

**The Unknown Revolution, 1917–1921. Book One.  
Birth, Growth and Triumph of the Revolution**

Voline

1947

# Contents

Voline (1882–1945) <i>by Rudolf Rocker</i>	5
Introduction: <i>Some Essential Preliminary Notes</i>	9
Preface	10
Part I. The First Fruits (1825–1905)	12
Chapter 1. Russia at the Beginning of the 19 <sup>th</sup> Century; Birth of the Revolution	13
Chapter 2. Repression, Violence and Failure; Development Continues (1825–1855)	16
Chapter 3. Reforms; Resumption of the Revolution “The Failure of Tsarism” and the Failure of Revolution; Reaction (1855–1881)	22
Chapter 4. The End of the Century; Marxism; Rapid Evolution; Reaction (1881–1900)	26
Chapter 5. The 20 <sup>th</sup> Century; Hasty Development; Revolutionary Advance; Results (1900–1905)	28
Part II. The Jolt (1905–1906)	34
Chapter 1. The Gaponist Epic; First General Strike	35
Chapter 2. The Birth of the “Soviets”	46
Chapter 3. The Disastrous War; Victory of a Revolutionary Strike	54
Chapter 4. Defeat of the Revolution; Evaluation of the Jolt	57
Chapter 5. The “Pause” (1905–1917)	63
Part III. The Explosion (1917)	66
Chapter 1. War and Revolution	67
Chapter 2. Triumph of the Revolution	71

<b>Chapter 3. Toward the Social Revolution</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Chapter 4. Toward a Socialist Government; The Poverty of Socialism</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Chapter 5. The Bolshevik Revolution</b>	<b>85</b>

The present work is a complete translation of **La Revolution Inconnue, 1917–1921**, first published in French in 1947, and re-published in Paris in 1969 by Editions Pierre Belfond. An abridged, two-volume English translate of the work was published in 1954 and 1955 by the Libertarian Book Club (New York City) and Freedom Press (London). The present edition contains all the materials included in the earlier edition (translated by Holley Cantine), as well as the sections which were omitted (Book I, Part I and II, and some brief omissions later in the work, translated by Fredy Perlman). In the newly translated sections, Russian words are transliterated into English. However, in the sections which are reprinted from the earlier edition, French transliteration of Russian words was frequently retained in the English translation. As a result the present edition, a Russian word is frequently spelled in two different ways.

## Voline (1882–1945) by Rudolf Rocker

Vsevolod Mikhailovich Eichenbaum was born on August 11, 1882, in the district of Voronezh in Great Russia. So far as I know only one of his writings, a small booklet of Russian poems, was published under his real name, while all the others, and certainly his many articles and essays, were signed with his pseudonym. It is much easier to think and speak of him as Voline.

Both his parents were medical doctors, who lived in comfortable circumstances which permitted them to engage French and German governesses for the early education of their children. So Vsevolod and his brother Boris had opportunity to become familiar with both languages from their early youth. Voline was able to speak and write French and German as fluently as his Russian mother tongue.

His first general education was received at the college in Voronezh. After he had finished his studies there he was sent to St. Petersburg to study jurisprudence. But all plans for preparation for his future life were interrupted by the critical situation which developed in Russia at that time. Voline became acquainted with revolutionary ideas as a student at the age of nineteen, and made himself notably useful in the labour movement from the year 1901.

In 1905, when the whole Russian Empire was under the spell of the great revolutionary upheaval which nearly overthrew the tyrannical Romanov rule, the young man from Voronezh joined the Social Revolutionary Party and took an active part in that uprising. And after the bloody suppression of the insurrection he, like so many thousands, was arrested. In 1907 a Tsarist tribunal's sentence banished him to one of the numerous places in Russia for political exiles. But he was lucky enough to find means of escape and went to France.

It was in Paris that Voline found a larger opportunity to study and weigh the various schools of the Socialist movement and the many-sided aspects of the social problem in general. He became associated with various libertarians, among them Sebastian Faure, the eloquent orator of the French Anarchists. And he made connections with the small circle of Russian Anarchists in Paris, with A. A. Kareline and his group, and other organizations of Russian exiles. Under the influence of his new surroundings it was inevitable that Voline gradually altered his political and social views, with the result that in 1911 he separated himself from the Social-Revolutionaries and joined the Anarchist movement.

In 1913, when the danger of armed conflict cast a shadow over all Europe, he became a member of the Committee for International Action Against War. This activity nettled the French authorities, and in 1915, when the battle-lines were being extended on the Continent, the Viviani-Millerand Government decided to put him in a concentration camp for the duration of the fighting. Warned in time, he was able, with the help of some French comrades, to escape to Bordeaux. There he shipped out as a storekeeper on a freighter bound for the United States.

In New York, Voline joined the Union of Russian Workers in the United States and Canada, a formidable organization with about 10,000 members which entertained ideas similar to those of the *Confederation Generale du Travail* (the General Confederation of Labour) in France in that period. Thus he found a rich field for his activities. And soon he was serving on the editorial staff

of *Golos Truda*, The Voice of Labour, weekly paper of the Federation, and as one of its most gifted lecturers.

But in 1917, when the Revolution broke out in Russia, the whole staff of *Golos Truda* decided to leave for that country and to transfer the periodical to Petrograd. Arriving there, they got ready co-operation from the lately organized Anarcho-Syndicalist Propaganda Union. So it was easy to make arrangements for the publication of *Golos Truda* on Russian soil. Voline joined that Union and was immediately elected as one of the editors. During the early months the paper appeared as a weekly, but after the events of October, 1917, it became a daily.

Meanwhile the Bolshevik Government in Moscow had signed the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk by which the whole Ukraine was handed over to the German and Austrian occupation forces. For this reason Voline left Petrograd and joined a troop of libertarian partisans who went to Ukraina to fight against the foreign invaders and their Russian supporters. Thus he found it possible to go to Bobrov and visit his family, which he had not seen since 1915, when he was compelled to leave France for America.

During ensuing months of comparative freedom in Russia, when other social movements beside the Bolsheviki still enjoyed opportunity to spread their ideas through their own publications and at public meetings, Voline was constantly busy in many fields. He took part in the work of the Soviet Department for Public Education and Enlightenment of the People, first in Voronezh and later in Kharkov. In autumn, 1918, he helped to build up the Anarchist Federation of the Ukraine, for a few months a potent organization, known by the name *Nabat* (Tocsin), which issued a great deal of literature. Besides its principal organ in Kursk, *Nabat* had regional papers under the same name in several parts of the Ukraine. Voline became a member of *Nabat's* Secretariat and of the editorial staff of its periodicals. And the Conference of that organization in Kursk entrusted him to work out a *Synthetical Declaration of Principles* which would be acceptable to all schools of libertarian Socialism in Russia and permit them to work together.

But all *Nabat's* plans for the future came to naught when in spring, 1919, the Soviet Government began to persecute the Anarchists by suppressing their papers and arresting their militants *en masse*. It was then that Voline joined the revolutionary army of Nestor Makhno. And Makhno had in that army also a special department to enlighten the people and prepare them for a new social order, based on common ownership of the land, home rule of communities, and federative solidarity. Voline soon became head of this department, and acted as such during the whole campaign against Denikin.

In December, 1919, the Military Revolutionary Council sent him to the district of Krivoi-Rog to oppose the dangerous propaganda of the agents of Hetman Petlura; but on his way he was stricken with typhoid fever and had to remain in the cottage of a peasant. Meanwhile Denikin's army was defeated, and shortly afterward there was a new break between the Soviet Government and Makhno's partisans. Still exceedingly ill, Voline was arrested on January 14, by military agents of the Moscow Government and dragged from one prison to another. Trotsky already had ordered his execution, and according to Voline, he escaped death then only by sheer accident.

March, 1920, saw him taken to Moscow, and he was a prisoner there until October, when he and many other Anarchists were released by virtue of a treaty between the Soviet Union and Makhno's army. Voline then returned to Kharkov, resuming his old activities and participating in continuing negotiations between the Lenin Government and a delegation from Makhno's forces. But the agreement reached by these contending parties was quickly broken by the Bolsheviks,

and in November, scarcely a month after their release, Voline and most of his comrades were arrested again and confined in the Taganka prison in Moscow.

There was nothing against them except their libertarian views. Yet there can hardly be any doubt that except for a sudden turn of circumstance they all would have been liquidated in one way or another like so many thousands later. It was by a mere coincidence that their lives were saved.

In the summer of 1921 the Red Trade Union International held a Congress in Moscow. The delegates included representatives of some Anarcho-Syndicalist organizations in Spain, France, and other countries, who had come to ascertain whether an alliance with this new International would be feasible or not. They arrived in the capital just as the Anarchists in the Taganka prison went on a hunger strike which lasted more than ten days and was carried on to compel the authorities to explain publicly why they had been jailed.

When those delegates heard what had been happening they voiced a vehement protest, demanding the liberation of their Russian comrades. But it was only after the affair became an open scandal in the Congress that the Government consented to release the hunger-strikers, on condition, however, that they leave Russia. It was the first time that political prisoners were deported from the vaunted Red Fatherland of the Proletariat.

And the Soviet Government had the audacity to furnish those victims with passports taken from Czechoslovakian war prisoners en route to their homeland. When the deportees arrived at the German port of Stettin they gave the authorities their real names and pointed out that the passports given to them by the Bolsheviki actually were not theirs. Fortunately for them, Germany itself was then in the midst of a revolutionary situation, when many things could be done which were later impossible.

Though the commissar of the port had no legal right to let this group of about twenty remain on German soil, he sympathized with their plight and permitted them to send two of their comrades to Berlin to see whether they could find a friendly organization which would assume responsibility for their maintenance and good behaviour. When the two delegates appeared at our headquarters in Germany's capital, Fritz Kater, chairman of the *Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands*, went with them to the Chief of Police and signed all necessary documents, so that within a few hours they had permission to bring the whole group to Berlin. They arrived by the end of 1921.

It was not an easy job to provide for such a number, but the German comrades did what they could. Especially was it hard to find places for the newcomers to live in, for the housing question in Germany after the first World War was simply abominable and remained one of the nation's greatest problems for many years. And our toughest task was to discover a spot where the Voline family of seven could all be under the same roof. The only shelter our committee could find for them at that time was an attic which could be heated.

It was then that I first met Voline and his comrades. Although only forty-one, he looked much older, for his hair and beard were almost white. But his energetic gestures and quick movements quickly corrected my initial impression. He was a genial and intelligent man with mild manners, thoughtful and courteous, and almost immune to outer circumstances and personal hardship. Having an unusual faculty for concentration, he could go on with his writing, apparently without difficulty, in the same attic where his whole family had to sleep, eat, and carry on their daily lives.

In fact, Voline did a great deal of useful work while in Berlin. He wrote, in German, a valuable pamphlet of eighty pages, entitled *The Persecutions of the Anarchists in Soviet Russia*. This was

the first authentic and documented information to the outer world about what was then going on in Russia. He also translated Peter Arshinov's book. *The History of the Makhnovist Movement*, [Published by the Group of the Russian Anarchists in Germany, Berlin, 1923.] into German, and at the same time edited a Russian Magazine, *The Anarchist Worker*. Besides, he did extensive work for the German libertarian movement, lecturing and writing articles for our press.

Voline remained in Berlin for about two years, then received an invitation from Sebastian Faure to settle with his family in Paris, where living conditions in those days were much better than in Germany. Faure was occupied with the preparation and publication of his *Encyclopedic Anarchiste* and needed a man who was familiar with foreign languages as a regular contributor. So Voline found a challenging and engrossing field for his further activity. He wrote various articles for the new Encyclopedia, many of which were also published as special pamphlets in several languages. Too, he accepted an invitation of the *Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo* (National Confederation of Labour) in Spain to become editor of its French periodical in Paris, *L'Espagne Anti-Fasciste*.

But although his economic fortunes in France were notably more favourable than they could have been in Germany, he suffered a succession of misfortunes, of which the death of his wife under harrowing circumstances was the worst. Shortly afterwards he left Paris for Nimes, and a little later arrived in Marseilles, where he was caught by the second World War. After the Nazis invaded France, his position became more and more dangerous. Going from one hiding place to another, he was compelled to live amid constant tragedy and in dire misery.

When the war ended he returned to Paris, but only to enter a hospital, for he was afflicted with incurable tuberculosis and knew that his days were numbered. There he died on September 18, 1945. Many of his old friends followed him on his last journey, which led to the crematorium in the old cemetery of Pere-Lachaise. They mourned the loss of a dauntless comrade who had suffered much in his life, but who remained to the last a valiant fighter for a better world and the great cause of freedom and social justice.

Rudolf Rocker.

Crompond, N.Y.,

May, 1953.



## Introduction: *Some Essential Preliminary Notes*

1. "Russian Revolution" can mean three things: either the entire revolutionary movement, from the revolt of the Decembrists (1825) until the present; or only the two consecutive uprisings of 1905 and 1917; or, finally, only the great explosion of 1917. In this work, "Russian Revolution" is used in the first sense, as the entire movement.

This is the only way the reader will be able to understand the development and totality of events as well as the present situation in the U.S.S.R.

2. A relatively complete history of the Russian Revolution would require more than one volume. This would have to be a long-term project carried out by future historians. Here we are concerned with a more limited project whose aims are: (a) to provide understanding of the entirety of the movement; (b) to underline its essential elements, which are largely unknown abroad; (c) to make possible certain evaluations and conclusions.

As the work progresses, it becomes increasingly broad and detailed. It is mainly in the sections dealing with the upheavals of 1905 and 1917 that the reader will find numerous details which have until now been unknown, as well as a large number of previously unpublished documents.

3. One problem should be constantly kept in mind: the difference between the general development of Russia and that of Western Europe. In fact, an account of the Russian Revolution should be preceded by a complete historical study of the country, or better yet, should be inserted into such a study. But such a task would be far beyond the limits of our subject. To remedy this situation, we will give the reader historical information whenever this seems necessary.

# Preface

Every revolution — even when studied closely by many authors of various tendencies, and at different times — long remains, fundamentally, a great Unknown. Centuries pass, and from time to time, men turn up new facts and unpublished documents among the remains of old uprisings. These discoveries upset our knowledge and ideas which we had supposed to be complete. How many works about the French Revolution of 1789 already existed when Kropotkin and Jaures unearthed from the ruins elements unknown until then, which threw unexpected light on that period? And didn't Jaures say that the vast archives of the Great Revolution were hardly tapped?

Generally, it is not known how to study a revolution, just as it is still not known how to write the history of a people. Moreover, authors, even when experienced and conscientious, commit errors and negligences which prevent the reader from getting a clear understanding of their theme. They take the trouble, for instance, to examine meticulously and explain in detail the striking facts and phenomena, those which unfold in the light of day, in the burning "revolutionary furnace". But they mistrust and ignore those developments which occur silently, in the depths of the revolution, outside the "furnace". Or, at best, they accord them a few words in passing, basing their comment on vague testimonies, with interpretations which are frequently erroneous or biased. And it is precisely these hidden facts which are important, and which throw a true light on the events under consideration and on the period.

Too, the scientific keys to the phenomena of revolution — economics, sociology, psychology — are at present incapable, by reason of their rudimentary state, of explaining adequately what has happened.

And this is not all. Even from the point of view of pure "reportage", how many gaps there are. In the terrible whirlwind of revolution, a multitude of facts, engulfed by crevices which open and shut at every instant, remain undiscovered, perhaps forever. Those who live through a revolution, those millions of men who, in one way or another, are carried away by the storm, are, alas, very little concerned with noting down, for future generations, what they saw, thought, or experienced.

Finally, there exists still another reason, which I particularly want to emphasize. With very few exceptions, the rare witnesses who leave notes, and also the historians, are disgustingly partial. Each one deliberately seeks and finds, in a revolution, the elements which will support a personal thesis, or will be useful to a dogma, a party, or a caste. Each one carefully hides and discards all that might contradict his own theory. The revolutionaries themselves, divided by their theories, try to dissimulate or distort whatever does not agree with such and such a doctrine.

We of course are not speaking of the disconcerting number of books which simply are not serious.

In the last analysis, who then can seek to establish the real and only truth? No one — or practically no one. And it is not astonishing that there exists, on the subject of a revolution, nearly as many versions as volumes, and that the fundamental truth of the real revolution remains unknown.

However, it is this hidden revolution which carries within it the seeds of future upheavals. Whoever wants to live meaningfully, or who wants to understand events clearly, must discover and scrutinize this Unknown. And the duty of the author is to help the seeker in his task.

In the present work this unknown revolution is the Russian Revolution, not the one which has been treated many times by politicians and bought-and-paid writers, but the one that has been either neglected or adroitly hidden, or even falsified by such people.

Leaf through a few books on the Revolution in Russia. Until now nearly all have been written by more or less biased individuals, and from a doctrinal, political, or even personal point of view. According to whether the writer is a White or a Red, a Democrat, a Socialist, a Stalinist, or a Trotskyite, everything differs in appearance. The reality itself is adapted to the design of the narrator. The more you seek to establish it, the less you succeed. For authors [of histories of Russia in 1917] have all too often passed over in silence facts of the highest importance, if they did not conform to their own ideas, did not interest them, or were inconvenient.

A fundamental problem has been bequeathed to us by the revolutions of 1789 and 1917. Opposed to a large extent to oppression, animated by a powerful breath of liberty, and proclaiming liberty as their essential purpose, why did these revolutions go down under a new dictatorship, exercised by a new dominating and privileged group, in a new slavery for the mass of the people involved? What will be the conditions which will permit a revolution to avoid this sad end? Will this end, for a long time still, be a sort of historical inevitability, or is it due to passing factors, or simply to errors and faults that can be avoided from now on? And in the latter case, what will be the means of eliminating the danger which already threatens the revolutions to come? Is it permissible to hope to avert or surmount it?

In the opinion of the author, it is precisely the elements that are unknown — or that have been deliberately dissimulated — which offer us the key to the problem before us and supply material indispensable to its solution. And this volume is an attempt to clarify that problem with the help of incontestable facts.

The author actively participated in the Russian Revolution of 1917, as well as in that of 1905. And he wants to examine, with complete objectivity, the available authentic facts [about the overturn in 1917]. Such is his only concern. If he did not have it, he never would have bothered to write the pages which follow.

This concern for a frank exposition and an impartial analysis of that revolution is favoured by the author's ideological position. Since 1908 he has not belonged to any political party. By personal conviction, however, he sympathizes with the libertarian idea. So he can permit himself the luxury of being objective, for, as an Anarchist, he has no interest in betraying the truth, no reason to deceive. He is not interested in power, nor in a high position, nor in privilege, nor in the triumph, "at any cost", of a doctrine. He seeks only to establish the truth, for only the truth is fertile. His passion, his only ambition, is to explain the events of 1917 in the light of exact facts, for only such an explanation permits one to formulate correct and useful conclusions.

Like all revolutions, the Russian Revolution involved a wealth of unknown and even unsuspected facts.

The present study is offered in the hope that some day it will take its modest place beside the works of authors who have wished, been able, and known how, to explore those great riches, honestly, and in complete independence.

## **Part I. The First Fruits (1825–1905)**

# Chapter 1. Russia at the Beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century; Birth of the Revolution

The enormous size of the country, a sparse population whose disunity makes it an easy prey for invaders, Mongol domination for more than two centuries, continual wars, varied catastrophes and other unfavorable factors caused the enormous political, economic, social and cultural backwardness of Russia in relation to other European countries.

*Politically*, Russia entered the 19<sup>th</sup> century under the rule of an absolute monarchy (the autocratic “Tsar”) which was dependent on an enormous landed and military aristocracy, an omnipotent bureaucracy, an extensive and pious clergy, and a peasant mass consisting of 75,000,000 souls — primitive, illiterate and prostrate before their “little father,” the Tsar.

Economically, the country had reached the stage of a type of agrarian feudalism. Except for the two capitals (St. Petersburg and Moscow) and some cities in the South, the cities were hardly developed. Commerce and particularly industry stagnated. The economic base of the country was agriculture which supported 95% of the population. The land did not belong to the direct producers, the peasants, but was the property of the State or of large landed proprietors, the “pomeshchiks.” The peasants, legally tied to the land and to the property-owner, were his serfs. The largest proprietors owned veritable fiefs, inherited from their ancestors who, in turn, had received them from the sovereign, the first proprietor, in exchange for services rendered (military, administrative or other). The “lord” determined the life and death of his serfs. He not only made them work as slaves; he could also sell them, punish them and make martyrs out of them (he could kill them without much inconvenience to himself). This serfdom, this slavery on the part of 75,000,000 people, was the economic foundation of the State.

It is hardly possible to talk of the *social organization* of such a “society.” On top were the absolute masters: the Tsar, his numerous relatives, his slavish court, the high nobility, the military caste, the high clergy. On the bottom, the slaves: peasant-serfs in the countryside and the lower class people of the cities, who lacked all notions of civic life, all rights, all freedoms. Between the two, there were certain intermediate strata: merchants, bureaucrats, functionaries, artisans and others -colorless and insignificant.

It is clear that the cultural level of the society was not very high. Nevertheless, already for this period we have to make an *important reservation*: a striking contrast which we will again describe later, existed between the uneducated and poverty-stricken population of the cities and villages and the privileged strata whose education and training were quite advanced.

The serfdom of the masses was the plague of the country. A few noble-spirited individuals had already protested against this abomination toward the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They had to pay dearly for their generous gesture. On the other hand, the peasants rebelled with increasing frequency against their masters. Besides local uprisings of a more or less individual nature (against one or another lord who went too far), the peasant masses gave rise to two extensive movements (the Razin uprising in the 17<sup>th</sup> and the Pugachev uprising in the 18<sup>th</sup> century) which, though

they failed, created enormous problems for the Tsarist government and nearly overthrew the entire system. It should be noted, however, that these two spontaneous movements were directed mainly against the immediate enemy: the landed nobility, the urban aristocracy and the corrupt administration. No general idea of overthrowing the social system in its entirety and replacing it with another and more equitable system was formulated. By using treachery and violence, with the help of the clergy and other reactionary elements, the government succeeded in totally subjugating the peasants, even “psychologically,” to such an extent that any movement of widespread revolt was rendered nearly impossible for a long period of time.

The first consciously revolutionary movement directed against the regime appeared in 1825 when, after the death of Alexander I, who left no direct heir, the crown, rejected by his brother Constantine, passed to his other brother Nicholas. Socially, the program of this movement aimed for the abolition of serfdom; politically, for the establishment of a republic or at least a constitutional regime.

This movement emerged, not from among the oppressed, but from the privileged classes. The conspirators, taking advantage of the government’s preoccupation with dynastic problems, began to carry out the projects they had long been preparing. In the revolt which broke out in St. Petersburg, they were supported by some of the regiments in the capital. (At the head of the movement there were some officers of the imperial army.) The rebellion was defeated after a short battle at the Senate Square between the insurgents and the troops which remained loyal to the government. Several uprisings which had been planned in the provinces were nipped in the bud.

The revolt made a profound impression on the new Tsar, Nicholas I, and he personally supervised an extremely thorough investigation. The investigators sought and ferreted out even the most distant and platonic sympathizers of the movement. The repression, in its desire to be definitive and “exemplary,” did not stop short of cruelty. The five principal instigators died on the scaffold; hundreds were imprisoned, exiled or condemned to hard labor.

Since the revolt took place in December, the participants came to be known as Decembrists. Nearly all belonged to the nobility or to other privileged classes. Nearly all had received professional training or higher education. Open-minded and sensitive, they were pained by the sight of a people weighed down by an arbitrary and unjust regime, by ignorance, poverty, and slavery. They took up the protests of their 18<sup>th</sup> century predecessors and translated them into action. What gave them the necessary impetus was largely the journey many of them had taken to France after the war of 1812, which made it possible for them to compare the relatively high level of civilization in Europe with the barbaric living conditions of the Russian population. They returned to Russia having made the firm decision to struggle against the backward political and social system which oppressed their countrymen. They rallied many educated individuals to their cause. Pestel, one of the leaders of the movement, even elaborated some vaguely socialist ideas in his program. The famous poet Pushkin (born in 1799) sympathized with the movement, although he did not join it.

As soon as the revolt was put down, the frightened new emperor, Nicholas I, pushed the despotic, bureaucratic and police rule of the Russian State to its extreme.

