their own status as workers. In fact, we are far more likely to find descriptions of the everyday working life of the workers in the writings of the *intelligently* and other members of the educated class than in workers’ own writings. But perhaps the worker-writer will describe at length his early experiences as the child of peasants or urban workers? In fact, most workers’ memoirs say relatively little on this theme.

The autobiography of Kanatchikov (translated by Zelnik into English the late 1980s) contains very detailed passages and whole chapters describing his childhood and family life, his feelings towards his father and mother; his migration from the village to Moscow in search of factory work; his apprenticeship (including fascinating descriptions of how he acquired the skills of a machine operator, modeller and draftsman in various metalworking factories; his sense of pride in his work, his awe of the big city; the psychological anguish of cutting himself off from the countryside and his family in pursuit of his own, urban life...) Justly, the autobiography has received attention from scholars and a small literature has built up around analyses of Kanatchikov's writings and his life.⁷² Yet, in just these respects, Kanatchikov's autobiography is a truly singular work. The number of workers' memoirs displaying the sort of attentiveness to psychology or the 'inner life' of the author, as found in Kanatchikov, is very small indeed. Even comment upon working life as an activity meriting attention independently of the questions of exploitation and suffering is a rare occurrence in this literature. Amongst the worker-revolutionaries of the 1870s, childhood and working life appear only fleetingly:

I was born in 1848. My father first taught me to read and write in Old Church Slavonic. I never went to any school. In 1861 I was handed over to the school at the *kustar*' metal-working mechanics' workshop, owned by the German Reinhardt, on Bolshaia Koniushennaia street in Petersburg.

(Smirnov, *At the Trubochnyi Factory*, 1928, Appx. C: 286)

I was born on April 4th, 1845, the soon of a poor joiner of Simbirsk *guberniia*, Korusunskii *u'ezd*, Belozerskiia *volost'*, in the town of Stanichii. My father, a former serf, was burdened with a family of ten. I first learnt to read and write from the local priest [*ponamaria*], and later taught myself independently. The poverty of my parents forced me, when I was still young, into work at the linen-spinning factory. There, at 17 years of age, I began to study the worker question [*rabochii vopros*]. For me, the life of the workers at those factories seemed so poor both materially and spiritually, that I could not work there more than six months. Later, I moved to the town of Simbirsk, in order to learn the metal-working trade. Having studied for two years, I entered as an employee of an iron-foundry. At the factory, all my time was taken up with the propaganda of collective ideas. The factory owner once cursed me so coarsely when I approached him that I became utterly enraged, so much so that I grabbed up a metal rod an *arshin* in length, feeling I would smash his head in with it. But other workers had

⁷² Zelnik, 'Russian Bebels' [Parts I and II]; Bonnell, *The Russian Worker*, p. 1-32; *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia*, (Stanford, 1986); H. Reichman, 'On Kanatchikov's Bolshevism: Workers and *Intelligenty* in Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?*,' *Russian History/Histoire Rus*, vol. 23, nos. 1-4 (Spring-Winter 1996); R. L. Hernandez, 'The Confessions of Semen Kanatchikov: A Bolshevik memoir as Spiritual Autobiography,' *Russian Review*, Vol. 60, Jan. 2001; O. Figes book, *A People's Tragedy* (London 1997), uses Kanatchikov's story (alongside those of Gorkii, Brusilov, etc) as representative of the workers' experience of the Revolutions.

come up from behind, snatching the rod from my hands. None the less, my boss didn't dismiss me, as I was a strong worker. Having worked on for another month, I quit and left the factory...

(Volkov, *Autobiography of a Worker-Revolutionary*, 1924, Appx. B: 281).

At eleven years of age I arrived from Finland at the Kreenholm manufactory, close to Narva, where I myself was transformed into a machine, having to work everyday for 14 hours. (Aleksandrov, *Recollections of Revolutionary Activity*, 1926, Appx. C: 290)

What is striking in this selection is the apparent *intention* to 'frame' the stories that follow in terms of a class background that needs no further explanation. And what follows tends to be a description of a life which is specifically that of a worker-*revolutionary* or a worker-*intelligent*. In memoir after memoir, it is the political life of the author which concerns his writing, not his particular life 'as a worker.' The workshop, the factory, or a childhood remembered fondly or suffered, are a *backdrop*, a bare frame of reference, to the activities of the workers and the radical circles. The *traktiry* and workers' quarters are the spaces in which the worker-revolutionaries and the intelligentsia 'proper' moved as 'developed' and 'educated' people, distinct from the 'mass' which had become the object of their political passions. The worker-writers understood their marginality to the 'working class' and commented upon it in their memoirs; they themselves had occasion to look upon the 'workers' - divided as they were from it by skill, pay, dress, education, culture - as so much passive human material, waiting to be worked up into something worth the efforts of the social liberation they demanded. The great weight of the memoirs' historical content presses the worker-*intelligent* toward the intelligentsia and away from the mass of workers. Yet the bare knowledge of a working-class background, rather than the historical content *per se*, determines the way the memoir is read. It is the aura of 'being working class,' a fact that speaks directly to an audience which understands its signifiers without needing any further explanation, that distinguishes the worker-writer sharply from his intelligentsia comrades and his writings from theirs.

Still, as in the case of Alekseev's speech, it is not self-evident that what 'workers' (or any subcategory of 'workers,' or the 'working-class' as a whole) said or wrote was at any point *systematically* different - either in its substantial content, its themes, or in its form (structure, style, etc) - from what the socialist parties or 'intellectuals' were saying about the workers, or the working class, or what they were saying on the workers' behalf. I have not found a work that has shown this systematic difference over any significant period. There are many works, however, that have shown the overlap between intellectuals' and workers' writings. *The*

Russian Worker is a case in point. The materials collected there boast, on the one hand, of their worker authors and, on the other, of their authors' experience of the workers' milieu. Thus, extracts from Kanatchikov's autobiography and the writings of another former metalworker, P. Timofeev (a.k.a. P. Remezov) sit alongside the studies and reports of F. P. Pavlov, E. A. Oliunina and A. M. Gudvan (the latter an independent scholar from 'an educated background').⁷³ In this case it is 'direct experience' of the workers' milieu - not the *experience of class* - that is opposed by Bonnell to the Soviet mythologies and its crude categories as an alternative source of knowledge. Yet, each and every author was engaged in political writing - engaged in discussing and proposing answers to the same kinds of questions being asked by the revolutionary intelligentsia of the time. Kanatchikov and Timofeev belonged to the Social-Democratic and Socialist-Revolutionary parties when they wrote these works.⁷⁴ Pavlov takes the trouble to relate, modestly, his 'few observations and impressions, accumulated in the course of a decade of factory experience' to the 'problems associated with the growth of industry' in Russia, in which 'Russian society [had] taken a lively interest' in the same decade (around 1890-1900).⁷⁵ Timofeev's work, in its opening sections making similar efforts as Pavlov's to relate his first-hand experience to the political questions of the day, was published in *Russkoe Bogatstvo*, 'a journal with pronounced SR [Socialist-Revolutionary] leanings.'⁷⁶ Kanatchikov's memoirs, perhaps written in the 'period of reaction' after 1907, during his own exile, was published and republished in 1924, 1929 and 1934, with the evident approval of those Soviet institutions apparently producing and promoting a crude Marxist-Leninist take on revolutionary history.⁷⁷ It might be noted, in passing, that political (in the narrow sense of ideologically informed) themes are evident in Kanatchikov's writings about childhood and labour - his condemnation of the kulak's 'tight fisted grip,' his evocative description of the carelessness of peasants toward their children, his awe before the collective products of labour.⁷⁸ Indeed, the autobiography begins with a short narrative in which the 'noteworthy events' of his own, 'home district' are recited: Comrade Lenin visits in order to open the Soviet Union's first electric power station; the first show trials are of his countrymen; the power

⁷³ Bonnell, 'Introduction,' *The Russian Worker*, p. 30-34.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 31-32; Zelnik, 'Introduction' to Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker*, p. xxvii-xxviii; idem, 'Russian Bebel: An Introduction to the Memoirs of the Russian Workers Semen Kanatchikov and Matvei Fisher, Part I,' *Russian Review*, Vol. 35, No. 3, (Jul. 1976), p. 339-40.

⁷⁵ F. P. Pavlov, 'Ten Years of Experience: Excerpts from Reminiscences, Impressions and Observations of Factory Life,' *The Russian Worker*, p. 114.

⁷⁶ Bonnell, 'Introduction,' *The Russian Worker*, p. 32.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 31.

⁷⁸ Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker*, p. 1-2, 50-1, 83-4.

station is closed again – all, equally, the outward signs of Russia’s progress towards socialism.⁷⁹ Even the most evocative, literary, and personal workers’ writing makes known in a very direct way its attachments to the abstract political ideas supposedly external to it. Indeed, all these writers make use of categories and concepts central to writings of the revolutionary parties and the ‘Bolshevik meta-narrative.’⁸⁰ Terms like ‘proletariat,’ ‘worker,’ ‘child worker,’ ‘progress,’ ‘growth,’ ‘Russia’ were clearly part of a discourse in which the revolutionary intelligentsia (of various parties or fractions of parties), the autocratic state (ministers, petit officials, gendarmes and police, lawyers, factory inspectors), publicists, literary figures, businessmen and, of course, ‘workers’ were actively or passively involved in sustaining, enriching and changing. Terms like ‘isolation,’ ‘alienation,’ ‘exploitation,’ ‘high and low’ (skill, wages, status), ‘inside and outside,’ were loaded with political meanings. Even a glancing familiarity with the content of these works and the works of socialists, historians and other ‘outsiders’ will allow judgements regarding the *relative* abstraction of the categories used therein, but not of a clear distinction between the ‘abstract’ and the ‘particular,’ the ‘political-ideological’ and the ‘personal.’ Further, these documents were often *practically* tied up with organisations that had a definite political use for them, and an apparent use for ‘observation’ and ‘experience’ as well. Yet, where the possible influence of ‘models’ of the worker-*intelligent* or examples of workers’ memoirs are touched upon by scholars, no substantiation is offered at all. Indeed, politicisation has been treated as if it took place outside of wider society, entirely in the social and intellectual relations between ‘workers’ and ‘*intelligently*.’ The diversity of identities or representations obscures the diversity of political-historiographical conditions within (or against) which self-identified workers committed their stories to paper and, through publication or the archive, to posterity.

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Social historians have been aware of the consequences of their own interest in representations. A shift in credulity from the intelligentsia to the worker-*intelligent* has, generally, remained an unfulfilled gesture promptly forgotten almost as soon as it is suggested. But such statements should not be ignored for all that. Zelnik was well aware that the fact of having left a memoir or any ‘subjective’ record of one’s life distinguished the worker-*intelligently* from the vast majority

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 1.

⁸⁰ Koenker, *Moscow Workers*, p. 4.

of Russian workers and peasants: that having left behind ‘a critical mass of memoir material ...virtually assures (or even defines) their membership to one or other part of the worker-intellectual set.’⁸¹ The privilege of the ‘worker’ to speak on behalf of other workers then looks decidedly shaky. In an introduction to a collection of German workers autobiographies (*The German Worker*, 1987), A. Kelly expanded on the problem:

The first question usually asked of workers’ autobiographies is: are they representative of the lives of the working class as a whole? In the narrowest sense the answer to this question must be no. Anyone of any class – but particularly the working class - with the time, talent, and ambition to complete an autobiography is almost by definition exceptional. Out of the millions of working-class lives we have only about a hundred autobiographies...Moreover, at the time they wrote, some of these men and women had left behind the world of work – if not the working-class – and become writers, trade union or party functionaries, or even state officials. There is then a grey area where the working-class autobiography meets the proud story of the self-made bourgeois.⁸²

Of course, the Russian worker-revolutionaries of the 1870s and 1880s were unable, at least in the short-term, to pass from local activism to working-class organisations like trade unions and parties, and still less likely into Russia’s rather ill-defined ‘bourgeoisie’ (legally, some of these men already belonged to the petit-bourgeois estate – the *meshchanstvo*, while others were registered as peasants – *krest’ianin’e*). But the question of representation and class is pertinent for students of the Russian worker-memoirists, just as for their German counterparts. In a review of Zelnik’s *Law and Disorder* (1998) and *Workers and Intelligentsia* (1999) Daniel Kaiser observed, after Zelnik, that ‘worker voices...are relatively rare in the record, and even when preserved appear either retold in elite discourses or else so understated as to make difficult any firm conclusions....’ He went on to reason that,

if elite representations depended upon superficial contact with and understanding of workers, and if “worker intellectuals” like Vasili Gerasimov occupied the margins of their social class, recovering the “mental and moral world” of Russia’s working class seems an unattainable goal.’⁸³

Kaiser’s worries can lead in one of two directions: either the ‘working class’ is understood to be an intellectual construct to which only a small group of men and women ascribed themselves -

⁸¹ Zelnik, *Law and Disorder*, p. 226.

⁸² A. Kelly, ‘Introduction,’ *The German Worker: Working-Class Autobiographies from the Age of Industrialisation*, translated and edited by A. Kelly (Berkeley, 1987), p. 2-3.

⁸³ D. H. Kaiser, ‘Review Essay: Worker Voices, Elite Representations: Rewriting the Labor History of Late Imperial Russia,’ *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Spring, 2001), p. 699 and 301.

feeling themselves, paradoxically, on the periphery of the imaginary social unity that they themselves created and sustained - or, it is admitted that our historical knowledge of these men and women's self-ascription to a social group of workers, peasants, or the working class does not have any necessary relation to the 'working class' that we, as historians, identify. The latter argument then identifies the major fault line of our historical knowledge with the division between the intelligentsia and the working class, with the proviso that the worker-revolutionaries or worker-*intelligenty*, by dint of having a personal voice in the historical records – by dint of making the question of their particular experiences and lives possible of a substantial, empirical enquiry – place themselves on the side of the intelligentsia and exclude themselves from the 'working class.' Their privilege of 'speaking for the workers' is thereby lost where, 'by speech,' a personality is gained.

Nineteenth century worker-memoirists were aware of the fact that having a particular voice, training one's eye onto one's own life, utilising a skill, an education and a sensibility that was thought beyond the reach of most workers, was an act of self-exclusion. M. Maynes relates in her *Taking the Hard Road* (a study of European workers' memoirs): 'Autobiographers were not typical workers...One of them, Sebastian Commissaire, declared in the preface to his autobiography that "workers don't write memoirs."'”⁸⁴ In Russia - it was said - workers did not read or write enough to even contemplate contributing their own stories to history. Workers were, by definition, not readers or writers. In his speech, Alekseev explained the wider implications of this:

I suppose everyone knows that workers are persecuted for reading books in Russia. If a worker looks at a book that speaks of his condition, he's arrested. And they'll say, right to his face: "Brother, you're no worker: you read books." The strangest thing is: the irony of the words has been missed. In Russia, *being a worker* is the same as *being an animal*...
(Appx. A: 278)

This was a plea for the Russian state and 'educated society' to see workers as something more than animals. Alekseev was an example of what a plain worker – 'an ordinary *muzhik*, through and through' – was capable of, *if* he was just given a chance. And yet the millions remained uneducated, convinced that reading was either 'sacred or distraction' (Appx. A: 279). Potentially, they were human; but - for now at least - they were still animals. Alekseev's

⁸⁴ M. J. Maynes, *Taking the Hard Road: Life Course in French and German Workers' Autobiographies in the Era of Industrialisation* (Chapel Hill/London, 1995), p. 4.

identification of education with a person's *humanity* gives pause to think: is this not the viewpoint of the state, the landlords, the factory owners, and the intelligentsia? Who else would deny *humanity* to a worker because of his lack of education, except a group whose status and self-worth and sense of being 'truly human' were based on being educated? For all his anger at their conditions, Alekseev looks back on the 'working millions' - and perhaps his own working life before the movement - and sees nothing but cattle-suffering, devoid of subtlety, diversity, sensibility, civilisation – in other words, devoid of humanity:

We sleep where we drop, without bedding or a pillow under our heads, wrapped in rags, surrounded on all sides by every kind of parasite. In such circumstances the intellect becomes blunted and the moral senses, acquired during childhood, remain undeveloped. There is only one means of expression left to those who live by manual labour, badly educated, isolated from any civilization, and forgotten by everyone. As children we, the workers, have to suffer under the capitalist yoke. What else are we supposed to feel towards the capitalists but hatred? Under such conditions, still young, we assume an apathy that allows us silently to endure the oppression brought by the capitalists, all the time with hatred in hearts. (Appx. A: 277).

By self-education and self-development, the worker-revolutionaries made themselves different to their workmates, their friends, and their families: Kanatchikov tells us that, in the 1890s, such workers would be called 'students.'⁸⁵ And indeed, who else *would* write about themselves but students, *intelligently*, state officials, military men, and other lordly types?

Alekseev's letters appear at first sight to give us Alekseev not as a 'category,' or a 'symbol,' but as an individual undergoing particular experiences. Given the bluntness with which other sources on Alekseev – his speech, the memoirs of his friends, the historical works of the Soviet period – proclaim a political message meant to transcend the experiences of individuals, it is tempting to see in Alekseev's letters an account of his experience or mentality which is purer, more direct, less 'political,' giving us (as scholars like to say) 'access' to Alekseev, allowing us to get under his thick, political skin.⁸⁶ By describing his 'inner life,' Alekseev's letters are quite

⁸⁵ Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker*, p. 27, 186-7.

⁸⁶ R. Zelnik, *Law and Disorder on the Narova River: the Kreenholm Strike of 1872*, (Berkeley, 1995), Zelnik writes regarding the 'oldest autobiographical writing by a "Russian" worker known to historians, that, "Vasilii Gerasimov's memoir is unique in the access it gives to the sensibilities, values, and self-representation of a worker who wrote before there was any model available to him of a worker's memoir, and before there was a Russian cultural prototype of the radical or revolutionary worker to which he might be tempted to adhere" (p. 61-2). See also V. E. Bonnell, 'Introduction,' *The Russian Worker*, where the author says that workers' own accounts of their activities 'allow us *to enter the world* of Russian workers,' and 'illustrate the complex and varied contemporary perceptions of the workers' milieu as well as the diversity of experiences and conditions within the labouring population' (emphases added), (p. 30).

distinct from the overtly political statements made by the radicals of his time, and distinct also from such statements attributable to Alekseev or to his fellow worker-revolutionaries around the 1870s and 1880s. Where social revolutionary propaganda (including Alekseev's speech) eschewed questions of the 'inner life' – appealing instead to evidence of the *narod*'s visible, collective suffering, calling upon the audience to *act*, and act effectively, to stop it – Alekseev's letters are documents whose simple aim seems to be the communication of experiences to his friends. In Alekseev's speech, intended for the Russian radicals and their sympathisers, the evocation of class oppression - low wages, violence, humiliation, filth - was channelled into hopes of the imminent, popular self-liberation. Alekseev's letters have no happy ending: where once it was channelled into action, his anger becomes impotent, nothing more than an empty gesture. Only the petit distractions of everyday life and, perhaps, the distractions of writing offered Alekseev escape from the traumas of exile and 'hard labour.' Yet, neither in their content nor in their existence can these documents be viewed as in any sense historically meaningful without noting the context of their writing and preservation. It is, of course, by dint of the political and historical value Alekseev acquired as a radical and an orator (and precisely because he was a *popular* radical and a *popular* orator) that his letters were deemed worthy of preservation, publication, and scholarly attention. These particular historical moments and Alekseev's particular 'sense of things' acquire importance because of his earlier role as a worker-propagandist and representative of (or substitute for) the 'labouring *narod*.' Alekseev may have understood his own condition in exile by observing, pitifully, the lives of the poor Yakuts. His life before the workers' circles – as a peasant in Smolensk *guberniia*, or a migrant labourer waiting at the factory gates for work, then a (usually employed) weaver in St. Petersburg and Moscow – may have seemed, as he looked back, as empty as the Siberian landscape and the lives of the men and women who lived there, 'badly educated, isolated from any civilization, and forgotten by everyone' (Appx. A: 277). But Alekseev was not forgotten, and neither were his moments of desolation and boredom. The fact of such moments' being preserved in letters, and having survived long enough to be published and republished – first in the late 1920s and early 1930s,⁸⁷ again in the late 1950s – already hints at the process whereby Alekseev's actual person and, by extension, his words, were valorised by the revolutionary movement. They became a part of the Alekseev myth.

⁸⁷ See *KiS*, no. 5 (34), 1927 and *Krasnyi Arkhiv*, no. 1 (44), 1931.

Beyond the mere fact of their existence and preservation, and beyond the ‘Alekseev myth,’ it is the *content* of Alekseev’s descriptions of the ‘inhuman lives’ and the ‘pigsty’ that secure him and his person – his particular life and being, even in the emptiness or absence of significant experience of which he so sorely and so justly complains, *as* particular or ‘unique,’ in contrast to the lives of those people – seen from a distance, unnamed and ambiguous, the labouring, anguishing Yakuts – with whom he identifies:

On a few rare occasions, I see a half-naked Yakut, on a single, scrawny branch, floating across the lake, or another on the bank, catching pathetic little fish. I would not be so sick in my heart if, after an entire life of anguish and hard labour, the *narod* could live with a little humanity. And yet still they are thrown into the pigsty where, apart from the filth and stench, there is nothing.⁸⁸

Can this really tell us anything about the *Iakuts*’ experiences, or the experience of the ‘*narod*’ he makes of them? The Yakuts appear here as exemplifications of popular suffering and little else. The movement from his observation of impoverished lives to the ‘pigsty’ of popular life is seamless; it is without question that the Yakuts/*narod* suffer a life ‘without even a little humanity,’ and that the meagre rewards of fishing on the Aldan amount to nothing but the ‘stench and filth’ through which the peasants and workers trudged daily. In giving them so little, it seems he expresses the nothingness he feels as an exile, returned to the land from which he had once escaped. Self-pity becomes pity for the *narod*.

But this is, after all, the view of a politicised *ex*-worker, exiled and excluded from the ‘mass,’ looking upon the *narod* with the mixture of hope and pity and derision so characteristic of the radical intelligentsia. He has become so imbued with their habits of thought that he does not see people, as such, but only the *narod*. In his expressed viewpoints in the letters and the speech, Alekseev reaffirms the gap between the ‘worker-revolutionary’ – to all intents and purposes an ‘*intelligent*’ - and the ‘mass of workers’ upon which he looks from the ‘outside.’ He was, indeed, different from them culturally, politically, and intellectually, and knew himself to be so. But what placed him outside ‘the mass’ was more than representation or self-representation. The *very act of speaking* – the very fact of being an historical figure, or something more than an instance of a category - distinguished him from the masses who *could not speak for themselves*: the ‘silent masses, groaning under the yoke of oppression’ (Appx. A: 280): since these ‘masses’

⁸⁸ [Alekseev], ‘Pis’mo P. S. Ivanovskomu,’ 7 June, 1885, Karzhanskii, p. 154.

were imaginary - constituted by a discourse into which Alekseev was drawn - they could not help but be silent.

III. HISTORY AND CATEGORIES OF THOUGHT

At this point the analysis has discarded any foundation in an extra-linguistic reality or experience, positing neither a 'materially real' or socially unified *narod* or working-class, or a class experience, or even the much maligned 'self-identical subject,' fidelity to which the social historians and the political historians have been equally criticised in recent years. The recent works of Igal Halfin, Robert Hernandez, Anna Krylova, and a few others have criticised social-historical approaches to the Russian Revolution from this point of view.⁸⁹ The works of Halfin are especially relevant to this discussion, since they explore - in concert - the themes of class (as a category), the worker/intelligentsia relationship, and the composition of autobiographical writings in Imperial and revolutionary Russia. His categorical analyses of the proletarian/intelligentsia relationship in *From Darkness to Light* (2000) overlap in some places with the account of 'workers' experience' I have given above. The analysis of Theodor Dan's treatment of Alekseev's speech is one of them.⁹⁰ 'Having been accused in the "Trial of the Fifty" (1877) of distributing revolutionary propaganda,' Halfin writes,

the weaver [Pëtr] Alekseev became a classic example of a mythical worker. His main merit was his ability to get at the bottom of the messianic relation between the proletariat and the intelligentsia: 'the Russian workman can have hope only in himself and can expect help only from our young intelligentsia which has stretched out a brotherly hand to us...It alone, like a good friend and in all sincerity, wants to put us on the right road. It alone leads us on, and it alone, united with us, will accompany us until the time when the muscular arms of the millions of workers will be raised.' The leading theorist of Marxism, [Theodor] Dan, held that 'Alekseev had realised that the intelligentsia and proletariat have

⁸⁹ I. Halfin, 'The Rape of the Intelligentsia: A Proletarian Foundational Myth,' *Russian Review*, vol. 56, no. 1 (Jan., 1997); *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial*, (Cambridge, MA., 2003); 'Between Instinct and Mind: The Bolshevik View of the Proletarian Self,' *Slavic Review*, Vol. 62, No. 1, (Spring, 2003); 'Introduction,' *Language and Revolution: Making Modern Political Identities*, I. Halfin (ed.), (London, 2002), p. 3-4; *Intimate Enemies: Demonizing the Bolshevik Opposition, 1918-28* (Pittsburgh, 2007); R. L. Hernandez, 'The Confessions of Semen Kanatchikov: A Bolshevik memoir as Spiritual Autobiography,' *Russian Review*, Vol. 60, Jan. 2001; A Krylova, 'Beyond the Spontaneity-Consciousness Paradigm: "Class Instinct" as a promising category of historical analysis,' *Slavic Review*, Vol. 62, No. 1, (Spring, 2003). See also J. Hellbeck, 'Working, Struggling, Becoming: Stalin-Era Autobiographical Texts,' *Language and Revolution*, I. Halfin (ed.); idem, *Revolution on my Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006); S. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, 1995).

⁹⁰ The brief discussion in section (i) regarding the concept of *Bildung* or 'self-formation' and its relation to 'personality' (*lichnost'*) is another (cf. Halfin, *From Darkness to Light*, p. 105; 107).

to march together.’ Paradoxically, the ‘authenticity’ of the voice of the proletariat depended, in this analysis, on the proletariat’s ability to speak with the voice of the intelligentsia.⁹¹

In this work Halfin’s intention is to ‘consider the history of the analytic categories Proletariat and Intelligentsia,’ rather than ‘study the historical formation of the Russian working class and intelligentsia.’⁹² Several books, articles and notes develop these analyses, drawing on the notion that Marxism can (or should) be understood not as a scientific theory oriented towards material or social reality, but as a ‘salvation narrative’ concerned with the triumph of good over evil by the return of alienated Man to himself. This thesis and the theory behind it need to be fleshed out a little if we are to understand Halfin’s discussion of Alekseev and Dan, his general approach to the question of the proletarian/intelligentsia ‘dyad,’ and the ‘construction of class’ in post-Revolutionary autobiographical writings.

Halfin’s account of ‘Marxism’ draws heavily on a few sources: for its general thrust, Halfin relies on Karl Löwith’s secularisation thesis as propounded in *Meaning in History* (1949), where Marx’s ideas are understood as a ‘pseudo-morphism of Judeo-Christian messianism,’⁹³ or (as Halfin puts it) ‘a secularized version of providential Christian eschatology.’⁹⁴ Hans Blumenberg’s *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (1966) - originally written in response to Löwith’s critique of progress and to the ‘secularisation thesis’ - functions as a foil. In its details, Halfin’s main lines of discussion, especially regarding Marx’s concept of (historical) alienation and its roots in ancient and Christian theologies/ philosophies - are similar to the opening chapters of the first volume of Leszek Kolakowski’s *Main Currents of Marxism* (1976)., Halfin argues in that vein that Marxism was (and is) a discourse structured around the notion of time as linear (unidirectional and unified) and eschatological (with a consummate endpoint).⁹⁵ It is a variation on the Gnostic story of the alienation of Man from God and his return, on the Judeo-Christian salvation story, and the Hegelian system, with its own ‘Fall,’ ‘Paradise’ and ‘Messiah.’ Marxism was not derived directly from Hegelian thought or from Christianity, however. Halfin states that his is not a genealogical analysis of Marxism but a ‘synchronic’ (e.g. structural) one. His strategy is to look at Marxism not as a developing body of thought, with

⁹¹ Halfin, *From Darkness to Light*, p. 118. For the extract from Alekseev’s speech, Halfin cites Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, p. 534-5; Dan’s analysis is from *The Origins of Bolshevism* (London, 1964), p. 152-5.

⁹² *From Darkness to Light*, p. 12.

⁹³ K. Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago/London, 1949), p. 46.

⁹⁴ Halfin, *From Darkness to Light*, p. 43.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 1-2.

prior 'roots' in Hegelian philosophy, any one kind of Christianity, or Gnosticism, but to see each of these – including the 'Russian Marxist' discourse (such as it can be identified as 'separate' from the Marxist discourse as a whole) - as structured in similar ways, according to an identifiable 'ur-eschatology.'⁹⁶ That Gnosticism and Hegelianism came 'before' Marxism is not, therefore, an issue: the 'original' (or 'first') quality of the 'ur-eschatology' is in the structural relationship between terms: to read Marxism through Judeo-Christian eschatology is then only to read two different expressions of an underlying 'discourse,' the latter – properly speaking – outside of time. This approach is then extended to the Russian Marxist discourse and its central structuring idea – the 'Janus-Faced messiah.' Halfin treats Marxist texts (or statements) from the 1890s to the 1920s as instances of the 'grammar' of Marxism. This 'grammar' cannot be isolated or expressed outside of its 'instances' (particular statements made according to the rules of the discourse) in Russian Marxist texts. The same can be said of the 'ur-eschatology' expressed in its Marxist, Christian and Gnostic variants.

The basic notion of this 'ur-eschatology,' then, is that 'a pure society could be attained through knowledge.'⁹⁷ In the case of Gnosticism, it was knowledge of Man's original unity with God and his separation from it that would allow his return to his origins; he would return, enriched by this separation, having come to consciousness of his own divine nature and his role as the finite realisation of God's being.⁹⁸ The Gnostic doctrine, also identifiable in the Hegelian story of the Absolute's self-alienation and self-return, is echoed in Marx's 'extrapolation [of] a universal history [in which] once upon a time man had been an integral producer.'⁹⁹ Man, Marx said, would 'return to this state of bliss' from the alienation of capitalism. Under capitalism, Man's authentic existence - his self-realisation through a unified mental and physical labour process – was the alienating process which broke the 'head' and the 'hand' apart: 'Man and his labour could not reach their fullest expression as long as the object of man's labour was not of his own choice. The split within human agency, and the separation between thought and work, the separation between intention and the activity that realises it, were at the root of what Marx refers to as human alienation.'¹⁰⁰ Between the Fall ('original expropriation') and the Last Judgement or 'End of History' (the Revolution), capitalism itself would create a 'Messiah,' a universal force representing humanity as a whole, that would return humanity, enriched by the

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 3.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 54.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 56-7.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 57.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 44-5.

hell it had passed through, to itself. This ‘Messiah,’ Halfin argues, was dual, in reflection of the alienation of man’s ‘intentions’ from his ‘labour’: it was at once the ‘Proletariat’ and the ‘Intelligentsia.’ History would come to its end in Revolution and Communism when these two parts of Man – his thought and his labour – were reunited through human self-consciousness. Humanity reunified would find its individual expression in the ‘New Man,’ both thinker and labourer, whose labour and thought were unified: in other words, the ‘worker-*intelligent*.’¹⁰¹

Capitalism, then, created its own gravedigger in the form of a ‘morally pure’ social agent. As the only class in history to have no material stake in the system of private property, and the only class to suffer a universal dehumanisation and debasement, the proletariat was ‘morally pure.’ It would be able to act for the interests of humanity rather than its own interests. What it lacked, however, was ‘consciousness,’ or education. Halfin comments that, in the intelligentsia/proletariat relationship, the problem of the relationship between ‘freedom’ and ‘necessity’ was solved by dividing it along class lines: free commitment to the proletarian messiah was the privilege of the intelligentsia, whereas the necessity of the historical process was expressed in the increasing militancy and ‘class-consciousness’ of the proletariat. Consciousness would be provided by the intelligentsia – a group at first chained to reproducing the capitalist system, but able (by having the education and leisure-time for reflection) to commit itself to the revolutionary class below. In this commitment, the intelligentsia would endow the proletariat with ‘class consciousness’: that is, they would ‘universalise’ consciousness and realise it in the material form of the proletariat, thus enabling it to fulfil its pre-ordained, messianic mission.

Marxist thinkers (Halfin continues) ‘portrayed ideal workers as individuals who investigated the meaning of their lives.’¹⁰² The New Man or worker-*intelligent* could not be a mere proletarian, since the proletarian without ‘consciousness’ was a fragment, exploited and hunch-backed, unfit to play the role of messiah. He had to be developed or educated. The Marxist tradition ‘prided itself on workers who were, *in essence*, indistinguishable from the intelligentsia. The myth of the worker who embraced intelligentsia consciousness was set up as a model for the entire working class to emulate’ (emphasis added). Thus, ‘[Theodor] Dan held that “Alekseev had realised that the intelligentsia and the proletariat have to march together.”...the “authenticity”

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 1 and p. 6.

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 118.

of the voice of the proletariat depended...on the proletariat's ability to speak with the voice of the intelligentsia.'¹⁰³ Halfin goes on to examine Dan's treatment of the story of Victor Obnorskii, 'a hagiographical account structured around the workers' attainment of consciousness,' in which Obnorskii (just like Alekseev) had initially benefitted from the tutorship of the 'Chaikovskiyite Populists,' before outgrowing their teachings. He had gradually come to see the specific interests of the proletariat as somehow separate from those of the Populists and their preferred revolutionary agent, the *narod*. 'The political programme Obnorskii eventually wrote for the proletariat was "an out-and-out paraphrase of the *Communist Manifesto*," Dan noted in jubilation. Through the mouth of Obnorskii, claimed the narrator, the proletariat started speaking for itself.' The next couple of passages - related to the stories of Alekseev and Obnorskii and Dan's treatment of them - are the key to Halfin's argument and (its weaknesses). I quote at length:

By instilling a universalist identity in Obnorskii, Dan, unequivocally a member of the intelligentsia, came to identify with his protégé, becoming, in this sense, a worker. To the extent that universalism was an intrinsic proletarian quality, a broad-minded intelligentsia metamorphosed into a proletariat....Aware of his identity as a worker, Obnorskii was also a thinker. He thought out the task of the proletariat and embraced messianic consciousness. The proletariat's exclusive identification with the manual labourer was thus obliterated...

The memoir of the worker Fedor Samoilov...demonstrated how, by assuming intelligentsia habits, a worker estranged himself from his class. Samoilov recalled how, reading profusely after work, he aroused the anger of his comrades who were disturbed by his constantly burning lamp. 'Sharing with me the same living space, my fellow workers lived the life of beasts of burden: all they cared about was working, eating and sleeping, without any intelligent diversions except bad jokes, fooling around and intoxication.' Clearly, his theoretical interest had turned Samoilov into a member of the intelligentsia.

Universalist interests, not social origins or a position in production, was the ultimate measure for proletarian identity.¹⁰⁴

Now, Halfin *needs* to show that the terms 'Proletarian' and 'Intelligentsia' did *not* follow from 'social origins or a position in production' in order that his analysis of the 'creation of the "New Man"' in Soviet universities, and the ascription or construction of students' identities as 'workers,' 'peasants,' 'artisans' or 'old intelligentsia' be explicable by the Marxist eschatological discourse:

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 119-20. Halfin cites Dan, *Origins of Bolshevism*, p. 154-7 and F. Samoilov, *Vospominaniia ob ivanovo-vozhnesenskom rabochim dvizhenii 1903-05 gg* (Moscow, 1922), p. 12-3.

Bolshevik class identities were produced through poetical means. They were not automatic results of a social process....Class identity was built through a variety of parameters...The discourse of class defined the Soviet self, that is, students did not only manipulate class discourse for their own interest, they were in turn manipulated by it. Class terminology provided students with the bricks from which their self-identity was constructed. Historical subjects did not precede the discourse they used but were to a considerable degree structured by it.¹⁰⁵

Hence, any notion of a class identity outside of the Marxist discourse, and indeed any notion of a 'subject' (i.e. a worker or an *intelligent*) *before* Marxist discourse, is discarded. It has been the continued belief in this 'outside' that has stumped previous attempts to understand the Russian revolutionary process and its relation to Marxist ideology, Halfin argues: 'The social historian realises that the proletariat and the intelligentsia are not autonomous classes, but agencies that interacted with one another....Yet, for him, proletariat and intelligentsia remain social groups that existed before they interacted. Thus proletariat and intelligentsia turn into an objective given.' However (he says), 'Marxists understood classes as messianic symbols and not as sociological populations. Any distinction between scientific class analysis and messianic prophesying violates Marxist self-understanding and ignores the operation of Marxist language. That the proletariat and intelligentsia (in particular) and classes (in general) were not meant by Marx as social forces is a leitmotif of this book.'¹⁰⁶ To read Marxist language as if it referred to 'real groups' is to make the mistake of assuming that the discursive symbols had some relation to social groups or a reality that did not - and could - exist outside of discourse. The question of workers' consciousness and its relation to socio-economic conditions is a question for Marxist discourse, and formed by accepting *its* 'grammar' and *its* notions of truth and falsity. It is not a question for historians. Neither can the historian think about the 'authenticity' of workers' representations of things or of their 'voice': 'Marxists understood the intelligentsia's right to speak for the working class not as a question of [authentic or self-] representation, but as a question of the eschatological timetable':¹⁰⁷ in other words, the level of 'proletarian consciousness' – its closeness to or identity with, the intelligentsia's - determined the degree to which the workers could 'speak for themselves.' Thus, Halfin argues, Pëtr Alekseev and Victor Obnorskii were celebrated by the Marxists because they were '*in essence*, indistinguishable from the intelligentsia' (emphasis added).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Halfin, *From Darkness to Light*, p. 37.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 15.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 118.

All this ignores the fact that it was ‘speaking in a worker’s voice,’ and not necessarily the content of the message, that was most important to Dan, just as it had been for Alekseev and his comrades in 1877. In ‘essence,’ the worker was still a worker – a class position he could not escape, because his ‘social origins’ and his ‘position in the processes of production’ had marked his life (and thus his words) with class. This ‘class essence’ overrode the *content* of the message given by such workers as Alekseev and Obnorskii. It was *who* said it, not only *what* they said, that mattered. There was, then, a means of identifying ‘a worker’ or an ‘*intelligent*’ that operated beneath any discursive schema casting the ‘proletariat’ as messiah. In fact, Samoilov’s memoir account of 1922 demonstrates this: his ‘theoretical interests’ might have made him culturally different to the other workers with whom he shared a living space, but he does not hesitate to refer to them as his ‘fellow workers.’ It might be admitted that Samoilov had constructed his own notion of what a ‘proletarian’ or ‘worker’ *should* be, and a scheme explaining how he might escape from the ‘life of a beast of burden’ (of which he so clearly disapproves in his fellow workers). Perhaps Samoilov believed this ‘education’ or ‘consciousness’ or ‘theoretical interest’ would be necessary for the Marxists’ messianic ‘Proletariat’ to fulfil its historical task and that *he* was the model of the workers’ future. *But they were still understood to be workers.* Samoilov still understood himself to be a worker as well, regardless of his higher ‘level of development.’

If Marxist discourse did, indeed, identify (and produce) its Intelligentsia and Proletarian subjects by reference to their ‘level of consciousness’ – if ‘universalist interests, not social origins or a position in production, was the ultimate measure for proletarian identity’ – what was it in this discourse that demanded the verification of its message in the voice of workers, not *intelligently*? What was it in this discourse that demanded that the growth of ‘class consciousness’ be explained by quite clearly defined socio-economic conditions (as in Plekhanov, or - by implication – in Dan’s references to Alekseev and Obnorskii)? What was it in the Marxist discourse that made Plekhanov, Dan, Lenin and others argue that workers did not need the intelligentsia to behave like the revolutionary class (the proletarian messiah) they saw in them? That workers’ own conditions and occupations pointed them in this direction? That the Marxists (or social democrats) only gave them the right language, the universal or historical view, they lacked to explain their own actions? Why did they try to explain the growth of Marxism as an ideology in Russia in relation to the growth of capitalism and a proletariat there, allowing that ‘Populism’ - and ‘democratic radicalism’ before it - had been suitable for the

objective conditions of those times but had now outlived their usefulness? How did Lenin and others find support for their notions of the growth of a proletariat in Russia using statistical evidence provided by the state? How did the ‘Marxist discourse’ of Proletariat and Intelligentsia relate to the autocratic state’s own worries, going back to the 1830s and ‘40s, regarding the growth of a proletariat in Russia, and possible means of avoiding it?

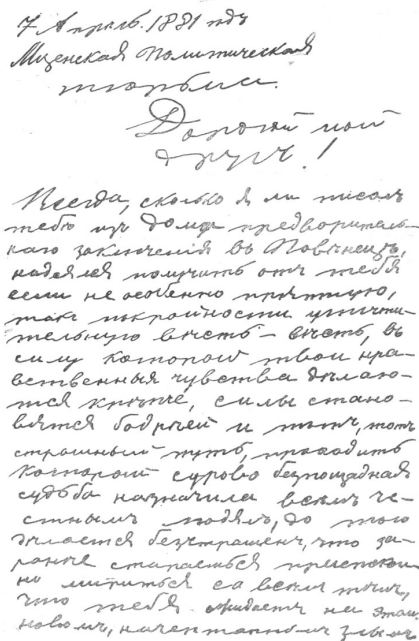
Halfin might point to the ‘ur-eschatology’ here: the structure of a Marxist language that turns ‘mundane historical events’ into signposts in an eschatological discourse. The Intelligentsia and Proletariat would then be the mere bearers of messianic roles in a highly structured narrative of ‘salvational time’ that has reproduced itself, in different contexts and with different designated Messiahs or agents, from the Gnostics to Schelling and Hegel to Marx and the Marxists. Time and particular evidences would then be irrelevant to the Marxists. The identities of the Intelligentsia and the Proletariat, existing outside of any possible world with which it might be confronted – in fact, shaping and producing a world outside of which there was nothing – would not have to comport themselves to ‘Russian reality’ or any reality whatsoever, except in so far as the exact eschatological meaning of any event or text needed to be made to fit into the mythologizing processes of the discourse. Yet, there was a strong sense of class identity that was outside of the revolutionary (‘Messianic’) role attributed to them. The designations ‘intelligentsia’ and ‘proletariat’ *did*, at least, have meanings beyond the salvation drama Halfin describes. One could be a worker and live a brutalised life of ‘bad jokes and intoxication,’ or be an educated worker with theoretical interests: still the worker identity held. And it was this identity that ensured the ‘authenticity’ of the workers’ voice (and workers’ testimonies), and the workers’ message, not its identity with the intelligentsia.

Halfin resists any notion of a ‘worker’ outside of discourse. After the discussion of Samoilov’ memoir, Halfin, in a footnote, turns to Zelnik’s work on the worker-intelligentsia, his article on Gerasimov’s memoir (‘Before Class’) in particular: ‘Searching for the pre-Marxist identity of the Russian worker – “before there was any reductive cultural prototype of the radical worker-revolutionary” – Zelnik might be pursuing a mythical subject,’ Halfin writes, continuing:

It is unclear in what sense a subject could identify itself as a ‘worker’ remaining outside the discursive tissue that privileges labour as a vehicle of emancipation. Nor is it obvious

that a historian can peel off the allegedly contaminating ‘intelligentsia influences’ and find at the bottom of the worker’s soul his, so to speak, gut identity.¹⁰⁹

In the second sentence, Halfin addresses a real problem in social history – the validity of the term ‘worker’ in relation to their writings. He is, however, extremely unfair here, since, even if it was Zelnik’s intention to ‘peel off’ intelligentsia influence (a problematic aim), it was not his intention to find, ‘at the bottom of the workers’ soul,’ a ‘gut identity.’ Zelnik’s whole argument was that, in Gerasimov’s memoirs, being a worker is not as significant a point of self-understanding as being a ‘foundling.’ Indeed, the a real problem with ‘workers’ memoirs’ is that ‘worker identity’ often seems strangely external, even peripheral, to the stories offered by their writers. The ‘worker identity’ is there, but it is not substantiated or ‘made real.’ The ‘worker identity’ is then thrown into doubt: its ideological or historiographical function – the notion of authenticity, for instance - can then be examined.



Г. А. Алексеев. 1881 г.
Митенский политический
заключенный.
Дорогой мой
Смирнов!
Несколько дней и ни слова
небо ни слова не говорю,
как закончил в Митенке,
каждый поглотил свои мысли,
если не особенно приятно,
тогда искренности, чуждым
тембром вечно - вечно, во
силу которого являю кра-
вешинский кубетва думасо-
мел крошеч, силы стало -
вместе доброты и твое, мать
страшным, твое, правду
Коллегой сурово безобразная
судьба наградилась безумь ре-
стивый, модный, до того
милости безобразный, что го-
рочее старались исполнить
но митенка сдвинула, что
тогда, как вечно не знаю
каково, как вечно не знаю

16. Alekseev’s letter to I. T. Smirnov from Mtsensk political prison, 7th April, 1881¹¹⁰

Still, it is the first – quite jaw-dropping - sentence that relates properly to the question of ‘being a worker.’ How, Halfin asks, could a ‘worker’ be identified – ‘how could a subject identify itself’ - as a worker, without ‘the discursive tissue that privileges labour as a vehicle of emancipation’? As if the term ‘worker’ were entirely the product of Marxist discourse and

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 425, ft. 83, citing Zelnik, ‘Before Class,’ p. 61

¹¹⁰ Karzhanskii, p. 152.

meaningless without it! As if no other discourse could lead a 'subject' to 'identify itself [*sic*] as a worker' but 'messianic Marxism'! One does not have to assume some 'real identity' in 'the gut of the worker' to *know* that there were, at least, other discourses, other institutions, other authorities, that ascribed to 'historical subjects' the identity 'worker.' When representatives of the autocratic state used the term *rabochii* to describe a 'subject' belonging to the legal estate of the peasantry or the (town-dwelling and town-born) petit-bourgeoisie, it was certainly not to 'privilege labour as a vehicle of emancipation.' It was a description of who they were, what they did, and a normative ascription of the ways they were expected to behave in relation to their masters ('bosses,' *khoziaka*) and toward the government or state. When factory owners distributed new pay-books to their employees with the terms *rabochii* or *master* (semi-skilled worker; master-worker) inscribed in them, it was not to 'privilege labour as a vehicle of emancipation.' Here was a discourse centred on notions of value, skill, contract, authority, duty. When the machinist or the child labourer or the field labourer had occasion to identify himself or herself as a labourer or worker, or if they happened to identify themselves as 'the poor,' or 'the exploited,' or describe themselves as if 'at the bottom of the heap,' 'sweating and bleeding for the machine' or 'for the boss' – they did not necessarily do so in order to 'privilege labour as a vehicle of emancipation.' Indeed, both 'proletariat' and the 'intelligentsia' were terms in circulation within other discourses, and neither (for instance, in the 1830s or the 1850s, respectively) were necessarily involved in 'privileg[ing] labour as a vehicle of emancipation.' Even if these notions or identities were 'discursively formed,' it has to be admitted that these discourses were not only different to the Marxist discourse that Halfin describes, but also that they confronted it, as if from the outside, and presented certain evidence, certain identities, a certain terminology, certain people - Alekseev or Obnorskii, for instance - to the Marxists, who had to deal with it in the terms set out by *their* ('eschatological') discourse. We do not have to posit any trans-historical or extra-discursive reality to these notions to see Halfin's myopic vision of Russian history everywhere obscuring the complexity of the notions with which he is dealing.

What are obscured completely in Halfin's analysis are 'experiences,' from the very notion of the empirical or perceptual to representations of direct, personal and other 'particular' experiences. They are even rejected as possible categories of the examined discourse. It is Halfin's stated intention to do this: 'In reading personal accounts as transparent descriptions of life...we reproduce - without analysis – historical subjects' views of themselves. In assuming

that personal documents “register” the author’s perceptions of events, we assume that reality preceded its interpretation. The mechanism through which interpretation produced reality is thereby overlooked.’¹¹¹ Thus, the method that, in contrast, perceives ‘the self as both author and product obviates the need to establish the veracity of the autobiographical account, its correspondence to the life it purports to describe. Without discourse there can be no subjectification.’ Further, as a warning, Halfin tells us that, ‘since the tools of the historian cannot be applied to anything beyond discourse, and discourse always implies some sort of public interaction, there is no way...the historian can investigate the “authentic” subject even if he insists on presupposing his existence.’¹¹² And generally Halfin is indifferent to the events, people, ideas, etc. that his student autobiographers describe in writings from the 1920s, since his interest is in their structure, in the ‘poetics of the self,’ e.g. how an identity or subject was formed through writing and according to, or against, the Bolshevik discourse and its ‘eschatological salvation narrative.’ What is obvious here is the conflation of the historian’s assumption of a reality outside of discourse, understood to limit any possible statements within or about it, and the assumption of a trans-historical subject or identity which subsists, and can even be identified, beneath or ‘outside’ the subject’s expression or construction of ‘Self’ – e.g. in memoirs, in letters, or whatever. Surely, inquiry into the past events or people or relationships a ‘subject’ might describe in a memoir, and comparison of these descriptions to other accounts of these events, or people, or relations, is a different order of enquiry that one that tries to investigate the truth or falsity of a ‘subject’s’ presented or constructed self against some transcendental or real ‘self’? Halfin treats all ‘presented realities,’ like the ‘mythical’ subject ‘outside of discourse,’ as inaccessible to the historian, or non-existent, or part of the construction of a discourse. The notion that a theoretical ‘event,’ or ‘subject,’ or ‘class’ can be constructed by the historian from documentary records – not really to find its ‘transhistorical meaning,’ but in order to explain various documented perspectives on it (and indeed, to make these perspectives intelligible) - cannot be entertained. If we enquire into the (‘mythical’) subject behind the text, we reproduce rather than analyse ‘its’ story. If we enquire into the historical formation of the proletariat or the intelligentsia, we repeat rather than analyse Marxist discourse. If we broach the idea of a ‘workers’ identity’ outside of the ‘discursive tissue that

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 35-6.

¹¹² Ibid, p. 286-7.

privileges labour as a vehicle of emancipation,' we take up the tools of Marxism and surrender ourselves to its 'dangerous dreams.'¹¹³

The conflation of 'discourse methodology' with a 'discursive ontology' is exaggerated by the quite extraordinary myopia of Halfin's view of 'Marxism.' The account of what 'Marx said' or wrote is clearly skewed by the Russian focus of his work. Debates over the role of the intelligentsia, for instance, are read back into Marx's work without any attention being paid to the quite peculiar emphasis placed on this debate in Russia: one does not have to posit a 'special Russian reality' to see that the emphasis placed on the question in Russia was greater than it ever was in Marx's own works. This skewed perspective follows from Halfin's approach. I believe it is accurate to call it 'Speculative,' in the Hegelian sense, since it begins with the results of its investigations and proceeds backwards from there. We are given a synchronic treatment of the 'ur-eschatology' - as it is expressed in 'Marxism' - as well as a synchronic treatment of 'Marxism' as it was expressed by Russian authors; what follows is an explanation of Russian Marxist 'doxology' - the various, conflicting opinions of Marxists over the role of the intelligentsia which took place, nevertheless, *within* the Marxist discourse, before seeing how this discourse was 'realised' through the Soviet state and its subjects. Halfin even has his own 'cunning of reason': since historical narratives constructed within the Soviet discourse assume the Messianic role of the proletariat and the realisation of that role in 1917, history before that time is necessarily constructed according to that discourse. We cannot enquire into the reality behind these accounts, because the history of the Russian revolution is the history of Marxism realising itself in state power, and by the construction of narratives. Hence, Halfin begins by constructing a 'Marxism' that is transhistorical in order to explain how it 'expressed itself' through the writings of 'Soviet subjects', the latter being his starting point.

Halfin creates a theoretical entity, apparently immanent to Marxism yet irreducible to it, in order to explain its structure. He compares Marxism to Gnostic, Judeo-Christian and Hegelian eschatologies, *not* to show the historical development of one into the other, but in order to show the identity of their structures, outside of time, and outside of any possible social context. The question of why there should be such different eschatologies with the same basic structure, but with different terms or 'signifiers,' is left (formally) to one side. Informally, references to the 'ur-eschatology' indicate that Halfin imagines 'Marxism' itself as one, determinate expression

¹¹³ Ibid, p. xi and p. 38.

of a discourse that is ‘original’ and at the root of these various expressions, but that cannot be expressed in pure form (since it cannot exist outside of these determinate forms). The ‘original’ expresses itself (and *has* to express itself) in different forms, but these different forms have no relation to a social reality or conditions outside of discourse; even a genealogical approach, limited to explaining the development of these discourses, is rejected. Nothing is allowed to disturb its purity. This is also the Hegelian approach, and a mystification of history: ‘If I say: Roman Law and German Law are both systems of law, then that is obvious. But if I say, *Law*, this abstraction, is realised in Roman and German law, these concrete systems of law, then the relation is mystical.’¹¹⁴ The mystification of an analytical abstraction follows from Halfin’s conflation of a method (where Marxism is compared to Hegelian thought and Christianity, etc: their common points brought out *by the historian*) and ontology (where the abstraction is given to exist, in some sense, ‘outside’ of historical processes and, secondly, seen to ‘realise itself’ in various concrete forms e.g. the Marxist Revolution,¹¹⁵ Bolshevik autobiographies,¹¹⁶ etc). What is passed over is not only the complexity of the historical development of Marxism in Europe and in Russia in the nineteenth century. It is also the confrontation of the Marxist discourse with a world decidedly not created by it, a world that limited what Marxists could and could not say, and presented them with certain structures, ideas, people, even classes, as apparent ‘givens.’ If these latter were all discursively constructed – fine: this can be argued consistently. But the power of creating the ‘Russian intelligentsia’ cannot be given to ‘Marxism’ any more than the social structure in which the ‘working class,’ ‘peasant-workers,’ workshops, factories, allotments, taxes, the gendarmes, property relations and legal relations - already ‘presented’ to different groups in different ways, and understood and defined variously - can be attributed to its ‘constructive powers.’

* * *

The special ‘workers’ individuality’ found in Alekseev’s and the worker-revolutionaries’ writings had its origins in the attempt to reconcile personality and consciousness with the abstract concept and the social category of class. Historical studies have either wholly identified the two moments of worker-individuality (thus missing the fact that they conflict), or emphasises one aspect at the expense of the other. Because historians have been unwilling to

¹¹⁴ K. Marx, ‘Die Weltform,’ Marx-Engels, *Kleine Okonomische Schriften* (Berlin, 1955), p. 271, cited in Coletti, ‘Introduction,’ Marx, *Early Writings*, p. 39.

¹¹⁵ See Halfin, ‘Introduction,’ (ed.). *Language and Revolution*, p. 4.

¹¹⁶ See idem, *Terror in My Soul*, *passim*.

examine exactly how worker's writings and representations were influenced by political ideologies, these ideologies have been repeated in historical studies rather than examined themselves. Thus, social history re-enacts the autocracy's treatment of the worker-*intelligenty* in 1874-78: they are separated and thus excluded from their class for speaking, and yet continue to be surreptitiously identified by it and with it. Categorical analysis, in contrast, repeats consciously, as a 'method,' what social-revolutionaries did against their own intentions, that is, it makes the abstract category the subject of history and makes all concrete evidence expressions of the category. Since categorical analysis does not give itself any ground from which to criticise the discourse examined, it cannot do anymore than endorse it. Thus, historical studies to date have not been able to identify the political and social influences that shaped workers' writings and created a workers' individuality.

5. Conclusions

There were historiographical doctrines and traditions that shaped the ways in which revolutionaries, including worker-revolutionaries or worker-*intelligent*, spoke and wrote about themselves, their particular lives, and their particular experiences. The social-revolutionary historiography developed in concert with debates and doctrines regarding the role of the individual, the historical role of social determination, and the political value of direct, personal, and class experiences. Revolutionary groups retained the idea that individuality (or ‘personality’) was *created* and *affirmed* by critical thought and critical action. Thoughts and actions that went against intellectual and social ‘givens’ were proof of a person’s *particular* existence and his or her *particular* powers. ‘(Self-) developed’ people were able to achieve consciousness (*soznanie*) of their own powers within and, at times, against social and intellectual pressures, thus affirming the capacity of individual people to be free. But social-revolutionary doctrine ascribed the power of wholesale social change only to *society* - in particular, to the popular mass or the working class – all else being secondary to its thought and action. Social movements were produced by social laws or social struggles. Developed and conscious people (usually, of the educated classes) therefore had a central ‘choice’: to commit themselves to the social movement below, or to reject it, ignore it, or oppose it, and be swept away by its revolution. Individuals could still assert themselves and therefore affirm their individuality: but this was secondary to the self-assertion of the popular mass or the working class, whose actions were driven by material necessity. Thus the problem of the worker-*intelligent* and the worker-revolutionaries: Did the critical thought and action of working people follow from a necessity general to the class, or from free actions that were particular to them and affirmative of *their* individuality? Was worker radicalism an instance of a social law or an exception to it? Simply put: were their actions *free*, or *determined*? The terms ‘developed worker’ and worker-*intelligent* were an attempt to show that they were both free *and* determined, conscious *and* instinctive, personal *and* of the class as a whole. That the social-revolutionaries felt compelled to create a new sub-category that synthesised the determinism of workers’ experience with the freedom of *intelligent* consciousness is just one demonstration of the privilege given to the categories of their thought over the experience that contradicted them; that experience and the *workers’ voice* became categories of their own is another.

Revolutionary historiography, in so far as it grew from and continued to draw upon theories and practices that were *narodnik* – e.g. committed to the ‘self-emancipation of the working-class,’ ‘the proletariat’ – *valorised class itself* and so reproduced it in their doctrines and their practices. Moreover, they did this at precisely the point where working men were trying to escape their class, when their actions demonstrated freedom rather than the powers of social necessity, and when the reactions of the autocracy showed the externality of class to their individual lives by imposing it upon them. Yet workers themselves, ascribed to the position and thrown back into it, came to think their actions, thoughts and certain of their experiences were *determined* by class relations: oppression, exploitation and, more basically, the indifference of the upper-classes to the particular lives of individual working men and women. The *particular* thoughts and actions of worker-revolutionaries, their *particular* choices to educate themselves, to commit themselves to radical ideas and revolutionary action, were explained by a class experience and a class existence that was nothing if not *general*. Class then became the ‘essence’ of their radicalisation and the quality most valued in their ‘voices.’ When workers spoke or wrote, they were *witnesses* to class relations that deprived them of individuality. But, in being mere ‘class witnesses’ - at the same time *this* worker and *any* worker - they were also deprived, in part, of their individuality at exactly the point where it could have been asserted most forcefully.

In Alekseev’s case it is obvious that political exigency – the conflict with the autocratic government – was one important influence on the practical development and expression of the revolutionaries’ doctrines. The autocracy had its own, official history, backed up by and, in a sense, constituted by theories of individual responsibility and of class. In the autocratic economy of history, the *narod* or working people (workers; peasants) were only answerable for their actions to the extent that those actions indicated their separation from their proper ‘way of being’ as a class. In popular disorders and strikes, a long-practiced division between the ringleader (*zachinshchik*) and the ‘crowd’ (*tolpa*) allowed the spontaneous and impassioned actions of ordinary peasants to be forgiven in the knowledge that responsibility for stirring up the ‘passions’ (*strasti*) belonged to more or less conscious individuals. As in the revolutionary ideology, individuality was associated with consciousness and consciously chosen actions, determinism (in the autocratic case, by ‘essence’) with the actions of the crowd, multitude, or ‘mass.’ Those found to be ‘answerable’ were isolated, interrogated, harangued, imprisoned,

‘sent home,’ observed, and so found a place, *as individuals*, in the documentary record. It was the aim of revolutionary orators (including Alekseev) to argue the opposite of autocracies’ division into the ‘responsible individual’ and the ‘irresponsible,’ and so indeterminate, ‘crowd.’ The *intelligenty* accepted the consequences of their actions without accepting that they were wholly ‘responsible’ for them: their decisions reflected the movements of the *narod* and social laws that were expressed through individuals. Alekseev argued that it was the condition of the ‘working millions’ that drove them towards revolution, thus giving to the actions of the working-class as a whole (and to himself as a part of it) the excuse of social determination. The result, then, was not a *criticism* of class and the indeterminacy forced upon its members, but affirmation of both. The celebration of Alekseev by the revolutionary press necessarily highlighted his ‘personal qualities,’ while the doctrine of social determination - including the proposition that class conditions had led to *his* radicalism – buried choice, consciousness, freedom and any substantial individuality under abstract categories: *rabochii*, *muzhik*, *tkach*, *rabochii-intelligent*.

