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**Workers' Organisations and the Development of
Worker-Identity in St. Petersburg, 1870-1895**
A Study in the Formation of a Radical Worker-Intelligenty

John Jackson

Abstract

In the last three decades of the 19th century small groups composed of primarily skilled, male workers in Petersburg factories developed and refined a specific form of worker identity, that of the *worker-intelligent*. This identity was the product of a combination of an ideal conceptualisation of proletarian man derived from readings of western socialist literature and ideas introduced into the workers' environment by members of the radical *intelligenty* alongside their material experience of work in the rapidly developing industries of the capital. Seeking to appropriate the 'intelligence' of their radical intelligentsia mentors to create 'Russian Bebels', from the early 1870s small groups of workers aspired to develop their own worker organisations to give voice to the specific needs, demands and assumed aspirations of the emerging working-class within an autocratic society that maintained the fiction that a specific industrial working-class did not exist.

Whilst workers enthusiastically welcomed the intelligentsia as bearers of the knowledge essential to construct their own specific identity, the process of identity creation frequently led to power struggles with the intelligentsia over the latter's role and control of knowledge. It is in the often contested relationships between workers and intelligentsia that vital clues emerge as to how workers perceived themselves and others within the worker-class. Within this contested arena the radical *worker-intelligenty* frequently articulated their independence from the intelligentsia who they frequently regarded as a temporary ally, essential to satisfy their initial thirst for knowledge and to fulfil certain technical tasks, but who eventually should be subordinate to the workers' movement that workers alone were capable of leading. Although workers eagerly embraced the revolutionary ideals received from the *intelligenty*, these were processed and reconstructed in terms of a worker-hegemony in the revolutionary process, taking entirely literally the dictum that '*the liberation of the workers must be a cause for the workers themselves.*' This represented the essence of the *worker-intelligenty* belief system and, when taken in conjunction with their conviction that the mass of workers remained 'backward,' incapable of effecting their own liberation, produced a strongly held belief that it was incumbent on enlightened workers to act as advocates of the whole class, irrespective of the degree to which the mass of workers conformed to their vision of the ideal revolutionary worker.

These early Petersburg workers' organisations are of historical importance as from their inception they articulated a specific 'worker' ideology opposed to both the political regime and emerging Russian industrial capitalism, an opposition that would subsequently be

transformed in Soviet Russia into an historical narrative that presented them as a vanguard for the working-class and the precursors of the Soviet '*new man*.' In the process of fusing of the mind of the *intelligenty* within the body of a worker, the first generations of *worker-intelligenty* consistently sought to demonstrate in practice their own revolutionary primacy. Painfully aware of the disparity between their ideal proletarian man and the reality of the 'backwardness' of the mass of their fellow workers, the early *worker-intelligenty* developed and nurtured their own particular institution - the workers' circle, *kruzhok*, an institution which simultaneously reinforced their own sense of identity and worth whilst providing a space in which they could receive their necessary enlightenment from the radical intelligentsia. Rather than viewing workers as passive objects, the Petersburg *worker-intelligenty* was instrumental in its own creation, throughout the period under discussion acting as a revolutionary subject in its own right, to a significant extent determining the nature and content of study involving the *intelligenty*, establishing clear organisational frameworks to govern relationships with *intelligenty* groups, and, critically, seeking opportune moments to enter the public sphere and declare their presence as workers, revealing themselves as a social force to be recognised.

In the historiography of the revolutionary working-class in Russia these worker-led organisations have been largely ignored or subsumed under the rubric of the name of a leading member of the radical *intelligenty* associated with workers' circles, as for example in the so-called Brusnev organisation. For a long period Soviet and western historians privileged the role of the radical intelligentsia, reflecting competing ideological biases that in the case of the Soviet interpretation viewed workers as a dependent category requiring enlightenment from an external Marxist party, whilst much western research focused on ideological debates amongst *intelligenty* 'leaders' and/or incipient reformist and non-revolutionary tendencies amongst worker activists. Although in more recent time a number of historians have explored the autonomous nature of worker activism in 1905 and 1917, whilst others have explored the cultural attitudes and beliefs of workers, the first specifically worker-led organisations created by *worker-intelligenty* have been largely ignored. What remains missing is a study that addresses the actual historical practice of the *worker-intelligenty* during its formative years and how it sought to give form to its self-realisation and express its received knowledge as the advanced representative of its class. The discourse of class not only gave life to the *worker-intelligenty* but critically guided its first at times uncertain footsteps towards fulfilling what it had come to believe was its 'historic' role.