It should be emphasized that there was no contradiction between the peasants’ revolts against their oppressors on the one hand, and their blind veneration of the “little father the Tsar” on the other. The peasant revolts, as we said earlier, were always directed against the *immediate* oppressors: the landowners (“pomeshchiks”), the nobles, the functionaries, the police. It did not

occur to the peasants to look for the source of the oppression further, in the Tsarist regime itself, personified by the Tsar, grand protector of the nobles and the privileged, first and most highly privileged nobleman. To the peasants the Tsar was a type of idol, a superior being high above ordinary mortals, above their small interests and weaknesses, guiding the great destinies of the state. The authorities, the bureaucrats, and above all the priests (the “popes”) did all they could to engrave this idea in the peasants’ heads. The peasants finally accepted the legend, and later it became unshakeable. The Tsar, they told themselves, wants nothing but the well-being of his “children”; but the privileged intermediaries, interested in preserving their rights and advantages, stand between the Tsar and his people and keep him from knowing their misery. (The peasant masses were convinced that if the people and the Tsar could face each other directly, the Tsar, temporarily misled by the privileged, would see the truth, would get rid of his bad advisors and other dishonest people, and would deal with the sufferings of the tillers of the soil; he would free them from their yoke and would give to them all of the good land which by rights ought to belong to those who work it.) Thus, while sometimes revolting against their most cruel masters, the peasants waited with hope and resignation for the day when the wall separating them from the Tsar would be demolished and social justice would be re-established by the Tsar. Their religious mysticism helped them accept the period of waiting and suffering as a punishment and trial imposed by God. They resigned themselves to it with a primitive fatalism.

This outlook was extremely characteristic of the Russian peasant masses. It became even more pronounced during the nineteenth century, in spite of growing discontent and increasingly frequent individual or local acts of revolt. The peasants were losing patience. *But the more impatient they became, the more fervently they waited for their “liberator,” the Tsar.*

This “legend of the Tsar” was a central characteristic of popular Russian life in the nineteenth century. Failure to take it into account will make it impossible to understand the events that follow. This legend clarifies certain phenomena which would otherwise be unexplainable. It goes a long way toward explaining the Russian paradox which we have already mentioned, a paradox which shocked so many Europeans, and which did not disappear until the outbreak of the 1917 revolution: on the one side are numerous individuals who are cultured, educated, advanced, who want to see their people free and happy, who are aware of the ideas of their time, and who struggle for the emancipation of the working classes, for democracy and socialism. On the other side are people who do nothing for their liberation (aside from a few minor and unimportant revolts), people who remain obstinately prostrate before their idol and their dream, people who do not even understand the gesture of one who sacrifices himself for them. Indifferent, blind to truth, deaf to all appeals, these people wait for the liberator Tsar just as the first Christians waited for the Messiah.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>There are analogies between this situation in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia before the revolution of 1917, and that of France in the eighteenth century before the revolution of 1789. But naturally certain peculiarities are specifically Russian.

## Chapter 2. Repression, Violence and Failure; Development Continues (1825–1855)

The reign of Nicholas I lasted from 1825 to 1855. From a revolutionary point of view nothing striking characterizes these years. This thirty year period is nevertheless notable in several important respects.

Having ascended to the throne in the shadow of the Decembrist revolt, Nicholas I undertook to hold the country in an iron vice so as to squelch in the bud any expression of liberalism. He strengthened absolute rule to the limit and succeeded in transforming Russia into a bureaucratic and repressive state. !

The French revolution and the revolutionary movements which subsequently shook Europe were nightmares for him. He undertook extraordinary precautionary measures.

The entire population was closely watched. The arbitrariness of the bureaucracy, the police and the courts no longer had any limits. Any expression of independence, any attempt to elude the iron fist of the police was ruthlessly repressed.

Naturally there was not even a shadow of freedom of speech, assembly, or association.

Censorship thrived as never before.

All infractions of the “laws” were punished with the utmost severity.

The Polish uprising of 1831 (drowned in blood with a rare ferocity), as well as the international situation, led the emperor to further accentuate the militarization of the country. People’s lives were regulated as in barracks and severe punishment fell on anyone who tried to avoid the imposed discipline.

This sovereign well deserved the name: *Nicholas the Fierce*.

In spite of all the measures — or rather because of them and their nefarious effects, which the Tsar in his blindness did not take into account — the country (namely certain sections of the population) expressed its discontent at every opportunity.

The landed nobles, pampered by the emperor who considered them his main support, exploited the serfs with impunity and treated them abominably. The peasants became perceptibly irritated. Acts of rebellion against the “*pomeshchiks*” (lords) and against the local authorities reached alarming proportions. Repressive measures began to lose their effectiveness.

The corruption, incompetence, and caprice of the functionaries grew increasingly unbearable. Since the Tsar needed the support and the violence of the functionaries to “keep the people in line,” he would hear nothing and see nothing. The anger of those who suffered from this state of affairs only grew more intense.

The vital forces of the society did not stir. Only the official routine, absurd and impotent, was allowed.

This situation was unavoidably leading toward the future decomposition of the entire system. Powerful only in appearance, the “regime of the knout” was rotten inside. The immense empire was already becoming a “giant with clay feet.”



Growing sections of the population were becoming aware of this state of affairs.

The spirit of opposition against this impossible system was infecting the entire society.

It was in these circumstances that the magnificent evolution — both rapid and important — of the young intellectual stratum began.

In a country as large and prolific as Russia, youth were numerous among all classes of the population. What was their general outlook?

Leaving aside the peasant youth, we can observe that the more or less educated younger generations professed advanced ideas. Mid-nineteenth century youth did not readily accept the slavery of the peasants. Tsarist absolutism shocked them. The study of the Western world, which no amount of censorship could prevent (on the contrary, the censorship gave rise to a taste for forbidden fruit), stimulated their imaginations. The rise of the natural sciences and of materialism made a strong impression on them. It was during this same period that Russian literature, taking its inspiration from humanist principles, flowered and exerted a powerful influence on youth, in spite of the censorship, which it successfully circumvented.

At the same time, economically, the labor of the serfs and the absence of all freedoms no longer responded to the pressing needs of the time.

For all these reasons, intellectuals, particularly the youth, were theoretically emancipated toward the end of the reign of Nicholas I. The intellectuals were resolutely opposed to serfdom and absolutism.

It was during this period that the well-known nihilist current was born, as well as a sharp conflict between conservative “fathers” and fiercely progressive “sons,” a conflict superbly depicted by Turgenev in his novel, *Fathers and Sons*.

Outside of Russia a widespread and deeply rooted misunderstanding accompanies the word “nihilism,” which originated some 75 years ago in Russian literature and which, due to its Latin origin, passed into other languages without being translated.

In France and elsewhere, “nihilism” is generally understood as a revolutionary *political* and *social* doctrine, invented in Russia where it has or had numerous organized adherents. People still speak of a “nihilist party” and of its members, the “nihilists.” None of this is exact.

The term “nihilism” was introduced into literature and subsequently into the Russian language by the celebrated novelist Ivan Turgenev (1818–1883) in the middle of the nineteenth century. In one of his novels Turgenev used this word to describe a current of ideas — *and not a doctrine* — which appeared among young Russian intellectuals at the end of 1850. The term caught on and quickly became part of the language.

This current of ideas had an essentially philosophic and largely moral character. Its field of influence was always limited since it never went beyond the intellectual stratum. Its standpoint was always *personal* and *pacifist*, which did not keep it from being animated by a generous spirit of revolt and guided by the dream of happiness for all humanity.

The movement which was set off by this current (if one can speak of a movement) did not go beyond the domains of literature and customs (*moeurs*). Any other type of movement would have been impossible under the regime of the time. However, in these two domains it did not hesitate to draw the logical conclusions which it not only formulated but also sought to apply individually as rules of conduct.

Within these limits, the movement paved the way for an intellectual and moral development which led Russian youth toward some very broad and progressive conceptions. One result was

the emancipation of educated women, an achievement of which late nineteenth-century Russia could justly be proud.

In spite of its strictly philosophical and individual character, this intellectual current, due to its humanistic and liberating spirit, carried the germ of later social conceptions which gave rise to a real revolutionary movement that was both political as well as social. "*Nihilism*" prepared the ground for this movement, which appeared later under the stimulus of European ideas as well as internal and external events.

Outside of Russia, the "nihilist" current is generally confused with the later movement which was led by *parties* or *organized* groups with a program of action and *concrete* goals. But it is only to the current of ideas which was a *precursor* of this movement that the term "*nihilist*" should be applied.

As a philosophical conception, nihilism was based on *materialism* and *individualism*, understood in their broadest, even exaggerated, sense.

*Force and Matter*, the famous work of Buchner (German materialist philosopher, 1824–1899), was translated into Russian, clandestinely lithographed, and thousands of copies were distributed despite the risks. This book became the Bible of Russian intellectual youth of the time. The works of Mole-schott, Charles Darwin and several materialist and naturalist authors also exerted a great influence.

Materialism was accepted as an unquestionable absolute truth.

As *materialists*, the nihilists engaged in an unrelenting war against religion and against everything which escapes pure reason or positive proof, against everything which is beyond material reality or beyond values with no practical use — in short, against everything which is spiritual, sentimental or idealistic.

They scorned esthetics, beauty, comfort, spiritual enjoyment, sentimental love, fashion, the desire to please. They went so far as to completely reject art as a manifestation of idealism. Their great ideologist, the brilliant publicist Pisarev, who died in an accident when he was young, formulated (in one of his articles) his famous parallel between a worker and an artist. Pisarev held that any cobbler was infinitely more admirable than Raphael, since the first produces useful material objects while the paintings of the second serve no purpose. In his writings, Pisarev fervently applied materialistic and utilitarian principles to dethrone the great poet Pushkin. The nihilist Bazarov in Turgenev's novel, says, "Nature is not a temple but a laboratory, and man is there to work."

When speaking of the "unrelenting war" waged by the nihilists, one must understand a literary and verbal war, and no more. Nihilism's activity was limited to a veiled propaganda of its ideas in journals and among intellectuals. It was not easy to spread this propaganda since it was necessary to take into account the censorship as well as the Tsarist police, which suppressed "foreign heresies" and all independent thought. The "external" manifestations of nihilism consisted mainly of dressing very plainly and behaving uninhibitedly. For example, nihilist women generally had short hair, often wore glasses to make themselves ugly and emphasize their contempt for beauty and stylishness, dressed in coarse clothing to defy fashion, walked like men and smoked in order to proclaim the equality of the sexes and demonstrate their contempt for the rules of convention. These extravagances did not in any way diminish the seriousness of the movement. The impossibility of any other type of "exteriorization" explained and, in large measure, justified them. In the realm of personal morality, the nihilists practiced an absolute rigorism.

But the main principle of nihilism was a form of *specific individualism*.

Originally a very natural reaction against everything which the Russia of that period suppressed, this individualism ended up by denouncing, in the name of absolute individual freedom, all constraints, obligations and obstacles, and all the traditions imposed on man by society; the family, customs, morals, beliefs, established conventions.

*The complete emancipation of the individual, whether man or woman, from everything which might infringe on his independence or his freedom of thought:* this was the basic idea of nihilism. It defended the sacred right of the individual to total liberty and to the inviolability of his life.

The reader can understand why this current of ideas is called *nihilism*. This term was used to describe the partisans of an ideology which accepted *nothing* (in Latin, *nihil*) of that which was natural and sacred for others: family, society, religion, traditions. When one asked such a person, “What do you admit, what do you approve in the environment which surrounds you and which claims to have the right and even the duty to control you?” he answered: “*Nothing!*” (*Nihil*). He was a nihilist.

In spite of its essentially individualistic and philosophical character (it defended the freedom of the individual in an abstract manner rather than against the ruling despotism), nihilism *prepared the ground for the concrete struggle against the real and immediate obstacle*, for concrete political, economic and social liberation.

But it did not itself undertake this struggle. It did not even ask the question: “What can be done to actually liberate the individual?” To the very end it stayed in the realm of purely ideological discussions and purely moral achievements. The other question, the question of direct action for liberation, was posed by the next generation, during the period between 1870 and 1880. It was then that the first revolutionary and socialist groups were formed in Russia. *Action* began. But it no longer had anything in common with the “nihilism” of former days. Even the word was discarded. It remained in the Russian language as a purely historical term, a relic and souvenir of the intellectual movement of 1860–1870.

The fact that abroad people erroneously use the term “nihilism” to refer to the entire Russian revolutionary movement before “Bolshevism” and speak of a “nihilist party,” is due to lack of knowledge of the real history of the revolutionary movements in Russia.

The outrageously reactionary government of Nicholas I refused to recognize either the real situation or the intellectual ferment. Instead, it defied society by creating a secret political police (the well-known *Okhrana*: “Security”) and special corps of police to destroy the movement.

Political persecutions became a true scourge. We might remember that during this period the young Dostoyevsky was almost executed, and was imprisoned for belonging to a completely harmless study group inspired by Petrashevsky; that the first great Russian critic and publicist, Belinsky, barely succeeded in making himself heard; that another great publicist, Herzen, was forced to become an expatriate; not to mention accomplished and active revolutionaries like Bakunin. J

All of this repression did not succeed in calming the agitation, the causes of which were too deeply-rooted. It succeeded even less in improving the situation. The Tsar’s remedy was to strengthen the repressive and bureaucratic apparatus still more.

Concurrently, Russia was drawn into the Crimean War (1854–1855). This was a catastrophe. The vicissitudes of the war factually demonstrated the bankruptcy of the regime and the real weakness of the Empire. The “clay feet” gave way for the first time. (Naturally the lesson served no important purpose.) The State’s political and social sores were exposed.

Nicholas I, defeated, died in 1855 as soon as the war was lost. Perfectly aware of the bankruptcy but unable to face up to it, he probably died of the moral shock. Some even insisted that he committed suicide by poisoning himself. This interpretation is highly plausible but there is no proof.

We must insist on a little known fact to help the reader understand what follows.

*In spite of all the weaknesses and obstacles, during this period, the country made considerable cultural and technical progress.*

Driven by inescapable economic necessities, “national” industry was born, simultaneously giving birth to a working class, a “proletariat.” Large factories were established in several cities. Harbors were opened. Coal, iron and gold mines began to operate. Transportation networks were enlarged and improved. The first express railway was constructed, connecting St. Petersburg (Leningrad) and Moscow, the two capitals of this immense country. This railway is an engineering marvel, since the region between these two cities is unsuited for this type of construction; the land is not firm and frequently consists of swamps and marshes. The distance between St. Petersburg and Moscow is about 600 versts (400 miles). From the standpoint of an economically rational construction, there could be no question of a straight route. It is said that Nicholas I, who took a personal interest in the project (the state was doing the construction), ordered various engineers to draw up and present blueprints with estimates. These engineers, taking advantage of the situation, presented the Emperor with projected routes which were extremely complicated, entailing numerous switchbacks, etc. Nicholas understood. Glancing briefly at the blueprints, he pushed them aside, took a pencil and piece of paper, drew two points, connected them with a straight line and said, “The shortest distance between two points is a straight line.” It was a formal order, without appeal. The engineers had only to carry it out, which they did, thus accomplishing a genuine feat. It was a gargantuan task, accomplished at an unbelievable cost, causing devastating hardship for thousands of workers.

From its completion, the “Nicholayevskaya” (Nicholas’s) railway has been one of the world’s most remarkable railways: there are exactly 609 versts (405 miles) of track in an almost perfect straight line.

We should note that the emergent working class continued to retain close ties with the countryside from which it came and to which it returned as soon as the “outside” work was finished. Furthermore, as we have seen, the peasants, attached to the land of their lords, could not leave it permanently. Before they could be employed in industrial projects, special arrangements had to be made with their landowners. The real workers of the cities — at this time itinerant craftsmen — were a very small contingent. Thus we are not yet dealing with a “proletariat” in the proper sense of the term. But the impetus for the creation of such a proletariat was already there. The need for reliable and regular laborers was one of the pressing economic reasons which demanded the abolition of serfdom. Two or three generations hence the class of wage laborers, the real industrial proletariat, no longer tied to the land, was going to appear in Russia, as it had elsewhere.

There were also great advances in the cultural realm. Well-to-do parents wanted their children to be educated and cultured. The rapidly growing number of high school and college students forced the government to continually increase the number of secondary schools and institutions of higher education. Economic and technical needs, as well as the general development of the country, also demanded educational establishments. At the end of Nicholas’s reign, Russia had six universities: in Moscow, Dorpat, Kharkov, Kazan, St. Petersburg and Kiev (listed in the order of the dates of their founding) as well as several schools for advanced technical or special studies.

Thus the widespread legend that all of Russia at this time was uneducated, barbarian, almost “savage,” is false. The peasant population under serfdom was indeed uneducated and “savage.” But the inhabitants of the cities had no reason to envy the cultural achievements of their western counterparts, except in some purely technical realms. As for the intellectual youth, they were, in some respects, even more advanced than the youth of other European countries.

This enormous, paradoxical gap between the mentality of the enslaved population and the cultural level of the privileged strata has already been mentioned earlier.

## Chapter 3. Reforms; Resumption of the Revolution “The Failure of Tsarism” and the Failure of Revolution; Reaction (1855–1881)

It was the son and successor of Nicholas I, Emperor Alexander II, who had to face the difficult situation of the country and the regime. General discontent, pressure from the progressive intellectual strata, fear of an uprising by the peasant masses, and finally the economic necessities of the period, forced the Tsar to give in and embark resolutely on a path of reform, despite the bitter resistance of reactionary circles. He decided to put an end to the purely bureaucratic system and to the absolute arbitrariness of administrative officers, and instituted far-reaching changes in the judicial system. Above all, he confronted the problem of serfdom.

From 1860 on, reforms followed each other in rapid and uninterrupted succession. The most important were: the abolition of serfdom (1861); the establishment of assize courts with elected juries (1864) which replaced the earlier State courts composed of functionaries; the creation (in 1864) of units of local self-administration in the cities and in the countryside (the *gorodskoe samoupraleniye* and the *zemstvo*: forms of urban and rural municipalities), with the right of self-government in certain domains of public life (some branches of education, health, transportation, etc.).

All the vital forces of the population, particularly the intellectuals, turned toward the projects which were now possible. The municipalities devoted themselves enthusiastically to the creation of a vast network of primary schools with secular leanings. These “municipal” and “urban” schools were obviously under the surveillance and control of the government. Religious instruction was obligatory and the “pope” played an important role. The schools nevertheless enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy, the teaching staff being recruited by the “zemstvos” and the urban councils from among progressive intellectuals.

A great deal of attention was also devoted to sanitary conditions in the cities and to the improvement of transportation.

The country breathed more freely.

However, in spite of their importance in relation to the earlier situation, the reforms of Alexander II were very timid and incomplete in relation to the aspirations of the advanced strata and to the material and moral needs of the country. To be effective, to give the people a real impetus, the reforms would have to be accompanied by the granting of certain freedoms and civic rights: the freedom of speech and of the press, the right of assembly and association, etc. In this area, however, nothing changed. Censorship was scarcely less ridiculous. Speech and the press remained muzzled; no freedoms were granted. The emerging working class had no rights. The nobility, the landowners and the bourgeoisie were the dominant classes. Above all, *the absolutist regime remained intact*. (It was precisely the fear of changing the regime that led Alexander to

throw the bone of "reform" to the people, while preventing him from carrying these reforms through to the end. Thus the reforms failed to satisfy the population.)

The conditions in which serfdom was abolished provide the best illustration of what we are saying. This constitutes the weakest point of the reforms.

The landowners, after struggling in vain against any change in the status quo, had to bend before the supreme decision of the Tsar (who reached this decision after long and dramatic vacillations under the energetic pressure of progressive elements). But the landlords did everything they could to make this reform minimal. It was all the easier for them to do this since Alexander II himself naturally did not want to infringe upon the sacred interests of his "beloved nobles." It was primarily the fear of revolution which finally dictated his gesture. He knew that the peasants had heard of his intentions and of the disagreements which surrounded this subject at court. He knew that this time their patience was really at an end, that they expected their liberation, and that if they learned of the postponement of the reform, the agitation which would follow could provoke a vast and terrible revolt. In his last discussions with the opponents of the reform, the Tsar expressed this well-known sentence which says a great deal about his real feelings: "It is better to give freedom from above than to wait until it is taken from below." Therefore he did everything he could to make this "freedom," namely the abolition of serfdom, as harmless as possible to the interests of the landed nobles. "The iron chain has broken at last," wrote the poet Nekrasov in a resounding poem. "Yes, it broke; one end hit the lord, but the other, the peasant."

To be sure, the peasants finally obtained individual freedom. But they had to pay for it dearly. They received mini-scale plots of land. (It was obviously impossible to "free" them without granting them plots of land which were at least large enough to keep them from dying of hunger.) Furthermore, in addition to having to pay taxes to the State over a long period, they were required to pay a large fee for the lands taken from the former landowners. It should be noted that 75 million peasants received little more than a third of the land. Another third was retained by the State. And almost a third remained in the hands of the landowners. This proportion condemned the peasant masses to a life of famine. They remained at the mercy of the "pomeshchiks" and, later, of the "kulaks," peasants who had, in one way or another, become rich.

In all his "reforms," Alexander II was careful to grant as little as possible: only the minimum necessary to avoid an imminent catastrophe. Thus the defects and the shortcomings of these "reforms" could already be felt by 1870.

The working population of the cities was defenseless against the growing exploitation.

The absence of any freedom of speech and of the press, as well as the absolute prohibition of all meetings with political or social content, rendered impossible all criticism, all propaganda, all social activity, the circulation of all ideas, in short, all progress.

The "people" were no more than "subjects" under the arbitrary power of absolutism which, while less ferocious than under Nicholas I, nevertheless remained intact.

As for the peasant masses, they remained beasts of burden reduced to the hard labor of feeding the State and the privileged classes.

The best representatives of the young intellectuals quickly became aware of this deplorable situation. They were all the more distressed because in this period countries in the West already had relatively advanced political and social systems. Around 1870, Western Europe was in the midst of social struggles; socialism had started its intense propaganda and Marxism had begun the task of organizing the working class into a powerful political party.

As before, the best publicists of the period continued to defy and circumvent the censors, who were neither well enough educated nor intelligent enough to understand the finesse and variety of the procedures (although Chernyshevski ultimately paid for his audacity by forced labor). The publicists succeeded in communicating socialist ideas to intellectual circles through magazine articles written in conventional styles. In this way they educated the youth, keeping them regularly informed of the movement of ideas as well as the political and social events abroad. At the same time they skillfully exposed the underside of the so-called reforms of Alexander II, their real motives, their hypocrisy, and their shortcomings.

Thus it is altogether natural that clandestine groups formed in Russia during this period, in order to struggle actively against this contemptible regime, and above all to communicate the idea of political and social liberation of the working classes.

These groups were composed of youth of both sexes who consecrated themselves, with a sublime spirit of sacrifice, to the task of "bringing the light to the working masses."

Thus was formed a vast movement of Russian intellectual youth who, in large numbers, left families, comforts and careers and threw themselves "toward the people" in order to enlighten them.

At the same time, terrorist activities against the main servants of the regime began. Between 1860 and 1870 there were several assassination attempts on the lives of several high government officials. There were also some unsuccessful attempts against the Tsar.

The movement ended in failure. Almost all the propagandists were arrested by the police (frequently on the basis of denunciations by the peasants themselves); they were imprisoned, exiled or sent to hard labor.<sup>1</sup> The practical results of the movement were nil.

It became increasingly evident that Tsarism represented an *insurmountable* obstacle to the education of the people. It was necessary to go only one step further to reach the logical conclusion that, since Tsarism represents such an obstacle, it must be destroyed.

And this step was in fact taken by tattered and desperate youth whose primary goal was the assassination of the Tsar. Other factors also led to this decision. The man who had deceived the people with his so-called "reforms" had to be publicly punished. The deception had to be exposed before the vast masses; their attention had to be attracted by a dramatic and terrible act. In short, the elimination of the Tsar was to show the people the fragility, the vulnerability and the fortuitous and temporary character of the regime.

The "legend of the Tsar" was thus to be killed once and for all. Some members of the group went further: they held that the assassination of the Tsar could serve as a point of departure which, in the context of the general development, would end in revolution and the immediate fall of Tsarism.

The group, which called itself *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Will), after detailed preparations, executed the project: Tsar Alexander II was killed while traveling in St. Petersburg on March 1, 1881. Two bombs were thrown by terrorists at the imperial carriage. The first destroyed the carriage, the second mortally wounded the Emperor, removing both of his legs. He died almost immediately.