The impersonal economic and social laws to which the revolutionaries made constant reference were not easily squared with the celebration of the personalities and actions of executed, exiled, or otherwise lost friends and comrades; the personal judgments of tactics, or programmes, or actions or people did not always sit easily with the dry, factual content, aimed at some future young radical or the historian, that filled the pages of their writings; the desire to grasp the past as *one’s own* and make it part of *one’s own* history clashed with an historiographical project that aimed at the opposite: the collection and correlation of historical knowledge *through*, but not *for*, individuals. Yet, for revolutionaries of the middle and upper classes, the route to radicalism remained one of contingency and of consciousness: where childhood, young adulthood and ‘conversion’ to the cause were narrated, or a political life ‘devoted’ to the cause described, the personal and unique route remained a part of the story that could not be abandoned to social forces. The educated class, or ‘educated society,’ was related to the popular cause and its ‘forces’ through consciousness - as Lavrov put it, through ‘critical thinking’ that demonstrated the identity of an developed self-interest with the achievement of Kantian ‘kingdom of ends,’ a realisation and a commitment that entailed a choice to fight the chasm that divided ‘civilization’ from the oppressed working people who made it possible. For Plekhanov, consciousness consisted in the consciousness of social law: one could hitch oneself to the wagon, or reject the opportunity to influence its course and thus be damned ‘by history.’ Thus,

the switch of allegiance from one collective subject to another – from the *narod* or ‘workers in general to the hired workers or proletariat – did not alter substantially the relation of the upper-class, radical intellectual to the ‘cause’ and its forces.

Some of the features of Alekseev’s ‘individuality’ – being the application of a wider doctrine of individual self-sacrifice to ‘the cause’ - can be found at the root of the revolutionary historiography that followed his exile. Since the project to preserve and write the history of the movement was born of the same doctrine and the same political juncture that had made Alekseev a worker-martyr, the functions of these disparate kinds of documentation converged. The desire to bear witness to the historical process (the ‘popular cause’), added to the necessity of reliance in this ‘witnessing’ upon the subjective views, memories and knowledge of individual participants, renewed the tension found in Alekseev’s speech between the personal or singular and the political or general aspects of ‘individuality.’ For many workers, working-life itself was not described as an experience that was personal or personally formative. Many worker-memoirists said nothing about this part of their lives, barring a few stock phrases about poverty, exploitation, or oppression. In describing their political lives, worker writers were often more definite and precise, and yet, in several ways this too was described as if ‘from the outside,’ impersonally: very often, they were responding to accounts that had already been written by others about the circles they were involved in or about their own lives: the major reference points in their biographies had already been determined by others; revolutionary historiography was already strongly inclined to view the relation of experience as material for an objective historical account yet to be written: thus, many workers (like their ‘*intelligenty*’ comrades) recorded facts and impressions without feeling the need to give the whole ‘a meaning,’ either from the autobiographical point-of-view or in terms of the workers’ movement as a whole; because of this, worker-memoirists rarely described ‘inner lives’ of feeling, thought, perception, impression, etc. All the available evidence suggests that this was *not* a matter of their ‘literacy’ or even of their confidence as writers, but rather a tendency produced by specific situation in which these writings were composed and collected, and the specific role they were given as contributors to a ‘workers’ history.’ For those reasons, they were *bearers* of knowledge and, as such, nominal individuals for history. Their testimonies were filled with significance because of their class and the direct relation it gave them to the ‘working-class experience’ of the past. Yet, in so far as they wrote about being *workers*, rather than being *radical* workers, their representations of ‘class experience’ were anything but personal: any direct relation was

not conveyed by the subjectivity or personal meaning or historical perspective of the writing, but simply in that these descriptions both confirmed that they were workers, and that they could be attributed to them *as* workers. In so far as they described their lives as radicals, they responded to the political and historiographical demands of a movement that gave primacy to the working class (variously identified) or the working-people as revolutionary subject, with various more or less contradictory theories of how free or conscious action related to social laws or forces that were extra-personal. These tensions entered workers' writings either as a/ the contrast between their representations of their working and their political lives or b/ in the impersonal, fragmentary or structure-less narration of events strangely devoid of any overt biographical meaning.

The claim for the authenticity of workers' writings once emphasised the class backgrounds and class experience of the worker-*intelligenty* at the expense of their own attempts to break class boundaries. Scepticism towards radical workers' claims on behalf of the 'Russian working class' now severs workers' accounts altogether from the unrecoverable experiences of the 'silent masses,' putting weight instead on the individual author and his representations at the expense of his social position. That these men were somehow under the intellectual and moral influence of social-revolutionary intelligentsia allows initial doubts to spread inwards, to the substance of what was said. From the original distinction between the 'workers who wrote' (about whom we know something in particular) and those who didn't, suspicion begins to fall on the actual content of workers' writings. The result is that every category used and shared by those workers and intelligentsia in the thrall of 'socialist ideology' has to be placed under the microscope. The denial of a 'class position' outside of representation and identity – a category at very the centre of social-revolutionary thought and practice - leaves 'workers' writings' shorn of the categories that make their initial identification as 'workers' writings' intelligible. Yet, it can be seen from an examination of the 'workers' voice' that class existed for these men as something external: the most obvious evidence of this is the way in which the *intelligenty*, intent on breaking class barriers, and sometimes successful in doing this, still reverted to an understanding of class that made social position and an 'essence' with a certain value. The origins of this turn-around, back to the categories which they were trying to substantiate and therefore negate, were in the practices of propaganda and agitation. Direct contact and acquaintance with the working people in fact confirmed to the *intelligenty* the special role of the *class* even as the were presented with men and women whose actions and thoughts and

‘commitment’ were expressions of individual freedom *against* the class imposed upon them. It is also clear, however, that this imposition of class and boundaries between classes – the great chasm between the elite and the *narod* – pre-existed and then shaped social-revolutionary doctrines. The Russian autocracy had very definite notions of what it meant to be part of its working class (including, through the 1870s at least, the peasantry and the city workers); part of the autocratic notion of class had it that working people were essentially *plural*, their actions determined not by individual will, but by instinct, by desire, or by nature. Social revolutionaries, committed to the notion that true and fundamental social change would only take place by the actions of the masses or the working class, then made the connection between social position, social being, and action tying workers’ actions to *necessity*, and therefore to a compulsion similarly perceived by the autocratic government in the actions of working people. This made it likely (if not inevitable) that the revolutionary *intelligenty*, despite a strong desire to overcome class entirely, would continue to perceive the workers and peasants in ‘class ways’ and write about them in ‘class ways.’ It has been the intention of this thesis to show why working people, though in revolt against class, were inclined to do the same in their writings.¹

J. R. MEADOWCROFT, GLASGOW, SEPT. 2011.

¹ A detailed discussion of the findings of this study, their implications, and possible extension are included as Appendices ‘F’ and ‘G’ to this thesis (Vol. 2, p. 39-169).

VOLUME 2

6. Appendices A-D

Translations of the writings of the early Russian worker-revolutionaries

Appendix A

Speech of Pëtr Alekseev, made at Trial before the Special Meeting of the Governmental Senate (10 March, 1877)¹

Alekseev: We,² the working millions, barely able to walk, are thrown to the whims of fate by our fathers and mothers. We are without education, because there are no schools, and scarcely a minute away from the forced labour with its meagre rewards. As ten³ year old boys we try to survive on the bit of bread allotted to us at work. What awaits us there? For a bit of black bread we are sold to the capitalists to do piece-work, placed under the gaze of the adults who train us with belts and sticks to do forced labour, hardly fed, wheezing from the dust and from the fetid air contaminated by a hundred diseases. We sleep where we drop, without bedding or a pillow under our heads, wrapped in rags, surrounded on all sides by every kind of parasite. In such circumstances the intellect becomes blunted and the moral senses, acquired during childhood, remain undeveloped. There is only one means of expression left to those who live [earn their day's bread] by manual labour, badly educated, isolated from any civilization, and forgotten by everyone. As children we, the workers, have to suffer under the capitalist yoke. What else are we supposed to feel towards the capitalists but hatred? Under such conditions, still young, we assume an apathy that allows us silently to endure the oppression brought by the capitalists, all the time with hatred in hearts.

¹ From *Rabochee Dvizhenie v Rossii v opisannii samikh rabochikh ot 70-x do 90-x godov* (Moscow, 1933), p. 30-35. The footnotes refer to a different, 'official' version of the speech, preserved in a document now held in the personal fond of the then Minister of Justice, Graf S. S. Pahlen, in RSIA (formerly TsGIA SSSR), *f.* 1016, *op.* 1, *ed. kh.* 199, *ll.* 16-26, and published in I. B. Panukhina, 'K istorii rechi Petra Alekseeva,' *Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta*, No 5, 1965, p. 87-89. Panukhina argues that these notes were taken at the court as Alekseev spoke (p. 85-87). The actual text of this 'official version,' I believe, confirms the claim. I let the reader judge...

² Before these opening lines is a long section, which follows:

'I do not wish to talk about whether or not I was a revolutionary or if I did propaganda. I can only talk with regards to the workers being 'led astray,' as the senator put it, 'from the path of truth.' As a worker, I would like to describe this path, which no-one could say is false, and describe how there could be no human force more powerful than the state of the workers [itself]. Why it is that the barely literate are drawn to it [this path] and do propaganda...In general, perhaps, it is dissatisfaction [disappointment] that leads them to it. We, the million...[etc]' (p. 86).

³ Has 'nine year old boys' (p. 86).

The wages of the adult worker have hit rock-bottom: without a glimmer of conscience, the capitalists try by any means possible to take away his hard-earned kopek, considering it as an income.⁴ The⁵ capitalist puts the worker onto piecework, quite free to control every moment of the worker's day and all the work he is doing, even during those shifts for which he won't be paid.⁶ The workers bow before the capitalists whilst, with or without cause, they issue fines, terrified of being deprived of the hunk of bread that is all he has to show for seventeen hours' labour. Still, I won't describe all the abuses of the *fabrikanty* in detail – my words might seem inappropriate to those who don't care to know about the lives of workers and who don't see the Moscow workers who live under the power of the *fabrikanty*: Babkin, Guchkov, Butikov, Morozov and the rest....

Senator Peters: *Vse ravno* ['that doesn't matter' – e.g. 'it's all the same (to me)']...you mustn't talk about that.

A.: *Da, deistvitel'no, vse ravno!* [as in, 'Its true its all the same to you']. Even the most pitiful state remains unobtainable for most workers. Seventeen hours of labour a day and you might only get 40 kopeks – it's disgusting. The prices of goods are high, but he has to divide his paltry wages between keeping his family alive and paying government taxes. No – in the present conditions of life the workers can't even satisfy the most basic human needs. For now, they are dying their slow starvation-deaths, and with hardened hearts we'll watch them, until our tired hands are released from the yoke and can be held out freely to help our friends.⁷

On the one hand this [situation is] strange, incomprehensible, and on the other it's deplorable – especially now, when a man who, all his life, without fail, worked seventeen hour days for a bit of black bread, sits on the court bench, being judged.

I know something about the worker question of our brothers in the West. They differ from the Russians in many ways: there, the workers who spend every free minute and many a dark night in reading are not persecuted, as they are here. Quite the opposite. There, it is a matter of pride. They look at the Russian workers like slaves, like animals.⁸ And as what [how] else could they see us?

Do we have any free time for such pursuits? Could the poor man be educated from childhood? Do we have books that are useful and accessible? From where are we supposed to learn?

Just cast your eyes over Russia popular literature. Nothing is more striking than examples of books published here for the '*narod*' – like 'Bova Korolevich,' 'Eruslan Lazarevich,' 'Van'ka Kain,' 'Zhenshchikh v chernilakh i nevesta vo shchakh,' and so on. Our people get the idea that reading is either sacred, or a distraction. I think everyone knows that in Russia the worker who reads books will be persecuted. If he looks at a book that speaks of his situation – he's already arrested. They'll say right to his face: 'Brother, you're no worker: you read books.' The strangest thing is: the irony of the words has been missed. In Russia, being a worker is the same as being an animal.

Gentlemen, do you really think that we, the workers - whom everyone thinks are deaf, blind, empty-headed and stupid - that we don't know how we are cursed as idiots, idlers and

⁴ '...considering it just[ifiable]...' (p. 86).

⁵ Before this: 'On the one hand it is strange, on the other, deplorable...[pause]...excuse me, I am mistaken.'

⁶ Preceding sentence absent. Instead: 'The very best of the Moscow *fabrikanty* – not to mention the others – drain the last ounce of strength from the workers in exchange for their paltry wages.' Then: 'The workers are given to the capitalists, who use up every day of his life, including holidays...' (p. 88).

⁷ Here 'starvation,' '...with hardened hearts...', '...and can be held out freely to our friends' absent. Instead of '...we'll watch them...' ['*my smozhem...*'], 'we must watch them' (p. 88).

⁸ Instead of this section ('They differ...like animals'): 'There the workers don't go out walking [*ne guliaut*], but every free minute they have is spent reading books. There this is treated with pride, and we are thought of as slaves, as half-animals....' (p. 88).

drunkards? That the workers themselves would accept that they deserve this reputation? Do you really think we don't see everywhere how others are getting rich and enjoying themselves by trampling all over us? That we can't see or understand why we are judged so badly and from where our endless labours come from? How can others live it up without working? Where do they get their wealth from? Are we supposed to ignore the heavy burden of so-called 'all estate' conscription?⁹ Really, don't we know how slowly and painfully the problems of the introduction of rural schools for the peasants were dealt with? We were supposed to think that it wasn't possible to set them up? Really, wasn't it miserable and hurtful to read in the papers false opinions about the hired working class? Those who have such opinions of the working people – that they feel nothing and understand nothing – are deeply mistaken. The working people, despite remaining in primitive conditions and receiving no education, look on these things as temporary evils, as it does on the government, holding onto its powers so tightly... One cannot expect anything from them.

We, the workers, wished and waited for the government to get out of its rut and provide for the peasants materially, not to place new burdens on us, to lift us out of our primitive state and take a few quick steps forward. But, alas! We look back with disappointment, and when we remind ourselves of that day, the 19th of February [1861], a day unforgettable for the Russian people, a day when, with outstretched arms, full of joy and hope for the future, the people thanked the Tsar and the government... what do we realise? It was just a dream for us...¹⁰

The peasant reform of February the 19th 1861, a reform with which we were 'graced,' even though it was a necessity, was not carried out for the people themselves, and did not provide for even the basic demands of the peasants.

As before, we remain without even a bit of bread, with scraps of useless land, and we pass into the hands of the capitalists. If your witness – the steward of the Nosovyi factory – says that, apart from on holidays, all workers are under strict observation and cannot get through a single working day without being punished, and that all around them are a hundred such factories packed with the peasant people, living in the similar conditions – that means that we're serfs!

If we have to ask the capitalist for a raise when he himself has [just] lowered the wages, and we're accused of striking and exiled to Siberia – that means we're serfs!

If we are forced by the capitalist to leave the factory and demand higher rates, because of a change in the quality of the materials or the because we are oppressed by fines and deductions, and we are accused of rioting, and forced to return to work at the end of the soldier's bayonet, and some are called ringleaders and exiled to some distant region – that means we're serfs!

⁹ Instead of this sentence ('Are we supposed... conscription'): 'Really don't we feel how heavily military service burdens us? I will not try and prove that it is heavy... - not one journal, not a single newspaper ever said how heavy this burden is for us [*].' (p. 88) (At [*], Panukhina adds: 'The *chinovnik* of the Ministry of Justice was unable to write the last phrase: in brackets the words of this unwritten phrase are struck out: "...therefore I must fall back on the feelings of those who were close to me, who were at work and in the villages."' (p. 88, *ft.* 31).)

¹⁰ A long passage runs:

[**Alekseev**] 'Such a splendid reform, given to us...

Peters: You are telling us about things that have no bearing on your defence. If you want to say something that is relevant, then talk, but what you are saying now has nothing to do with the matter at hand.

Alekseev: I want to finish talking about things which are happening and are known to everyone. I want the government to pay attention to the working people and think seriously about them...

Peters: That is not a matter for the court.

Alekseev: I will try to sum up [*obobshchit*] and finish my speech. The reform...' (p. 89).

If each of us alone can't complain to the capitalist, and any offer to do so collectively is greeted with kicks and punches in the teeth by the first policeman we bump into on the street – that means we're serfs!

It is obvious from all I've said that the Russian working people can only rely on themselves, and can't expect any help from anyone else, except our youth *intelligently*.

S. P: Quiet, shut up!¹¹

A: [raising voice, continuing]. They alone have offered a fraternal hand to us. They alone have shouted out, adding their voices to the cries of all the peasants of the Russian Empire. They alone sympathise [with us] to the depths of their souls, knowing why such cries are heard everywhere and what they signify. They alone do not look on indifferently at the emaciated and oppressed peasant, groaning under the yoke of despotism. They alone, like good friends, extend a brotherly hand to us and, with sincere hearts,¹² try to guide us out of this [hell] onto a more favourable path.¹³ They alone, not withdrawing their hands, will lead us, revealing to us any means of escape from this cunningly constructed snare, until the time when we lead ourselves independently towards the people's common good.¹⁴ They alone will accompany us, unswervingly, until the muscular arm of the million working people is raised....

S.P. [angered, and standing up, shouting] Quiet! Quiet!¹⁵

A: ...and the yoke of despotism, guarded by soldiers' bayonets, blows away like ashes!¹⁶

¹¹ Instead: '**Peters:** None of this aids your defence...' (p. 89).

¹² '...sacrifice themselves for us...' is added in a different hand. (p. 89)

¹³ Plus '...opening up to us every branch of knowledge' (p. 89).

¹⁴ This sentence is absent.

¹⁵ Instead: '**Peters:** Stop, be quiet.' The 'stage directions' are also missing. After this, the phrase is written: 'Alekseev said something about soldiers' bayonets which I didn't manage to get down' (p. 89, *ft.* 35).

¹⁶ The last phrase is written later in a different hand (p. 89, *ft.* 36).

Appendix B

S. K. Volkov, 'Autobiography of a Worker-Revolutionary in the 1860-70s'¹⁷

I was born on April 4th, 1845, the son of a poor joiner of Simbirsk *guberniia*, Korusunskii *u'ezd*, Belozerskiia *volost'*, in the town of Stanichii. My father, a former serf, was burdened with a family of ten.

I first learnt to read and write from the local priest [*ponamaria*], and later taught myself independently.

The poverty of my parents forced me, when I was still young, into work at the linen-spinning factory. There, at 17 years of age, I began to study the worker question [*rabochii vopros*]. For me, the life of the workers at those factories seemed so poor both materially and spiritually, that I could not work there more than six months. Later, I moved to the town of Simbirsk, in order to learn the metal-working trade. Having studied for two years, I entered as an employee of an iron-foundry.

At the factory, all my time was taken up with the propaganda of collective ideas. The factory owner once cursed me so coarsely when I approached him that I became utterly enraged, so much so that I grabbed up a metal rod an *arshin* in length, feeling I would smash his head in with it. But other workers had come up from behind, snatching the rod from my hands. None the less, my boss didn't dismiss me, as I was a strong worker. Having worked on for another month, I quit and left the factory.

Then I began having lessons at the '*Kavkaz i Merkuri*' Society at Spasskii Zaton in Kazanskaia *guberniia*, which specialised in the study of steam mechanics.

In 1863 the great political trial of Professor Shchapov was taking place in Kazan. Nikolai Gavrilovich Orlov approached us, having been sent by Doctor Molesson, who quickly organised out of us - eight working men - a Society for the propaganda of collective ideas. The first thing he organised was a Consumers' Society. Later he concentrated on developing us into propagandists of social ideas. Having lived with us for a year, he began to say that 'we could now go off to the four corners of Russia' and propagate social ideas. Later we parted with him, and many of us dispersed ourselves around the country.

I ended up in Saratov. That was in 1872. In Saratov, a railroad from Moscow had only just been constructed. A bit later I would broadly propagate the best of my social ideas among the mass of workers who had already gathered there.

[After the first two years of service], something unexpected happened. During Holy Week, on the Thursday, a telegram was received from the administration of the railway in Saratov, saying that the workers would not receive their salaries by Easter, because the work was presently very urgent, and that the workers, if they received their wages, would be drunk after the two days of holiday. This so affected the workers that they wanted to quit work altogether, go to Saratov - two *versts* away - and ask for their salaries [from the administration]. Luckily for them, the *nachal'nik* of the track, a relatively young man of 32 years and [in charge of all the] rolling stock, was at the workshop. The workers threw themselves upon him with such hostility that they were hardly able to control themselves. Then Comrade Fillippov and I appeared, and began persuading the workers that we might settle the issue by different means. But they were so afraid that they sat down on the girders and began to weep. Then a certain smithy, Mironov, a sturdy and strong-looking lad, came running up wanting to smother the *nachal'nik*. With a bit of force, Fillippov and I managed to persuade him to hold back. When I asked the *nachal'nik* whether he would pay the wages by Easter or not (it

¹⁷ VNP, p. 141-150.

was about 12 o'clock at this point), he said to me: 'If you spare my life, then everyone will get paid.' We said, 'Your life is secure; but still, we're going to arrest you.'

He was sat down in the large hall of the workshop and the young lads were made to keep an eye on him. [...]. He called the clerk from the administration and began to hand out the salaries for the two days [of Easter] to the workers. This carried on until two o'clock in the morning.

When the wages had all been handed out, he went over to the door and said, 'I'll be sorting the bad apples out of this barrel.' This was intended for Fillippov and me. Sure enough, after Easter, it was proposed to me and Fillippov that we leave the railways. Then I moved to Moscow and started work on the Nikolaevskii railway. I realized then that the administrative regime there was far stricter than it was on the private railways. The workers, for example, were not even given clean water to drink: it was taken from a swamp near the depot. The administration itself received purified water.

Despite the drawbacks, I continued to conduct propaganda of social ideas in Moscow. Having lived there for six months, I realized that the workers there, relatively speaking, found it harder to grasp how these ideas might benefit them. I asked that I be sent to the St. Petersburg depot of the railway.

I came to the office of the *nachal'nik* of the Petersburg depot, still holding onto my bag. He turned out not to be there. The *nachal'nik's* assistant, taking my bag, told me to start work the next day. Leaving the depot, I asked the guard where the depot's *nachal'nik* was. He politely explained that the day before there had been a piss-up [*popoika*], and that in the course of it he had beaten up two [of his] subordinates. When I asked if *he* had gotten punched, the guard answered fearfully, 'How can a *nachal'nik* get beaten up...?' I said to him, 'Well I would have taught him a lesson.' At that point I left the depot. Having gone fifty yards or so, the guard came chasing up after me and said: 'you were told to come to work here tomorrow, but don't bother. We don't need scrappers here.'

Then I went around the factories [*zavody*] of Petersburg. At one of the largest iron-foundries, owned by the Rasteriaev company, I entered an *artel'* of two hundred [men] and boarded there, hoping to spread some propaganda. For three months I worked hard and talked about my social ideas [with the other workers], but, noticing that I was beginning to be observed, I moved to another factory, and so got into the 'Imperial Instrumental Factory',¹⁸ where I met the mass of *intelligent*-workers – one could say, the flower of the Petersburg workers in [terms of their] intellectual development. With them collective ideas had already developed strongly. [...].

Over the course of one or two weeks, the [Third Department] arrested a couple of people. None the less, we were still, as before, organising a union among the workers.

Among us was the student Aleksandr Nizovkin, who later turned out to be a provocateur.

In March 1874¹⁹ our Union was destroyed by arrests and its members spread around various jails in Petersburg. I found myself in the prison of the Third Department. After sitting around for a week, I was called to the procurator for interrogation. The first question put to me was 'what kind of ideas does the union follow?' 'None,' I said. 'It is simply that intelligent workers are buying and reading books.' He said that other workers had mentioned me as the one who ran the library. I said that every intelligent worker bought books and, having read them, left them in our apartment and took another one. Then the procurator put the question to me: 'how did the work of Ferdinand Lassalle – found upon my arrest – find its way into the

¹⁸ That is the 'Trubochnyi (Patronnyi) Factory.'

¹⁹ Volkov's dates are mistaken. He says that the arrests referred to here took place on the 24th of October 1874 (*Korul'chuk*).

library?’ I said that some of the workers knew students, and that they had probably given them that book.

Then came the ordeal of the Petersburg prisons. In the end I was taken to the ‘House of Preliminary Detention’. After a long and tedious imprisonment, it happened unexpectedly that one of our comrades, Mel’nikov, was being placed in solitary confinement [*karster* – ‘lock-up’]. From all three hundred cells rose a most tremendous racket. The sound so affected me that I smashed a foot into the *fortochka*, through which food was served, which went flying off into the corridor. Within five minutes the door had been opened, and five men, all with rifles at the ready, walked in; behind them came the overseer of the jail, who asked if I would stop my protest. I answered, ‘If all the rest quieten down, then I will stop.’ The overseer then declared that Mel’nikov had been released from the lock-up, and the jail began to calm down. The door was closed and the soldiers left.

Soon after, I went down with scurvy. The prison hospital was full to the brim with the sick, and the doctor ordered that I be taken to the ‘arrestees’ ward’ of Nikolaevskii Hospital, from which Prince Kropotkin had earlier escaped.²⁰ In Nikolaevskii hospital I didn’t see anything especially interesting, although my eyes were opened in so far as the attitude of the Russian soldier to the ‘politicals’ was concerned. When there was only the one, old soldier guarding us, he would open all 15 of the secret cells in which the politicals were held for an hour or two, and we would stroll around and exchange thoughts with one another.

It happened unexpectedly that, at 12 o’clock one night, I heard my cell door being opened. An officer of the gendarme walked in with a police assistant following, who ordered me to fetch up my things and leave with them. We all sat down in the four-man compartment and set off for Petersburg. We travelled a long way, and in the end I saw that I was being taken back to Petropavlovskii Fortress. I was led into the cell where two gendarmes were standing. Further down the corridor I could hear the interrogation of a woman, a Jewess, which went on for two or three hours. A gendarme with a loud snore was sleeping as he guarded me. I saw in the corner of the room a small door, opened it, and then saw a room full of illegal literature. I took one book, looked over it, took another – one of them was Lassalle, another, ‘El’ba,’ a third, Lassalle again. Having not been caught [so far], I pinched this [last] book and hid it under the floorboards.

At six in the morning I was taken out for interrogation. The *polkovnik*, Novitskii, handed me a sheet of paper, and I saw the signature of the student Nizovkin on it. I read the note and told *polkovnik* Novitskii that Mr. Nizovkin didn’t know what he was talking about, that in reality, in Kazanskaia guberniia, at Spasskii Zaton, Nikolai Orlov had organised a consumers’ society, [organisations] which were allowed by the Ministry and still existed presently. Then the *polkovnik* asked, ‘Can’t you add anything else?’ I answered, ‘no, nothing.’ Novitskii gave the order to have me sent to the DPZ. When I arrived there, the assistant of the prison’s *nachal’nik*, having handed me over to an officer of the gendarme, said that I would have to be searched. The gendarme officer replied that I had already been searched, and that I could be sent straight to a secret cell, but the assistant of the *nachal’nik* insisted on a search, as was demanded by the regulations of the time [...]. Taking advantage of their argument, I - unnoticed – placed the book [by Lassalle] on a shelf in the neighbouring room, as I was stood between the doors [of the two rooms].

On my return to the cell, whilst walking, I saw Nizovkin in the yard. Through the window I asked him: what had compelled him these last two years – I was talking about the former organisations of ours – to give confessions about these things. He told me that his health was already weak, and that he was unlikely to live to see the end of the matter, but if he lived, then he would refuse to acknowledge any of his statements. But when the matter got to the

²⁰ P. Kropotkin’s escape from the Military Hospital took place on the 30th June, 1876 (*Korul’chuk*).

court, his first statement was that ‘my health is weak, but I verify that everything in my earlier statements was true.’

The hospital’s doctor told me that my illness would not improve unless I was released from the jail, and consequently I was released immediately, but it was forbidden for me to leave St. Petersburg. So again I joined the workforce at the Instrumental Factory.

The organisation of workers was then already so large that secure meetings could only be held on an island in the Gulf of Finland. At the *skhod* there were around 100 people, at it was there that I met the ‘great and good’ of the Russian political world: Plekhanov, Mark Natanson [and others].

Mark Natanson visited me on the day after my return to St. Petersburg. He had with him a wax cast of the keys of the House of Preliminary Detention, and said that we had to liberate two of the prisoners that were being held there, Kovalik and Voinaralskii, who had already managed to escape once, but had been unlucky enough to run into some engineer, a drunkard, who saw them descending the prison wall and from the crossroads began shouting to the local police man [*gorodovoi*] that they were escaping, so that he would arrest them, which he did.²¹

Revolutionary activity was already proceeding much more rapidly with people like Plekhanov, who often stayed the night at my apartment. In general, during our periods of freedom, any despondency the workers felt whilst under arrest completely vanished, and the workers dealt more manfully with arrests, and were not scared of them. I soon made the acquaintance of the well known revolutionaries, Victor Obnorskii and Stepan Khalturin, and we decided to organise the ‘Northern Workers’ Union’ (in St. Petersburg).

Soon after a few comrades and I were arrested in the boarding-house, where the comrades’ books had been amassed, including a small number of multiple copies.

In the Third Department, having sat [in the cells] for a week or so, I was called for an interrogation by the well known procurator, Poskochin (a man known for his more liberal leanings). For over two hours he questioned me, trying to establish some link between myself and Plekhanov, M. Natanson and Kravchinskii. I denied any connection with them, and said that I didn’t know these three; knowing for well that they had hidden abroad, I demanded that I be allowed to confront them face-to-face. I was asked, for instance, about Plekhanov spending nights at my apartment, about Kravchinskii and Natanson’s visits, and about the meetings at which we had all met. All this I denied, still demanding a confrontation.

After the unsuccessful attempts to get something out of me, procurator Poskochin wrote a long statement, giving all his opinions on the matter without asking me to verify them, and then he suggested that I should sign the whole thing.

After that I was asked to sit down on the sofa, a cigarette and two Dutch cigars were produced from somewhere, and one was offered to me. I refused, as I do not smoke.

Five minutes of silence passed.

Then he said, ‘Judging by your statement, it is clear that you do not wish to repent. Therefore we can’t offer you any leniency.’ He said, ‘I want to ask you two questions – you were from amongst the first rank of the Petersburg workers, earning a salary of 100 roubles a month...?’ I said, ‘Mr. Procurator, we aren’t so close that we can have such frank conversations.’

He answered, ‘I’ve said to you already how everyone looks upon me as they do the gendarmes...but your frankness will in no way worsen your position. You and your comrades – *intelligentnye* workers – do you have a definite aim in going to the working mass to propagandise?’ I answered that the aspiration to a higher organisation of the social system had impelled me to go to the people. At this point he quite leapt out of his chair and said, ‘and we

²¹ Kovalik and Voinaralskii’s escape attempt took place on the 8th of April 1876 (*Korul’chuk*).

too have such aspirations, but we will only go by the way of evolution, whereas you are a revolutionary.’

The second question was this: ‘would there be a revolution in Russia?’, but I said to him, ‘Mr. Prokuror, that is a very pernicious question.’ He said to me, ‘you are an experienced man in life, you have lived among all sorts of workers: *fabrichnye*, railway workers. Tell me your impressions, if you will.’ I said assuredly that, taking into account intellectual and moral progress, and observing the growing dissatisfaction with the monarchist administration, that a revolution would have to take place in Russia. The procurator asked, ‘When will the revolution be?’ I said, ‘In fifty years time’ (this conversation took place in 1877). He thanked me for my honest explanations, called for the gendarme and ordered me to be sent to Petropavlovskii Fortress.

In Petropavlovskii Fortress I sat for three months. A great deal of literature was most helpful to me while I was there.

Later, talk began about the Trial of the 193. We were called to the DPZ, and there the accusations were delivered to us. We were told that we were undeveloped people, that we had been drawn into anti-governmental propaganda by the ill-intentioned intelligentsia, and twenty people were sentenced to administrative exile. I was one of the twenty. [...]

Appendix C

D. N. Smirnov, 'At the Trubochnyi Factory of the Past.'²²

I was born in 1848. My father first taught me to read and write in Old Church Slavonic. I never went to any school. In 1861 I was handed over to the school at the *kustar*' metal-working – mechanics workshop, owned by the German Reingardt, on Bolshaia Koniushennaia street in Petersburg.

With regards to the mechanic 'S...' in Plekhanov's book – I will admit that he resembles me. I did indeed earn a lot, up to 100 roubles a month. All of us in the workshop earned a great deal. I did buy books and I subscribed to periodicals; I did live well, in a nice, furnished apartment with two rooms. Aleksei Peterson, Semen Volkov, Liliental' and I lived in one apartment on the corner of the 6th line and Srednyi Prospekt, in a stone building on the second floor, occupying two rooms.

Victor Pavlovich Obnorskii was a comrade of mine. We worked with him in the same instrument-making workshop. He wasn't a member of our circle didn't come to the *skhody* on the Vyborg Side. I might say a few words about our circle at this point: it consisted of me, Semen Kuz'mich Volkov, Aleksei Nikolaevich Peterson and Liliental' (I forget his first name). The circle didn't have any name. But I went along with Obnorskii to his circle, to the *skhody* that took place in Liteinii. At these meetings we met only with the 'intelligent public,' including the women who went there. Victor Pavlovich seemed to me the most well read of our brother workers, but then he didn't look much like a worker, earning a lot and dressing well. He was popular at our workshop – he was a little arrogant [proud], but this didn't spoil our impressions of him. The suddenly he disappeared, and some people suggested that he had gone abroad.

Prince P. A. Kropotkin came a few times to our *skhody*, where the workers from the Nobel and Lessner factories and some of the *fabriki* went. The *skhody* met on the Vyborg Side, I remember, on the second floor of a dilapidated wooden house on Astrakhanskaia Street, in the apartment (I think) of a certain Davidchikov. Who this Davidchikov was, I don't know. We assumed he was a medical student. At these meetings Kropotkin would tell us about the lives of the workers abroad (the Germans), about how they were struggling for the improvement in their conditions, and he said that our workers should fight for the rights to assemble, to organise a union, and that we should go on strike, making sure that they were seen to be political, that, for now, the dispute was with the government, and not with the bosses. Kropotkin made a splendid impression on us workers by his appearance [alone] – middling height, clean clothes, a beautiful beard and a very gentle voice.

Apart from Kropotkin, other 'intelligenty,' as we called them, came to the *skhody*. Conversations went on about various aspects of science, but it was mostly about the struggle with the capitalist-bosses.

I only saw Kravchinskii once at the *skhody*, or maybe twice. He was already living 'illegally' then and was terrified of being denounced. Peterson and I went to his flat a couple of times, still before Peterson was exiled from Petersburg. Kravchinskii lived in some sort of shack, but it had a good view of the Neva. He was a rather unsociable and severe kind of man, in my view, but maybe he didn't have much to say to 'common workers' like us. But then, Peterson was already well read by then.

²² First printed in *Krasnaia Letopis*', 1928, No. 2 (26), pp. 217-223. Translation from From *VNP*, p. 151-9.

Very occasionally Dmitrii Klements turned up at the *skhody*. This perpetual student was a general of the revolution. He spoke with us in a quite bookish tongue, although in an attractive manner. I didn't much understand him but still listened to him with pleasure. He dressed eccentrically: in a red shirt (during summer), tied round the waist with a belt. Under the shirt collars another starched collar protruded. He wore blue glasses, and a soft, wide-brimmed hat. Later we discovered that he dressed like Mark Volokhov from the novel *Obryv*, by Goncharov, and we [began calling] Klements a 'nihilist,' as Volokhov had called himself.

Nizovkin used to visit us and I knew him well. I think he was a medical-student, but I never saw him in uniform. [...] He was an intelligent man, in our view, and very spiritual. I don't remember when he 'fell behind,' but by the end of 1875 he had stopped visiting. When I was sitting in 'the *predvaritka*' [DPZ], there was a rumour going round that under interrogation he had given away a great deal, but I didn't believe it then and I still don't now.

Plekhanov mentions Mitrofanov in his book, *The Russian worker in the revolutionary Movement*. There he endowed Mitrofanov with a very good character. I also knew Mitrofanov, but obviously not the same one that Plekhanov wrote about, or maybe, just the same Mitrofanov in a different period of his life. I knew Mitrofanov as the boss of a cobblers' workshop which had an open policy in the hope of transforming the place into a 'centre of conspiracy.' Apparently the money had been given by A. I. Kornilov and the daughter of General von Herts'feld. But this apartment didn't seem very conspiratorial to me. It was on the Vyborg Side, not far from the Krest prison. Students and apprentices were there. They sewed up boots for us, the 'politicals.' It was said at the time that *skhody* took place there, but I was never at them, and Mitrofanov also never came to our apartment on Vasil'evskii Island. I would say that Plekhanov is describing a Mitrofanov quite different from mine.

In the autumn of 1872 or 1873, I don't remember well, a *skhod* of the workers of the instrument workshop took place in the apartment of a comrade, over a bar called 'Petushok' (I don't know who would remember this bar now, but in our time there was a club for workers there, and occasionally we met and chatted about politics in the billiards room). 30 people met that day. I kicked off with a proposal to engage in self-education and to form our own library and self-help *kassa*. Life itself was at every step pushing us toward this. It was pointed out to me that there was already a library and a *kassa* at the factory –this was correct. But I told them that I thought the library was poor, and reminded them that it wasn't always possible to get money out of the *kassa*. Many agreed with me in this, and the plan to found a library and a *kassa* was approved. Immediately after, a list was compiled of all those who were willing to donate. I was chosen as the *kassir*, and Semen Volkov as librarian. Everything proceeded so quickly and smoothly that within an hour we had said our thanks and goodbyes to the host and went into 'Petushok' to 'wash down' our successes. The afternoon after the decision was taken, I collected 30 roubles according to the list we had made.

At different times, we bought Mill's *Political Economy*, Flerovskii's *The Condition of the Russian Working Class*, Chernyshevskii's *What is to be Done?*, and other books we thought were suitable.

The comrades who had signed up started coming to our flat for books and money. So it continued during the winter. In spring, on the name-day of our comrade Aleksei Peterson, there was a big celebration at our place with eating, guests and drinking...At midnight, as we might have expected, after the guests had left, we were subjected to a search: the assistant of the *prokuror*, gendarmes, local police officers, police from the nearest stations and a whole crowd of *dvorniki* came crowding into the two rooms. They took our list of participants, but we didn't have any books or money on us, the presence of which the assistant of the *prokuror* was convinced, having checked the book lists. We were told that we were under arrest, and were ordered to get dressed. We protested – 'What for? You've found nothing illegal here.' They

started crowding round us and leading us away. A scuffle started. The ‘birthday boy’ armed himself with a bottle and went for one of the gendarmes. We were quickly overcome. Peterson was taken by the arms from behind, and we were seized by the arms by the gendarmes. By the morning we had ended up in Vasil’ostrovskii police station. As the whole convoy tumbled out of the house, we noticed that our comrade Liliental’ wasn’t with us – he hadn’t been arrested. Only later did we find out that this Liliental’ had been our denouncer.

By the evening of that day I had found myself in Kolomenskoi police station, Volkov – in Aleksandro-Nevskoi, and Peterson in the Litovskii lock-ups. We were all lead through the prisons, as important people, into a carriage with the gendarme officers. Some time passed and in the same fashion, taken from the carriage with the officers to have my photograph taken.

On my release from the station I went to the photographer and asked that a card be printed off for me [with my picture on it], but he said that the gendarmes always took the negatives away, and didn’t have the photographer print them.

At the end of summer I was released from Kolomenskoi station under the close observation of the police, and was told every week I should be at the station, ‘for observation,’ but I didn’t go there once – and nothing happened. At work I returned again to my old place, the workshop at the instrumental factory. I went to my same old place in the mechanical shop and to my comrade Semen Volkov. Our mutual comrade Aleksei Peterson didn’t come back to the factory – he had been sent away from Petersburg, and we didn’t know where to. We didn’t find our former comrade Liliental’ at the factory.

At the time, there was a yearning on the part of many workers to get out of Russia and work abroad. A comrade of mine from my factory, Aleksei Zvonnikov left for England, and he wrote to me from Hull to say that he was working in a factory and was receiving two [] sterling a week; but neither he nor any of us were earning less [in Russia]. He was not an ardent socialist, and didn’t come back o Russia; he got married [over there].

Vasilii Savel’ev, I think, worked at the instrumental factory. He was an ardent socialist, but didn’t come to our *skhody* –he went to somewhere in Gavan, to his own circle. He was a little bit unsociable and hard to meet [get on] with. He worked, as I remember, until 1873, and then quite suddenly he was not coming to the factory anymore. Later things were said about him, but now I don’t remember [what].

After the decimation of our library, Volkov and I lived in separate apartments. [...].

In the winter of 1875, I rented a big flat on the 5th line of Vasil’evskii Island, close to Malyi Prospekt, in a one-storey wooden building with windows facing out onto the street. I lived here with Semen Volkov, and we held large *skhody* at the flat. Klements came to these *skhody*, and I think also Rogachev. We didn’t go over to the Vyborg Side anymore.

Around us it was all new people. Some of the workers from the Borisovskii *fabrika* (on the 8th line, between the river and Malyi Prospekt), who had at another time ‘gone to the people,’ apparently in Tverskaia guberniia. Two of them came back and then came to us – I don’t know about the rest. Of all the people who visited us we knew very few by their surnames.

In the spring of 1876 we began noticing some suspicious people snooping around beneath our windows. Opposite our apartment was the bar of Bannikov. From the second floor of this bar someone else often began looking into our rooms. In a word, we were becoming suspicious of being observed by spies. I let my flat to a comrade, a worker with a family and completely innocent of any political activities. Everyone was warned not to come to our flat anymore. Volkov and I went to different flats. I stayed near the Chernoi River, on the corner of the 4th line, in the flat of a former general of the first rank. Volkov stayed somewhere miles away in Gavan. But in the end [even] this didn’t save us. At the end of June, in the same year, I was searched, but it was a very ‘quiet’ one, during some holiday and in the afternoon. That it

was such a 'quiet' search, taking place at such an unusual time of day, I attribute to the flat having been owned by a general of the first rank. Apart from that, only a friend of the *prokuror* came to the apartment, one gendarme and a local watchman. Nothing was disturbed and they only searched around superficially. The *prokuror*'s friend had told me that he would have to take me for an interrogation, for not longer than a day. I saw a reserve of policemen as I went out onto the street. One gendarme and I sat down in the carriage, and we rode off towards the building by the Tsepni Bridge.

I was at the Third department under interrogation for two days, and then I was transferred, again by carriage, to the DPZ. After a while I found out that my comrade Semen Volkov was there too...

Semen Volkov was a machinist by trade. He used to tell me how he had 'escaped' by steamboat from Syzran to Saratov. At the instrumental department of the Patronnyi factory he worked as a blacksmith, in the mechanical workshop.

Volkov was older than me – not less than five years.

When [later] we were in exile in Ust-Sysolsk, at the same time Vera Pavlovna Rogacheva and Maria Gerasimov Osinskaia were there. The local administration didn't like it, probably as we were living communally in one house, so they sent Rogacheva to Iarensk, and Osinskaia to some other town. But Volkov went with Osinskaia as her husband. After that I didn't see Volkov again. After his release I found out that Volkov was living in Ufa and had gone as a machinist onto the railways. In 1897 his wife, on a trip to Orel, visited me in Tula and said that her husband was still working at a workshop.

*

What was the attitude of the workers to the intelligentsia in the 1870s? To those, of course, who visited us and accompanied us to meetings?

I speak only for myself:

For a long time I didn't treat the intelligentsia with any sort of reverence. I think that others of my comrades treated them with great respect – at that time we still didn't know how to approach them in any other way – *critically*: that only came later. But we already knew then that the students, as soon as they had finished their courses, hanging on to their piece of the 'financial pie,' would forget everything we had spoken of together. But no anger about this was really aroused on our part [...].

I remember once, G. Lopatin came to me to ask me to find a flat for a *skhod*. By Sunday I'd found an apartment, that of the mother of my friend Herman, on Kirochnaia Street. All these young lads met at the *skhod* – workers. When Lopatin had finished painting his pictures of the bright new future, many turned to him with the question: 'Will I see it...when will it be?' He thought, and then said to me: 'it will come when you are cleverer [wiser].'

We read Karl Marx, the *Political Economy* of Mill with notes by Chernyshevskii, but, to our shame, we understood little of it, and as a result there were many arguments among us. Nothing was mentioned about Marxism then. The intelligentsia never spoke to us about Marx – they said we wouldn't have understood it.

Appendix D

D. A. Aleksandrov, 'Recollections of Revolutionary Activity in the 1870s'²³

At eleven years of age I arrived from Finland at the Kreenholm manufactory, close to Narva, where I myself was transformed into a machine, having to work everyday for 14 hours. At the end of 1873 I got to know Vyachislav Mikhailovich D'iakov and Siriakov in Petersburg.²⁴ D'iakov was a young man. He spoke with me until midnight, but it was clear that he was holding something back and not speaking candidly with me.

Then I said to him: 'Listen, young man. If you have something to hide from me then it is better that we part.' He thought about this for a while, and then said that he was a socialist.

This shocked me. The problem was that confused and unclear rumours about socialists were going around at our factory [*fabrika*]. It was said that they were followers of a certain German, Karl Marx, and that they called for slaughter, fire, robbery and destruction.

D'iakov's words seemed odd to me. I too had many prejudices then: I believed in God, and believed that Aleksandr II was 'God's appointed.'

I talked about this with D'iakov, and he began to speak openly – that his aim was to overthrow the monarchy. I don't remember the conversation in detail; I remember [though] how he painted such a horrible picture of how the workers and peasants lived.

'You are a student I suppose?' I blurted out.

'No. I am a worker.' He answered.²⁵

'Speak with me honestly. I'm no scoundrel, and I won't denounce you.'

After this he began to speak with me openly.

I said to him then that I couldn't yet decide on anything, and I invited him to the dacha of Bazunov,²⁶ where 5 or 6 comrades were living, who were all trustworthy men.

He soon visited us. After the second visit we had already decided that it was necessary to devote ourselves to the cause. But how? We had nothing and the government had everything: soldiers, police, resources...

My comrade Gerasimov was first to become attracted to D'iakov's ideas, and after that – myself. We considered many things, but in the main we mulled over the question of what we could lend [to the cause]. Soon, we began to distribute the books that D'iakov had lent us among the *fabrichnye* and *zavodskie* workers, as well as the soldiers of the Moskovskii regiment. Among the latter were Zaitsev (who was later sentenced to five years of 'corrective labour'), Iankovskii (five years) and Karl Ushkar'.

²³ From *VNP*, p. 160-3.

These recollections were reprinted from *Katorga i Ssylka*, 1926, No. 4 (25), pp. 129-131. According to Korol'chuk's note Aleksandrov first gave these recollections at a meeting of the Yakutsk Branch of the Society for Political Exiles at the beginning of March 1925. The memoirs were written down by M. Krotov and checked by the author.

²⁴ Aleksandrov was introduced to D'iakov through N. Kondrat'ev, who also worked at the Cheshire factory. Kondrat'ev was in the employ of the III Department, beginning from the time of the Chaikovets, as was his comrade M. Tarosov. (K).

²⁵ The members of D'iakov's group conducted propaganda, having entered factories [*zavody i fabriki*] as employees. On the day of his arrest, D'iakov was on his way to Vasilevskii Island to the Patronnyi factory, intending to join them as a worker. He and his comrades distributed propaganda, which they did both among the *tekhtsil'shchiki* and the *metallisty*. Aleksandrov and another member of D'iakov's group, 'Sofia Alekseevna,' brought illegal books into the Putilov works. (K).

²⁶ The following were members of the *artel* of workers from the Cheshire Factory, who occupied Bazunov's dacha: Ia. A. [], his brother Anton, V. Gerasimov, M. Klasson, M. Reikas, A. Ianson, P. Aleksandrov (who is called 'Eshov' by D. Aleksandrov). (K)

I had said to the circle that the soldiers had to be brought onto our side. Among the soldiers we distributed the pamphlets ‘Khitraia Mekhanika,’ ‘Chtoi-to, bratsy...,’ and others.²⁷ A few of the soldiers were in tears as they read these books.

The soldiers said that in the barracks there were 60 cannons, which we could consider ‘at our disposal.’ Of course there were many fantasies then, but we wanted to believe that they could be realized, and so in some circles we made a plan for an uprising: 30 cannons to be placed on Nikolaevskii Bridge, and 30 cannons on Tuchkov, and then begin to bombard the Tsar’s palace.

I remember D’iakov saying ‘...and that’s how we’ll get ourselves hung.’

Of course none of this was seriously suggested or considered for long.

But we were denounced by Pavel Ershov, although at my questioning I said that it had been a joke, a product of a glassful of vodka, and that this would be verified by the others.

Before this we had decided to send Gerasimov to Finland, so we got hold of a passport for him. But he was arrested at the station, and the D’iakov and Siriakov were too.

On the 18th of April (the second day of Easter), I met with someone, and told him that the people he was supposed to be meeting had been arrested.

-Really?

-Honest to God, they’ve been arrested. Be careful – I said.

I went to the dacha and lay down to sleep, but between 3 and 4 o’clock I went to the barracks to find out if [anyone] in the regiment had been arrested. But it turned out that, for them it had not come to that, only that some general or *polkovnik* had asked around among the soldiers about the source of the few books they had, to which they received the reply, ‘from people.’

I began to talk with Zaitsev, with the other soldiers standing around us. During the conversation I said that we had put the Tsar where he was and that we could get rid of him, and not leave it to God to sort out. Suddenly the *polkovnik* appeared. The soldiers scuttled off and then, under interrogation, said that I was one of the people who had given them the books.

I was arrested, spent two or three hours in the lock-up, and then was taken to the Third Section.²⁸

Gerasimov, who had been arrested earlier, had gotten a little confused at the interrogation and let something slip. The friend of the procurator Kobylanskii pressed me and said that Gerasimov had revealed everything. He then went to the side door, bringing out Gerasimov and ordering him to repeat what he had said earlier. I shouted at him in Finnish (we both knew the language well) – ‘Why are you afraid of these idiots?’

The *prokuror* ordered me to stay quiet, but it was already too late – Gerasimov disassociated himself from his earlier statements.

²⁷ ‘Khitraia Mekhanika’ (by Kravchinskii) and the proclamation ‘Chtoi-to, bratsy...’ (P. Lavrov) were first published in 1874. (K).

²⁸ The arrest of the D’iakov group members and the soldiers mentioned here was part of a wave of arrests that swept the country. D’iakov was sentenced to ten years hard labour, A. S. Siriakov to six years, and Gerasimov and Aleksandrov to nine years each.

7. Appendix E

G. V. Plekhanov

*The Russian Worker in the Revolutionary Movement: From Personal Memories (sections I, II and extracts of III)*¹

I

Mitrofanov and I met by chance. He was the first worker-revolutionary with whom I had had any contact, and was already well known amongst the Russian revolutionaries of the time. Later on he ended up in prison, and there died he of typhus. I met him for the first time at the end of 1875 at the house of some students, the brothers Kh-, who were studying at the medical academy. Mitrofanov was already living illegally then, and was hiding from the police at the students' place. Like all student-revolutionaries of the time, I, of course, was a great 'lover of the people' (*narodolyubets*), and had moved to Petersburg in order to go 'to the people,' my concept of which, however (again, like all other student-revolutionaries of the time) was rather hazy and ill-defined. Whilst loving 'the people,' I knew of them only a very little (perhaps not even that), although I had grown up in the village. Meeting with Mitrofanov for the first time, it dawned on me that he was a *worker* – that he was one of 'the people' – and a mixed feeling of pity and a kind of awkwardness swelled up inside me. I felt as if I had done some wrong to him. Of course I wanted to speak with him, but at the time I was at a loss as to how and in what manner I could talk with him. It seemed to me that the language of our student comrades would be utterly incomprehensible to this 'son of the people,' and that talking with him I would still be speaking in that absurd, feigned² style, in which so many of our revolutionary pamphlets were written. Fortunately, Mitrofanov broke the silence and solved the problem for me. I still don't know how, but the conversation turned to revolutionary literature. I saw that my interlocutor had been reading not only our pretentious little leaflets. He was familiar with the works of Chernyshevskii, Bakunin and Lavrov, and knew how to treat them critically. The journal and newspaper *Vpered!*, he thought, were not revolutionary enough. He was inclined towards the *buntarstvo* as a means of making revolution, and he defended it using the same arguments so often produced by the *buntarstvo* –students.

My surprise did not end there. Nowhere within the narrow limits of my sentimental image of 'the people' could a personality such as Mitrofanov's have been accommodated. But then, for that reason, I found him all the more interesting. We began to meet often, and I would relentlessly interrogate him about his revolutionary activities amongst the people.

Owing to circumstances, from all the different elements of society, it was the Petersburg workers who were closest to me, and so I asked Mitrofanov what he thought of them.

¹ G. Plekhanov, 'Russkii rabochii v revoliutsionnom dvizhenii' [1893], *Sochineniia*, 24 volumes (D. Riazanov, ed.), vol. 3. (Moscow/Petrograd, 1923).

² The word is *pereriazhannyi*, 'dressed-up' ('fake,' 'affected,' in this context). What Plekhanov means (and when he begins talking about revolutionary literature later on this becomes clear) is that he would affect a simplistic kind of speech, as the pamphlets had affected the 'people's tongue' in order to get through to them.

Mitrofanov himself had a rather negative opinion of them. It seemed to him that the *real* 'people' were the peasants; the town workers had been, to a remarkable degree, corrupted and saturated by the bourgeois spirit, and as a consequence the revolutionaries would have to go into the countryside. Such opinions, completely coinciding with our concept of the people, didn't arouse much of an inclination in me to get to know the Petersburg workers or to become closer to their milieu, and so, in the course of some months, Mitrofanov remained the single worker with whom I was personally acquainted. But at the time there was rather energetic propaganda work going on in the city, and I felt I should quickly take up a role in it.

At the very beginning of 1876 it happened that there were no suitable apartments in which the revolutionary workers could hold their *skhody*. On the Petersburg Side I had a splendid, large apartment, with a wonderful landlady *chukhoda*,³ who never objected to the young people's crowded evening meetings. Any fears of denunciation from her side were baseless. In fact, "if worst had come to worst," she would have been the first to try to prevent and protect her visitors from harm. All my revolutionary friends were aware of the courage of my landlady; some of them were engaged in propaganda work amongst the people.

According to 'good revolutionary habits,' these people had for some time kept their activities secret from me. But because they found no reason not to trust me, they opened themselves up almost immediately, at least as much as they thought necessary – if not personally to me, then at least in my presence. They had asked whether or not it was possible for the workers to meet for their *skhodki* at my home. Of course I happily agreed, and, despite my adoption of Mitrofanov's prejudices against the city workers, I waited impatiently for the arranged time.

The meeting took place over what was then a great holiday. At around eight o'clock in the evening five or six people – intelligentsia "revolutionaries" – began to turn up; I was meeting some of them for the first time. Later the workers began to gather. The meeting was conducted openly; probably up until that time all such meetings in Russia were similar – that is, informal. Regular *skhodki* subjects gradually turned into general arguments, and anyone wishing to say something made his observations known, and no one bothered to ask whose turn it was to speak. The floor was everyone's and belonged to no one in particular. Owing to that, the debate lost a lot in terms of order, but on the other hand played out well in terms of atmosphere and passion. The particular debate that took place during the *skhod* at my apartment had great significance. At that time a programme had just been worked out by the *buntary* – *narodniki*. The majority of revolutionaries of the "intelligentsia" thought that the main strength of a Russian socialist party should be directed towards '*agitation on the basis of existing aspirations of the people*,' and that only so called Lavrists, people with little influence because of their lack of activity within the revolutionary milieu, stood by the use of '*propaganda*.' As *buntary*, the intelligentsia tried to push the workers on to the road of agitation. In general, the workers remembered and understood the various points from different programmes rather badly; the intelligentsia went to great lengths with this or that worker, like Mitrofanov, so that he would comprehend the questions relating to programmatic debates, even to the point of fine detail. The consequence of this I had already noticed. Presently I saw only that, in debate with the *buntary*, the workers reacted defensively and were not willing to give up their opinions easily.

I must say that meeting here were the better, more reliable and more influential men from the worker-revolutionaries in Petersburg. Many of them had suffered the consequences of propagandising the cause in 1873 and '74 (from some of them would come the famous '193' of the trial). Sitting in prison, they had studied and read a great deal. On their exit they willingly

³ Old Russian word for a 'Balt' living in Petersburg.

and fervently renewed their revolutionary activities, and yet they looked on the revolutionary workers circles, above all, as circles of *self-education*. When the *buntary* expressed their view that propaganda had no real significance for revolutionaries, the workers protested passionately.

“How is it that you aren’t ashamed to say such a thing?” a certain V...⁴ exclaimed angrily, who, if I am not mistaken, worked at the Vasil’ostrovskii Shell factory, and had only just left House of Preliminary Detention, where he had been placed because of his involvement with the *chaikovtsy*, ‘all of you – *intelligent* – you’ve studied in five schools and you’ve washed yourselves in seven different seas – but how many workers would know even how to *open the door* of a school! You don’t need to study anymore, you already know so much; but for the worker it is impossible to live without it!’

“It is not difficult to devote yourself to the cause, when you already understand what it is,” said a young construction worker, V. Ia..., ‘but its bad when you don’t know what you’re devoting yourself to. A lot of good you’ll do with workers who don’t know anything!’

‘Really, doesn’t every worker–revolutionary already know by *his own situation*,’ began a *buntary*, ‘that the boss is living on the worker’s account?’

‘He understands that it’s hard, he sees that, but not as he should,’ - the workers stood their ground – ‘To many, it seems that any other life isn’t possible, that God made the world so that the worker would suffer. But you show them that another life is possible...then you have real revolutionaries.’

The conversation stretched on for some time. In the end both sides yielded. It was decided not to disregard propaganda, although no convenient opportunity for agitation should be missed. I was sure, however, that the workers were still unclear as to what kind of “agitation” they might get from the *buntary*. Even the *buntary* themselves attached a quite ill-defined meaning to the word.

Somehow or other the debate had come to an end; the *skhod* seemed to be over. The *buntary* left, as did some of the workers, but the majority continued to sit, engrossed in their tea-drinking. Someone ran down for some beer, some drinking started, and the talk became light-hearted. V... told everyone various funny stories from his time in prison, and V. Ia... - the same V. Ia... who had talked about how a person might act selflessly for the cause only if it was already perfectly clear to him what it was - even began to sing a song, composed (he said) by the Kolpinskii workers after Karakazov’s [assassination] attempt. I can only recall the beginning of this song:

Thanks go to Karakazov, for trying to kill the tsar...

This cheery group sat up until well after midnight; in the end we parted like old friends.

The impression made on me was very strong. I had completely forgotten Mitrofanov’s gloomy opinions about the Petersburg workers. I saw and understood only that all these men - the most reliable examples of the people available to me - were comparable only to the most cultivated of people, people with whom I could speak as I wished to. Consequently, I spoke as candidly as I would have with my student friends. As for the few who had already sat out a period in prison – I felt as if they towered above me.⁵ ‘I have still done nothing to prove my devotion to the cause, whilst they have already been able to take their stand for it,’ I thought to myself, and looked at them almost with awe, as would any young and untested revolutionary at

⁴ S. Volkov.