Contents

Abstract	2
List of Illustrations	6
Acknowledgements	7
Author's Declaration	8
Chapter 1. Introduction	10
Section I	
Chapter 2. Marxist Narratives on Class and Consciousness	20
Chapter 3. Petersburg Industrialisation and the Formation of a Working-Class	32
Chapter 4. Culture, Education and the Petersburg Working-Class	47
Chapter 5. The <i>Worker-intelligenty</i>	69
Section II	
Chapter 6. The Petersburg Workers' Organisation of the 1870s	105
Chapter 7. Revival of the Petersburg Workers' Organisation in the 1880s	156
Chapter 8. The Central Workers' Circle: First Phase. Emerging from the Shadows 1889-1892	182
Chapter 9. The Central Workers Circle: Second Phase The <i>Worker-intelligenty</i> Defined, 1892-1894	245
Chapter 10. The Central Workers' Circle: Final Phase From Propaganda towards Agitation, 1894-1895	271
Chapter 11. Conclusion	312
Appendix A. A Note on Sources	322
Bibliography	326

List of Illustrations

1 Map of Petersburg, c. 1905	9
2 Semen Kanatchikov	26
3 Aleksandr Bogdanov	29
4 Putilov Factory, c. 1900	34
5 Putilov Factory, Mechanical Workshop	35
6 Daily Life on the Petergof Highway	39
7 Workers' <i>Artel</i> ' at the Putilov Factory	40
8 Tavern in the Narvskii Gate	48
9 Timofei Budrin, Principal of the Baltic Technical School	61
10 Pupils at the Baltic Technical School, c. 1890	62
11 Kornilov-Smolensk Sunday/Evening School	63
12 Pattern Making Workshop, Baltic Shipyards, 1903	74
13 Open Hearth Furnace, Putilov Factory	75
14 A.S. Shapovalov	84
15 Nikolai Ge: Christ and the Robber	95
16 Andrei Fisher	100
17 Petr Alekseev	115
18 Dmitrii Smirnov	118
19 Andrei Presniakov	133
20 Petr Moiseenko	136
21 Leaflet of the Northern Union	143
22 Dmitrii Churkin	145
23 Viktor Obnorksii	148
24 Programme of the Northern Union	150
25 Stepan Khalturin	152
26 Pavel Tochisskii	158
27 Egor Afanas'ev-Klimanov	181
28 Blacksmith Workshop, Nobel Factory	182
29 Cover of Petersburg Workers' May-Day Speeches, 1891	198
30 Fedor Afans'ev and Nikolai Bogdanov	200
31 Vera Karelina and Anna Boldyreva	219
32 Vladimir Fomin	221
33 Baltic Shipyards, c. 1890	222
34 Workshops at the Baltic Shipyards	223
35 New Admiralty Shipyards	229
36 Petersburg Workers at the funeral of N.V. Shelgunov, 1891	237
37 May-Day, 1891	241
38 Konstantin Norinskii	252
39 Covers of Agitational Pamphlets	268
40 Vasilii Shelgunov	277
41 [Nevskii] Semiannikov Mechanical Factory	282
42 Factory Shop at the Semiannikov Factory	283
43 Boris Zinov'ev	285
44 Courtyard of Textile Factory Barracks	301
45 Thornton Textile Factory	303
46 Ivan Babushkin	310

Acknowledgements

The thesis is presented as a remembrance to the first *worker-intelligenty* in Petersburg, men, who, along with a few women, committed themselves to acquiring knowledge and in the process risked victimisation and imprisonment but through their persistence and endurance gave voice to their aspirations for a better future for their entire class. Although this voice may have faded over the years, I still believe it said something important that deserves to be heard again. Presenting this thesis is a small contribution to recovering and honouring their struggles.