The act was not understood by the masses. The peasants did not read the journals. (They could not read at all.) Completely ignored, outsiders to all propaganda, fascinated for over a century by the idea that the Tsar wished them well but that his good intentions were thwarted by the nobility,

---

<sup>1</sup>The famous and monstrous trial of "the 193" was the climax of this repression.



the peasants accused the nobility of assassinating the Tsar to revenge itself for the abolition of serfdom and with the hope of restoring it. (The peasants found further proof for this in the nobility's resistance to their liberation and also in the compulsory payment of large fees for their plots of land, for which they blamed the intrigues of the nobility.)

The Tsar was killed. But not the legend. (The reader will see that twenty-four years later history itself destroyed the legend.)

The people did not understand and did not move. The servile press screamed about the "low criminals," the "horrible villains," the "imbeciles."

There was not much disorder at the court. The young heir Alexander, oldest son of the assassinated Emperor, immediately took power.

The leaders of the *Narodnaya Volya* party, those who organized and carried out the assassination, were rapidly found, arrested, tried and killed. One of them, the young Grinevetski -the very one who had thrown the bomb that killed the Tsar – had himself been mortally wounded by the explosion and died on the spot. Sofya Perovskaya, Zheliabov, Kibal-chich (the famous technician of the party, who made the bombs), Mikhailov and Ryssakov were hung.

Exceptionally extensive and severe measures of persecution and repression quickly reduced the party to complete impotence.

Everything "returned to order."

The new Emperor, Alexander III, greatly affected by the J assassination, found nothing better to do than to return to the recently abandoned path of complete reaction. The to-l tally inadequate "reforms" of his father seemed to him excessive, unfortunate and dangerous. He considered them a deplorable mistake. Instead of understanding that the assassination was a consequence of their inadequacy and that they had to be broadened, he, on the contrary, saw in them the cause of the evil. And he took advantage of the murder of his father to oppose the "reforms" in every possible way.

He set out to distort their spirit, to counteract their effects, and to create obstacles for them through a long series of reactionary laws. *The bureaucratic and repressive State regained its rights. Every movement, every expression of liberal thought, was stifled.*

The Tsar obviously could not re-establish serfdom. But the working masses were condemned to remain more than ever in their condition as an indistinct herd, good for exploiting, and deprived of all human rights.

The slightest contact between the cultivated strata and the people again became suspect and impossible. The "Russian paradox," the unbridgeable gap between the cultural level and the aspirations of the higher strata and the somber and unthinking life of the people, remained intact.

Social activity of any type was once again prohibited. What survived of the timid reforms of Alexander II was reduced to a caricature.

Under these conditions, the rebirth of revolutionary activity was inevitable.

This was in fact what took place. But the form, as well as the very essence, of this activity was totally transformed by new economic, social and psychological factors.

## Chapter 4. The End of the Century; Marxism; Rapid Evolution; Reaction (1881–1900)

After the failure of the *Narodnaya Volya* party's violent campaign against Tsarism, other events contributed to the fundamental transformation of the Russian revolutionary movement. The most important was the *appearance of Marxism*.

As is known, Marxism expressed a new conception of social struggle: a conception which led to a concrete program of revolutionary action and, in western Europe, to a working class political party called the Social Democratic Party.

In spite of all the obstacles, the socialist ideas of Lassalle and the concepts and achievements of Marxism were known, studied, preached, and clandestinely practiced in Russia; even the legal literature excelled in the art of dealing with socialism by using a veiled language. The well-known "large journals" reappeared with great enthusiasm; among their contributors were the best journalists and publicists of the time, who regularly analyzed social problems, socialist doctrines, and the means to realize them. The importance of these publications for the cultural life of the country cannot be exaggerated. No intellectual family could be without them. In the libraries, it was necessary to place one's name on a waiting list to obtain the latest issue. More than one generation of Russians received its social education from these journals, completing this education by reading all types of clandestine publications.

Thus Marxist ideology, basing itself solely on the *organized action* of the proletariat, came to replace the disappointed hopes of earlier conspiratorial circles.

The other important event was the increasingly rapid development of industry and technology, with all their far-reaching consequences.

Railway networks, other means of transportation, mining, oil drilling, metallurgy, textile and machine tool industries — all of these productive activities developed with great strides, making up for lost time. Industrial regions sprang up throughout the country. The environment of numerous cities changed rapidly due to the new factories and the growing population of workers.

This industrial upsurge was supported by a labor force consisting of large masses of miserable peasants who were forced either to abandon their inadequate plots of land permanently, or to look for additional work during winter. As elsewhere, industrial development meant development of the proletarian class. And as elsewhere, this class began to furnish contingents to the revolutionary movement.

Thus, diffusion of Marxist ideas and growth of the industrial proletariat on which the Marxists depended, were the basic elements which determined the new situation.

Industrial development and the rising standard of living in general required in all fields educated people, professionals, technicians and skilled workers. The number of schools of all types — official, municipal and private-increased continually in the cities and the countryside; universities, special technical schools and other higher institutions, primary schools, professional

courses, sprang up everywhere. (In 1875, 79% of the drafted soldiers were illiterate; by 1898 this figure had fallen to 55%.)

This entire development took place outside the framework of the absolutist political regime and even in opposition to it. The regime stubbornly held on — an increasingly rigid, absurd and obtrusive carcass on top of the living body of the country.

Consequently, in spite of the cruel repression, the anti-monarchist movement as well as revolutionary and socialist propaganda became increasingly widespread.

Even the peasant population — the most backward and the most oppressed—began to budge, prodded as much by the poverty and the inhuman exploitation as by the echoes of widespread agitation. These echoes were carried to the peasants by the numerous intellectuals who worked in the “Zemstvos” (at the time these people were known as “zemstkii rabotniki”: “zemstvo workers,” by workers who had family ties with the countryside, by seasonal workers and by the agricultural proletariat. The government was powerless against this propaganda.

Toward the end of the century, two clear-cut forces confronted each other irreconcilably. One was the ancient force of reaction which consisted of the highly privileged classes who gathered around the throne: the nobility, the bureaucracy, the landowners, the military caste, the upper clergy and the nascent bourgeoisie. The other was the young revolutionary force which in 1890–1900 consisted mainly of the mass of students but which had already begun to recruit from among young workers in cities and industrial regions.

In 1898, the revolutionary current with a Marxist tendency created the *Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party* (the first social-democratic group, called “Emancipation of Labor,” had been founded in 1883).

Between these two clearly opposed forces stood a third, which consisted mainly of representatives of the middle class and a certain number of “distinguished” intellectuals: university professors, lawyers, writers, doctors. It was a timidly liberal movement. Even though they secretly and very prudently gave support to revolutionary activity, these people had greater faith in reforms, hoping that under the threat of imminent revolution (as during the reign of Alexander II) the absolutist regime would grant large concessions, eventually leading to the establishment of a constitutional regime.

Only the peasant masses continued to remain outside of this ferment.

Emperor Alexander III died in 1894. His place was taken by his son Nicholas, the last of the Romanovs.

A vague legend claimed that the new Tsar professed liberal ideas. It was even said that he was disposed to grant “his people” a constitution which would seriously limit the absolutist powers of the Tsars.

Taking their desires for realities, certain liberal “zemstvos” (municipal councils) presented the young Tsar with petitions in which they very timidly asked for some rights of representation.

In January, 1895, on the occasion of the marriage of Nicholas II, various delegations of the nobility, the military and the “Zemstvos” were ceremoniously received by the Tsar in St. Petersburg. To the great amazement of the municipal delegates, the new master, while accepting the congratulations, suddenly grew angry and, stamping his foot and shouting hysterically, called on the “zemstvos” to renounce their “crazy dreams” forever. This demand was immediately emphasized by repressive measures against certain “instigators” of the “subversive” attitude of the “zemstvos.” Thus absolutism and reaction reaffirmed themselves once again, contemptuous of the general development of the country.

## Chapter 5. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century; Hasty Development; Revolutionary Advance; Results (1900–1905)

The events and characteristics which we have just mentioned became even more pronounced at the beginning of the twentieth century.

On the one hand, instead of recognizing the aspirations of society, the absolutist regime decided to maintain itself by all possible means and to suppress not only all revolutionary movements, but also any expression of opposition. It was during this period that the government of Nicholas II diverted the growing discontent of the population by means of large-scale anti-Semitic propaganda followed by the instigation — and even the organization — of Jewish *pogroms*.

On the other hand, the economic development of the country continued at an accelerated pace. In a period of five years, from 1900 to 1905, industry and technology made an enormous leap. Petroleum production (at Baku), coal (at Donetz), and the production of metals, were rapidly reaching the level of other industrial countries. Roads and means of transportation (railroads, motor transport, river and ocean transport) were enlarged and modernized. Large construction plants employing thousands and even tens of thousands of workers rose or expanded on the outskirts of the large cities. Entire industrial regions sprang up or were expanded. For example, we can list the large Putilov factories, the extensive Nevsky shipyards, the large Baltic Factory, as well as others in St. Petersburg; industrial suburbs of the capital with tens of thousands of workers such as Kolpino, Chu-khovo, Sestrorech; the industrial region of Ivanovo-Voznessensk near Moscow; and several important factories in southern Russia: Kharkov, Ekaterinoslav and elsewhere. This rapid development was not well known abroad outside of interested groups. (There are many who, even today, believe that before the rise of Bolshevism, there was almost no industry in Russia; that industry was created entirely by the Bolshevik government.) Nevertheless, the development was considerable, not only from a purely industrial standpoint, but also socially. Industrialization brought about the rapid growth of proletarian elements. According to the statistics of the period, there were about three million workers in Russia in 1905.

At the same time the country made rapid advances in cultural matters.

The education of adults was also progressing rapidly.

In 1905 there were about thirty universities and schools of higher learning in Russia, for men and women. Almost all these institutions depended on the State (except for a few that were supported by private municipal funds). Following an old tradition, but mainly as a result of the reforms of Alexander II, the statutes of the universities were quite liberal and allowed a great deal of internal independence (autonomy)! Alexander III and Nicholas II tried to diminish these. But every attempt of this type provoked major disorders. The government finally gave up such projects.

The professors of the universities and higher schools were chosen from among university graduates according to a special procedure.

Almost all cities, even unimportant ones, had high schools ] and preparatory schools for boys and girls. The secondary schools were founded by the State, by individuals or by the "zemstvos." In all three cases the teaching programs were established by the State, and the teaching was perceptibly similar. The teaching of religion was obligatory.

The teaching staff of the secondary schools was recruited from the university community with minor exceptions. The program of studies leading to the diploma, which gave access to the university, lasted eight years. Students who were well prepared could spend a year in a preparatory class, in addition to the eight obligatory years.

The number of primary schools in the cities and in the countryside increased rapidly. Some were founded by the State; others by municipalities and "zemstvos." All of them were under the surveillance and control of the State. Primary education was free. It was not compulsory. The State naturally imposed the catechism in the primary schools. The men and women who taught in the primary schools had to have at least a diploma for four years of secondary school.

Evening courses for adults and some well organized "popular universities," which were well attended, functioned in all the large cities. Municipalities and particularly individuals devoted themselves to these institutions with great zeal.

The children of workers and peasants were obviously rare in the high schools and universities. The cost of this education was too high.

Nevertheless, contrary to a widespread legend, access to these schools was not forbidden either for the children of workers or the children of peasants. The majority of the students came from families of intellectuals from the liberal professions, functionaries, clerical workers, and from bourgeois families.

The fact that intellectual circles professed a *credo* which was at least liberal made it possible for a propaganda of fairly progressive ideas to take place outside of the school curriculum in numerous municipal and popular schools and institutions, in spite of police surveillance.

The lecturers of the "popular universities" and the teachers of the primary schools often came from revolutionary circles. Some directors, usually with liberal leanings, tolerated them. They knew how to "arrange things." In these circumstances the authorities were hardly able to oppose this propaganda.

In addition to schooling and conversation, education took place through writings.

An immense quantity of popular pamphlets, in general written by scholars or consisting of excerpts from the great writers, appeared on the market. These pamphlets dealt with all the sciences and analyzed political and social problems in a very progressive spirit. The official censorship was powerless against this mounting flood. The authors and publishers discovered numerous ways to deceive the vigilance of the authorities.

If we add the wide diffusion of clandestine revolutionary and socialist literature in intellectual and working class circles we will have a good idea of the vast movement of education ] and preparation which characterizes the period between 1900 and 1905.

We have permitted ourselves to present certain details which are necessary for an understanding of the extent and the progressive character of the revolutionary movements which followed. We should emphasize that this movement of political and social aspirations was completed by a remarkable moral development.

Young people liberated themselves from all prejudices: religious, national, sexual. In some respects Russian avant garde circles had for a long time been more advanced than those in western countries. The equality of races and nations, the equality of the sexes, free marriage (*union libre*), the negation of religion, were inherited truths in these circles; indeed, they had been practiced since the time of the "Nihilists." In all these fields, Russian writers (Belinski, Herzen Chernyshevsky, Dobrolubov, Pissarev, Mikhailovsky) accomplished an enormous task. They taught several generations of intellectuals the meaning of total liberation, and they did this in spite of the compulsory education with an opposite content imposed by the Tsarist system of secondary education.

This spirit of liberation ultimately became an inalienable *sacred tradition* for Russian youth. While they submitted to the officially imposed education, young people got out from under its rod as soon as they received the diploma.

"Do not go to the University!" shouted the bishop of our diocese when the diplomas were ceremoniously distributed among us, students graduating from high school. "Do not go to the University. Because the University is a den of rioters ..." (Where did he want us to go?) He knew what was happening, this honorable bishop. It was in fact the case that, with few exceptions, all young men and women who went to the universities became potential revolutionaries. Among the people, "student" meant "rebel."

Afterwards, when they grew older, these one-time rebels broken by the problems and misfortunes of life, forgot and often denied their first impulses. But something generally remained: a liberal credo, a spirit of opposition, and sometimes a living spark which was ready to burn on the first serious occasion.

Nevertheless, the political, economic and social situation of the working population remained unchanged.

Exposed to the growing exploitation of the State and the bourgeoisie, without any means of defense, lacking all rights to congregate, to be heard, to impose their demands, to organize, to struggle, to strike, the workers were materially and morally dissatisfied.

In the countryside, the poverty and dissatisfaction of the peasant masses continued to grow. The peasants — 175 million men, women and children — were abandoned and were considered a sort of "human herd" (corporal punishment was a reality for them until 1904, even though it had been abolished legally in 1863). A lack of general culture and elementary education; primitive and insufficient tools; the absence of credit or any other form of protection or aid; very high taxes; arbitrary, contemptuous and cruel treatment by the authorities and "superior" classes; continual parcelling of their plots as a consequence of the division of the land among new members of families; competition between the "kulaks" (wealthy peasants) and the landed gentry — such were the varied causes of their misery. Even the "peasant community" — the famous Russian *mir* — was no longer able to support its members. Furthermore, the government of Alexander III and that of his successor Nicholas II did everything they could to reduce the *mir* to a simple administrative body, closely observed and policed by the State, a body whose primary purpose was to force the peasants to pay taxes and fees.

It was thus inevitable that socialist and revolutionary propaganda and activity should meet with a certain success. Marxism, spread clandestinely but energetically, found numerous followers, mainly among students, but also among workers. The influence of the Social-Democratic Party, founded in 1898, could be felt in many cities and in certain regions, despite the fact that this party was illegal (as were all others).

The government's severity against militants became increasingly brutal. There were countless political trials. Measures of administrative and police repression savagely struck thousands of "subjects." Prisons, places of exile and hard labor camps filled up. However, although the authorities were able to reduce the activity and influence of the party to a minimum, they did not succeed in stifling it, as they had succeeded earlier in stifling the first political groups.

After 1900, despite all the efforts of the authorities, the revolutionary movement grew considerably. Disorders among students and among workers became daily events. In fact, universities were frequently closed for several months precisely because of political troubles. The response of students, supported by workers, was to organize resounding demonstrations at public places. At St. Petersburg, the square of the Kazan Cathedral became the classical spot for these popular demonstrations where students and workers gathered, singing revolutionary songs and at times carrying red flags. The government sent detachments of police and Cossacks on horses back to "clean up" the square and the neighboring streets with swords and whips (*nagaikas*).

The Revolution began to conquer the streets.

Nevertheless, in order to give the reader an accurate idea of the general situation, we should make another reservation!

The picture we have just painted is accurate. *But by referring only to this picture*, without making major corrections, without referring constantly to the *large totality* of the country and the people, we will run the risk of exaggerating, and will end up making erroneous general evaluations which will not lead to an understanding of later events.

We should not forget that, out of the immense mass of more than 180 million people, the groups influenced by the intellectual movement we have described consisted of a very small stratum: In fact, it consisted of a few thousand intellectuals, mainly students, and the elite of the working class of the large cities. The rest of the population: the innumerable peasant masses, the majority of the city inhabitants and even the majority of the working population, were still outside the revolutionary ferment, indifferent and even hostile to it. The members of advanced circles did increase rapidly from 1900 on the number of workers won to the cause grew continually; the revolutionary outburst also reached the increasingly miserable peasant masses. But at the same time, the vast mass of the people — *the mass whose activity alone determines major social changes* — retained its primitive outlook. The "Russian paradox" remained nearly intact, and the "legend of the Tsar" continued to dazzle millions of human beings. *In relation to this mass*, the movement in question was no more than a small and superficial ferment (only four workers took part in the Social-Democratic Congress in London, 1903).

In these conditions, all contact between those in front, who were way ahead, and the mass of the population, who remained way behind, was impossible.

*The reader should constantly keep this in mind in order to understand the events that followed.*

In 1901 revolutionary activity was enriched by a new element: alongside the Social-Democratic Party rose the Socialist-Revolutionary Party. The propaganda of this party quickly met with considerable success.

The two parties differed from each other on three essential points:

1. Philosophically and sociologically, the Socialist-Revolutionary Party disagreed with Marxist doctrine;

2. Due to its anti-Marxism, this party elaborated a different solution for the peasant problem (the most important in Russia). While the Social-Democratic Party, basing itself solely on the *working class*, did not count on the *peasant masses* (it waited for their rapid proletarianization),

and consequently neglected rural propaganda, the Socialist-Revolutionary Party hoped to win the Russian peasant masses to the revolutionary and socialist cause. The latter considered it impossible to wait for the peasants' proletarianization. Consequently it carried out large-scale propaganda in the countryside. The Social-Democratic Party's agrarian program anticipated nothing more than the enlargement of the peasants' Plots and other minor reforms, whereas the minimum program of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party included the complete and immediate socialization of the land.

3. Perfectly consistent with its doctrine, the Social-Democratic Party, counting on the action of the masses, rejected all terrorist activity and all political assassinations as socially useless. The Socialist-Revolutionary Party, on the other hand, attached a certain public utility to assassination attempts against high Tsarist officials who were excessively zealous or cruel. It even created a special body called the "combat organism," which was charged with preparing and carrying out political assassinations under the direction of the Central Committee.

Except for these differences, the short-term political and social programs ("minimum programs") of the two parties were almost the same: a bourgeois democratic republic which would pave the way for an evolution toward socialism.

From 1901 to 1905 the Socialist-Revolutionary Party carried out several assassination attempts, some of which had major repercussions. In 1902 the student Balmachev, a young militant of the party, assassinated Sipiagin, Minister of the Interior; in 1904 another Socialist-Revolutionary student, Sazonov, killed von Plehve, the well known and cruel successor to Sipiagin; in 1905, the Socialist-Revolutionary Kalayev killed the Grand Duke Serge, governor ("the hideous satrap") of Moscow.

In addition to the two political parties, there was also a small anarchist movement. Extremely weak and totally unknown by the population, it consisted of some groups of intellectuals and workers (peasants in the South) without permanent contact. There may have been two anarchist groups in St. Petersburg and about that many in Moscow (the latter were the stronger and more active), as well as groups in the South and West. Their activity was limited to a weak (though nevertheless extremely difficult) propaganda, some assassination attempts against overly zealous servants of the regime, and some acts of "individual revenge." Libertarian literature was smuggled from abroad; this consisted largely of pamphlets by Kropotkin, who had himself been forced to emigrate after the collapse of the *Narodnaya Volya*, and had settled in England.

The rapid increase of revolutionary activity after 1900 alarmed the government. What bothered the authorities most was the fact that the propaganda was favorably received by the working population. In spite of their illegal and therefore difficult existence, both socialist parties had committees, propaganda circles, clandestine print shops and fairly numerous groups in the major cities. The Socialist-Revolutionary Party successfully committed assassinations the repercussions of which attracted a great deal of attention and even admiration. The government decided that its methods of defense and repression-surveillance, espionage, provocation, prison, pogroms-were inadequate. In order to draw the working masses away from the influence of the socialist parties and all other] revolutionary activity, it conceived a Machiavellian plan which was logically to lead to the government's mastery over the workers' movement. It decided to launch a *legal, authorized* workers' organization which the government itself commanded. It was thus going to kill two birds with one stone: on one side it would attract toward itself the sympathy, gratitude and devotion of the working class, pulling it away from the revolutionary parties; on the other



side, it would be able to lead this workers' movement wherever it wanted, while keeping close watch on it.

There was no doubt that the task was delicate. It was necessary to attract workers into State organizations, calm their suspicions, interest them, flatter them, seduce them, and dupe them, without their being aware of it; it was necessary to pretend to satisfy their aspirations, eclipse the parties, neutralize their propaganda, and go beyond them — especially with concrete acts. To succeed, the government would be obliged to go to the point of agreeing to make certain concessions of an economic or social order, while constantly keeping the workers at its mercy, manipulating them at will.

Such a "program" had to be executed by men in whom the government had absolute confidence, men who were cunning, skillful and experienced, who were familiar with the psychology of workers, who knew how to impose themselves on workers and win their confidence.

The government finally chose two agents of the political secret police (*Okhrana*), who were charged with the mission of carrying out this project. One was Zubatov, for Moscow; the other was a priest, chaplain in a St. Petersburg prison, Father Gapon.

The government of the Tsar wanted to play with fire. Before long it burned itself cruelly.

## **Part II. The Jolt (1905–1906)**

# Chapter 1. The Gaponist Epic; First General Strike

In Moscow Zubatov was fairly quickly unmasked. He was not able to accomplish a great deal. But in St. Petersburg the affair went much better. Gapon, very crafty, working in the shadows, knew how to win the confidence and even the affection of groups of workers. Genuinely talented as an agitator and organizer, he succeeded in setting up so-called “Workers’ Sections” which he personally led and which he stimulated with his energetic activity. Toward the end of 1904 there were eleven of these sections, located in different areas of the capital, with a membership of several thousands.

Workers voluntarily attended these “Sections” in the evening to discuss their problems, listen to lectures, look at the newspapers. Since the entrance was rigorously guarded by the Gaponist workers themselves, the militants of the political parties could not easily get in. And even if they got in, they were quickly spotted and thrown out.

The St. Petersburg workers took their sections very seriously. Having complete confidence in Gapon, they told him about their misfortunes and their aspirations, and discussed ways to improve their situation, examining various methods of struggling against the bosses. Himself the son of poor peasants and having spent his life among workers, Gapon perfectly understood the psychology of the workers who confided in him. He was extremely good at pretending approval and genuine empathy for the workers’ movement. Such was also his official mission, at least at the beginning.

The proposition which the government wanted to impose on the workers in their sections was the following: “Workers, you can improve your situation by applying yourselves to this task meticulously, within legal limits, in the context of your sections. To succeed you don’t need to engage in politics. Concern yourselves with your concrete personal and immediate interests, and you’ll soon be leading a happier life. Parties and political struggles, recipes proposed by bad shepherds — the socialists and the revolutionaries — won’t lead you to anything worth having. Concern yourselves with your immediate economic interests. This is permitted, and it’s only in this way that you’ll really improve your situation. The government is very concerned about you and will help you.” Such was the thesis that Gapon and his helpers, recruited from among the workers themselves, preached and elaborated in the sections.

The workers did not wait to respond to the invitation. They prepared an action. They developed and formulated their demands, with Gapon’s agreement. In his extremely delicate situation, Gapon had to take part. If he failed to do so, he would immediately provoke discontent among the workers; he would certainly even be accused of betraying their interests and supporting the boss’s side. He would lose his popularity. Even more serious suspicions would arise. If this happened, his work would be ruined. In his double game Gapon had above all else and at all costs to retain the sympathies he had known how to win. He understood this well and he acted as if he

completely supported the workers' cause, hoping to be able to retain mastery of the movement, manipulate the masses at will, direct, shape and channel their action.