⁵ The phrase here is, literally, *I looked at them from below upwards*, e.g. this could be translated simply as ‘I looked up to them,’ ‘I admired them greatly,’ etc. I prefer what is written here because it gives a sense of the inferiority that Plekhanov feels before these ‘veterans’ of the revolution, as becomes clear in the next sentence, and not only a sense of ‘respect.’

an experienced comrade who had sacrificed himself for the cause. Such had been my feelings when I had made the acquaintance of Mitrofanov, but I had considered him to be something of an exception. Suddenly I realised that there were many other ‘exceptions’ just like him. The business of getting close to the people, however, which had previously so frightened me by its very difficulty, now seemed simply and easy. Right away, I decided to try and become as much a part of my new acquaintances’ group as possible. Maintaining these connections was made easier when some of them gave me their addresses, and proceeded to invite me as a guest to their homes.

First of all I visited a certain G..., who turned out to be a neighbour of mine. He was one of those eccentric men who had hardly even one of the characteristics that the ‘intelligentsia’ liked to attribute to ‘the people.’ There were no remnants of peasant spontaneity in him; neither was there that peasant desire to live and think always as one has lived and thought before. He was distinguished by his strong thirst for knowledge and the truly astounding energy with which he approached the business of self-education. Working ten or eleven hours each day, he would only get back home in the evening; yet he would be glued to the pages of some book until one o’clock at night. He read slowly and, I noticed, it had not been easy for him to master reading – but he had managed to learn the fundamentals. Short, weak-chested and pale, with a small moustache, he wore his hair long and dark blue glasses rested on his nose. In the winter cold he would throw a broad rug over his thick, knee-length trench coat. Consequently he ended up looking like a student. He actually *lived* like a student too, in his diminutive little apartment with its singular table, covered with books. When I came round to see him I was struck by the quantity and variety of the theoretical questions with which he summarily bombarded me. What wasn’t this man interested in, this man who had hardly looked at a book in his youth? Political economy and chemistry, social questions and Darwinian theory, all attracted his attention, awoke in him a single-minded interest. It seemed to me, and by his reckoning too, that it would take ten years even to begin to satiate his intellectual hunger.

I was both delighted and saddened by the various elements of his character. It should be obvious why I was delighted: this needs no further explanation. I was saddened because, at the time, I was strongly convinced by the *buntarstvo* view, and for the *buntary* an unnecessary predilection for books was considered a weakness, the sign of a cold and un-revolutionary temperament. However, judging by G...’s temperament, he really wasn’t a revolutionary. He probably would always have felt more at home in the library rather than at some noisy political meeting. But he never fell behind his comrades, and his position with them was as solid as stone.

Accompanied by G..., I visited most of the other workers who had been at that most dangerous of *skhody* at my apartment. Later I acquired a great many friends from among them. Seeing how interested I was in the ‘workers’ cause,’ the *buntary* accepted me into their circle. As time passed, my engagement with the workers would become a revolutionary obligation.

II

It was clear to me that, amongst the workers, as everywhere, there was a great variety in their characters, in their abilities and even in their education. Some, like G..., read a great deal, others not a lot and not a little, still a third preferred a cup of tea or a bottle of beer to ‘clever’ talk about books. But, in general, all of them were marked out by their notable intellectual development and their high standard of living. I saw with surprise that these workers didn’t live much worse – and many of them lived far better – than the students. On average each of them was paid from 1 rouble 25 kopeks to 2 roubles a day. Of course, even on this comparatively

good wage, it was not easy to keep a family. But a single man – and most of the workers I knew were single – could spend twice as much as the poor students. There were among them some who were genuinely well-off – like S...,⁶ whose daily wage could reach up to three roubles. S... lived with V... (who at the *skhod* had so angrily defended the use of propaganda in the workers' circles). These two friends occupied splendid, furnished rooms, bought books for themselves, and occasionally liked to indulge themselves with a good bottle of wine. They dressed themselves, in particular S..., like proper dandies. But then, all the workers of this type dressed incomparably better than our students. All of them kept for special occasions a good pair of black [trousers]; when they put them on they looked a lot more like *barins* than any student did.

The intelligentsia often reproached the workers bitterly for their predilection for dandyism, but it wouldn't have been possible to eradicate, nor even to impinge slightly on this damaging inclination. This habit of theirs was already second nature. Really, the workers cared only as much about their appearance as the intelligentsia did about theirs; only this manifested itself differently in the different groups. The *intelligenty* loved to get decked out '*po demokraticheski*,' in a red shirt or in some muddied⁷ blouse. The workers, having been bored to tears by their frayed and filthy blouses at work, loved, when they got home, to dress up in clean clothes - that is, for us, *bourgeois clothes*. The intelligentsia used their often exaggeratedly careless dress to protest against fashionable foppishness; the workers, caring about their cleanliness and tidiness, used theirs to protest against their social conditions, thanks to which they were too often forced to dress themselves in filthy rags.

Presently, I would think, anyone would agree that the latter of these protests was the more important, but at the time we saw the matter differently. Our minds were saturated with 'ascetic socialism;' we were prepared to preach that very 'absence of desire,' in which Lassalle had seen one of the chief obstacles to the success of the workers' movement.

The more I got to know the Petersburg workers, the more I was struck by their culture. Sharp, articulate and independent, they were able to treat the world around them critically. They were urban people (*gorozhdanye*), in the best sense of the word. Many then held the view that the 'propagandised' workers from the city would later have to go to the peasantry, in order to carry out in earnest whatever revolutionary programme they happened to subscribe to. Opinions about this had divided some of the workers. I have already said how completely Mitrofanov had come out for activity amongst the peasants. Such a view was the immediate and unavoidable consequence of the growth of the *narodnichestvo*, with its contempt towards the urban civilisation, and its idealization of the life of the peasantry. The supremacy of *narodnik* ideas amongst the revolutionary intelligentsia naturally made its mark on the *views* of the workers as well. But it didn't impact upon their habits, and so the genuine urban workers, that is, the workers who had completely adapted themselves to the conditions of city life, were, in the main, rendered useless in this work anyway. Really, it was harder for these men to meet with the peasants than it was for the 'intelligentsia.' City dwellers, even if they had only begun to chip away a part of that deferent mentality towards the noblemen, still looked down on the peasants. At least that's how the Petersburg workers looked at them. They would call him 'grey' (*seryi*), and in their hearts they distained him, although at the same time they completely and without any affectations sympathised with him as a [fellow] pauper. In that respect Mitrofanov, with his dislike towards the people, undoubtedly imagined himself to be an exception to the rule. But Mitrofanov, being a *nelegalnyi*, had lived for long amongst the intelligentsia and had managed to internalise all of their prejudices.

⁶ Smirnov.

⁷ The word is *zavelennye*, which I presume is derived from *zavelit'*/*zavelivat*, 'to block,' 'to obstruct'; also colloquially 'to muck up.'

It should be said that the peasant often cut a wretched figure among the Petersburg workers. At the Vasil'evskii Shell factory, a peasant from Smolenskaya *guberniia* joined the workforce as a new greaser. At that factory the workers had their own shop and their own canteen, which at the time served as a reading hall, as almost all of the capital's papers were provided for the workers there. The Herzegovina uprising was in full swing then. The new greaser set off to eat in the canteen, where newspapers were read - usually out loud - after dinner. On that day there was talk in one of the newspapers (I don't know which) about one of the 'glorious defenders of Herzegovina.' The villager intervened just as the conversation was coming to its conclusion, and suddenly blurted out:

'He must be a lover of hers.'

'Who...? Whose...?' asked the surprised interlocutors.

'This Herzegovina's defender. Why would he start defending her if there were nothing going on between them?'

The other workers broke into giggles. 'So according to you Herzegovina is not a country but just some *baba*?' they cried. 'You don't understand anything, you proper bumpkin!' From then on he was nicknamed *seryi*. This nickname really surprised me when I first came across it in the middle of Autumn, 1876, when I was already a convinced revolutionary and a most active propagandist.

'Why do you call him that?' I asked the workers.

'Well it's like this: he made a sort of joke with us when we were in the canteen; he thought that...,' and the story of Herzegovina's lover followed.

'Oh well...it was a mistake,' the greaser had excused himself light heartedly. 'What did I understand then?'

Such incidents often gave rise to mockery. But between the 'grey people' and the Petersburg workers, sometimes misunderstandings of a far more depressing kind took place. The worker B...n',⁸ from Novgorodskaiia or Peterburgskaia [*guberniia*], ended up in prison for carrying out propaganda in thirty-seven *gubernaii*.⁹ Released after almost a year of captivity, B...n' set off home, if I'm not mistaken, in order to change his passport. Immediately on his return, he was given the 'cold shoulder,' and a bit later the elders decided to pester him a little for his arrears [in taxes]. The decision was explained to him, and how this was quite normal and completely unavoidable.

'But you've gone out of your mind,' exclaimed B...n', 'Just you try and even touch me - I'll put this whole village to flame, oh, it will cost you! You'll be sorry you ever messed with me!'

The elders were taken aback; they decided to let their 'convict' off, that it was better not to get 'mixed up with him.' And so B...n' left his hometown, having not paid his arrears. But he was never able to forget the incident.

'No,' he would say to us, 'as before, I'm ready to get involved with propaganda amongst the workers, but I'll never go back to the village, not for anything. *Not for anything*. Peasants are sheep - they'll never understand revolutionaries.'

More than once I noticed that the workers saw corporal punishment as particularly degrading of human values. Sometimes they would show me a newspaper story about peasant floggings, and it was hard for me to decide what angered them most: the ferocity of the torturer or the humble silence of the tortured.

When 1876 came round, *Zemlia i Volia* began to settle their revolutionaries 'among the people,' having also managed to get some Petersburg workers to agree to go to Saratovskaia *guberniia*. These were experienced people, the devotion and enthusiasm of which it was

⁸ I.Bachin.

⁹ Reference to the 'Trail of the 193.'

impossible to doubt. But their attempts to organise in the villages came to nothing. Having wandered around the villages for a while, hoping to find a suitable place in which to settle themselves (some of them having been taken in by German peasants), they gave up the whole business and went back to Saratov, where links were being made with the local workers. How little surprised we were by the estrangement of 'the people' from its city children! But now the fact was as clear as day: we had to abandon the idea of attracting workers to activity with the peasants.

I ask the reader to bear in mind that I talk now about the so-called *zavodskie* workers, who made up the significant portion of the working population in Petersburg, and who were sharply distinguished from the *fabrichnye*, in comparing both their economic situations and their cultures. The *fabrichnyi* worked more (12-14 hours) and was paid less (18-25 roubles) than the *zavodskii*. He wore a cotton-print shirt and a knee length *podovka*, which the *zavodskie* would joke about. He didn't get the chance to rent his own apartment or room, and so lived in a common *artel'*. He had much stronger connections with the village than the *zavodskii* worker did. He knew and read much less than the *zavodskii*, and in general he was closer to the peasantry. The *zavodskii* worker placed himself somewhere between the *intelligenty* and the *fabrichnye*; the *fabrichnye* somewhere between the peasants and the *zavodskie* workers. Whether any particular *fabrichnyi* was more similar in his conceptions to the peasant or to the *zavodskii* depended on how long he had lived in the city. If he had just arrived from the countryside, he would remain for some time a genuine peasant. He was there not only because of the economic attraction of the city, but because of the heavy taxation and the lack of land which drove him there. He saw his stay in the city as temporary; at most it was a highly unpleasant necessity. But, little by little, he fell under the influence of urban living. Unbeknownst to him, he would begin to acquire the habits and the outlook of the townsman. Having worked in the city for some years, he became uncomfortable in the village and didn't want to return there, especially if he had managed to acquaint himself with 'intellectual' people, and if he had gotten interested in books. I knew *fabrichnye* who, being forced to go back home for a while, went there as if into exile, and – like the *zavodskii* B...n' – were driven away by the decidedly cold and unfriendly attitude of the villagers. The cause of this was always the same: village manners and customs had become something mysterious to them; for an even *slightly* developed person, the village order would become incomprehensible. And the brighter the worker, the more he thought and studied in the city, then the quicker and more decisively was he cut off from the village. The *fabrichnyi*, having taken part in the revolutionary movement for a few years, could not tolerate living more than a few months there. Sometimes the relations between such workers and their elder relatives assumed a quite tragic character. The 'father' would weep bitterly over the 'children's' lack of respect, and the children became convinced that they were now nothing more than strangers to their families. They were irrepressibly drawn to the city, to the intimate friendships that existed between comrades in the revolutionary circles.

It is hardly necessary to explain the source of the better economic position of the *zavodskii* worker: it was part and parcel of kind of work he did. Learning to work at a spinning or weaving machine (as one might in a *fabrik*) was quick and easy. A couple of weeks would be sufficient. But to become a *stolyar*, a *tokar* or a *slesar* needed, in some cases, a year of preparation. A worker who already knew one of these trades was immediately considered a *masterovyi*, and such men were needed in the factories. The necessity of paying taxes, which were often higher than the peasant could afford whilst living off the produce of his allotment, every year drove a mass of *obshchinnitsy* from the village into the towns. For their part the peasants flung themselves into the factories [*fabriki*], and by their mutual rivalry for jobs depressed the working wage quite horribly. In the factories [*zavody*] this influence was less

perceptible, as there it was uncommon for a person without any special training to get a position. Besides that, many of the *zavodskie* workers – the urban *meshchany* – that is, people who had been fortunate enough to end up as proletarians (a lot not often bestowed upon the Russian worker), did not have to pay anything directly to the government. It is accepted that hunger alone was more than enough to put the sellers of labour power in a condition most unsuitable for the sale of that labour. But with the '*krepkie zemlie*' *fabrichnyye*, exploitation through taxes was added on top of hunger. The government took away any chance even of fighting with hunger, apart from with hands tied behind the back.

As legal citizens, many of the *zavodskie* workers had had greater access to education as children than the *fabrichnyye*. Amongst the *zavodskie* workers that I knew, I never met any who had not at some time or in some way received an education. One will have studied at the local preparatory or 'primary' school, another in the Technological colleges or the Philanthropic society. I never really got familiar with the latter (I only heard from the workers that one of them had had a few classes there), but the school of the Technical Society was very well known to me. Surrounded by poverty, they did rather well in teaching reading, writing and arithmetic to the young factory workers. For adult workers Saturday (evening) or Sunday (morning) classes were organised on 'cosmography' and other natural sciences. At the lessons, the 'public' would always show in up in great numbers; one could not fail to notice with what attention they listened to their teachers. I was more than once witness as the workers approached their teacher after a lesson, thanking them furiously for their hard work: 'It's always so interesting,' they would say, 'we can't thank you enough.' At some of the factories, worker-propagandists had observed that, if a person had not been to classes, then he would be less reliable later on; they also noted the opposite: the more closely a worker followed what one was saying, and so on, the more definitely could it be said that he would become a reliable revolutionary. It was always by this rule of thumb that they dealt with the business of attracting new members into the circles.

It was not long before some of the more 'bookish' workers were themselves taking up the pen. At the Vasil'evskii Shell factory, through the course of time the workers managed to produce their own handwritten journal, sharply satirical and taking its lead from the experience of factory life. Most of all it was the factory bosses who appeared on those pages, but sometimes the lash of the worker's satirical whip was aimed a little higher. So, I remember, the newspaper had brought to the attention of its readers that a new, special award was being considered within government circles, which would be given to the managers who, in the course of a year, managed to injure or maim the greatest number of employees at their factories; according to the workers, an award which would 'correspond to the number of severed fingers, hands and legs...' This bitter mockery reflected the situation in a country where legislation sought to protect the interests of the employers, but, in a most shameless fashion, disregarded the interests of those they hired.

The young workers, I noticed, were far more independent than their counterparts from the upper classes. Life itself by its severity forced these children from an early age into the struggle for existence, leaving a particular resourcefulness and hardening on those who had managed to avoid a premature death. I knew a thirteen year old boy, an orphan, who, working in Gabaroi Gavan at the MacPherson factory [*zavod*] lived quite alone, without, it seemed, feeling the slightest need for any kind of help from the outside. He went by himself and had it out with the clerks at the factory office, and without being led by anyone, was able to keep his modest wages at the same level. I don't know if he had a guardian or not. I think this would simply have been too luxurious for a worker. But if he did, I doubt the boy was able to rely on him much. Conflicts between the *masterovye*, the managers and the young workers developed in its own peculiar [*edinodushnyi*] way. During the spring of 1878, at the time of the strike at the New Cotton Spinning Plant, some young *fabrichnyye* were arrested and thrown into the cells.

Their comrades, also young workers, as well as being *'buntovshchiki,'* rushed off in a group to the prison, demanding their release. A peculiar children's demonstration took place. Adult workers didn't participate in any way. They just looked on and said approvingly, 'look what are boys are up to – they've got nothing more to learn.' But then, in this case, there was nothing by which they *could* learn. They were already taking the most active and the most useful role in the strike, and knew exactly what it was all about. When a meeting of strikers took place in the vacant courtyard of the factory, the young people took the primary role against the incursions of the Cossacks. They had somehow sensed the approach of something unfriendly and quickly brought it to the attention of the older ones. 'The police are coming, the police are coming,' the sounds of children's voices rang from all sides, the meeting breaking up spontaneously. When the police arrived at the meeting place, not a soul remained there. The adult policemen were immensely irritated by these young workers. Many of these young strikers were later given 'corrective punishments.' I don't think the punishments 'corrected' them in the way the police had intended, though.

It would have been interesting to have had such a delicate observer as Uspenskii turn his attention to the workers. But our *narodniki*-belletrists essentially never paid, and still don't pay, any attention to them. For them 'the people' ended where peasant spontaneity disappeared, and where the inheritance of Ivan Ermolaevich's philosophy began to be corrupted by the just-waking thoughts of the workers.

It's true that in the 1870s this transgression was committed not only by the belletrist-*narodniki*, or even in 'legal' literature in general. 'Illegal' writers for their part sympathised greatly with the false idealisation of the peasant and with the celebration of the 'exceptionalist' theory of Russian socialism, never being able to get a view of the Russian question from the correct perspective. Imprisoned by *narodnik* prejudices, at that time, all of us viewed the triumph of capitalism and the development of the proletariat as the greatest evil Russia might face. Thanks to that, our attitude towards the workers was always duplicitous, inconsistent. On the one hand, in our programmes, we didn't attribute the proletariat with any independent political role and placed all our hopes exclusively with the peasant *bunt*. On the other hand, we all considered it necessary to 'engage with the workers,' and couldn't step away from that engagement, in so far as it had been incomparably more successful than the preferred 'settling among the people,' and with a much smaller expenditure of energy. But, having gone to the workers, not 'against our will' but, so to say, *'against our theory,'* we, you will understand, could not very well explain to them what Lassalle had called 'the idea of the workers' estate.' We preached to them neither socialism nor even liberalism, but, namely, those [two] things altered to suit Russian conditions – that is, Bakuninism – which taught the workers to scorn 'bourgeois' political rights and 'bourgeois' political freedoms, [140] and placed before them as a seductive ideal the old-fashioned peasant way of life. Listening to us, the workers would become filled with a hatred toward the government, filled with the 'buntarskii' spirit, and they could affect a sympathy with the 'grey' *muzhiki* and wish them the best, but they still couldn't understand what was, for them, their real task: the socio-political task of the proletariat. They had to reach a conception of this in their own minds, and the reader will see below how, when the worker had made these conclusions by his own efforts, he put to shame all the bona fide *'intelligenty.'*

Here we should stop and take account, so far as we have spoken of the attitude of the *intelligenty* towards the worker question, but only in relation to the *intelligenty-buntary* and not to other the people who shared their (*narodnik*) point of view. These kinds of people were in a minority then and were soon 'to exit the stage.' But we should give them their due: *their* propaganda was, probably, more intelligent than ours. It is true that, like us, they scorned 'bourgeois' political freedom, and they, in the end, were more prepared than we to live by their

principles. Our views were full of inconsistencies, as were theirs; but their inconsistencies arouse from one fortuitous root. Whilst rejecting ‘politics,’ they treated German Social Democracy with the greatest sympathy. It is impossible to maintain a particularly high opinion of the logic of people who, scorning politics, at the same time sympathised with the German SDs. But these people’s engagement with social democracy engendered a whole set of healthy notions in the minds of others who, in favourable conditions, might master the social democratic programme or otherwise become familiar with it to some extent. For that reason they are worthy of merit. In particular such merit was warranted by the Lavrists. Remembering now the lectures read at the *buntary* worker’s circles, I think the only ones which could have been useful to them were the lectures of the late I. O. Fesenko. Unfortunately this man, who had such a great command of his subject and who knew, more than that, how to apply his teachings in a way that was both generally accessible as well as attractive, died much too early. Anyhow, his lectures had gone on for a couple of months. On his departure from Petersburg, we quite neglected the teaching of political economy. According to our basic plan, ‘stories from Russian history’ were read, concerning themselves with tales of the ‘*bunty*,’ of Razin, Bulavin and Pugachev, as well as touching on the history of the peasantry (primarily from Beliaev’s well known book, *Krest’iane na Rus’*). These ‘stories’ added nothing to the comprehension of the worker question. Occasionally we would tell our audiences about the International Association of Workermen, but only in our roles as ‘*buntary*’ – making the activities of Bakunin our model, as opposed to those of the ‘centralists,’ Marx and Engels, who were seen as quite mischievous reactionaries. Such a view of the International was not likely to arouse the sympathies of our audience.

With the Lavrists there was no such refusal to turn their attention to the Western European workers’ movement. But then they believed that, under the influence of *their* stories, the Russian worker might better understand his own tasks. If, in their programme of the winter of 1878-79, the Northern Union of Russian Workers had sounded a loud social-democratic note, then to a significant degree this should be put down to the influence of the Lavrists. But in general, the contemporary intelligentsia-revolutionary lecturers didn’t get on brilliantly, mainly because they knew very little. Even what they *did* know they hadn’t understood correctly. They were more useful to the workers as good, committed youths, who could get them illegal books, make them passports, and organise suitable apartments for secret meetings: in other words, as teachers of ‘conspiracy.’ They would push, awaken and attract the workers by their liveliness, by their selflessness and by their unlimited capacity for ‘self-denial.’ Although many, the more developed workers in particular, were sometimes sceptical about the ‘*intelligenty*,’ they could not have done without that inconspicuous ‘conspiratorial’ factor. Under the influence of Khalturin and his close comrades, the Petersburg workers’ movement through the course of time genuinely became the cause of the workers themselves.¹⁰ But Khalturin was always being forced to return to the *intelligenty* for help in one the other practical matter.

What kinds of books were being read among the workers? For a start, it wasn’t those revolutionary pamphlets – tales about the four brothers and the kopek, about Mudrits Naimoven and so on – which the revolutionaries had intended to be ‘works for the people.’ All of it was so poor in content that a worker at any level of literacy found it disappointing. Really, they only excited those who were beginners, people who hadn’t really read anything yet. Most often their attitude to these books was treated as a ‘touchstone,’ a way of judging their initial attitudes. If a

¹⁰ Here Plekhanov seems to be aping the well known principle of the International and, latterly, of both the ‘Bakuninist’ and ‘Lavrists’ strains in Russian revolutionary movement, viz., that the “workers’ revolution must be the business of the workers themselves.” This accounts for the awkward phrasing Plekhanov uses here, which runs (literally) that ‘the workers movement...became a genuinely independent cause of the workers themselves.’

worker was unafraid after having read such a book, it meant that one might get some sense out of him; that feelings of loyalty and 'Judaic fear' were not that well inculcated in him. If he started getting scared – then it was better to keep one's distance, or at the very least to be most careful from then on. But, once convinced of the revolutionary outlook of any particular worker, you would have to either get hold of some more serious material for him to read, or, in private conversation, answer the questions that had come to his mind whilst he was reading. Only 'The Hungry and the Full,' published in Geneva, anarchist in spirit and style, and perhaps also 'The Cunning Trick,' were considered as more than 'beginners' reading' by the workers. All the other revolutionary works written for the people were seen as too elementary. 'It's for the *servie*,' the *zavodskie* workers would say. In general I noticed that, whilst reading a book written especially for the people, the able worker felt as if he had somehow shrunk and was now like a baby reading a children's story. He would feel the urge to get onto works intended for a general audience, and not only for the 'grey' people. He wanted to get on as quickly as possible. For many workers, the reading of serious or even academic books was a matter of pride. I remember a certain I. E-, from Ardiadalskaia *guberniia*, who, with a passion which deserved to be met with more suitable reading matter, sat for whole evenings over Spencer's *Biology*.

'So you think we workers are quite the idiots?' he answered me angrily when I advised him to get something a bit easier. Such workers willingly read everything that was printed by the revolutionaries for the intelligentsia: Bakunin's *State and Anarchy*, *Vpered!*, *Obshchina*, *Zemlia i Volia*, and so on. But therein lay a new problem. In revolutionary publications for the 'intelligentsia,' a lot was written and said about things that didn't really interest the worker: for instance, the particular 'intelligentsia' question about the 'debt of the educated classes to the people' and the moral duties that ran from this debt, about the attitude of revolutionaries to 'society,' debates about 'programmes' and so on, in other words, debates on the easiest and most convenient ways of influencing the people and, along with them, the very same workers who were reading those publications. The workers, as already noted, were rather indifferent to these 'programmatic debates,' although they could not be indifferent to the direction in which revolutionary activity should have to go. 'No, these journals aren't for us,' Khalturin would often say regarding *Zemlia i Volia*. Of course he was perfectly correct. *Zemlia i Volia* – just like *Vpered!* and *Obshchina* – couldn't be workers' newspapers either in content or in direction. Asking the workers what they demanded from revolutionary literature, I always received the exact same answers.

In the majority of cases, each of them wanted solved those problems with which they were engaged at the time. The workers pondered a variety of different problems, and thanks to the various mentalities and characters among the workers, each had his favourite problem. One would be most interested in questions concerning God and would maintain that revolutionary literature should direct its main energies into breaking the religious beliefs of the people. Others would be mainly interested in historical, political and natural-scientific questions. Among my *fabrichnye* friends there were even those who were especially occupied by the 'woman question.' They had found that the workers didn't respect women and treated them almost as a lower life-form. According to them, many married workers even told their wives to make themselves scarce when their guests started discussing the revolution – they didn't want to get the '*babas*' involved in it. Therefore women had no social interests, which, in its turn, alienated them from the men, who, because of their underdevelopment, always tried to deflect the women away from the dangers of the revolutionary cause. My friend had never come across a 'propagandized' woman, and he tried with all his strength to set up a special revolutionary circle among the female workers. He was always trying to convince his comrades that the developed people should pay the attention to the woman question that it deserved. Naturally,

with these ideas in mind, they went and demanded help from revolutionary literature. It is only unfortunate that it still paid so little attention to the woman question.

I mention in passing that this fervent supporter of the liberation of women belonged to those *fabrichnye* for whom life in the village had become completely unthinkable. When I was introduced to him he was still a young lad, but he was already considered a 'veteran,' as he had been propagandized at the time of the 'Chaikovets.' In 1873-74, when he was still quite young, he ended up in prison, where he looked after himself splendidly and developed a predilection for reading. On his release he went a few times to his home in Tverskaia *guberniia*, but he was already on bad terms with his family there. They called him a 'student' and considered him a 'hopeless case.' He had shocked them with his habits and his views, by his disrespectful attitude towards the bosses. On the other hand, they consoled themselves with the old proverb – 'marriage changes a man.' He had hardly reached 18 when someone – God knows who – was chosen for him. But by then he was already interested in the 'woman question' and wouldn't even consider the idea that a decent man could be married to a woman he didn't know. So as to avoid pointless conflict, he decided not to go home anymore. The family decided on their part that their lad was completely ruined. I wonder if in this case the *narodniki* would have agreed with them.

Among the female workers in Petersburg, there were some revolutionaries, some of whom had already gotten involved in a strike (for instance, at the tobacco factories), but in general the women were really at the bottom of the pile in so far as the revolutionary movement was concerned. Some of the *zavodskie* worker-revolutionaries hadn't immediately gotten married because, given the kind of conditions within which they moved as revolutionaries, they thought there weren't any woman around that suited them.

'Our *babas* are pretty stupid, and an *intelligentka* wouldn't look twice at one of us – she'll already be on the arm of some student,' such workers would say, not without a hint of bitterness. I think in this case it was not 'being spoilt' by the city but serious moral development that told on them. But then again, I don't want to idealise the conditions of contemporary urban life – we are already too well versed in false idealisations. I have seen and I know the negative side of this situation. Arriving from the village into the city, the worker sometimes really was 'spoilt.' In the village he lived under the eye of his father, who without any reasoning subjected his children to the way of life established long before. In the city these habits – this way of life – immediately lost all meaning. So that they weren't left without any moral standards, they had to take on new habits and a new view of things. Such a change was, in reality, gradual, because the unavoidable, everyday struggle with the bosses itself already imposed a moral obligation on the workers. But at that moment when the fledgling worker undergoes a sudden moral crisis – sometimes this manifested itself in quite ugly behaviour.

This is repeated when any social class, when any society undergoes the transition from a narrow, patriarchal order to another broader, but still more complex and indefinite one. Having begun to develop by its own logic, Reason will criticize the old morality and, by that, allow itself to take on other, unpleasant aspects. Reason can, of course, make mistakes, and probably more often than any 'eternal' system of customs would. For this it is cursed by all the defenders of the old order. But between periods of progress, the periodic breakage of old habits will inevitably be halted. The 'ruin' of some is the other, inevitable outcome of Reason's confrontation with old habits and old customs. But its mistakes cannot be corrected by the preservation of the old order. Only the long term developments of life will correct them. As new structures develop, they become more intelligible to those who live within them, in so far as, little by little, new moral demands take on the solidity of traditions, which then restrain the excessive 'ruination' brought about by the movements of reason. In this way, the negative sides

of this development are eliminated by its own, positive progress, and the role of the intellectual [the thinking individual] within this inevitable historical movement is defined of its own accord.

I knew a young *fabrichnye*, a quite honest lad, as yet untouched by revolutionary propaganda. But as soon as the revolutionary critique of the exploiters became known to him, he started robbing from members of the upper classes. 'What does it matter, it was stolen from us,' he said while his comrades reproached him, having quite openly shown the loot to them and offered to share it out. Had the late Dostoevsky known of such cases, of course he would not have failed to take a swipe at these revolutionaries in the *Brothers Karamazov*, where these lads would have been trotted out alongside that 'victim' of freethinking, Smerdiukov, or in *The Devils*, in which, as we know, 'no step was too horrible.' It is interesting that these workers themselves, hardly familiar with the works of Dostoevsky, began calling their little thief 'Devil.' But they didn't blame the escapades of their 'Devil' either on the intelligentsia in general, or on socialist propaganda in particular. By their own influence they attempted, so to say, to 'polish up' [finish] the moral character of this young man, and to teach him how to struggle against the upper classes: not as a trickster and a thief, but as a revolutionary agitator. I soon lost contact with the 'Devil,' and now I don't know whether he made it through the moral crisis he was experiencing then onto the 'good' side. But such a favourable result was certainly possible, or was made possible, among other things, by the outrage that his exploits induced among all the worker-revolutionaries around him.

III

At that time there was a great deal of debate among the 'intelligentsia' about the possibility of revolutionary propaganda among the workers. I think that anyone who had even associated slightly with the Russian workers would have been aware of how attentively, how sympathetically they reacted to this propaganda. It was said that propaganda activities were coming against unmanageable resistance from the police's side. But too often this sort of thing was said by people who had never made any attempt themselves in this direction. Sometimes, I admit, such statements were born of experience. But then, no two experiences are alike. Without ability [skill], any kind of revolutionary activity is impossible, but able people are never stopped by the police. At the time, the *Zemlia i Volia* organisation [*obshchestvo*] kept the connections between itself and the workers alive through the mediation of a few of their members. Remarkably, the whole time, our own workers' matters were conducted by *one person* and even that later came to a meaningless end: our comrade I..., who had been engaged in propaganda at a Moscow factory [*fabrik*], was arrested in 1878 after one of the workers was interrogated. The numerous arrests of workers that took place in the Spring of the same year, arrests, thanks to which both the late Khazov ('Dedushka'), as well as a few others, were captured by the police, were entirely the fault of the 'intelligentsia' themselves. It was Khazov, at the time living illegally in Moscow, who had asked the students of the Petrovskiaia Academy to hide some 'conspiratorial' papers. The students put them in a packet and buried them in the gardens of the Academy, but apparently not deeply enough. At just the wrong moment some happy little dog dug the packet up from out of the ground, and then a certain officious busy-body, having looked at the contents of the packet himself, took them to the authorities. This unexpected find turned out to be a real boon for the police, who immediately arrested Khazov and some of his friends in Moscow. As often happens in such cases, this arrest led to others: the arrests spread to Petersburg, where the numerous and well organised circles of Galeroi Gavan suffered especially. Our losses were very serious then, but we understood that we couldn't blame the workers, only ourselves.

The *zemlevoltsy* always used the following approach in their relations with the workers. The members of the organisation who were entrusted with the leadership of ‘workers’ matters’ (they were always few in number, at the most 4 or 5 people), were told to form a special circle from the young revolutionaries. These circles, properly speaking, did not belong to the *Zemlia i Volia* organisation, but since they were under the influence of its members, they could not but work in the spirit of its programme. Here is how these circles set up connections with workers: Given that, thanks to the propaganda of 1873-74, there were already quite a few revolutionaries in the workers milieu, the task of the *zemlevoltsy* and their young assistants was, above all, to bring these already prepared people into the organisation. The ‘elders,’ for the greater part already experienced revolutionary-workers, uniting themselves with some reliable newcomers, comprised the core of the Petersburg workers’ organisation, with whom the intelligentsia mainly communicated. We could rely on those people absolutely: to be scared of being handed over [to the police] by them would have been absurd. None the less, understanding that ‘too much is better than too little’ [that butter doesn’t spoil the kasha], and that caution was always required where secret revolutionary matters were concerned, even when it might seem quite superfluous, the *zemlevoltsy* didn’t tell the experienced workers their addresses or their names (that is, the names under which they were listed by the police). I add that they never approached even a single worker under their own names [in such a way]: The address of a *zemlevolets* was usually fictitious, the name under which he lived - even within the organisation itself - was usually only known to a very few people: for instance, those involved in the same area of work as him. People engaged in other specialities had to be satisfied meeting him in a ‘conspiratorial’ flat, where general *shkody* would take place. The duty of leading the local workers circles, founded in one or the other part of Petersburg, fell to a central, specially selected workers’ group. The intelligentsia didn’t interfere with the local groups, limiting themselves to providing books, helping to run meetings at secret apartments, and so on. Every local circle took responsibility for attracting new members. They were told that other circles existed in Petersburg, but only the central core of workers knew exactly what kind of circles and where they were. This central group would hold a general meeting every Sunday. The revolutionary *intelligenty* served as propagandists at the local circle meetings. Because they were only known by their false names, if some spy had managed to get into the meeting, then he could only report back that a Fedorich or an Anton or Dedushka had ‘shaken the floorboards’ at a certain place and a certain time; where to look for this Fedorich or Anton or Dedushka remained a mystery. Following these men on the street was not so easy, because they could resort to special measures: in sight of the open courtyards and the cabbies, he would make a sudden turn into a place where there were no other cabs, get onboard, and inevitably the man following on foot would be left behind, etc., etc. Using such precautions, we were able to carry on with our work even during the riskiest periods, when those revolutionaries who didn’t belong to organisations (‘nihilists,’ as our jargon had it) fell into the hands of the vigilant police [*argusov*] in droves due to the most petit trifles.

Already in 1876, when the *zemlevolsty* had only just begun arranging the ‘settlement’ of revolutionaries among ‘the people,’ propaganda among the workers took on a rather broad scale, both in Petersburg (in Galeroi Gavan, on Vasilev’skii Island, on the Petersburg and Vyborg Sides, at Nevskaia and Narvskaa Gates) and in the surrounding regions (in Kolpin, at the Aleksandrovskii manufactory, Krondstadt, and so on). But, as I have already said, the *buntari* were not satisfied with propaganda and had never given up the desire *to agitate*. Our outlook, in the end, also infected the workers. At that time everyone remembered the demonstration of the spring of 1876 commemorating the death in prison and the funeral of the student Chernyshev. It had made a very strong impression on the intelligentsia, and all summer we had, as we say, raved about demonstrations. But workers hadn’t taken part in the

Chernyshev demonstration, as, for one thing, it had taken place on a weekday, and the organisers hadn't remembered about them. So the workers wanted their *own* demonstration, one that by its revolutionary character would utterly eclipse the demonstrations of the 'intelligentsia.' They assured us that, if the matter was handled well and was set to take place on a holiday, then up to 2000 workers might come. We were doubtful of that, but our rebellious streak persuaded us and we committed ourselves to it. So, on the 6th (18th) of December, 1876, the well-known Kazan Square [Kazanskaia] demonstration took place.

Now this demonstration has been quite forgotten. Even Mr. Dragomanov himself, who loves to reproach revolutionaries for it, mentions it less and less often. But at the time it set off many debates and arguments. Some approved of it and others damned it, although often both one and the other had a perfectly mistaken conception of what it actually was. For the intelligentsia its aims remained unclear, probably because its involvement in the preparations was limited to a few *zemlevoltsy* active among the Petersburg workers. These people used every means available to them to attract as many workers as possible, but as far as I know they thought little about the intelligentsia. 'If they come without invitation, fine – if not, the cost isn't great. Perhaps that would even be better: we'll have a pure workers' demonstration.' None the less, on the morning of the 6th many students gathered at the Kazan Church. This happened, I think, because already throughout November a rumour had been circulating about a demonstration that would take place near Isaakiia, and the public were therefore already prepared. Who had conceived of the demonstration and what sort of character it was going to take on – we, the *zemlevoltsy*, didn't well know, although, it was understood that, if something had actually happened at Isaakiia, then we would have been there. But that demonstration never took place, it was always being delayed and moved from one holiday to another, and in the end the impatient 'nihilists' started to get angry. Now everything said about the Isaakiia demonstration was tinged with irony. Not wanting the public to laugh at us from the sidelines [*medlitiiami*], we hurriedly chose another place – the Kazan church – for *our* demonstration. So, when the rumours got through to the public about our plans, many decided that the proposed Kazan demonstration was the same one that was supposed to take place at Isaakiia. The revolutionaries, for so long hungry for something extraordinary, poured in from all around, and compared with the workers, despite our initial estimates, they turned out to be in the majority.

Few workers came, and that was completely understandable. If the demonstration represented an agitation attempt for the workers who already belonged to revolutionary circles, for those comrades still untouched by propaganda it was really just interesting as something new and previously unheard-of. Participation in it, for them, would have no tangible result. Therefore they didn't come to it. Just a few days before the demonstration we saw how the high hopes the workers' circles had for it had dissipated. But it was too late to pull out. We all saw how amusing the overly-cautious organisers of the Isaakiia demonstration had become for the public, and we didn't want to be likened to them. At the meeting of the evening of the 4th, to which, apart from us (the *zemlevoltsy*), the most influential workers from various parts of Petersburg came, it was decided almost unanimously that the demonstration had to take place, if at least a hundred people would come. At the same meeting the idea of the red flag, which no-one had thought of before, was suggested and approved.

Sewn into the flag was the inscription: 'Zemlia i Volia,' which we considered to be the very best expression of the ideals and demands of the people. But for those actual people – at least, those living in the capital – it didn't make sense. 'How can it be,' it was reasoned later at some factories, 'that they want land and freedom? Land is what has to be given to the peasants, and they've already been given freedom.'¹¹ So what are they for?' It turns out that our slogan was at least fifteen years too late. On the other hand, in peasants' areas people heard quite

¹¹ The Emancipation of 1861.

different opinions on that score. A friend of mine living Malorossia told me that, once, he had been present when there was talk of the Kazan demonstration among the peasants. 'What they want,' said one elder, 'is what everyone wants. Everyone needs land and freedom.' The very same elder never wanted to believe that the revolutionaries might have so just a demand. 'There wasn't anything for them [to do],' he maintained, 'when the Tsar simply summoned them to him and said, "Hang on, lads, you'll have land, and freedom, only there's no need to shout about it in the streets.'" One way or another, the whole of Russia was talking about the Kazan demonstration.

But who did the demonstration itself happen? I said that the meeting of the 4th of December had resolved not to cancel it if at least 100 people would turn up. We devoted the whole of the following day bustling [rushing] about in the workers' quarter. On the morning of the 6th of December all the '*buntarskii*' workers' circles (Lavrists were against the demonstration) gathered together at the appointed place [*mesto deistviia*]. The Gavanskii workers were especially well represented: from one factory came the entire contingent of workers (40-45 men) from one of the workshops. But there were simply no workers from outside [those organisations at the demo]. Realising that our numbers were too small, we decided to wait a little. The workers disappeared into nearby *traktiry*, having left behind only a small group at the porch of the church, who were overseeing the arrival and movement of people in and out of the building. The young students were approaching in large groups. Although there were few people in the church, towards the end of mass the public became shocked by the terrible influx of unusual worshipers. The church elder was looking over anxiously in our direction with surprise. The mass was over but these strange supplicants [prayers/worshipers] didn't leave. A conversation started between us and the church elder. 'Can I be of any service, gentlemen?' he asked, hurriedly approaching the *buntari*.

'We would like to give a requiem,' we answered him.

'It can't be done today: today is the Tsar's day [*Tsarskii den*].'

The *buntari* were taken aback. Really, the idea of a liturgy have never been a part of the plan for the demonstration, but the revolutionary public kept arriving, and the *buntari* needed to stall a little. They hit upon the idea of a requiem simply as a specious prologue to the further arrivals into the church. They momentarily broke into laughter when the elder told them that the service wasn't possible.

'I'll go and ask for a [public] prayer,' the (late) Sentianin whispered to me.

'Go ahead, and pay the priest for our abstinence,' I answered, handing over a three rouble note.

Sentianin went. But even now I don't know what he managed to organise with the priest. The nihilists, getting bored, started to leave the porch, and the worker-*buntari*, coming from the neighbouring *traktiry* came up to the people who were there. The crowd took on quite surprising proportions. We decided to get on with it [act].

The local powers, it would seem, got wind of our preparations through rumours that were going around. But there were very few police or gendarmes on Kazan Square. They watched us and 'waited for the kick-off.' As the first words of the revolutionary speech rang out, they tried to elbow their way through towards the local police officers, yet they were straight away pushed back. All the demonstration's participants became terribly agitated. The workers surrounded the local officers by forming a tight circle. 'Lads, keep tight together, don't let the police come near us,' Mitrofanov commanded as the whistles of the police sounded out across the square. The speech was over and the red flag was raised aloft, a cry was heard: 'Long live the socialist revolution, long live *Zemlia i Volia!*' Mitrofanov snatched the hat from the speaker and placed some kind of service-cap on him to hide his face. 'Now we'll all go together, otherwise we'll get arrested,' someone shouted, and as a crowd we moved off in the

direction of Nevskii. But hardly had we taken a step when the police, who, at the whistles of the local officers had come running up to reinforce, began to seize hold of the rear ranks of the crowd as it moved off. The agitation of the crowd had reached its peak. 'Stop,' someone commanded, 'some of ours are taken,' and the crowd threw itself into freeing the arrested. The police were routed and they fell back to the church on Kazanskaia street. If, having deflected this first unsuccessful attack, the revolutionaries had shown more self-assurance, then they probably would have gotten away without any losses and in good order. The *zemlevoltsy* knew this, and as soon as the arrested had been freed, they began shouting for the public to again form a tight circle. But anyone who has participated at any time in similar scuffles knows the difficulty of restoring order once it has been broken. The public continued back in pursuit of the police. Dreadful disorder took hold, our ranks had almost completely dissolved; new and stronger reinforcements appeared. A whole rank of local police along with a number of *dvorniki* closed on the same Kazanskii street, towards which the retreating police were heading. Having gotten carried away by the chase, the revolutionaries clashed with them [the police] face to face. A bitter brawl ensued. The strength of the police was constantly increasing; the revolutionaries were surrounded on all sides. The planned escape had become utterly impossible. It was still fortunate that significant groups managed to get away. These groups for the most part, although not without suffering serious physical harm, successfully defended themselves from the attackers. But those who ended up alone were seized straight away and, after vicious beatings, were carted off to the police stations.

I have no desire to sing the praises of whomever of those who were involved in the violence. But bearing in mind the brutality meted out by the police, it isn't without pleasure that I note that they caught their fair share of it. The revolutionaries, some of whom were armed with knuckle-dusters, mounted a desperate defence. On that account the student N... particularly distinguished himself. Tall and strong, he struck the enemy like an impassioned Ajax, son of Telamon; wherever his broad-shouldered figure appeared terror descended on the defenders of order. As the police made no efforts to seize him, he had easily [happily] repelled every attack, then returned home just as he had arrived on the square: as a '*legal'nyi*.' Those defenders of 'order' who had suffered him only knew that they had been pummelled by some tall, strong brunette, but obviously they couldn't recall his face. Later, when the clash at the square was already over with, and they met Bogoliubov in Morskaia, they maintained that he was their ferocious attacker. Bogoliubov was arrested, beaten badly at the police station, then, as is well known, sentenced to hard labour. But Bogoliubov took absolutely no part in the demonstration.

When the red flag was raised during the course of the speech, it was held by a young peasant, Popatov. The workers lifted him up and for some time held him high above the heads of the crowd [of those present]. The police took note of his features, although for long time they didn't manage to catch him. A group of stubborn and courageous people defended him as they moved off slowly along the Nevskii [Prospekt]. They reached the corner of Sadovaia. The pursuit was constantly weakening and eventually, it seemed, had stopped altogether. Then he was at on a small horse [*na konku*], thinking he was now out of danger. But he was being followed by a spy. While he was still with others the spy kept a respectful distance, and as soon as they split up, he ran up behind the horse and, having stopped it, arrested Popatov. They found the red flag on him, which constituted an undisputable piece of evidence. None the less, the court sentenced him only to detention in a monastery as an act of 'penance.' The relative leniency of the sentence could be explained by Popatov's youth. But everyone knows that in Russian political trials the courts were never ashamed of using hard labour as a sentence, or in the military court, where even very young defendants were sentenced to death. In this case the reasoning was different. The government had decided to spare the workers. Ten or twelve sat

accused in the stocks, all of them got rather light sentences: a few, like Popatov, were sent to repent at a monastery, others into exile in Siberia; the intelligentsia defendants, for the most part, went to hard labour, and more than that were given sentences of lengths unheard of up until then. The judges were unable to see that the guilt of almost all the accused was, to some degree, doubtful. On two of the workers arrested there were found notes which, according to the observations of the *prokuror*, 'clearly indicated premeditation [a plan]'; they really did point to the existence of a plan, but it was less clear that none of the accused from the 'intelligentsia' revolutionaries had any part in it. The third Department knew very well that the main organisers of the demonstration had not been arrested. But the court showed no remorse as it took revenge on those who had been arrested for those who remained hidden away. It is known that the government always imposed a sort of 'mutual responsibility' on the revolutionaries. What they never could understand was that there might be exactly such incorrigible '*buntovshchiki*' among the workers as there were among the intelligentsia. They tried to convince themselves that, under the vile influence of the latter, the workers had ceased to be the faithful subjects of the monarch, and were most unwilling to put them in the docks, preferring to send them into administrative exile. That much was well understood. When only representatives of the intelligentsia were brought into court as political criminals, it was possible to convince the peasants that these criminals were all of the gentry [*barami*] embittered against the Tsar for the emancipation of the serfs. Among the workers any such beliefs as regards these criminals were quite out of the question, and the idea [*obraz*] of the 'buntovshchiki' took on a new and, from the government's point of view, most unfortunate form in the people's imagination. The government understood very well how unfavourable it would be for them if the revolutionary movement, far from being limited to the intelligentsia, was shown to have brought some elements of the people into its purview.

The Kazan Square demonstration was the first attempt to apply practically our concepts of agitation. At this point these concepts were far too abstract, and, going by them alone, practical application could not have been successful. The Kazan demonstration showed most clearly that we would always remain alone if our revolutionary activities were controlled by our abstract yearnings for agitation, and not by the outlook and by the immediate, essential needs existing within the milieu in which we were going to agitate.

We didn't forget this lesson, but another year passed before the opportunity arose for agitation to be taken up again among the worker population in Petersburg. This was a very depressing case. At the Patronnyi factory [*zavod*] on Vasilev'skii Island some gunpowder had exploded. A few workers were badly injured, and four had been killed on the spot. Two more died of serious injuries on the following day. The workers were going to have to accompany their six [dead] comrades to the Smolenskoie Cemetery. The factory management's guilt for the explosion was inexcusable. The workshop in question was situated on the second floor, its only connection with the outside world was by way of a single staircase. Once, at the entrance to the workshop near the staircase, a quite significant quantity of processed [*pressovannogo*] gunpowder was lying in the common storeroom, from which the shells were made. When the gunpowder was ground down on the machines, a light dust was produced which flew up and then settled on the machines and covered the floors and walls of the workshop. One spark was enough to set the dust alight and, the fire having reached the storeroom near the staircase, to deny the workers any means of rescue. The workers were then quite aware of the danger posed to them, that a sparks were often produced by friction whilst the machines were working. It even happened occasionally that a spark would set the dust alight which had covered those machines. But because over any period of time these incidents were rare, the management left the whole matter up to the grace of God. The workers complaints went by unheeded. When the explosion happened, it is understood, the reaction of the workers was fierce. The revolutionary

circle that existed there realised that they had to act. One of its members drew up a declaration, which drew connections between the unpleasant events at the factory and the state of the working class in general. This declaration, printed at our own secret typography, made a good impression and was even read with sympathy by workers who had never before sympathised with revolutionaries. But very few of these were printed. The revolutionary circle at the Patronnyi factory wanted to make the upcoming funeral into a demonstration.

This circle was not under the exclusive influence of the *'buntari.'* At the same time as communicating with the *'buntari,'* they maintained permanent friendly relations with the *'Lavrists.'* But they well knew the negative attitude of the Lavrists to any kind of *'rebellious attempt'*; they were worried that they would not approve of their plans for a demonstration. It was very unpleasant for the workers to incur the opprobrium of the Lavrists, but it would have been more unpleasant to hold back from the demonstration. Given that, they started to plan, cunningly. Having invited the *buntari* to come to the funeral, they persistently asked them not to have any dealings with the Lavrists. *'God is with the Lavrists,'* they said, *'they're good people, but there will be arguments, and that will only prove how empty our plans are. We can't listen to them, the workers are already agitated.'* The *buntari* hadn't the slightest wish to give their game away to the Lavrists.

On the day of the funeral a well-armed group of *buntari*, including the late Osinskii, arrived at the buildings of the factory, in front of which a large crowd of workers had gathered. The *buntari* were approached by the members of the factory circle, who were also armed *'just in case.'* The late Khalturin, who was working at another factory at the time, also came to the funeral. A meeting began: what mood were the workers in? What could the revolutionaries do at the funeral? The *buntari* thought that entering into revolutionary speeches would be inappropriate. The crowd of workers, dressed up for the holidays, seemed too *'bourgeois'* to them, and this was made known not only by the *'intelligentsia'* who were *'engaged'* with the factory workers, and would have known them habitually, but – it is awful to say – even by the members of the local workers' circle. Their morale too had dropped considerably.

The coffins appeared, those present took off their hats, and the funeral of the six began. There was a bitter frost that day, cooling off our revolutionary temper still more. *'No, gentlemen, revolution has to be made in the summer. In this cold not a soul will be stirred,'* we said, covering up our frozen noses and ears.

But now we arrived at the cemetery. In one corner along way away from the entrance, six fresh graves have been dug out of the frozen ground, near which were lying modest wooden crosses. The police, accompanying the bodies in quite significant numbers and then reinforced by the local officers at the gates of the cemetery, began to form a circle around the graves. The priest had reached the end of his last prayer and the coffins were lowered into the ground. The crowd remained utterly calm as they were buried, and we were quite convinced that nothing was going to happen. But when everything was over and the time had come to leave, something stirred among the workers. A red haired worker, completely unknown to us, elbowed his way towards one of the graves.

'Gentlemen,' he shouted out in his excited voice, *'Today we have buried six men, not victims of the Turks,¹² but of our management, to whom our care is entrusted.'*

He broke off:

The police whistles rang out and the *okolotochnyi*-watchman placed his hands on the redhead's shoulders with the words: *'I'm arresting you.'* But hardly had he managed to get the words out when something completely unexpected happened. From all sides outraged shouts rang, and the crowd – the same crowd who had produced such a hopeless impression on us by its apparently bourgeois conservatism [appearance, slicked-down hair, dandyism] – fully threw

¹² This was at the time of the Russo-Turkish War (*footnote in original, JRM*).

itself onto the dumb-struck policemen. In a second the arrested man was swept somewhere far away by the surging wave of workers, and the watchman who had tried to arrest him, in his faltering voice, apologised to the public.

‘I cannot but answer for the disorder myself before the management, gentlemen.’

‘You tell them! We’ll let you have your moment, just so you won’t go sticking your nose in where it isn’t wanted again,’ came the answer from the crowd.

‘Let’s beat him up!’ shouted the more embittered.

The position of the police had become critical. Here, at the distant Smolenskoie Cemetery, they were completely powerless before a thousand enraged workers. But they were saved because this powerlessness was so obvious to everyone.

‘Brothers, why would we want to beat them?’ came someone’s voice. ‘We are many, and they are few, we would be ashamed of it. I say we go home; none of us should touch them.’

This most diplomatic, really good-spirited speech calmed down the workers down a little. The shouting quieted: the public stopped threatening the police with beatings, but on the other hand, they didn’t want to let the police out of sight, as they were afraid that they would follow as they left and try to arrest their orator. The crowd left in two parts, one surrounding the police, the other forming a circle around the orator, solemnly escorting him to the gates. He, it seemed, had never expected such an honour, and looked on at his comrades abashed, thanking them profusely for their sympathy. All of them loudly cursed the management and the police. All of us were especially casting our eyes towards a tiny, skinny old woman who, not associating with anyone in particular and as if talking to herself, fiercely repeated that they had to stand by their man. And the crowd, undoubtedly, was ready to stand by him. But because of their lack of experience, they could have been outwitted by spies. The *buntari* felt the need to give them some reasonable advice. At the main gates some cabbies were waiting in expectation of fares. One of us revolutionaries was sat down in a sled with the worker who had tried to speak, and the rest were told not to move off the spot. Out of caution the horses were placed under reigns. In that way, not a single spy was able to come after the orator, already making a rapid exit accompanied by two reliable people. When the police, escorted by the remaining part of the crowd, arrived at the gates, he was already out of sight. The police were still being held by the crowd, however, they themselves only letting out a few light-hearted and humorous remarks. Of course they didn’t want to spoil things by excessive ardour. Having found himself at the gates, one *okolotochnyi* - the very same man who had interrupted the orator’s speech - pulled a whistle from his pocket and quickly put it to his lips. The public again became incensed. The whistle was snatched from him and he was given a few sharp thumps and shoves. All that was for him was cursing. ‘This is a riot!’ he shouted in impotent rage. ‘You’ll all answer for this, you can’t get away with it!’

‘And you would be better off holding your tongue, now you’ve said your piece,’ the workers instructed him.

‘I have no reason to stay quiet, I’m doing my duty, and you are rioters,’ he fumed, suddenly turning to a group of *buntovshchiki*, noticing that he had seen them all before on the Kazan Square.

‘It’s nice to meet up with old acquaintances again,’ the *buntari* answered politely, ‘we hope it isn’t for the last time.’

The workers laughed. The *okolotochnyi* shrugged his shoulders, all the while his utter indignation showing on his face.

‘So then, time to let them go and get home, get warmed up,’ the public decided, beginning to disperse in groups of twelve or thirteen, everyone discussing the days events in excited voices. Only the most intransigent continued to abuse and even shove the *okolotochnyi*

in the back as he tried to get into the cabby's sled. In the end they too left, and the Smolenskoe Cemetery again assumed its usual emptiness.

The concerted rebuff given to the police by the workers of the Patronnyi factory made a splendid impression, both on the workers' circles in Petersburg and on the *'buntarskii'* intelligentsia. It proved that even workers completely untouched by propaganda were capable of decisive and united [unanimous] action and, at the right moment, were not afraid to unite with the *'buntovshchiki of Kazan Square,'* that is, the revolutionaries. We only had to make sure not to let that moment slip away in order to assure ourselves of the sympathy of the mass...

8. Appendix F

Outlines of a Study 'Russian Workers and the Economies of History, 1825-1930'

I

The privileging of the worker's voice by the social-revolutionary movement provides an important connection between the historiographical problem of workers' writings and the better-studied doctrines of *narodism*. Strong claims were made in social revolutionary thought for the authority of the working class or the *narod* both to 'act for itself' and 'speak for itself,' and these were both considered to be important events in the movement towards social revolution and popular freedom. This entered into the way particular workers described themselves (indeed, making it necessary that when they 'spoke,' that they spoke about themselves *as* workers) and so had determinate effects on our ability, as historians, to ask and answer biographical questions about these particular workers, with concomitant effects on the way we view working-class experience and the Russian working-class historically. It was suggested further that associations between the historical attribution of authority, authenticity, and individuality according to class, and the historiographical effects of those attributions, could be found both outside and prior to the social-revolutionary thought and the emergence of the worker-*intelligenty* in the mid-1870s. The historical problem of the relation between particular workers and their social position or (self-) categorisation (class position or class identity) and the historiographical-methodological problem of particular workers' writings and their employment of certain categories or languages, should be studied in concert. Previous approaches have tended to emphasise either the 'general' or the 'particular' (the 'event' as against a 'state of things'; a set or class of things as against a unique, unusual, original thing; the rule as against the instance), either *as* approaches, determined by pre-existing lacunas or by theories, or in specific moments of their own analyses. In contrast, rather than choosing to emphasise, more or less arbitrarily, the 'general' or 'particular' in past, primary-source representations of workers' lives, I would like to show how these two aspects or moments of the ongoing documentation of the past (the process whereby social reality was represented and documented. e.g. objectified) relate to one another. I think it is in *this* relation that the basic

historical and historiographical problems already identified in the study of the radical workers, their writings, and the working-class can be seen to be closely connected historically, and so more adequately explained.

The root problem with previous studies of the worker-*intelligent* has been the excessive stress placed on the relations between 'workers' and the 'intelligentsia.' There are obvious, historical reasons for the attention given to this relationship over others in Russian labour history and political history. Studies that confronted the 'Bolshevik' version of events (its main outlines set down by the mid-1930s) widened to include the relations between workers and Mensheviks, Socialist-Revolutionaries, Liberals; studies that confronted the 'dark masses' of the mainstream of Western political history widened to include sections, sub-sections, cultures, self-identified groups, etc. within a nominal 'working class.' As has been seen, more recent scholarship has examined the relations – political, intellectual, and social – between the emerging group of radicalised workers and the groups of *intelligenty*, thus bringing into view for social and political historians the particular biographies of worker-revolutionaries of the late nineteenth century. The problems in this area as regards class, identity, representations, and writings are evident. An understanding of what was, for them, an *objective* class position requires an analysis of social relations (whether 'socio-economic' or 'discursive') outside of worker/intelligentsia encounters. Confronted with 'representations of class,' the social historian has (formally) abandoned class as an 'objective' relation. And to a certain extent this is a correct move, since it recognises class relations for what they were: social relations that could be challenged or even broken. The mistake is to contrast 'objective class position' with the diversity of cultures, behaviours, mentalities and ideas found 'within it.' This assumes the historian is looking to correlate 'representations' or cultures, etc. with 'objectively defined' class positions, which is evidently impossible. But to believe that great diversities in culture, thought, or representation among workers invalidates class definitions outside of 'their states of mind,' etc., is to misunderstand the way in which class divisions were enforced by the autocracy and other authorities (factory owners and managers, landlords, bailiffs, peasant or workers' 'elders,' etc). It was at the *boundaries* of the classes and, more specifically, at the *moments* when peasants and workers seemed to transgress those boundaries, that classes were defined. Within these boundaries - marked out by state power in accordance with its own categories of thought and self-understanding - there were many cultures and ways of life. The working class to which the worker-revolutionaries devoted themselves had no recognised organisational,

cultural or political unity. What the worker-revolutionaries referred to as the '*narod*,' 'labouring class,' or 'working people' was a group objectively defined by skirmishes between the autocracy and people like themselves on the edges of acceptable working class thought and behaviour. Class - in this sense - was something that was seen at the time to *happen to them*, not a perceived essence or a 'gut identity.'