It has taken many years for this thesis finally to be completed. It began life a long time back in the 1970s under the supervision of James D. White at the then Institute of Soviet and East European Studies. Its original conception owes much to Professor White who also encouraged and supported me in returning to complete the thesis, offering throughout deep insights and thought provoking ideas on the nature of Russian workers and their struggles. Thanks also goes to Terry Cox and Jon Oldfield at CEES for also supporting my ambition to return to complete my research and to Professor Christopher Berry for agreeing that I could re-register at the University in order to accomplish this. Geoff Swain who generously agreed to become my supervisor over the last three years has been a source of excellent advice, giving much needed direction, support and encouragement. Without his patience and good sense in focusing my research on a specific time and place it is likely that I would be still searching for the often elusive *worker-intelligenty* in various parts of Russia.

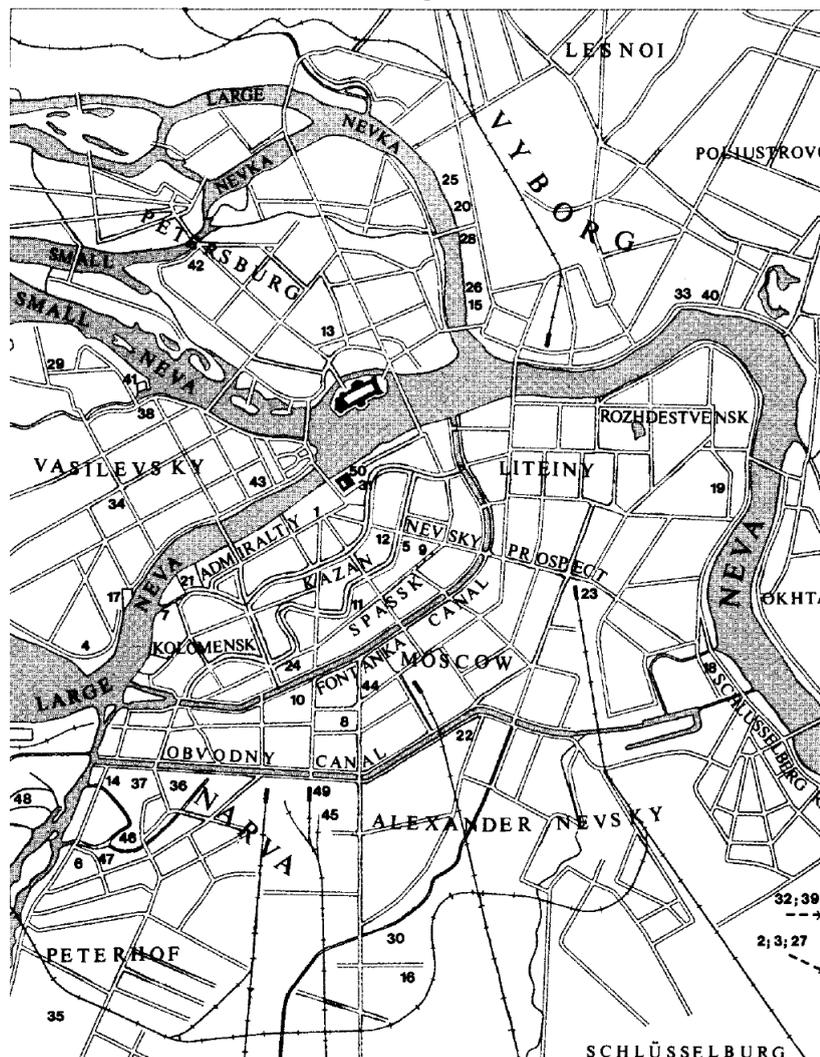
Most importantly my appreciation goes to my family. To Kirsty, my daughter, who as a child had to put up with her daddy being absorbed for too long in Russian books. And especially to Lynn, my wife, this thesis is dedicated with love and thanks for the many years she has patiently lived with my at times obsessive fascination with Russian workers. The thesis would never have been completed without her belief in me.

Author's declaration

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

Signature _____

John Jackson.