But the opposite took place. The movement quickly went beyond the limits that had been assigned to it. It rapidly acquired unforeseen amplitude, vigor and momentum, burning all the calculations, overturning all the expectations of its authors. It soon became a veritable flood which carried Gapon with it.

In December, 1904, the workers of the Putilov factory, one of the largest in St. Petersburg, and one where Gapon had numerous followers and friends, decided to begin the action. With Gapon's agreement, they drew up and gave the managers a list of economic demands which were very moderate. At the end of the month they learned that the managers "did not believe it possible to consider these demands" and that the government was powerless to do anything about it. Furthermore, the managers of the factory fired some workers who were considered leaders. It was demanded that they be reinstated. The management refused.

The indignation and anger of the workers was immense, first of all, their long and laborious efforts had led to nothing. Secondly, and more importantly, they had been led to believe that their efforts would be crowned with success. Gapon himself had encouraged them, had filled them with hope. And here their first step along the good legal road had brought them nothing but a bitter failure which could in no way be justified. They felt tricked and morally they felt obliged to intervene in favor of their fired comrades.

Naturally their eyes turned toward Gapon. To save his prestige and his role, Gapon acted more indignant than anyone else and urged the workers to go to the Putilov factory to react vigorously. They did not hesitate. Feeling themselves safe, continuing to limit themselves to purely economic demands, protected by the sections and by Gapon, they decided, after several turbulent meetings, to support their cause with a strike. The government, trusting Gapon, did not intervene. It is thus that the strike at the Putilov factories, the first major strike in Russia, broke out in December, 1904.

But the movement did not stop there. All the Workers' Sections stirred and moved to defend the action of the Putilov workers. They very rightly understood the failure of the Putilov workers as a general failure. Gapon naturally had to side with the sections. In the evening he visited all of them, giving speeches everywhere in favor of the Putilov strikers and urging workers to support them with decisive actions.

Some days passed. Extraordinary agitation shook the masses of workers of the capital. Factories emptied spontaneously. Without signal or sign, without preparation or leadership, the Putilov strike became a nearly general strike of the workers of St. Petersburg.

And it was a tempest. The strikers rushed en masse toward the sections, disregarding all formalities and rules, calling for immediate and impressive action.

In short, the strike alone was not enough. It was necessary to act, *to do something*: something large, impressive, decisive. This was the general feeling.

It was then that a fantastic idea was formulated, no one knows exactly how or where — the idea of preparing a "petition" to the Tsar in the name of unhappy workers and peasants *of all the Russias*; the idea of a massive demonstration in front of the Winter Palace to support the petition; the idea of giving the petition to the Tsar himself through a delegation headed by Gapon, asking the Tsar to listen to the miseries of his people. However naive and paradoxical it might have been, this idea spread like wildfire among the workers of St. Petersburg. It unified them, inspired them, made them enthusiastic. It gave a meaning and a precise goal to their movement.

The sections, joining together with the masses, decided to organize the action. Gapon was charged with drafting the petition. Once again he agreed. Thus by force of circumstances he became the leader of a major, historical movement of the masses.

The petition was ready during the first days of January, 1905. Simple and moving, it exuded devotion and confidence. The sufferings of the people were elaborated with a great deal of feeling and sincerity. The Tsar was asked to turn to these sufferings, to agree to effective reforms and to see them carried through.

It is strange, but unquestionable, that Gapon's petition was an inspired and genuinely moving work.

The next step was to have the petition adopted by all the sections, to communicate it to the mass of the population and to organize the march toward the Winter Palace.

In the meantime a new factor came into play. Some revolutionaries belonging to the political parties (until this moment the parties had stayed away from "Gaponism") met with Gapon. Their main aim was to influence him to give his attitude, his petition and his action a style which was less "submissive," more dignified, more firm — in short, more revolutionary. Circles of progressive workers also drove him in this direction. Gapon gracefully gave in. Some Socialist Revolutionaries established relations with him. In agreement with them, he changed his original petition, enlarging it considerably, and playing down its loyal devotion to the Tsar.

In its final form, the "petition" was the greatest historical paradox that ever existed. It was loyally addressed to the Tsar and it asked the Tsar to authorize, and even carry out, neither more nor less than a thoroughgoing revolution which would, in the last analysis, eliminate his power. In fact, the entire minimum program of the revolutionary parties was included in it. Among the urgent measures demanded were: complete freedom of the press, of speech, of thought; absolute freedom for all associations and organizations; the right of workers to join unions, the right to strike; some agrarian laws leading to the expropriation of the large landowners in favor of peasant communities; and finally the immediate convocation of a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of a democratic electoral law. It was a blunt invitation to suicide. Here is the complete and final text of the "petition":

Lord,

We, the workers of St. Petersburg, our wives, our children and our parents, old people with no resources, have come to You, Oh Tsar, to ask you for justice and protection.

We are reduced to beggars. We are oppressed, crushed under the weight of exhausting labor, drenched in insults. We are not considered human beings but are treated as slaves who must suffer their sad fate in silence. We have suffered all this patiently. But we are now being thrown to the very bottom of the abyss where only ignorance and despotism will be our lot. We are being smothered by despotism and by a treatment contrary to all human laws.

We can endure no more, Oh Tsar! The terrible moment has come when we would really rather die than continue our unbearable sufferings. This is why we have stopped working and why we told our bosses that we will not return until they have granted our just demands.

We have asked for very little, yet without the little we have asked for our life is not a life, but a hell, an eternal torture.

Our first request asks our bosses to take full account of our needs, in agreement with us. And they have refused! We have been denied the very right to discuss our needs, under the pretext that the law does not recognize such a right.

Our demand for an eight hour day has also been rejected as illegal.

We have asked for participation in the determination of our wages; for arbitration in case of disagreement between us and the internal administration of the factory; for a minimum wage of a rouble a day for unskilled workers, men and women; for the suppression of overtime; for safety in the workplaces so that those who work there will not die of wind, rain or snow ... We have also asked for care for the sick; we have also asked that orders given to us not be accompanied by insults.

All these demands have been rejected as contrary to the law. The very act of formulating demands has been interpreted as a crime. The desire to improve our situation is considered by our bosses as insolence toward them.

Oh Emperor! Those of us here number more than 300,000 human beings. And yet we are human beings only in appearance. In reality we have no human rights. We are not allowed to speak, to think, to meet for the purpose of discussing our needs, to take measures to improve our situation. Whoever among us dares to raise his voice in favor of the working class is thrown into prison or exile. To have a generous heart and a sensitive soul are considered crimes. To express feelings of fraternity toward the unfortunate, the homeless, the victimized, the fallen, is an abominable crime.

Oh Tsar! Is all this consistent with the commandments of God, through whose power you govern? Is life worth living under such laws? Would it not be preferable for all of us, Russian workers, to die, leaving the capitalists and the functionaries to live alone and enjoy their lives?

Lord, such is the future that awaits us. And this is why we are assembled in front of Your palace. You are our last hope; Do not refuse to help bring Your people out of the pit of outlaws where there is only misery and ignorance. Give Your people a chance, a means to realize their real destiny. Deliver them from the intolerable oppression of the bureaucrats. Demolish the wall that separates You from the people and call them to rule the country jointly with You.

You have been sent down here to lead the people to happiness. Yet bit by bit, happiness is taken from us by your functionaries, who give us only pain and humiliation.

Look over our demands with attention and without anger. They have been formulated, not for evil, but for good, for our good, Lord, and for Yours. It is not insolence that speaks in us, but awareness of the general need to put an end to the insupportable situation of today.

Russia is too enormous, its needs are too varied for her to be led by a government composed solely of bureaucrats. It is absolutely necessary for the people to participate in the government, because only the people know their needs.

Do not, therefore, refuse to help Your people. Tell the representatives of all the classes in the country to assemble without delay. Let the capitalists and the workers be represented. Let the functionaries, the priests, the doctors and the professors choose

their delegates as well. Let each be free to elect whoever pleases him. To this end, allow the election of a Constituent Assembly under a system of universal suffrage.

This is our central demand; everything else depends on it. This would be the best and the only real balm for our open wounds. If it is not applied, our wounds will remain open and we will bleed to death.

There is no panacea for all our ills. Various cures are needed. We are going to list them now. We speak to you with sincerity, with open hearts, Lord, as to a father.

The following measures are indispensable.

The first group consists of measures against the absence of all rights and against the ignorance which marks the Russian people. These measures include:

1. Personal freedom and integrity; freedom of speech, of the press, of association, of thought in religious matters; separation of Church and State.
2. State-supported universal and compulsory education.
3. Ministers who are responsible before the nation; guarantees for the legality of administrative measures.
4. Equality of all individuals before the law, without exception.
5. Immediate release of all those imprisoned for their beliefs.

The second group consists of measures against poverty:

1. Abolition of all indirect taxation. Direct and progressive taxation of incomes.
2. Repeal of the fees for the purchase of lands. Low interest credit, gradual remission of the land to the people.

The third group consists of measures against the crushing of labor by capital:

1. Legal protection of labor.
2. The freedom of workers to establish unions for the purpose of cooperation and to regulate professional problems.
3. An eight-hour working day; restriction of overtime.
4. The freedom of labor to struggle against capital.
5. Participation of representatives of the working class in the preparation of a law on State insurance for the workers.
6. Minimum wages.

These, Lord, are our principal needs. Command their fulfillment. Swear to us that this shall be done, and You will make Russia happy and glorious, and Your name will forever be inscribed in our hearts, in the hearts of our children and of our children's children.

But if You do not give Your promise, if You do not accept our petition, we have decided to die here, on this square, in front of Your palace, because we have nowhere to go, nor any reason to be elsewhere. For us, only two paths are open: one leads to

freedom and happiness, the other, to the grave. Point to one of these paths, oh Tsar, and we will follow it, even if it leads us to death.

If our lives become a holocaust for suffering Russia, we will not regret the sacrifice. We offer it with joy.

It is noteworthy that despite all the paradoxical elements of the situation that was created, the action which was being prepared was no more, for an informed observer, than the logical outcome of the combined pressure of various real factors; it was a natural “synthesis” of the various elements at play.

On the one hand, the idea of a collective demonstration before the Tsar was in essence nothing more than a manifestation of the naive faith of the popular masses in the Tsar’s good will. (We have already described the hold which the “legend of the Tsar” exerted on the people). Russian workers, who had never broken their bond with the countryside, momentarily returned to the ancient peasant tradition by going to ask the “little father” for help and protection. Taking advantage of the unusual situation which was offered to them, roused by a spontaneous and irresistible outburst, they undoubtedly tried to point to the sore spot, to obtain a concrete and definitive solution. While expecting, from the bottom of their hearts, at least a partial success, they wanted most of all to know where they stood.

On the other hand, the influence of the revolutionary parties — who could do nothing but stand aside, too powerless to stop the movement, not to speak of substituting for it a more revolutionary movement — was nevertheless strong enough to exert some pressure on Gapon, obliging him to “revolutionize” his act.

In short the act was a bastard, but natural, product of the forces in play.

As for intellectual and liberal circles, they could do no more than passively observe the events as they unfolded.

The behavior and psychology of Gapon himself, paradoxical as they may seem, can nevertheless be easily explained. Originally no more than a clown, an agent in the pay of the police, he was swept along by the tremendous wave of the popular movement which drove him irresistibly forward. The movement ultimately carried him with it. Events placed him, despite himself, at the head of crowds who idolized him. Adventurous and romantic in spirit, he must have let himself be nursed by an illusion. Instinctively aware of the historical importance of the events, he probably drew himself an exaggerated picture. He could already see the entire country undergoing a revolution, the throne in danger, and himself, Gapon, supreme leader of the movement, idol of the people, carried to the summit of glory. Fascinated by this dream that reality seemed to justify, he finally gave himself body and soul to the movement he had started. His role as police agent ceased to interest him. He no longer even thought of it during the course of these feverish days, completely dazzled by the lightning of the enormous storm, completely absorbed by his new role, which must have seemed to him almost a divine mission. Such was probably the outlook of Gapon at the beginning of January, 1905. It is reasonable to assume that at this moment, and in this sense, he was sincere. At least that’s the personal impression of the author of these lines, who met Gapon a few days before the events and saw him in action.

Even the strangest factor of all — the silence of the government and the complete absence of all police intervention during the days of feverish preparation — can easily be explained. The police could not read the thoughts of the new Gapon. They trusted him to the very end, interpreting his action as a clever move. And when the police finally did become aware of the change



and the imminent danger, they could no longer stop or master the events that broke out. Somewhat disconcerted at first, the government finally decided to wait for the opportunity to wipe out the movement in a single blow. For a moment, having received no orders, the police didn't budge. We should add that this incomprehensible and mysterious fact encouraged the masses and raised their hopes. "The government doesn't dare oppose the movement; it'll give in," people commented.

The march toward the Winter Palace was set for Sunday morning, January 9 (old calendar). The last days were devoted mainly to public readings of the "petition" at the "sections." The same sequence was repeated almost everywhere. During the course of the day, Gapon himself or one of his friends read and commented on the petition to masses of workers who took turns filling the meeting places. As soon as the place filled, the door was closed and the petition was read; those present signed their names on a separate sheet and left the room. Another crowd of people who had patiently waited for their turn in the street filled the room, and the ceremony was repeated. This continued to take place in all the sections until after midnight.

What gave a tragic note to these last preparations was the supreme appeal of the orator and the crowd's solemn, grim oath in response to the appeal. "Comrade workers, peasants and others!" said the orator, "Brothers in misery! Be loyal to the cause and to the demonstration, all of you. Come to the square in front of the Winter Palace on Sunday morning. Your failure to do so will be treason to our cause. But come quietly and peacefully, living up to the solemn hour that strikes. Father Gapon has already warned the Tsar and has personally assured him that he will be safe among you. If you allow yourselves a misplaced act, Father Gapon will have to answer for it. You have heard the petition. Our demands are just. We can no longer continue this miserable life. That's why we're going to the Tsar with open arms, our hearts full of love and hope. All he has to do is receive us and listen to our request. Gapon himself will give him the petition. Let us hope, comrades, let us hope, brothers, that the Tsar receives us, that he listens to us and that he takes steps to satisfy our just demands. But, brothers, if instead of receiving us, the Tsar turns on us with guns and swords, then, my brothers, pity for him! *Then we no longer have a Tsar. Then let him be damned forever, together with his entire dynasty!* Swear, all of you, comrades, brothers, plain citizens, swear that then you will never forget his betrayal. Swear that then you will try to destroy the traitor in every way possible ..." And the entire assembly, completely carried away, raised their hands and answered: "We swear!"

Where Gapon himself read the petition — and he read it at least once at every section — he added: "I, the priest George Gapon, through the will of God, free you in that case from the oath given to the Tsar, and I bless in advance whosoever shall destroy him. Because *in that case we will no longer have a Tsar!*" Pale with emotion, he repeated this phrase two or three times to the silent and trembling audience.

"Swear that you'll follow me, swear on the heads of your dear ones, your children!" "Yes, father, yes! We swear on the heads of our children!" was invariably the response.

On January 8, in the evening, everything was ready for the march. Certain intellectual and literary circles learned that the decision of the government had been taken: under no circumstances was the crowd to approach the Palace; if the crowd insisted, shoot without pity. In all haste, a delegation was dispatched to the authorities to try to prevent the shedding of blood. But in vain. All the orders had already been given. The capital was in the hands of troops armed to the teeth.

The rest is known. On Sunday, January 9, in the morning, an immense crowd composed mainly of workers (often with their families) as well as various other elements, began to move in the direction of the Winter Palace. Tens of thousands of people, men, women and children, starting out from all parts of the capital and its suburbs, marched toward the meeting place.

Everywhere they ran into curtains of troops and police who fired continuously at this human sea. But the pressure of this compact mass of people — a pressure which continued to increase from one minute to the next — was such that the crowd continued to move toward the palace anyway, and without pause, filling and congesting the streets around it. Thousands of people, dispersed by the shots, obstinately moved toward the goal, taking side streets and detours, moved by the impetus of the action, by curiosity, by anger, by the pressing need to cry out their indignation and their horror. There were many who continued, in spite of everything, to retain a spark of hope, believing that if only they could succeed in reaching the square in front of the Tsar's palace, the Tsar would come to them, would receive them and would mend everything. Others thought that, faced with a *fait accompli*, the Tsar could no longer resist and would be obliged to give in. Still others, the most naive, imagined that the Tsar was not aware of what was happening, that he knew nothing of the butchery, and that the police, after concealing the facts from the very beginning, were now trying to keep the people from coming into contact with the "Little Father." So they had to reach the Tsar at all costs ... Furthermore, they had sworn to be there ... And finally, Gapon was there; perhaps he had succeeded in reaching the Tsar ...

In any case, waves of human beings broke through from every direction and finally invaded the immediate surroundings of the Winter Palace and entered the square itself. The government found nothing better to do than to shoot, to sweep away the disarmed, distressed and despairing crowd with rounds of fire.

It was a terrifying spectacle, a vision which could hardly be imagined, unique in history. Machine-gunned point blank, screaming with fear, pain and rage, this immense crowd, unable either to advance or retreat because its own size prevented all movement, received what was later called a "blood bath." Driven back slightly by each round, as if by a strong gust of wind, partly trampled, suffocated, crushed, the crowd formed again, over dead bodies, over the dying, over the injured, pushed by new masses who arrived, and continued to arrive, from behind. And new rounds of fire periodically sent a shudder of death through this living mass. This went on for a long time: until the adjacent streets finally emptied, and the crowd was able to escape.

Hundreds of men, women and children perished on this day in the capital. The authorities intoxicated the soldiers so as to dull their consciences and remove all their scruples. Some soldiers, completely mindless, installed in a garden near the palace, amused themselves by "shooting down" children who had climbed trees "to see better."

Towards evening, "order was reestablished." The number of victims was never known, even approximately. But what is known is that, during that night, long trains filled with corpses transported all these poor bodies outside the city; they were buried haphazardly in fields and forests.

It was also known that the Tsar was not even in the capital on that day. After having given a free hand to the military authorities, he had taken refuge in one of his summer residences: at Tsarskoye Selo near St. Petersburg.

Gapon, surrounded by carriers of icons and pictures of the Tsar, led a large crowd which moved toward the palace by way of the Narva Gate. As elsewhere, this crowd was dispersed by troops stationed at the very approaches to the Gate. He barely escaped. As soon as the first shots were fired, he lay flat on his stomach and did not budge. For a few instants people thought he had been

injured or killed. But he was quickly carried off to safety by friends. His long hair was cut, and he was dressed as a civilian.

Some time later he was abroad, completely out of reach. Before he left Russia, he launched the following short appeal to the workers:

I, the pastor, curse all those, officers and soldiers, who in this hour massacred their innocent brothers, women, and children. I curse all the oppressors of the people. My blessing goes to the soldiers who give assistance to the people in their struggle for freedom. I release them from their oath of loyalty to the Tsar — the traitor Tsar whose orders caused the people's blood to flow.

In addition, he prepared another proclamation which said:

... Comrade workers, there is no longer a Tsar! Today torrents of blood flowed between him and the Russian people. The time has come for the Russian workers to undertake the struggle for the liberation of the people without him. You have my blessing in this struggle. Tomorrow I will be in your midst. Today I am working for the pause.

These appeals were distributed in great numbers throughout the country.

This might be the best place for a few words about the fate of Gapon.

Saved by his friends, the ex-priest settled abroad. Certain Socialist-Revolutionaries took care of him. From now on his future depended only on him. He was given everything he needed to break with his past, to complete his education and to formulate his ideological position, in short to really become a man of action.

But Gapon was not made of such stuff. The sacred fire which once accidentally burned in his dark soul was in him nothing more than the fire of ambition and personal indulgence; the spark went out quickly. Instead of devoting himself to the work of self-education and preparation for serious activity, Gapon was content with inactivity, mother of boredom. Slow, patient work meant nothing to him. He dreamed of an immediate and glorious repetition of his ephemeral adventure. But in Russia events dragged on. The great Revolution did not come. His boredom grew. He finally turned to debauchery to try to forget. He passed most of his time in shady cabarets where, half drunk, in the company of prostitutes, he wept bitterly about his broken illusions. His life abroad disgusted him. The situation of his country tortured him. He wanted to return to Russia at any price.

So he conceived of the idea of writing to his government, asking for pardon and for permission to return in order to render his services again. He wrote to the secret police. He resumed his relations with it.

His former chiefs received his offer rather favorably. But before consenting they asked him for material proof of his repentance and his good will. Aware of his acquaintance with influential members of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, they asked him to furnish precise information which would help them deal the decisive blow against this party. Gapon accepted the offer.

In the meantime, one of the influential members of the party, the engineer Rutemberg, Gapon's intimate friend, heard about the new relations between Gapon and the police. He mentioned the matter to the Central Committee of the party. The committee charged him (Rutemberg himself

told about this in his memoirs) with the task of doing everything within his power to unmask Gapon.

Rutemberg had to play a role. He did this successfully and won the confidence of Gapon, who assumed that the engineer would voluntarily betray his party for a large sum of money. This was precisely what Gapon proposed to him. Rutemberg acted as if he accepted. It was agreed that, through Gapon, he would deliver to the police some very important party secrets.

They bargained about the price. This bargaining — which Rutemberg feigned and purposely dragged out, while Gapon carried it out with the agreement of the police — finally ended in Russia when Gapon as well as Rutemberg were able to return.

The last act of the play took place in St. Petersburg. As soon as he arrived, Rutemberg forewarned some workers who were Gapon's loyal friends; they refused to believe that he was a traitor; Rutemberg told them he could supply incontestable proof. It was agreed that the Gaponist workers be hidden at the last meeting between Gapon and Rutemberg, a meeting where the price to be paid for Rutemberg's "betray-al" was to be settled once and for all.

The meeting took place at a deserted villa not far from the capital. The workers, hidden in a room adjacent to the room where the meeting was taking place, were to remain in this room, without being seen, so as to be convinced of the real role of Gapon and to be able to unmask him publicly.

But the workers couldn't contain themselves. As soon as they were convinced of Gapon's treason, they burst into the room where the two men were talking. They threw themselves on Gapon, grabbed him and, despite his pleading (which was pathetic; he got down on his knees and begged for their pardon in the name of his past) killed him brutally. Then they put a rope around his neck and hung him from the ceiling. It was in this position that his body was accidentally found some time later.

Thus ended the personal epic of Gapon.

In his memoirs, which are largely sincere, Gapon tried—very awkwardly — to justify in his own way his relations with the police before January 9, 1905. On this point he seems not to have told the whole truth.

As for the movement, it followed on its course.

The events of January 9 had enormous repercussions throughout the country. In the darkest corners of the land, the population learned with indignant stupefaction that instead of listening to the people who had come peacefully to the Palace to tell their miseries to the Tsar, the ruler had coldly given the order to shoot. Over a long period of time, peasants delegated by their villages went secretly to St. Petersburg with the mission of learning the truth.

Soon everyone knew the truth. *It was only then that the "legend of the Tsar" disappeared.*

Another historical paradox! In 1881 some revolutionaries had assassinated the Tsar in order to kill the legend. It survived. Twenty-four years later it was the Tsar himself who killed it.

At St. Petersburg, the events of January 9 had the effect of enlarging the strike. It became a total general strike. On Monday, January 10, not a single factory or shipyard moved. A movement of muted revolt rumbled everywhere. The first great revolutionary strike of the Russian workers — the strike of the St. Petersburg workers — became an accomplished fact.

An important conclusion can be drawn from everything that precedes:

*Before the population could begin to understand the real nature of Tsarism, the totality of the situation and the real tasks of the struggle, they needed to live through a tangible and extensive*

*historical experience. Neither propaganda nor the sacrifices of enthusiasts could have led to this result by themselves.*

## Chapter 2. The Birth of the “Soviets”

We now arrive at one of the most important aspects of the Russian Revolution: *the origin and the initial activity of the “Soviets.”*

Another paradoxical fact: this is one of the least understood and most frequently distorted aspects of the Revolution.

In all that has been written to this day on the origin of the “Soviets” — I do not only speak of foreign studies, but also of Russian documents — there is a gap which the interested reader cannot fail to notice: *no one has yet been able to determine precisely when, where or how the first workers’ “Soviet” was formed.*

Until today, almost all writers and historians, bourgeois as well as socialist (“Menshevik,” “Bolshevik” or other) dated the origin of the first “Workers’ Soviet” *at the end of 1905*, at the time of the October general strike, of the well known Tsarist manifesto of October 17 and the events which followed. By reading the following pages the reader will understand the reason for this gap.