Zelnik's psychological analyses of workers' 'selves,' presented through memoirs and speeches, brackets the historiographical question, while emphasising the historical one; yet, his critique of the *intelligentsia's* representations of the radical workers mentions both the ideological *and* the historical mediation of these views. Halfin's analyses of the narratives 'constructed' by a Marxist or Bolshevik discourse recognise (almost) no distinction between what was and the way it is presented in 'texts': the method and the narrative (discourse analysis) become 'what existed'; the historical question is swallowed by the historiographical one. The social-historical emphasis on *representation* has undermined the intuitive notions of class or social structure with which it still approaches (and, somehow, still leaves) its subject matter. The identification of 'workers' as a group indicates a sort of 'social necessity' behind workers' writings, but this repressed notion of an objective class position is impossible to relate in any systematic way to the culture of the politicised worker, or to the representations that they (and others) left behind regarding their lives and the society of which they were a part. This gives the impression that the historian's 'intuitive notions' of class and necessity are unfounded in documentation and should be discarded. The (counter-) emphasis on the *discursive construction* of the 'world,' of 'experiences, and of 'subjects' through categorisation, the composition of narratives, and self-defining gestures of power, neglects the relations of one discourse with another, as well as with a 'presented reality' (whether discursive or not) 'outside' of discourse(s). When coupled with the notion that discourse 'forms its referent' rather than 'referring to it,' the fabled unity of the discourse - a unity within which differences of 'opinion' (*doxa*) are framed by a fundamental agreement of the rules of engagement and the truths underlying them (the *episteme*) - makes the transformation or fracturing of any particular 'discourse' or system of thought, and the means by which this fracture was 'dealt with,' both difficult to spot and hard to account for. This approach neglects the possibility that a 'discourse' - as a language and as a set of 'practices,' institutions, and ways of perceiving the world - could provide both a 'truth' to follow *and* the grounds to criticise it, as if from the outside, in the very same 'gestures' and 'constructions.'

The separation between historiographical method and historical ontology, therefore, lacks clear delineation in *both* social and discursive histories of the Russian worker-*intelligenty*.

In terms of historical and biographical *writings*, it is clear that the sorts of questions so far asked have been inadequate to the subject at hand. The question of the construction of a narrative and a (personal; biographical) identity through writing forgets the conditions (or categories) through which the personal story and any 'historical facts' contained within it became valuable for the author and for other individuals or groups. The question of a subject's formation *by* narratives, following discursive rules, forgets that 'categories' and 'subjects' were given before any kind of documentation (not to say before 'discourses' generally). More importantly, both miss the fundamental distinctions made *in documents* between historical and ahistorical things, and the way these two realms of social being, thought, and experience relate (and were made to relate) to each other. The possibility of becoming 'a person' with a particular biography, or a particular political or moral 'subject,' was not open to everyone. Categories of political thought and their practices excluded many (or most) people from becoming 'people' for history or 'subjects' for discourse and its analysts. For many, a 'place in history' was secured only by appearing to those with the power of documentation *as* the categories of the other's political thought. Further, both questions ignore the conditions under which 'history' - as a description of a particular event or set of events, or ideas, or people, and their interconnections - and the 'subject' - defined as a bearer of rights, duties, responsibilities, or a source of knowledge or perception or a perspective, or as a potential actor, agent or cause of something - either breaks through, or is suspended within, or (depending on one's initial attitude to 'people' and 'events') is repressed by, a mode of documentation that has no special interest in unique 'histories' or unique 'subjects,' or, at least, understands reality by splitting apart what is 'historical' and 'unique' in it from what is 'ahistorical' - e.g. the perception of an event or person as the expression of a social nature or function; the sense that there is a stable 'order of things' that needs to be protected and reproduced; the idea that one's own actions are reflections or expressions of a fundamental conflict or division in society which is more basic than one's own 'expression' of it.

Fundamental limits are imposed by the documentary records on the way in which certain individuals or (posited) groups can be studied. The notion that what survives in documentary form is largely contingent captures a part of what the historian is faced with: no *overall* system of thought or institutional regulation organised and decided what would enter the archive. And,

indeed, the same can be said of the written records at the time of their composition and original preservation: there were significant contingencies and freedoms in the content, form and survivability of documents, and these do not necessarily reflect the interests, ideas, and problems faced by a society or social group. (Thus, the problem of the relation of the worker-*intelligent* and his writings to the wider social groups to which he belonged legally, culturally, politically: the group of politicised workers; the revolutionary movement and its fractions; the ‘working-class’ as they and others understood it; the Russian *narod* as they and others understood it; Russian society, etc.). Still, would anyone deny that the so-called ‘educated classes’ in Russia – in the widest terms, the literate; more specifically, those formally educated and belonging to one or other of the legal categories beside the *krest’ianstvo* and the *meshchanstvo* – donated the weightiest bundles of material into the hands of the publishers, the ‘politicals,’ and future archivists? For the nineteenth century, documents on the social groups outside of this minority are huge, complex, and enormously rich. But, they are documents overwhelmingly of the educated classes, composed for a variety of purposes that were not, generally, those of the ‘peasants’ or the ‘petit bourgeoisie’ (‘workers,’ master workers, child assistants, etc.) in the towns and villages. The majority of the population in nineteenth century Russia were illiterate or semi-literate peasants. The industrial and urban workers were largely drawn from the peasantry. Most documentation of their lives and thoughts were mediated by people and institutions of the Russian educated classes – especially professional writers, publicists, the government and its agents - or to educated people from abroad. It is acknowledged that the ‘cultural chasm’¹ between the educated classes and the peasantry (or *narod*) was mirrored in a documentary record heavily skewed toward the educated, the properly literate, and those institutions for which the literacy and education of its members were understood as characteristic.²

It is the tendency of historians to look at blank spaces, relatively indeterminate and abstract descriptions of people, groups and events as unfortunate (and more or less contingent) limits imposed by past documentary practice, by the skewed interests of past authors or institutions,

¹ D. Moon, *Russian Peasants and Tsarist Legislation on the Eve of Reform: Interaction between the Peasants and Officialdom, 1825-1855* (London, 1992), p. 10, 19-20; C. D. Worobec, ‘Reflections on Customary Law and Post-reform Peasant Society’, *Russian Review*, vol. 44 (1985), p. 25; M. Confino, ‘Russian Customary Law and the Study of Peasant Mentalités’, *Russian Review*, vol. 44 (1985), p. 36; M. Perrie, ‘Folklore as Evidence of Peasant Mentalité: Social Attitudes and Values in Russian Popular Culture’, *Russian Review*, vol. 48, no. 2 (1989), p. 120-1.

² Y. Kotsonis, *Making Peasants Backward: Agricultural Cooperatives and the Agrarian Question in Russia, 1861-1914*, Basingstoke, 1999), p. 2-3; Perrie, ‘Folklore as Evidence,’ p. 120.

by the accidents of archiving, and so on. The limits are acknowledged so as to get round them as best as possible. I would suggest a different approach: that the historian might take the 'social chasm' in Russian society - at first primarily in its documentary form, later in intellectual and social forms (where permissible) - not as a limit to knowledge about the way things 'were' for the 'silent masses,' but as an indication of *what they actually were* 'in' and 'for' significant parts of Russian society. This will allow us to show how the many exclusions of the worker-*intelligent* from his milieu - culturally (in his own sense of being different from the other peasants and workers), politically and legally (in being exiled for participation in propaganda, forbidden organisations, etc), historiographically (in being judged by historians to be other than a worker by dint of education, literacy, political thought), and personally (in being treated in a certain way according to one's occupation and legal status, whatever his own claims about his actions; in having to eschew his own personality in favour of a collective; in being identified as 'the whole working-class') - followed from the categorisation of reality under the autocracy, and the reproduction of those categories (though often in inverted form) by the revolutionary activists and thinkers (including the worker-*intelligenty* themselves) who documented their lives.

Large sections of the documentary record - especially those composed and preserved by representatives of the Russian state - are concerned with structures, ideas, and social essences that are thought *not* to change, as such, but only to 'reveal themselves' in particular people, events, experiences, moments, or processes. Many documents - whether in their formal language (closely connected to received knowledge and procedures) or their treatment of a subject matter (drawing on an ideology and its categories) - are hardly unique in themselves, except in being 'placed' in history by those most accurate and least substantial of markers - calendar time and the name of an author. What is true of these documents is often true also of the events, people and social groups being described in them. The description and explanation of peasants' or workers' disorders unfold according to an *a priori* understanding of how disorders came about and who the major culprits for inciting disorders were, with similarly *a priori* concepts of the 'popular nature' and individual 'wilfulness' or 'ill-intent' brought into play at key points in the explanation. For many of those identified as 'workers' or 'peasants' (or, indeed, as 'students,' or the 'sons of merchants' or the 'daughters of noblemen'), little is left to historians but a passing mention, a name, a bare gesture, a list of legal or social categories. Others are merely posited as individuals by being numbered, along with the others,

in relation to some event, or action, or object, or idea ('400 peasants refused to allow the land surveyor entry to X's estate, and resisted the attempts of the local police to reason with them'). Others are, for the historian, individuals only in theory, their actions or ideas having been recorded as those of a 'crowd' or 'multitude' (*tolpa*), a mob (*chërn*), or 'the people' (*narod*). In contrast, even the passing mention - by name or by a physical description - of a peasant, worker, student, once or at several points in the documentation, suggests this was a *person*, or at least an individual, for author(s) of that document. This is often the case when dealing with the reports of the police on a disorder, the gendarme or one of their agents on a workers' circle, in students and workers' testimonies to the police, and in memoirs published by the revolutionaries. There were, of course, other figures who were lavished with attention on both sides of the divide, building up webs of references and cross-references to themselves in various obscure documents, and often leaving voluminous writings of their own. Thus, during the 1850s and 1860s, Herzen, Bakunin, Mikhailov, Chernyshevskii, Pisarev and a few others were referenced regularly in state documentation regarding 'sedition' and even (though much more rarely) in reports on peasants and workers' disorders. Ishutin, his secret organisation (*Ad*, 'Hell'), Karakozov, and Nechaev became key reference points in the documentation of 'sedition' in the late 1860s and early 1870s. All these figures left writings of their own apart from, and in contrast to, those left by their friends, comrades, the Western European authorities, and the Russian government. Here, the individual appears to the historian more or less as a given and readily identifiable reference point, without undue positing by means of analogies, metaphors, or intuitions of individuals 'behind' categories.

Acknowledgement of the documentary limits imposed upon historians in their pursuit of working class experience, thought, and particular workers' lives or biographies returns us to an ill-defined, intuitive, but nevertheless *given* division between the extremes of description, blurred in its middle but well defined at the far edges, that correlates with the big divisions in Russian society. It is obvious - even accepting the radical critique of the notion of the person or a reduction of the person to a sort of mute point created and sustained by repeated documentary references - that the extent and manner of the documentation of some people's lives makes biographical study more or less viable and meaningful for historians. Further, it is acknowledged by historians (the fact would be hard to deny) that, in mid-to-late nineteenth century Russia, people ascribed to some social or legal categories had a much greater chance of becoming 'people' for documented history (even in the bare sense of being a name or an empty

point around which attributed characteristics and events and thoughts revolved and found some nominal commonality) than others. Now, in isolation these have been and still are virtual truisms for those engaged in the study of the Russia working class, the peasantry, and other groups, who were (more or less) without literacy and (more or less) part of oral rather than written cultures through most of the nineteenth century. But the prosaic fact - the limits on historical knowledge of Russian workers and peasants - becomes more meaningful when placed beside the (admittedly tentative) historical-historiographical connections already identified in the study of the social revolutionary movement and the early worker-revolutionaries. If the appearance of some radical workers in the records as well as their ability and manner of 'speaking' about themselves was demonstrably connected with social revolutionary thought and practice, is it not obvious that patterns of discrimination in the manner of description of individuals and groups in documents other than those of the revolutionaries and radical workers was informed by the social and intellectual structures that deemed documentation necessary, and a certain means of composing it preferable? We could suggest further that, just as 'speaking,' the worker's 'speaking for himself,' and more basically, documentation of workers' acts of self-possession or freedom, were *integral* to social revolutionary thought and practice, that documentation more generally was integral to the way that other groups, institutions, or social systems developed over time, understood themselves, or reproduced themselves. An examination of the Russian government's documentation of the revolutionary movement, and even more of peasant and workers' disorders or disturbances, lends credence to the idea that documentation and description of certain kinds of people in and through given social categories - with the extent of their abstraction or generality quite systematically connected to the ideal social order the autocracy wanted to create or protect - were both the reflection *and* the instrument for reproducing that order and those categories outside of 'thought' or language.

If it is possible, then, for an historian to ask biographical questions about *particular* people (including our 'radical workers' of the 1870s), and also possible to *answer* these questions in some meaningful way, on the basis of documentation related specifically to an individual, then to a great extent this is determined by the brute fact, the manner, and the frequency of his entry into the documentary records precisely *as* a particular person, whose existence was marked then as unique, and whose unique existence was considered by someone or other (some institution, authority or group) to be worthy of note. It is clear, in this regard, that Alekseev's 'place in history,' as a particular person with a unique existence, was earned because of his arrest, his

trial and his exile. Once he had been recognised as different from the other peasants and workers, meriting attention as an individual, then certain kinds of documentation with certain kinds of emphases were produced in investigating, prosecuting and observing him. It is equally clear that Alekseev's physical and 'essential' exclusion from the Russian working-class (both as he and the autocracy understood it) was an important influence not only on the content of his speech and letters, but also in their acquisition of historical importance or value for the revolutionary movement. During Alekseev's lifetime and beyond, active *exclusion* - not just education, literacy, a perception of cultural difference, or some more or less subjective sense of 'identity' - was key to Alekseev's 'becoming a person' for history and, indeed, for historians. Questions of how, for instance, a worker represents or constructs his life or experiences through 'categories' and 'narratives,' or of how a 'subject' is formed by a narrative within a determinate system of language, begin at the point where the 'biography' or the 'subject' is *already* a meaningful, documentary reference point or entity for historians, and this possibility has been determined by the 'documentary practice' or, in the broadest sense, the standards of historiography and political judgements within and by which the sources used by historians were composed. The appropriate question is, then:

What were the conditions in which people, events, relationships, objects, etc. were recognised as a 'unique' or 'particular' in documentary history, and what was the relation between this recognition and (other) categories or systems of thought, ideologies and concepts?

This give a better starting point for the examination of the relationship between particulars (people, events, experiences), categories (linguistic, discursive, social), and their existence (for us) as historical things, i.e. in or as documents. And these are the problems that have appeared in the study of the early Russian worker-revolutionaries, both as historical questions and as historiographical-methodological ones.

II

A study taking up this problem would then examine and explain the 'economies of history' that made the entry of workers into the documentary records *as particulars* (individuals or persons) necessary and/or possible within the given social-intellectual systems of their time, including

those of the Russian autocracy and the social-revolutionary groups of which workers were or had been a part. The term 'economy of history' has not been used before; neither have the distinctions made in documents between historical and ahistorical things become a subject for historical enquiry. The question of the extent of the 'historicity' of things (the extent of their historical 'definition'; the attribution of this quality to those things given by thought or experience; its actual meaning in documents; the relation of this quality and of its attribution to things to the wider social and intellectual contexts) has not been understood so far to be a question for historians, nor even for historiographers. By 'economies of history' I mean to indicate not only the structured ways in which things were documented in the past and thereby made into 'history,' but more specifically the particular system of thought or practice that informed judgements about the actual *historicity* or 'ways of existing' of those things actually perceived, conceptualised, experienced, or remembered by those people and groups in a position to document them.

The study of 'economies of history' is, in the first place, a study of *documentation*, understood as the process whereby social reality was represented, 'written down' and preserved. The word 'documentation' is used specifically for two reasons: firstly, as a reminder that something is actually being written about, described, analysed, represented, manifested, or exemplified in the sources, and that those who documented it had a 'primary' relation to it while we, as historians, do not. That this 'something' (whether experience, intention, a social system, an intellectual system) is now gone and survives for us only in objective form is already implied in the word 'document.' The extent to which a document was actually related to something *external* to language should be a matter for investigation rather than an *a priori* judgement. This brings us to the second point: that 'documentation' was, in the past, both an active and a passive process. A poem, a propaganda leaflet, and a memoir are all possible documents *for us*, but not all were equally *intended* as documents when they were written. Identification of the extent of *the intention to document*, whether this intention belonged to an author, an institution, or an habitual action or procedure, is revealing both of an attitude to the world and, perhaps, to oneself *as* historical and the document's more or less conscious response to the world and what it 'presented.' There is an *economy* of history is so far as judgements are made regarding the extent of a thing's singularity or generality in relation to 'history': these judgements imply a sort of distribution or marshalling of the power to recognise and document things as historical. They are manifest determinately and empirically by the manner in which things are described,

narrated, explained, gestured to, posited or repressed in documents. Lastly, it is an economy of *history* because people, events, moments, experiences, etc., etc. are described and documented in such a way as to indicate their ‘historicity,’ whether in a black-and-white judgement (‘history’ and ‘ahistory’) or in relative terms according to the given system of thought and practice informing judgements. This overcomes some of the major problems identified in previous historians’ studies of the Russian worker-*intelligenty*. The study of the autocratic and revolutionary ‘economies of history’ over time allows us to face the documentary records directly without emphasising, *a priori*, either their common (linguistic/terminological, stylistic, substantial, ‘poetic’) structures or abstractions, or such particular or unique entities that might be suggested by ‘common sense’ or by the documents themselves (people, subjects, experiences, perceptions, events).

In different economies of history, ‘history’ could mean different things: who or what was judged to be ‘historical,’ and to what extent, depended on the social or intellectual structures that informed it. What ‘history’ and the ‘historical’ actually meant, and how it was recognised or attributed to things within any particular economy of history, is an aspect of what that economy of history was and how it worked. It was sometimes the case that the extent of the ‘historicity’ of a thing was determined by the extent of its perceived or documented *singularity*, with ‘history,’ as such, considered then to be those people or sets of people, or events, or groups, or conflicts (or whatever) in the past that were recognisably unique and unrepeatable; the ‘ahistorical’ was then, in contrast, those events and people and groups perceived and documented more or less as instances of some principle, law, essence, state of affairs, or order of things. In practical terms this meant that, in a social or intellectual system, history was already associated with what was definite, determinate, and unique, and that this judgement was reproduced and/or reinforced by perceptions and descriptions of things as historical or ahistorical. In the autocratic ‘economy of history,’ at least up until the appearance of ‘worker-intelligent,’ this division of the historical and ahistorical, and the concomitant tendency to describe things according to it, was extremely systematic, with class divisions playing a major role in applying the judgement in practice and in transforming it into documentation. This is especially true in regards to individuals and personhood, in which a given social role (for instance, ‘Tsar’ or ‘peasant’) was closely associated with the extent of personhood (the Tsar being seen as conscious, free, and so in essence self-determining and ‘singular’; the peasant seen as instinctive or ‘passionate’, close to nature, communal, and so in essence indeterminate

and ‘plural’) and with ‘history’ as that which was dynamic and changing (the Tsar was the agent of Russian history, the peasants – the *narod* - were the bearers of Russia’s ahistorical ‘essence’). Conversely, there were systems of thought and practice that understood ‘history’ quite differently. This had evident effects on their own documentation of things and their own ‘economies of history.’ In the intellectual and radical circles of the 1830s and 1840s, for instance, under the combined influence of German philosophy and the autocratic social system in which they lived, ‘history’ was understood as the realm in which Reason manifested itself. It was the assumption of many of those thinkers later to become radicals (Herzen; Bakunin), following Hegel, that the finite world of things was Reason ‘objectifying itself’ in matter, and that the truth of *particular* things was in their concept, e.g. their ideal form, or the aspect of them that was Universal. Human beings, however, were to have a special place in the finite expression of Reason: as both Schelling and Hegel argued, they would be ‘individuals’ in so far as they grasped the movements of Reason and made themselves a part of it. The documentary consequence was a very pronounced tendency to explore and express the subjective as a means of self-development towards ‘individuality,’ notable not only in correspondence and diaries, but also in the growth of a sort of autobiographical tradition along the lines of Goethe’s *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. The notion of individuality as a unique balancing of Reason and Nature was also (by Hegel especially) extended to nations, so that Europe (e.g. Germany, France and England) were understood to be ‘historical,’ and other areas or regions (the African continent and Far-Eastern sub-continent) treated as ‘ahistorical’: the former expressing in dynamic form the unfolding of Reason in the historical and political spheres, the latter still too much embroiled in Nature and ‘particularity’ to be considered part of its development. The important question for Russian intellectuals of whether Russia was a ‘Western’ or ‘Eastern’ nation, or whether or not it was ‘historical’ or ‘ahistorical’ in nature, can in part be traced back to this idea. Further, it was also the case that a person’s capacity to become an ‘individual’ was judged in Fichte, Schelling, Schiller and Hegel according to their ‘estate’ or ‘class.’ Though this is an understudied aspect of their philosophies, it was nevertheless extremely important from the point of view of the Russian intellectual’s attitudes to the government and to the social hierarchy in the 1830s and 1840s, and even more so to the development of social-revolutionary thought and practice. The association of universality, history and the proletariat, oft-noted in Marx’s early works, was repeated (thought not because of any direct influence) by the Russian radicals. What this signified was an attribution to the ‘collective,’ to ‘society,’ or to a particular part of it of the dynamism and historicity that had once been the property of Reason and ‘expressed’ by the

person in becoming 'individual.' The intelligentsia were convinced that, behind their own concepts, there was something more: real people, real events, real communities, whose lives and aspirations could be grasped through contact and through 'experience,' yet their own 'turn to the *narod*' was predicated on the assumed correspondence between the abstract social category and the people they might meet and propagandise who they believed 'belonged' to it, shared its interests, latterly, 'expressed it' in the course of their particular lives and in their particular qualities.

III

It has been shown that past judgements and ways of describing things in terms of their degree of generality or particularity, whether this is 'essential' to what is described or merely accidental, places limits upon what present-day historians can know about nineteenth century Russian society and its members. Many millions of people made no personal mark on the documentary records whatsoever; many thousands who *did* make it into documents were treated, more or less, as units in collectives (part of a 'crowd' or 'mass,' for instance), or as individual instances of social categories (this or that 'peasant,' or 'worker,' or 'student'). That some people did enter into documents as individual people – that those in a position to document their history attributed enough significance to their particular lives to collect their biographical information, relate their actions or thought specifically to certain events, to describe their appearance, to think and write about their 'inner life' or soul – provides documentary grounds for the assumption that those others excluded or referenced only indeterminately were also 'people.' This does not change the fact that they are historical people *for us* only theoretically. Still, the realist assumption that there *were* individual people beyond documentation, and that they were passed over and/or excluded from it, *should* be retained by historians. Every approach so far examined has anyhow found it necessary to invoke a 'reality behind the documents' - however critical its attitude to a supposedly 'bourgeois' or 'Hobbesian' belief in individuals or subjects before language - in order to make itself intelligible. However, I think it useful to entertain the possibility that these people, described indeterminately or categorically and so only *for us* 'theoretically' individual, were not only *represented in documents* as indeterminate, but were also *perceived, treated* and actually *were* indeterminate from the point of view of a particular social system and its related 'economy of history.' The historians' description of 'masses' or 'classes' or 'groups' could then be understood as *valid* in so far as it re-presented an historical

reality already made categorical by documentation and by the systems of authority and power of which they were a part. The retention of the 'individual' behind such descriptions allows that such indeterminacy in the description and/or perceived existence of things, as it appears in documents, can indeed be understood as a kind of indeterminacy (that there *was* a determinate thing, or moment, or person, or viewpoint behind it, or repressed by it, or in conflict with it). It also allows that the description of a categorised reality - having presented itself then *as* 'empirically' or 'positively' categorical, and having created limits or boundaries in people's lives that were external to them and seemingly 'objective' - might correlate closely to what we can now know about these people, but can still be transcended and criticised at the points where it was broken or challenged.

The worker-*intelligent*, as he appears in official documentation of 'sedition' (the revolutionary movement), is both proof of the existence of persons behind social categories and a demonstration of the social pressure to return the working man and his experiences back to the categorical reality that remained socially (if not personally) primary. The radical's designation of the worker-revolutionaries as 'worker-*intelligent*' emphasised the survival of a class position and a class essence beyond and above education; though education had been seen as a primary means to self-assertion, self-formation and 'personality' (as in the tradition of *Bildung* and the Russian *samoobrazovanie*), for the workers who *did* 'develop themselves' it designated universal, human capacity for 'freedom' and a particular role vis-à-vis the 'movement of history': the general and the necessary aspects of their lives (historical law, moral imperatives, humanity, the role of the oppressed) were emphasised over the contingent fact of these *particular* men's entry into workers circles, their desire for learning, their lucky proximity to those who offered it, and their free decision to commit themselves to revolutionary activities: their practical rejection of the social position and 'identity' they were given in social relations.

The significance of the individual worker or peasant's entry into the documentary records - whether as a ringleader of a disorder or strike, or as a revolutionary agitator - is only clear when it is remembered that their categorical or indeterminate existence was, in both the conceptual and empirical senses, *primary* for those who documented their lives, both empirically and nominally. It was only in unusual situations that the individual peasant or worker would emerge from the 'crowd' and be recognised as something more than a 'peasant' or 'worker.' Generally, under the autocracy, it was in or through the act of challenging an objective social position that

a working person was recognised as an individual. In the nineteenth century, the envelopment of 'the worker' or 'the peasant' in the social categories by which he was designated and to which he was thought to belong was common both to the government and to the revolutionaries. We have already begun to look at the way in which this affected social revolutionaries' ideas about the workers and peasants with whom they interacted in the 1870s and the effects of this on their actual perceptions and descriptions of those people. What should be noted, however, was that when the *intelligenty* did turn to the *narod* in the early 1860s, they turned to something that was socially real. Thinkers who invoked the concept or image of a unified class or group 'below' them referred to a social reality that was already divided up, ruled, and perceived in terms of classes. The Russian working-class - referred to variously as 'the people' (*narod*), the 'simple people' (*prostoi narod*), the 'peasantry' (*krest'iansvo*), the 'working class' (*rabochii klass*), the 'lower class' (*nizhnyi klass*), or the 'labouring class' (*klass trudiashchikh*) - was given as a reality before and outside of social-revolutionary thought. Officialdom and other recognised authorities made classes in accordance with their notions and perceptions of society. Class divisions were enforced by the autocracy and by other authorities - factory owners and managers, landlords, bailiffs, peasant or workers' 'elders,' etc - drawn upon in their search for order and morality. Social revolutionary thinkers took up these social divisions in thought, under the influence of radical literature, on the one hand, and the readily perceived 'cultural' or 'social chasm' between themselves and the *narod*, on the other. The chasm they perceived between themselves and the '*narod*' was real for them, and marked by actual limits on their behaviour, actual perceptions of things, and indeed their own sense of the distance between their 'concepts' and the reality to which they were supposed to refer.

Individual 'peasants' and 'workers' had a particular existence largely in being categorised as such: the identification of a person as a 'peasant' or 'worker' tended to emphasise the aspect of their being that was categorical or shared with many others. And this was reflective of the kind of society that the autocratic government tried to create and reproduce, including the sorts of social roles and behaviours appropriate to each group in society (including the *narod*, e.g. the peasantry, the industrial workers, the 'petit bourgeoisie'). In autocratic thought and practice, the *narod* was a body of men and women whose individual members were considered - if at all - as exemplars of the category '*narod*.' In the ideal or normal state of things, the autocracy was both intellectually and practically indifferent to diversity within the *narod*. That officialdom knew virtually nothing about its 'popular estate' except what was garnered from the censuses, from a

few statistical and/or anthropological studies, and their numerous suppressions of peasant 'crowds' in disorder, gives some idea of why individual peasants and workers would be perceived as indeterminate. This view of the *narod* was reproduced in official documentation (in the indeterminate description of the peasantry as 'crowds'), and official action and documentation helped reproduce this view and the system of relations behind it. It has been noted that the intelligentsia's turn to the '*narod*' was accompanied by a desire to overcome, through experience and action, the abstraction perceived in the categorisation. In that sense the intelligentsia grasped that its own image or concept of the '*narod*' was based on being separated from it, external to it, and that the lives of the particular people categorised as 'peasants' and 'workers' could not be exhausted in identifying them as such. On the other hand, the intention to 'acquaint themselves' with the *narod* or the working class in its 'reality' assumed that it existed outside of its relations with the authorities, independently of the external and abstract view they brought to bear on it, and beside the acts of persuasion and violence that reproduced it materially. It seems they were expecting to find a concrete 'class culture' or 'class essence,' the sort of internal qualities posited by the autocracy in its treatment of peasants and workers. When the intelligentsia did find it, it was a culture of self-education and, eventually, radicalism that they and particular workers had created in opposition to the normal order of things - a culture that marked these workers as *culturally* distinct from other workers and peasants, and served to mark them for the autocratic government as dangerously 'other' to the popular mass. It was class as a 'culture' or a logical response to particular experiences, but not a class or a social unity somehow potential or essential to all the 'members' of the '*narod*' or the working-class. But, both the autocracy and the intelligentsia found it difficult to distinguish between the two senses of what a class could be, thereby mistaking what were actions informed by, but *in opposition* to, class as an external boundary, defined entirely by the relations between groups that were understood and perceived abstractly (the 'mass' or crowd against the state or government), as so many expressions of the essence of 'popular life' and the commonality of working-class experience.

It is possible for the historian to avoid making this same mistake, while still allowing that the emergence of the worker-*intelligenty*, their treatment by the state and the intelligentsia, their self-understanding, as well as their self-description in writings, are revealing of class relations in autocratic Russia. The individuation of certain peasants and workers in the course of the suppression of collective acts of defiance, protest, or supplication, was the means by which the

autocracy saved its own concept of a *narod* whose members were, by ‘essence,’ irresponsible, without personality (e.g. self-determination), and so ‘indeterminate.’ The granting of sovereignty to the workers’ actions and the workers’ voice by the intelligentsia, though often couched in tactical terms, was also based on the notion that there was a working-class ‘essence.’ The actions of individual workers against the autocracy and their resulting exclusion or exile were understood as a proof of the more fundamental doctrine that ‘liberation’ would only come to particular workers by a popular, collective act of ‘freedom’ and ‘self-determination.’ The ‘workers’ would only achieve ‘personality’ by making themselves a part of the collective subject. Hence, neither grasped the very obvious fact that the ‘radicalised workers’ of the 1870s *chose* their actions; that their actions were meant to demonstrate to the authorities that they were *more* than just workers; that ‘being a worker’ was synonymous with *being treated* as a worker and *as nothing more than* a worker; and that this treatment or perception of them as ‘just workers’ denied them even the modest freedoms, and the modest sense of individuality, of which their own particular perceptions and particular actions were *proof*. That this fact came to be expressed in terms of a ‘class essence’ by the authorities, the intelligentsia, and the radicalised workers themselves was due to fact that class divisions were socially real - that the practical abstraction (‘classification’) imposed upon those designated as ‘peasants’ and ‘workers’ by their everyday relations with the authorities (including the landlords, *fabrikanty*, and ‘the state’) *presented* the ‘working people’ or the ‘*narod*’ as really indeterminate, as really ‘a mass.’ Peasants and workers themselves, in moments of contact or conflict with the authorities, might actively present themselves in this way also, either as a tactic, or by necessity, or (perhaps) in a collective expression and embodiment of what was objectively (socially) true for them in their particular society. Hence it is only natural that, when they are referred to as ‘peasants’ or ‘workers,’ that this comes to signify not only their ascribed place in Russian society (as submissive and dutiful ‘producers’) but also ‘what they were.’ This is reflected in documentation of the time, in the uncritical use of the same terms in historical analyses, and in the more recent problems of squaring our intuitive identification of ‘workers,’ ‘peasants,’ ‘*intelligenty*,’ etc. with the notion that being a worker was a ‘subjective identity,’ a state of mind, or a discursive fact, rather than a social relation that could not be attacked or criticised without consequences.³

³ The first part of such a study is included below (see Chp. 9: ‘Appendix G.’)

9. Appendix G

Workers, Peasants and the Autocratic Economy of History

Popular disorders, 1825 - April, 1861

I. Introduction

The enraged man always appears as the gang leader of his own self, giving his unconscious the order to pull no punches, his eyes shining with the satisfaction of speaking for the many he is himself. The more someone has espoused the cause of his own aggression, the more perfectly he represents the repressive principle of society. In this sense more than in any other, perhaps, the proposition is true that the most individual is the most general.

- T. W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 45

On the night of the 3-4th of June, 1924 Semën Volkov, hospitalised and on his death bed, dictated stories from his life to a young man, a fellow worker at the factory of the Embanest Trust, Gu'rev (Kaluga *oblast*), who was lying ill nearby.¹ Before his death on the night of the 5th, Volkov related among other incidents the story of a disturbance that took place in the week before the Easter holidays of 1872, at a workshop and depot on the Saratov-Moscow railway where, alongside other skilled metal-workers and a larger group of 'navvies' (*zemlikopa*), he worked for a time as a machinist (*slesar*). The workers had been told that they would not receive their pay before the Easter holidays. After violent outbursts turned to muted disappointment, the workers – at Volkov's direction - responded by arresting the manager (*nachal'nik*) of the rolling stock. The Soviet historian E. A. Korol'chuk writes, 'their demand - to receive their wages before the holidays – was conceded.'² However, shortly after this, Volkov and another worker, a certain 'comrade Phillipov,' were asked by their employers to leave and find work elsewhere. It was clear to Volkov, fifty or so years later, that his dismissal was due to the leading role he had played in forcing the employers to pay the workers' wages. (Volkov, Appx. B: 281-3).

Prior to his employment in Saratov, Volkov had worked in one of the textiles factories near Simbirsk, close to his home village of Stanichnii, then at an iron foundry (he does not specify which or where) in the city itself and, after a period learning to build and repair steam engines at the *Kavkaz i Mercuri* Society's shipbuilding plant in Kazan', spent at least four years working in the workshops of railways then being built in and around Saratov, Moscow, and St. Petersburg. It was in the capital, in the early 1870s, that Volkov came into contact with the *chaikovskii* circle, other radical intelligenty, and what he called in his memoir the 'flower of the

¹ *VNP*, p. 379, ft. 1; see also E. A. Korol'chuk, *Severnyi Soiuz Russkikh Rabochikh i Revoliutsionnoe rabochee dvizhenie 70-kh godov XIX v. v Peterburge* (Moscow, 1971), p. 5-6.

² *RDSG*, p. 118.

city's workers' - the 'intellectually developed,' self-educated men who would be recognised a few years later as the first 'worker-intelligenty.' (Ibid: 280). This was not, however, Volkov's first contact with radical ideas, or with the radicalised Russian intelligentsia, nor with the 'worker question' (*rabochii vopros*) as he understood it. 'The poverty of my parents forced me, when I was still young, into work at the linen-spinning factory [*fabrika*],' Volkov wrote:

There, at 17 years of age, I began to study the worker question [*stal izuchat' rabochii vopros*]. For me, the life of the workers [at this factory] seemed so poor, both materially and spiritually, that I could not work there more than six months. Later, I moved to the town of Simbirsk, in order to learn the metal-working trade. Having studied for two years, I entered as an employee of an iron-foundry. (Ibid: 281)

Volkov was one of those serf-children fortunate enough not only to receive, but also to benefit from the instruction given haphazardly by the Orthodox Church, having already learnt to read and write by the time of his entry into the linen-spinning factory. It was probably his literacy, supplemented perhaps by connections through compatriots (*zemliaki*) to other factories nearby (his father was one of the many serfs who had supplemented or replaced agricultural labour with the artisanal or industrial, having been a joiner by trade), that made his move to Simbirsk and an apprenticeship in metalworking possible. This was in the very early 1860s, in the midst of industrial expansion, the Emancipation, and the partial reorganisation of administrative and property relations between the nobility and the peasantry. It was also the period in which the earliest, overtly social-revolutionary society – the first *Zemlia i Volia* (1861-64) – was being formed, and hesitant attempts made to follow Herzen's calls to 'go to the people.'³ The combination of the historical conjuncture and Volkov's own background and character (a young, literate, now skilled peasant-worker) made him open to the advances of radicals, then intent on educating and organising the *narod* to spread the message of the uprising (*bunt*):

In 1863 the great political trial of Professor Shchapov was taking place in Kazan. Nikolai Gavrilovich Orlov approached us...[and] quickly organised out of us - eight working men - a Society for the propaganda of collective ideas. The first thing he organised was a Consumers' Society. Later he concentrated on developing us into propagandists of social ideas. Having lived with us for a year, he began to say that 'we could now go off to the

³ 'Iskander' [A. I. Herzen], 'Ispolin prosypaetsia,' (dated October 22, 1861), *Kolokol*, no. 110, (November 1, 1861), p. 918: 1. (*Kolokol* is reprinted in the collection: *Kolokol: Gazeta A. I. Gertsen i N. P. Ogarev: vol'naia russkaia tipografii, 1857-1867: London-Zheneva*, I. V. Nechkin (ed.), (Moscow, 1962). Volumes of this collection are delineated by year. The pagination is continuous across volumes. Hereafter, references to articles in *Kolokol* will give the original date and number (*list*) of the particular issue cited, with page and column numbers to this collection of reprints).

four corners of Russia' and propagate social ideas. Later we parted with him, and many of us dispersed ourselves around the country.

(Ibid: 281)

When Volkov was interrogated for the first time after his arrest in April, 1874, Orlov's 'Consumer Society' was remembered to Volkov by the gendarmes. It seems they suspected what Volkov denied during his questioning, but admitted in his memoir: that it had been a 'secret society' or, at least, a 'society' formed to cover for activities that had to be kept secret from the government. Yet, whatever the influence of the Orlov or the radical *intelligenty*, Volkov's story is clearly not one having been 'manipulated' by educated radicals into illegal and immoral activities, as the authorities would later suppose. He was, after all, already 'studying the worker question' when seventeen and employed in the local textiles industry, long before his contact with students and revolutionaries.

In the 1850s and 1860s, the 'worker question' was already a practical one for the Russian authorities. The 'spiritual and material poverty' of the industrial workers was readily contrasted, by those informed of such matters, to the conditions of agricultural labourers in the countryside. It was not so much that the urban workers were a new species for the authorities, or even that they were seen to be essentially different from the peasantry. The vast majority (almost all) the newly-hired industrial labourers, whether in factories (*fabriki*) and plants (*zavody*) in the cities, on construction sites in the ports, on a fast expanding rail network, or attached to some rural manufactory (the so-called *kustar* industries) as out-workers, were peasants legally (by passport), and were still registered either with their 'home villages' or (until 1861) with the office of their estate in the city. It was the great concentration of the peasants in urban areas, as well as the extremity and the visibility of the factory workers' conditions, that caused the government (and some publicists and industrialists) alarm. The serfs' past poverties and hardships were shameful in so far as they had been avoidable, but they did not follow from the condition of 'being a peasant' in and of itself. Government reform, a new generation of administrators and landlords, a legal system waiting to be freshened up by a crop of young, educated people, a renewed alliance of the autocracy and its 'natural' supporters among the landed nobility – all would help quell the arbitrariness, cruelty, laziness and neglect that resulted from years of serf-owning and the un-Christian behaviour its rhythms and relations had bred among the peasants and landlords equally. In the period 1840-80, however, the question of the *quality* of factory labour and the drawing of peasants into it was still an open one. Was it

intrinsically harmful for the 'simple people'? The peasant condition was natural, morally good, and suitable to those born into it. But what of twelve or fifteen hour days cooped within brick walls, without ventilation, proper breaks, plagued by exhaustion, illness and injury? What of the alienation from village life and labour and the salutary effects of inertia and deference they fostered? The possibility of disagreements and disturbances - relatively easy to handle in the countryside, isolated by sheer space and the apparent narrowness of the peasant imagination - breaking out in the factories, or among the rows and rows of two-storey wooden houses in the outer districts, or in the centres of the big towns? The problem of abuse and moral degradation tended to overlap with the fears regarding 'public order' in the cities; the problem of maintaining 'public order' was the most concrete of the government's duties to a wider, moral-political order of things. This latter included the protection and 'fostering' of the *narod*.

If the contrast of the peasants' and the workers' conditions were obvious to those able to look upon these problems as observers rather than direct participants, it seems safe to infer that the same sense of contrast attended to Volkov's entry into the textiles factory. Doubtless, his anonymous workmates at the factory were, or had been, aware of it as well. It is most likely that they, just like Volkov, had been drawn from the local peasant population and that they were still, either through annual returns to the village for the harvest season, or by sending money home to families or to 'their' landlord as cash dues (*obrok*), closely connected to the 'peasant' way of life, despite having been thrown into a new environment and new kinds of labour. References to the 'spiritual and material poverty' Volkov found at the factory, a poverty that drove him after only six months forever away from textiles work, is certainly reminiscent of Pëtr Alekseev's description of the 'workers' condition' and the brutalised people that these conditions created. That description had made the distinction between 'factory workers' and 'peasants' only in terms of the particular ways in which they were exploited and abused, with the basic social position of the 'working millions' still shared by peasant-workers as a whole. Yet, Volkov - according to the *Autobiography* - already felt himself to be different to the other workers at the factory. He seemed already to look upon these other workers as an 'outsider' would, and to understand himself as such - perhaps for being thoughtful or for being shocked by the conditions that they, the 'spiritually impoverished' workers, were already accustomed to. The very fact of his leaving for an apprenticeship in the 'metal working trade' and, in turn, for more skilled work in at the iron foundry in Simbirsk, evidences some awareness or sense of what was and was not tolerable *for him*.

It might be, then, that his ‘study of the worker question’ consisted, in the main, of this awareness – born of thought about the textile workers’ conditions - or at least from a sense that, in the conditions to which they were subjected, something was not right. The authorities knew of the physical and moral effects that the move from seasonal field labour to intensive factory labour produced in young peasant-workers. Volkov only entered the factory at seventeen: as an adult, more or less. Given the tendency of peasants, until at least the middle of the nineteenth century, to view education as irrelevant to peasant life and labour,⁴ or in conflict with peasant culture (they had their own kind of knowledge which was not that of the ‘lords’), or simply of too poor a standard, in its church-bound form, to promise much success for the time that would have to be devoted to it,⁵ the fact that Volkov was given enough leeway by his parents to study to a fairly high level of literacy is indicative of a life and an upbringing relatively sheltered from the widespread parental neglect mentioned by both Alekseev in 1877, and Semën Kanatchikov in relation to his childhood in the 1870s and 1880s.⁶ Volkov’s statement, otherwise difficult to square with the social and political conditions of the time, might be accepted if seen in these terms: from the perspective of a young man whose life was already different from those of many other peasants, who had not been subjected to the factory life that others had already gotten used to at an early age,⁷ and kept back from factory employment that, in its intensity, was understood as oppressive even for those who had grown up with hard, peasant labour. It may simply have been the exhaustion, the swearing and abuse, the unnaturally long days and weeks of his six months that constituted the ‘worker question’ for him, and made him more critical of the new regimes of labour then being haphazardly set in place all over Russia.

It is possible, however, that he came into contact with ‘social ideas’ in a more systematic form during the next phase of his life, whether this was through reading, or in conversation with a fellow apprentice, or with one of the skilled or ‘master’ workers (*masterovye*) who trained him into the metal-working trade (*slesarnoe remeslo*). The description given by Volkov of the time he spent at the iron foundry (short-lived, but clearly important both for his future access to

⁴ Brooks, *When Russian Learnt to Read*, p. 9-11.

⁵ For an account of village education, see Kanatchikov, *Radical Worker*, p. 3-4; for a peasant’s account of village education and parental attitudes to it, see *A Life Lived under Russian Serfdom: The memoirs of Savva Dmirtievich Purlevskii*, translated by B. B. Gorshkov (New York, 2005), p. 54-6.

⁶ Alekseev, ‘Speech,’ Appx. A: 2; Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker*, p. 1-2.

⁷ B. B. Gorshkov, ‘Factory children: an overview of Child Industrial Labor and Laws in Imperial Russia, 1840-1914,’ *New Labor History: Worker Identity and Experience in Russia, 1840-1918*, M. Melancon and A. Pate (Bloomington, 2002), p. 16-18.

employment in metalwork and for the development of his studies in the ‘worker question’) does give the impression that this was the case. While at the factory, Volkov writes, ‘all my time was taken up with the propaganda of collective ideas.’ As a still young, newly qualified machinist, Volkov’s direct experience of the ‘worker question’ was by the early 1860s imbued with a purpose, manifesting itself in Volkov’s relations with other workers (his ‘propaganda’ activities) and with ‘the boss’:

The factory boss once cursed me so coarsely when I approached him that I became utterly enraged, so much so that I grabbed up a metal rod an *arshin* in length, feeling I would smash his head in with it. But other workers had come up from behind, snatching the rod from my hands. Nonetheless, my boss didn’t dismiss me, as I was a strong worker. Having worked on for another month, I quit and left the factory.

(Volkov, Appx. B: 281)

Though the verbal abuse of workers was endemic to factory life at this time and later (becoming a major issue in many hundreds of cases of labour unrest in the years following the Emancipation)⁸ and personal antagonism towards foremen and other immediate ‘bosses’ among the workers was similarly rife, Volkov suggests that it was his ‘propaganda’ that, on this occasion, invited swearing abuse and Volkov’s reaction. Volkov had already marked himself out as ‘different’ from the other workers. But how ‘different’ was he, and in what way? There are certainly echoes of Alekseev as the 1870s’ ideal ‘developed worker’ or ‘worker-*intelligent*’ (what Soviet historians would understand as the ‘*narodnik*’ type of politicised worker). As in the Soviet treatment of Alekseev’s life and speech, and to an extent Alekseev’s presentation of the ‘working millions’ in the speech itself, Volkov here and elsewhere in the *Autobiography* presents himself as a sort of synthesis of the ‘spontaneity’ given by his lower-class upbringing and experience, and the greater awareness given by learning and thinking - the sort of ‘quasi-conscious’ structuring of ideas, attitudes and aims that comes from active thought about one’s situation. Again, Volkov *presents himself* as different from the other workers, but this time in two opposite ways: he more readily gives in to violent urges than his workmates, who hold him back from an action that will surely be disastrous for him; yet he is already engaged in the ‘propaganda of collective ideas’ – what must be Volkov’s term for the populist-socialist and proto-anarchist theories then circulating in Russia, especially among the radical *intelligenty* – that would give his violent act more significance than mere, unthinking ‘spontaneity.’ It is not

⁸ S. A. Smith, ‘The Social Meanings of Swearing: Workers and Bad Language in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia,’ *Past and Present*, No. 160 (August, 1998), especially p.183-5.

presented as mere ‘passion,’ unleashed in reaction to abuse, but proof of the absence in him of deference and the slave mentality he saw in others.

In the end, however, the ‘boss’ was willing to forgive. Volkov says this was because he was too valuable to the enterprise to be summarily dismissed. To an extent this rings true. The demands for skilled labourers (especially in the fast-developing heavy machine-, metals- and engineering industries necessary for the expansion of the rail network and the modernisation of the armed forces) was indeed high in the early 1860s,⁹ and it can be reasoned that the minor transgressions of a ‘strong worker’ (if Volkov means by this a qualified and generally reliable employee) would be passed over because of the difficulty and effort that would come from having to replace him. It was, after all, from the point of view of the ‘boss,’ only a thoughtless act, a gesture made in anger. Surely that much could be forgiven of a simple peasant-worker (even one with a big mouth)...?



1 Russian navies (*zemlikopa*) constructing a railway line (K. A. Savitskii)¹⁰

This is quite in contrast to the next incident mentioned by Volkov, the disorder at the Saratov rail depot in 1872. Having left the iron foundry, spent a period working in Kazan’, and having also been involved in Orlov’s ‘Consumer Society’ in the period between 1863 and the early 1870s, Volkov ‘ended up in Saratov,’ where

⁹ L. Haimson and C. Tilly (eds.), *Strikes, Wars and Revolution in an international perspective*, (Cambridge, 1989), p. 28-30; 380-81, 382.

¹⁰ *Ocherki Istorii russkoi kul'tury vtoroi poloviny XIX veka*, N. M. Volynkina (ed.), (Moscow, 1976), p. 333.

...a railroad from Moscow had only just been constructed. A bit later I would broadly propagate the best of my social ideas among the mass of workers who had already been brought together there.

[Then after] two years [service], something unexpected happened. During Holy Week, on the Thursday, a telegram was received from the administration of the railway in Saratov, saying that the workers would not receive their salaries by Easter, because the work was presently very urgent, and that the workers, if they received their wages, would be drunk after the two days of holiday. This so disturbed the workers that they wanted to quit work altogether, go to Saratov – two *versts* away – and ask for their salaries [from the administration]. Luckily for them, the *nachal'nik* of the track, a relatively young man of 32 years and [in charge of all the] rolling stock, was at the workshop. The workers threw themselves upon him with such hostility that they were hardly able to control themselves. Then Comrade Fillippov and I appeared, and began persuading the workers that we might settle the issue by different means. But they were so afraid that they sat down on the girders and began to weep. Then a certain smithy, Mironov, a sturdy and strong-looking lad, came running up wanting to smother the *nachal'nik*. With a bit of force, Fillippov and I managed to persuade him to hold back. When I asked the *nachal'nik* whether he would pay the wages by Easter or not (it was about 12 o'clock at this point), he said to me: 'If you spare my life, then everyone will get paid.' We said, 'Your life is secure; but still, we're going to arrest you.'

He was sat down in the large hall of the workshop and the young lads were made to keep an eye on him. He called the clerk from the administration and began to hand out the salaries for the two days [of Easter] to the workers. This carried on until two o'clock in the morning.

When the wages had all been handed out, he went over to the door and said, 'The bad sheep must be sorted from the flock' [*Ia vse-taki durnuiu ovtsy vydernu iz stada*]. This was intended for Fillippov and me. Sure enough, after Easter, Fillippov and I were asked to leave the railway. (Ibid: 281-2)

As if to give him the chance to 'do his stuff,' the employer's presumptuous decision to save the peasant-workers from the binge traditional to the festivities before Lent (a little bit of paternalism to cover up the fear of probable losses to production that hangovers and sickness would entail, *for them*, on the days after) offered Volkov the moment to apply an already strong awareness of the 'worker question' to a practical manifestation of the abuses the 'question' signified for the workers themselves. Volkov stepped in just as the blunt emotions of the other workers - reduced to tears as they collapse onto the sleepers - seem to let the employers off the hook, even confirming the moral and economic reasoning for holding back the Easter wages by appearing to those with more self-possession – Volkov, Phillipov, the authorities – as what they were presumed to be: children without self-control, as helpless with the temptations of drink as with the sting of disappointment at work. What might have burned itself out in petit acts of violence ('The workers threw themselves upon him with such hostility that they were hardly able to control themselves'; 'Mironov, a sturdy and strong-looking lad, came running up

wanting to smother the *nachal'nik*) is controlled and channelled into effective action. Volkov plays the role with regards to his comrades at the rail depot that his workmates back at the iron foundry had done in order to protect *him* from his own passions ('with a bit of force, Phillipov and I managed to persuade [Mirinov] to hold back'), having already carried out the arrest and hostage of the *nachal'nik* and put the workers' demands to him, calmly, as others kept guard. No wonder Volkov and Phillipov were 'asked' to leave! What could be more dangerous than workers who could overturn the decisions and undermine the moral authority of those who hired them? A bit of scrapping and childish disorder, aimed at nothing in particular, at most driving the workers to petition the higher authorities ('...they wanted to quit work altogether, go to Saratov – two *versts* away – and ask for their salaries...'), an act that was officially forbidden by the government – in comparison to a 'strike,' this was no threat at all and, of course, it was already intelligible to employers whose given, paternal duty it was to look after the 'simple' peasant-workers.

So - having brandished in anger a two-foot metal rod over the head of 'the boss' (a foreman or manager) – why was Volkov kept on at the iron foundry? Why was he later dismissed from the Saratov railway workshop for arresting a *nachal'nik* and demanding that the workers' wages be paid up? What was it that, from the point-of-view of those authorities with the power to keep him on or dismiss him, distinguished these two acts from each other? Volkov remembers the distinction made by the Saratov *nachal'nik* between the 'bad sheep' and the rest of the 'flock.' The implication was that Volkov and Phillipov were the 'bad sheep' (*durnyu ovtsu*) and the other workers were the 'flock' (*stad*). This rather innocuous phrase, far from the routine language of Tsarist officialdom and the revolutionary propagandists of Volkov's time, still explains distinctions between the two acts that were important both to officialdom and to the revolutionaries. In so far as Volkov belonged to the 'flock,' he could be forgiven. It was in the nature of the 'flock' to follow its instincts and passions without thought or the mediation of reason. Their immoral acts were not premeditated but instinctive, just as their orderly, everyday lives were rhythmic and circular rather than dynamic. Therefore, Volkov's threat towards the 'boss' at the iron foundry was passed over. It was only a negative manifestation of 'instinct' or otherwise salutary thoughtlessness considered essential to peasant-workers' lives. Similarly, the 'flock' at the Saratov railway workshop were permitted to take their wages before Easter just as they had collectively demanded: Volkov does not mention any further reprisals or punishments for their behaviour excepting his own and Phillipov's dismissal. Clearly, what marked the actions

of Volkov and Phillipov as different from those of the other workers - the 'flock' - was thoughtfulness, even 'consciousness': not in the sense of having planned a 'strike' or 'disturbance' in some ordered way, with goals and means of achieving them decided beforehand (clearly their actions were still *reactions* to the employers decision to withhold wages), but in the much more basic sense of inserting thought and speech into a space between passion and action. For the 'flock,' these were one, unmediated 'moment.' Faced with a violent and emotional crowd of workers, reacting quickly, instinctively and ineffectively to events, Volkov and Phillipov became the mediators between the barely articulated desires of the 'flock' and the actual achievement of those desires. It was this that made the minor fractures in the employers' authority possible (or so it seemed to the *nachal'nik*). It was the thinking people, those who had, at least, signified to the authorities a premeditation and thoughtfulness deemed alien to the 'flock,' and were therefore were held to answerable for the disorderly actions of *all* the peasant-workers.

Volkov himself makes no explicit connections between these two events, and does not try to draw a general picture of the Russian government or the wider authorities from the incidents he records. He makes no specific interpretation of Russian society and its workings, and certainly does not explicitly draw upon, mention or bring into play any specific social 'schema' or ideological explanation for these events. Note also that Volkov does not mention the intervention of the police, gendarmes or any other representative of the government in the disturbance at the railway depot where he was briefly employed. Evidently, neither the local police nor the provincial government intervened in this incident. Now, the role of the autocratic government in repressing popular disorders and disturbances, in mediating between employers and workers, and in documenting the results is well known to historians of the Russian peasants' and workers' movements. Though the legal press and the revolutionary journals had, by 1872-4, begun to receive regular information about and report on disturbances among workers (sources which are used extensively in Korol'chuk's supplementary notes),¹¹ the bulk of *Raboochee dvizhenie v semidesiatikh godov XIX veke (The Workers' Movement in the 1870s, 1934)* consists of government reports, communiqués, memoranda, and notes. Still, of all the strikes and disturbances mentioned in Korol'chuk's *RDSG*, the Saratov disturbance (*volnenie*) is the *only* one included with a worker's memoir as its *only* source.¹² Among the hundreds of

¹¹ *RDSG*, p. 92-3; 117-9, 136-7, 170, etc.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 118.

government or government-sponsored documents included in A. M. Pankratova's later, more extensive collection *Rabochee Dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke (The Russian Workers' Movement in the Nineteenth Century, 1950)*, there are no other sources related to this incident.¹³ Thus, we are left with something quite rare in the records of the workers' movement of the 1870s: the testimony of a self-identified 'radical worker' regarding disturbances and conflicts amongst workers that are not documented elsewhere in the records, cannot be *directly* compared to an official or 'intelligent' narrative or report on the same incident, and were not written in response to such a pre-existing written narrative or record; it is not easily related to the ideas or ideologies of the revolutionary groups of the 1870-80s when these events took place, or those of the 1920s when he dictated his memoir; it is also notable for the absence of the languages (terminology; 'grammars') of these groups, using terms and a structure in his writing that provide no easy connections to revolutionary ideologies. Because of this, it is possible to show that Volkov grasped in his writing – and from the perspective of his experience of Russian society and Russian working-class life in the 1860s and 1870s - a *social relation* that was central to the definition and reproduction of both, without, however, going out of his way to describe it. He did this also without drawing directly upon the particular languages and systems of thought of Russian officialdom, of other authorities (landlords, factory owners, foremen, etc.), or the revolutionaries of the 1860s and 1870s (or of the 1920s, when his *Autobiography* was written). This social relation, dividing up peasants and workers into 'individuals' and 'masses,' was linked closely to the very principles of the autocratic system of things and the class system that was central to the autocratic *raison d'etat*. That it went far beyond the government, its direct representatives and its particular 'official language' to other social authorities tells us something about the importance of this social relation in the constitution of the 'state' and about the perceptions and given 'place' of peasants and workers in this state as well.

The statement of the *nachal'nik* (as Volkov remembers it) sums up in metaphorical form a social relation between (peasant)-workers and the given authorities (landlords, employers, the government) that was characteristic of the nineteenth century autocracy. It is one of the best documented facts in the history of Russian workers and peasants' movements that the autocracy tended to ascribe the immediate cause of disorders among the 'simple people' to 'ringleaders' (*zachinshchiki*; sing: *zachinshchik*) or 'agitators' (*podstrekatelia*, sing: *podstrekatel'*), with

¹³ The relevant volume would be *RD* 2.i, the 1872-4 section, p. 308-511.

those other peasants or workers involved in disorders or disturbances referred to as a ‘crowd’ or ‘multitude’ (*tolpa*). The ringleaders who had ‘caused’ peasant disorders were subject to the most direct forms of punishment at the hands of the authorities – arrest and interrogation, public flogging, or prosecution and sentences of surveillance, imprisonment and exile.¹⁴ The ‘crowd’ (depending on their willingness to return to order, to work or to honouring prior arrangements broken), after this division had been made, were left relatively unscathed.¹⁵ Different kinds of intention and influence were attributed to peasants or peasant-workers depending on their perceived role in certain incidents and the moral-political meaning of their actions, whether these were mere threats of violence or full-blown disorders or riots. Note that, in the second half of the 1870s, worker-revolutionaries still recognised this treatment as *their* reality, and as a reality for the wider labour movement that they saw forming around them. For Pëtr Alekseev, the habitual identification and punishment of the ‘ringleaders’ of strikes was one sign that the Emancipation had failed, and that the entry into the Russian factories did not mean the treatment of ‘hired-workers’ as anything more than peasants, as serfs:

If we are forced by the capitalist to leave the factory and demand higher rates, because of a change in the quality of the materials or the because we are oppressed by fines and deductions, and we are accused of rioting, and forced to return to work at the end of the soldier’s bayonet, and some are called ringleaders and exiled to some distant region – that means we’re serfs! (Alekseev, Appx. A: 279).