Petersburg c. 1905 ¹

Key to Map 1: Factories and Points of Interest

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Aleksandrovska Garden | 13. Kirchner Bindery |
| 2. Aleksandrovska Machine Works | 14. L. L. König Spinnery |
| 3. Atlas Iron & Copper Foundry & Machine Plant | 15. Lessner Machine Works |
| 4. Baltic Shipyards | 16. Mechanized Shoe Factory |
| 5. City Duma | 17. Nail Plant |
| 6. Ekaterinhof Spinnery | 18. Nevsky Shipbuilding and Machine Works |
| 7. Franco-Russian Machine Building Works | 19. Nevsky Spinnery |
| 8. Free Economic Society | 20. Nevsky Thread Factory ("Nevka") |
| 9. Gostinyi Dvor | 21. New Admiralty Shipyards |
| 10. Government Stationers | 22. New Spinnery |
| 11. Haymarket (<i>Sennoi rynek</i>) | 23. Nikolaev Railroad Station |
| 12. Kazan Cathedral and Square | 24. Nikol'skii Market |
| | 25. Nikol'sk Weaving Factory |
| 26. Nobel Plant | 39. Spassk & Petrovsk Cotton Mills |
| 27. Obukhov Steel Mill | 40. St. Petersburg Metal Works |
| 28. Old Sampson Spinning and Weaving Factory | 41. St. Petersburg Pipe Plant |
| 29. Osipov Leather Works | 42. St. Petersburg Rolling & Wire Mill |
| 30. Ozoling Machine Plant | 43. St. Petersburg University |
| 31. Palace Square | 44. Technological Institute |
| 32. Paul Factory | 45. Train Car Construction Plant |
| 33. Phoenix Machine Construction Works | 46. Triumphal Arch (Narva Gates) |
| 34. Possel' Horseshoe Works | 47. Triumphal Spinnery |
| 35. Putilov Plant or Works | 48. Voronin, Liutsh & Cheshire Weaving Factory |
| 36. Russian-American Rubber Factory | 49. Warsaw Railroad Station |
| 37. Russian Spinnery | 50. Winter Palace |
| 38. Siemens & Halske Electric Works | |

¹ Reproduced from Gerald D. Surh, *1905 in St. Petersburg. Labor, Society and Revolution*, Stanford, 1989.

Chapter 1. Introduction

A conscious comradesly organisation of the working-class in the present and a socialist organisation of all of society in the future - these are different moments of one and the same process, different degrees of one and the same phenomenon.

Aleksandr Bogdanov.

Kul'turnye zadachi nashego vremeni (Moscow, 1911)

In late 19th century Petersburg a new social phenomenon entered the public arena. Its arrival provoked a mixture of consternation, astonishment and delight amongst different sections of 'society' when they came face-to-face with a hybrid creation of workers who demonstrated that they shared common attributes of the *intelligenty*. This thesis is concerned with an exploration of the phenomenon of this *worker-intelligenty* to ascertain how a specifically working-class and socialist identity was created amongst relatively small groups of industrial workers in a city being subjected to rapid social change induced by industrialization and modernization.

In order to understand the twin questions of radicalisation and class-identity within this group of workers, it is necessary to examine workers' groups involved with the revolutionary intelligentsia, the evolving relationships between the two groups from the 1870s and the process through which workers absorbed and developed radical ideas received from their *intelligenty* teachers and fashioned them through their own experiences as factory workers into organisational forms that sought to emulate models of political organisations in western Europe. My analysis of the *worker-intelligenty* represents a fundamental reinterpretation of the emergence of worker radicalism, resulting in a counter-narrative to the standard Soviet and western historical accounts of the period from the first engagement between workers and *intelligenty* in the 1870s through to the arrest of leading workers at the end of 1895/early 1896 following a series of strikes in Petersburg factories.

From the union between radical intelligentsia and small groups of factory workers a distinctive child would be born that would appropriately become known as the *worker-intelligenty*. The offspring of this union combined the ideas and knowledge inherited from its *intelligenty* parent with the strength and resilience drawn from its worker origins. Conceived illicitly in secret, in darkened rooms, always conscious of the vast differentials in status between its two parents, the *worker-intelligenty* not only gave form to the dream

of the *intelligenty* to create a ‘*worker*’ in its own image, capable of acting as a bridge between it and the mass of workers, but also from a very early age demonstrated a ferocious independence, at times exhibiting an angry rejection of its *intelligenty* progenitor and its cultural heritage. Aware of the deep social gulf separating it from the radical *intelligenty* and from ‘privileged’ society, the *worker-intelligenty* often felt itself as an orphan, its *intelligenty* attributes often alienating it from the mass of uneducated and unenlightened workers yet unable to be the social equal of its *intelligenty* mentors. In such circumstances, there was often an inherent tendency within the group to retreat into social isolation, seeking solace and reinforcement in small groups of like-minded workers, further isolating themselves from the very class they purported to represent. The emerging *worker-intelligenty* was at times resentful of their *intelligenty* mentors but on a daily basis witnessed attitudes and behaviour amongst factory workers far removed from the ideal conceptualisation of the class that they had constructed from ideas fed to them by the *intelligenty*. It was within the arena of such conflicted personal experiences that the first generations of *worker-intelligenty* sought to make sense of their role in the maelstrom of social upheaval, political terror and reaction that characterised Petersburg in the final decades of the 19th century.