Some authors — notably P. Miliukov in his memoirs — vaguely allude to a forerunner of the future “Soviets” at the beginning of 1905. But they fail to give any precise details. And when they try to give details, they are wrong. Thus Miliukov believes that he found the origin of the Soviets in the “Chidlovsky Commission.” This was an official enterprise — half governmental and half liberal — which tried in vain to resolve certain social problems on the eve of January, 1905, with the collaboration of official delegates representing workers. According to Miliukov, one of the delegates, an intellectual by the name of Nossar, together with other delegates, formed a “Soviet” on the fringes of the Commission — the first Workers’ Soviet — and Nossar became the moving spirit as well as president of this Soviet. This is vague. And more importantly, it is inaccurate. When Nossar appeared at the “Chidlovsky Commission,” as we will show, *he was already a member — and also president — of the first Workers’ Soviet, which was formed before this “Commission” and had no connections with it.* Similar errors have been made by other authors.

The Social-Democrats sometimes present themselves as the real instigators of the first Soviet.

The Bolsheviks often do their utmost to steal this honor from them.

All of them are wrong, being ignorant of the truth, which is very simple: not one party, not one permanent organization, not one “leader” gave birth to the idea of the first Soviet. *The Soviet rose spontaneously, as the result of a collective agreement, in the context of a small, casual, and completely private gathering.*<sup>1</sup>

The material the reader will find here has not been published before and constitutes one of the least expected chapters of the “Unknown Revolution.” It is time to reconstitute the historical truth. This is made even more urgent by the fact that this truth is quite suggestive.

---

<sup>1</sup>Lenin, in his Works, and Bukharin, in his ABC of Communism, are perfectly right when they mention in passing that the “Soviets” were spontaneously formed by workers in 1905, but they fail to give details, and they give the impression that these workers were Bolsheviks, or at least “sympathizers.”

I hope the reader will excuse me for having to speak about myself. I was involuntarily involved in the birth of the first “Soviet of Workers’ Delegates” which was formed in St. Petersburg, not at the end of 1905, but in *January-February* of that year.

Today I am probably the only person who can relate and date this historical episode, unless one of the workers who took part in the action at the time is still alive and able to tell the story.

I’ve wanted to narrate these facts on several previous occasions. Whenever I studied the newspapers — Russian as well as foreign — I always found the same gap: not one writer was able to tell exactly where, when and how the first workers’ Soviet appeared in Russia. All that was known, all that has been known until today, is that this Soviet was born in St. Petersburg in 1905, and that its first president was a St. Petersburg legal clerk, Nossar, better known in the Soviet by the name of *Khrustalev*. *But where and how did the idea of this Soviet originate? Why was it launched? In what circumstances was it adopted and put into practice? How and why did Nossar become the president? Where did he come from, what party did he belong to? Who were the people in the first Soviet? What function did it serve?* All of these historically important questions remain unanswered.

We should emphasize that this gap is understandable. *The birth of the first Soviet was a completely private event. It took place in a very intimate atmosphere, beyond the reach of all publicity, outside of any far-reaching campaign or action.*

The reader can indirectly verify what I am saying. In the writings that treat this aspect of the Russian Revolution, the reader will find the name of *Nossar-Khrustalev*, mentioned almost incidentally. But he will also find something puzzling: no one ever says how or when this man appeared on the scene, why and in what circumstances he became president of the first Soviet. Socialist writers are visibly annoyed to have to speak of Nossar. They seem not to want to mention his name. Unable to be silent about this historical fact (which they would prefer), they mumble a few incomprehensible and imprecise words about Nossar and his role and then hasten to deal with the activity of the Soviets at the end of 1905, when Leon Trotsky became president of the St. Petersburg Soviet.

This discretion, this annoyance, and this haste can easily be understood. First of all, neither the historians nor the socialists (including Trotsky) nor the political parties in general *have ever known anything about the real origin of the Soviets*, and it is undoubtedly annoying to admit this. Secondly, even if the socialists learned the facts and wanted to take them into account, they would have to admit that they had absolutely nothing to do with this event and that all they did was to take advantage of it much later. This is why, whether or not they know the truth, they will try in every way possible to glide over this fact and to paint a picture favorable to themselves.

What has kept me from narrating these facts until now<sup>2</sup> is above all a feeling of annoyance caused by the need to speak about myself. On the other hand, I have never had the occasion to write about the Soviets for the “general press,” for which, furthermore, I don’t write. As time passed I did not decide to end my silence about the origin of the Soviets, to fight against the errors and the legends, to unveil the truth.

However, one time, several years ago, disturbed by the pretentious allusions and lies in certain articles and journals, I visited M. Melgunov, publisher of a Russian historical journal in Paris. I offered him, purely for the purpose of documentation, a detailed account of the birth of the first Workers’ Soviet. My offer led to nothing: first of all because the publisher refused to accept, a

---

<sup>2</sup>Missing footnote

priori, my condition that nothing be changed in my text; secondly because I learned that his journal was far from being an impartial historical publication.

Obligated to speak of the Soviets, I narrate the facts as they unfolded. And if the press — historical or other — is interested, it can find the truth here.

In 1904 I was engaged in cultural and educational work among St. Petersburg workers. I carried out my project alone, following my own method. I did not belong to any political party, although I was intuitively revolutionary. I was only 22 years old, and I had just left the University.

Towards the end of the year, I was instructing more than a hundred workers.

Among my students there was a young woman who, together with her husband, belonged to one of Gapon's Work-

I should mention one exception I mentioned these facts in a brief study of the Russian Revolution, published by Sebastien Faure in the *Encyclopedic Anarchiste*, under the word "Revolution." Afterwards Faure published a book with the title *La veritable Revolution sociale*, where he reprinted some of the studies that had appeared in the encyclopedia, including mine. But since the "general public" does not read libertarian literature, the facts which were cited remained almost unknown. "Sections." Until then I had heard almost nothing about Gapon or his "sections." One evening, my student took me along to our neighborhood "section," eager to interest me in this work and in its founder. That evening Gapon himself was to attend the meeting.

At that time the real role of Gapon had not yet been determined. Progressive workers did not have complete confidence in his project — because it was legal and emanated from the government — but they had their own interpretation of it. The somewhat mysterious behavior of the priest seemed to confirm their interpretation. They believed that under the protective shield of legality, Gapon was actually preparing a vast revolutionary movement. (This is one of the reasons why many workers later refused to believe that the man had been a police agent. Once this role was definitely exposed, some of the workers who had been Gapon's intimate friends committed suicide.)

At the end of December, I met Gapon.

His personality fascinated me. On his part, he seemed-or wanted to seem — interested in my educational work.

We agreed to see each other again and to talk at greater length, and for this purpose Gapon gave me his visiting card with his address.

A few days later the famous strike of the Putilov factory began. Soon after that, precisely on the evening of January 6, (1905) my student, filled with emotion, came to tell me that events were taking an extremely serious turn; that Gapon had set in motion an immense movement of the working masses of the capital; that he was visiting all the sections, haranguing the crowd and calling on them to gather on Sunday, January 9 in front of the Winter Palace to give a "petition" to the Tsar; that he had already written this petition and would read it and comment on it in our Section the following evening, January 7.

The news seemed highly unlikely to me. I decided to attend the Section the following evening, wanting to evaluate the situation on my own.

The following day I went to the Section. A large crowd gathered, filling the room and the street, in spite of the intense cold. The people were serious and silent. In addition to the workers, there were people from various walks of life: intellectuals, students, soldiers, police agents, small neighborhood merchants. There were also many women. There were no guards ("service d'ordre").



I went into the room. People were waiting for “Father” Gapon to come any minute.

It was not long before he came. He quickly made his way to the platform, through a compact mass of people, all standing and pressed tightly against each other. There might have been a thousand people in the room.

The silence was impressive. Suddenly, without even taking off his enormous fur coat which he only unbuttoned, making his cassock and his priest’s silver cross visible, removing his large winter hat with a brusque and determined gesture, and letting his long hair fall, Gapon read and explained the petition to this large crowd who, from the first words, listened attentively and trembled.

In spite of his extremely hoarse voice — he had been wearing himself out without pause for several days — his slow speech, almost solemn but at the same time warm and visibly sincere, went right to the heart of all these people who responded deliriously to all his pleadings and appeals.

The impression he made was unforgettable. One felt that something immense and decisive was going to happen. I remember that I trembled with extraordinary emotion during the entire harangue.

When he had barely finished, Gapon stepped down from the platform and left in a hurry, surrounded by a few loyal followers, inviting the crowd outside to listen while the petition was read again by one of his collaborators.

Separated from him by all these people, seeing that he was in a hurry, absorbed and worn out by a superhuman effort and also surrounded by friends, I did not try to approach him. Furthermore, this would have been pointless. I had understood that what my student had told me was true: an enormous movement of the masses, a movement of exceptional importance, was being launched.

I went to the Section once again on the following evening, January 8. I wanted to see what was happening. And mainly I wanted to come into contact with the masses, to take part in their action, to give shape to my own conduct. Several of my students accompanied me.

What I found at the Section told me what I had to do.

First of all, I once again saw a crowd gathered in the street. I was told that inside a member of the Section was reading the “petition.” I waited.

A few minutes later the door opened briskly. About a thousand people left the room. Another thousand rushed in. I went in with them.

As soon as the door was closed, a Gaponist worker sitting on the platform began to read the petition.

Alas! It was abominable. With a weak and monotonous voice, completely spiritless, without giving the slightest explanation or conclusion, the man mumbled the text in front of an attentive and anxious crowd. He finished his boring lecture in ten minutes. Then the room was emptied to receive another thousand people.

I had a brief consultation with my friends. We decided. I rushed toward the stage. Until that day I had never spoken in front of the masses. But I did not hesitate. It was absolutely necessary to change the manner of informing and educating the people.

I went up to the worker who was getting ready to do his duty once again. “You must really be tired,” I told him. “Let me replace you ...” He looked at me with surprise; he was disconcerted. It was the first time he had seen me. “Don’t be afraid,” I continued. “I’m Gapon’s friend. Here’s proof.” And I showed him Gapon’s visiting card. My friends supported my offer.

The man finally gave in. He got up, gave me the petition, and left the platform.

I began reading immediately, then continued by interpreting the document, emphasizing particularly the essential passages, the protests and demands, being particularly insistent about the certainty that the Tsar would refuse.

I read the petition several times, until very late into the night. I slept at the Section together with some friends, on top of tables pushed against each other.

The following morning—the famous January 9 — I had to read the petition one or two more times. Then we went out to the street. An enormous crowd waited for us there, ready to start out at the first sign. At 9 o'clock my friends and I lined up, arm in arm, in the first three rows, and, inviting the crowd to follow us, we set out toward the Palace. The crowd stirred and followed us in tight rows.

We obviously didn't reach either the square or the palace. Forced to cross the Neva, we ran into a wall of troops at the approaches to the so-called "Trotsky" bridge. After a few ineffective warnings, the troops started to shoot. The second round was particularly murderous; the crowd stopped and dispersed, leaving about thirty dead and twice as many injured. It should be mentioned that many soldiers fired into the air; a number of windows in the upper stories of the houses facing the troops were shattered by the bullets.

A few days passed. The strike remained almost complete in St. Petersburg.

It should be emphasized that this enormous strike had broken out spontaneously. It was not launched by any political party, by any union apparatus (at that time there were none in Russia), or by any strike committee. On their own initiative and with a completely free impetus, the working masses left factories and yards. The political parties were not even able to take advantage of the movement by taking it over, as is their habit. They were completely bypassed.

Nevertheless, the workers soon confronted the question:

What to do now?

Poverty knocked on the door of the strikers. It had to be confronted without delay. On the other hand, workers everywhere asked how they should and could continue the struggle. The "Sections," deprived of their leader, found themselves crippled and nearly powerless. The political parties gave no sign of life. Nevertheless an organ which would coordinate and lead the action was urgently needed.

I don't know how this problem was posed and solved in other parts of the capital. Perhaps some of the "Sections" were able to provide at least material aid to the strikers in their regions. As for the quarter where I lived, events took a specific turn. And as the reader will see, they later led to a

generalized action.

Meetings of about forty workers of my neighborhood took place in my house every day. The police left us alone for the time being. After the recent events the police maintained a mysterious neutrality. We took advantage of this neutrality. We looked for ways to act. We were on the verge of making some decisions. My students and I decided to put an end to our study group and individually join the political parties so as to be active. All of us considered the events to be the beginning of a revolution.

One evening, about eight days after January 9, someone knocked at the door of my room. I was alone. A young man came in: tall, with an open and sympathetic manner.

"You're so-and-so?" he asked. When I nodded, he continued:

"I've been looking for you for a long time. Finally yesterday I learned your address. I'm George Nossar, a legal clerk. I'll get to the reason for my visit. On January 8 I listened to your reading of the petition. I could see that you had many friends, many relations with workers' circles. And it seems that you don't belong to any political party."

"That's right."

"Well, I don't belong to a political party either; I don't trust them. But personally I'm a revolutionary, and I sympathize with the workers' movement. But I don't have any acquaintances among workers. On the other hand I have extensive contacts with circles of bourgeois liberals who oppose the regime. So I have an idea. I know that thousands of workers, their wives and children are suffering terribly because of the strike. On the other hand, I know some rich businessmen who would like nothing better than to help these miserable people. In short, I could collect fairly large sums for the strikers. But the problem is how to distribute them in an organized, fair and useful manner. I thought of you. Could you and some of the workers you know take charge of receiving the sums I can bring, and could you distribute them among the strikers and the families of the victims of January 9?"

I accepted right away. Among my friends there was a worker who had access to his boss's cart, which he could use to visit workers and distribute relief.

I got together with my friends the following evening. Nossar was there. He had already brought several thousand roubles. Our action began right away.

After a while our days were completely taken up by this task. In the evening I accepted the necessary funds from Nossar, and prepared my schedule of visits. And the following morning, helped by my friends, I distributed the money to strikers. Nossar thus got acquainted with the workers who came to see me.

But the strike was ending. Every day some workers returned to work. At the same time, the funds were running out.

Then the serious question came up again: What to do? How to continue the action? And what form could it take now?

The prospect of separating for good, without trying to continue a common activity, seemed painful and senseless. The decision we had taken to individually join the party of our choice no longer satisfied us. We wanted something else.

Nossar regularly took part in our discussion.

One evening when there were several workers at my house, as usual — Nossar was there too — we had the idea of forming a permanent workers' organization: something like a committee, or a council, which would keep track of the sequence of events, would serve as a link among all the workers, would inform them about the situation and could, if necessary, be a rallying point for revolutionary workers.

I don't remember exactly how this idea came to us. But I think I remember that it was the workers themselves who suggested it.

The word Soviet which, in Russian, means precisely council, was pronounced for the first time with this specific meaning.

In short, this first council represented something like a permanent social assembly of workers.

The idea was adopted. Then and there it was decided how the "Soviet" was to be organized and how it was to function.

The project grew rapidly.

The decision was made to tell workers in all large factories about the new creation and to proceed, still informally, to the election of officers of the organization which was named, for the first time, a council (Soviet) of Workers' Delegates.

Yet another question was asked: Who would direct the work of the Soviet? Who would head it and guide it?

The workers who were there unhesitatingly offered me this post.

Moved by the trust the workers expressed in me, I nevertheless turned down their offer. I told my friends: "You're workers. You want to create an organism that will deal with your interests as workers. Learn, then, from the very beginning, to deal with your problems yourselves. Don't commit your destiny to someone who is not one of you. Don't set new masters over yourselves; they'll end up by dominating and betraying you. I am convinced that in everything that has to do with your struggles and your liberation, only you yourselves will ever be able to reach real results. For you, above you, in place of you yourselves, no one will ever do anything. You should find your president, your secretary and the members of your administrative commission from among yourselves. If you need information or clarification on certain specific questions, in short if you need intellectual or moral advice which presupposes a certain amount of education, then you can turn to intellectuals, to educated people who should be happy, not to lead you as masters, but to give you their help without interfering in your organizations. They're obliged to give you this help because it's not your fault that you've been deprived of the necessary education. These intellectual friends could even attend your meetings — but only as consultants."

I added another objection: "How could I be a member of your organization, not being a worker? In what way could I get in?"

In answer to this last question, I was told that nothing was easier. A worker's card would be found for me, and I would take part in the organization under another name.

I protested vigorously against such a procedure. I considered it not only unworthy of me and of the workers, but also dangerous and ill-fated. "In a workers' movement everything should be straightforward, honest, sincere."

But in spite of my suggestions, my friends did not feel strong enough to do without a "guide." So they offered the crat Trotsky, future Bolshevik Commissar, entered the Soviet and had himself nominated secretary. Afterwards, when Khrustalev-Nossar was arrested, Trotsky became president.

The example given by the workers of the capital in January, 1905, was followed by workers of several other cities. Workers' Soviets were formed here and there. Nevertheless, at that time their existence was temporary: they were quickly spotted and suppressed by local authorities.

On the other hand, as we have seen, the St. Petersburg Soviet continued to function over a long period. The central government, discredited after the events of January 9, and particularly after the major setbacks it underwent in its war against Japan, did not dare to touch it. For the time being it limited itself to the arrest of Nossar.

Furthermore, the January strike had come to an end because of its own lack of momentum. In the absence of a more extensive movement, the activity of the first Soviet was soon reduced to insignificant tasks.

The St. Petersburg Soviet was finally suppressed at the end of 1905. The Tsarist government got back on its feet, "liquidated" the last vestiges of the revolutionary movement of 1905, arrested Trotsky as well as hundreds of revolutionaries, and destroyed all the political organizations of the left.

The Soviet of St. Petersburg (which became Petrograd) reappeared at the time of the decisive revolution of February-March, 1917, when Soviets were formed in all the cities and major regions of the country.

## Chapter 3. The Disastrous War; Victory of a Revolutionary Strike

The waves raised by the events of January 1905 were not to be calmed right away. This time the entire country had been jolted.

From Spring, 1905 on, the general situation of the Tsarist regime became increasingly untenable. The main reason was the bitter defeat experienced by Tsarist Russia in its war against Japan.

This war, which began in February, 1904, accompanied by a great deal of arrogance and carried out largely with the aim of stimulating nationalistic, patriotic, and monarchist feelings, was hopelessly lost. The Russian army and fleet were totally defeated.

Public opinion openly blamed the incompetence of the authorities and the degeneration of the regime for the failure. Not only masses of workers, but other strata as well, were rapidly seized by a growing anger and spirit of revolt. The effect of the defeats — which followed one another in rapid succession — was overwhelming. People could no longer contain their feelings: indignation knew no limits, and agitation became widespread.

The government, aware of its defeat, was silent.

Taking advantage of the situation, liberal and revolutionary circles began a violent campaign against the regime. Without asking for authorization, people practiced freedom of speech and of the press. It was a veritable conquest of “political freedoms.” Journals of all tendencies, even revolutionary ones, appeared and were freely sold, without censorship or control. The government and the entire system were vigorously criticized.

Even timid liberals turned to action: they founded numerous professional unions: the “Union of Unions” (a type of Central Committee directing the activity of all the unions), the secret “Union of Liberation” (a political organization). They also rushed to formally organize a political party called the “Constitutional-Democratic Party.” The government was constrained to tolerate all this, as it had already tolerated the January strike and the meetings of the Soviet.

Political assassinations followed each other at an accelerating rate.

Violent demonstrations, even serious uprisings, broke out in various cities. In some places people set up barricades.

In various provinces peasants rebelled, unleashing actual “jacqueries” (peasant revolts), burning castles, appropriating the land, chasing out or even assassinating the landowners. A *Union of Peasants* with a socialist program was formed. The enemies of the regime were becoming too numerous and too audacious. And, above all, they were right.

The military defeat of the government and its distressing “moral” situation do not explain everything. But they do explain the fact that it lacked the most important means for opposing the movement: money. Negotiations taking place abroad, mainly in France, for the purpose of securing a loan, dragged on endlessly because of lack of confidence in the Tsarist regime.

During the summer of 1905 serious troubles developed in the army and the navy. The well known revolt and epic of the battleship *Prince Potemkin*, one of the major units of the navy in the

Black Sea, was the outstanding episode. The last rampart of falling regimes — the armed forces — began to break.

This time the entire country began to turn more and more resolutely against Tsarism.

In August 1905, giving way to various pressures, the emperor finally decided to recognize, *post factum* — and, needless to say, hypocritically — certain “freedoms.” He also promised to convene a representative National Assembly (“Duma”) with very restricted rights and on the basis of extremely narrow electoral procedures. Bulygin, Minister of the Interior, was charged with preparing and carrying out this election. But this highly timid step, belated and manifestly hypocritical, satisfied no one. Agitation and rebellion continued and this “Duma,” called “Bulygin’s Duma,” was never formed. Bulygin was forced to “resign” (at the end of August), and was replaced by Witte, who had succeeded in convincing Nicholas II to accept more meaningful concessions.

Meanwhile, the inactivity and avowed impotence of the government encouraged the forces of opposition and the Revolution. From the beginning of October, people spoke of a general strike encompassing the entire country as the prelude to the final revolution.

This strike, which encompassed the entire country — an immense strike, unique in modern history — took place in mid-October. It was less spontaneous than the January strike. Long anticipated, prepared ahead of time, it was organized by the Soviet, the “Union of Unions,” and mainly by numerous strike committees. Factories, yards, workshops, warehouses, banks, administrative offices, railroads and all other means of transportation, post offices and telegraph stations — everything, absolutely everything, stopped completely. The life of the country was suspended.

The government lost its footing and gave in. On October 17 (1905) the Tsar issued a manifesto—the well-known “Manifesto of October 17” — where he declared that he had solemnly decided to bestow on his “dear and faithful subjects” all political freedoms and to convene, as soon as possible, a type of representative council: the “*State Duma*.” (The term *Duma* was borrowed from an earlier century when a Council of State or Chamber of Nobles [*Boyars*] was known as a *Dumaboyarskaya*: an institution called on to help the Tsar carry out his functions. Later, in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the term *Zemskaya Duma* was used for assemblies of representatives from different classes, assemblies comparable to the *Etats Generaux* of the ancient French monarchy. Finally, in the period we’re dealing with, “*Gorodskaya Duma*” meant “City Council,” “gorod” meaning “city.” The word “duma” means “thought.”) According to the Manifesto, this *Duma* was being summoned to help the government.

It was, in short, a nebulous promise of a vague constitutional regime. Some circles took it seriously. An “Octobrist” Party appeared almost right away, and declared that it would accept, apply and defend the reforms announced by the Manifesto.

In actual fact, this act of the Tsar’s government had two aims which had nothing to do with a “constitution”:

1. To produce an effect abroad; to give the impression that the Revolution was over, that the government had regained mastery over the situation, and thus to influence public opinion, particularly the opinion of French financial circles, so as to revive the loan negotiations;
2. To deceive the masses, calm them, and bar the path toward Revolution.

These two goals were realized. The strike ended, the revolutionary elan was broken. The impression created abroad was completely favorable. It was seen that, in spite of everything, the government of the Tsar was still strong enough to quell the revolution. The loan was granted.

It should be obvious that the revolutionary parties were not duped by the venture. They saw the Manifesto as a simple political maneuver and immediately began to explain it to the working masses. The workers, moreover, were more than a little suspicious. They had ended the strike, to be sure, *as if* they had obtained satisfaction, *as if* they had confidence. But the fact that the strike ended was simply a sign that the Revolution lacked impetus and could not yet go further. There was no expression of real satisfaction. The population did not hasten to use its “new rights,” being intuitively aware of their fraudulent character. This was quickly proved. In some cities, peaceful public demonstrations organized to celebrate “the victory” and the “new regime” promised by the Tsar were dispersed by the police and followed by Jewish pogroms – while the walls announced the Tsar’s “Manifesto.”



## Chapter 4. Defeat of the Revolution; Evaluation of the Jolt

Toward the end of 1905, the French bourgeoisie decided in favor of the loan, and high finance granted it. This "blood transfusion" saved the moribund Tsarist regime.

In addition, the government succeeded in ending the war with a peace treaty which was not overly humiliating.

From that point on, reaction took up where it had left off. Dangling a beautiful future before the eyes of the people, it fought and encircled the revolution.

The Revolution would in any case have died on its own. The October strike was its supreme effort and its highest point. What it needed now was to take a "breath," to "pause." Furthermore, it could count on rebounding later on, perhaps under the stimulus given to it by a left-wing Duma.