Pëtr Moiseenko, a radical worker well-known for his role in the ‘Morozov Strike’ of 1885, but by then already a veteran of the workers circles of the late 1870s and of the St. Petersburg textiles strikes of 1878-9, worked a mention of the ‘ringleaders’ into a revolutionary song of 1879. Apparently this song, *Tkachi (Weavers)* was intended not only as tub-thumping propaganda, but also as a warning about the likely consequences of going on strike:

Brothers, boldly / in one voice, cry *urrah!* / As the cry rings out/ leave the factory/ and we’ve got a strike/ Be bold, stick together/ when the gendarmes come/ and round us all up/ and drag us to jail/ one by one/ And when they ask us/ “Which of you are the ringleaders?”/

¹⁴ Discounting here the numerous, often ‘indirect’ or, from the legal point of view, informal collective punishments meted out to rebellious peasants: first and foremost the billeting of soldiers in villages and towns which had resisted ‘peaceful’ measures of suppression (see Field, ‘Year of Jubilee,’ p. 43); in some (relatively) rare cases - the April, 1861 disorders in Bezdna (in Spasskii uezd, Kazanskaia guberniia) being the most famous – violent confrontations between troops and peasant ‘crowds’ (see, for instance, Field, ‘Bezdna’ in *Rebels*, p. 31-105).

¹⁵ D. Moon, *The Russian Peasantry: The World the Peasants Made, 1600-1930*, (London and New York, 1999), p. 263, 266; D. Field, ‘Peasants and Propagandists in the Russian Movement to the People in 1874’, *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 59, no. 3 (September, 1987); D. Field, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar*, (Boston and London), 1976, p. 209-212; Zelnik, *Labor and Society*, p. 363.

We'll answer them: "There are none/ and yet, it's all of us/ We've no need for ringleaders/ the boss unites us/ He's to blame for everything."¹⁶

That these references were made by the worker-*revolutionaries* might cause some suspicion: didn't the radical workers have a special interest in resisting the autocratic tactic of divide and rule, especially when this tactic identified its enemies in the 'crowd' by the very activities that occupied and already marked the radicals as different from the others – reading, writing, a passion for ideas and knowledge, radicalism? Remember that these activities had the worker-*revolutionaries* branded 'students' (*studenty*) and 'lords' (*barina*), along with the *intelligenty* of the educated class, by their workmates – even those sympathetic to their ideas (or willing at least to tolerate the 'hotheads' for the sake of some decent banter at the workbench). The committed, radical workers had everything to lose in so far as the ringleader/crowd distinction was able to penetrate into the ranks of workers who they were, by then, desperately 'propagandising' and 'agitating' in pursuit of the unity of the working-class they had seen many times before broken by the police, the gendarmes, and the state procurators. Still, these suspicions should not allow the long-term existence and the widespread application of the ringleader/crowd distinction, both among peasants, peasant-workers and other members of the urban working population to be obscured. It predated the emergence of the worker-*intelligenty* by at least a century, if not more.

Historians have acknowledged the official distinction made between 'ringleaders' and 'crowds' both as a social-historical fact and as a limit to knowledge about peasant (worker)'s disorders. Yet, its full importance has not been recognised in either its social-historical, intellectual-historical or historiographical aspects, nor has it been in the distinct area - the 'economy of history' - whose study demonstrates the close connection between these aspects. In so far as its social meaning is concerned, it has been acknowledged that the ringleader/crowd distinction had a great longevity (being noticeable over the entirety of the nineteenth century) and, further, that the division was made regardless any of the contemporary distinctions perceived between the peasantry 'proper' and the urban or industrial workers (most of whom were anyway understood to be 'peasants' in both the legal and cultural senses). Historians like David Moon and Daniel Field, whose research focused mainly on the peasantry 'proper,' suggest that this approach to peasants and workers' disorders was in some way connected to an official perception or conception of the peasants as childlike, gullible, and easily manipulated - a

¹⁶ P. A. Moiseenko, *Vospominaniia starogo revoliutsionnera* (Moscow, 1966), p. 42.

conception that reinforced the paternalistic *raison d'etat*. Beyond this fruitful suggestion, however, the actual act of division carried out by state servants had been treated in terms of the symbolic presentation to the peasants of autocratic power:

[T]he authorities seized the peasants they believed to be the instigators or ringleaders, and had them flogged in front of the others *to encourage them to give up their protest*...After many disturbances the alleged instigators, ringleaders, peasants who had submitted petitions, and others judged to have played a major role in inciting the unrest...were arrested and put on trial [emphasis added].¹⁷

'This was probably to remind them' (Moon continues) 'that the balance of power still lay in the hands of the landowning and the ruling elites.'¹⁸ Moon even makes brief comments on the 'dialectical development' of peasant/government relations through this routine tactic of division. Just as peasant and peasant-worker petitions (*proshchenie*) sent to the local government or the Tsar were written in a the language of submission, dutifulness and victimhood that was expected of them as peasants, the disorderly crowds were said to have accepted the identification, punishment and prosecution of the 'ringleaders' who were supposed to have manipulated and misled them, accepting as well their own concomitant relegation back to the passionate and childlike 'multitude' in an effort to avoid becoming answerable for their actions. The resulting, official perception of the crowd as irresponsible and manipulated was then fed back into the decision-making and the conceptions of the government and its servants to be spit up again during the next disorder.¹⁹ Still, for all the sophistication of these insights (and they will be drawn upon in what follows), the wider social meaning of the identification of 'ringleaders' and 'crowds' – its relation to autocracy and official views of the peasantry and workers; the practical application of a 'tactic' to popular disorders; the interaction between this 'tactic' and actual perceptions of the peasants and workers among state officials; its deeper connections to conceptions of freedom, necessity, morality, duty, representation, consciousness, the individual – remain largely untouched. Historical investigations of peasant-workers' disorder have, understandably, pursued popular realities, or intentions, or mentalities *through* the sediment of official documentation of disorders (until the early 1860s, there were few others in a position to document such cases), with little or nothing said about documentation itself.²⁰

¹⁷ Moon, *The Russian Peasantry*, p. 266.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 269.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 268.

²⁰ An exception here is Field's article on the 'going to the people' movement in 1873-4 ('Peasants and Propagandists'), and parts of his book *Rebels*, especially the section on the Bezdna disorder. These will be returned to below.

This is true equally of historians of the peasantry and of the workers' movements, whether 'Soviet,' 'Russian' or 'Western.' Typically, the legal and linguistic formalisms, the fragmentations, the gaps and silences and the indeterminacy of official descriptions of peasants and workers in disorder have been mentioned, most often in passing, as warnings. They are given significance for the substantive historical problems tackled only by dint of presenting unavoidable 'technical' problems to historians. Since the relative absence of peasant and worker 'voices' before the peasant reforms is already a long-acknowledged difficulty for students of the Russian lower-classes (not to mention the 'mediation' of any and all information on these groups by members of the educated classes), it was unlikely that it would have been different. However, as new areas of investigation have been forced onto the historian's agenda, especially those of gender (in terms of gender relations, as well as the recognition of female peasants and workers as special social groups), the technical problems with documents have occasionally appeared in substantive discussions of peasant and workers' disorders. Again, Moon's work acknowledges the difficulties of research into peasant women's role in disorders:

The role of the peasant women in disturbances is harder to gauge. This is partly because village affairs were by custom largely a male preserve, and largely because the officials who reported on peasant unrest tended to concentrate only on the peasant 'leaders', who were usually male, and referred to the rest of the peasants as a crowd.²¹

But, because of the special problem of examining women's roles in such events, the fact that both male *and* female peasants' roles in disorder were largely obscured by the ringleader/crowd distinction and the concentration on the former is forgotten. So too are the strictly *documentary* consequences of this distinction left unexplained. Though it is strongly suggested by Moon's own comment, the close connection in such documents between the individuation of the peasant 'leaders' or 'ringleaders' - through the officials' focus upon them during investigations - and the relative indeterminacy of the description, conception and treatment of the peasant crowds (or crowd-peasant) is not mentioned or explained. The same has so far held in the study of the industrial and urban (peasant-)workers. And this brings us to the last, most surprising, point: despite all the attention that has been paid to the peasant/proletarian or peasant/worker distinction in Russian social and intellectual history, the continuity of the governments' and other authorities' treatment of peasants and workers' disorders has not been drawn upon in *any* analysis of the class- and estate systems in autocratic Russia. Yet (and quite besides official discussions about the special problem of the working population in the cities that seem to

²¹ Moon, *The Russian Peasantry*, p. 263.

presage the recognition and emergence of a classic, urban, wage-labouring 'working class' in Russia) the very uniformity of the government's treatment of disorderly peasants, peasant-workers and 'city workers,' until at least the mid or late-1870s, indicates the existence of a social group that was defined by being *producers of wealth* (whether attached to the land or to a factory), by being *peasant-like* in culture, behaviour, mentality and, moreover, by being subject to a policy that made individual, 'working people' primarily functions or bearers of these social categories. The 'ringleader/crowd' division, and the kind of documentation connected to it, were an integral part of the social and historical definition of *this* working class, both in recognising its supposed, cultural or social 'essence,' and in enforcing the actual limitations on its behaviour, or the behaviour of those understood to belong to it.

If the notions of 'consciousness' and 'spontaneity' (or 'education' and 'instinct') are suggested in the actual *events* documented by Volkov, study of the three aspects of the ringleader/crowd distinction can show the social-intellectual origins of these concepts. The precise way in which disorderly peasants and workers were treated by the authorities depended on the extent to which their behaviour was perceived by those authorities (or could be perceived by other peasants to originate) in individual or personal will or intentions; since it was assumed that 'thoughtless passion' was essential to peasant-like behaviour, what was measured in this judgement was both the individuality of particular peasant-(worker)s (the degree to which they controlled and planned their own actions— e.g. consciousness) and the distance that the peasant (-worker) had travelled in his actions from his own 'nature,' held to be 'essentially' devoid of consciousness and personality. The recognition of a peasant or peasant-worker *as* an individual, and thus the entry of individual peasant(-worker)s into documentation and 'history,' began with the authorities judgements vis-à-vis the level of consciousness manifest in their particular actions. Some actions were particularly associated with 'consciousness' or 'ill-intent,' serving to allow the authorities to identify the individuals responsible for disorders. These included, significantly, speech and writing of the kind that was forbidden to the working class, marked as un-'peasant-like.' Hence, there were close connections made between individuality and personality, consciousness, and its external signs, with a basic conception of the '*narod*' (as unconscious, servile, instinctive), the *muzhik* (as fungible or 'plural') and their roles in society. These reveal themselves systematically in the autocratic 'economy of history,' and so in the historiographical or documentary limits that confront historians of the Russian peasantry and of workers.

II. Autocracy and disorder: an overview

The 'ringleader'/ 'crowd' distinction, in its various formulations, and with all the judgements that informed it, can be understood as a constituent part of an autocratic society and a class system that confronted those ascribed to the working-class as an objective reality: a reality, moreover, that deprived them categorically of 'personality,' recognising it only in the meagre signs of consciousness that marked them, even if only partially and temporarily, as alien to their own nature. The autocracy's treatment of disorders and its 'economy of history' were linked to the basic principles and structures of autocratic society - particularly, the 'autocratic principle,' centred on an ideal relation and ideal definitions of the roles of the tsar and the *narod*.¹ The autocracy's economy of history began with a fundamental social and historical distinction between 'the tsar' and 'the *narod*.' These terms were abstract, ideal entities in so far as the ascribed social duties and powers of 'tsars' and of the '*narod*' transcended all of their possible historical or empirical manifestations (*this particular tsar* or *that particular muzhik*). Yet, the relation between 'tsar' and '*narod*' permeated the most basic, everyday relations between the peasantry, the workers, the government and other authorities. As an ideal linked closely to the autocracy's reproduction of itself in thought and practice, giving officials an *a priori* explanation for disorders, unrest, sedition, and immorality more generally, the relation of tsar and *narod* became, in documentation, a sort of 'social ontology.' It is clear from Russian historical writing of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that very strong conceptual connections existed, at least for the educated class, between the realm of once-occurring historical things and the person of the tsar: in the centuries after the reforms of Peter the Great, it was particular Tsars who were understood to 'make history,' who caused things to happen.²

¹ Throughout, 'tsar' will signify the social *position* of 'emperor,' 'Tsar' being reserved for particular Tsars; *muzhik* will mean an individual 'peasant.' 'Peasants/peasantry' and '*narod*' identify the legal and lower class, respectively, as they appeared in official thought.

² C. H. Whitaker, 'The idea of autocracy among 18th century historians,' *The History of Imperial Russian: The Profiles and Writings of Historians in a Multinational State*, T. Sanders (ed.), (New York, 1999), p. 19-20; 22-24. Whitaker argues that the place of the monarch as 'the ultimate causal factor in the state' (p. 20) and the attention paid to reforms or changes made by a particular tsar, was a new feature of eighteenth century historiography, having replaced a traditional, hagiographical-nationalistic accounts of the lives of Orthodox rulers. The key to this, Whitaker notes, was the influence of 'Enlightenment' upon certain Russian writers. The upshot of Voltaire and Diderot's writings, read in the light of Peter the Great's life and achievements, was the celebration of the 'enlightened autocrat,' desiring of social changes, and the foregrounding of such changes as were introduced by each autocrat. Note that the notion of an 'enlightened autocrat' – notable in the reigns of

The tsar's capacity to do this was already implied in the terms 'autocrat' (*samoderzhets*) and 'autocracy' (*samoderzhavie*): 'self-possession,' a grasping 'for oneself' and 'of oneself,' gave the Tsar '(true) freedom' (*volia*), the power of agency, the so too the power to make his personal mark on history. The *narod*, on the other hand, were the stable, ahistorical 'essence' of the Russian state and the keepers of Russian nationhood. For the historians of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it was only in a dimly recalled and crudely mythologized past that the Russian *narod* could be found acting, in unity, as an agent of history, and that only in so far as power was handed over from them in perpetuity to the hands of a protective, '(grand)father-monarch.'³ Hence, it was usual that, in the 'everyday' documentation of popular life, the individual peasant appear only fleetingly, more or less an exemplar of his or her 'inner nature,' which was shared with the *narod* as a whole, and always manifested itself in similar ways. At the edges of acceptable conduct, the peasant might be documented as an individual when he broke with the mass or 'crowd,' marking himself out for official attention. As a possible causal factor in unrest, as the voice of peasant or worker dissatisfaction, the individual peasant 'ringleader' trod on ground properly occupied by the Tsar alone: 'personal freedom.' The *muzhik* – the individual peasant-worker – thus gained his place in history only by trespassing.

Russian social classes (as distinct, but not entirely separate from, legal estates: *sosloviia*) were given definition by the limits the autocracy marked out around and between them.⁴ The limits

Peter I, Catherine II and Aleksandr II especially – always assumed along with it the necessity of the autocracy 'for Russia' (ibid, p. 25-26, 30-34).

³ Ibid, p. 26-7.

⁴ The best treatment of the term 'estate(s)' (*soslovie*; *sosloviia*) is G. L. Freeze's probing *Begriffsgeschichte*, 'The Soslovie (Estate) Paradigm and Russian Social History,' *The American Historical Review*, vol. 91, no. 1 (Feb., 1986), p. 11-36. It is frustrating, however, that Freeze's analysis stops at the point where a discussion of the relations and contrasts in the meaning(s) and use(s) of the terms *soslovie* and *klass* ('class') would have been appropriate. Apart from a comment on the weaknesses of the Soviet historians' 'effort to subsume the "economic substructure" within the traditional estate model' under 'a hybrid term, *klass-soslovie*' (p. 13), Freeze says little about *klass* as a term that was contemporary to the use of *soslovie* and was often made to overlap with it. What is clear is that the official use of the term *klass* in the second half of the nineteenth century (not to mention that of the revolutionaries and social revolutionaries in the same period) is extremely unsystematic. Often the word takes on the meaning of *soslovie* (of a social group having duties to the state or Tsar), or *soslovie* takes on the some of the meanings of *klass* (of having a definite, but not necessarily 'essential,' relation to production, or to the means of production: this at least in so far as 'peasant-workers' are concerned). My own use of the term 'class' is not derived from any contemporary usage of the term *klass*. It takes in elements of the *meaning* of 'estate' (as the duties of a definite social group, ascribed by birth) and of 'class' (as a role in, and relation to, production and productive labour), in reflection of the overlapping of 'legal/moral' and 'economic' social positions in nineteenth century Russia. These two aspects of social categorisation were so closely linked, at least in the treatment of the 'peasant-workers,' that too blunt an analytical distinction between them serves to obscure the meanings of both terms and their relation to the autocratic social system. Note also that the latter section of this Part are concerned to show how the Russian autocracy dealt with changes that might have suggested a more

placed on the working-class were enforced (or ‘realised’) in moments of contest and conflict between the government, other authorities (landlords, factory owners, managers, foremen, contractors, policemen, etc.) and the working people themselves (peasants, peasant-workers, ‘city-born’ workers of various types, peasant soldiers). Within these limits, there was no *necessary* unity of thought, behaviour, or culture. Class – as enforced and realised by the state – did not *determine* the way in which workers, *intelligently* (or anyone else) behaved in everyday life, or even at moments of conflict: it marked the limits of behaviour, thought, and geographical and social movement proper to each class, as well the proper ways in which these groups could interact. The ‘working class’ or ‘labouring people’ to whose cause the worker-revolutionaries were devoted was anything but unified in terms of culture, behaviour and thought. The class to which they addressed themselves had few independent organisations and few institutional traditions that could be said to ‘belong’ to that class. The men and women who would claim to speak for the workers as a group were only one of many sub-groups in the workshops of the factories and plants, the construction sites, and in the fields. The ‘*narod*’ or working people did not even exist as a legally or politically unified social group. Right through the middle of ‘*narod*’ ran the lines of officially delineated legal estates. Urban workers and peasants might equally belong to ‘the peasantry’ (*krest’iantsvo*) or townspeople (‘the petit-bourgeoisie,’ *meshchanstvo*). However, in conflict with disorderly urban workers and peasants, these estate distinctions made little difference to state practice. Its categories of class were, in practice, stronger, more effective, than official, legal categories. Neither did the numerous differentiations and ‘places’ allotted to workers of different skills, occupations, ages, origins or background matter as regards the unity given the working-class by the autocracy. The peasants and various urban workers were defined and treated according to a definite social role, which included dutifulness, a life of honourable labour, the fulfilment of agreements made with

systematic use of *soslovie*, as a legal/moral relation to the State, and *klass*, as a legal/economic relation (protected, but not substantially determined, by the government) to an employer. After the Emancipation, the strictly legal aspects of worker-employer relations were developed in concert with the legal aspects of peasant-landowner relations. The notion that hired (wage-) labourers, especially urban workers, were in some sense different from the peasantry, and that their relations with factory owners, contractors, sub-contractors and other employers (including the government, i.e. the military) needed to be formulated and enforced more systematically, was in tension with the knowledge that hired labourers were – generally – peasants, as officialdom understood it, e.g. *legally* (by passport/registration, by ‘legal estate’), *culturally* (in so far as still connected to their home villages, to the land, and inclined toward ‘peasant forms of behaviour’) and *essentially* (they were *meant* to be peasants and were *supposed* to behave like peasants, because ‘that is what they were,’ or were born to be). This tension lasted at least until the early-1880s, when Tsar Aleksandr III introduced reformed ‘factory laws,’ strengthened and systematised given means for enforcing contracts and agreements between workers and employers, and introduced a rudimentary factory inspection system (1882-6). Arguably, however, the class/estate tension was never resolved under the Tsars, with practical effects on the way in which Aleksandr III and Nikolai II’s governments approached industrial and agricultural policy, the labour movement, and political reform.

superiors. The orderly fulfilment of a duty to an employer, the show of respect to a social better, the responsibility of moral guidance and 'fair treatment' incumbent upon the manager or the sub-contractor or landlord - all were placed under the social duty of maintaining 'public order.' The suppression of disorder thus had a strong, moral aspect, closely linked to the maintenance of established patterns of authority and submission, which involved not only the relations between government and the 'simple people' (*prostoi narod*),⁵ but also the entire 'state' or social order, including the nobility, the factory owners, the military contractors, and those workers and peasants willing (or forced) to make of themselves agents of the government's suppression of disorder.

Transgression of the normative 'class behaviours' ascribed by the government brought the idealised Russian *narod* under the direct gaze of the central authorities. But direct contact and observation did not (generally) undermine the class understandings with which the state approached the 'agitated' peasants and workers. Definite means of averting or suppressing disturbances and disorders⁶ among the peasants, built up over many decades of contact between the authorities and the *narod*, contrasted with the ambiguity surrounding the outbreak of riots,

⁵ Often translated as 'commoners' or the 'common people', the derogatory connotations of the English phrase, implying the 'interchangeability' of lower-class people - their 'generality' - as opposed to the 'uniqueness' or 'singularity' of their educated or moneyed social 'betters,' are barely present in the Russian *prostoi narod* which, quite oppositely, emphasises the positive characteristic of the *narod*'s 'simplicity' or 'purity,' in contrast to the artificial cultivation or affected culture of urban 'census society,' the nobility, and the educated *raznochintsy* (on the history of the word 'common' and its pejorative connotations in English, as in 'common speech' or 'commoner,' see R. Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (2nd edition), (London, 1983), p. 71-72).

⁶ The term 'disturbance' (*volnenie*; pl. *volneniia*) is used in contemporary documents to describe incidents of collective unrest among the peasantry, including mass refusals to pay state taxes, mass refusals to render corvée (*barshchina*) to a landlord, or a literal 'riot' (*bunt*, pl. *bunta*; also *buistvo*, 'unruliness') among the peasants. In reports concerning the peasants (at least after 1861), the word 'disorder' (*besporiadok*, pl. *besporiadka*) is sometimes used interchangeably with *volnenie*, but often reserved for cases of unrest involving the physical presence of a crowd of peasants (though not necessarily connoting violent behaviour on their part). The term *bunt*, related to *buntar* ('rebel,' 'inciter to rebellion') and *buntartsvo* ('rebelliousness'), denotes colloquially not only the sorts of mass unrest described formally by *volnenie* and riots in general (not necessarily involving peasants), but also has links to the fabled 'peasants' revolt' or 'general uprising' predicted from the 1850s onwards in the works of revolutionaries like A. Herzen and M. Bakunin, as well as by state officials throughout the nineteenth century. Tsar Alexander used the term *bunta* ('riots') in an order approving V. K. Lieven's memorandum and recommending the 'deployment of troop units from neighbouring provinces at an early time...to suppress riots' (see: P. A. Zaionchkovsky, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia*, translated by S. Wobst, (Gulf Breeze, 1978), p. 102. No reference is given, but Zaionchkovsky mentions that Lieven's memorandum to the Tsar was read and its recommendations approved at the end of January, 1861).

Note that *volnenie* and *besporiadok* retain these meanings in official descriptions and investigations of unrest in workshops, factories and other industrial (non-agricultural, though not necessarily urban) settings, for instance, building or railway construction sites, railway depots, on so on. Note also the connection between *volnenie*, *volia* (freedom; will) and *svoevol'stvo* (willfulness) in the root *vol-*. Suffice to say, this is not a mere linguistic connection, unnoted by contemporaries: systematic links between the three words, based on a particular notion of 'will' or 'freedom' (*vol-*), are found everywhere in government documentation of peasant and workers' unrest (see below).

disorders and other incidents of mass immorality. The combination of a self-assured grasp of the mechanics of peasant disorder and the complete inability to document it in any other way than imprecisely reflected with crystalline clarity the relations that obtained between the Russian social elite and the *narod*. ‘Absurd rumours,’ an illegal currency circulating unchecked between villages, estates, and districts, dispersed through the aimless wanderings of ‘passers-by’ and the machinations of Russia’s more mischievous and wilful itinerants, seemed able to penetrate even the insularity of the peasant communities. In the ringleaders and instigators of peasant disorder, at first hidden to the pursuant authorities among the anonymous faces and bodies of the gathered peasantry, the ghostly figure of Emel’ka Pugachëv found a fleeting presence. Ill-intentioned manipulators, the government feared, were everywhere hidden among the peasant crowds, ready to drop a spark into what Baron Benckendorff had called the ‘powder keg’: the benighted, childlike, yet morally pure peasants’ estate.⁷

Investigations directed by the district police, the Third Section and the offices of the *gubernator* ascribed to disorders definite and immediate origins in the activities of the ‘ringleaders’ or ‘agitators.’ The ‘false tsar,’ a challenger to the Tsar’s absolute will, therefore remained a crucial figure in the government’s attempt to understand and subdue peasant unrest. What had become for the Russian elite, after Pugachëv and the *pugachevshchina* of 1773-5, the defining quality of peasant revolt – the combination of mass spontaneity and conscious manipulation, the impersonal crowds in the service of a definite and very personal will – was documented equally in isolated peasant disturbances thereafter, up to and beyond the Emancipation. The ringleader was understood by the authorities to be ‘answerable’ (*otvetstennyi*) to the state for stirring up latent hatreds or resentments towards the bureaucrats, the priests or the landowners; in spreading false rumours; misinterpreting the proclamations of the government; or articulating in speech or on paper the dissatisfaction of the ‘crowds.’ Yet, the attempt to identify with complete certainty those people answerable for peasant disorder followed in the last instance from the mythical concept of a merely passive, and hence morally innocent, *narod*. The ‘simple people,’ agitated or manipulated, acting without rationality or responsibility, threatened the existing order of things not by the force of its own will, but at the behest of ‘others,’ understood, often in the literal sense, as outsiders to the community. Yet in the primitive division between the ‘ill-willed’ persons and the ‘peasant crowd,’ the government endowed local disorder with the mystery which necessarily frustrated their own search for definite

⁷ ‘Iz otchetov III Otdeleniia ...o krest’ianskikh nastroeniakh,’ (1839), *KKR*, p. 64.

causes. To what end did the 'ill-willed' person manipulate the peasant crowd, and why should the peasantry be so vulnerable to such manipulation? Ultimately, autocratic ideology would fizzle out in essentialism and tautology when forced to address such questions: ritualised gestures towards the ill-will of the 'ill-willed,' on the one hand, and the simplicity of the 'simple people,' on the other. Police encounters with actual crowds of peasants, and the pursuit of the supposed 'ringleaders' and 'instigators' answerable for the peasants' insubordination, reinforced in turn the authority of a regime which had already endowed the *narod* and its behaviour with such irrationality and mystery as a means of legitimising its own power. Since the peasants' behaviour during disorders conformed to the elites' understanding of peasant nature, and since the *muzhik* was understood by nature to require authoritative guidance 'from above,' the direct investigation and suppression as well as the documentation and knowledge of peasant disturbances tended to reproduce and reinforce the peasants' subordinate social status both ideally (in elite conceptions of 'the *muzhik*,' 'the peasantry' or the *narod*) and practically (in the imposition of limits to the peasants' actions and thoughts). The 'chasm' posited by the autocracy between the peasants and the ('educated') elite was not merely 'cultural': that would imply that the peasant was recognised by contemporaries to possess a capacity for 'cultivation,' a capacity to transcend, either through external guidance or self-development, the limitations imposed by circumstances or by nature (whether external or internal), in other words: to learn how to act with or against external pressures (including those of the authorities) both freely *and* rationally. It was specifically this capacity that the Tsarist government denied the average *muzhik* - first and foremost, by its practical treatment of agitated peasants and peasant communities. Autocratic practice, as documented in the course the suppression of peasant disorders by many hundreds of government officials, posited a 'peasant nature' and sustained an understanding of the 'average *muzhik*' primarily by their own systematic demands for the peasants' submission to the authorities, and by the restoration of a passivity supposedly essential to the *muzhik*.

Documentation from the reigns of Nikolai I (1825-55) and Aleksandr II (1855-81) conforms, overall, to these traditional patterns and expresses the habitual fears that followed from the autocratic perspective on the *narod*. Such was the strength of the elite conception of the 'peasant mass,' lending legitimacy to the actions and the very existence of the autocratic

regime, that even the liberation of the serfs - the 'great turning point in Russian history'⁸ - was to leave government policy toward the 'agitated peasantry' largely unaffected throughout the institutional and cultural changes enacted by the government through the 1860s and 1870s. It should be noted that, later, and in other institutional circumstances, the association of particular disorders with the 'uprising' - the belief that, somehow, local unrest always contained the seed, or at least the microcosmic image, of *pugachevshchina* - was broken, albeit episodically, by the knowledge gained through investigation of individual cases of peasant-workers' disturbances in the cities; so too was the autocratic notion of individual answerability (*otvetstvennost'*) temporarily replaced by a Western European (primarily French) notion of 'moral competence' (*vmeniaemost'*). Yet, in both cases, the innovations of the reforms were either subtly undermined by the everyday routines of the regular and political police, or bluntly contradicted by the conscious actions of the more conservative members of the bureaucratic elite. Fear of the 'uprising' and the relations which sustained that fear would, then, endure well beyond the 'Era of Reforms,' despite the piecemeal institutional restructuring carried out in the 1860s and 1870s under the protective wing of the government. The persistence through Aleksandr II's reign of traditional patterns of thought and action among the state elite as regards the peasantry tended to negate well-meaning intentions among the 'enlightened bureaucrats'⁹ (such as N. Miliutin) and the - so to speak - 'reluctant progressives' (one thinks of V. Panin or P. Valuev)¹⁰ to transform relations between the state and the peasantry (including for them, the urban 'peasant-workers'). Popular disorder was hardly conceived of differently after 1861 than during the

⁸ L. Zakharova, 'Autocracy and the Reforms of 1861-1874 in Russia: Choosing Paths of Development,' translated by D. Field, *Russia's Great Reforms, 1855-1881*, B., Eklof, J. Bushnell and L. Zakharova (eds.), (Bloomington, 1994), p. 19.

⁹ On the 'enlightened bureaucrats,' see especially W. B. Lincoln, *Nikolai Miliutin: An Enlightened Russian Bureaucrat*, (Newtonville, 1977); idem, *In the Vanguard of Reform: Russia's Enlightened Bureaucrats, 1825-1861* (DeKalb, 1982).

¹⁰ I mean in the first place to describe those figures (such as Count V. Panin) who, at crucial moments in the preparations of the reforms, were charged by Alexander II with forcing through the tsar's own preferred programme of peasant reform against the resistance of conservative state officials and various partisans and parties of the nobility, despite personal opinions or prejudices which might in other circumstances have made them opponents of the 'progressive' or 'enlightened' minority within the state service, and, secondly, figures like P. Valuev, who recognised the need for the emancipation (in Valuev's case, already during the reign of Nikolai I) from the conservative perspective of the internal integrity and external security of the Russian state. One might place Alexander II himself in the category of 'reluctant progressive,' on both counts. On V. Panin, see Moon, *Abolition*: '[Rostovtsev] was succeeded as chairman of the Editing Commissions by the Minister of Education, Count Victor Panin. He came from a leading aristocratic family, owned several thousand serfs, and was known for his conservative views on the reform. Alexander appointed him on the understanding that he would follow the testament left by his predecessor, would not make any changes to the membership of the Commissions, and would abide by the decisions of the majority. Like Rostovtsev, Panin was a loyal servant of the tsar, whom Alexander felt he could depend on' (p. 68). On Valuev's belief in the necessity of major reforms (including the abolition of serfdom), see Zaionchkovsky's 'Introduction' to *Dnevnik P. A. Valueva*, 1, p. 19-21. On Alexander II's views of the reforms, see Zaionchkovsky, *Abolition*, p. 42-3.

reigns of Aleksandr I and Nikolai I, even when the administrative novelties of the peasant reforms – the appointment of the ‘peace arbitrators’ (*mirovye posredniki*)¹¹ in particular – impinged upon the government’s long-established approach to the suppression of peasant unrest.

In the absence of arbitration boards, trade unions, employers associations, or other, potentially neutral bodies, it was government officials - usually of medium rank and drawn from the locality in which a disorder had taken place - who worked closely with the regular police and gendarmes both as mediators and as agents of suppression. The maintenance of ‘public order’ was their stated priority, but this was only a part of the wider ‘order’ in which the state, landlords, employers and other ‘victims’ of disorder hoped to create and reinforce through society as a whole. This order was a moral order. Employers, landlords, even - on occasion – local state officials, given a wider area of decision making and self-direction than the peasantry and peasant-workers in the cities, could and would break this order: the arbitrariness or cruelty of certain landlords, the chicanery and trickery of the *fabrikanty*, the negligence or poor-decision making of a *gubernator* or *ispravnik*, were as offensive to the moral order as a disturbance among the peasants or workers, and would be ‘corrected’ by the state as the written legal code and the customary prerogatives of local authorities allowed. On the other hand, it was assumed that ‘normal’ behaviour on the part of these freer, more cultured, and generally better-educated individuals would be in line with the values propounded in autocratic rhetoric, its laws and its informal regulations. Judgement of the crimes or mistakes of the landlords, *fabrikanty*, etc. referred back to the special position of authority, care and moral discipline such figures had been given, by birth, custom or law, over the lower classes. Their arbitrariness was understood as an abuse of the limited freedoms granted to them as individuals, an abuse of the informal roles given to them as extensions of state authority.

The dispersion of moral and physical authority through the social hierarchy - its distribution of course determined by the categories of legal estate, age, sex, occupation, and ‘nationality’ - was presented in the nineteenth century as an ideal state of affairs and somehow peculiarly

¹¹ On the translation of *mirovoy posrednik* as ‘peace arbitrator,’ see R. Easley, *The Emancipation of the Serfs in Russia: Peace Arbitrators and the Development of Civil Society*, (London, 2009), p. 8-9: ‘The two usual translations of *mirovoy posrednik* are ‘peace mediator’ and ‘peace arbitrator.’ Mediation implies encouraging parties at variance to work at their differences amongst themselves; arbitration connotes a more artificial dispute resolution, in which judgment is made, but the two parties may remain yet far apart. The state intended for the *mirovyyi posredniki* to act as arbitrators and, for the most part, that is what they did.’

‘Russian.’ It was, however, just as much a practical adaptation to Russia’s nation-building and its related efforts to make itself ‘modern’: large geographical areas separating thousands of small villages and towns from the main administrative centres, combined with the tendency of the tsars, from the eighteenth century onwards, to concentrate major government powers in the capitals, which left daily administration of agriculture, domestic manufacturing, and the ‘moral cultivation’ of the serfs in the hands of landlords, their various assistants, the church, and to the peasants themselves (mainly older, male peasants). However, whatever dispersal of powers and whatever ‘chasms’ might have existed between the government elites and the *narod* in calm periods quickly disappeared with the appearance of disorder or unrest, where the numb arms and legs of the state, like those of a threatened spider, would spring to life only to curl inwards. Suppression of disorder then put into action a network of dormant ties between Tsar and *narod*, some formal, some informal. At such points, local police forces (both urban and rural), the Third Section (the political police) and the gendarmes (as an organisation nominally separate, but closely connected to, the Third Section) drew on the services of other figures of authority that would routinely act as mediators between the government and the population in villages, towns and cities. These latter included the noble landlords or ‘serf-owners’ (*pomeshchiki*);¹² bailiffs; local clergymen; appointed or elected peasant functionaries; caretakers or yard-keepers in apartment blocks (*dvorniki*); employees in the factory administration; foremen; the concerned public; ‘passersby,’ and anyone else who might volunteer themselves in aid of the government. The detailed records of investigations put forward ample evidence to secure the government’s idealistic self-presentation of ‘the State’ as a unity of ranked social groups and individuals, each waiting to serve the tsar in the roles granted them by birth, by traditions, habits, and (occasionally) on merit, and only waiting for the call to do so.

¹² The term *pomeshchik* (pl.: *pomeshchiki*, adj.: *pomeshchich’i*) denotes the land-owning (or, before 1861, serf-owning) nobility. The term ‘nobility’ - *dvorianstvo* (pers.: *dvorianin*, ‘nobleman,’ ‘a person of rank’ or ‘of the court’) denotes all those occupying a place in the government’s ‘Table of Ranks’ and thereby designated as ‘noble,’ irrespective of serf- or land-ownership. The term *dvorianstvo* replaced the earlier *shliakhetstvo* sometime in the middle of the 18th century (see: M. Raeff, *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth Century Nobility* (New York, 1966), p. 8-9; T. Emmons, ‘The Russian Landed Gentry and Politics,’ *Russian Review*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Jul., 1974), p. 269-70). High government officials could be referred to as *chinovniki*, but generally by the 1850s this term (along with *chinovnichestvo*, which can be translated plainly as ‘officialdom,’ but can be more literally rendered as ‘hierarchical bureaucracy’) has taken on either an openly derogatory meaning (as in ‘liberal-democratic’ and radical literature), or the more specific reference to *petit* government officials (as in official documentation, where higher officials are generally referred to by their specific administrative position – i.e. *ispravnik*, *gubernator* – or by military rank, i.e. *polkovnik*).

While the ‘government’ (*pravitel’stvo*) was, then, a definite body of men composed, almost exclusively, of the educated elites, the ‘state’ (*gosudarstvo*)¹³ was a moral-political ideal consisting of *all* legally recognised social groups (including the peasantry), *in ideal form*, e.g. as a set of groups bound to given authorities by certain roles and duties. The ‘state’ as an ideal overlapped greatly with the ideal of a ‘Russian nation.’¹⁴ The *narod* and the tsars were the primary bearers of ideal Russian nationality (as an ‘essence’ and as an ‘historical personification,’ respectively), the state a set of ideal roles and judgements thrown around them like netting, and the government the concrete body of men charged with realising and protecting those ideals. Whether or not certain groups or individuals were considered to be adequate to the ideal of ‘the state’ – to be adequately fulfilling the roles set out for them – was a matter for investigation. Thus, during the investigation of disorders among peasants, workers or students (or during the investigation of seditious or otherwise ‘harmful’ activities amongst the educated elite), quite rigorous divisions were made between different kinds of criminal or otherwise immoral behaviours based on the given (ideal) role of an individual or group (partially determined by their legal estate, partially by their age and gender, etc.), their *ideal* degree of answerability (determined by the same criteria), on a person or a group’s past actions (the seriousness of an immoral ‘deed’ or act), and – importantly – on their *response* to being investigated, e.g. to being identified as the cause or partial cause of a disorder, crime, or other divergence from the given moral order. Being ‘answerable’ for a disorder or crime did not, in and of itself, entail full exclusion from the state, and indeed it was always the aim of the representatives of the government to be lenient with criminals where this was merited by genuine remorse and/or formal acts of repentance (a confession, for instance). Though internal exile or being ‘sent home’ (*na rodine*) were favourite methods of punishment for disorderly types and those involved in other (political and moral) crimes, this was not merely a response to an immoral act, with its measure determined by the seriousness of the act itself. Repentance and observed rehabilitation – especially in the case of striking workers or peasant ‘ringleaders’ – were often followed by the lifting of controls (police surveillance, house arrest, etc) and the

¹³ On the history of the concept of *gosudarstvo* (with an emphasis on the ‘Russian Enlightenment’), see O. Kharkhordin, ‘What is the State? The Russian Concept of *Gosudarstvo* in the European Context,’ *History and Theory*, vol. 40, no. 2 (May, 2001), p. 218-26.

¹⁴ For a recent discussion of the relation between ‘nation’ and ‘state’ in Imperial Russia, see T. R Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863-1914* (DeKalb, 2008), p. 5-12. Weeks insists that ‘state’ and ‘nation’ never be used synonymously in reference to Imperial and late Imperial Russia (p. 4). This statement comes from the point-of-view of the contrast between the western European notions of the ‘nation-state,’ where the two terms have been and are often used synonymously (p. 5-6), with the Russian, Polish and Ukrainian cases, in which the terms are much more sharply delineated (p. 6).

possibility of a return to a place of work, village or to an occupation temporality barred. A 'heartfelt confession' from a peasant held answerable for a disorder and brought before the police or gendarmes could effectively nullify responsibility, showing the peasant to be part of the irresponsible 'crowd' from which he had been (provisionally) drawn out and separated off by the authorities. Others, by the seriousness of their crime, the depth of their answerability (typically, being older, of a higher legal estate, in a more responsible occupation) and an observed lack of remorse (refusal to confess or repent), would merit a permanent exclusion (exile or execution) on the basis of being, in essence and by personality, alien in nature to the ideals of Russian state and so already effectively 'outside' of the Russian nation.

Whilst eighteenth and nineteenth century historical writings, along with official pronouncements, laws and declarations of the same period, demonstrate the ideal of enlightened autocracy in a more or less *ideal form* (as carefully constructed political narratives or rhetorical devices), the wider official historiography of disorders demonstrates the reciprocal relation between the political ideal and the actual autocratic system. The study of events at the periphery of everyday life is especially revealing in this regard, since it was on the boundaries of the ordinary state of things (allowing for some significant freedoms within those boundaries) that the government enforced its ideals of state. It is evident in the structure of documentation and in the form and the language of particular documents. Structurally, documentation of disorders mirrored and reinforced strict, internal government hierarchies, with low-ranking officials (local police, gendarmes, assistants to local officials) feeding information up to their immediate superiors, these middle-ranking officials (often provincial chiefs – *gubernatory*, or the heads of regional police forces) passing on details to their superiors, and high-ranking officials (Ministers, advisors, city mayors) writing their own reports, on the basis of this information and with their own advice included, to the Tsar himself. The Tsar was, then, the intended audience for all reports of social misconduct and immorality (as well as other, more positive events). The hierarchy is obvious in the form (style or tone of the writing; structure of descriptions or arguments; even the neatness of handwriting) and in the content of particular documents. The further up the rankings, the freer became the personal input of the author. Ministers were able to give opinions on certain matters quite freely, and it is here that inter-Ministerial and personal rivalries that dogged Russia's complex bureaucracy are most evident. The further down the rankings, the more strictly was the content and language of documents determined by externally imposed standards, apparently given as points of reference and as models of good

administrative conduct to officials in the course of their training and through their careers. Legal references were the main, formal points by which documents were structured. References to the letter and line of the Statute book explained to superiors not only the illegal or questionable actions of those investigated by the government, but also justified those 'measures' taken by government officials in response. References to other documents or sets of documents (memoranda, previous reports by an author, reports or notes from inferiors or superiors) were another means of placing a particular document both in contact with actual events - placing the document within a developing story of explanation for events - and assigning it a place in the hierarchy of documents. Other languages or terminologies were much less formal than these – without definite, written sources behind them acting as guides or points of reference - but were nonetheless quite systematic. Examination of informal official languages shows the link between the 'autocratic ideal' and the actual practices of state officials 'on the ground,' in their relations with peasants, workers, students, other officials, and so on. The language used to describe peasant disorders was the imprint of officialdom's conception of the *narod*, its 'nature,' and its ascribed role within the Russian state system. Between the 1820s and the 1870s – despite the introduction of new institutions and personnel into the government/peasantry relationship after the 1850s and 1860s – this language changed very little. This is indicative of a strong continuity of government practice vis-à-vis the peasants, whether as 'serfs' or 'free rural dwellers.' It was through these languages - external (legal) and internal (documentary) references, as well as the informal but systematic language of 'crowds,' 'ringleaders,' 'answerability,' 'freedom' (*volia*), 'stubbornness' (*uporstvo*), 'wilfulness' (*svoevol'tsvo*), 'disobedience' (*oslushanie*), 'harm' (*vred*; *vrednyi*), 'consciousness' (*soznanie*; *soznanyi*) and 'error' (*zabluzhdenie*) - that officials understood as well as reported on disorders and 'immoral behaviours.' The languages, being at once a categorical framework informing judgements and actions, as well as a sort of 'plotting device' for composing documents, helped equally the petit local official and the Minister to explain the causes of, and narrate developments in, actual events as they unfolded, making them intelligible to autocracy and, ultimately, conducive to the autocracy's continued existence.

It can be argued that officials even *perceived* the objects of their investigations through or 'in' these languages, and so through the autocratic ideal: it permeated not only their thoughts, intentions and actions, but also conditioned the actions of peasants, workers and others. In that sense, the languages of the autocratic ideal could not but seem adequate to the 'reality' being

described. In run-of-the-mill events (a minor and short-lived disorder in one village, say), already intelligible to autocracy in terms of its ideal and, to an extent, already explained by its conceptions of social categories, causation, and responsibility, it would not have occurred to officials that definite categories of thought were being imposed and reproduced by their actions. Yet, even from a position ascribing some identity to the peasant or peasant-worker 'outside' of his or her relations with the government, with landlords, with bailiffs or with peasant functionaries (i.e. a relation to labour; to production; to the land; to 'nature'), this clearly *was* the case. Even if the officials had treated peasants solely from the perspective of their 'criminality,' without reference to their ideal position in a social system and their ascribed 'essence' as peasants, it would be obvious that government intervention in 'disorders' was upholding a prescribed, 'normal' state of affairs and, in suppressing criminal actions, reproducing or restoring this 'normality.'¹⁵ I would only argue that this pragmatist view would ignore very compelling evidence showing that the government, along with its supporters (those who were seen to uphold the ideal and 'do their duty') were involved in reproducing a categorised reality – a class system - which was always already, and then in turn, perceived as 'objective.' This is evident in cases where *a priori*, official explanations and languages did *not* immediately 'fit' with the behaviours or events being investigated.

The relations between the government and the new 'industrial populations' of working people in cities, towns and in the suburbs are particularly revealing. That Russian officials (and other educated elites also) had no accepted terms for describing these populations was indicative of the mismatch between the ideal and its languages and the reality they were being faced with. Historians might call them 'workers' or the 'working-class,' but for officials these terms were readily applicable to the peasantry as a whole. It was, indeed, part of the categorisation of Russian society that peasants were understood as workers or labourers, and that the ordinary state of things was one in which the peasant was calmly 'at work.' Patterns of disorder among the 'urban' or 'industrial' workers were often close to those found in the villages, or were, at least, reported and dealt with as if they were the same. The treatment of urban workers as simply more 'concentrated' populations of peasants, in slightly different (and admittedly harsher) working and living conditions, was confirmed by official knowledge that the urban

¹⁵ The word *bezporiadka* ('disorder,' but literally, 'without order') indicates the absence of *poriadka* ('order'), both in the concrete sense of 'public order,' and in the sense of the more fundamental 'social order' or 'order of things' (*poriadka veshch*) underlying it, thus pointing towards the positive or 'normal' state of affairs in naming the negative.

working population were made up mostly of temporary migrants from villages, and that most 'factory workers' were still 'attached to the land.' And yet, awareness of developments in Western Europe (the English, French and German experiences especially) amongst upper government officials, and educated society more generally, gave the Russian government a whole other set of terms and associated explanations for 'urban unrest': the emergence of 'a proletariat' and of lower-class unrest of the 'Western European' kind (strikes, public protests and political unions) were recurring worries for the enlightened autocracies of Nikolai I and Aleksandr II. These were made more significant by, firstly, the nineteenth century revolutions and upheavals in Western Europe and the Western part of the Russian empire (the Polish protectorate) and, secondly, by their own policies designed to induce the growth of heavy industries, rail, and light manufacturing in Russia. Strikes (as officials defined them) were a known phenomenon by the 1860s and became more frequent through the 1870s. Official responses to the 'worker question' and to strikes show them drawing heavily on received ways of dealing with peasant unrest in the countryside. The first half of the 1870s saw the formalisation of a government policy that was clearly tied to its understanding of peasant unrest, but shot through with knowledge of Western experience as well as a paranoia of the 'peasant' in the urban or factory setting that was entirely home-grown. But formal adherence to the 'new-old' (newly formalised) policy amongst lower government officials did not stop the divergence of opinions and responses to industrialisation and its apparent effects at the higher levels. Government suppression of strikes and factory disorders, made consciously as examples to audiences of impressionable 'peasant-workers,' diverged from the more subtle, more knowledgeable reports of Ministers, provincial chiefs and others. For them, new developments required new ways of dealing with the effects, and reports arguing as such drew on information that had been generated by the police, the gendarmes and the Third Section in the course of their repression of workers' disorders. Knowledge of particular disorders began to rub awkwardly against the government ideal that justified government actions and the existence of the autocracy.

It should be noted that, through all documentation of workers' and peasants' disorders, there are regular 'breaks' in the ideal story told by officials, and these come from the actions and words of peasants and workers themselves. Such information is given for historians as a ground for reconstructing an event, a set of behaviours, or even a 'peasant' or 'worker' reality quite different from those given positively by officials. Indeed, the fact of the government's

intervention in hundreds or even thousands of incidents of unrest annually (depending on economic conditions, government policies, and the attentiveness of government observers to the peasantry and workers) indicates the necessity of the active imposition of the 'objective reality' by the autocracy - the classifications that its officials tended to perceive in things themselves (since it structured their actions as well as their thought). While disorder 'in the abstract' could be explained by reference to peasant nature (wilfulness, the peasant interpretation of freedom), the licence allowed to the upper classes or estates (landlords' and factory owners' abuses of power), and by pure contingency (the unpredictable appearance of evil in people or in literature), the ideal narrative did not always fit with the particular disorder in all its details. 'Ringleaders' could not be found - the peasants or workers had to be made to *produce* them, even having 'stubbornly' pledged their allegiance to the collective; older working women seemed have a harmful influence on husbands, elders and younger men - their subservient place in village and family hierarchies had to be imposed by force of interrogation and by actual repression; occasionally it seemed that harmful ideas about industrial unions, international unions and revolutionary violence did *not* have clear origins in forbidden literature or the influence of educated outsiders - it was searched for and put there anyway. The mentalities or ideas of agitated and disorderly peasants and workers - especially those included in the ahistorical 'crowd' or mass - cannot be recovered by historians without the mediation of government documentation, but the latter's contradictions and tensions are indicative of other worlds outside of and in opposition to the 'objective' categories and behaviours that they helped to create and reproduce.

III. Autocracy and Disorder: 1825 – February, 1861

Who, or what, would be the agent of social transformation in Russia? The Russian government shared the question with those committed to its destruction. Their respective answers were very different. Yet, within their respective systems of thought, the associations of categories were similar, despite the different angles of vision they brought to bear on Russian social reality. It was a reality that the Tsars Nikolai I and Aleksandr II, a significant number of government officials, as well as out-and-out radicals, increasingly perceived as ‘backward’ and in need of change. Attitudes to Russia’s twenty-two million manorial serfs (after 1861, the estate of ‘free rural dwellers’) and, more generally, to the *narod* (including the ‘rural’ and ‘urban workers’) were central to the social and political thought of reformers and revolutionaries alike. Emancipation was hotly debated in secret committees, stately homes, teahouses, and the liberal and democratic press. Peasant-workers too had their own conceptions of freedom and emancipation. Attitudes to these popular conceptions served as a dividing line between the radicals and the government. For the governments of Nikolai and Aleksandr, it was necessary that emancipation come, if at all, ‘from above.’ For the intellectuals and radicals, the belief that a *true* emancipation should - and could only - come ‘from below,’ reinforced by the perceived failures of government-directed reform, became a central, dogmatic tenet and, later, the lynchpin of an entire system of thought and action (narodism).

While the radical intelligentsia of the 1840s and 1850s retained the Decembrists and their plans for social reform as part of their intellectual and political heritage, they would eventually throw in their lot with the *narod*, ‘the mass,’ over the small circles of intellectuals to which they and their recent antecedents had belonged. The failure to achieve individual ‘self-realisation’ by means of thought was, by the 1840s, seen by many not as a personal failure, but as a social one. In the late 1840s, such future intellectual luminaries as Belinskii, Herzen and Bakunin (like Marx in the early 1840s) reasoned that self-education – the incorporation of oneself into the development of Reason - was chimerical if limited to thought. To turn away from the evident, material and spiritual suffering of the exploited and poor ‘below’ for the sake of self-realisation in an illusory realm of Reason: was this not (it was wondered) merely the intellectualised equivalent of the moral bankruptcy that had, in the first place, made the European ruling

classes' material exploitation of the working poor possible, and for so long? Social change through action was necessary. Aware, firstly, that the individual will was empowered only to the extent of its expression of and foundation in a universal, human interest and, secondly, increasingly aware of the failure of European intellectuals to truly *grasp* this universal interest and take it on as their own, the Russian intelligentsia turned to the *narod* as the agent of a *social* (popular) revolution. The 'people,' 'working-class,' 'proletariat' became the force - the 'cause' - that abstract Reason or the Absolute had once been. The intellectual's embodiment and conscious expression of abstract Reason - an idealisation of the person - became the radical intelligentsia's *ideal* expression of popular, material suffering. 'What is to be done?' (*chto delat'?*) was the question fit to convey the dilemma of a group that defined itself by being marginal to the cause to which it was devoted.

It should be remembered, however, that the proposals offered to the question by a frustrated and increasingly marginalised and harried group of publicists after 1861 (Chernyshevskii, Mikhailov, Pisarev and Lavrov especially) were themselves a reaction to the failures of their predecessors (Herzen and Ogarev especially) to influence, positively and in any obvious way, officialdom's *own* plans for peasant reform. Having witnessed the Emancipation Statues signed and published, Herzen and Ogarev's *Kolokol* was reduced, in the early 1860s, to calling for reforms that could never be granted without a repudiation of the autocratic principle: a socialist democracy with complete freedom of speech and conscience, secured by a federal government comprised (mainly) of peasant deputies. Still, the great emphasis of its pre-Emancipation criticism had been directed towards achieving a sort of liberal alliance, with anonymous authors from inside Russian officialdom supporting a more radical reform of the system in works published alongside the articles of the radical émigrés. For almost a decade, the radical *intelligenty* were involved in debates and discussions concerning the Russian serfs and their conditions, the relation between serfdom and the political powers of the state, and the possible means of reforming a system recognised by many within the autocracy to be both inhumane and a political, economic and military dead-weight. Thus, until at least the early 1860s (and up until the 1870s), a significant group of radical *intelligenty* still considered the state a viable 'agent' of social, economic and political reforms - reforms that might bring fundamental changes to the conditions of the *narod* without need of violent and uncivilised popular uprising (the '*bunt*'). Moreover, the radicals' knowledge of the Russian *narod* was no more (nor less) 'abstract' than that of the autocratic government. What did divide the radicals and liberals from the (more or

less) conservative officials who took up or retained high-level positions in the government *after* 1861 was a certain concept of the *narod* which was, in turn, fundamental to the official notion of autocratic power.

For the radicals and revolutionaries of the 1840s and 1850s, the fear of the destruction of civilisation and the hope of the revitalisation of Russia and Europe by uprising were awkwardly mingled together (this was especially true of Herzen's later thought and writings). By the late 1860s, at least, a radical intelligent could be consoled with the thought that the death of nobles, officials, even sympathetic revolutionaries at the hands of the masses was, for the sake of the social revolution and true freedom, historically necessary and perhaps even personally preferable. Socially and aesthetically, too, there seems to have been something pleasing for the early radicals in the thought of Imperial Russia aflame. Social superfluity as an externally imposed and lived affliction drove the imagination of the intelligentsia inexorably from the empty gestures of philosophy and pure science to the materially and morally cleansing terrors of revolutionary action and the peasant *bunt*. The autocracy, of course, would prefer *its* emancipation 'from above,' draped in fine cloths, hung with portraits of the Tsar, illuminated by candles rather than the 'Red Cockerel.' The serfs' liberation, as government officials understood it, would be handed down at the behest of the autocrat and received calmly, gratefully and *passively* by the peasants. Indeed, it was *only* 'emancipation from above' that could be seriously considered by a regime whose rationale for such reforms was the *strengthening of autocratic power*. That element of the reforms driven by concerns for Russia's position in European politics – the sense that serfdom and its backwardness held back the development of Russia's economy and her military in turn – was balanced out by a more indefinite, and more strictly 'domestic,' concern: the fear of a peasant's uprising - of 'emancipation from below.'

As in the apocalyptic visions of Bakunin, Herzen and Chernyshevskii, government officials and the nobility dimly perceived in the 'peasant masses,' alongside a certain stability of culture and inertia of intellect, a spontaneous vitality and instinctive desire for 'freedom' (*volia*) that might, at any moment, be sparked into life to spread through the peasant population at large. Peasant 'wilfulness' (*svoevolst'vo*) was understood both as a particular manifestation of freedom according to the *muzhik* and its very essence. As much as the notion of *volia* was the ideal expression of the *muzhik*'s desire to live 'according to his own will,' borne along and sustained

by rumours, songs, and peasant stories, it was also potent with apparently arbitrary peasant ‘wilfulness,’ the force of instinct, an irrational, free activity striking out wildly against the rationality of the existing authorities (education, property, rank). It was also on the basis of this *muzhik* nature that Bakunin (and later, Peter Tkachëv) famously argued against Peter Lavrov’s plans for educating or ‘propagandising’ the peasantry in the late 1860s and early 1870s: the social revolution (*revoliutsiia*), according to Bakunin, would be driven not only by the peasant instinct for ‘communism,’ but also by a basic human instinct, - repressed by the abstract education and rational laws falsely lauded by the *intelligenty* as saviours - to rebel or, in other words, to act according to one’s own will. The fundamental opposition between *volia* as the peasants’ interpretation of freedom and ‘liberty’ (*svoboda*) as a ‘civilised’ or limited, legal-political freedom, was shared by the radicalised aristocrats of the 1840s and the autocracy’s officials throughout the reigns of Nikolai I and Alexander II. So too was the association of the *mass* behaviour of the peasantry with this rather mysterious and, from the perspective of the educated classes, quite alien notion of *volia*. Both groups alike took peasant wilfulness and the associated dream of *volia* as manifestations of uneducated and, in so far as directed against the existing, ‘rational’ order of things, irrational ‘instinct,’ to the influence of which the peasants were thought uniquely vulnerable. Hence, even in their ‘wilful acts,’ individual peasants were denied by the educated elite the sort of ‘conscious will’ that was understood to transcend the external and internal forces of material domination and animal desire - forces seated, ultimately, in nature, of which ‘human nature’ in its benighted and instinctive form was merely an extension. The conscious or rational subject who, observing, contemplating and acting in line with a personal or higher (rational) interest, made a *personal* mark upon history and the world against the impersonal forces of nature and society appeared, then, in polar opposition to the ‘mass peasant,’ whose ‘wilful’ actions were merely passive and, since determined by a nature belonging to the estate or class of peasants as a whole, neither personal nor conscious.

Various intellectuals and state officials, especially during the reign of Nikolai I, attempted to explain why absolute power - specifically, of the paternalistic guidance and discipline of the autocrat - was necessary for Russia as a state and as a nation. According to Gogol, the tsar was the ‘image of God on earth,’ and so it would be senseless to limit his powers by ‘harsh and inflexible laws.’ Rather, the well-being of the Russian *narod* would be ensured by his ‘supreme grace,’ a ‘softening [of] the law,’ which could (according to Gogol) ‘come only in the form of

absolute power.’¹ Count S. Uvarov, Nikolai’s Minister of Education, coined in the early 1840s a formula linking autocratic power to Orthodox Christianity and the protection of national forms of life, placing the weight of emphasis on autocracy above all: ‘with the name of the Russian *narod*,’ Uvarov wrote in his memorandum of April, 1833, ‘I indivisibly unite two ideas: unconditional submissiveness to the Church, and the same devotion and obedience to the sovereign.’² Uvarov and others (the historian M. Pogodin, for instance) likened the autocracy to a family, ‘in which the sovereign is the father and the subjects the children,’³ holding nominally to the notion of autocratic protection extending to all estates, including the nobility, the clergy and the peasantry. Yet, as Uvarov stated explicitly in his role as Minister of Education, it would fall to ‘every professor and tutor,’ and the educated elite as a whole, ‘to make of himself a worthy instrument of the government,’⁴ in order to protect, on the one hand, the ‘younger generation’ from a ‘harmful and ill-conceived taste for the superficial and the foreign’⁵ and, on the other, the mass of the uneducated peasants from its own nature.⁶ Nikolai I’s death and the decline of doctrine of official nationality, centred around Uvarov’s tripartite scheme of ‘Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality,’ liberalised relatively the relationship between the Tsar, state officials and the educated elite during the first part of Alexander II’s reign (between early 1855 to the autumn of 1861), but did not radically change the fundamental relations between the tsar and the peasantry expressed in Uvarov’s formula.⁷ Dynamism and ‘history’ itself still flowed directly from the ‘absolute will’ of the tsar. It was the autocrat and the autocrat alone who was attributed with the sort of consciousness and freedom of action which might confirm the power of the individual over base passions and external determination, and by dint of this monopoly on free-will that the autocrat and his servants were charged with the protection

¹ See T. Anderson, *Russian Political Thought: An Introduction* (Ithaca/New York, 1967), p. 174-5.

² *Ibid*, p. 174.

³ M. Pogodin, *Rechi, proiznesennye v tvorchestvennykh i prochikh sobraniyakh, 1830-1872*, v. 3 (Moscow, 1872), p. 90.