The period analysed commences in the early 1870s with initial contacts between workers and radical *intelligenty* and concludes at the beginning of 1896 following mass arrests of workers and *intelligenty* involved in worker unrest in the capital in late 1895, immediately prior to strikes by Petersburg textile workers in early summer 1896. Whilst the eruption of a mass workers’ movement in 1896 had been foreshadowed by the activities of the Petersburg workers’ organisation, the emergence of large-scale industrial conflict signalled the effective end of the period of the workers’ circle [*kruzhkovshchina*] that was the characteristic organisational expression of the radical *worker-intelligenty*. Whilst many of the same attributes and processes are observable in other Russian towns and cities, the nation’s capital has been chosen as the focus of study as it was in Petersburg that the relationships between *intelligenty* and workers were longest and deepest and it was here that workers formed their own organisations from the mid 1870s through to the mid 1890s that gave expression to their own distinctive beliefs and identity. It will be argued that by the end of this period, the Petersburg *worker-intelligenty* through engagement with the radical *intelligenty*, the mass of their fellow workers, wider society and the forces of authority had created a distinctive worker identity and were psychologically and ideologically prepared to assume leadership of a mass workers’ movement.

Understanding these workers' organisations is of historical importance as from their inception they articulated a specific '*worker*' ideology opposed to both the political regime and industrial capitalism, an opposition that would be portrayed in Soviet Russia as part of an historical narrative that presented them as a vanguard for the working class, the precursors of the Soviet 'new man.' Yet, paradoxically almost from the very inception of these groups another dynamic was at play, a dynamic in which workers waged a consistent struggle with their revolutionary *intelligenty* teachers, the same *intelligenty* who would create the parties that would contest for political supremacy in 1917 and claim to represent them. What was being played out in the early history of the workers' groups was a struggle that involved contesting hegemony within the revolutionary movement between *intelligenty* ideologues and *worker-intelligenty* who saw themselves as an independent social force and conceived their 'historic' role as developing their own ideological attributes in order to represent the wider working-class.

From different ideological perspectives the Russian *worker-intelligenty* has been viewed either as a prototype for '*socialist man*' that would emerge in Soviet Russia or as providing retrospective evidence of an unrealised potential in Russian workers towards a trade-unionist representative of labour treasured by earlier generations of western historians. Merely to pose the question in terms of the extent that the *worker-intelligenty* conformed either to a classical Marxian paradigm of class conscious workers or as embryonic reformist labour leaders, betrays a condescension that continues to view workers as hapless victims entrapped within competing ideological constructs based on 'ideal' historical types. Whilst it is a truism that workers were shaped by externally derived ideological constructions, there is a profound sense that workers' beliefs and activities were conditioned by their experiences and engagements within a variety of social contexts. Workers were not some tabula rasa on which the intelligentsia could inscribe their vision of some future 'ideal' class representative but were active participants in the process of becoming 'conscious,' their actions in turn shaping the intellectual constructions of their *intelligenty* mentors.

I will argue that analyses of the encounters and relationships between the intelligentsia and workers need to move beyond a dominant/subservient paradigm, a paradigm that presents the relationship in terms of a subordinate power dynamic with workers seen as a passive and dependent category receiving knowledge and enlightenment from their intelligentsia

mentors in order to awaken their consciousness; a narrative analogous to that of westernising religious missionaries bringing civilisation and enlightenment to ‘backward tribes’ in dark and ‘unexplored’ remote continents. Indeed, there was at times an uncomfortable symmetry in Soviet and Western treatments of the worker/intelligentsia discourse during the Cold War; a mirror image in which workers were envisioned as silent recipients of the ‘word’ that would, when translated into a series of actions defined and directed by the intelligentsia, result in their liberation and rebirth in an idealised worker-form.