In the meantime, the freedoms which had been taken by the people and then promised *post factum* by the Tsar in his Manifesto, were thoroughly suppressed. The government again made the revolutionary press illegal, re-established censorship, proceeded to make mass arrests, liquidated all workers' or revolutionary organizations within its reach, suppressed the Soviet, jailed Nossar and Trotsky, and dispatched troops for the purpose of purging regions where major uprisings had taken place and to inflict exemplary punishments. The military and the police were reinforced throughout.

But one thing remained which the government did not dare to touch: the Duma, which was about to convene.

Nevertheless, the Revolution made two more jumps, in response to the intractability of the reaction.

The first was a new revolt in the Black Sea fleet, under the leadership of Lieutenant Schmidt. The sedition was repressed and Schmidt was shot by a firing squad.

The second episode was an armed insurrection of Moscow workers in December, 1905. It held out against the government's forces for several days.

To put an end to it, the government brought in troops from St. Petersburg and even called in artillery units.

While this insurrection was taking place, attempts were made to provoke a new general strike throughout the country. If this strike had taken place the insurrection could have been victorious. But this time, even though the preliminary organization was similar to that of October, the necessary impetus was missing. The strike was not general. The postal service functioned, as well as the railways. The government was able to transport its troops and retained control over the situation everywhere. There was no doubt that the Revolution was out of breath.

Thus at the end of 1905 the tempest "died down without having overthrown the obstacle.

But it did carry out an important, indispensable task' it swept and prepared the terrain. It left permanent marks in the life of the country and in the mentality of the population. We can now examine the final "balance-sheet" of the jolt. What do we find on the "credit side?" Concretely

there was, first of all, the Duma. For the time being, the government was obliged to elaborate, for the Duma, an electoral law which was sufficiently broad to prevent excessively bitter or rapid disappointments. It did not yet feel completely secure; it, too, had to ‘breathe,’ to have a ‘pause.’

The entire population expected a great deal from the Duma. The elections, set for the spring of 1906, called forth a feverish activity throughout the country. All the political parties took part in it.

The situation created by this state of affairs was paradoxical enough. While the parties of the left now spread their electoral propaganda openly and legally (the government could intervene only by making new regulations and by setting cunning traps), the prisons were crowded with members of the same parties, arrested at the time of the liquidation of the movement; speech and the press remained muzzled; workers’ organizations were still prohibited.

This is only superficially a paradox. It can easily be explained. This explanation will also help us understand how the government foresaw the functioning of the Duma.

In spite of the fact that it had to grant its subjects a certain amount of freedom because of the elections, the government obviously did not interpret the Duma as an institution summoned to turn against absolutism. In the government’s view, the Duma was to be no more than an auxiliary organ, purely consultative and subordinate, good for helping the authorities in some of their tasks. Although it was obliged to tolerate a certain amount of electoral agitation by the left-wing parties, the government had decided earlier that it would only allow a certain amount and that it would react against any attempt by the parties, the voters or the Duma itself to take a defiant attitude. Since in the government’s view the Duma had nothing to do with the Revolution, the government was perfectly logical when it kept the revolutionaries in prison.

Another concrete fact, completely new in Russian life, was precisely the formation and the legality—even if only up to a certain point—of different political parties.

Until the events of 1905, there were in Russia only two political parties, both clandestine and more revolutionary than literally “political.” These were the Social-Democratic Party and the Socialist-Revolutionary Party.

The Manifesto of October 17, the few freedoms which followed it with a view to the electoral campaign, and, above all, the campaign itself, suddenly gave rise to a whole brood of legal and semi-legal parties.

Inveterate monarchists created the “Union of Russian People”: an ultra-reactionary and “pogromist” party whose “program” called for the suppression of all the “favours promised under the pressure of criminal uprisings,” including the Duma; and the total elimination of the last traces of the events of 1905.

Less fiercely reactionary elements: the majority of higher functionaries, large industrialists, bankers, nobles, businessmen, landowners, gathered around the “Octobrist Party” (called the “Union of October 17”) which we have already mentioned.

The political weight of these two right wing parties was insignificant. They were the butt of jokes.

The majority of the rich and the middle classes, as well as intellectuals “of distinction,” installed themselves in a large political party of the center, whose right wing was close to the “Octobrists,” and whose left wing went so far as to express republican leanings. The program of the majority of the party called for a constitutional system putting an end to absolutism: the monarch would be retained, but his power would be seriously restricted. The party took the name “Constitutional Democratic Party” (abbreviated “Ca-Det Party.”) It was also called the “People’s Freedom

Party.” Its leaders were recruited mainly from among municipal big wigs, lawyers, doctors, people who practiced liberal professions, academics. Very influential and well placed, with access to considerable funds, this party engaged in extensive and energetic activity from the moment of its creation.

At the extreme left there were: the “Social-Democratic Party” (whose electoral activity, as we’ve already mentioned, was more or less open and legal, in spite of its bluntly republican program and its revolutionary tactics) and, finally, the “Socialist-Revolutionary Party” (except for its treatment of the agrarian problem, its program and tactics did not differ from those of the Social-Democratic Party) who, at the time of the Duma, and in order to be able to move freely, carried on electoral campaigns and presented candidates under the name of “Labor Party” (which subsequently became a separate party). It goes without saying that the last two parties represented mainly the masses of workers and peasants as well as the vast stratum of intellectual workers.

At this point we should furnish some details about the programs and ideologies of these parties.

Except for the political question, the most important point of the programs of all the parties was undoubtedly the *agrarian problem*. It urgently demanded an effective solution. The fact is that the peasant population had grown so rapidly that the plots of land granted to the emancipated peasants in 1861, inadequate already then, had been reduced, during a quarter of a century, as a result of continual division, to plots of famine. “We don’t even know where to let a chicken run any more,” the peasants said. The immense population of the countryside waited with increasing impatience for a fair and effective solution to this problem. All the parties were aware of its importance.

For the time being, three solutions were presented, namely:

1. The Constitutional Democratic Party proposed an enlargement of the plots by a transfer of some of the lands of large private owners and of the State to the peasants; the peasants were to pay gradually for the transferred land, with State aid, on terms set by an official and “fair” evaluation.
2. The Social-Democratic Party proposed a transfer pure and simple, without payment, of the land needed by the peasants. The land would constitute a national fund and could be distributed according to needs (“nationalization” or “municipalization” of the land).
3. The Socialist-Revolutionary Party presented the most radical solution: immediate and complete confiscation of all land in the hands of private owners; immediate suppression of all landed property (private or state); placement of all the land at the disposal of peasant collectives, under the control of the State (“socialization” of the land).

Before doing anything else, the Duma had to deal with this urgent and complicated problem. We would like to deal briefly with the general ideology of the two parties of the extreme left in this period (the Social-Democrats and the Socialist Revolutionaries).

Already around 1900 a major divergence of views manifested itself at the heart of the Russian Social-Democratic Party. Some of its members, clutching its “minimum program,” held that the coming Russian revolution would be a bourgeois revolution, relatively moderate in its results. These socialists did not believe it possible to jump, in one leap, from a “feudal” monarchy to a

socialist regime. A bourgeois democratic republic, paving the way for rapid capitalist development which would lay the foundations for a future socialism — this was their basic idea. A “social revolution” in Russia, was, in their opinion, impossible for the time being-

Many members of the party, however, had a different opinion. In their view, the next Revolution already had every chance of becoming a “Social Revolution,” with all logical consequences. These socialists dropped the “minimum program” and prepared themselves for the conquest of power by the party and for the *immediate and decisive struggle against capitalism*.

The leaders of the first current were: Plekhanov, Martov, and others. The great creator of the second was Lenin.

The final split between these two camps took place in 1903, at the London Congress. The Social-Democrats with Leninist leanings had a majority. “Majority,” in Russian, is “Bolshinstvo,” and the partisans of this tendency were called *bolsheviki* (in English one would say “majoritarians”). Since “minority” is “menshinstvo,” the others were called “men-sheviki” (in English, “minoritarians”). As for the two tendencies themselves, the first acquired the name of *Bolshevism* (tendency of the majority), the other the name of *Menshevism* (tendency of the minority).

After their victory in 1917, the “Bolsheviks” called themselves the “Communist Party,” whereas the “Mensheviks” alone retained the title “Social-Democratic Party.” The Communist Party in power declared “Menshevism” counter-revolutionary and wiped it out.

As for the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, it also split into two distinct parties: a party of Socialist-Revolutionaries “of the right” who, like the “Mensheviks,” insisted on the need to pass through a bourgeois democratic republic, and a party of Socialist-Revolutionaries “of the left” who claimed, like the Bolsheviks, that the Revolution should be pushed as far as possible, ultimately to the immediate suppression of the capitalist regime and the establishment of socialism (a type of social Republic).

(In 1917 the Bolsheviks in power wiped out the right-wing Socialist-Revolutionaries as counter-revolutionaries. As for the left-wing Socialist-Revolutionaries, the Bolshevik government at first collaborated with them. Later, when major disagreements arose between the two parties, the Bolsheviks broke with their former allies. Finally they outlawed and annihilated them.)

At the time of the 1905 revolution, the practical influence of these two dissident currents (Bolshevism and left-wing Revolutionary Socialism) was insignificant.

To complete our presentation of the diverse currents of ideas that made their appearance at the time of this revolution, we should point out that the Socialist-Revolutionary Party gave birth to a third tendency which, detaching itself from the Party, called for the suppression, during the revolution, not only of the bourgeois State, *but of the State in general* (as a political institution). This current of ideas was known in Russia by the name of *Maximalism*, because its partisans, having rejected the minimum program, broke with the left-wing Socialist-Revolutionaries and proclaimed the necessity of struggling immediately for the complete realization of the *maximum* program, namely for complete socialism, built on an apolitical foundation.

Thus the “Maximalists” did not form a political party. They created the “Union of Socialist Revolutionary Maximalists.” This “union” published some pamphlets communicating its viewpoint. It also published a few periodicals, but these did not last long. It did not have many members, and its influence was negligible. It carried out mainly terrorist activities. But it did take part in all the revolutionary struggles, and many of its members died as real heroes.

By the totality of their ideas, the Maximalists were very close to anarchism. Maximalism did not in fact blindly follow the “Marxists;” it denied the usefulness of political parties; it vigorously

criticized the State and political authority. Nevertheless, it did not dare to renounce political authority immediately and totally. It did not consider it possible to pass directly to a completely “anarchist” society. (Thus it made a distinction between “complete socialism” and anarchism.) For the intervening period it offered a “Workers’ Republic” where elements of the State and of authority would be “reduced to a minimum” which, according to Maximalism, would assure their rapid extinction. This “provisional’ retention of the State and of authority separated Maximalism from anarchism.

(Like all the currents of ideas which disagreed with Bolshevism, Maximalism was crushed by the Bolsheviks at the time of the 1917 revolution.)

As for *anarchist* and *syndicalist* conceptions (we will examine these thoroughly at a later point in our study), in this period they were nearly unknown in Russia.

Outside of Russia many people believe that, since Bakunin and Kropotkin — these “fathers” of anarchism — were Russian, then Russia must for a long time have been a country with anarchist ideas and movements. This is a serious misconception. Both Bakunin (1814–1876) and Kropotkin (1842–1921) had become anarchists *abroad*. Neither of them had ever agitated in Russia as an anarchist. Their works had also appeared only abroad until the 1917 revolution, often in a foreign language. Only a few excerpts from their works, translated, adapted or published especially for Russia, were imported clandestinely to Russia, with great risk and in very small quantities. Furthermore, the distribution of these few publications in the interior of the country was nearly impossible. Finally, the entire social, socialist and revolutionary education of Russians had *absolutely nothing anarchist* about it, and but for a few exceptions, no one was interested in anarchist ideas.

Syndicalism was altogether unknown (a few erudite intellectuals excepted), since no workers’ movement existed in Russia before the 1917 revolution. It can even be assumed that the Russian form of workers’ organization, the “Soviet,” was hurriedly discovered in 1905 and taken up again in 1917 precisely *because of the absence of a syndicalist conception and movement*. There is no doubt that if a union apparatus had existed, it would have led the workers’ movement.

We have already mentioned that some small anarchist groups existed in St. Petersburg, in Moscow, in the West and the South. That was all. The Moscow anarchists did take an active part in the events of 1905 and attracted attention during the armed insurrection in December.

(After 1917 the Bolsheviks crushed the anarchist movement as they crushed all other movements that did not agree with theirs. But they did not crush it with ease. The struggle between Bolshevism and Anarchism during the course of the 1917 revolution — a tough, bitter struggle which is nevertheless almost completely unknown abroad, a struggle which lasted more than three years and in which the “Makhnovist” movement was the outstanding episode — will be described in the last part of this work.)

Let us turn to the moral consequences, the *psychological effects*, of 1905. Their importance for the future was far greater than that of the few immediate concrete achievements.

First of all, as we’ve already pointed out, the “legend of the Tsar” disappeared. The *vast masses* became aware of the real nature of the regime and of the urgency of doing away with it. Absolutism and Tsarism were morally dethroned.

This is not all. The popular masses at last joined forces with all those who had for so long opposed this regime: the avant-garde intellectual circles, the left wing political parties, and revolutionaries in general. Solid and extensive contact was thus established between the progressive

circles and the mass of the population. From now on this contact was going to spread, to deepen, to tighten. The “Russian paradox” had died.

Thus two capital achievements had been realized. On the one hand, there existed a *material* element on which an eventual revolution could “lean”: this was the *Duma*. On the other hand, the moral obstacle which had barred the way to all extensive revolt, had broken down: *the masses finally understood the malady* and at last joined those in the front lines of the liberation struggle.

*The ground was prepared for the next decisive revolution.* This was on the “credit” side of the jolt of 1905.

Alas! The “liabilities” were just as heavy with consequences.

*Unfortunately, the 1905 movement was not able to create a working class organization:* neither a syndicalist organization or even a trade union. The right to organize was not won by the working masses. They remained without contact or organization.

The psychological consequence of this state of affairs was that it predisposed the working masses to become, in the next revolution, the unconscious prize of political parties, of their baneful rivalries, of their abominable struggle for power in which the workers had nothing to gain, or rather, had everything to lose.

Thus the absence, on the eve of the Revolution, of a workers’ movement and a real workers’ organization opened all doors to the predominance — what am I saying? — the future domination of one or another *political party*, at the expense of the real action and the real cause *of the workers*.

The reader will in fact see later that the enormous weight of this “liability” was going to be fatal for the revolution of 1917: in the end it was going to crush the revolution.

We should still say something about the personal fate of Nossar-Khrustalev, first president of the first Workers’ Soviet of St. Petersburg.

Arrested during the “liquidation” of the movement (at the end of 1905), Nossar was tried, convicted, and exiled to Siberia. He escaped and sought refuge abroad. But like Gapon, he was not able to adapt to a new life, and even less able to undertake regular work. He did not, to be sure, lead a life of debauchery; and he did not commit any act of treason. But he dragged out his life abroad in disorder, poverty and unhappiness.

This went on until the 1917 revolution. As soon as it broke out, he, like so many others, rushed back to his country and took part in revolutionary struggles. He did not, however, play an important role.

We do not know what happened to him after that. According to a source that we consider to be above suspicion, he ultimately turned against the Bolsheviks and was shot by them.

## Chapter 5. The “Pause” (1905–1917)

The twelve years — exactly — which separate the real revolution from its first attempt, the “explosion” from the “jolt,” did not add anything salient from a revolutionary point of view. On the contrary, reaction flourished all along the line. We should nevertheless take note of some major strikes and of a rebellion in the Baltic Fleet at Kronstadt which was savagely repressed.

The fate of the Duma was the outstanding event of this period.

The Duma began its sessions in May, 1906, in St. Petersburg. Immense popular enthusiasm accompanied these first sessions. In spite of all of the government’s machinations, the Duma came out against the government. The Constitutional Democratic Party dominated it by the number of its members and the quality of its representatives. S. Muromtsev, professor at Moscow University and one of the party’s most distinguished members, was elected president of the Assembly. Left-wing deputies — Social-Democrats and Socialist-Revolutionaries (“Laborites”) — also formed an imposing bloc. The entire population followed the deliberations of the Duma with passionate interest. All hopes turned toward the Duma. People expected at least significant, effective and just reforms.

But from the very first contact, hostility-silent at first, but growing increasingly overt — developed between the “Parliament” and the government. The government treated the Duma patronizingly, with undisguised contempt. It hardly tolerated the Duma. It refused to accept the Duma, even as a purely consultative body. On the other hand, the Duma itself tried to impose itself as a legislative, constitutional body. Relations between them grew increasingly strained.

The people obviously sided with the Duma. The government’s position became unfavorable, ridiculous, and even dangerous. Nevertheless it did not have to fear an imminent revolution. The government knew this. Furthermore, it could count on the army and the police. So the government undertook a decisive measure. The new energetic minister, Stolypin, was put in charge. He used a projected “Appeal to the People,” prepared by the Duma and having to do mainly with the agrarian project, as his pretext.

One morning the “deputies” found the doors of the Duma closed and guarded by troops. Army and police paraded in the streets. The Duma — known as the “First Duma” — was dissolved. An official decree announced and “explained” this action to the population. This happened in the summer of 1906.

Except for a long series of assassinations and a few isolated revolts, the most important being those of Sveaborg and Kronstadt (the second in a short period of time, the first having taken place in October, 1905), the country remained calm.

The deputies themselves did not dare to resist effectively. This fact can easily be explained. Resisting would mean turning to revolutionary action. But everywhere it was felt that, for the present, the revolution was powerless. (Furthermore, if this had not been the situation the government would not have dared to dissolve the Duma, particularly in this insolent manner. The government felt genuinely powerful and, at least for the time being, it was not mistaken.) The

bourgeoisie was far too weak to dream of a revolution favorable to its interests. As for the working masses and their parties, at this point they did not feel ready to undertake a revolution.

Consequently the deputies submitted to the dissolution. The decree, furthermore, did not suppress the Duma, but announced new elections in the near future, based on somewhat modified rules. The “representatives of the people” limited themselves to launching a note of protest against this arbitrary act. To prepare this note in complete freedom, the ex-deputies — mainly the members of the Constitutional Democratic Party—met in Finland (where they were protected by a certain independence of legislation in this part of the Russian empire), in the city of Vyborg, which is why the note was baptized the “Vyborg Appeal.” Afterward they calmly returned home.

In spite of the innocuous character of their “revolt,” they were nevertheless tried and convicted some time later by a special court and given light sentences. (They did, nevertheless, lose the right to be re-elected to the Duma.)

Only one deputy, a young peasant from the Department of Stavropol, the “Laborite” Onipko, did not resign. It was he who stimulated the uprising in Kronstadt. Seized on the spot, he was almost shot by a firing squad. Certain interventions and fears saved him. He was finally tried and sentenced to exile in Siberia. He succeeded in escaping and found refuge abroad. He returned to Russia in 1917. What happened to him later is unknown. According to some very reliable sources, he continued to struggle as a member of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party of the right, turned against the Bolsheviks and was shot by them.

Immediately after the dissolution of the “first Duma,” the government revamped the electoral law, unscrupulously had recourse to other preventive measures and maneuvers, and summoned the “second Duma.” Much more moderate in its gestures and significantly more mediocre than the first, this Duma was still “too revolutionary” for the government. It is true that, despite all the machinations, it still had numerous left-wing deputies. This Duma was in turn dissolved. This time the electoral law was significantly modified. Furthermore, the population soon lost all interest in the activity -or rather the inactivity — of the Duma, except for rare moments when an exciting event or a stirring debate briefly attracted their attention.

The dissolution of the second Duma led to a third and finally a fourth Duma. This last Duma — a completely docile instrument in the hands of the reactionary government—was able to drag out its bleak and sterile existence until the revolution of 1917.

As for reforms or useful laws, the Duma accomplished nothing at all. But its presence was not completely useless. The critical speeches of some opposition deputies, the position of Tsarism in the face of the burning problems of the hour, the very impotence of the “Parliament” to deal with these problems so long as the absolutist regime remained intact, all these facts continued to enlighten the vast masses of the population about the real nature of the regime, about the role of the bourgeoisie, about the tasks to be accomplished, about the programs of the political parties. For the Russian population this period was, in short, a long and fertile “experimental lesson,” the only one possible in the absence of other means of political and social education.

Two parallel processes were the main characteristics of the period in question: on one side, the accelerated and definitive degeneration — “decay” would be a better word—of the absolutist regime; on the other, the rapid growth of the consciousness of the masses.

The unquestionable signs of the degeneration of Tsarism were known abroad. The attitude and life-style of the Imperial Court were typical of those which generally preceded the fall of monarchies. The incompetence and indifference of Nicholas II, the cretinism and corruption of his ministers and functionaries, the vulgar mysticism which took hold of the “monarch” and his



family (the well known episode of the priest Rasputin) this ensemble of elements was not a secret to anyone abroad.

What was not as well known were the profound changes taking place in the psychology of the popular masses. Nevertheless, the spiritual condition of a man of the people in 1912, for example, no longer had anything in common with the primitive outlook of the same man before 1905. Increasingly vast layers of the population were becoming straightforwardly anti-Tsarist. Only the savage reaction, which prohibited all organization of workers and all political or social propaganda, kept the masses from giving a final shape to their ideas.

Thus the absence of striking revolutionary events does not in any way mean that the revolutionary process had stopped. It continued with undiminished intensity, under the surface, especially in people's thoughts and feelings.

In the meantime, all the vital problems remained suspended. The country had reached an impasse. *A violent and decisive revolution became inevitable.* Only the impetus and the weapons were missing.

It was in these conditions that the war of 1914 broke out. This war gave the masses the necessary impetus as well as the indispensable weapons.

## **Part III. The Explosion (1917)**

# Chapter 1. War and Revolution

Like the governments of other countries, that of Tsar Nikolai II succeeded in arousing, at the beginning of the European war in 1914, the whole gamut of evil instincts, animal passions, and wicked sentiments such as nationalism and chauvinism.

In Russia, as in those other lands, millions of men were duped, hypnotised, disoriented, and compelled to rush to the battle front like a herd of cattle to a slaughter-house, while the real problems of the hour were forgotten. And the few early “successes” attained by the Tsarist troops further kindled “the great enthusiasm of the people”.

Nevertheless a special note was blended in this artificial and directed concert, an idea deeply implanted in the spirit was hiding behind this “enthusiasm”. Very well — the Army and nearly all the civilians reasoned — we will fight and win. But the Government would better not deceive itself. When the war is over, we will present our bill. In return for our devotion and sacrifices, we expect a complete change in the regime. We will regain our rights, our liberties. Things will be different after the war.

And the soldiers whispered: “When the war is over we will keep our guns, at all costs”.

But soon enough the situation in Russia was altered. A series of defeats began, and with them the unrest, the disillusionment, the rage of the people returned.

The war cost dearly, frightfully, in money and especially in men. Millions of human lives were sacrificed, to no purpose and with no compensation. Once more the Romanov regime demonstrated its incompetence, its rottenness, its weakness. Moreover, certain defeats which cost hugely in victims were unexplained, mysterious, suspect. All over the country there was talk — not only of flagrant incompetence, but of criminal negligence, venality of the authorities, espionage in the supreme command, the German origin of the dynasty and of several leaders, and of high treason in the Imperial Court itself. Members of the royal family were almost openly accused of sympathy for the Germans, and even of having direct dealings with the enemy. With little secrecy, and with anger and hatred, the Tsarina was called “the *Boche*”. Alarming and sinister rumours spread among the masses.

At first the Imperial Court was not much disturbed. Later several measures were taken — tardily and awkwardly. Being purely formal, they were ineffective, satisfied no one, accomplished nothing.

In an attempt to restore the morale of the troops and the people, Nikolai II personally assumed supreme command of the fighting forces, at least nominally. He went to the front. But this gesture did not change anything in the general situation, which was getting worse each day, and against which the Tsar, absolutely incapable and inactive, was powerless. Everywhere there was disintegration, — both in the Army and in the country at large.

In despair, several plots were fomented in liberal circles and even in the immediate entourage of the Tsar. One design of the plotters was to make the ruler abdicate in favour of a more “up to date” and popular monarch, for instance the Tsar’s uncle, Grand Duke Nikolai, “to save the war and the dynasty”, the impending fall of which was expected by all concerned.

They began by wiping out the evil monk Rasputin. But the conspirators hesitated about what to do next, and delayed, not being able to reach an agreement among themselves.

Things were at this stage when, brutally, the explosion in February, 1917, occurred.