⁴ Anderson, *Russian Political Thought*, p. 174.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 176.

⁶ This is rather neatly expressed by way of criticism in ‘Nicholas I’s Speech...’ in Moon, *Abolition*, p. 142-3. Nikolai is discussing here the position of the serfs and proposed changes to the system of serf ownership: ‘the reasons for this change...I cannot but attribute to two reasons above all: first, to the carelessness of landowners themselves, who give their serfs higher education, which is incompatible with their status...[and] second, to the fact that some landowners...forget their noble duty and abuse their power...’ (p. 142). Note that the comment about ‘serf status’ only *directly* points to a contradiction between *serfdom* and education, rather than between higher education and ‘peasant nature,’ as such; but the implication of Nikolai’s statement is closer, I believe, to the latter idea. The second point does, however, clearly indicate the given role of the nobility - alongside and in a local imitation of the autocrat’s - to protect and guide the serfs, as well as the moral duty to use this power over the peasants properly, e.g. responsibly.

⁷ See N. V. Riazanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality, 1825-55* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1959), passim; Zakharova, ‘Autocracy and the Reforms,’ p. 22.

of the *narod*, the ‘simple people,’ on behalf of the nation and of God. The tsar stood at the polar opposite of the *muzhik*, both in his historical particularity and in his ability to act consciously and freely. In principle, then, the only possible ‘cause’ of a morally and politically acceptable social transformation - including any peasant reform or emancipation - was the autocrat.



2.2 Tsar Aleksandr II

If Aleksandr II’s words are taken at face value, then Emancipation, denoting the release of the serfs ‘from above’ to a limited freedom (*svoboda*), was enacted to check the threat posed by *volia*: the sort of freedom that the peasants would secure by their own efforts and their own activity ‘from below.’ Maintaining the *muzhik* in his proper submission to the regime, in a positive state of passivity, was a principle condition of the Emancipation’s success. This was stated - more or less explicitly - in Aleksandr’s address to the Marshals of the Nobility in Moscow, commonly seen as the symbolic starting point of the reform era,⁸ delivered on the March 30, 1856:

⁸ Ibid, p. 23-4.

It has been rumoured that I wish to give freedom to the peasants... I am convinced that, sooner or later, we will reach the point where we must do this. I think you would agree with me thus far; consequently, it is far better that this happens from above than from below.⁹

Images of peasant unrest and rebellion were apparently familiar enough to the audience of noble landowners to be understood even through so vague a metaphor as the one employed by Aleksandr. And it was, perhaps, appropriate that ‘peasant uprising’ should take in Aleksandr’s speech a form so shapeless and indefinite. Real fears of the *bunt*, as well as the attempt of some officials to stir up such fears by reference to it, fed on the ambiguity of knowledge and the haziness that permeated their perceptions of the *narod*. Imposing, by the use of vague historical imagery, an immutable ‘peasant nature’ from which disorders and risings were supposed to have issued (and from which they might issue in the future), references to the peasant risings of Razin, Bulavin and Pugachëv demonstrate a unity of ‘mythical’ and ‘empirical’ knowledge in autocratic thought. Mass disturbances and disorder among the peasants were, according to the autocratic view of things, the outer signs of the passivity of peasant nature, just as more literally passive behaviours – devotion and loyalty to the Tsar, ‘good natured submission’¹⁰ to the established authorities, or even the apathetic fulfilment of obligations to landlords, the government, or the church – were understood to follow from this essential characteristic of peasant being.

The difficulty for both Tsars was that, by the 1860s, Emancipation ‘from above’ was already long awaited by the serfs. Reports through the nineteenth century documented a widespread belief in a ‘true freedom’ that would be granted ‘from above,’ providing the serfs with the right

⁹ ‘Rech’ Aleksandra II...,’ *KKR*, p. 85. D. Moon translated and published two alternate versions of this speech, both slightly different from the version in *KKR*, in the appendices to *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia: 1762-1907* (Harlow, 2001), p. 147-8. The first version is from the memoirs of A. I. Levshin, originally published in 1885, excerpts from which are also included in *KKR* (p. 73-85); the second version is from the notes of Senator Ia. A. Solov’ev, published in 1881. According to Moon’s translations, the key lines in Levshin run: ‘...I will not say to you that I am completely against [emancipation]; we live in such an age that it must come about in time. I think that you are of the same opinion as I am: therefore it is much better that this happens from above than from below,’ and in Solov’ev: ‘...you yourselves understand, that the present order of owning souls [i.e. serfs] cannot remain unchanged. It is better to start to abolish serfdom from above, than to wait for that time when it starts to abolish itself from below.’ It is clear from these three variants, recorded at different times, that Aleksandr *did* use the key image, ‘from above, not from below,’ in his speech. The overall meaning of each variant is also very similar in each case.

¹⁰ [Drozdov], ‘Alexander II’s Proclamation announcing the Abolition of Serfdom, 19 February 1861,’ (translated by D. Moon), in Moon, *Abolition*, p. 156; ‘Manifest 19 fevralia 1861 goda ob osvobozhdeniia pomeshchichn’ikh krest’ian iz krepostnoi zavisimosti,’ *KKR*, p. 212. In what follows, I have used Moon’s translation and compared it to the original. In some cases I have restored a few words or passages left out of Moon’s version. Hereafter, references to this document will be given to both versions in the following form: “[Drozdov], ‘Alexander II’s Proclamation...,’ Moon, *Abolition*, p. ---/‘Manifest 19 fevralia 1861...,’ *KKR*, p-.”

to possess the land which they worked, freedom from excessive taxation, and freedom from the authority of landowners and corrupt state officials. The ideal existence of liberation in the peasants' fantastical rumours, their mythical images of the Tsar-liberator (*tsar-osvoboditel'*) and their dreams of 'living as they wished to' under the Tsar's light-touch protection threatened to cast the real, historical liberation and *its* 'freedom' (*svoboda*) in an unfavourable light. The Tsar, surrounded by the aura of divinity, social and physically removed from the lives of individual peasants and their communities ('too far away,' as the peasants put it simply), was for the peasantry a figure largely imagined rather than known. In his ideal state the Tsar remained unblemished by the venality, corruption and trickery the peasants, whether 'liberated' or 'free,' perceived in their immediate relations to the state (including the real, rather than mythical, Tsar, his government, and the nobility). The Emancipation, intended to strengthen the autocracy by formalising the position of the peasants and reinforcing the 'good practice' of the conscientious and morally superior noble landowner, was interpreted by many peasant communities through a myth that separated the statements and actions of local authorities (nobles, officials, bailiffs, police, priests) rather sharply from the supposed intentions of the 'Tsar-protector' and 'Tsar-liberator.' The 'myth of liberation' and the 'myth of the Tsar-liberator,' combined with almost universal illiteracy among the serfs, and the widespread alienation between themselves and officialdom, the nobility, and (especially) the noble landlords, made more probable the misinterpretation, whether wilful or innocent, of even a favourable settlement on the proposed peasant reforms. The legal and economic freedom (or 'liberty,' *svoboda*) granted by the state was threatened with a disfigurement at the hands of 'average *muzhik*,' who understood the promised freedom as the elimination of limits to his will - as *volia*; the promulgation of an emancipation that did not correspond to the popular dream of *volia* had the potential to make of Aleksandr not only the celebrated 'liberator' of the serfs but also, against his will and that of his government, the central reference point - the reluctant leader - of an uprising of the peasantry on a scale spared the autocracy since the rebellion of Emel'yan Pugachëv under Catherine II. Therein lay the difficulty for Nikolai I and Aleksandr II.

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Throughout the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s, the outbreak of a 'peasants' uprising' comparable to the popular rebellions led by Pugachëv figured as a real possibility in the decisions made by the

autocratic elite regarding the proposed reforms.¹¹ In 1842, the threat of a new *pugachevshchina* had been Nikolai I's argument *against* the abolition of serfdom. 'At the present time,' Nikolai told the State Council on the 30th March, 'any thoughts about this would be nothing other than a criminal encroachment on public tranquillity and the good of the state. The Pugachëv riot showed us how far mob violence could go.'¹² Into the reign of Alexander II, numerous high ranking figures at the centre of the autocratic government, including the Chief of the Third Section of His Majesty's Chancellery (the political police set up by Nikolai I shortly after the Decembrists' failed uprising in 1825), V. Dolgorukov, and the Chief of State Domains, M. Murav'ev, having been charged with examining the moods of the peasantry (*krest'ianskoe nastroyenie, npravsvvenno-politicheskoe nastroyenie*), the popular state of mind (*raspolozhenie umov*), and the attitudes of the nobility in preparation for a more or less limited peasant reform, called on the hazy memories and bloody legends of Pugachëv and his mob, the 'black multitude,' in an effort to dissuade the Tsar from actions that might, in Nikolai I's words, endanger 'the good of the state.'

Direct references to the Pugachëv risings were not uncommon. In a report to Alexander II in 1857, Dolgorukov observed that, among certain parts of the population (especially in the lower Don and Volga regions), memories of the Pugachëv uprisings and fears of their repetition were still strong. Alongside these observations were his own warnings that emancipation might provoke a rebellion among the newly liberated serfs.¹³ Aside from any conscious political intentions Dolgorukov may have had in relating the Pugachëv risings to the emancipation, the effect of the association alone was to bring to mind not only a potent memory or image of this particular event, but also an image and a corresponding concept of the peasantry *in general*, a peasantry understood to be (as David Moon puts it) 'ignorant, irrational, credulous, devoted to the Tsar, nominally servile and passive, but prone to spontaneous outbreaks of anarchy and violence when stirred up by outsiders.'¹⁴ What Dolgorukov repeated here was a habitual transposition of the historical and particular with the universal - a simultaneous gesture to the

¹¹ P. Kolchin, 'Some controversial questions concerning nineteenth century emancipation from slavery and serfdom,' *Serfdom and Slavery*, p. 53; Zaionchkovsky, *Abolition*, p. 70-1 Moon, *Abolition*, p. 27-8; Zakharova, 'Autocracy and the Reforms,' p. 22-3; Field, 'Year of Jubilee,' p. 42; T. Emmons, *Russian Landed Gentry*, p. 49.

¹² See 'Nicholas I's Speech....,' in Moon, *Abolition*, p. 142.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Moon, *Russian Peasants and Tsarist Legislation*, p. 3; see also *idem*, *Russian Peasantry*, p. 268: '[there was a] common idea among Russian elites that peasants were usually submissive and loyal, but on account of their ignorance, simplicity, and gullibility, were easily led astray.'

unique and definite alongside the ambiguous and general - which was already expressed quite clearly in Nikolai I's speech to the State Council in 1842:

There is no doubt that serfdom is in its present condition in our country is an evil, apparent and obvious to everyone, but to touch it now would be even more harmful. The late Emperor Aleksandr [I] at the start of his reign intended to grant freedom to the serfs, but then gave up his idea as utterly premature and impossible to implement. I have also resolved never to do it, considering that if the time when it will be possible to undertake such a measure is still far off, then at the present time any thoughts about this would be nothing other than a criminal encroachment on public tranquillity and the good of the state. The Pugachëv riot showed us how far mob violence could go. The most recent events and endeavours of this sort have until now always been happily brought to a halt, which, of course, in future will also be a special and, with God's help, successful concern of the government.¹⁵

Thinly veiled by the practical concerns and the self-interest immediately apparent in the passage ('impossible to implement,' 'utterly premature,' 'the time when it will be possible to undertake such a measure is still far off,' 'a criminal encroachment') is a line of reasoning which legitimises autocratic power by gesturing, rather subtly in this case, to the vulnerability of the Tsars' peasant subjects. Without the *narod* (present here, on the one hand, as a part of the state's 'tranquil public' and, in another guise, as Pugachëv's 'violent mob'), Nikolai would be found reasoning that the autocracy had protected and maintained 'manifest evil' - with divine sanction, no less - in order to secure its own continued existence. Instead, Nikolai gives us the more familiar image of a paternalist government charged by God with securing the 'good of the state' (the well-being and 'tranquillity' of all estates under the authority of the Tsar) against the encroachments of pretenders and 'false tsars' who might upset the existing order of things. Pugachëv's 'violent mob' (understood by the elite, at least after the approach of *pugachevshchina* towards Kazan in 1773, as a *peasant* 'mob'¹⁶) had become for Nikolai merely Pugachëv's plaything, an extension of the Cossack's personal challenge to the absolute authority of Catherine II. This is indicative of the fear driving Nikolai, Dolgorukov and many other elites to argue *against* the emancipation in the 1840s and 1850s: freed from the moral education and direction provided by noble landowners, the government and the church, the peasants would become vulnerable to manipulative outsiders and 'false tsars' like Pugachëv, who would play on the peasants' childish desires for freedom and their naive belief in the 'Tsar-liberator' to further purely personal quests for recognition and power.

¹⁵ 'Nicholas I's speech....,' in Moon, *Abolition*, p. 142.

¹⁶ Moon, *Abolition*, p. 24.

For its protracted length and brutal (though unsystematic) violence, the Pugachëv uprising (1773-5) was to become for the government and the nobles alike the archetypal peasant uprising.¹⁷ The Pugachëv rising was, apparently, more than just a ‘collective memory’ or a political or rhetorical device. In being - for officialdom - archetypal, the Pugachëv rising revealed (and continued, a century or so later, to reveal) something about ‘peasant nature,’ something about peasant disorders (of whatever scale), and something about how the latter were an ‘expression’ of the former. Peasant nature was understood to be static - an essence revealed in certain behaviours, beliefs, rituals, etc – that, from the perspective of the state, could be expressed both positively and negatively. ‘Disorders’ were historical events that expressed the ‘negative’ aspect of peasant nature or, more accurately, peasant nature agitated by and filtered through negativity. In order for peasant behaviour – in its neutral state ritualistic, repetitive, self-reproducing and - in the best possible way - alien to the dynamism and relative freedom of the thought and action of the educated elite – in order for this ‘state of things’ to become *singular* or *historical*, a force from the outside was necessary. Acceptance of the autocratic social order presupposed that positive national or popular (*narodnyi*) change could come about only at the direction of the tsar, through the mediation of the state, and that these changes or actions embodied his ‘will.’ Thus, in the 1840s, Nikolai I was willing to make reforms in the relations between the state, the landlord and serf: this was described as a ‘duty’ handed down by divine providence through history. Aleksandr II’s proclamation on the eve of the Emancipation told a similar story of reform ‘from above,’ in response to *his* desire and his sense of duty to God’s will. The latter Tsar’s actions drew from the peasants a positive expression of their nature (submissiveness, obedience, faith, a pure and true religiosity).¹⁸ However, others might appear

¹⁷ Historically, Pugachëv’s army was able between 1773 and 1775 to threaten or lay siege temporarily to a number of large towns, and to seize many small ones, in the southern and western parts of the Russian empire : see J. T. Alexander, *Autocratic Politics in a National Crisis: The Imperial Russian Government and Pugachev’s Revolt, 1773-1775*, (Bloomington, 1969), p. 60-85, 176-78. See also the very detailed treatment in V. V. Movrodin (ed.), *Krest’ianskaia Voina v Rossii v 1873-75 godakh. Vosstanie Pugachev*, three volumes (Leningrad, 1964-70), as well as A. I. Andrushcehniko, *Krest’ianskaia voina, 1773-75 na Iaike, v Preural’e, na Ural’e i v Sibiri* (Moscow, 1969), with a marked focus on regional developments of the rebellion, and the role of leaders in each region. No rebel armies were ever able to threaten seriously Russia’s old or new capital: according to David Moon, ‘the revolts began and were at their strongest on the peripheries of the empire...In each case [e.g. the ‘Razin’ and ‘Pugachëv’ uprisings], once the rebel armies approached the central regions of Russia they were defeated. None of the rebel armies stood a realistic chance of victory once it came up against the full might of the Russian state and its armed forces’ (see Moon, *Abolition*, p. 24). However, fear of the ‘peasant miscreants’ amongst the nobility in Moscow was extremely high during the Pugachëv revolts, due in part to the fall of some noble landowners, their families, or members of the government appointed *starshina* (administrative council of the Iaik Cossacks) to the serf and Cossacks’ ‘summary justice.’

¹⁸ For a discussion of the ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ aspects of peasant nature, and the foundation of a ‘myth of the peasant’ in Russia in the aftermath of the Pugachëv risings, see: M. Raeff, ‘Pugachev’s Rebellion,’ *The*

whose intentions were opposite to, or otherwise in conflict with, those of the tsar. Under the manipulation of ‘false tsars,’ pretenders, ringleaders, and others intent on following their *own* thoughts and ‘will,’ as against the intentions and decisions of the autocrat, peasants might show the nature negatively, in childlike credulity, greed, myopia or social idealism, the overflowing of emotions, urges, and ‘passions.’



3. The ‘False Tsar’ Emel’ian Pugachëv holding court (*Pugachev’s Judgement*, V. G. Perov, 1868)¹⁹

It was the free and conscious person (‘tsars’ and ‘false tsars’)²⁰ – or, at least, the individual displaying signs of having acted and thought freely (‘ringleaders’) - who brought the peasantry into the purview of history, where ‘history’ consisted of reigns, as well as the events that took place, and the personalities who made their mark, in them. Though God was understood to be both the ‘formal’ and ‘final’ cause of the social structure and of historical change, the tsar was seen as the ‘efficient cause’ of the historical events that took place within society, whether in response to outside pressures or inner convictions. Yet, it was generally the person or the individual that made a singular mark on ‘history,’ through the events they caused, while the peasants remained ‘peasants,’ a crowd, the bearers of a certain ‘nature.’ Thus, it was possible for Nikolai and Dolgorukov to refer to *pugachevshchina* at one and the same time as an *historical* event (as a *singular* occurrence led by a *singular* person, by his ‘will’) and as a

Preconditions of Revolution in Early Modern Europe, R. Foster and J. P. Greene, (eds.), (Baltimore, 1970), p. 198-200. On the ‘myth of the peasant’ in relation to proposed peasant reforms and the Emancipation, see Field, ‘The Year of Jubilee,’ p. 47.

¹⁹ The Yorck Project, *10,000 Meisterwerke der Malerei* (2002), available online. Accessed 10/04/11.

²⁰ On the appearance of ‘false tsars’ and its relation to peasant mentality, see Field, *Rebels*, passim (but see especially p. 2-17); Moon, *Russian Peasantry*, p. 240-52; M. Perrie, “‘Popular Socio-Utopian Legends’ in the Time of Troubles,” *Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 60, no. 2 (April, 1982), p. 221-43.

possible event in the future. Pugachëv, Catherine II and her representatives lent the event its 'history'; peasant nature provided the ahistorical foundation. It was only the combination of the two that made Nikolai and Dolgorukov's reminders of Pugachëv meaningful as comments on the possible consequences of reform. Small-scale 'events' (a disorder or riot, for instance) might enter history by the same route, with the same double-sided reference.

Thus, in the two centuries dividing Catherine II's suppression of the Pugachëv revolt and Alexander II's abolition of serfdom, the term *pugachevshchina* earned a place alongside numerous other terms that might already designate, more or less broadly, large-scale peasant rebellion or uprising (*bunt*; *miatezh*; *vosstanie*).²¹ In so far as the word referred, simultaneously, to a unique 'peasant uprising' in history as well as to a concept or type of peasant rebellion, possible of repetition, *pugachevshchina* was a close equivalent to the French *jacquerie*, a term coined originally by horrified nobles to describe the mass uprising of peasants around the Oise valley, north of Paris, in 1358.²² Significantly, though, while the 'peasant mass' and its figurehead were memorialised alike in the word *jacquerie*,²³ the various followers of Pugachëv – private and state-owned serfs, factory peasants, Iaik Cossacks, schismatic 'Old Believers,' priests, townspeople – were referred to only indirectly in *pugachevshchina*. A certain reference confirming Pugachëv's historical existence - his singularity, his role as the leader and cause of this *particular* rising – also comprehended the ahistorical basis upon by which this rising had been possible, e.g. 'peasant nature.' Only this double-reference (to the event *and* the class of events) really makes Nikolai's comment intelligible: 'I have also resolved never to [grant freedom to the serfs], considering that if the time when it will be possible to undertake such a measure is still far off, then at the present time any thoughts about this would be nothing other

²¹ On the word *bunt*, see above. *Miatezh* is occasionally used as an equivalent of 'disorder' (*besporiadok*) or 'riot,' 'rebellion' (*bunt*) in police documents, functioning also as a synonym for *bunt* in social revolutionary literature, though it has the special and primary meaning of 'mutiny' or 'insurrection.' *Vosstanie* is translated as 'rising' or 'insurrection,' and can indicate a revolt or rising among any social, political or national group, not limited to the peasants or army. The word is equally appropriate in 'peasants' rising' (*krest'ianskoe vosstanie*) as it is in, for instance, 'Decembrist uprising' (*vosstanie dekabristov*), the 'rising of the middle class' (*vosstanie srednego klassa*) or even (though unusually), 'the armed insurrection of October, 1917' (*Okt'iabr'skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie*).

²² For a short account of these events, see: J. Sumption, *The Hundred Years War* (3 vols.), v. 2: *Trial by Fire* (London, 1999), p. 327-336. On the notion that this term signified both this particular peasant revolt and, later, peasant revolts in general, see R. Neillands, *The Hundred Years War* (London/New York, 1990), p. 153; M. Dommanget, *La Jacquerie* (Paris, 1971), p. 7-8. Note that Dommanget specifically mentions Pugachëv and *pugachevshchina* in his introduction (p. 7).

²³ In connoting both *jacques* and 'Jacques Bonhomme.' The latter was a nickname applied to individual, rebel peasants and then, later, to the supposed leader of their revolt, Guillaume Cale, after the chainmail coats - *jacques de maille* - traditionally worn by the French and English archers and by the peasantry (Dommanget, *ibid*, p. 14-18).

than a criminal encroachment on public tranquillity and the good of the state. *The Pugachëv riot showed us how far mob violence could go.*²⁴

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The historian has cause, however, to question the ‘depth’ of these statements, which is to say, their actual intentions, the context of their usage, and their reception by specific audiences. What, if anything, demonstrates that these were *genuine* fears of peasant behaviour, that these were genuine references to the peasantry ‘below,’ rather than mere rhetorical devices aimed at manipulating a social elite alien to the peasantry and ignorant of it? In what relation did references to the Pugachëv risings stand to the smaller-scale disorders actually recorded and quelled by the state under Nikolai I and Aleksandr II? Isn’t it possible that references to ‘false tsars’ and a mythic ‘peasant nature’ were, by the 1840s, already understood by officials *themselves* to be ‘mythic,’ to be rhetorically or politically useful, even if unrelated to actual evidence of peasant disorder or unrest? It would be reasonable to suppose a distinction between the ideal image of society that the autocracy produced (as a model for action; as propaganda; as a sort of self-delusion) and the more private representations of society that might be found in documentation of cases of unrest, disorder, or indeed any contacts between the state and the peasantry. After all, these statements were made in the context of a elite discussion of how the interests of serfs, landowners and the state might best be served in concert, with self-consciously ‘conservative,’ ‘liberal’ and ‘progressive’ (or radical) groups emerging in the process of debate and conflict. It may have been in the political interests of the more conservative of the state officials, opposed to the planned peasant reforms, to spoon-feed Tsar Alexander II with descriptions of the potentially disastrous consequences of the emancipation for the autocracy.²⁵ Before 1861 (as Moon has shown), elite reports to the Tsar on peasant unrest differed both in tone and content according to the political standpoint of their authors on the proposed reforms. Hence, Dolgorukov report of 1857 counted a far higher number of disturbances among the peasants for the preceding year (65 in 1856) than a concurrent report

²⁴ ‘Nicholas I’s speech...,’ Moon, *Abolition*, p. 142.

²⁵ This was the view of one member of the ‘Main Committee on the Peasant Question,’ Ia. A. Solov’ev, as stated in his memoirs of the period, ‘Zapiski Senatora Ya. A. Solov’eva...,’ originally published in *Russkaia Starina*, no. 30, extracts from which are printed as ‘Iz vospominanii Senatora Ya. A. Solov’eva “Krest’ianskoe delo v 1856-59 gg”’ in *KKR*, p. 136-149. Moon cites Solov’ev from the original *Russkaia Starina* as evidence of the ‘political’ or ‘ideological’ use of the threat of disorder by the ‘conservative’ (or, as Solov’ev says, ‘reactionary’) party against the proposed reforms (*Abolition*, p. 60); see, on this point, ‘Iz vospominanii Senatora Ya. A. Solov’eva...,’ *KKR*, p. 140-1.

made by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Graf S. S. Lanskoï, on peasant disturbances during the same year (25). Overlain on these figures were widely divergent views on the significance of disorders, the rumours of emancipation circulating among the peasants, and the generally disturbed ‘state of mind’ of the peasantry: Dolgorukov transmitted to the Tsar the view of many noble landowners that liberation would only induce bestial sorts of behaviour from the unenlightened peasantry; Lanskoï, oppositely, found the incidence of peasant disturbances and peasants’ rumours insignificant to the Tsar’s plans for emancipation.²⁶ ‘Since Dolgorukov was opposed to the reform,’ Moon notes, ‘and Lanskoï was in favour, it is not hard to detect a political explanation [for this discrepancy].’²⁷



4. V. A. Dolgorukov²⁸



5. S. S. Lanskoï²⁹

It would be quite consistent with a political explanation of the disagreement between the 1857 reports if Dolgorukov and Lanskoï had simply chosen different sources to back up their assertions regarding the peasantry.³⁰ Moon notes, after Zaionchkovsky, that figures for peasant disorders varied according to the institution which had compiled them: ‘there were two police forces: the rural police, who were subordinate to provincial governors and the Ministry of

²⁶ Moon, *Abolition*, p. 60

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Perepiska Imperatora Aleksandr II s velikim Kniazem Konstantinom Nikolaevichem: 1857-1861* (Moscow, 1994), illustrations following p. 272.

²⁹ *Iu. F. Samarin: stat'i, vospominaniia, pis'ma: 1840-1876* (Moscow, 1997), illustrations following p. 60.

³⁰ Moon includes similar observations about institutional discrepancies in documentation of peasant disorders in his argument regarding Dolgorukov and Lanskoï’s reports: ‘Even allowing for the fact that the ministry’s figures on peasant disturbances were usually lower than the Third Section’s...the differences between the figures and the attitudes to peasant unrest were significant’ (Moon, *Abolition*, p. 60).

Internal Affairs, and the Third Section (the secret police)...[The] rural police tended to report fewer disorders, since larger numbers would have suggested to their superiors that they were not carrying out their duty to maintain law and order. The agents of the Third Section...usually reported higher numbers, since they were anxious to justify their role.’³¹ Given that the disjunctions between the police institutions’ criteria for enumerating disorders would have been recognised by contemporaries, it is even conceivable that Lanskoï – arguing, through his report, in favour of far-reaching reforms – and Dolgorukov – arguing for a more conservative approach to the peasant question – might have quoted each others’ figures without doing any serious, logical damage to their own cases. What is often missed in discussions of the enumeration of disturbances is the fact that the *number* of incidents was quite secondary to the arguments offered by each official: ‘it was not the number [of incidents] which terrified the government,’ as Zaionchkovsky noted, ‘but rather the taut atmosphere in the countryside.’³² The respectively negative and positive tones taken in Dolgorukov and Lanskoï’s reports to Alexander, against the background of this vague sense of an agitated peasant mood and an atmosphere signalling the further deterioration of relations between the serfs and the landlords, were more significant than the numbers of peasant disturbances they reported to the Tsar. Their arguments rested on more or less general conceptions of the peasantry and interpretations of peasant behaviour and peasant mentality extended from these conceptions and from empirical information provided by direct reports of disturbances. For Lanskoï, the rumours and the ‘loose-talk’ of the simple people were, in practice, quite harmless. Rumours had, after all, been the subject of rural police reports since the time of Pugachëv, had been under the surveillance of Third Section since its establishment in 1826, and monitored by its numerous predecessor organisations under Alexander I; as such, rumours were a recognised facet of peasant culture and so could be taken, with some confidence, *not* to correlate in any precise way to actual cases of disturbance or unrest. For Lanskoï rumours were at the very least ‘known enemies,’ and fairly toothless ones at that. Dolgorukov, oppositely, emphasised the dangers of the peasant ‘rumour mill,’ the potential for brutality and destruction signified by ‘harmful gossip,’ even if its circulation was not precisely correlated with the incidence of disturbances.

Whatever the opinions of upper state officials, rumours of the coming ‘freedom’ (*svoboda*; *osvobozhdenie*; *volia*; *vol’nost*), even when encountered episodically or at second-hand, were

³¹ Ibid, p. 26; see also Zaionchkovsky, *Abolition*, p. 27.

³² Zaionchkovsky, *Abolition*, p. 65.

taken seriously by the authorities on the ground, and were thus presented at this level as part of the ‘phenomenon of disorder’ in official documentation. The attention given to the subject through report after report over decades is enough indication of this. By 1857-8, the lunacy of ‘freedom’ according to the *muzhik* had been repeatedly observed by official commentators on peasant culture. What was treated later, by writers slightly more detached from the everyday control of the peasantry, as a curiosity of peasant mentality and culture fated to disappear with the coming of modernity or capitalism,³³ had to be taken as a serious threat to public order by officialdom as it prepared in earnest to liberate the serfs, namely, the concept of *volia*: the beliefs that ‘in ancient times, all peasants had belonged to the state but had been gradually transferred to the private landlords,’ that the nobility and the church had ‘hidden His Majesty’s ukase [*ukaz*] granting the peasants freedom,’ and that the land, belonging ultimately to God, should be possessed only by those who actually worked it.³⁴ Popular dreams of freedom were a threat to the basic moral order of things. Repeated stories of a life freed from state taxation, labour dues, and the arbitrary powers of the local landowner could not help but feed the desires of the peasants, giving transitory public existence to an admittedly natural, but still infantile impulse to rebel. ‘The most dangerous aspect of the *narod*’s understanding of freedom,’ one anonymous chinovnik wrote to Murav’ev (the latter another vociferous opponent of serfdom’s abolition) in mid-1857,³⁵

is that the peasant mob [*chern*] will allow itself, under the sway of this concept, to act just as it wishes, accepting no correction and accepting no limits to its will. Outbursts of the passions, laziness, and negligence are all considered expressions of freedom; equally, vice, drunkenness, unruliness, brutality and wilfulness [*svoevol’stvo*] are seen as laudable acts of daring that merit no punishment.³⁶

³³ See, for instance, N. P. Semenov, ‘Byt’ krest’ian do obnarodovaniia polozheniia 19 fevralia 1861 goda’ (an extract from Semenov’s *O syd’bakh krest’ianskogo sosolviia v Rossii*, (St. Petersburg, 1894)), in *KKR*, p. 58-61.

³⁴ ‘Zapiska, predstavleniia v kontse 1857 ili nachale 1858 g. chlenu sekret’nogo komiteta po krest’ianskomu delu M. N. Murav’evu, o kharekture volnenii krest’ian pomeschchika Fedorova i pomeschchika Kireevoi v 1852-1853 gg.’ *KKR*, p. 64-5.

³⁵ The editors of *KKR* were not able to date the ‘Zapiska, predstavleniia... M. N. Murav’evu,’ stating only that it was delivered to Murav’ev, in his capacity as a member of the ‘Secret Committee on the Peasant Question’ (a predecessor of the Main Committee on the Peasant Question,’ both of which discussed various proposals for the peasant reforms through 1857-61), either in 1857 or 1858. Yet, another document written by Murav’ev – his ‘Zamechaniia o poriadke osvobozhdeniia krest’ian,’ dating from 1857 (after Murav’ev’s return from a fact finding trip around the central regions and his entry into the ‘Main Committee’) bears such a close resemblance in its discussions of the ‘peasant concept of freedom,’ that it seems reasonable to conclude that Murav’ev used the anonymously authored ‘Zapiski...’ in the composition of his own notes for the Committee (see ‘Iz zapiski chlena Glavnogo komiteta po krest’ianskomu delu, ministra gosudarstvennykh imushchestv M. N. Murav’ev “Zamechaniia o poriadke osvobozhdeniia krest’ian,”” 1857, *KKR*, p. 165 (see also the editorial notes to this document, p. 483). I have therefore dated the ‘Zapiska, predstavleniia... M. N. Murav’evu’ to mid-1857.

³⁶Ibid, p. 65.

The connection made between the peasant mentality (or ‘peasant nature’) and popular disorders’ threat to the social hierarchy began with a moralising judgement of everyday peasant behaviour. ‘Drunkenness,’ ‘vice,’ ‘brutality’ and ‘laziness’ among the serfs, dealt with by bailiffs, state officials and peasant functionaries on a day-to-day basis as a necessary part of their management and control of the labour force,³⁷ became in the chinovnik’s report indicators of the peasants’ potential to do harm not only their own lives, but also to the ‘good of the state.’ Established hierarchical authority, the maintenance of state security and the direction of the autocrat’s subjects toward Christian goodness and salvation formed a single elite interest, challenged not only in the habitual tendencies of the peasantry towards drunkenness and vice, but also in the reproduction, *in extremis*, of those everyday behaviours in the ‘popular concept of freedom.’ Even without an overt or specific ‘political position’ being taken, such reports tapped into the vein of elite paranoia which linked, in a fairly vague way, the simplicity of the ‘simple people,’ the dangers of their moral degradation when freed from the authoritative guidance of the nobles and the state, and the uncontrollable burlings of the peasant ‘rumour mill.’

This particular report aimed to describe in the first place the disturbances among privately-owned serfs in Ardatovskii *uezd*, Nizhegorodskaiia *guberniia*, in 1852.³⁸ It would have been one of many collected by the ‘Secret Committee on the Peasant Question’ under Alexander II. In describing the causes of these disturbances, the chinovnik moved directly from the definiteness of time, place and extent of the unrest to the rather more diffuse, obscure force of the ‘rumour mill’: ‘Insubordination appeared among the peasants on the estates of the landowners, Fedorov and Kireevaia in 1852,’ the chinovnik reported, and these disturbances were ‘founded on rumours that the serf class would be made free [*otpushchen na voliiu*] with all the land and other goods belonging to the landowner.’³⁹ The report went on to describe how, through the investigations of the rural police, especially the detailed interrogation of the peasants themselves, this ‘rumour’ was linked to the ‘popular concept of freedom’ held by the agitated peasants and, in turn, their sudden refusal to pay taxes to the state and quitrent to the landlords. In the transition from the description of the Fedorov and Kireevaia disorders to the explanation of the peasants’ concept of freedom, the chinovnik replaces the word ‘peasants,’ *krest’iane*,

³⁷ See S. L. Hoch, *Serfdom and Social Control in Russia: Petrovskoe, a Village in Tambov* (Chicago, 1986), *passim*.

³⁸ ‘Zapiska, predstavleniia... M. N. Murav’evu,’ *KKR*, p. 64.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

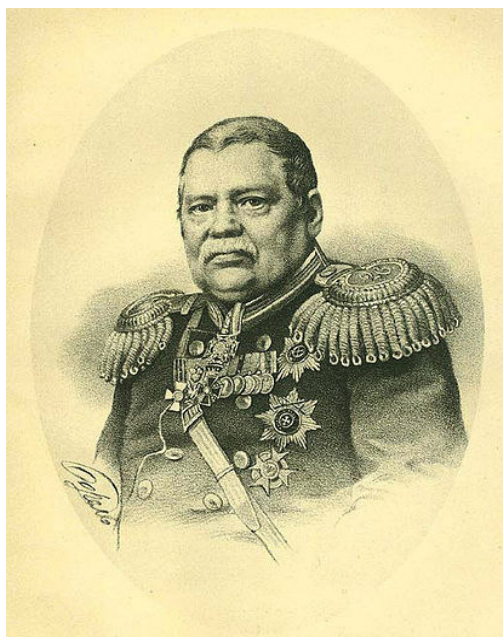
with the more negative *chern'*, often rendered as '(violent) mob,' 'black multitude,' or 'peasant mass,' used here as a collective term to describe the peasants in their agitated state.⁴⁰ The shift from the *krest'iane* to the *chern'* in this report indicated a double movement: on the one hand, from a description of the peasants (*krest'iane*) as an audience for rumours of freedom to a description of the agitated peasants (*chern'*) as bearers of the concept of freedom, behaving in line with the dictates of the concept as instinctively and quite perversely interpreted by them; on the other, from a description of the particular peasants of Fedorov and Kireevaia to a description of peasant behaviour and mentality in general:

Investigations of the disorders in the town of Goliatkin showed that the peasants [*krest'iane*] had begun to repudiate all rights to property, having declared that rich men had no right to possess capital on their own, and that it should be shared with the poor, and that if freedom [*svoboda*] would make all the people equal, then the rights to property should also be made equal for all. From all this it can be concluded that, having accepted this perverse conception of freedom, they interpret it in an unconditional way ... The danger of the fermentation of thought among the peasant mob [*chern'*] is not in a resultant demand for a reasonably limited sort of freedom, but in the peasants' irrational inclination [*nerassudnoe uvlechenie*] to see freedom as the satisfaction of vulgar passions [*grubykh strastei*]; one cannot guarantee calm among the peasants – it is presently maintained by fear alone. Not only do government measures not work; they cannot hope to work even in the short term. The most dangerous aspect of the *narod's* understanding of freedom [*samoe vrednoe poniatie naroda o svoboda*] is that the peasant mob [*chern'*] will allow itself, under the sway of this concept, to act just as it wishes...⁴¹

Starting from an investigation into the origins of a particular disorder in Nizhegorodskaia guberniia, the chinovnik brings the reader to startling propositions regarding the nature of agitated peasant crowds and, ultimately, the *narod* as a whole: that the fermentation of peasant thought, their interpretation of freedom, was somehow largely *unthinking*, irrational (*nerassudnoe*); that the peasant concept of freedom was simply the expression or reflection of the vulgar passions of the peasant mob; that having passively accepted or received (*poluchiv*) the bare notion of freedom, the people were inclined to understand it only as a spontaneous and frenzied outpouring of immorality.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 64-5.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 65.



6. M. N. Murav'ev

It is significant that concern for the moral order of things and the corresponding, general propositions about 'peasant thought' and 'peasant being' entered the official records of the government near the base of the bureaucratic hierarchy. Judgements of the overall 'peasant mood,' drawing on a certain concept of 'peasant nature,' were present, fully-formed, even in reports concerned with particular disturbances and disorders. Was anything added, for political purposes, by Ministers and upper state officials when drawing on such sources? An examination of the fate of the chinovnik's report, once sent to Murav'ev, especially the reliance of, or references made by, the Minister to this document, gives an idea of how deeply moral judgements were intertwined with the empirical content, ostensibly drawn from direct investigations into actual peasant disturbances, of these reports. Murav'ev, in a report to the 'Main Committee on the Peasant Question,' seems to have taken almost word-for-word from the chinovnik's notes on the Fedorov and Kireevaia disorders an overview of what he referred to as 'so-called freedom' - the popular concept of freedom - describing it as 'a wilful and unbridled sort of freedom,' that demanded 'all land be available for the peasants use,' contended that the nobility had no right to property in land, and that under its sway (after the chinovnik's report again), the peasants would replace the existing state system with 'a series of village assemblies' (*mirskie sudilishcha* in Murav'ev; *mirskie skhoda* in the chinovnik's notes).⁴² Murav'ev ended his report on the 'mood of the peasantry' by concluding that 'the

⁴² Ibid; 'Iz zapiska...M. N. Murav'eva "Zamechaniia o poriadke osvobozhdeniia krest'ian,'" [1857-58], *KKR*, p. 165. This latter is also printed as Doc. 38 in *KD: 1850-56*, p. 121-4.

current direction of peasant thinking and the peasants' opposition to the social order of things... [are persuasive arguments] against the creation of an estate of free rural inhabitants.⁴³ Murav'ev had been charged with examining the feasibility of a full legal emancipation of the serfs, granted with land equalling that utilised by them before the reforms – the most radical of the proposals put to the 'Secret Committee' after June, 1857 and the 'Main Committee' after early 1858. His report would include not only investigations of the various proposals' probable economic and social effects, but also the probable effects of *delaying* the reforms, news of which had already begun to circulate among the peasantry. With a growing sense of panic among certain circles of the nobility and the government about the situation in the countryside,⁴⁴ it was quite natural that those involved in discussing the reforms should wish to know the extent and content of rumour spreading among the people and the 'mood of the peasantry' as whole before making their judgements. It was to that end that Murav'ev set off into the provinces in 1857, and on that basis that he presented his 'notes' to the 'Main Committee' in 1858.⁴⁵ Yet, given the confused and unsystematic way in which even the *quantity* of disorders was calculated, year upon year, by different sections of the state's police forces, the confusion extending even to the basic criteria for the identification of a single disorder or a single disturbance, what possible legitimacy could propositions about the overall 'mood of the peasantry,' the attitudes, mentality and beliefs of millions of serfs, have had? It might be argued that no divergence in the sources of different kinds of knowledge would be noticeable for precisely the reason that quantitative and qualitative judgements of disorders were 'political' to the root. Is there not, however, a perceivable disjunction between the information garnered *in situ* through the direct investigations of the officials, on the one hand, and the reports regarding the 'peasant mood,' apparently derived from an ideological stance vis-à-vis the peasantry, on the other - between 'empirical' and the 'categorical' statements about particular peasants and the *narod*, respectively?

Examination of the chinovnik's report from Nizhegorodskaiia, and Murav'ev's later use of it as a model or support for his own general propositions about the peasantry can explain the unquestioned legitimacy of this knowledge among government officials. Already identified in the chinovnik's report is a merging of the apparently objective, empirical information about a disorder and the morally biased judgments about peasant behaviour and peasant thought. The

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Zaionchkovsky, *Abolition*, p. 53, 65-6.

⁴⁵ Ibid; *KKR*, p. 483.

description of the Fedorov and Kireevaia estate disturbances retained a certain recognisable, empirical legitimacy not only in the basic historical details provided (location, the names of the serf's owners, the time of the occurrence of the disturbances, etc.), but also in the investigative methods gestured to by the chinovnik in the course of his report: the detailed interrogation and questioning of the peasants themselves during and after the disturbances; on-the-spot observations of their behaviour; records of their reactions to government measures (the use of troops), and so on. It is indicated through the implied or 'secondary' description of the chinovnik's own methods of investigation that direct contact had been made and maintained with the agitated peasants by state officials, troops and perhaps others (the noble landowners). Hence, the truthfulness of the chinovnik's assertions was implicitly asserted by (apparently) incidental references to 'enquiries' (*doznanie*), 'detailed investigations' or 'research' (*issledovaniia*), the questioning of the peasants (*'krest'ain[e] byli sprosheny...*),⁴⁶ and seemingly verbatim records of the peasants responses to questioning:

[the disorderly peasants] were asked why they were not paying the [state's] per capita tax [*podushykh*: the state's 'poll tax' on the peasants] and were refusing to carry out their obligations – some spoke of falling into poverty, others explained that they were not obligated to pay because they had been granted freedom by a special ukase, which had been hidden by the gubernatorial officials. Refuting their claims, we told them that even the state and private peasants, whom they revered as 'free men' [*svobodnymi*], bore cash obligations; but they answered that they did not consider [the state peasants] to be free [*vol'nymi*]; they were understood to belong to the state: 'how can they be free [*vol'nie*] when all sorts of payments are demanded of them?'⁴⁷

Details giving the impression of precision in these descriptions – the use of *svoboda* to denote a 'reasonable concept of freedom' and *volia* to denote the peasants' own interpretation of it; the movement, in describing the peasants, from *krest'iane* to *chern'* to *narod*, apparently signifying the movement between different levels of abstraction – lends to the chinovnik's report the legitimacy of direct experience: the official is reporting on something unique, singular, derived from his own investigations of disorder or direct confrontations with the peasantry, and hence referencing directly the particular objects of those investigations. The dividing line between objective knowledge and knowledge issuing from a moralising ideology and its rhetoric seems to be thick and well-defined. But the aura of direct experience conceals the moral judgments which precede every description of the peasants and their ideas. They veil too - and more

⁴⁶ 'Zapiska, predstavleniia... M. N. Murav'evu,' *KKR*, p. 64-5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 64.

successfully - the utter lack of epistemic clarity and precision which runs through this entire report from its historical details to its general propositions.

A moral judgement enters the report at its most basic level. The close connection posited by the chinovnik between disorder, immorality, rumour and the peasant interpretation of 'freedom' has already been noted. This was not, however, a conclusion arrived at purely through investigation of the Fedorov and Kireevaia estate disorders: it was a framework of interpretation which was brought into play as an interpretative device from the moment the investigations into those disorders began. Indeed, the first act of the chinovnik was to intervene in peasant 'unruliness' and 'insubordination,' to mediate between the nobles and the agitated serfs on these estates, with the ultimate purpose of restoring public order, of forcing the peasants to pay their taxes and fulfil their labour obligations to the landlords, and in that very direct sense to protect an order of things already understood to be 'morally good.' The chinovnik implicitly set out the 'reasonably limited' concept of freedom (*svoboda*), which he believed did not pose any threat to the state, in tearing apart the 'false' and 'perverse' (*prevratnye*) conceptions of freedom (*volia*) and linking it to recognised immoral inclinations and immoral behaviours among the serfs. It was the 'unlimited' nature of *volia* which posed a threat: one the one hand, in the drunkenness, vice and insubordination which followed when the *muzhik*'s desires and will were given free reign and, one the other, in the demand for unrestricted access to and use of lands rightfully belonging to the noble landlord. In both cases, the attack on the established social hierarchy corresponded to the 'limitless freedom' of the peasant; a reasonable limit to the peasants' freedom would include the protection of the landlords' estates as well as the protection of the peasant from his own desires and will. Indeed, in trying to refute the peasants' mistaken conception of freedom, the chinovnik went some way towards enforcing his own concept of a 'reasonable limited' freedom for the peasants. The next step in restoring the moral order of things - as the report notes - was the arrival of troops in Nizhegorodskaia *guberniia*.

Moral judgement of the *narod* and a certain imprecision of knowledge coincide in the chinovnik's first observations regarding the disturbance in 1852: 'Insubordination appeared among the peasants on the estates of...Fedorov and Kireevaia... founded on rumours that the serf class would be made free with all the land and other goods belonging to the landowner.'⁴⁸ In motioning towards the power of the 'rumour,' the chinovnik was, by 1857-8, on explanatory

⁴⁸ Ibid.

ground surely familiar to the upper government officials for whom the report was intended. The rumour was understood as an uncontrollable and unpredictable *force*, occasionally audible to the authorities as it passed from person to person in the taverns or marketplaces, but observable for the most part in its apparent effects. Despite strenuous efforts to identify the sources of such harmful talk and to document its passage through the countryside (see below), the circulation of the rumour was rarely identifiable as an event or a series of events, and hence took on a mysterious and sometimes horrifying unpredictability akin to that of a force of nature. What lent the 'rumour' a veneer of definiteness was the recourse to judgments of the peasantry by kind or, in other words, judgements of peasant 'nature'. The peasants, according to the chinovnik, had an irrational inclination not only to a perverse interpretation of the concept of freedom, but also to a passive acceptance of loose talk *about* freedom: 'having *accepted* this perverse conception of freedom' - the chinovnik wrote, implying its passage from the outside inwards through the harmful rumour - 'they [the peasants] interpret it in an unconditional way' (emphasis added). The Fedorov and Kireevaia disturbances, then, become just one discernible manifestation of an otherwise concealed meeting point between the 'rumour,' an unpredictable 'force,' and the irrational tendencies - the irreducibly spontaneous and so immoral nature - of the unchained and untutored 'serf class.' Peasant actions, their resistance to the existing order of things, their dreams of living according to their own will, their articulation of these desires, were understood as mere by-products of their nature, the harmful manifestations of the crude, animal passions within each *muzhik*. From the relatively definite ground of 'a disturbance,' the report brings us to the empirically indefinite realm of myth, what Daniel Field described as the 'myth of the peasant.'⁴⁹ This 'myth' acquired truthfulness in so far as it was sustained not purely 'in thought,' but also in practice. The government of 'educated adults,' a paternalistic government enforcing, at one and the same time, the moral norms imposed by the elite and the order of the state, produced a myth to legitimise its own authority: a general concept of the peasantry - the simple, uneducated *narod*, ruled by its passions and impulses - requiring of a civilised, fully human master to ensure, above all, *its own well-being*. In its investigation and suppression of 'disorders' and 'disturbances' among peasants, the rural police, Third Section and various other local officials reinforced in their very actions the notion of a proper state of things, an order without disorder, a condition undisturbed by the emotional and irrational outbursts of the unchecked peasant will. And since it was this 'state of order' and this paternal authority which proposals and preparations for the emancipation of the serfs were, above all

⁴⁹ Field, *Rebels*, p. 213.

else, concerned to maintain,⁵⁰ the sort of general propositions regarding the *narod* found in the reports of Murav'ev and the anonymous chinovnik were taken, almost without thought, as meaningful, object-referential, and 'legitimate.' The legitimacy of such knowledge was identical to the legitimacy of the regime that produced it.

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This myth, at the very centre of autocratic authority, was turned back on the peasant in the documentation of disorder. The generality of the notion of a 'peasant nature' was to have a discernable effect even on the description of nominally unique peasant individuals, in other words, on the descriptions of the actual people with whom government officials had direct and personal contact. The formalisms of the official report echoed in modest form the basic principle of the autocratic regime: the rule of one person over a hierarchy of estates. The formal demand for precision in reports had the officials identify the private serfs by their location (village, town, estate, *uezd*, *guberniia*), by the name of their owner, in their quantity (as a crowd, as a community, as a labour force), and on occasion by their first names and surnames. Such a fleeting and functional appearance to officialdom and to history was hardly able to contain the complexity of a life actually lived; against a growing interest among upper state officials and radicals émigrés in garnering public and historical recognition for their personal achievements and dearest causes (seen most clearly in the growth in popularity of autobiographical and memoir accounts), the shadowy presence of the individual peasant in contemporary documentation is all the more striking. A brief look back to the report on the Fedorov and Kireevaia estate disturbances demonstrates the ambiguity of reference under a thin veil of historiographical precision characteristic of official documentation:

...Refuting their claims, we told them that even the state and privately owned peasants, whom they revered as 'free men,' bore cash obligations; but they answered that they did not consider [the state peasants] to be free; they were understood to belong to the state: 'how can they be free when all sorts of payments are demanded of them?'⁵¹

⁵⁰ See Zaionchkovsky, *Abolition*, p. 42-3, 44-6, 48-9, 53, 65-6, 105-11. Except the last, these references indicate Zaionchkovsky's discussions of the preparations of reforms, from Alexander II's famous speech in March, 1856 (discussed below), to Baron Haxthausen's warnings about revolutionary uprisings in Europe (related by him to the survival of serfdom in Russia), to the deliberations of the Secret and Main Committees on the Peasant Question between 1857 and early 1861. The last reference is to a discussion of the extensive military and other preparations for the promulgation of the Emancipation in March – May, 1861 (discussed in detail below).

⁵¹ 'Zapiska, predstavleniia... M. N. Murav'evu,' *KKR*, p. 64.

The use of the pronoun in the third person plural (*oni* - ‘they,’ and also *im* - ‘to them’) has become so familiar, because so common in official records of the peasant speech, that it hardly seems to merit attention. Yet, what it expresses is a basic indifference on the part of this official to the particular ideas, particular thoughts and particular lives - ultimately, to the existence – of individual peasants. The object of the chinovnik’s report is, instead, the peasant multitude, the ‘mob,’ not quite as a collective body, but as an entity made up of merely nominal individuals. Probably it was not the chinovnik’s intention that his descriptions be taken literally, in other words, to have his ostensibly verbatim reports of peasant speech taken as truly ‘collective.’ Whatever the chinovnik’s intentions might have been, the image of a chorus of peasants answering the officials’ questions and ‘refutations’ in perfect harmony, as a ‘collective,’ is not the one readily brought to mind by the context or by the chinovnik’s rendering of the peasants’ responses. Rather, it is *the* peasant, the image of the peasant type or *muzhik*, which the use of ‘they’ evokes. For government officials, any particular *muzhik* might stand for any other particular *muzhik*, and might stand for the serf- or peasant-class as a whole, since the object of their description was not the individual peasant, his thoughts and concerns, the motives of his actions, but an ‘agitated’ or ‘rioting peasantry’ (*buntovavshch[ie] krest’ian[e]*) more or less submissive to its own ‘instincts,’ closer or farther from submission to the ‘reasonable’ social-moral order of things, more or less threatening to that order according to the extent of its agglomeration. This is shown in the seamless movement affected by the chinovnik between a description of disorders on the Fedorov and Kireevaia estates, to the intellectual ferment of the *chern’*, to the warnings of the *narod*’s dangerous interpretation of *svoboda*. In each case the chinovnik described the peasants collectively in terms of their relation to the autocratic system of things: as *krest’iane*, the passive receivers of *harmful* rumours; as *chern’*, an *insubordinate crowd* on its way to becoming physically, economically, and morally threatening to the local government and landlords; and as exemplars of the *narod*, the ‘simple people,’ ‘impulsive and bestial...vulnerable and innocent [...] requir[ing] of authoritative guidance.’⁵² It was from the ‘myth of the peasant’ that knowledge began, and always to the ‘myth of the peasant’ that knowledge circled back. This ‘circling back’ of reference and description, typically away from the unique, individual peasant and towards his *muzhik* nature, had as its starting and end points in the maintenance of the autocratic regime which, as already suggested, found the legitimacy for its authority and the boundaries of its own rationality in the nature of the commoners, the ‘simple people.’ Knowledge of the individual peasant and interest in his history became more

⁵² Field, *Rebels*, p. 213.

definite only on the borders of this recognised ‘peasant nature,’ where the spontaneity and irresponsibility of *volia*, following from the ‘simplicity’ of the *muzhik*, was replaced by signs of the wilful manipulation of the peasants. Those singled out by officials as potential objects of investigation were recognised as unique individuals only in so far as they were uniquely guilty and uniquely answerable (*otvetstvennyi*) for causing disturbances among the peasant mass. The *unique person* arrives in the documents by dint of his antithetical (and so evil) imitation of the tsar, in acting freely and consciously *against* the tsar and his regime, and breaking ‘public tranquillity’ as puppet-master of the mass, mob or (most often) the ‘crowd’ of the peasants. The upshot was that the actions of the ‘crowd,’ supposedly carried out under the influence of the ‘ringleaders’ and ‘instigators’ of the unrest, were understood as merely passive, the expressions of ‘*muzhik* nature’ merely multiplied, unleashed and made coherent by the actions of the manipulators. Those peasants comprising the ‘multitudes’ and ‘crowds’ fell back into documentary and historical obscurity, benighted doubly as the light of government investigation came to rest solely on the consciously ‘ill-intentioned’ (*zlonamerennyi*) and individual peasant ‘ringleaders.’

The association of individual existence with *conscious* will, whether moral or immoral, and the mass existence of the *muzhik* with his merely passive and spontaneous will, had its roots in the *raison d’etat* of the autocratic regime. Something of this was at least implied by the chinovnik in connection with the concept of *svoboda*. By employing the notion of ‘rationality’ (reason; reasonable limits) and pointing to its absence in the ‘peasant mob,’ moral judgements and fear of unleashed ‘peasant nature’ posited, alongside and in contradiction to an essential distinction between the *muzhik* and the educated elite, the *universal* presence of harmful instincts and passions that might be overcome by cultivation or education. The chinovnik in Nizhegorodskaia acted and reported in line with this contradictory notion of rationality. In the first place, the chinovnik pointed to the chasm between the rational, educated elite and the uneducated, irrational *muzhik* in distinguishing between a proper concept of freedom, *svoboda* (taking in as it did the maintenance of established rights of property and of the established moral order, including the serfs’ obligations to the landlords, demanded by the government and the nobility in unison) and *volia*, the perverse interpretation of freedom arrived at autonomously by the *muzhik*. *Volia* was understood as *svoboda* refracted and distorted by irrationality, as ‘freedom’ shorn of the self-control and the rational cast of mind acquired by the elite through education and service to the tsar, a primitive state where desire and action formed a single moment

unbounded and unmediated by thought. *Volia*, the rule of animal passions, was the natural state of the peasants, and perhaps of all men, lacking guidance from a higher, more rational authority. As demanded of the authorities in cases of peasant unrest, it fell to the chinovnik first to *reason* with the peasantry before calling in the troops; his attempt to refute (*oproverzhenie*) the peasants' mistaken idea of freedom (specifically, the suspicion that the ukase granting *volia* had been concealed by local government officials) expressed not only a self-assured belief in the guidance he himself offered on behalf of the regime's educated rulers, but also the nominal capacity of the *muzhik* to follow the rational arguments and accept the truths and the social order imposed by the authorities. However, the capacity recognised in the *muzhik* to grasp the truths and reasonable limitations offered by his social betters did not yet endow him with the *autonomy* of will and reason possessed by those authorities. Reason was not understood as an empty capacity, realised in its exercise. The rationality of an action was determined not just by the imposition of thought between desire and action, but by thinking and acting in line with a recognised interest, a higher or absolute authority. Clearly, in the case of the state officials, it was autocratic absolutism, the autocratic regime itself, which served as this higher authority and this benchmark of reason. What could be considered rational of a lowly government official depended, on the one hand, on how it might contribute to the continuing existence and prosperity of the autocracy and the tsar and, on the other, the decisions made and passed down through the bureaucracy as orders or instructions by the regime's only truly autonomous, or free *and* rational, person: God's appointed on earth, the tsar.

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From top to bottom, then, official documentation of peasant disturbances and investigations of the 'moods,' 'casts of mind' and 'rumours' vaguely associated with disorder and resistance, were inescapably *of* the autocratic system of things, and made *from the autocratic viewpoint* on the peasantry. Transcending the opinions and political biases of this or that state official was an 'autocratic perspective' on the peasantry, produced and reproduced not only in conceptual schemes and bloody fantasies bandied about in serene isolation from the peasants themselves, but more regularly in the routine tasks of the authorities and in regular, face-to-face contact with the peasantry. What can be seen from the preceding discussions is this: that any particular disturbance or series of disturbances had such indefinite causal connections to rumour spreading, to the 'general mood of the peasantry,' and to the much-feared outbreak of

pugachevshchina among the peasants, that reports of unrest and disorder or any other indicators of ‘the peasant mood’ might easily bear both optimistic and pessimistic takes on the peasants’ moral and political condition and so serve as support for both pro-and anti-reform arguments. While all these officials drew upon the abstract or general notion of peasant mentality, especially the indicators of this mentality in rumours and their perverse content, the chinovnik concluded that even government measures designed to induce fear in the peasantry and hence suppress their animal desires and *volia*, would not work even in the short term; though, ‘after the arrival of troops in Nizhegorodskaiia, no further disorders were encountered among the peasants,’ this was only a temporary calm which ‘[could] not be expected, in any circumstances, to last for long.’⁵³ The implication of the report was that military means or punishments would not hold the peasant mob back from its belief in liberation and freedom; perhaps it was the chinovnik’s intention to recommend a ‘reasonably limited sort of freedom,’ carried out and enforced by the state, in order to avert the risk of a perverse kind of freedom being imposed from below by the peasant multitude itself. Since the chinovnik was not explicit on this point, it is impossible to say what his true attitude to the proposed reforms might have been.

An argument similar to the one implied by the chinovnik’s report can, however, be found stated quite explicitly in a report written by the first Chief of the Third Section, Chief of the Corp of Gendarmes and trusted advisor to Nikolai I, Count A. K. Benckendorff, in 1839:

At some point and in one way or another, [the process of emancipation] must be put in motion, and it is better do it gradually, carefully, than to wait for it to start from below, with the *narod*. This will only be successful when carried out by the government itself, quietly, without big words and clamour, observing the need for a gradual approach. But, everyone agrees that it is necessary, and that the peasant estate [*krest’ianskoe soslovie*] is a powder keg.⁵⁴

⁵³ ‘Zapiska, predstavlennaia... M. N. Murav’evu,’ p. 65.

⁵⁴ [A. K. Benckendorff], ‘Iz otchetov III Otdeleniia Sobstvennoi Ego Imperatorskogo Velichestva Kantseliarii o krest’ianskikh nastroeniakh (nравstvenno-politicheskii otchet za 1839 god),’ *KKR*, p. 64. This passage is also cited in Zaionchkovsky, *Abolition*, p. 34; the document is translated and included in the appendices to Moon’s *Abolition*, p. 139-41 (the quotation cited here appears on p. 141). Except in the translation of *krest’ianskoe soslovie* (in Zaionchkovsky/Wobst rendered as ‘serf class,’ and in Moon simply as ‘the peasantry’), both Moon and Wobst’s translations of this passage differ only stylistically from my own, which was originally made without reference to either of those works. Hereafter, page references to Moon’s translation of this document will be given in brackets, after the reference to *KKR*.

Benckendorff recommended that Tsar Nikolai I *not* announce *svoboda* to the peasants directly, given that such an act might incite disorders among the *narod* purely by dint of its ‘suddenness.’ Clearly expressed in passage is the ideal synthesis of a passive, popular essence beneath the appearance of activity (the disorder or the rising). Though understood as a unified act, in the sense of having definite and, in Benckendorff’s words, ‘terrible’ consequences for the state, the ‘peasant rising’ would require of no central direction and no conscious aim, at least on the part of the peasant crowds themselves, in order to achieve those effects. Instead, *svoboda*, as Benckendorff understood it – bringing the serfs under the protection of the law, systematic regulation of the dues owed by peasants to their landlords, taking the election of peasant functionaries from the hands of the landlords – should be introduced by a series of quiet and sensible steps.⁵⁵ Having acknowledged both the threat posed to state security by the widespread agitation of an enserfed peasantry deprived of freedom (part of Lanskoi and others later arguments in *favour* of the reforms), as well as the threat posed by the government’s own act of emancipation and the *muzhik*’s misunderstanding of the concept of ‘freedom’ (part of Dolgorukov and Murav’ev’s arguments *against* the reforms), Benckendorff put forward a version of the serfs’ emancipation which would realise, both in its content and enactment, the monopoly on free will held and jealously guarded by the autocrat.⁵⁶

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In a discussion with Nikolai I on peasant reform and recent unrest among the peasantry, Benckendorff’s writing demonstrates the connection of class with freedom and responsibility in both the aspects mentioned above. This comes out all the more clearer in so far as the subject matter of his report is the popular interpretation of ‘freedom’ and the question of responsibility for popular unrest. In the Third Department’s report for 1834, aiming to give an overview of the peasant ‘state of mind,’ Benckendorff observed that, ‘year upon year, thoughts of freedom [*vol’nost*] grow in extent and intensity among the manorial peasants,’ but at the root of this

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 63-4 (Moon, *Abolition*, p. 141-2).

⁵⁶ Note that, when he passed the Decree on Obligated Peasants’ on 2 April, 1842, Benckendorff’s doctrine of gradual reform was being overtly practiced by Nikolai I. In his speech of March, 1842, Nikolai said: ‘if...decisive methods to end [the present situation] are...impossible without general upheaval, then it is necessary at least to prepare the way for gradual transition to a different order and... to discuss calmly the [likely] benefits’ (see ‘Nicholas I’s speech...,’ and ‘Nicholas I’s Decree on Obligated Peasants,’ in Moon, *Abolition*, p. 142 and 143-145, respectively); further, when I. Rostovstev, chairman both of the ‘Secret Committee...’ and of the ‘Main Committees on the Peasant Question’ from 1857 to his death in 1860, put forward his first proposals for reform on April 20, 1857, the necessity of gradual change was emphasised, with the first phase understood as merely a period of serfdom’s ‘softening’ (see Zaionchkovsky, *Abolition*, p. 45-46).

phenomenon Benckendorff saw only pure, circular, self-reinforcing desire, transformed into obsession:

In 1834 there were many incidents involving peasant insubordination towards their landlords, and in almost all of these cases, as investigations have shown, such insubordination was caused, not by oppression, nor by poor treatment, but purely from thoughts of their right to freedom [*na svobodu*].⁵⁷

Breaking any connection between social conditions and thoughts of freedom, Benckendorff understood peasant dissatisfaction and disorder as the product, on the one hand, of freely circulating rumours of freedom (*svoboda*) and, on the other, as ‘awakened’ or ‘enflamed’ by ‘ill-intentioned people.’ ‘With every new reign and every major event at court or in the affairs of state,’ Benckendorff reported, ‘news spreads among the simple people of an impending change in the administration of the state, and thoughts of freedom [*svoboda*] are awoken among the people; as a consequence, in various places, disorders, murmurings, dissatisfactions come about...posing a terrible, if still distant, threat [to the state].’⁵⁸ As in the chinovnik’s notes from Nizhegorodskaia, a distinction is made in Benckendorff’s 1834 report between *svoboda* and *volia*, this time with a clearer distinction made by the author between the concept of *svoboda*, transmitted (perhaps unintentionally) to the *muzhik* through rumours, and the *volia* or ‘pure wilfulness’ made of it by the peasants:

People of good conscience do not expect our watchful government to let slip from view the important task of maintaining calm in Russia; they understand the difficulty of this task and will, with the greatest conscientiousness, make every effort to avoid stirring up disturbances among the peasants, for [it is understood] that the peasants do not fully grasp the concept of freedom [*svoboda*], and that *volia* has become synonymous with pure wilfulness [*s svoevol’stvom*].⁵⁹

Judging by these two reports, Benckendorff understood the dissemination among the peasants of the idea of *svoboda*, at its point of origin a notion of limited political liberty and the rule of law under the autocrat, as the unintended effect of loose, even well-meaning talk among the elite about freedom. Additionally, rumours might originate with the ‘great events’ of court and state publicised by the autocracy (‘on the occasion of the marriage of the Grand Duchess Maria

⁵⁷ ‘Obozrenie raspolozhenie umov i razlichnykh chastei gosudarstvennogo upravleniia v 1834 godu,’ *KKR*, p. 61.

⁵⁸ ‘Iz otchetov III Otdeleniia ...o krest’ianskikh nastroeniakh,’ (1839), *KKR*, p. 62 (Moon, *Abolition*, p. 139).

⁵⁹ ‘Obozrenie raspolozhenie umov...,’ *KKR*, p. 62.

Nikolaevna,' for example, 'news spread that the peasants would be emancipated'),⁶⁰ in other words, with the state itself. Hence, it was to be expected that 'conscientious' and 'sensible' people (*blogomyshliashchie liudi; luid[i] zdravomyshliashchi[e]*), guided by the government's orders and suggestions, would make every effort to avoid adding to the murmurings of the 'rumour mill.' Alongside the unintentional dissemination and misunderstanding of *svoboda* through officialdom and the educated elite, Benckendorff identified, rather vaguely in the 1834 report, but more specifically in the report of 1839, the 'ill-intentioned people' answerable for spreading rumours and for stirring up or intensifying the dissatisfaction of the peasants. What stands out above all in the 1834 report is the haziness of the intentions attributed to the 'ill-intentioned' people. 'In every case of peasant insubordination,' Benckendorff observed,

there are always ill-intentioned people who, for their own personal gain, play upon the agitation of the peasants, reinforce it, and drive the peasants to insubordination. Up until now, all such cases have been isolated from each other, lacking any common ties between them; hence it has been possible for the government to end such disorders without employing any particular force. However, there may be people, harbouring destructive thoughts, who might take advantage of the present circumstances to harm the government, and hence the declaration of their [the peasants'] freedom from the landlords might easily lead to disaster.⁶¹

It was consistent with autocratic rationality that the 'ill-intentioned people' should appear as the antithesis to the tsar and his government: whilst the tsar's free actions are guided by thoughts of the peasants and their welfare, the ill-intentioned people appear among the agitated peasants in order to drive them *en masse* to insubordination for their own 'personal gain' ('*pol'zuiias' zabluzhdeniem krest'ain, iz odnikh vidov lichnoi vygody...vobuzhdaiut k nepovinoventiu*'). That this 'personal gain' should be considered 'harmful to the government' with no further qualification only reinforces the *irrationality* of the intentions of the ill-intentioned person and, importantly, the irreducible evil of personality expressed in his particular actions. Significantly, Benckendorff understood the ill-intentioned people as potential links between the otherwise isolated peasant communities. Universality of the dream of *volia* amongst the peasants might have produced the conditions for a general uprising - a 'disaster' (*bedstvie*), in Benckendorff's words - but it was the ill-intentioned who could give it purpose and unity beyond dumb, material agglomeration. Since the state of *volia* was understood to consist of directionless passion, pure wilfulness (*svoevol'stvo*), rather than purposeful and conscious action, a general

⁶⁰ 'Iz otchetov III Otdeleniia ...o krest'ianskikh nastroeniakh,' (1839), *KKR*, p. 62 (Moon, *Abolition*, p. 139).

⁶¹ 'Obozrenie raspolozhenie umov...', *KKR*, p. 61-2.

uprising with the *appearance* of internal unity could not, by itself, be an expression of the desires or a reflection of the shared conditions of the peasants. It would, rather, be a side-product of the will of the ‘ill-intentioned,’ a multitude united solely for the ‘personal gain’ of those who had set themselves against the will of the Tsar. Benckendorff’s report of 1839 gave a more detailed description of the ‘ill-intentioned people’ and their means of influencing the peasant crowds. He sets out a series of ‘types,’ more or less alienated from (and so opposed to) the government and, more importantly, considered by Benckendorff to be ‘outsiders’ to the peasant communities they manipulated. Here, Benckendorff adds substance to the notion of ‘personal gain’ found in the 1834 report, explaining the route taken by such ‘outsiders’ away from the autocratic rationality and towards ‘destructive thoughts’:

In general, the whole spirit of the people is directed towards one aim, towards freedom, and meanwhile, in all parts of Russia there are idle people, who stir up this idea, and in recent years the persecution of the Old Believers has turned them against the government so that their retreats have become the centres of this evil...In general, serfdom is a powder keg beneath the state, and it is all the more dangerous because the army is made up of these same peasants, and because of the formation of a large mass of landless nobles and *chinovniki* who, being inflamed with ambition and having nothing left to lose, welcome any disruption of the existing order of things [*rasstroistvu*].⁶²

The empty ‘ill-intentions’ referred to in the 1834 report are given some concrete context in this passage. Interestingly, the victimhood of each group – the Old Believers (*raskolniki*) subject to an unnamed persecutor, the ruined nobility to an unexplained process of economic or social decline – is outweighed by a moral judgement which returns the argument to the realms of ‘myth’ and so to autocratic rationality: the *raskol’niki*, already opposed to the state, harbour the evil (*zloi*) which drives peasant disorder; the landless nobility and the *chinovniki* are given over to the self-regarding and hence unworthy passion for honour, ‘ambition’ (*vospaleny chestoliubiem*), a sort of perversion of the desire for recognition which would be more properly expressed in dutiful service to the Tsar and the state. Social causes disappear again beneath the weight of a morality driven by the practicalities of social control; personal difference and naked opposition to the autocracy are brought to the fore. In certain of Benckendorff’s ‘types,’ however, the distinction between the consciously self-interested agitation of the ill-intentioned

⁶² ‘Iz otchetov III Otdeleniia ...o krest’ianskikh nastroeniakh,’ (1839), *KKR*, p. 63. (This is the same as Moon’s translation in *Abolition*, p. 140, except in the last sentence, where Moon has ‘...now a large mass of landless nobles has emerged from officials who are inflamed with ambition and, having nothing to lose, welcome any disorder’).

people ‘proper’ and the (possibly unintentional) agitation of the peasants through harmful rumours is to some extent blurred:

Soldiers released on indefinite leave draw attention to themselves. The best of them remain in the capital cities and the towns, and for the most part men who are lazy or are badly behaved have dispersed themselves around the villages. Having lost the habit of peasants’ labour, without any property, strangers to their home villages, they provoke hatred against the landowners with their tales of Poland, the Baltic provinces and, in general, could have a harmful influence on the mind of the *narod*.⁶³

The dividing line between the ‘lazy’ or ‘unruly’ soldier, who merits a relatively definite description in the report, and his possible victim, the ‘mind of the *narod*’ (note, in the singular: ‘*um naroda*’) or the typical *muzhik*, seems clearly drawn. As with the *raskolniki* and the landless nobles, Benckendorff motions implicitly to a wider explanatory context for the emergence of the ‘rumour-spreading soldier’ in the villages, which is then quickly annulled by his moral judgement of their attitudes and behaviour. Responsibility for the emergence of these outsiders might have been placed at the feet of the government itself, firstly, in recruiting its army almost solely from the ‘unenlightened’ peasant mass (and hence creating a shared interest between those threatening the state and those meant to defend it), and secondly, for stationing those peasant soldiers in Poland and the Baltic provinces where serfdom either did not exist, or had been recently abolished.⁶⁴ Such stories could only reinforce the sense of injustice reportedly felt by the ‘Orthodox Russian peasants’ that ‘all non–Russians are free’ and, ‘in spite of the [teachings] of the Holy Scriptures,’ only ‘the Russians, the Orthodox are unfree.’⁶⁵ Certainly, for the same reasons, the government might have been understood as the agent of the soldiers’ alienation from their home villages and the loss of their ‘habit for peasant labour’. Still, Benckendorff denied that the simple act of recruitment was the cause of such behaviour: after all, there were good troops, the ‘best of the soldiers on indefinite leave,’ who had remained in the cities and towns, to prove that the effect of recruitment was not universally damaging for the peasants. Hence, Benckendorff’s explanation is brought back to the irreducible ‘laziness’ and

⁶³ Ibid, (ibid).

⁶⁴ Serfdom had been abolished in the Baltic provinces during the reign of Alexander I, 1816-19 (Moon, *Abolition*, p. 45-6). It was from the neighbouring, western *gubernii* of Vilna, Kovna and Grodno (now Lithuania) that petitions had been sent by the nobility to Alexander II, arguing for the abolition of serfdom along the same lines as attempted in the original reforms (1816-19) in Estonia, Livonia and Kurland, e.g. the liberation of the serfs without land. Alexander’s reply to Governor-General Nazimov, the famous ‘Nazimov Rescript’ of 20 November, 1857, though sent many months after the formation of the ‘Secret Committee’ on the reforms, is considered by many to mark the beginning of the reform process proper (see Zakharova, ‘Autocracy and the Reforms,’ p. 24).

⁶⁵ ‘Iz otchetov III Otdeleniia ...o krest’ianskikh nastroeniakh,’ (1839), *KKR*, p. 62-3 (Moon, *Abolition*, p. 140).

‘bad behaviour’ of those soldiers returned to the villages – a quality of personality out of line with autocratic morality and rationality - which takes precedence over and becomes the primary causal factor in explaining their alienation from peasant life, peasant labour, and the dutifulness appropriate to them.

Notice, however, that Benckendorff’s moral judgement of the ‘soldier on leave’ differs in kind from that of the *raskolniki* and the landless nobility. Ambition and evil were understood as the outcome of a ‘superfluity of will,’ a conscious antagonism with the state and the tsar chosen by those ‘ill-intentioned people’ and carried on by them *purposefully*, for their own ‘personal gain.’ In contrast, ‘laziness’ and ‘bad behaviour’ (*‘luidi bol’sheiu chastiiu lenivye i durnogo povedeniia’*), the harmful qualities of the soldier on leave, are clearly those of unrestrained *muzhik* ‘wilfulness,’ of ‘peasant nature’ unrepressed. In 1834, Benckendorff had explicitly associated *volia* with *svoevol’s tvo*, a pure and directionless ‘wilfulness,’ making a link between the ‘laziness’ of the soldiers and the loss of the ‘habit of peasant labour’ in the report of 1839. Together, these observations are close to the more explicit explanation of *volia* given in the 1857 report by the chinovnik from Nizhegorodskaia. The concept of *volia*, the chinovnik wrote, would result in ‘outbursts of... passion’, ‘laziness and negligence,’ noting further that ‘vice, drunkenness, unruliness, brutality and wilfulness [*svoevol’s tvo*]’ were all considered by the *muzhik* to be expressions of *volia*.⁶⁶ In his 1839 report, Benckendorff also made reference to an underlying *muzhik* nature, ‘the [peasant’s] irrational inclination to see freedom as the satisfaction of vulgar passions,’⁶⁷ as the chinovnik would later put it. ‘Serfdom is a powder keg,’ Benckendorff wrote, ‘and it is all the more dangerous because *the army is made up of these same peasants*’ (emphasis added). Benckendorff added in this regard that ‘[the] best of the soldiers on indefinite leave will not be able to counteract [the] harmful influence [of the stories of the soldiers in the villages], *because opinions which stir up passions are readily accepted* [*‘potomu chto l’stiashchee strastiam mnenie prinimaetsia okhotno’*]’ (emphasis added).⁶⁸ Hence, whatever differences might be found between the ‘good’ soldiers on leave in the towns and ‘bad’ soldiers spread around the villages, whatever the alienation of the ‘lazy soldier’ from his home village, his status as a figure meriting attention and description followed not from his conscious ‘ill-intent’ towards the peasant crowds or the government, but only from an

⁶⁶ ‘Zapiska, predstavleniia... M. N. Murav’evu,’ *KKR*, p. 65.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ See ‘Iz otchetov III Otdeleniia ...o krest’ianskikh nastroeniakh,’ (1839), *KKR*, p. 63; Moon, *Abolition*, p. 140. I have followed Moon’s translation here almost exactly.

intensification or a spilling over of his innate *muzhik* nature, his aimless 'wilfulness' coming into contact with that of other peasants. Here, the division of the peasant 'ringleaders' from the peasant 'crowds' begins to appear, in conjunction with very definite conceptions of freedom (unreasonable 'will' and reasonable 'political liberties'), disorder and order, and the ascribed place of the peasantry and the *narod* in the autocratic social system.

Benckendorff's fear that the disgruntled elites would deliberately cause harm to the state *through* the peasantry sat comfortably alongside his worries about the 'lazy peasant-soldiers,' both being examples of a harmful influence individualised and brought to the peasantry from the 'outside.' Abstractly speaking, fear of those individuals who might 'cause' or instigate popular disorders referred back always to the unifying effect that was seen to be so decisive in the movement of peasant disturbances from isolation to agglomeration to uprising. In this conception of the mechanics of disorder, all individual influences could be treated as equally harmful in their possible effects. On first mention, the 'landless nobles' and 'lazy soldiers' therefore seem (practically) comparable in their potential to do harm, and are equally marked by their status as 'outsiders' to peasant communities. Many characteristics were shared between the types, over and above the distinction of 'ill-will' from mere 'wilfulness.' Both the 'landless noble' and the 'lazy soldier' were *alienated* from the productive part of the social system, either through the loss of private property or the loss of the 'habits of labour.' These alienations were seen to have negative effects on the *morality* of the alienated, with the implication that having a 'place' and a 'role' in producing had a positive effect, reinforcing dutifulness and personal interest in the state. Both the 'Old Believers' and the 'lazy soldier' were estranged from the ways of life that would be expected of them, having been excluded either through self-isolation and persecution, or through recruitment, travel, and the experience of those. Lastly, by their break from the behaviours and ways of life appropriate to them, all *drew attention to themselves*, or marked themselves out for the authorities: the landless noble seeks his own personal gain, breaking his connection to the tsar and offending the duty look after, and to act in the interests of, the serfs; the 'Old Believers' rejected the Orthodox Christianity of the tsars and the close connections that had made between the government and the church, going so far as to declare the Russian state the 'antichrist'; the soldiers on leave were lazy, talkative, and viewed even as 'strangers' by their own communities.

Still, if all these characteristics could be understood - in the abstract - in terms of the suspects' relations to the government and the state, and even if their 'harmful influences' upon the *narod* might have had the same sorts of effects, in all cases the means of judging their significance of criminal or immoral acts, and the actual meaning of their opposition to or alienation from the state, depended upon an ideal of the division of the population into legal estates, occupations and - through these latter - into classes. Class was, in fact, the primary distinction, in so far as it determined (very broadly) the attitudes of the authorities to any particular individual or group (to be refined according to other categories), offered to the authorities certain ideals with which to explaining certain events and actions, and gave these acts their social meaning beyond mere 'appearances' and 'effects.' Though the division of the 'cultured' and 'educated' elite from the *narod* had no systematic legal (or even shared cultural) foundations, relations and conflicts that placed these two groups in direct contact demonstrate the strength of what was an intuitive act of identification. The identification of the estate and the occupation of a suspected person were enough for the authorities to put into action the modes of 'repression' and 'correction' appropriate to each *class*. In so far as criminal acts were concerned, the difference between members of the elite and the *narod* were so obvious that explicit explanation of the class division was rarely considered necessary. Thus, it was only registered in a language that tended to merge the peasant estate with the *narod*, leaving the nobility (*dvorianstvo*), the clergy (*dukhovenstvo*), the townsmen (*meshchanstvo*) and other legal and social groups apart from the peasants to dissolve into their own, separate estates, each with their special duties and roles (some formal, some customary), and little to unify them. This ignores the fact that, when brought into conflict with each other, it was quite clear who belonged to the 'elite' (e.g. what these other estates shared in their relation to the government and in opposition to the *narod*) and who belonged to the *narod* (whether they were legally of the *krest'ianstvo* or not). The rise of intermediate social groups in the 1850s and 1860s - the *raznochintsy* (literally, 'people of various ranks') and the city-born working people - the cases of conflict between themselves and the government or other authorities, and their subsequent treatment by the authorities, leaves no doubt as to the 'natural' belonging of the first with the 'elite' and of the second with the '*narod*.' Clearly, these judgements were not made by exclusive reference to legal estates, which were in some cases given by birth, in some by occupation, in some by location and in some by direct service to the state. Instead, they had to do with the ways in which certain groups were related to the autocracy, both as a dynamic, historical thing, and as a 'system' with certain elements perceived to be (or made) 'static.'



7. Count. A. K. Benckendorff (G. Bottman)⁶⁹

There was a difference between the capacities given to each broad class as regards the development of ‘personality’ and its corollaries, consciousness (*soznaniie*) and reason (*razum*), with classification having an important role in determining a person’s freedoms and his or her relation to ‘history.’ Where the classification of the elite was a *knowing* abstraction, drawing on common characteristics (certain relations to and differences from the *narod*; certain relations to the government; a given place in the ideal state; given capacities for thought, etc.), the popular ‘class essence’ was understood to be the primary ‘way of being’ of the *narod*. Those who belonged to the elite could be ‘cultured’ and ‘educated,’ but this was not an achieved fact simply given by inherited social position. Within each part of those estates belonging to the ‘elite’ - from higher government and church officials, to serf- or landowners (whether wealthy or relatively impoverished), to students, traders (*kupsty*), and others – all that was given by birth was a *capacity* to be cultivated and educated (‘formed’), to rise up to the duties and to the relative liberties given from the government through rising up to and taking into oneself the rationality of the state. Self-interest, culture (gained through upbringing, service, or formal education) and duty were therefore intertwined, and in the Russian social ideal, would come to be balanced in ‘personality.’ Thus, the basic privilege granted the ‘elite’ was the opportunity to

⁶⁹ Available online at: [http://www.oceansbridge.com/paintings/museums/new-hermitage/Bottman_Georg-ZZZ-Portrait_of_Count_Alexander_Benkendorff_\(copy\).jpg](http://www.oceansbridge.com/paintings/museums/new-hermitage/Bottman_Georg-ZZZ-Portrait_of_Count_Alexander_Benkendorff_(copy).jpg). Accessed 01/07/11.

become someone in *particular*, to make a personal mark on history through service to the state. The opportunity could be used well, squandered, abused or rejected. The measure of the class, the normal state of being used to judge those given this opportunity, was the complex code of morals – some given in law, some in Scripture, some in custom – that included an ideal relation to the *narod* (the duty of care) and an ideal relation to the tsar (a duty of obedience and service). It held across a whole range of roles and occupations, from those in direct government service to those only its servants in so far as they participated in the reproduction and betterment of the state (big traders, industrialists, journalists, the literati, etc.). It came most openly into action at times when the elite strayed from the ideal role set out for them. Conversely, it is a misnomer to talk of ‘members of the *narod*’ or of ‘those who belonged to it as a class.’ Class here was not an ‘abstraction,’ made from the common or essential characteristics of individuals and then stamped with a name or category (*krest’ianstvo*; *nizhnoe soslovie*; *prostoi narod*). It was not a shared set of characteristics made or even perceptible to the ‘*narod*’ itself, with all the regional, ethnic, occupational and historical diversity that was ‘contained’ within that social body. Nor was it an ideal role to be attained by ‘cultivation,’ at least not of the kind driven by the individual’s grasping of a higher purpose, or the social-moral meaning of their everyday activities. It was at once understood as the definition *of* their existence and a normative, ascribed ideal *for* their existence. At those crucial moments when the normative ideal of popular behaviour and the collective, popular social position was challenged by peasants, peasant-workers and city-born workers themselves – however modest this challenge may have been, and however submissive and deferent their appeals to the government supposed to protect them – no space was perceived between the ‘popular behaviour’ imposed by authority and the ‘popular behaviour’ recorded by officials in the course of disorder. It was the concrete form of an identity of thought, reality and action that the peasants and workers were reduced to ‘categorical’ beings - to class - in their thoughts and actions.

It is with both sides of this class division in mind that the documentation of peasant disorder should be understood. The contrast between the documents so far examined – all related specifically to the question of reform - and the more routine, ‘run-of-the-mill’ documentation can be understood better in those terms also: the contrast of the ‘routine’ documents of disorder with the more unusual discussions of peasant moods, peasant life, and peasant unrest is itself evidence of how the ‘ideals of state’ and the ideal governing the ruling part of the elite class operated. The emergence of the ‘personality’ of a government official through opinion can be

examined in its relation to the freedoms given to, or withheld from, officials in their documentary practice, this freedom or lack of it having effects on an official's description or treatment of 'peasant affairs' in documents. Now, clearly, Benckendorff's reports from 1834 and 1839 reports to Nikolai I and the anonymous chinovnik's report to Murav'ev in the late summer of 1857 cannot be considered 'run-of-the-mill' documents. In both cases, discussions of the possibility and likely consequences of the abolition of serfdom were part of the explicitly stated aims of the documents themselves or the higher authorities who had requested them. It is certainly remarkable that the language and even the arguments of these authors - twenty years apart, in reigns separated by the characters of the two Tsars' styles of government as much as the relative seriousness of Aleksandr's plans for reform in comparison to those of Nikolai - are so similar. It could be surmised that the *tone* of these documents, as well as the precise languages in which they were written, were still shaped by the similarity of the political contexts of their composition. The relative freedom with which Benckendorff expresses himself in both 1834 and 1839 regarding the emancipation is not quite matched by the writing of the anonymous chinovnik, whose subject matter is more specific (even if the aim of the document's collection by Murav'ev was comparable to Benckendorff's) than that of the former head of the Third Section. Yet both officials were able to give their own opinions on the central issue of reform without the needing to skew their writing in affectation of the 'modesty' of their own opinions or in emphasis of their subordination to superiors - aspects of official documentation notable elsewhere. It is known that Benckendorff was one of Nikolai's most trusted advisors, and that the Tsar considered him a personal friend also. This accounts for his appointment to the head of the Third Section and the Corp of Gendarmes, a position that required of those appointed to it a strong grasp of the moral purposes of those institutions as well as an approach to matters of state (especially challenges to the autocratic authority) balancing the letter and the spirit of the Laws.⁷⁰ It also accounts for the relative *informality* of his reports to the Nikolai. But the freedom to offer opinions was open to - indeed, it was expected from - all men of his rank and position (certainly to the upper government officials (Ministers; city mayors; the heads of the regular police forces) with direct access to, and regular personal contact with, the Tsar, regardless of his *strictly* 'personal' relations with them. It was part of the privilege and the burden of state service at this higher level that personal opinion - whether it was to the Tsar's

⁷⁰ On Benckendorff and his relationship to Nikolai I, see P. S. Squire, *The Third Department: The establishment and practices of the political police in the Russia of Nicholas I*, (Cambridge, 1968), p. 48-131. (On the fact that Benckendorff had 'enjoyed the favour of [Nikolai] even before the latter's eventful accession to the throne,' see: p. 49).

liking or not – was expected to be offered on issues that were genuinely controversial, which is to say: without an obvious ‘imperial view’ available to officials for imitation. Under Nikolai I, serfdom and its reform were certainly controversial in this sense; under Aleksandr II, more intent on political and social reforms, spaces still remained for higher officials’ opinions, as well as those of landowners and relatively junior bureaucrats, to diverge according to interests, to compete for hearings, or to be called upon in earnest by the Tsar himself *as* ‘free opinions.’ In that way it is possible to understand the relative freedom of the upper officials in terms of the class divisions fundamental to autocracy: freedom of opinion and the chance to influence the Tsar’s actions (and so to influence history) belonged to those who had shown, by birth and/or by merit, the capacity to exercise their freedoms rationally, in service to the Tsar, and in producing the state of which they were the conscious part. This, of course, shows up in the documents so far examined. Though the ‘chinovnik’ remains stubbornly anonymous, it is probable (given the tone and the content of his 1857 report) that he was either a middle-ranking official or an assistant to an upper official in the provincial administration of Nizhegorodskaia guberniia. Murav’ev’s fact-finding mission in 1857, his request of information from the provinces, and the probable ranking of the chinovnik, explain the latter’s ability to discuss with relative freedom the probable failures awaiting the government’s short-term approach to rumour spreading, wilfulness and disorder amongst the serfs.

That said, it is clear from the ‘run of the mill’ documentation of peasant disturbances that the substantial connections made between rumour-spreading, ill-intent, wilfulness, freedom and disorder were present equally in the lower level and routine reports as in the higher-level and specially requested ones. What makes this documentation ‘run-of-the-mill’ is partly the absence of opinion, which is also the absence of an author ‘behind the document,’ sustained and substantiated by an opinion’s presence. Lacking this anchor in a reality beyond the ideal social system and the routine acts that reproduced it, the particularity of the *document*, at first confirmed by empirical details and chronological markers, is then veiled by the language employed and the wider social intentions of which it is part. The ideal or model of state service, given to officials in the course of acculturation to a social role, strips the events on which they report and the things they describe of their potential, historical character (in this case, their singularity). What *has* to be documented as particular (*this* disorder on *this* estate; *this* peasant’s words; the movements of *this* crowd; *these* actions taken by *these* representatives of autocratic authority) remains to gesture beneath a language and a system of concepts seemingly designed

to emphasise continuity, sameness, and indifference to new, unusual and singular things. It is at the point where documentation of disorder gives way to explanation that these two moments appear to separate in 'routine' documentation; but clearly the overt language of 'explanation' (wilfulness, freedom, ringleaders) was also the starting point for *all* descriptions of the peasants and peasant workers in 'disorder.' The detailed records of disorders' extent, locations, victims, elite and official participants, and main 'events' or developments, though now separable from official explanations and responses also recorded there, are still suspended within a language signifying a whole set of normative judgements regarding the peasants and their 'orderly' state. Since this same language and these same judgements were the starting point in forming opinions about disorders and their causes, the concepts and their connections still performed some of the task of explanation, before actual thought began, for those officials actually free to form opinions. Thus the convergence in the 'routine' and 'free' descriptions of the peasantry, in spite of the fact that each kind of document had a different function or object (the 'maintenance of order' and the possible 'reform' of that order, respectively). Projects for reform did not challenge the notions of peasant nature that underlay the enforcement of class boundaries. Discussions of reform brought those connections – manifest most often in practice (including the routine practices of documentation) - to the fore, filling in the gaps that the everyday reproduction of categories, evoked over and again by the peasants' challenges to local authorities, left empty in their habitual employment.

The semblance of empirical precision in the official record of disorders reminds us insistently of the instrumental function of these documents, a function that presents itself more immediately than the systematic determinants of their form and content. The relay of information vertically, through the hierarchy, from lower to upper officials and to the Tsars themselves, can be read as evidence of the hierarchy: but it cannot be forgotten that information *was* being relayed upward – filtered and concentrated on its way - eventually to land on the work-desk of the Tsar. And at each level of documentation (putting now to one side the documents of 'opinion'), by the ways in which information was relayed, the continuity of the government's approach to popular disorder, across the reigns of Nikolai I and Aleksandr II, is confirmed. Since each department or institution had its own roles in relation to a given Tsar and to the populace, continuity of the structures and/or categories employed in respective documentation would not be expected. The ways in which information was gathered at the bottom of each institution's hierarchy, as well as the 'filtering' and 'concentration' of such information for the sake of superiors, was also

dependent on the particular institution in question, as well as the extent of its involvement with any particular event or set of events ‘on the ground.’ Rivalry between institutions is rarely present in lower-level documentation, and still appears only muted at the higher levels; but the doubling of policing functions in particular (with the Third Section, its agents, and the Corps of Gendarmes often acting independently of the regular police and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, becoming at times the ‘police of the police’ in its given role as Russia’s ‘moral’ policeman), and the consequent doubling of documentation, gestures to the conflicts of bureaucratic interests within government structures. The sorts of information gathered and the ‘tone’ of its expression also differed according to each institution and according to the kind of unrest or disturbance being dealt with. Importantly, the particular grievances or complaints of peasants affected the way the case was handled by the authorities (what actions were taken, how deep the investigation would go, whether higher officials were informed of events and if so, in how much detail); the particular *reactions* of peasants to the intervention of the government could and did have effects in turn on further actions of the authorities. Given all this, it would be expected that great divergences of focus, of language, of description, and of documentary structure would obtain as regards peasants’ disorders even over the period 1850-60 (not to mention the entirety of Nikolai and Aleksandr’s reigns). It does not. The diversity of the peasant disturbances and ‘transgressions’ over these periods, and the concomitant detail found in both the factual (location, duration, quantity) and narrative moments of the documentation, serve to highlight the regularity of the explanatory and categorical-referential moments. The language of ‘peasant nature’ and of an order desired (and *always* obtained) occasionally strikes through the pedantic details offered, but repeated exposure to it threatens, however, that the two merge into one. With the ‘social ontology’ of autocracy and the economy of history that followed from it kept in mind, it is easier to see the central, social categories and their connotations retaining a power of obfuscation and abstraction, even as the diversity of peasants’ challenges to the given authorities defied the categories through which the authorities understood those challenges.

In the decade before the Emancipation, the heads of the Third Section gave annual reports (*otchet*) directly to the Tsar on matters of criminality, unrest, disorder, and the overall moral state of the populace as observed by its agents and in the activities of the gendarmes. These reports always contained a section on the peasantry and ‘peasant affairs,’ which (at least between the 1850 and 1860), included also the ‘peasant-workers,’ e.g. peasants employed in manufacturing, mining or industrial occupations). It was, in fact, in the nature of the Third

Section that its reports on the peasants be relatively *irregular* in comparison to those of the Department of Police, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Ministry of Finance, all of which had ongoing connections with the peasantry outside of disorders and disturbances, had closer connections to those relations of government to *narod* that had so often aggravated the peasants into disorder (taxation and recruitment especially), and were more directly involved in discussions of the ‘peasant question’ in the 1840s, ‘50s and ‘60s. The Third Section was founded in 1826 with the moral state and moral protection of the populace its object and mission respectively.⁷¹ Commonly referred to by scholars as the ‘political police,’ the Third Section’s political duties were formulated (by Benckendorff, among others) around an implicit ideal of state and nation defined in the identification of threats as much in the positive explication of the ‘autocratic principle.’ These threats had already found their canonical definition under Tsar Aleksandr I, in the foundation of the Third Section’s predecessor organisations.⁷² Significantly, the moral and spiritual threats identified in the last twenty years of Aleksandr I’s reign, included the harmful influence of foreign agitators (French and Polish), the harmful influences of foreign political and philosophical literatures, and the agitation among the peasants of expectations of freedom, whether by rumour spreading or by direct contact.⁷³ These same threats were identified by the founders of the Third Section. The probable victims of such harmful influences would be the ‘educated youth’ and the ‘simple people,’ both distinguished from other groups by their relative lack of ‘culture’ (of experience and will-power), which manifested itself in a tendency to swallow new and exciting (that is, ‘foreign’ and ‘harmful’) ideas whole, without criticism or thought, as well as in the irrational tendency to act upon the passions these ideas agitated. It was the belief of the founders of the Third Section (this including Nikolai I himself) that such influences and such victims had to be handled in way conducive to the recovery and redemption of those acting immorally, with exclusion from the state a last resort.⁷⁴ The Third Section was then conceived as a sort of ‘elder-advisor’ for the nation, an extension of the Tsar’s own symbolically ‘personable’ relation to his subjects, with a duty at first to admonish, persuade, advise and direct subjects *without* passing cases of ‘political immorality’ over to the formal procedures of the law. This preventative function was, however,

⁷¹ P. S. Squire, *The Third Department: the establishment and practice of the political police in the Russia of Nicolas I* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 85-86; I. Lauchlan, ‘The Okhrana: Security Policing in Late Imperial Russia,’ *Late Imperial Russia: Problems and Prospects: Essays in Honour of R. B. McKean*, I. D. Thatcher (ed.), (Manchester, 2005), p. 44-5.

⁷² Squire, *ibid.*, p. 13-32.

⁷³ On the sphere of competence of the ‘Committee of the 13th January, 1807,’ see *ibid.*, p. 68-9.

⁷⁴ ‘Instructions given by the Chief of the Gendarmes to Lieut. Shervud-Vernyi, Life Guards Dragoon Regiment, 13 January, 1827,’ in Squire, *ibid.*, p. 243-4; see also Anderson, *Russian Political Thought*, p. 176.

backed up by arms: each head of the Third Section was also the head of the Corp of Gendarmes, with both bodies having investigative, repressive and surveillance duties, reporting directly to the Tsar, as well as to the relevant Ministries and departments according to particular cases.⁷⁵ Where, in the case of most government officials, the ideals of state presented themselves as objectified in writing or in habitual practices – in laws, regulations, procedures, and ‘proper ways of behaving’ – all of which were to mould the individual into a ‘rational’ and ‘cultured’ person, the first officials of the Third Section were, from the outset, already to be the individual embodiments of the state ideal of ‘rational personality’: they were hand-picked on merit, with ‘tact,’ sociability, and a well-developed moral sense valued as much as formal-educational performance and experience in government service.⁷⁶

Given the growing unpopularity of the Third Section among elements of the educated elite by the 1840s and 1850s, its activities more readily seen as an extension of the strict censorship and intellectual control of Uvarov and the Ministry of Education, it should be remembered that the it was a rather popular institution, especially within the ‘census society’ (*obshchestvo*) that its operations targeted, in the first decade or so of its existence. It is possible that, just as the ‘peace arbitrators’ of the 1860s were specifically designed as *visibly* ‘autonomous agents’ of the enactment of the Emancipation Statutes – to generate trust by personal qualities of fairness and tact - the Third Section was originally conceived to be visibly autonomous of those other government institutions (the provincial administration; the regular police) already perceived by the populace to be corrupted, bureaucratic, and ineffective. That the Third Section was ‘in the pocket’ of each Tsar, with the underlying moral-political conception of autocracy and its defence made its overt guide to action, would then have been its greatest strength: the Third Section would be real link between the Tsar and his subjects that had been severed by the stuffy formality and occasional venality of other government agencies. But close attachment to the personal aims and desires of the Tsar determined that the Third Section would reflect closely, on an everyday level, the personal style of that Tsar. In the latter years of Nikolai’s reign, when relief at the failure of the Decembrists gave way to disappointment with the stagnancy of Nikolai’s vision of autocracy, the Third Section became what its original conception promised it would be: an extension of the authoritarianism more or less essential to autocracy as a mode of governance, especially stifling in that ‘autocracy’ (its laws, institutions, practices and class

⁷⁵ Lauchlan, ‘The Okhrana,’ p. 45.

⁷⁶ ‘Report on the activities of the Coprs of Gendarmes since its institution up to 1 Januray, 1829,’ Squire, Third department, p. 250; on Benkendorff’s ‘recruiting techniques,’ see also p. 82-7.

divisions) made almost no distinctions between the moral, legal and political aspects of social life. Under Aleksandr II, Nikolai's grip on the literature, thought and behaviour of the educated class was loosened; the central aims of the Third Section remained the same, however. It continued to portray anti-autocratic ideas as 'foreign,' of 'foreign origins,' and therefore 'alien' to educated Russians and the Russian *narod*, a strategy (or impulse) made easier by the isolation of genuinely anti-autocratic voices and the appropriation of the mild liberalism of the 'enlightened bureaucrats' for autocracy's ends (especially in the preparation of the peasant reforms). The alienation of 'educated society' (students, academics, 'self-enlightened' noble landowners, liberal government officials) –Riasanovsky's 'parting of ways'⁷⁷ - remained only partial through Aleksandr's reign, even as the freer atmosphere of the pre-reform years, and the meaningful freedoms given to the press and young people then, were stripped away in the two decades following the Emancipation. The aversion of a full break between 'educated society' and the government was aided by the systematic demonization and exclusion of voices that proclaimed to see through the liberal atmosphere of Aleksandr's first years and the faux-radicalism of radical peasant reforms- processes in which the Third Section was instrumental. For those who rejected the peasant reforms as ill-conceived, harmful to the peasants, a fop to modernity, the vast majority seemed to accept it as a genuine forward step, a mark of Aleksandr's good intentions toward the *narod* as well as the landowners. And, while many in 'census society' could sympathise with the complaints of students, soldier-officers, and publicists against petit controls, regulations, and over-zealous censorship, and a significant minority even secretly read the works of Herzen and Ogarev, few were prepared to openly support views becoming more and more tied to uprisings, planned assassinations, murders, and anti-tsarist movements at the empire's peripheries (Poland, the Caucasus). In that sense, 'educated society' were led to conceive of anti-autocratic dissidence in just the way that the 'autocratic principle' demanded: some complaints (those of students, for instance) were understood to be legitimate, with the arbitrariness of certain elites to blame, but their means of expressing their dissatisfaction inappropriate; some were seen to be victims of influences that they had not the maturity or culture to understand and deflect (students and peasants); a very few others were seen to be truly 'evil' and worthy only of exclusion or destruction. This was both the starting point and the desired end of the Third Section's activities from 1826 onwards,

⁷⁷ See N. V. Riasanovsky, *A Parting of Ways: government and the educated public in Russia: 1801-1855* (Oxford, 1976).

its own policing tasks an explicit formulation of the autocracy's conception of its own order and of the disorder that threatened it.

If, in this regard, some changes of attitude and relative control were evident in the relation of 'society' to the government between 1840 and 1861, the same cannot be said of the relations between the government and the *narod*. Where society's ideas and complaints were appropriated by the government for autocratic ends, and the non-government elite invited to share in the process of reform, the *narod*, though the object of extensive discussions and plans under both Tsars, remained excluded from participation in them. *Its* 'characteristic' means of resistance and opposition to authority, though inducing sympathy and, arguably, a desire for action on the part of the elites, remained unacceptable merely in being expressed. Thus the continuity of the autocratic notion of a 'popular order' despite the changes in perception of the *narod* in terms of the personal and property rights of its members. The moral/political synthesis and the designed autonomy of the Third Section from other institutions (an apparent 'doubling' of policing functions) can be seen in its relations to the peasants and its documentation of their 'transgressions.' The use of secret agents and other conspiratorial methods were designed to break through the pronounced mistrust of the *narod* toward local authorities. These methods of investigation also led to an informal sort of documentation, at the 'base' of information gathering, often hastily scribbled notes passed from agents to 'handlers' in clandestine meetings. These notes would be tidied up, filtered of repetitions, and placed in the context of the law, of another documents, or a given 'history' or government action, before being passed on by officers to their superiors.⁷⁸ Thus, reporting on the reactions of peasants working in St. Petersburg to the news of the sending of 'rescripts' (the beginning of the preparation of reforms) around 1857-58 began with agents listening in on conversations in bars, tea-houses and other lower-class hangouts.⁷⁹ This raw material was turned into a series of formal reports to Aleksandr, in which the impressionistic information on the city peasants' loose-talk and the

⁷⁸ This has already been shown in the relation between Murav'ev's 1857-8 'Zapiski...' and the anonymous chinovnik's report from mid-1857. The 'working-up' of documents and 'filtering' of information will be further substantiated below. Note that this process is more obvious in dealing with archival sources than in the published ones, where the notes of agents are placed in the same files as reports by/ to the higher authorities. Note also that it these processes are more obvious in the *RD* collections than in *KD* collections since, when dealing with large, long-running, or (what are judged to be) historically important disturbances among city workers, the editors of *RD* tend to include initial investigative reports, memos and other documents alongside those written by higher authorities to the Ministries and/or the Tsar after the fact. Because the *KD* collection tends to favour the *latter* kind of document, some of the quality of 'ground level' investigation and action is lost - if not in terms of the story and the details of each case, then in the language, tone, and structure of these lower-level documents.

⁷⁹ 'Iz doneseniia Peterburgskoi agentura v III otdelenie,' Dec. 1857 - Jan.1860, *KKR*, p. 185-9.

‘verbatim’ records of their plans to kill their masters, to rise up for their own emancipation (*podymut bunt*), or their idea that freedom had already been declared, but was being hidden by the landlords,⁸⁰ were placed in the context of the reform process (the immediate ‘history’ behind the investigations), the spread of rumours (the problematic phenomena to be investigated), and the wider issue of the peasant response to the reform process and the future reforms (the part of the investigations that might feed back into the government’s approach to the ‘peasant question’).⁸¹ The Third Section were given the special task of surveying, reporting on and (at the upper levels) forming ‘opinions’ about the mood of the peasantry or the mood of the *narod*, with particular attention being paid to the possible causes of this ‘mood,’ as manifest in conversations, ‘loose talk,’ rumours, and crimes. If a sense of this ‘mood’ would be evident to Ministers and the Tsar from readings of the Police Department’s regular reports to the Ministry of Internal Affairs – the comparison of the quantity and quality of peasant disorders being part of *its* documentary task – the Third Section, especially its Heads (*nachal’niki*), were to offer opinions explicitly, and independently of those of the police of the Ministers. Benckendorff’s 1839 report to Nikolai I was a ‘Moral-Political Report’ (*nравственнополитический отчет*), with an important section on peasant disorders and rumours headed ‘A summary of opinions regarding Russia’s domestic state of affairs and its determinants’ (*свод мнений внутреннего состояния России и действующих ее оснований*).⁸² We find Aleksandr’s Third Section chief, Dolgorukov, offering his opinions on the peasant mindset – especially the influence of thoughts and rumours of freedom – in 1857 and 1858.⁸³ In 1857, Dolgorukov judged the ‘the preparations for the emancipation of the manorial peasants’ to have been ‘the important issue occupying Russia,’ and the ‘influence of the idea of freedom on the thoughts of the peasants’ to be an important cause of immoral acts, particularly the refusal of some to pay *obroki*, and rise in cases of peasant murders of landlords in that year. In this regard, Dolgorukov noted: ‘the majority of landlords believe that the peasants are still too uneducated to understand civil rights [*слишком необразование, дабы понимать гражданские права*], that on the granting of freedom [*сводода*]...disorders, murders and robbery would be inevitable, and that in many *guberniia*, especially in the Volga region, the terrible times of *pugachëvshchina* are being

⁸⁰ These statements respectively from III Section agents’ notes dated: “April 1859,” “31 Dec. 1857” and “19 Dec. 1857”: Ibid, *KKR*, p. 185-7).

⁸¹ [Dolgorukov], ‘Iz godovykh otchetov nachal’nik III otdeleniia za 1857-59 gg. o nastroneniakh v strane v sviazi s nachavshheisia podgotovskoi krest’ianskoi reformy,’ [1857-58], *KKR*, p. 181-85.

⁸² ‘Iz otchetov III Otdeleniia ...o krest’ianskikh nastroeniakh,’ (1839), *KKR*, p. 62.

⁸³ “Iz otchet za 1857 god” and “Iz otchet za 1858 god” in ‘Iz godovykh otchetov nachal’nik III otdeleniia za 1857-59 gg....,’ *KKR*, p. 182-184.

recalled.’⁸⁴ He concluded that, while the fears of uprising were exaggerated, and the ‘hold of thoughts of freedom’ on the peasant mind still not too tight (‘up until now, at least’), that the regular police and the soldiers should be used effectively to ‘strangle at birth’ peasant disorders and disturbances. The maintenance of order across Russia in the coming years would depend upon the proper distribution and preparation of the army.⁸⁵

Similar judgements and recommendations were given by Dolgorukov in his 1858 report, in which the broad outlines of disorders, their causes, and their links to the question of emancipation in that year were discussed.⁸⁶ Again, the Third Section was being drawn upon by the Tsar as well as other institutions to give an overview of the prospects for reform and its possible impact on peasant-landlord relations: in this case, besides his recommendations for maintaining order in ‘Russia,’ Dolgorukov commented specifically on questions that were then occupying the ‘Main Committee’ on peasant reform: the situation of the landless or land-impooverished serfs, and the actions of the landlords in response to individual requests for freedom (this having been made legal by Kiselev’s reforms in 1842).⁸⁷ Some landlords, making their own preparations for the Emancipation and the distribution of lands between themselves and their serfs it would entail, used the means at their disposal to rid themselves of troublesome and or economically useless ‘souls’ by granting freedom to some serfs without their agreement, arranging that others be recruited into the army, and relocating others to estates in Siberia.



8. A. F. Orlov⁸⁸

⁸⁴ “Iz otchet 1857 g., in Ibid, p. 182-3.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 182.

⁸⁶ “Iz otchet 1858 g.,” in ‘Iz godovykh otchetov nachal’nik III otdeleniia za 1857-59 gg...,’ p. 182-84.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 184.

⁸⁸ *Perepiska Imperatora Aleksandr II*, illustrations following p. 172.

Since by 1858 it was known by many landlords that the redistribution of their lands would take place according to the number of male serfs then in their possession (in that year landlords were asked by the 'Main Committee' to submit reports on their landholdings, their quality, and their possession in serfs), it seems many took the opportunity to 'rid themselves of superfluous people and to reduce the amount of land held by them.'⁸⁹ Dolgorukov commented that disorders had broken out among the peasant in 1858 not only because of the 'appearance of instigators' in certain regions (*gde iavlialis' podstrekateli*), but also because of the rule of landlords on some estates did not 'correspond to the spirit of the times.'⁹⁰ So far, the timely intervention of the police, the gendarmes and the army, at the direction of the provincial administrations, had brought disorders and disturbances to their end quickly and, by and large, peacefully. Dolgorukov urged that the local government make further efforts to enforce the law and correct the abuses of certain landlords, the actions of whom he branded 'unjust' (*nespravedlivyi*) and 'arbitrary' (*priozvol' vladel'tsev*).⁹¹ The duties incumbent upon the landowners were to be reiterated by communications from the Main Committee to the provincial government officials and passed onto suspect landlords. In this regard, the moral-political obligations incumbent upon *all* estates - mediated by law, but judged in terms of 'justice' and '(moral) right' - was particularly manifest in Dolgorukov's report. However, where the peasant's 'misunderstandings' and transgressions were to be dealt, above all, by the threat of force, the 'untimely,' arbitrary actions of landlords that in part caused peasant disturbances would be corrected by persuasion and, it necessary, by an appeal to the law. Thus, across the Third Section's 'irregular' reports, offering opinions, similar functions and similar concepts are encountered. Taking the autocrat's point-of-view on internal affairs, Benckendorff and Dolgorukov boiled down masses of information on disorders, rumours, crimes and abuses to give a panoramic of Russian society and its tensions, with the aim of returning their recommendations to the local level having passed them through the authority of the Tsar. Benckendorff's reports were composed when the question of reform was still very much an open one, and Dolgorukov's when it was already a 'going concern': thus the differences in the range of questions touched upon by each Third Section head. However, the basic starting points – their categorical understandings of Russian society – were the same: however justified the peasants' complaints, it would be *force* in the short term (and reasonable freedom in the long

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 183.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 184.

⁹¹ Ibid.

term) that would keep them in necessary order; the efficient causes of their disorderly acts were external (rumours; instigators; the abuses of landlords), but the essential source of their means of expressing dissatisfaction and/or desires was peasant nature. Thus, it was possible to pass from detailed information on disorders and crimes in this or that *guberniia* or region – information that, in 1856-60, was essential to the deployment of the armed forces as well as to the composition of the ‘local’ Statutes – to a general statement about the peasant ‘mood,’ Russia’s situation, etc, etc. It was also common to both sets of reports that the major classes were treated differently and therefore described differently: where peasants’ misunderstandings and disturbances were *of* the peasantry, so that each particular case related logically to the whole, the abuses of landlords were more or less *personal* in form (‘arbitrary’). The latter would be corrected by the repetition and explanation of laws and new guidelines that would be explained and enforced personally, at the local level. The peasants, in contrast, would receive no positive information about the substance of the reforms; disorderly peasants were simply to be reassured – by speech or by the bayonet – that they were mistaken, and should return to paying *obrok*, rendering labour to their landlord, and waiting patiently for the Tsar’s own word on ‘freedom.’

Besides disorders and their repression, murders and more minor cases of individual ‘insubordination’ towards authorities (offensive speech, assaults, death threats) concerned the Third Section’s reports especially. In all Third Section reports to the Tsar (Benckendorff’s to Nikolai I in the 1830s, A.F. Orlov’s to Nikolai in the late 1840s and early 1850s, and Dolgorukov’s to Aleksandr in the mid-to-late 1850s), the abuses of landlords were described in some detail alongside the crimes of the peasants, and serious cases of physical abuse by landlords were reported independently of the reaction of its victims. Thus, Orlov’s annual report for 1852 (written in early 1853) mentions 23 cases of the murder of a superior by a peasant (13 of them landlords), along with 13 more unsuccessful attempts. The report also mentions that ‘vicious punishments’ were meted out by one landlord’s son and by one landlord, in one case to a peasant proper, in another to a household serf, the former leading to an (unsuccessful), attempt on the landlord’s son’s life, the other mentioning no criminal actions on the part of the victimised peasants.⁹² Similar descriptions are also found in Orlov’s report for 1853 (written

⁹² ‘Iz otchetov glavnogo nachal’nik III otdeleniia A. F. Orlov Nikolaiu I za 1852 g. o krest’ianskom dvizhenii v Rossii’ [1853], *KD: 1850-56*, p. 289-91

early 1854),⁹³ and Dolgorukov's report for 1856 (written in early 1857).⁹⁴ Strikingly, even in those cases where the individual peasant-murderer or peasant-criminal is the ostensible object of the report, their names, ages and 'stories' (e.g. their biography; their stated explanations or excuses) were rarely mentioned. As with disorders involving a group or groups of peasants, the specific historical marker of each incident was the name of the landlord and his or her estate, the name of the victim, and the names and ranks of those officials who investigated the incident. Only in cases where no manifest abuse was perpetrated by the landlord (or other authority) *and* the attempt on an authority's life was *successful* did the peasant-criminal earn his name in the record. Peasant victims of abuse *were* mentioned, however. Obviously the absence in the reports of details of other murders (of peasants by peasants, for instance), and the inclusion of other cases of insubordination, indicates that it was the general attitude of peasants, on the one hand, and the particular, arbitrary acts of landlords towards their serfs, on the other, that interested the Tsar, and which the Third Section were therefore called upon to investigate and report. Consequently, the treatment of peasants as *cases* or *instances* of their class, and landlords as members of theirs, comes through strongly in Orlov and Dolgorukov's descriptions of these incidents, and so too the class division that went behind the more obvious, more formal delineation of 'estates.'

The folding back of the individual or singular actions of particular peasants into their 'class nature,' or their class relations with landlords or government authorities, was the starting point for most investigations into the 'peasantry,' in so far as the concept of order and the concept of disorder assumed, for the most part, the *muzhik* to be an 'instance' of his class. It could be argued that, to the extent that the category of the peasant or *narod* was invoked at any level in documentation, the notion of 'order' and so of peasant 'nature' was also connoted by officials. But there is a difference between a formal identification of 'the peasant' (or 'the peasantry') and the substantiation or predication of this identification: it was not, in other words, impossible that direct observation or investigation of 'the peasantry' or *narod* could describe or report events, conversations, actions (or whatever) that contradicted the autocratic conception of the peasantry and its proper social position, despite the fact that it was this latter conception which informed the functions of whole institutions, as well as the decisions and actions of the particular officials who were bound by those institutions' regulations and procedures. Historians who have studied

⁹³ 'Iz otchetov...A. F. Orlov Nikolaiu I za 1853 g.,' [1854], *KD*: 1850-56, p. 392-3.

⁹⁴ 'Iz otchetov...V. A. Dolgorukov Aleksanru II za 1856 g.,' [1857], *KD*: 1850-56, p. 603-6.

the peasant or workers' 'movements,' or the everyday lives of the Russian working classes, recognise that official documentation, however saturated with the ideology of autocracy and its vocabulary, does provide information that undermines the official language used to describe the *narod*, and the power system that informed that language. Hence, it is argued by some historians that peasants' and workers' petitions to the authorities ('supplications,' *proshchenie*) - when read literally indicative of the subordination and dependent mentality of the peasants - in fact provide evidence of a *strategy* on the part of peasants and workers to persuade and cajole the government into action by presenting it with familiar images of their innocence (as opposed to landlords' and local officials' arbitrariness, corruption, and cruelty) and therefore conducive to garnering their sympathy. Further, it has been argued that the peasant's well-documented faith in the 'distant Tsar' - the notion that his declaration of Emancipation had been hidden by corrupt, local officials - was a rationalisation and legitimisation of their material desire for more land and fewer taxes by appeal to a figure more or less ideal for them (the *Tsarbatiushka*), and not synonymous with any real, historical Tsar. Cases where individual peasants proclaimed to the authorities their unity with the *mir*, possible of a 'class' reading in the autocracy's understanding (peasant subordination to authority; a misguided fidelity to peasant patriarchy; the collective or crowd nature of the peasants), contradicted officials' recourse to explain peasant actions by their 'passions' and their 'nature' by documenting the thoughtful and conscious resistance of particular peasants to the authorities. It could be argued further that, in the 'filtering' of information from the lower to the higher levels of official documentation, a sort of ideological purification took place: that upper officials reporting directly to the Tsar were more likely to describe peasants and peasant disorders in the clichés that, through repeated use by officials, had become the 'natural' way of summarising copious notes and extensive investigations to a form easier to digest. The categorisation of 'peasant incidents' into 'disorders,' other 'cases of insubordination,' 'murders' and 'attempted murders' (as one finds in the Police Department's annual reports to the Ministry of Internal Affairs) indicates just this process. The strong continuity in the means of reference to the peasantry, the connotations of a 'peasant nature' present in the listing of disorders and their forcible return to 'order,' the formulaic - apparently habitual - use of certain explanations for peasant disturbances (the 'tendency of the peasant to interpret liberty [*svoboda*] as freedom [*volia*']; the 'appearance of instigators or ill-willed people in the villages,' etc.) could then be understood as an effect of the task the upper officials were actually set in writing reports, with a more obvious 'hold' over descriptions and correspondence between substance and reference in the 'summary' (where the

filtering of details and the demand for reasonable ‘opinions’ removed all that did not fit the ‘general picture’ of the peasantry or the populace that such summaries were meant to be) than in the agent’s note, scribbled hastily, or the lower officials narrative of a particular disorder.