It was not so much the military developments, nor the rumours of treason in the Royal Court, nor even the incompetence and unpopularity of the Tsar that set off this sudden detonation.

What made the people desperate and brought on the crucial blow was *the complete disorganization of economic life, and of existence itself, throughout the country*. "The disorganization is such," Minister Krivochein admitted, speaking of the administration and all the services of the State, "that it is like a lunatic asylum." And it was in this field that the impotence of the Tsarist government and the disastrous results of its conduct compelled the masses to take decisive action.

All the warring nations were suffering great economic and financial difficulties at this stage of the European conflict, because of the necessity of feeding and supplying the other needs of the millions of men on the far-flung battle-fronts, and at the same time maintaining the normal life of those countries. Everywhere this double task caused tremendous strain. But everywhere else — even in Germany, where the situation was especially difficult — it was accomplished more or less successfully. Everywhere except in Russia, where nothing had been foreseen, nothing planned in advance, nothing organized.<sup>1</sup>

It must be added that the terrible effects of this total disintegration of power and the State would have manifested themselves even sooner, had it not been for the efforts of certain living forces in the empire, such as the Union of the Cities, the War Industries Committee, and others. Arising spontaneously, these organizations were able to provide to a considerable degree for the more pressing needs of the Army and the civilian populace.

The energetic and beneficial activity of these forces, as well as that of the zemstvos (provincial councils), the municipalities, et cetera, — an activity which, we must emphasize, was carried on in opposition to the laws and resistance of the bureaucracy — also had a highly important moral effect. Every day, alike in the Army and in the country at large, one could clearly perceive, not only the total incompetence of Tsarism, but also the existence of elements perfectly capable of replacing it, and furthermore, the disgraceful way in which the dying Romanov regime, fearing those elements, impeded their action, thus pushing the whole nation toward catastrophe.

Every day the Army and the Russian people saw with their own eyes that it was these free unions and committees which, on their own initiative and with sublime devotion, assured production, organized transport, supervised supplies, and guaranteed arrival and distribution of rations and munitions. And every day, too, the Army and the people saw the government oppose this indispensable activity and hold it back, with no concern for the interests of the country.

This final moral preparation of the Army and the populace for the downfall of Tsarism and its replacement by other elements was exceedingly important. It completed the pre-revolutionary process. It gave the last touch to the preparatory work.

In January, 1917, the situation had become untenable. The economic chaos, the poverty of the workers, and the social disorganization of Russia were so acute that the inhabitants of several

---

<sup>1</sup>The reader should not be surprised at this weakness. He must realize that in Russia then the bourgeoisie — weak, disorganized, and wholly dependent on the State — had no initiative, no real strength, and could play no organizing role in the national economy; that the industrial workers and the peasants — serfs, with no voice or rights — were less than nothing in the empire's economic life and cared nothing for the Tsarist State; and that thus the whole mechanism, political, economical and social, was in the hands of Tsarist functionaries. Once the war had disrupted this class and upset its obsolete machinery, everything went to pieces.

targe cities — notably Petrograd — began to lack not only fuel, clothing, meat, butter, and sugar, but even bread.

February saw worse conditions. Despite the efforts of the Duma, the *zemstvos* (provincial councils), the municipalities, the unions, and the committees, not only was the urban population doomed to famine, but the supplying of the Army became entirely defective. And at the same time a complete military debacle was reached.

By the end of February, *it was absolutely impossible for the country, both materially and morally, to continue the war*. And it was impossible for the industrial workers in the cities to procure supplies [to keep the factories going].

But Tsarism did not want to know anything about these realities. It persisted blindly now in running the old machine completely off its tracks. And it fell back, as usual, on repression, violence against those who were active, and the militants of the political parties.

It was the inability of the people to continue the war and endure conditions of famine, on the one hand, and the blind obstinacy of Tsarism, on the other, that brought about the Revolution, two and a half years after “the great enthusiasm”.

On February 24 (Russian old style) disturbances began in Petrograd. Primarily provoked by the lack of provisions, they did not seem likely to become serious. But next day events took a sudden turn. The workers in the capital, feeling that the Russian people generally were in solidarity with them, extremely agitated for weeks, starving, and not even receiving any more bread, thronged the streets, demonstrated fiercely, and flatly refused to disperse.

Yet on this first day the demonstrations were cautious and inoffensive. In close-packed masses the workers, with their wives and children, shouted: “Bread! Bread! We have nothing to eat. Either give us bread or shoot us! Our children are dying of hunger. Bread! Bread!”

Besides the police, the Government sent detachments of mounted troops, Cossacks, against the demonstrators. But there were few troops then in Petrograd — except unreliable reservists. So the workers were not at all frightened. They bared their breasts to the soldiers, held up their children, and cried: “Kill us all if you dare! Better to be shot than to starve to death!”

Finally — and this was the key point of the episode — nearly all of the soldiers, smiling, walked warily towards the crowd, without using their weapons, and ignoring the orders of their officers. And many of the latter were not particularly insistent. In some places the soldiers fraternized with the workers, going so far as to give them their rifles, getting off their horses, and mingling with the throng. Naturally this attitude of the troops encouraged the protesting workers.

Here and there, however, the police and the Cossacks did charge groups of demonstrators carrying red flags, and several of them were killed or wounded.

In the barracks of Petrograd and the suburbs of the capital, the garrison regiments still held back from taking the side of the Revolution. And the government held back from sending them to combat it.

But the morning of February 26 brought a notable new happening. By decree, the Government ordered the Duma dissolved.

This was a sort of signal that everybody seemed to have been waiting for before beginning decisive action. The news, known everywhere in the capital almost instantaneously, spurred on events. From that moment, the demonstrations took on the character of a strictly revolutionary movement.

Shouts of “*Down with Tsarism!*”, “*Down with the War!*”, and “*Long live the Revolution!*” rang from the milling crowd, whose attitude steadily became more determined and menacing. All over

the city the demonstrators resolutely attacked the police. Several public buildings were burned, including the Court House. The streets bristled with barricades. Soon many red flags appeared. The soldiers still maintained a benevolent neutrality, but more and more frequently they mingled with the throng. The Government could depend on its troops less and less.

Now it hurled the whole police force of the city against the rebels. The police quickly formed detachments for mass attack. They installed machine-guns on the roofs of various houses and even in some churches, and occupied all strategic points. Then they began a general offensive against the rising masses.

During that whole day of February 26 the fighting was hot. In many instances the police were dislodged, policemen were killed, and their machine-guns silenced. But elsewhere they resisted fiercely.

Tsar Nikolai II, who was at the war-front, was warned by telegram of the gravity of the situation. *Meanwhile the Duma decided to continue sitting and not yield to the order to dissolve.*

## Chapter 2. Triumph of the Revolution

The decisive action occurred on February 27, 1917.

From early morning, whole regiments of the Petrograd garrison, no longer hesitant, mutinied, left their barracks, arms in hand, and took over certain strategic points in the capital, after brief skirmishes with the police. The Revolution gained ground.

At a given moment, a dense mass of demonstrators, defiant and grimly threatening, and partially armed, assembled in Znamenskaya Square and in the vicinity of the Nikolaievsky railway station. The Government sent two cavalry regiments from the Imperial Guard, the soldiers it still could trust, as well as a strong detachment of police, both on foot and mounted. The troops were supposed to support and assist the police.

After the usual summons [warning the demonstrators to disperse], the police commander gave an order to charge the crowd. But now another last-moment “miracle” occurred. The officer commanding the Guard cavalymen raised his sabre, and with a cry of “Charge the police!” launched his two regiments against them. In almost no time the latter were beaten, thrown back, overwhelmed.

Soon the last resistance of the police was broken. The revolutionary troops seized the Government arsenal and occupied all vital points in the city. Surrounded by a delirious multitude, the regiments drew themselves up, with flags unfurled, before the Tauride palace, where the Duma – the poor Fourth Duma – was sitting, and put themselves at its disposal.

Shortly afterward the last regiments of the garrison of Petrograd and its suburbs joined the movement. Tsarism had no more armed forces in the vicinity of the capital. The population was free. The Revolution had triumphed.

The events which presently followed are well known.

A provisional government, composed of influential members of the Duma, was formed and ardently acclaimed by the people.

The provinces enthusiastically joined the Revolution.

Some troops were hastily withdrawn from the front, and were sent by order of the Tsar to the rebel-held capital, but were unable to reach it. For the railroad workers refused to transport them further when they drew near the city. Then the soldiers refused to obey their officers and went over to the Revolution. Some returned to the front; others simply dispersed.

Tsar Nikolai himself, returning to Petrograd by railroad, had his train stopped at Dno station and then had it take him back to Pskov. There he was joined by a delegation from the Duma and by military personages who had joined the Revolution. He could do nothing but accept the situation. After some trifling negotiations he signed his abdication, for himself and his son Alexis This on March 2.

For a moment, the provisional government sought to present the throne to the ex-Emperor’s brother, Grand Duke Michael But he declined the offer, declaring that the fate of the country and the dynasty should be put into the hands of a regularly con voked Constituent Assembly.

The front hailed the accomplished Revolution.

Tsarism had fallen. Formation of the Constituent Assembly was the order of the day. While waiting for it to be called, the provisional government became the official authority — “recognized and responsible”. The first act of the victorious Revolution was over.

We have recounted the facts of this February revolution in some detail in order to bring out in relief the main point:

Once more, *the action of the masses was spontaneous, logically climaxing a long period of concrete experience and moral preparation. This action was neither organized nor guided by any political party. Supported by the people in arms — the Army — it was victorious.* The element of organization had to be introduced — and was introduced — immediately afterward.

(In any case, because of the repression, all of the central organizations of the political parties of the left, as well as their leaders, were, at the time of the Revolution, far from Russia. Martov of the Social Democratic Party, Tchernoff of the Social Revolutionary Party, Lenin, Trotsky, Lunacharsky, Losovsky, Rykov, Bukharin, et al., were all living abroad. It was not until after the February Revolution that they returned home).

Another significant point also emerges from these events.

Again, *immediate and specific impetus was given to the Revolution by the absolute impossibility of Russia continuing the war — an impossibility which naturally was intensified by the obstinacy of the Government.* This impossibility resulted from the inextricable chaos into which the war had plunged the nation.



## Chapter 3. Toward the Social Revolution

The provisional government formed by the Duma was of course strictly bourgeois and conservative. Its members, Prince Lvov, Gutchkov, Milioukov, and others (with the exception of Kerensky, who was vaguely Socialist) nearly all belonged politically to the Constitutional Democratic party; socially to the privileged classes. For them, once absolutism was overthrown, the Revolution was over. In reality it had only begun.

Now, they wanted to “re-establish order”, ameliorate little by little the general situation in the country and at the battle-front, “push” the war more actively than ever, inspire it with new spirit, and especially prepare peacefully for the calling of the Constituent Assembly, which would establish the new fundamental laws of the nation, the new political regime, and the new form of government. Henceforth the people had only to wait patiently and prudently, like the good children that they were, for the favours which these new masters would grant them.

These new masters, the members of the provisional government, naturally saw themselves as good moderate bourgeoisie, who would use their powers like those in other “civilized” countries. And the political outlook of that regime did not go beyond a nice constitutional monarchy. At most some of its members perhaps timidly envisaged a very moderate bourgeois republic. The agrarian question, the question of the workers, et cetera, would be resolved by the future established government, in the manner of the “proven” western models.

In the last analysis, the provisional government was more or less sure of being able to utilize the preparatory -period for stalling, if need be, and for restoring the masses to calmness”, discipline, and obedience, in case they should evidence too violently their desire to go beyond the limits thus proclaimed. It finally occupied itself with assuring, by behind-the-scenes manoeuvring, a “normal” election, which would result, at the desired moment, in a prudent and upright Constituent Assembly — bourgeois, of course.

At this point it is pleasant to state that the “realists”, the “established” politicians, the scholars, the economists, and the sociologists, were wrong in their calculations. *The reality completely escaped them.*

I recall attending, in New York, in April or May, 1917, a Russian lecture by an honorable professor who made an elaborate analysis of the composition and probable actions of the forthcoming Constituent Assembly. And I asked the respectable professor a single question: “What do you foresee in case the Russian Revolution goes beyond the Constituent Assembly?”

Disdainfully enough, and ironically, the eminent lecturer said, as his only reply, that he was a “realist” and that his heckler was “surely an Anarchist, whose fantastic hypothesis is of no interest to me.” But the future soon demonstrated that the learned professor had masterfully deceived himself and that he himself was the “fantastic” one. In his two-hour speech he had neglected to analyze only one eventuality: *that which actually took place a few months later.*

Here I would like to add some personal reflections.

In 1917 the realists, the men of politics, the writers, the professors, both Russian and foreign, had, with few exceptions, superciliously and scornfully failed to predict the triumph of Bolshe-

vism in the Russian Revolution. In our time, since triumphant Bolshevism is, and has been for a short period, historically speaking, an accomplished fact, many of those gentlemen are willing to recognize it, to take an interest in it, and concern themselves with it. They even recognize – again deceiving themselves masterfully – its “great positive importance” and “its complete world-wide triumph”.

I am absolutely sure that, with the same “realism” and “clairvoyance”, the same arrogance before and the same assurance afterward, these same gentlemen will fail to predict in time, only to accept it after it happens – *the real and complete triumph of the libertarian idea in the world-wide Social Revolution*.

That first provisional government certainly did not take account of the obstacles which confronted it. The most serious obstacle was the nature of the problems with which it had to deal before the calling of the Constituent Assembly. (And it never occurred to the Government leaders that the workers might not want to wait for the forming of the Assembly and that they were wholly within their rights [in taking that position].

First, *the problem of the war*.

Disillusioned and exhausted, the people continued that war against their will, or at the most, with utter apathy. For the Army was undeniably beaten, both physically and morally. On the one hand, the miserable conditions of the country, and on the other, the Revolution, had definitely upset it.

Two solutions were possible: to end the war, conclude a separate peace, demobilize the Army, and be concerned solely with domestic problems – or attempt the impossible task of maintaining the battle-front, restoring discipline, “reviving” the morale of the Army, and continuing the war at any cost, at least until the Constituent Assembly was called.

Obviously the first solution was unacceptable to a “patriotic” bourgeois government, allied to other belligerents and considering it a “national disgrace” to break that alliance. Furthermore, inasmuch as the Government was “provisional” it felt obliged to follow the [conventional] formula: “No important changes before the Constituent Assembly is called; it will have full right to make any decisions.”

So the provisional government adopted the second solution. But under the existing circumstances this was unrealizable.

This point must be insisted on, for generally it is not given enough emphasis.

The machine called the “bourgeois State” broke down in Russia in February, 1917. Its purpose and its activity had always been contrary to the interests and aspirations of the people. Since the latter, for the moment, had become masters of their own destinies, it could not be repaired and put back into working order. For *it is the people who make such a machine run* – whether under compulsion or freely – and not the governments. The broken apparatus could neither exercise nor re-establish rule by force. And the people no longer “marched” voluntarily toward goals that were not their own.

Hence it was necessary to replace the disabled apparatus with another one, adapted to the new situation, instead of losing time and strength in vain efforts to get it running again.

The bourgeois and nationalist government couldn’t understand this. It insisted on maintaining both the “machine” and the evil heritage of the fallen regime, the war. On this account it was making itself increasingly unpopular. And with the machine [the bourgeois State] broken, was powerless to go ahead, to impose its war-like will.

This first problem of the hour, the most serious, the most immediate, was thus inevitably condemned to remain unsolved by the provisional government.

The second thorny problem was the agrarian question.

Russia's peasants — who made up 85 per cent, of the population — aspired to possess the land. The Revolution gave these aspirations an irresistible force. Having been reduced to impotence, exploited, and duped for centuries, the peasant masses no longer would pay attention to anything else. *They needed the land, at all costs, and immediately, without protocol or ceremony.*

Neither physically nor morally could Russia continue the war. Refusal of the Tsarist government to recognize that fact was the immediate cause of the Revolution. And so long as this impossibility continued, any government which failed to recognize it would, logically, fall like that of the Tsar.

To be sure, the provisional government hoped to be able to alter the situation, to end the chaos, reorganize the country, give it new energy. But these were illusions; neither the available time nor the state of mind of the masses would permit it.

Back in 1905, at the Peasant Congress called shortly after the Manifesto of October 17 (while the "liberties" still existed), in preparation for the calling of the Duma, numerous delegates had acted as spokesmen for the aspirations [of the rural masses].

"Any mention of redemption of the land revolts me," one of those peasant delegates declared. "They propose that we reimburse the enslavers of yesterday, who, even in our own day, aided by the functionaries, have made our life into an obstacle course. Haven't we already reimbursed them sufficiently by paying rent? It is impossible to measure the barrels of blood with which we have watered the soil. And that's not all; with their own milk, our grandmothers nursed the hunting dogs of these gentlemen. Isn't that redemption?"

"For centuries we have been grains of sand blown by the wind. And they were the wind. And now we have to pay again? Oh, no. There is no need for diplomatic discussion. There is only one just way — the revolutionary way. Otherwise they will fool us once more. Anything that speaks of 'redemption' is a compromise. Comrades, don't repeat the error of your fathers. In 1861 they [the enslavers] were cleverer than we, and they had us; they gave us only a little because the people did not take everything."

"We never sold them the land," peasants from the Orel regio protested. "Therefore we don't have to redeem it. Already we have paid enough by working for an inhumanly low wage. No, in no case will we pay a redemption. My Lord didn't get the land from the moon; his grandparents seized it."

"Redemption would be a flagrant injustice to the people," delegates from the Kazan district averred. "The people ought to receive a receipted bill of sale with the land. For, in fact, these gentlemen never bought that land. They confiscated it, to sell it later."

And other peasants told the eminent savant Nf Nikolai?] Ruba-kin, sometime between 1897 and 1906: "All these gentlemen — Orlov, Demidoff, Balachoff — got their land free from the Tsars and Tsarinas as presents. And now they want us to redeem it at such prices? That is not only injustice, it is open robbery

This explains why the peasants did not want to wait any longer [in 1917]. Nearly everywhere they were forthrightly expropriating the land, driving out any landlords who had not already fled. Thus they had solved the "agrarian question" in their own way and by themselves, without bothering about deliberations, machinations, and the decisions of the Government or the Constituent

Assembly. And the Army, composed primarily of peasants, certainly was ready to support this direct action.

The provisional government was undecided whether to accept the situation or to resist it — that is to struggle against the revolting peasants, and also, almost inevitably, against the Army as well. So naturally it adopted the tactic of waiting, hoping, as with the problem of war, to be able to arrange things by manoeuvring intelligently and skilfully. The Government spokesmen adjured the peasants to wait patiently for the Constituent Assembly, which, they said, would have the right to establish all law, and certainly would give full satisfaction to the peasants. But nothing came of this. These appeals were for the most part futile, and this tactic had no chance of success. For the peasants did not have the least confidence in the words of the “gentlemen” in power. They had been fooled often enough! And they felt strong enough now to take the land. To them this was only justice. If sometimes they hesitated again, it was only out of fear of being punished for the acts they were committing.

Too, the problem of the industrial workers was as insoluble by a bourgeois government as that of the peasants. The masses of those workers sought to obtain from the Revolution a maximum of well-being and of [the establishment of] rights to a minimum. Immediate and very serious struggles were foreseeable in this field of conflict. And by what means was the provisional government going to maintain its position?

Also *the purely economic problem* was exceedingly difficult, because it was closely related to the other problems, on the one hand, and moreover, coping with it could not be delayed. In the midst of war and revolution, with a chaotic situation in a disrupted country, it was necessary to organize production anew, as well as transportation, exchanges, finance, et cetera.

There remained, finally, *the political problem*. Under the existing circumstances there was no valid solution for it. The provisional government had of course assigned the task of calling the Constituent Assembly in the near future. But for a thousand reasons [attainment of] this task could not succeed. Above all, the government *dreaded* the opening of that Assembly. Contrary to its promises, its fondest hope was to postpone the Assembly as long as possible, and meanwhile it would seek the installation, through some fortunate turn of luck, of a “constitutional” monarchy. But presently other perilous obstacles arose.

The most serious was *the resurrection of the workers’ Soviets*, notably the Petrograd Soviet. This had been re-established in the very first days of the Revolution — by tradition, and also as in 1905, in default of other workers’ organizations. True, at that moment the industrial workers were under the influence of the moderate Socialists, Mensheviks, and right Social Revolutionaries. But, all the same, their ideology and programme was absolutely contrary to the project of the provisional government, and naturally the moral influence and activity of the Petrograd Soviet soon began to conflict with that of the Government, to the detriment of the latter.

The Petrograd Soviet was a sort of second government for the country. It set the tone of all the vast network of provincial Soviets and co-ordinated their activity. Being thus supported by the working class of the whole country, it quickly became powerful. Also it steadily gained more and more influence in the Army. Before long the orders of the Soviets often carried far more weight than those of the provisional government. Under such conditions the latter was obliged to deal carefully with the Soviets.

It goes without saying that the Government would have preferred to fight them. But to take this action against the organized workers on the morrow of a revolution which had loudly proclaimed

absolute freedom of speech, of organization, and of social action, was impossible. For on what real force could it depend to carry out that task? It had none.

Accordingly the Government was compelled to make the most of a bad situation, to tolerate its powerful rival, and even to “flirt” with it. The provisional regime well knew the fragility of the sympathies it had among the workers and in the Army. It was keenly aware that in the first serious social conflict those two decisive forces indubitably would side with the Soviets.

As always it “hoped”. It sought to gain time. But the presence of this second “directorate”, unofficial, but threatening, and with which it had to deal, comprised one of the biggest obstacles that the provisional government — official but powerless — must surmount.

*The violent criticism and vigorous propaganda by all the Socialist parties, and especially the extreme leftist elements* (left Social Revolutionaries, Bolsheviks, Anarchists) also were not to be disregarded. For, naturally, the Government could not have recourse to repressive measures against freedom of speech. And even if it had dared do this, where were the forces to carry out its orders? It had none at its disposal.

Even a powerful bourgeoisie, organized and strongly entrenched, which already had withstood more than one combat with oppositional forces and possessing powerful material forces (police, Army, money, et cetera) would have been hard put to arrive at a satisfactory solution to so many problems and to impose its will and its programme in the face of the existing situation. And *such a bourgeoisie did not exist in Russia*. As a class conscious of its own interests, the capitalist class in that country was scarcely beginning to exist. Weak, unorganized, and without tradition or historical experience, it could hope for no success. Also it was not active.

So, representing “in principle” a hardly existing and inactive bourgeoisie, the provisional government was condemned to work in a vacuum. This was without doubt the basic cause of its failure.

## Chapter 4. Toward a Socialist Government; The Poverty of Socialism

Thus the first provisional Russian government, essentially bourgeois, was rapidly and inevitably reduced to manifest ridiculous and fatal impotence. The poor thing did what it could to maintain itself: it manoeuvred, it temporized, it stalled. Meanwhile all the cardinal problems also were bogged down. Criticism of and then general anger against this phantom government increased from day to day. Soon its existence became insupportable. Scarcely sixty days after its solemn inauguration, it was compelled to give way, without a struggle, on May 6, to a so-called “coalition” government (with Socialist participation), whose most influential member was Alexander Kerensky, a very moderate Social Revolutionary, or rather “independent” Socialist.

Could this bourgeois-Socialist regime hope to achieve more satisfactory results than its predecessor? Certainly not. For the conditions of its existence and the impotence of its actions would necessarily be identical with those of the first provisional government. Obligated to rely on a powerless bourgeoisie, forced to continue the war, incapable of finding a real solution of the more and more urgent problems, attacked by the leftists, and surrounded by difficulties of all kinds at all times, this second provisional regime perished ingloriously like the first, and in almost the same length of time, stepping aside on July 2 for a third provisional government, composed primarily of Socialists, with a few bourgeois elements.

It was at this point that Kerensky, supreme leader of the third and subsequently of a fourth government (almost the same as its immediate forerunner) became, for a time, a sort of Duce of Russia, and the Social Revolutionary Party, in close collaboration with the Mensheviks, seemed to have emerged definitely as masters of the Revolution. One step further, and the country would have had a Socialist government which could have relied on very real forces: the peasantry, the mass of industrial workers a large section of the intellectuals, the Soviets, the Army, et cetera.

However, it accomplished nothing.