This interpretation is partly supported by a comparison of Dolgorukov’s 1858 and 1859 reports on the ‘peasant mood’ to the notes (*doneseniia*) of agents of the Third Department from the same years, taken in and around Petersburg’s peasant-worker quarters (among other locations). At ‘ground level,’ the reform preparations just recently announced were clearly a topic of great interest to peasant-workers, officials, noblemen and others that agents knew, overheard, or were able to engage with in conversation. The peasant-workers’ distrust of the process, hope and excitement regarding reform, as well as frustration, anger and hatred, are all evident in their agents notes:

Among [the *narod*] now [1858] various questions and judgements had arisen [in response to the news of the delivery of the ‘Rescripts’ to the government], for instance: ‘but no-one is really talking about freedom [*vol’nosti*] anywhere, so obviously everything will stay the same, everything will still be wrong,’ ‘Twelve years – it’s a joke...twelve years! That’s twelve chances to die, and we won’t see freedom [*vol’nosti*]’ ...⁹⁵

On the 31st of December [1858], in the hotel ‘Vyborg,’ at Samsionievskii Bridge, the peasant Mikhail Krasavin, from Galichskii *uezd*, Kostromskaia *guberniia*, talked about the necessity of emancipating the peasants soon and about the coming manifesto. He said he wanted to murder his landlord, adding: ‘No mistake about it – justice says we should get rid of all the landlords.’ On that note he added, threateningly: ‘If our hopes for freedom don’t come true, then the peasants will make a *bunt* and emancipate themselves’...⁹⁶

On the 19th of January [1859], at a soup kitchen in Nevskii, the peasant Korenev read the ‘Rescripts’ and, with hatred in his voice, said: ‘It’s a good thing the government is paying attention to us now...70 thou[sand] noblemen oppress the majority, they torture the peasants, they tear off their skin...’ and so on. His audience agreed...⁹⁷

On the 19th of January [1859], at the Dement’ev tavern, the peasants of Gr[af] Nirodi ...were meeting. They said that ‘a letter must be sent to the village, so the peasants now living there will no longer obey the elders who were chosen by the landlord, that they have no power anymore, and they’ve already chosen their own elder, who’s here with us

⁹⁵ “No. 3: Dec., 1857,” ‘Iz doneseniiia Peterburgskoi agentura v III otdelenie,’ Dec. 1857 - Jan.1860, *KKR*, p. 184. The ‘Rescripts’ of Nazimov and Ignat’ev were published in newspapers in November, 1857, at the order of the Lanskoii (M. Naidenov, *Klassovaia bor’ba v porefermennoi derevne* (1861-63), (Moscow, 1955), p. 9). The ‘twelve years’ referred to is the ‘transition period’ suggested in the ‘Rescripts’ (*KKR*, p. 486, *ft*).

⁹⁶ “No. 4: Dec, 1857,” *ibid*, p. 185.

⁹⁷ “No. 1: [19 Jan.], 1858,” *ibid*, p. 186.

now.’ The chosen elder thanked the others for the trust they showed in him and treated his electors to some vodka....⁹⁸

These diverse responses (and many others from across the country) became in Dolgorukov’s 1858 summary:

Many [peasants] understand limited freedom [‘liberty’: *svoboda*] as freedom [*vol’nosti*], and there are some who think that the land belongs to them as much as it does the landowners...Disorders, now more frequent, consist in the inclination of serfs not to pay their cash dues [*obrok*] and other obligations, or their refusal to subordinate themselves to elders or to the landowners themselves [*samim vladel’tsam*].⁹⁹

The annual report of the Department of Police from early 1859, drawing upon the Department’s own records of investigations and repressions of disorders, as well as on the reports and recommendations of the Third Section and the Ministry of Internal Affairs,¹⁰⁰ observed:

It is clear that thoughts about the freedom [*vol’nosti*] of the serfs have been awoken among the *narod*, that they will no longer tolerate their [present] situation...the danger now is that the general promulgation of information about the improvement in the conditions of the manorial peasants would give grounds for them to break order and to refuse to subordinate themselves to the landowners, on the basis of their misunderstanding of [the information or concepts] presented to them, or of a mistaken view of the government, or for some other reason.¹⁰¹

The connection made between rumour and disorder – not a necessary one, as was shown in the discussion of Lanskoï’s reports from 1859 – begins again with ‘peasant nature,’ the peasant understanding of freedom, and lurches back towards it in use of the word ‘tendency’ or ‘inclination,’ taking specific information about specific disorders and transforming it into a proposition about peasants in general. This much has already been observed in regard to the chinovnik’s 1857 report and Benckendorff’s reports from the 1830s. It can be seen again in the fluctuating reports of the Department of Police on disorder and the effects of the ‘rescripts’: in the report for 1859 (written 1860), the police claim that the idea that ‘the promulgation of the

⁹⁸ “No. 2: [19 Jan.], 1858,” *ibid*, p. 187.

⁹⁹ “Iz otchet 1858 g.,” ‘Iz godovykh otchetov nachal’nik III otdeleniia za 1857-59 gg...,’ *KKR*, p. 184.

¹⁰⁰ The author of the report refers specifically to the recommendations, made by Dolgorukov in his Third Section report of 1859, regarding the distribution of soldiers around the country. The Department of Police report complains about the impracticality of this recommendation, especially with regards to the permanent billeting of troops away from their own barracks, and gives a counter recommendation: see ‘Iz otchet departamenta politsii ispolniel’noi za 1858 g. o krest’ianskikh volnenniakh i merakh, priniatikh dlia ikh podavlenii,’ 1859, *KD: 1857-61*, p. 181.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*.

government's plans to improve the lives of the manorial peasants would make more difficult the maintenance of calm among the people of that estate' – the idea they had put forward the year before – was, in fact, 'completely unfounded,' and that 'most peasant disorders over the last year have been caused by the improper actions of the landowners, and have been halted by police actions alone.'¹⁰² But a discontinuity of descriptions is also notable here, quite aside from the indeterminate relation of 'fact' to interpretation or recommendation. The link between the detailed reports available to Dolgorukov (certainly it would have passed through his hands, though perhaps already in tidied and summarised form) and his own *otchet* is there, but (to borrow an image), it is as if it were 'dubbed':¹⁰³ if attention has already been paid to this lower level of documentation, and it is then brought to a reading of Dolgorukov's report, then the 'ground level' reports can be felt 'gesturing underneath' Dolgorukov's text.¹⁰⁴ The variation and specificity offered in the agent's reports have been transformed into the clichés of Dolgorukov's report, clichés which echoing the same kinds of summary and analysis found in Benkendorff's reports of twenty years previous. Indeed, Dolgorukov's report only maintains *its* substantial specificity as a document in so far as it is marked by bare identifiers (dates; the author; descriptions of particular disorders and murders marked similarly) and by a few 'opinions': shorn of these markers, and the 'opinions' set forth by each in separation from the empirical, this documentation would lose its singularity. 'History' (singularity) is only granted in the citing of facts which sink immediately beneath the clichés, a formulaic language apparently always at the hand of officials whose task it was to observe and control the 'simple people.' Opinion, the recommendations that responded to knowledge presented as historical only in terms of quantity and dispersion (not 'quality' or 'essence'), with terms of moral judgement ('arbitrary,' 'harsh,' 'terrible,' 'unjust') adding to spice the dish - this being the only expression of Dolgorukov's freedom and thus, of his personality, in the document.

To suppose, however, that these processes were limited to the higher-level documents and the summaries given therein would assume too close a correspondence between the intentions of the author (to summarise; give an overview), the functions of the document (to act as a basis for government actions, recommendations to the Tsar, etc.) and their clichéd and formulaic language. Before any summary or generalisation (translation into cliché) of 'particulars' took

¹⁰² 'Iz zapiski, sostavlennoi v departamente politzii ispolnitel'noi, o volneniiakh krest'ian v 1859,' before April, 1860, *KKR*, p. 236-7.

¹⁰³ R. Hullot-Kentor, 'Translator's Introduction' to T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London/New York, 1997), xiv.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

place, detailed documentation, gathered ‘at ground level,’ was already structured by the same clichés and social categories. The interdependence of description, judgement, aims, and knowledge has been shown briefly as regards the chinovnik’s 1857 report to Murav’ev. It can be seen also in the notes of the agents of the Third Section, some already cited above, which were drawn upon by Dolgorukov in his annual reports to Aleksandr II. Read together, these notes, documenting three years of conversations, observations, and the ‘immediate’ judgements of agents, indicate their prior orientation towards the ‘social category’ over and above the particular, but also the intention to reach the same old judgements regarding these social categories through encounters with real people and actual observations of them. It was the aim – indeed, the *formal* aim, given by the order of superiors within the Section – to understand the ‘mood of the *narod*’ or the views of the peasants or ‘simple people’ on the preparations of the reforms. But agents were not merely ‘making the circuit’ through the empirical in order to reach the ‘mythical’ (the ‘mind’ or ‘mood of the *narod*’): the categories *presented themselves* to agents as self-evident as much as these categories were actively employed in order to make those observations intelligible in terms of the given, formal aims. Thus, in the following passage, the three main aspects already noted in the anonymous chinovnik’s report – the *relative* indeterminacy of peasants in descriptions given, the envelopment of the observation or ‘fact’ by the category, and the tendency of the primacy of social categories to be obscured by the apparent precision of the observations and descriptions – are all quite evident:

On October the 21st [1859] on the Nikolaevskii railway, an agent got into a conversation with three work gangs [*arteliami*] of labourers [*chernorabochii*]..., about 60 men. All of them were peasants from Riazanskaia guberniia, Spasskii uezd, of Mr. Poludenskii, Mr. Schreider and Mr. Olsuf’ev. They spoke heatedly about the emancipation. One was disappointed that everything was moving too slowly; another doubted that it would come to anything at all; they complained about the very burdensome labour dues [*barshchina*] and the poverty in their villages...and also about the suspect way in which the peasants are governed; they said from letters they had received [from the village], it was clear that even talk of freedom [*svoboda*] was forbidden there.¹⁰⁵

The aim to understand the ‘popular view’ rather than the views of these men in themselves is obvious from the imprecision of his attribution of statements: ‘one, ‘the other,’ ‘they...’ – these are descriptions that intend to convey disagreement or diversity as a quality of a *thing* observed, but not to delineate, trace or attribute diverse views to different *people*. Certainly, the agent was concerned here with precision of observation and reporting: this is indicated in so far as he

¹⁰⁵ “No. 5: Oct., 1858,” ‘Iz doneseniiia Peterburgskoi agentura v III otdelenie,’ Dec. 1857 - Jan.1860, *KKR*, p. 187.

enquired into the home villages and owners of the serf '*chernorabochii*.' But in the juxtaposition of the collective work-gang of labourers with the (at least) onymous Mr. Poludenskii, Mr. Schreider and Mr. Olsuf'ev only reinforces the peasant workers' anonymity – an anonymity already designated as an *objective* quality in the use of the term '*chernorabochii*.' Still, it must be remembered (as in agent's observations at soup kitchens, tea houses, and the other public meeting places of the 'simple people') that what was observed then presented itself *as* the classifications being imposed by the agents in description. There was no question that the 'soup kitchens and restaurants' of the 'simple people' were indeed those of the *narod*; the means by which such places, and examples of the *narod*, were identified – clothing, a manner of speech, location – did not require any explanation beyond the act of identification itself.¹⁰⁶ The unity of enormous social groups was taken to be as self-evident as the identity of their meeting places, the unity of their views and the correspondence of the social category with the thing perceived. The categories of *narod* and *muzhik* assumed plurality and the primacy of essence: this was the object of agents' investigations, only rarely disturbed by the odd *muzhik* and a genuinely unusual trait or utterance (criminal intent or a criminal act, for instance). Thus, naturally, when confronted with a confusion of conversations, collectives, and individuals, the agent saw the *crowd*. The agent treated the work gang - not its constituent parts - as his subject matter: they already presented themselves to him as a crowd, their speech bustling together and merging into a set of views nevertheless identified with a single, 'popular' view of things. Perceptions coloured by aims (to report on the 'mood' or 'views of the people'), and descriptions structured around given terms and categories, were met with a reality whose apparent correspondence to those perceptions and categories would only have been broken by the conscious effort to break them.

What was given as a formal aim of investigation and its subject matter led agents to differentiate between the views of different classes. The fear of the influence of the 'educated' upon the *narod* – or at least, of the 'middle or upper rank' on their attitudes to the reform – can be seen in this differentiation. While the attitudes of the *pomeshchiki* to the reform were of as much interest to the government as those of the *narod*, Third Section and police reports were clearly not the *only* place in which the noble landlords would find a place to have those attitudes documented. Still set to remain a major part of the administration of the countryside after the peasant reforms, more or less the natural provider of officials in a government that was only

¹⁰⁶ "No. 3, Dec. 1857," *ibid*, p. 185.

nominally separate from the nobility (especially its noble landowners), every aspect of the reform was open to the (albeit limited) participation of the *pomeshchiki*. Agents *were* sent to report on the views of noble landowners, apparently in pursuit of the hidden agendas and private attitudes of individual members of that group - views that might not be uttered in encounters with central government, but threatened still to derail or slow the enactment of any reforms agreed to. In one sense this confirmed the noble landowners as a part of an abstract social category, adding to the economic and political calculations of the various Drafting Committees some notion of a general mood or shared attitudes amongst members of the group. But this categorisation was in the context of a reform process in which the roles of the 'nobility' and of the 'noble landlords,' as an estate, were *self-consciously* drawn into debate and discussion by the Tsar, his supporters, and those more or less opposed to their relatively thoroughgoing plans to abolish serfdom. Opportunities for particular elites to make their mark on the debates - even on the Statutes themselves - were many. Letters were sent; clubs and unions were formed; the Secret and Main Committees consisted largely of men who were also owners of serfs and significant quantities of land; central government ministers were usually landowners of considerable wealth and influence, their positions as trusted advisers almost guaranteed by social connections, if not by inheritance. Knowledge was gained about the mood or attitude of *fractions* of the elite, with no 'overall mood' posited out of particular instances, with reports by agents focusing on one or two strains of opinion (the possibly harmful ones), in addition to knowledge of the transgressions of individual landowners gathered by the regular police. The categorisation of the elite was thus, still, a *knowing* act of abstraction, as well as a reminder to those brought under it of the moral duty imposed by the category, the latter confirming the freedoms with which the elite were entrusted, included the freedom to 'express' autocratic rationality personally rather than 'mechanically.' The tendency in description and comment upon these fractions of the elite - fractions of the serf-and land-owning nobility, even - was for the initial categorisation to be sublated almost immediately by the particular fact, event, opinion, fear, etc. being brought to light. Thus, Benckendorff's complaints about the impoverished, landless nobility drew on the category of nobility (and *its* relation to the freedoms and duties of the elite class) to support the moral judgements he offered on their 'ill-will,' their desire to see Russia in disarray. His expression of confidence in the 'conscientious' and 'well-meaning' members of 'educated society,' belonging to the same class as the landless and ill-willed nobility, operated in the same way. Dolgorukov's comment on the fear amongst nobles of a repetition of the *pugachevshchina* was followed up by a series of qualifications:

especially in the southern regions, especially among the big landowners of those regions, etc. The category ('nobility'; 'clergy'; the 'educated') remained a regulative principle, an ideal outside of what was recorded or observed, but not as a term explaining exhaustively, in itself, the actions or opinions of the particular 'nobles' or 'clergy' (or whoever) in question.

The opposite tendency is notable in descriptions of the 'simple people': the particular facts recorded, as well as the narrower categories, both giving a nominal sort of diversity to observations of the peasants, labourers, etc., were constantly being passed over in favour of the basic category of the *narod* – the social-intellectual and moral category that informed and shaped the whole process of documentation. In the agent's notes, the formal aim of the investigation leaps into an impressionistic description of the social effect produced by the Rescripts, in which an opening passage suggests an interest and excitement that transcends the categories of '(social) rank' (*zvanie*), 'estate,' and the basic class division with which observation was approached:

The Rescripts now constitute the most important, most involving, and common subject of conversation and opinion not only all public encounters, and in the private and family circles of the middle and upper ranks [*zvaniiia*], but also among the simple people [*prostoi narod*], for whom the most important topic is their future well-being. At present, in St. Petersburg, there is not one place in which these documents are not receiving lively readings, especially in the clubs and bars; even in the simple people's restaurants and soup kitchens, they have made a strong impression, where those reading the texts are permanently encircled by curious audiences, straining to hear every word...¹⁰⁷

This passionate interest – notable quite across the class divide in attentive readings, debates, conversations, not excluding 'a single place in Petersburg' – is followed by verbatim reports of the stated responses of 'simple people' that suggest, alongside what was common to the city, a diversity of views or, at the very least, a diversity in the language used to express attitudes, that might break open the social category of the *narod* from the inside:

Among [the *narod*] now, various questions and judgements had, for instance: 'But no-one is really talking about freedom anywhere, so obviously everything will stay the same, everything will still be wrong,' 'Twelve years – it's a joke...twelve years! That's twelve chances to die, and we won't see freedom'...¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ "No. 3, Dec. 1857," 'Iz doneseniia Peterburgskoi agentura v III otdelenie,' Dec. 1857 - Jan.1860, *KKR*, p. 185.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 185-6.

If there was a *conscious* intent to the inclusion of these verbatim records here, it was the injection into an already impressionistic description of a popular language *designed* to jar with the clipped and formal language of the author. The record of the rhythms and vocabulary of popular speech added to the report the aura of the empirical otherwise achieved by secondary descriptions of the author's direct contact with, and detailed investigation of a certain event or phenomena. This nod to empirical precision is followed immediately by a judgement regarding the attitudes of the whole of the 'simple people':

From this it is clear that the simple people expect not preparatory measures and a gradual achievement of freedom [*vol'nosti*], but the publication of His Majesty's Manifesto, giving them, upon its publication, unlimited freedom [*bezuslovniiu svobodu*], and that the documents just published have been misunderstood by them.¹⁰⁹

This is close to the sorts of judgements regarding the 'deficiencies of the peasant understanding' found in upper-level government reports of the same period (1857-60), but already found in Benckendorff's reports from the 1830s. What is remarkable here, however, is the movement affected between the impressionistic passage through the verbatim 'examples' of popular reactions, to the notes' closing judgements regarding the 'simple people,' the latter supposed to follow from the other two parts. The logic of these movements is hardly proven in the *substance* of each part: '...Among the simple people,' the agent writes, '...the most important topic is their future well-being.' This is followed by '...for instance: "But no-one is really talking about freedom anywhere, so obviously everything will stay the same, everything will still be wrong," "Twelve years – it's a joke...twelve years! That's twelve chances to die, and we won't see freedom." But these are comments on the likelihood that freedom would not be granted, not 'future well-being' (whatever that was *supposed* to mean: one could assume economic improvements and political rights here, but equally the vision of *volia* – 'living as one wants to' – might be denoted). The agent then writes that 'the [Rescripts] just published have been misunderstood by the [simple people].' The cited views of the 'simple people' hardly show *misunderstanding*, however: they show mistrust of the process and an absence of any expectation of its success. This same incongruity of the record with the judgements made is often encountered. Given the frequent recourse among officials to the notion of 'popular misunderstanding,' it is worth recalling the snippets of 'popular views' recorded in the agents' notes again:

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

‘No mistake about it – justice says we should get rid of all the landlords.’ On that note he added, threateningly: ‘If our hopes for freedom don’t come true, then the peasants will make a *bunt* and emancipate themselves’...

‘It’s a good thing the government is paying attention to us now...70 thou[sand] noblemen oppress the majority, they torture the peasants, they tear off their skin...’ and so on. [The] audience agreed...

They said that ‘a letter must be sent to the village, so the peasants now living there will no longer obey the elders who were chosen by the landlord, that they have no power anymore, and they’ve already chosen their own elder, who’s here with us now.’ The chosen elder thanked the others for the trust they showed in him and treated his electors to some vodka...

One was disappointed that everything was moving too slowly; another doubted that it would come to anything at all; they complained about the very burdensome labour dues and the poverty in their villages...and also about the suspect way in which the peasants are governed; they said from letters they had received [from the village], it was clear that even talk of freedom was forbidden there...

On the 19th of January... a few peasants... said it was a shame that the committee set up to examine [the peasant question] included no deputies from the peasantry itself, and said they thought that condition into which the committee would put the peasants would be highly unsatisfactory for the peasants, since the nobles [*dvoriane*] only look after their own interests.¹¹⁰

The agent’s judgement seems to be based on the notion of textual misunderstanding: he talks specifically about the ‘simple people’ crowding around those who could read the Rescripts, ‘straining to hear every word’ - he talks of the misunderstanding of *documents*. But none of the views cited in the notes indicates ‘textual incomprehension.’ Indeed, several passages indicate the opposite: an understanding of at least the *process* of reform, as well of some of the recommendations being given, in the Rescripts (‘no peasant deputies,’ ‘twelve years’). Putting that question to one side, however, it becomes clear that ‘misunderstanding’ refers to a whole set of statements and reactions: a lack of trust among the peasants in the authorities (both the government and the ‘nobility’ or landlords); a dismissive attitude to the government’s plans; the attempt to ‘support’ the reform efforts by their own means (electing new elders); more or less criminal intentions expressed by peasants (wanting to kill landlords); statements offensive to the landowners and to their ideal authority (‘they exploit the peasants, tear off their skin...’ etc.). These statements hardly indicate a unified, ‘popular view’ of things. The reactions and

¹¹⁰ “No. 3: 19 Jan., 1858,” *ibid*, p. 186.

statements were too various for that. Though the Rescripts and announcement of reforms may have given *some* of those ascribed to the *narod* cause to think about the conditions of the peasantry as a whole (and perhaps the agents' own efforts to make conversation on the issue pushed certain of their interlocutors in that direction also), there is neither the unity of the content of views nor actual evidence of *incomprehension* to support either assertions implied by the cliché, 'popular misunderstanding.' It was not, then, a unified, 'popular view' or 'popular conception' of freedom to which the term 'misunderstanding' referred, but the very unpredictability of 'popular thought.' Liable to a disparate expression that undermined the social categories from which knowledge of the *narod* had to refer to be intelligible, the singularity of the thoughts, gestures, statements and actions of those ascribed to the *narod* were subsumed under the category. Clearly, contact with the 'simple people' could and did produce records that contradicted the unifying concept, not only substantially (in having containing different attitudes), but also formally (in having been recorded as singular and historical, only for this singularity to be ignored). But the initial approach to this social group - the classification emphasised by the formal aims of investigations, its unity secured by the intuitive identification of its members - determined that even such evidence that contradicted it was marshalled in support of the category. Class, imposed by external authority and its categories, was nevertheless perceived as internal to the members of the working class. In the unquestioned identity of the social category with the reality known about and described, the identity was reproduced in documents, repressing the constitutive role of the actions, investigations and documentations in *making* the class and giving it its 'essence,' at the same time repressing information officials gathered that contradicted the essentialist conception of class imposed by the use of terms that allowed what was 'wrong' to be reintegrated into itself as something 'normal.' Disorder itself became a part of the autocratic *raison d'etat* - a normal part of the autocratic order - in its attachment to the covering term 'misunderstanding,' and the concept of a *muzhik* nature upon which it rested.

IV. Emancipation and Freedom (February – April, 1861)

On February the 19th, 1861, three days after the final discussions of the State Senate on the peasant reforms, Tsar Alexander II signed the Emancipation Statutes.¹ That spring, in the public squares and churches, the manorial serfs (*pomeshchich'i krest'iane*) gathered alongside landlords, priests and other local notables to receive their freedom from the Tsar. To that end, and with various documents and pronouncements in hand, the state's *chinovniki* travelled out from the provincial capitals to the towns and villages scattered across the countryside. This was not without its difficulties: the warm spring weather had thawed the winter snows and covered the pitted country lanes with a layer of grey sludge. The *chinovniki* were forced to abandon horse and carriage and make their way by foot to the parish churches, where crowds of expectant peasants were being rallied by the district police.² In contrast to officials in the higher echelons of government service and the landowning nobles, the peasants, along with the *chinovniki* and other petit officials in the countryside, had been kept ignorant of the details of the Emancipation almost until the promulgation began. Called upon to pronounce the Emancipation to the serfs, backed by troops, cavalry and artillery,³ priests and state officials confronted the congregated peasantry with a message of obligation and submission expected equally to confuse and disappoint them.⁴ As an object of investigation, discussion and debate, the peasantry were 'sometimes seen but rarely heard' by social elites as reforms were prepared and enacted on their behalf.⁵ Until March and April, 1861, the twenty-two million serfs who

¹ Zaionchkovsky, *Abolition*, p. 80, 106; [G. D. Shcherbachev], 'Iz vospominanii G. D. Shcherbacheva ob ob"iavlenii manifesta 19 fevralia 1861 g. v Peterburge,' (first published in 1891), *KKR*, p. 264 and p. 469, *ft.* 1.

² This description is based on the notes of an anonymous parish priest from Vladimirskaia guberniia: 'Zapiski sel'skogo sviashchennika, 1861,' *KKR*, p. 274-7. These 'Zapiski... sviashchennika' were originally published in *Russkii Starina*, no. 1, 1880 (see background information on the 'Zapiski... sviashchennika' in *KKR*, p. 497). Long extracts from the 'Zapiski' are used in. Zaionchkovsky, *Abolition*, p. 110.

³ In his diary on the 20th February, 1861 – a week before the declaration of emancipation took place in St. Petersburg and Moscow – Valuev described the military preparations and precautions being made in advance by the government elite to protect themselves and the tsar from possible unrest in the capitals. Valuev mentions that, along with *consigners* and an two sections of the police, that artillery and a stockpile of shells had been prepared in St. Petersburg; he also mentions that the Minister of the Imperial Court, Alderberg, his son, and Minister of War, Dolgorukov, were rumoured to have stayed the night in the Winter Palace, at the side of the tsar, ready to whisk him away on horses specially prepared for the occasion (see *Dnevnik P. A. Valuev: Ministra Vnutrennykh Del*, two volumes, (Moscow, 1961), vol. 1, p. 72-3; see also Zaionchkovsky, *Abolition* p.107).

⁴ Zaionchkovsky, *ibid*, p. 106.

⁵ Y. Kotsonis, *Making Peasants Backward: Agricultural Cooperatives and the Agrarian Question in Russia, 1861-1914*, Basingstoke, 1999), p. 3.

would be expected to conform to the myriad, intricate terms and directions set out by the ‘Emancipation Statutes,’ were almost completely excluded from active participation in the preparation of those documents.

Accounts of the promulgation entered contemporary documentation already skewed by their authors’ awareness of the historical importance of the event. But premonitions of the poor reception of the reforms were in tension with the sense of historical achievement and occasion which the long-awaited reform brought upon the completion of its preparations. In the relevant entry in the diary of S. Valuev, soon to be Minister Internal Affairs, an acknowledgement of the historical importance of the reform rings out emptily, with a mechanical tone, in juxtaposition with his observations regarding the crowds’ actual response to the promulgation:

March 5: A new era. Today in Moscow and St. Petersburg the *Manifesto* on the abolition of serfdom was read. It made no great impression on the *narod* and nor could it have, given its content...On leaving the *manezh*, the *narod* hailed the Tsar with a cry of *urrah!*, but without great enthusiasm. In the theatre, a spiritless rendition of ‘God Save the Tsar.’⁶

Valuev’s account expresses concisely the mixture of accomplishment and fear noticeable in Tsarist officialdom’s documented sentiments regarding the announcement and enactment of the peasant reforms. The source of this mixed sentiment was the mass of peasants. The government had intended that the promulgation pass as quickly and quietly as possible over the peasants while retaining its symbolic importance for the population at large. The momentousness of the event, generated by a century of expectation was to be absorbed, not neutralised, by a series of measures designed to encase the reform’s novelty in languages familiar to the peasantry and conducive to their continued submissiveness to the authorities. The scheduling of the promulgation to coincide with Lent, the aping of the language of Orthodoxy in the *Manifesto*, the use of local priests and church officials to read it to the populace, were all attempts to appropriate for the promulgation the warm reassurances and the soporific effects of the peasants’ own religiosity and the rituals associated with it. The peasant response still threatened to distort government plans, endowing the promulgation with unwanted significance by drowning it in a wave of apathy, wilful misunderstanding, or petulant resistance.

⁶ *Dnevnik P. A. Valuev*, p. 80.

The promulgation (*obnarodovanie*) marked only the culmination of the preparatory period of peasant reform. The enactment of the peasant and other reforms during the remaining years of the 1860s would have far deeper effects on Russian society than the promulgation itself. After 1861, for the remainder of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth, the changes introduced by the Reforms would frame the lives of many millions of peasants and workers. The Reforms were intended to work themselves out over an extended period. The abolition of serfdom would include a two year period of transition (from February, 1861 to February, 1863), an indeterminate period in which the peasants would be temporarily obligated to their former owners in return for guaranteed use of land allotments, and a period of redemption, beginning at the landowners' request, during which the peasants would purchase set amounts of land from the landowner with the temporary aid of state loans, which would last a further forty-nine years. Explanation of the exact terms of the reforms would be a drawn out process, carried out firstly through the publication of the hefty 'Statutes' (to be kept by each landlord for consultation), secondly, through the assistance provided by the peace arbitrators in the field, and thirdly, through the work of the provincial 'Committees on Peasant Affairs,' to which the peace arbitrators would be officially attached. If the peasants were to understand the many details of the Emancipation, then it would be in the drafting of agreements with landlords over temporary obligations, land usage and land partition in their particular communities and on particular estates, and by the external enforcement of those agreements by the government in the decades after 1861.



9. 'Emancipation from above': Tsar Aleksandr II and the popular crowd, February 1861⁷

⁷ *Velikii Kniaz' Konstantin Konstantin Nikolaevich Romanov* (Samara, 2004), p. 146.

And yet considerable attentions went into organising the promulgation, and considerable fears still attached to the fated event amongst elites. The lack of peasant participation up to 1861 made necessary a direct and simultaneous communication with the peasantry. This in itself was perceived as a threat to the governments' oft-stated desire for gradual change. In the short term, it was the anticipated disappointment of the manorial peasants with a 'liberation' that immediately ended neither obligations to the landlord, nor the *de facto* authority of the landlord over the former serfs, and did not grant freely to the peasants even their own modest allotments (the amount and cost of the land to be purchased would be calculated by a complex system with regional variations, and agreed upon in a series of 'Regulatory' or 'Land Charters' (*ustavnye gramota*) with the help of the peace arbitrators), which gave the act of promulgation a significance beyond its intended ceremonial and modest explanatory purposes. Threatened with the breakdown of the public and moral order, the Emancipation was to be accompanied by measures of social control quite consistent with the traditional autocratic rhetoric of paternal authority and moral guardianship.⁸ Moved by Christian love for the 'simple people' entrusted to its care,⁹ fearful of the manipulation to acts of brutality and irrationality to which the 'simple people' were thought vulnerable, the autocracy marshalled sacred teachings and the threat of violence as means to prevent the outbreak of disorders in the villages,¹⁰ and to calm those peasant communities stirred up by harmful rumours, the dissemination of which given fertile soil in the *narod*'s own 'deluded' notions of freedom.¹¹ The moral and physical aspects of the

⁸ On paternalism and patriarchal authority in Russia, see S. Morrissey 'Patriarchy on Trial: Suicide, Discipline and Governance in Imperial Russia,' *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 75, no. 1 (March, 2003), p. 23-4; for a more involved discussion of paternalism and patriarchy as an all pervasive principle of social organization, with corresponding effects on peasant social *mentalité*, see B. N. Mironov, 'Peasant Popular Culture and the Origins of Soviet Authoritarianism,' *Cultures in Flux*, 55-61.

⁹ On contemporary understandings of the peasant reforms through the doctrines of sin and the interpretation of the Bible (especially the passage from Corinthians 7:20-23) see: Paperno, 'Liberation of the Serfs as a Cultural Symbol,' p. 417-421.

¹⁰ According to Zaionchkovsky's account: 'At the end of December 1860 the quartermaster general of the Ministry of War... V. K. Lieven, submitted a special memorandum "On Providing Troops with Means to Suppress Peasant Disorders." In it he carefully analyzed the extent troop distribution in terms of the need to quell peasant disturbances, and concluded that on the whole the current troop deployment was capable of quashing any possible agitations... At the same time, Lieven considered it expedient to determine precisely and in good time which troop units could be assigned to put down peasant disturbances in a particular province' (Zaionchkovsky, *Abolition*, p. 102). In his diary on the 20th February, 1861 – a week before the declaration of emancipation took place in St. Petersburg and Moscow – Valuev described the military preparations and precautions being made in advance by the government elite to protect themselves and the tsar from possible unrest in the capitals. Valuev mentions that, along with *consigners* and an two sections of the police, that artillery and a stockpile of shells had been prepared in St. Petersburg; he also mentions that the Minister of the Imperial Court, Alderberg, his son, and Minister of War, Dolgorukov, were rumoured to have stayed the night in the Winter Palace, at the side of the tsar, ready to whisk him away on horses specially prepared for the occasion (see *Dnevnik P. A. Valuev: Ministra Vnutrennykh Del*, two volumes, (Moscow, 1961), vol. 1, p. 72-3).

¹¹ The word 'delusion' (or 'mania,' *maniia*) is used in A. Berte's report of August, 1861 regarding the lax censorship of the most recent issue of *Sovremennik*: 'I find it completely inexplicable that the censor permitted

governments' attempts to enforce its authority and retain order among the peasants were so closely intertwined in the thought and practice of officialdom as to almost invalidate the distinction between them; what was true of autocratic measures was equally true of the peasantry in the official conception of its nature. It was an apparently observable characteristic of the *muzhik*, as an individual or as part of a 'crowd' (*tolpa*) or 'mass,' that the various elements of his physical existence (his needs, his productive life, his habits and routines) were more closely linked to his spiritual and intellectual existence (his beliefs, faiths, desires, passions, and thoughts) than in the case of an educated or rational elite. Hence, the autocratic preparations for the Emancipation aimed to convey the message of submission, duty, and patience to the peasantry by the appropriation of the particular rituals thought familiar to them and the particular faces of authority thought most acceptable to them, rather than through words.

It was, then, assumed by state officials that the complexities of the Emancipation legislation, comprised of 'four hundred pages of legalisms, obscurities and seeming contradictions,'¹² would be lost on the largely illiterate peasantry. Though expectation of the long-awaited 'freedom' was growing among the peasants, kept to a large extent ignorant of the details of the Statutes' preparation and contents, no announcement of the event was made on that day.¹³ Orders had been sent by N. Mukhanov of the Main Censorship Board to St. Petersburg's Censorship Committee at the end of January, and again in mid-February, that no information regarding the 'peasant question' should be allowed to appear in print without the specific say-so of the government.¹⁴ On the 12th of February, the Minister of Internal Affairs, S. Lanskoï, had secretly informed provincial governors by telegram that the promulgation would begin on the 6th of March, the first day of the Lent festival.¹⁵ 'The reason for this decision,' the scholar Peter Zaionchkovsky conjectured,

such notions of popular freedom, about the necessity of its realization, about the simple people's delusions of living as they wish to [to appear in print]': see V. Evgen'ev-Maksimov, *'Sovremennik' pri Chernyshevskom i Dobroliubovoe* (Leningrad, 1936), p. 500.

¹² Field, *Rebels*, p. 33.

¹³ Zaionchkovsky, *ibid.*, p. 105-6; Emmons, *Russian Landed Gentry*, p. 323.

¹⁴ See 'Predpolozhenie chlena glavnogo upravleniia tsenzturny N. Mukhanova predsedateliu peterburgskogo tsenzturnogo komiteta o nedopushchenii v pechat' i svednenii po krest'ianskomu voprosu,' 29 January 1861, *KKR*, p. 201, and 'Predlozhenie chlena glavnogo upravleniia tsenzturny N. Mukhanova predsedateliu peterburgskogo tsenzturnogo komiteta peredavat' vse stat'i po krest'ianskomu voprosu na predvarfiteľnoe rassmotrenie v gosudarstvennuu kantseliariuu i pechatat' ikh tol'ko posle odobreniia,' 14 February 1861, *KKR*, p. 201-2.

¹⁵ Zaionchkovsky, *Abolition*, p. 106.

was the government's attempt to publish the statutes at the most precipitous moment. Lent...was just such a moment. The government realised that the peasants would be disappointed by the reform, but during the Lenten period their dissatisfaction would be muffled to some degree. Since preparations for the 'absolution of sins' (confession) were imminent, believers would be expected to meet the standards of Christian behaviour with particular attentiveness...Thus, timing publication for the Lenten period again emphasised the adjunctory role of the church. Especially after the creation of the Synod by Peter the Great, the church became one of the offices of the state apparatus.¹⁶

The notion that 'the Orthodox Church was an instrument of the state' - what Gregory Freeze understood as a persistent and 'unchallenged assumption in Russian historiography' - was successfully disputed in his article of 1989, 'The Orthodox Church and Serfdom in Prereform Russia.'¹⁷ Freeze demonstrates, in the first place through examination of church liturgy ('the most important and continuous point of interaction between church and serf')¹⁸ not only that the formal submission of the church to the state under Peter the Great did not entail any systematic, instrumental role for the village priest in promoting serfdom before 1861 (as claimed by authors such as Richard Pipes and Mark Raeff, amongst others),¹⁹ but also that Orthodox liturgy was 'not suitable for inculcating' any 'secular ideology,' whether for or against serfdom, 'at least not in the crudely explicit fashion that would have been comprehensible to illiterate serfs.'²⁰ It might be added that, both before and after the Emancipation, the suspicions of the police or gendarmes occasionally fell on village priests in the course of their investigations into peasant 'disturbances' or 'incidents' of peasant criminality, especially in cases of peasant supplication to higher powers (provincial governors), or to the Tsar himself over the heads of local officials. As necessarily literate figures attached to largely illiterate peasant communities, priests – alongside village clerks, rural teachers and doctors and the odd educated peasant – had occasion to act as 'brokers'²¹ between the state and the peasantry, attempting (usually, given the illegality of petitioning by the peasants, unsuccessfully)²² to speak the language of officialdom in order to

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ G. L. Freeze, 'The Orthodox Church and Serfdom in Prereform Russia,' *Slavic Review*, vol. 48, no. 3 (Autumn, 1989), p. 361.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 362.

¹⁹ R. Pipes, *Russian under the Old Regime* (London, 1974), p. 245 (cited in Freeze, *ibid*); M. Raeff, *The Well-Ordered Police State: Social and Institutional change through law in the Germanies and Russia, 1600-1800* (New Haven, 1983), p. 182-3, 188-90, 197; see also S. L. Firsov, 'Workers and the Orthodox Church in Early Twentieth Century Russia,' translated by O. Fedorova, *New Labor History*, M. Melancon and A. Pate (eds.), (Bloomington, 2002), p. 65- 6.

²⁰ Freeze, 'Orthodox Church,' p. 362, 363-6.

²¹ The role of the 'broker' is examined in detail by Moon in *Russian Peasants and Tsarist Legislation on the Eve of Reform: Interaction between the Peasants and Officialdom, 1825-1855*, (London, 1992).

²² See *Svod zakonov ugolovnikh*, XV, (1842), st. 438 (cited in 'Perechen' statei zakonov,' *KD*: 1857-61, p. 558).

draw attention to some particular abuse or a detrimental alteration in the relations between the peasant communities and the landlords or local government.



10. The peasant's traditional Easter-time celebrations (V. G. Perov)²³

This does not, however, invalidate Zaionchkovsky's thesis regarding the coincidence of the promulgation with the Lent festival and the role of the Church (or better, of the parish priests usually charged with managing Lenten rituals at a local level) in that event. Freeze notes briefly in his article the relative importance of rites and rituals over that of sermons and church-bound services in the list of duties falling to the village priest.²⁴ Officialdom and the upper sections of the church may have understood this fact negatively. Evidence suggests that members of the educated elite, able to comprehend and manipulate the convoluted language and teachings of Orthodoxy more easily than the 'average *muzhik*,' made much of the peasants' low attendance at church services,²⁵ seeing in peasant 'spirituality' a pseudo-religion merely shadowing the

²³ *Ocherki Istorii russkoi kul'tury*, p. 303.

²⁴ Freeze, 'Orthodox Church,' p. 365-6.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 364-5.

official teachings of the church, infected by superstitions and paganism²⁶ and, perhaps, a set of beliefs responsible for the minor transgressions of the moral code perpetrated by the peasants on a regular basis (drunkenness, rudeness, swearing).²⁷ Yet it was through rites and rituals that the village priest and the Church maintained their place in the everyday lives and concerns of parishioners, to the extent that peasant prejudice and mistrust towards the authorities was provisionally suspended. Particular emphasis was placed by the church on the Easter holiday (*pashka*), of which Lent was a part.²⁸ To the exasperation of officials, the Shrovetide feast (*maslenitsa*) preceding Lent was taken by peasants as an excuse for ‘gluttony, drunkenness and ruinous [behaviour],’ but this was merely the preparation for an intense ‘spiritual period’ including (as Zaionchkovsky notes) individual confession as well as ritual blessings made to a God whose presence was felt in the successes or failures of the peasants’ everyday, productive lives.²⁹ At Easter it was one of duties of the village priest (among many others) to bless livestock as they were ritually driven into the fields by their owners; in the fifty days following Easter the priest would be summoned to participate in various rituals supposed to ensure the well-being of the community and the success of the coming harvest.³⁰ In the first place, then, it was peasant spirituality or religiosity (not necessarily Orthodox Christianity as an articulated and applied set of teachings) that was appealed to by the state in its attempt to sugar the pill of the Emancipation settlement. While it was hoped that liberation would be greeted positively by the peasants (and early reports of peasant reactions recorded plenty of ‘happiness,’ ‘calm’ and ‘quiet’),³¹ it was also hoped that the momentous event might fold back, as quickly and quietly as possible, into the long-established rhythms of the peasants’ communal lives. Like the Easter festival, whose annual interruption into the everyday lives of the peasants was both novel on the short time scale and reassuringly repetitive in the longer one, the promulgation was designed to encase the news of the event within familiar forms without entirely brushing over its momentousness. The concurrence of these events would, secondly, allow the government to use ‘the church’ (the parish priests close to the spiritual (and productive) lives of particular peasant

²⁶ C. D. Worobec, ‘Death Ritual among Russian and Ukrainian Peasants: Linkages between the Living and the Dead,’ *Cultures in Flux: Lower-Class Values, Practices and Resistance in Late Imperial Russia*, S. P. Frank and M. D. Steinberg (eds.), (Princeton, 1994), p. 12-3.

²⁷ Worobec, ‘Death Ritual...,’ p. 13; S. P. Frank, ‘Confronting the Domestic Other: Rural Popular Culture and its Enemies in Fin-de-Siècle Russia,’ *Cultures in Flux*, p. 74-82; S. A. Smith, ‘The Social Meanings of Swearing: Workers and Bad Language in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia,’ *Past and Present*, No. 160 (August, 1998), p. 170-1, 173; S. K. Morrissey, *Suicide and the Body Politic in Imperial Russia* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 31-3.

²⁸ Chulos, *Converging Worlds*, p. 29.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30; 37-8.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31; 32-33; Morrissey, *Suicide and the Body Politic*, p. 30.

³¹ See the series of ‘Doklady’ sent from the Ministry of Internal Affairs to Alexander II between March-June, 1861, *OKP*, p. 7-36. These documents are discussed in detail below.

communities) as an instrument by which the ‘true message’ of the Emancipation could be translated for the peasants into familiar actions and relationships rather than into words. The ‘message’ of the promulgation was a demand for the serfs’ patience during this period of transition to ‘temporary obligation’ (until the 19th of February, 1864), transmitted primarily through practical and familiar rituals supposed by the elite to be more easily comprehensible to the peasants than spoken proclamations or written declarations.

Proclamations and declarations did, of course, still play a major part in the ritual of promulgation as well as in the conveyance of the autocratic ideal to the populace. In St. Petersburg, in late February and early March, preparations were hastily made for the publication of the Statutes³² and for their distribution, along with a short emancipation *Manifesto*, to the provincial governors. This latter was the *Manifesto of the 19th February, 1861*,³³ the document distributed to the clergy in St. Petersburg and Moscow after the 5th of March (‘the Sunday of the Absolution of Sins’)³⁴ and to the provincial parish priests via the *chinovniki* after the 6th of March.³⁵ The Minister of Justice and, from February 1860, chairman of the Editing Commissions, Count V. Panin, had placed the task of writing this ‘manifesto’ in the hands of L. Drozdov, Filaret Metropolitan of the Holy Synod in Moscow and a known defender of serfdom, having already rejected a version drafted by Iu. Samarin and N. Miliutin.³⁶ Complaints came from various quarters regarding the pomposity and the sheer ugliness of the language in which Drozdov had written the *Manifesto*.³⁷ Eyewitnesses noted priests’ inability even to read it clearly.³⁸ Misunderstandings of the *Manifesto*’s language were widely reported. Many peasants took from its reading only the disappointment of having to wait a further two years for *volia*, the disappointment of being granted a liberation which did not live up to the dream of *volia*, or the suspicion that true *volia* had been concealed or muddied by the priests and nobles with who they were gathered together:

³² [Shcherbachev], ‘Iz vospominanii...,’ *KKR*, p. 264-5.

³³ [F. Drozdov], ‘Alexander II’s Proclamation announcing the Abolition of Serfdom, 19 February 1861,’ (translated by D. Moon), in Moon, *Abolition*, p. 156/ ‘Manifest 19 fevralia 1861 goda ob osvobozhdeniia pomeschichn’ikh krest’ian iz krepostnoi zavisimosti,’ *KKR*, p. 211-2.

³⁴ Zaionchkovsky, *Abolition*, p. 107.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 107-11.

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 107; Moon, *Abolition*, p. 82-83.

³⁷ Moon, *ibid*, p. 83.

³⁸ ‘Zapiski... sviashchennika,’ *KKR*, p. 275-6.

We entered the church; the parish priest was already waiting for us there. At least fifteen landowners at least had come, but none entered the church. The priest cut a path through [the crowd of peasants] towards the altar; in sight of the *narod*, I handed him the *Manifesto*... Crossing himself, he began to read. As soon he read these words from the *Manifesto* – ‘good relations between the landowners and the peasants have weakened and opened the way for an arbitrariness which tyrannizes the peasants and harms their well-being’ – the *narod* began to grumble...³⁹

Reported incidents of disorder did indeed soar (as expected) in the three months following the promulgation. Evidently, then, if the document was intended to make the terms of the Emancipation more accessible to the peasants, or to urge their continued patience and submission to the local authorities, then it was a failure.⁴⁰ Still, to call the *Manifesto* a failure on these grounds assumes that its intention was on the one hand, broadly similar to those of the promulgation as a whole, that is, to diffuse peasant disappointments and avoid the outbreak of mass disorder by the invocation of ritual and on the other, to give the peasantry in particular a better grasp of the terms of the Emancipation actually granted. If the *Manifesto* was a failure in this first aspect, then so equally was the government’s broader appeal to the spirituality and everyday rituals of peasant life. But the practical measures taken by the government as regards the possible behaviour of the serfs, as well as and the content of the *Manifesto* itself, show that explication was not its real function. The *Manifesto* is better understood as a message aimed at the *nobility*, not the peasants. It contained a highly idealised image of what the reform process had been over the period 1856-61, as well as a model for how the enactment of the reforms - especially over the following two years of transition - should proceed. Between those two moments, it was the old ideal of the consciously dutiful, elite class- with the landed nobility at its head – that served to give continuity to the autocratic system, in spite of the systematic change in the order then being introduced. The opening of the *Manifesto* repeated the Tsar’s publicly stated aims for the peasant reforms, assuring the nobility of its vital role in maintaining social and moral order among the peasants, and setting out an ideal of autocratic power still reliant on the landed nobility as a property-owning and educated estate. The opening of the *Manifesto* combines the ideal of universal well-being under the protection of absolute autocrat with support for the existing social hierarchy:

By the grace of God, WE, Alexander II, Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russians, Tsar of Poland, Grand Prince of the Finns, etc, etc, etc., announce to our loyal subjects: called

³⁹ ‘Zapiski... sviashchennika,’ *KKR*, p. 274-276.

⁴⁰ Moon, *Abolition*, p. 82-3.

by Divine Providence and the sacred law of succession to OUR ancestral throne, in that spirit WE vowed in OUR heart to embrace with OUR tsarist love and solicitude all OUR faithful subjects of every rank and social estate, from those who nobly bear sword in defence of the fatherland to the craftsmen who humbly wield the tools of their trade, from those who serve the state at the highest levels to those who plough the fields.⁴¹

Blind as Drozdov's autocrat may have been to 'rank' and 'estate' in dealing out love and solicitude to his subjects, submission to the tsar's kindness and authority did not at all undermine the differences of status and wealth which still obtained between those ranks and estates. Though the passage implies the equal worth of the Tsar's subjects irrespective of their place in the hierarchy, it is only the Tsar's vow to 'embrace all faithful servants,' and only in relation to the Tsar's authority, that the differentiation of the 'high' and the 'humble' servants is transcended. All were represented as 'servants' of the tsar, but the service of the nobleman is exemplified by *direct* entry into the ranks of the state – military officers ('those who nobly bear the sword'), Ministers and officials ('those who serve the state at the highest level'); the state officials and soldiers' direct service to the Tsar is ennobled over the work of the 'humble' craftsmen and the men and women at work in the fields whose service is identified in the first place in the conscientious fulfilment of their duties as labourers.

The notion of a well-differentiated hierarchy of estates under the direction of the Tsar was extended from the first static, ahistorical, description of the state, to the *Manifesto's* explanation of the peasant reforms, their rationale, and their historical meaning. There is no doubt that the *Manifesto* gave only a caricatured history of the preparation of the reforms, in which the elements of landed nobility were first invited to participate in 1857, and to which large sections of the landed nobility (perhaps the majority), aided by more conservative state officials, would oppose more or less strenuously by formal means from thereon in, up until the promulgation in the spring of 1861:

WE were...convinced that the task of improving the condition of the serfs is a legacy left to Us from our predecessors, and a destiny conferred upon Us by the hand of Providence. We began this task with an act of OUR trust in the Russian nobility, knowing of its great proofs of loyalty to the throne and its readiness to make sacrifices for the good of the fatherland. WE left it to the nobility itself, according to its own wishes to prepare proposals for a new way of organising the new way of life of the peasants, whereupon the

⁴¹ [F. Drozdov], 'Alexander II's Proclamation,' p. 155/ 'Manifest 19 fevralia 1861 goda,' *KKR*, p. 211.

nobles offered to limit their rights over the peasants and to bear the difficulties of a transformation that would entail loss to themselves. And OUR trust was justified.⁴²

Still, even in this highly public official document, the government was willing to admit not only the imposition of an *historic* duty on the Tsar by his predecessors (a vague enough sentiment admitting both of mild condemnation and of reverence for past Tsars and their governments), nor even simply the historic ‘evil’ of serfdom (its recognised immorality as a ‘state’ in which to be, and as system of which to be a part), but also the processes and people *responsible* for the damaged spiritual condition of the serfs:

Hitherto, the rights of estate owners were broad and not precisely defined in law, wherefore tradition, custom, and the estate owners’ good will prevailed. At best this produced good patriarchal relations of sincere solicitude and benevolence on the part of the estate owners and good-natured submission from the peasants. But owing to the decline of morals...and a lessening of the estate owners’ direct paternal relations with the peasants, and because estate owners’ rights sometimes fell into the hands of persons seeking only their own advantage, good relations weakened, and the way was opened to an arbitrariness that has been burdensome for the peasants and not conducive to their welfare, whence they have shown indifference to any improvement in their lives.⁴³

Again, it was not the given moral-political hierarchy that was coming under attack here, but the mere misuse by certain people - broken from the ideal of state given them as a model, abusive of the freedoms granted by birth into nobility and property - of the privileges properly given by that hierarchy to the ‘cultured’ elite. As in Benkendorff’s reports from the 1830s, however, the ‘self-interest’ of these men was *not* explicable by the system itself, despite the fact that serfdom – with its lack of ‘precisely defined laws and rights’ - is admitted here to have made their actions all the more harmful to the peasants under their care. It was, in other words, a matter of *persons* and a particular orientation towards the ‘self’ rather than the state - irreducible even to the worst legal and moral relations established in their society - that explained their actions. Hence, the appearance of the term ‘arbitrariness’ — here, indicating that certain kinds of behaviour were produced by, or issued from, personal ‘will’ (*proizvol’*). Thus, it was clearly not the concern of the autocratic government to present to the educated public or to the populace at large an immaculate image of Russian society under Tsarist rule.

⁴² Ibid, p. 156/ 211.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 156/ 211-12

БОЖІЮ МИЛОСТІЮ
МЫ, АЛЕКСАНДРЪ ВТОРЫЙ,
 ИМПЕРАТОРЪ И САМОДЕРЖЕЦЪ
ВСЕРОССИЙСКІЙ,
 ЦАРЬ ПОЛЬСКІЙ, ВЕЛИКІЙ КНЯЗЬ ФИНЛЯНДСКІЙ,

и прочая, и прочая, и прочая.

Объявляемъ всѣмъ **НАШИМЪ** вѣроподаннымъ.

Божіимъ Провидѣніемъ и священнымъ закономъ престолонаследія бывъ призваны на прародительскій Всероссийскій Престолъ, въ соответствие сему призванію **МЫ** положили въ сердцахъ **СВОЕМЪ** обить обнимать **НАШЕЮ** Царскою любовію и попеченіемъ всѣхъ **НАШИХЪ** вѣроподанныхъ всякаго званія и состоянія, отъ благородно владѣющаго мечемъ на защиту Отечества до скромно работающаго ремесленнымъ орудіемъ, отъ проходящаго высшую службу Государственную до проводящаго на поляхъ борозду сохою или плугомъ.

Вникая въ положеніе званій и состояній въ составѣ Государства, **МЫ** усмотрѣли, что Государственное законодательство, дѣятельно благоустроивъ высшія и среднія сословія, опредѣляя ихъ обязанности, права и преимущества, не достигло равномерной дѣятельности въ отношеніи къ людямъ крѣпостнымъ, такъ называемымъ потому, что они, частью старыми законами, частью объявляемъ, потомственно укрѣплены подъ властію помѣщиковъ, на которыхъ съ тѣмъ вмѣстѣ лежитъ обязанность устроить ихъ благосостояніе. Права помѣщиковъ были дондѣшны обширны и не опредѣлены съ точностію закономъ, мѣсто котораго заступали преданіе, обычай и добрая воля помѣщика. Въ лучшихъ случаяхъ изъ сего

ими собою, благотворность новаго закона дополнить вѣрнымъ, благонамѣреннымъ и прилежнымъ употребленіемъ въ дѣло дарованныхъ имъ правъ. Самый благотворный законъ не можетъ людей сдѣлать благополучными, если они не потрутся сами устроить свое благополучіе подъ покровительствомъ закона. Довольство пріобрѣтается и увеличивается немалое, какъ неслабкимъ трудомъ, благоразумнымъ употребленіемъ силъ и средствъ, строгою бережливостію, и вообще честно въ страхъ Божіемъ живнію.

Исполнители приготовительныхъ дѣйствій къ новому устройству крестьянскаго быта и самаго введенія въ сіе устройство употребить дѣятельное попеченіе, чтобы сіе совершалось правильнымъ, спокойнымъ движеніемъ, съ наблюденіемъ удобности вре-

менъ, дабы вниманіе земледѣльцевъ не было отвлечено отъ ихъ необходимыхъ земледѣльческихъ занятій. Пусть они тщательно воздѣлываютъ землю и собираютъ плоды ея, чтобы потомъ изъ хорошо наполненной житницы взять сѣмена для посѣва на землѣ постояннаго пользованія или на землѣ пріобрѣтенной въ собственность.

Осѣни себя крестнымъ знаменіемъ, православный народъ, и призови съ **НАМИ** Божіе благословіе на твой свободный трудъ, залогъ твоего домашняго благополучія и блага общественаго.

Данъ въ Санктпетербургѣ, въ децятнадцатый день Февраля, въ лѣто отъ Рождества Христова тысяча восемьсотъ шестьдесятъ первое, Царствованія же **НАШЕГО** въ седмое.

На подлинномъ Собственно
 ЕГО ИМПЕРАТОРСКАГО ВЕЛИЧЕСТВА рукою подписано:
 « АЛЕКСАНДРЪ. »



Печатанъ въ Санктпетербургѣ
 при Правительствующемъ Сенатѣ.

11. First and last pages of the 1861 *Manifesto*⁴⁴

The ideal most befitting of the concept of autocratic order included within itself elements of the disorder – in other words, ‘free’ or unpredictable actions, contingencies, external conditions – that limited, legitimised, or even threatened its rule. The extent to which such forces of disorder were granted a place in the ‘ideal of tsarism’ depended on the nature of the force involved (whether ‘nature,’ ‘history,’ ‘enlightenment,’ ‘the nobility,’ ‘the peasantry,’ ‘the individual,’ or particular persons). The peasant reform, carried out under the guidance of the autocrat and in willing alliance with the landowning nobility, displayed in action, before the rhetorical expression or explanation of a social ideal, the recognition of certain forces that acted, and could be *accepted*, as limitations to the doctrinally ‘absolute’ will of the Tsar. Here were a monarch, a government, and a significant enough portion of the social elite willing to treat serfdom (in the words of Nikolai I) as a ‘manifest evil,’ who recognised in Russia’s future a divergence from the models of autocratic power given by her past; here, above all, was an autocrat cognisant of, and responsive to, changes the in political and economic circumstances that urged him, as if from the outside, to ‘choose to act’: to fulfil his given duty as *autocrat*. Hence, the very intention to abolish serfdom, possible of a representation that would have pushed to the forefront of the story only the Tsar’s will and, along with it, the principle of absolute power, in fact emphasised the relative freedoms of the Tsar and the elites to ‘express’

⁴⁴ Velikii Kniaz’ Konstantin Konstantin Nikolaevich Romanov, p. 152 and p. 159.

Providence in relatively *personal* ways, as well as gesturing to the possibility of particular people having made mistakes or indulged desires or passions not strictly in line with the *raison d'etat*, contingencies only made possible by the relative freedom given the elites.

Set out clearly in the *Manifesto* was the government's desire that the traditional dominance of the noble landlords and the elite would be safeguarded, with special emphasis placed on the submissiveness and passivity of the newly freed serfs in the two year period of 'obligation,' and in the formulation of agreements between the peasants and their old masters. While the historical details of the 'emancipation settlement' (the heavy involvement of the landowners at all points in the process; the brute fact of the serfs' exclusion from actual participation in these negotiations) and the arrangements for the promulgation in March-June demonstrate in the autocracy's practical arrangements for the emancipation the (limited) freedoms of thought and comment given the elites in this period, and the denial of this to the peasants, what we find in the *Manifesto* is this same differentiation of 'classes' into those capable of wielding authority, and those unable to do so. Since this message was aimed largely at the noble landlords and, perhaps, those preparing to take up the new positions of peace arbitrator, or becoming involved in regional peasant committees, or perhaps in the new *volost'* level of administration, of the duty to the *state* to behave as the reforms demanded towards the ex-serfs. Mixed in with this message of *noble* submission to the autocrat – a requirement to rise to the task that had been set by the reforms against the wishes of many of them – was an appeal to the noble's 'good nature,' the in-born capacities that had placed them in positions of authority in the first place.

The fact that the Emancipation was couched in terms of the 'autocratic principle' (allowing for the 'arbitrariness' of elites and the preparing in light of the peasant desire for *volia* and its various manifestations) would suggest not only a real effort to *restate* the principle, more or less rhetorically, to the population but also an inability to think beyond the social categories that shot through the discussion and organisation of the Reforms. On the other side of the government-landowner relation central to the discussions of 1856-61 was the menace of peasant uprising, underpinned by a deeply entrenched and systematic concept of the *narod*. This 'other side' of the autocratic system, the 'popular nature' that made autocratic rule necessary and Emancipation 'from above' the only legitimate 'freedom' to be hoped for by the serfs, was revealed – as had been expected by many of the elite for decades – in the aftermath of the promulgation, reinforcing many of the assumptions and perceptions that had informed the

peasant reforms. A discussion of the months and years following the announcement of the reforms demonstrates the continuity of the 'autocratic principle' through the reforms, and in spite of the very profound changes that the Statutes promised would be introduced into the lives of the peasantry. These changes were introduced in earnest beginning in 1864; several new institutions directly relevant to the peasants' place in society, reforming their powers in the community and their everyday relations with landowners and the government, were set up. Yet somehow the old approaches to peasant disorders and disturbances remained almost unchanged. Since it was in these conflicts that the 'class nature' of the Russian working class was reproduced most directly, the fact of the continuity of the state's relation to the peasants suggests also continuity of the autocratic system of class.

[End of Appendix G]

10. Bibliography

Note: Journals and newspapers from the 1870s and 1880s, along with their sources, are preceded by a star (*). Documentary collections are listed by title. All other sources listed by author's name or first editor's name, and thereafter in date order.

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