Upon its attainment of power the last Kerensky government appeared very strong. And, in fact, *it could have become so.*

Kerensky, a lawyer and a Deputy, enjoyed great popularity, both among the masses and in the Army. His speeches in the Duma at the outbreak of the Revolution scored memorable success. And his assumption of power aroused tremendous hopes throughout Russia. He could depend without reservation on the soviets — and therefore on the whole of the nation’s working class — for at the moment the overwhelming majority of the delegates [the Soviets, factory committees, and the soldiers’ committees] were Socialists, and the Soviets were entirely in the hands of right Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks.

In the early weeks of the Kerensky ministry, it was dangerous to criticize its leader in public, so strong was the country’s confidence in him. Several agitators learned this to their cost, while trying to speak against Kerensky in the public squares. There were even cases of lynching.

But to profit from all these remarkable advantages it was necessary that Kerensky fulfil — and fulfil effectively, by deeds — a single condition: the one recommended by Danton in days gone by. He must have *audacity, still more audacity, and audacity all the time*.

Well, this was precisely the quality that Kerensky completely lacked!

In the existing situation *audacity* for him properly meant: 1. Immediate abandonment of the war (the finding of some way to do this); 2. A decisive break with the capitalist bourgeois regime (that is, the formation of a wholly Socialist government); 3. Immediate orientation of the economic and social life of all Russia toward a frankly Socialist system.

All this would have been perfectly logical and “mandatory” for a government of Socialist persuasion, with a Socialist majority, and a Socialist leader. But no! As always, as they did everywhere, the Russian Socialists and Kerensky himself, instead of understanding the historical necessity and seizing the propitious moment to go forward and finally fulfil their real programme, remained prisoners of their bastard “minimum” programme which categorically required a struggle for a bourgeois democratic republic.

Instead of putting themselves candidly at the service of the working masses and their emancipation, the Socialists and Kerensky, held captive by their own flabby ideology, could find nothing better to do than play the game of Russian and international capitalism.

Kerensky dared not abandon the war nor turn his back on the bourgeoisie, dared not base himself solidly on the working classes, nor even simply to continue the Revolution! And he dared not hasten the calling of the Constituent Assembly.

He wanted to continue the war! And at all costs and by whatever means!

*What he did dare to do* was, first, to institute a group of reforms in reverse: re-establishment of the death penalty and court-martials at the front, repressive measures in the rear. And finally, there was a long series of visits to the battle-front, and the making of speeches and inflammatory harangues which would, in Kerensky’s opinion, revive the war-like enthusiasm of the early days of the conflict among the soldiers. He was aware that the war continued only through inertia. And he wanted to give it a new impetus with words and punishments, not taking any account the reality.

He orated so much that his title of *Commander-in-Chief* (he also was president of the Council of Ministers) was soon changed by the Russian public to *Orator-in-Chief*.

About two months sufficed to make Kerensky’s popularity fall to the bottom, especially among the industrial workers and soldiers, who ended by jeering at his speeches. They wanted deeds, *deeds of peace and social revolution*. They also wanted the speedy calling of the Constituent Assembly. The obstinacy with which all the provisional regimes delayed that convocation was one of the reasons for their unpopularity. The Bolsheviks took advantage of this, promising, among other things, the calling of the Assembly as soon as they would come into power.

In short, the reasons for the failure of the Kerensky government were the same as those which brought on the collapse of the preceding regimes: the inability of the moderate Socialists to end the war; the lamentable impotence of this fourth government to solve the basic national problems; and its intention of imprisoning the Revolution within the limits of a bourgeois regimen.

Several circumstances and events — the logical outcome of these fatal inadequacies — aggravated the situation and precipitated Kerensky’s downfall.

In the first place, the Bolshevik Party, having by this time assembled its best forces and thus possessing a powerful organization for propaganda and action, daily spread throughout the country, by means of thousands of orators and published articles, skilful, accurate, and vigorous criticisms

of the policy, attitude, and activities of the Government (and also of all the moderate Socialists). It advocated immediately cessation of the war, demobilization, continuation of the Revolution.

It diffused with all its energy its social and revolutionary ideas. It repeated every day its promise to convoke the Constituent Assembly at once, and finally to resolve — quickly and successfully — all the problems of the hour *if it was given power*. Constantly it hammered, without let-up and without allowing itself to be intimidated, on the same nail: *Power!* “All power to the Soviets!” it shouted from morning to evening, and from evening to morning. Give political power to the Bolsheviki and everything would be fixed, resolved, realized.

Increasingly listened to and followed by the intellectual workers, the working masses in industry, and the Army, multiplying, with precipitous rapidity, the number of its adherents, and thus penetrating into all the factories and enterprises, the Bolshevik Party already had recruited by June, 1917, an imposing force of militants, agitators, propagandists, writers, organizers, and men of action. It also possessed considerable funds. And it had at its head a courageous central committee directed by Lenin. It carried on activity that was fierce, feverish, and fulminating, and it felt itself, at least morally, the master of the situation. Especially was this true because it had no rivals on the extreme left. The left Social Revolutionary Party, much weaker, could only figure as a satellite, the Anarchist movement was scarcely beginning; and as for the revolutionary Syndicalist movement, it was, as we know, non-existent.

*Kerensky*, feeling himself less and less secure, *dared not attack the Bolsheviks resolutely, straightforwardly*. He had recourse, in a desultory manner, to half-measures, which, while sufficient to defeat his opponent, gave it publicity, so that it won the attention, esteem, and finally the confidence of the masses. In the last analysis, these timid reactions strengthened the enemy instead of weakening it. And then, like many others, Kerensky did not see the danger. At that moment hardly anyone anticipated a Bolshevik victory. It is notable that even in that party itself, Lenin was almost alone in his certainty of winning and almost alone insisted that opportunity for preparing for an insurrection was at hand.

Finally Kerensky, pressed by the Allies, and hypnotized by his own dreams and probably by his own speeches, had the misfortune of launching, on June 18, his now famous offensive on the German front — an offensive which failed miserably and struck a terrible blow to his popularity. And on July 3 an armed uprising against the Government, participated in by troops (and by sailors from the Kronstadt fortress) broke out in Petrograd, with cries of “Down with Kerensky! Long live the Social Revolution! All power to the Soviets!” This time Kerensky still could master the situation, though with difficulty. Nevertheless he lost the very shadow of his former influence.

Then an event occurred which gave him the coup de grace. Made desperate by the rising tide of the Revolution and by Kerensky’s indecision, a “White” general, Kornilov, brought from the front several thousand soldiers (mostly from Caucasian regiments — in effect colonial troops — more easily duped and manipulated than others), deceived them about what was happening in the capital, and sent them to Petrograd under the command of another general who swore that he would “put an end to the *bands of armed criminals* and defend the Government, which is powerless to exterminate them.”

For reasons which perhaps will someday be known specifically, Kerensky gave only feeble resistance to Kornilov — a token resistance. The capital was saved only by the furious determination, the prodigious effort, and sublime spirit of sacrifice of the city’s workers. With the aid of the Petrograd Soviet’s left wing, several thousand of the workers armed themselves hastily and



departed on their own initiative for “the front” against Kornilov. A battle, on the outskirts of the capital, remained indecisive.

The workers did not yield an inch of territory. But they left many dead on the field, and were not sure of having enough men and munitions for the next day. However, thanks to the quick and energetic action of the railroad and telegraph workers, assisted by soldiers’ committees on the battle-line, Kornilov’s headquarters were isolated from the front and from the whole country.

In the night, that commander’s soldiers, surprised by the heroic resistance of [men who had been described to them as] “bandits, criminals, and idlers”, and suspecting trickery, decided to examine the dead. They discovered that the bodies all had the calloused hands of *bona fide* industrial workers. Presently, too, a few groups of Socialists from the Caucasus who were then in Petrograd managed to get a delegation into Kornilov’s camp. The delegates conferred with the soldiers there, told them the real situation, dispelled the myth of the “bandits”, and persuaded them to abandon the fratricidal fight. Next morning, Kornilov’s men, declaring that they had been deceived, refused to continue fighting against their brother workers and returned to the main front. The Kornilov adventure ended.

Immediately after this, public opinion accused Kerensky of secretly conniving with Kornilov. Whether true or not, this story was widely believed. Morally the situation spelled the finish of the Kerensky government and, in general, of the moderate Socialists. The way was open for a resolute offensive by the Bolshevik Party.

Then another event of major importance occurred. In new elections of delegates (to the Soviets, factory committees, and soldiers’ committees) *the Bolsheviks scored a crushing victory over the moderate Socialists*. Thus that party attained full control of all working class and revolutionary activity. With the collaboration of the left Social Revolutionaries the Bolsheviks likewise gained wide sympathy among the peasants. They were now in an excellent strategic position for a decisive attack.

At this juncture Lenin conceived the idea of calling a Pan-Russian congress of Soviets, which would rise against Kerensky, overthrow him with the help of the Army, and inaugurate Bolshevik power. And preparations to carry out that plan began at once, partly in the open, partly in secret. Compelled to hide, Lenin directed the necessary operations by remote control. Kerensky, while suspecting the danger, was powerless to avert it. Events moved swiftly. The last act of the drama was about to start.

It is fitting at this point to sum up certain outstanding elements in the Russian situation in that period.

All the conservative or moderate governments which officiate! from February to October, 1917, proved their impotence to solve under the existing conditions, the exceptionally acute problem with which the Revolution had confronted the people of Russia. This was the principal reason why the nation threw out, one after the other in the short space of eight months, the bourgeois constitutional government, the democratic bourgeois government, and the two moderate Socialist governments.

Two facts especially marked this impotence:

1. The impossibility of the country continuing the war, and of any of the four governments cited ending it.
2. The urgency with which the people awaited the calling of the Constituent Assembly, and the inability of those governments to call it.

The insistent propaganda of the extreme left for immediate cessation of the war, for immediate summoning of the Assembly, and for the integral Social Revolution as the only way to safety, with other factors of less importance, animated the thunderous march of the Revolution.

Thus the Russian Revolution, which had broken out in February, as an uprising against Tsarism, rapidly outgrew the stages of a bourgeois political revolution, and of democratic and moderate Socialism.

In October, the road being cleared of all obstacles, the Revolution was set, effectively and completely, on a social revolutionary basis. And therefore it was logical and natural that, after the failure of all the moderate governments and political parties, the working masses should turn to the last party remaining, the only one which looked toward the Social Revolution without fear, the only one which promised, if it were given power, a speedy and happy solution for all the existing problems — the Bolsheviki Party.

The Anarchist movement, we must repeat, was still much too weak to have tangible influence on events. And there was no Syndicalist movement.

From a social point of view, the situation was as follows:

Three fundamental elements existed: 1. the bourgeoisie; 2. the working class; 3. the Bolsheviki Party, acting as ideologue and “advance guard”.

The bourgeoisie, as the reader knows, was weak. The Bolsheviki would not have too much trouble in eliminating it.

The working class also was weak. Unorganized (in the true sense of the word), inexperienced, and basically unaware of its true task, *it could do nothing by itself* in its own interests. *It left everything to the Bolsheviki, who seized control of the action.*

We will add a note here which anticipates developments somewhat, but which will enable the reader to follow and understand them better.

*This inadequacy of the Russian working class at the beginning of the Revolution subsequently proved fatal to the whole Revolution.* [Apropos of this] there was an evil debit left over from the abortive revolution of 1905–06; at that time *the workers did not win the right to organize*; they remained scattered. In 1917 they felt the effects of that fact.

[Consider the early course of the Bolsheviki Party after it took control]. Instead of simply helping the workers to achieve the Revolution and emancipate themselves, instead of aiding them in their struggle, the role to which the workers assigned it in their thoughts, the role which, normally, would be that of all revolutionary ideologists, and which never [properly] includes taking and exercising “political power” — instead of performing this role, *the Bolsheviki party, once in control, installed itself as absolute master.* It was quickly corrupted. It organized itself as a privileged caste. And later *it flattened and subjected the working class in order to exploit it, under new forms, in its own interest.*

Because of this the whole Revolution was falsified, misled. For, when the masses of the people became cognizant of their danger, it was too late. After a struggle between them and the new masters, solidly organized and in possession of ample material, administrative, military, and police strength, the people succumbed. That bitter and unequal conflict went on for some three years, and for a long time remained practically unknown outside of Russia. The real emancipating revolution again was stifled, and by the “revolutionaries” themselves.

Let it be explained here that “political power” is not a force in itself. It is strong when it can base itself on capital, the arms of the State, the Army, the police. Lacking those supports it remains “suspended in the void”, powerless, and unable to operate. The Russian Revolution has

given formal proof of this. After February, 1917, the Russian bourgeoisie had “political power” in its hands, yet it was actually powerless, and its “power” fell by itself two months later. Following its bankruptcy it no longer possessed any real force — neither productive capital, nor mass confidence, nor a solid State apparatus, nor an Army of its own. The second and third provisional governments fell in the same manner and for the same reason. And it is highly probable that if the Bolsheviki had not precipitated events, the Kerensky regime would have met precisely the same fate a little later.

Manifestly it follows that if the Social Revolution is in the process of taking over [a nation] (so that capital, land, mines, factories, means of communication, and money begin to pass into the hands of the people, and the Army makes common cause with the latter) there is no reason to be concerned about “political power” If the defeated classes attempt, in line with tradition, to form a government, what importance could it have? Even if they should succeed in that, it would be a phantom government, ineffectual and easily suppressed by the slightest effort of the armed people.

And as for the Revolution, what need has it of a “government” of “political power”? It has only one task to perform, that of advancing by the same course as the people, to organize itself, to consolidate itself, to perfect itself economically, to defend itself if need be, to extend itself, to build a new social life for the masses. Which has nothing to do with “political power”. For *all this is a normal function of the revolutionary people themselves*, of their various economic and social organizations, their ordinating federations, their defence formations.

What is “political power” fundamentally? What is “political” activity? How many times have I posed these questions to members of left political parties without ever being able to obtain an intelligible definition or answer! How can one define “political” activity as an activity in itself, specifically useful for the community having a definite reason for existing? One can describe and define more or less precisely other activity — social, economic, administrative, juridical, diplomatic, cultural. But “political” activity — what is it? It is maintained that this term denotes exactly a central administrative activity, indispensable for a widely extended group: for a nation. But then *does* “political power” mean “administrative power”?

It is easy to see that these two ideas are not at all identical. Consciously or unconsciously, *power* and *administration* are thus confused (just as *State* and *society* are confused). The fact is that administrative activity is not separate — cannot be separated — from any branch of human activity; it is an integral part of it. It functions in all activity in so far as it is a principle of organization, of co-ordination, or normal centralization (to the degree that it is needed) federatively — and from the periphery toward the centre.

For certain kinds of human activity, one can conceive of a general administration. In each field, or in a group of fields, the men possessing the ability to organize should normally exercise the function of organizers, or “administrators” — a function which is simply a part of the whole activity of the field in question. These men, workers like the others, could thus insure the “administration of things” (contact, cohesion, equilibrium, et cetera) without having to establish a rigid political power as such. And “political power”, like every other “thing apart”, remains undefinable, because it does not correspond to any normal, real, concrete human activity. That is why “political power” becomes empty and falls of its own weight when the real functions are carried out normally, by their corresponding services. “As such”, it cannot exist, for there is no specific “political” function in a human community.

A. A. Goldenweiser, a Russian jurist, recounts in his memoirs [*Kievan Reminiscences*, in Archives of the Russian Revolution, Vol. VI, pp. 161–303, [Moscow?] 1922.] that he lived during the Revolution in a city in the Ukraine which was in a notably unstable zone. In the course of events that city was left several times without “power”, either White or Red. And with astonishment, M. Goldenweiser reports that during the whole period the people there lived, worked, and took care of their own needs as well as, or even better than, when there was “power.” M. Goldenweiser was not the only one to mention that fact. What is surprising is that he was astonished at it.

Is it “power” that makes men live, act, and organize to satisfy their needs? In all human history, has there ever been a “power” which rendered society well organized, harmonious, and happy? History teaches us the opposite: human societies are — to a degree that it is historically possible — happy, harmonious, and progressive in periods when political power is weak (*vide* ancient Greece or certain periods in the Middle Ages) and where the people have been more or less let alone by it. And *vice versa*: a strong “political power” never gives the people anything but misfortunes, wars poverty, stagnation.

“Political” power took form in the evolution of human society for special historical reasons, which in our time no longer exist. We cannot concern ourselves here with this matter; it would take us too far from our subject. We shall confine ourselves to stating that fundamentally, for thousands of years, “power” has never produced anything but wars. All scholarly writings [on that theme] testify to this. And [recent decades in Russia have demonstrated] it in a striking manner.

It is contended that in order to “administrate” it is necessary to be able to *impose, command, coerce*. Thus a “political power” is a central administration of a large group (of a country) which possesses the means of coercion. But, in case of need, a popular administrative service, as such, can have recourse to measures of this sort, without having to set up a specific, permanent “political power”, and even more efficiently than the latter.

Also it is argued that the masses are incapable of organizing themselves and of creating by themselves an effective administration. Farther on in this work the reader will find, I hope, ample proof to the contrary.

If, in the midst of a social revolution, the political parties want to amuse themselves by “organizing power” the people have only to pursue their revolutionary tasks, leaving the parties isolated; they will soon abandon this useless game. If after February, 1917, and especially after October, the Russian workers, instead of creating new masters, had simply continued their tasks, helped by all the revolutionists, defended by their own Army, and supported by the country at large, the very idea of “political power” soon would have disappeared.

In the pages which follow the reader will come upon various facts, publicly unknown until now, which will confirm this thesis.

We hope that the next revolution will travel the right road, and not let itself be misled by the political “palace revolutionists”.

## Chapter 5. The Bolshevik Revolution

At the end of October, 1917, the climax drew near in Russia. The masses were ready for a new revolution. Several spontaneous uprisings since July (the one already mentioned in Petrograd, one in Kaluga, another in Kazan) and disturbances among both troops and civilians, were adequate evidence of this. From that time onward the Bolshevik Party saw itself in a position to avail itself of two real forces — the confidence of the great masses and a large majority in the Army. It went into action and feverishly prepared for a decisive battle which it was determined to win. Its agitation was furious. It put the finishing touches on the formation of workers' and soldiers' units for the crucial combat. Also it organized, completely, its own units and drew up, for use in the event of success, the composition of the projected Bolshevik government, with Lenin at its head. He watched developments closely and issued his final instructions. Trotsky, Lenin's right-hand man, who had returned several months earlier from the United States, where he had lived after his escape from Siberia, was to share a considerable portion of the power.

The left Social Revolutionists were collaborating with the Bolsheviks. The Anarcho-Syndicalists and the Anarchists, few in numbers and badly organized, yet very active, did everything they could to support and encourage the action of the masses against Kerensky. However, they tried to orient the new revolution away from the political course of the conquest of power by a new party, and to put it on the true social road, toward free organization and collaboration, in a spirit of liberty.

The ensuing course of events is fairly well known. We shall recount the facts briefly.

Having recognized the extreme weakness of the Kerensky government, won the sympathy of an overwhelming majority of the working masses, and having been assured of the active support of the Kronstadt fleet — always the vanguard of the Revolution — and of the majority of the Petrograd troops, the Bolshevik Party's central committee set the insurrection for October 25. The Pan-Russian Congress of Soviets was called for the same day.

In the minds of the central committee, this congress — the great majority of its delegates being Bolsheviks who supported their party's directives blindly — would, if need be, proclaim and uphold the Revolution, rally all of the country's revolutionary forces, and stand up to the eventual resistance of Kerensky.

On the evening of October 25 the insurrection came off, effectively. The congress met in Petrograd as scheduled. But it did not have to intervene.

There was no street fighting, no barricades, no widespread combat. Everything happened simply and quickly.

Abandoned by everyone, but holding fast to its illusions, the Kerensky government was sitting in the Winter Palace in the capital. It was defended by a battalion of the "elite" guards, a battalion of women, and a handful of young cadets.

Some detachments of troops won over by the Bolsheviks, acting according to a plan worked out jointly by the Congress of Soviets and the party's central committee, surrounded the palace and attacked its guards. This action of the troops was supported by some of the battleships of the

Baltic fleet, brought from Kronstadt and drawn up in the Neva opposite the palace. Most notable was the cruiser *Aurora*.

After a short skirmish and a few cannon-shot from the cruiser, the Bolshevik troops took the palace.

Meanwhile, however, Kerensky had managed to flee. The other members of the Government were arrested.

Thus, in Petrograd, the “insurrection” was limited to a minor military operation, led by the Bolsheviks. Once the seat of government was emptied, the party’s central committee installed itself there as conqueror. The overturn was virtually a palace revolution.

An attempt by Kerensky to march on Petrograd with some troops summoned from the front (Cossacks, and again the Caucasian division) failed — thanks to the vigorous armed intervention of the capital’s working masses, and especially of the Kronstadt sailors, who quickly came to the rescue. In a battle near Gatchina, on the outskirts of Petrograd, a part of Kerensky’s troops were beaten, and another part went over to the revolutionary camp. Kerensky fled and escaped abroad.

In Moscow and elsewhere, the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks was attended with greater difficulty.

Moscow saw ten days of furious fighting between the revolutionary forces and those of reaction. There were many victims. Several sections of the city were heavily damaged by artillery fire. Finally the Revolution won.

In certain other cities also, the victory was gained only after intense struggle.

But the countryside, for the most part, remained calm, or rather, indifferent. The peasants were too much absorbed in their own local preoccupations. For some time they had been in the process of solving the “agrarian problem” for themselves. In any case, they could see nothing wrong in the Bolsheviks taking power. Once they had the land, and didn’t have to fear the return of the pomestchiki, the big land-owners, they were nearly satisfied, and gave little thought to the occupants of the throne. They didn’t expect any harm from the Bolsheviks. And they had heard it said that the latter wanted to end the war, which seemed perfectly just and reasonable to them. Thus they had no reason to oppose the new involution.

— — The way in which that revolution was accomplished illustrates very well the uselessness of a struggle for “political power”. If, for one reason or another, such power is supported by a strong section of the populace and especially by the Army, it would be impossible to win against it, and therefore futile to attack it. But if, on the contrary, it is abandoned by the majority of the people and by the Army — which occurs in every genuine revolution — then it is not worth bothering with. At the slightest gesture of the armed people, it will fall like a house of cards. It is necessary to be concerned, not with “political” power, but with the real power of the Revolution, with its inexhaustible, spontaneous, potential forces, its irresistible spirit, the far-flung horizons it opens — in short, with the enormous possibilities it brings in its train.

However, in several regions, notably in the East and in Central Russia, the victory of the Bolsheviks was not complete. Counterrevolutionary movements soon appeared. They consolidated themselves, gained in importance, and led to a civil war which lasted until the end of 1921.

One of those movements, headed by General Anton Ivano-vitch Denikin, took on the proportions of an uprising which seriously threatened the power of the Bolsheviks. Starting from the depths of Southern Russia, Denikin’s army almost reached the gates of Moscow in the summer of 1919.

Also very dangerous was another uprising launched by General Baron Peter Wrangel in the same region. And a third movement of White Russians organized by Admiral Alexander Vasilievitch Kolchak in Siberia was for a time conspicuously menacing. Marching with his army from his headquarters in Omsk westward to the Ural mountains, he vanquished the Bolsheviki in several battles.

Other counter-revolutionary rebellions were of less importance.

The greater part of these movements was partly supported and given supplies through foreign intervention. Some were backed and even politically directed by the moderate Socialists, the right Social Revolutionaries, and the Mensheviks.

On the other hand, the Bolshevik power had to carry on a long and difficult struggle in two directions — against its ex-partners, the left Social Revolutionaries, and against the Anarchist movement and ideology. Naturally, these leftist movements did not fight the Bolsheviks on the counter-revolutionary side, but, on the contrary, in the name of “the true Social Revolution”, betrayed, in their opinion, by the Bolshevik Party in power.

Beyond question, the birth, and especially the extent and strength of the counter-revolutionary forces, were the inevitable result of the bankruptcy of the Bolshevik power, and of its inability to organize a new economic and social life for the Russian people. Farther on the reader will see what the real development of the October Revolution was, and also what were the means by which the new power had to impose itself, maintain itself, master the storm, and “solve” after its own fashion the problems of the Revolution.

Not until the end of 1922 could the Bolshevik Party feel itself completely — at least for a moment in history — master of the situation.

On the ruins of Tsarism and of the bourgeois-feudal system, it was now necessary to begin to build a new society.

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



Voline  
The Unknown Revolution, 1917–1921. Book One. Birth, Growth and Triumph of the Revolution  
1947

Retrieved on December 23, 2009 from [www.ditext.com](http://www.ditext.com)

[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)