A Brief Historiographical Overview

The development of a revolutionary *worker-intelligenty* from the 1870s to the 1890s has received surprisingly little attention from historians. For many years, historians privileged intellectual and ideological ‘leaders’ of the revolutionary movement, focusing on theoretical and ideological debates within the emigration.¹ During the Soviet period, Russian historians operating within a straight-jacket of a Leninist teleological view of the development of the working-class and the creation of consciousness through the external agency of the Party were constrained in their examinations of independently formed and autonomously operating worker organisations, particularly in Petersburg where Lenin was directly involved from 1893 onwards.²

Such a privileging of the role of a radical intelligentsia common to both Soviet and many western historians was at significant variance with the early Soviet histories of the development of the revolutionary workers’ movement. In 1921 the subsequent Chairman of *Istpart* M.S. Ol’minskii, who had been closely involved with Petersburg workers’ organisations from the mid-1880s through to 1894, wrote in the introduction to the invaluable memoir collection *Ot gruppy Blagoeva k Soiuzu Bor’by* that workers’ narratives

¹ Prominent examples of this approach are Samuel H. Baron, *Plekhanov: The Father of Russian Marxism*, 1963; Abraham Ascher, *Pavel Aksel’rod and the Development of Menshevism*, 1972; Leopold H Haimson, *The Russian Marxist and the origins of Bolshevism*, 1955.

² During the 1920s several Soviet historians published works on the early period of Russian Social-Democracy that contained valuable information on the genesis and developments of early workers’ groups in both Petersburg and provincial centres. In particular, V.I. Nevskii and N.L. Sergievskii emphasised the continuity between *narodovol’tsy* workers’ organisations and the emerging social-democratic oriented workers’ groups of the late 1880s and 1890s. See listed works in Bibliography. Later Soviet works that provide useful information on the Petersburg workers’ organisation of the late 1880s/early 1890s albeit within a Leninist periodisation and framework include Iu.Z. Polevoi, *Zarozhdenie marksizma v Rossii 1881-1894* gg., Moscow, 1959; G.S. Zhuikov, *Peterburgskie marksisty i gruppy ‘Osvobozhdenie truda’*, Leningrad, 1975; R.A. Kazakevich, *Sotsial-demokraticheskie organisatsii Peterburga kontsa 80-kh – nachale 90-kh godov [kruzhki P.V. Tochisskogo i M.L. Brusneva]*, Leningrad, 1960, and A.M. Orekhov, *Pervye marksisty v Rossii. Peterburgskii rabochii Soiuz’ 1887-1893* gg., Moscow, 1979.

from this period would 'strike a considerable blow to the conceit of Marxists from the intelligentsia.... [demonstrating] that Marxism was more deeply entrenched among workers than we had previously believed and they showed much more independence and initiative than has been attributed to them until now.' ³

Western historians who studied the period up to 1895 focused attention on the supposedly *intelligently* leadership of the workers' movement, often with a view to anticipating developments after 1895. ⁴ In 1963, in what was then a ground breaking analysis of the Petersburg workers' movement, Richard Pipes revealed that during the 1890s workers in the capital developed a network of circles that to a significant degree operated autonomously from the various radical intelligentsia groups existing at this time. Pipes proceeded to argue that these workers' circles showed little interest in revolutionary theories and practice and were composed of workers whose primary focus was on educational self-development and improvements to the economic position of factory workers. From this, Pipes concluded that the workers' movement in Petersburg in the 1890s was essentially moderate and reformist in nature and hostile to the revolutionary proclivities of both the remnants of the *narodovol'tsy* and the emerging social-democrats in the capital.

The failure of the St. Petersburg Social-Democratic intelligentsia to merge with labor or to acquire leadership over it must be ascribed above all to a divergence of interests. Labor was mainly concerned with intellectual and economic self-improvement, the Social-Democratic intelligentsia mainly with politics. As long as the Social-Democrats gave labor what it wanted..... (education and assistance in trade-union organisation), they secured labor's cooperation and even sympathy. But the workers never yielded to the socialists' efforts to politicise their movement.... ⁵

In an ironic twist, Pipes, an arch anti-Leninist, ends up reflecting a view of workers as apolitical not dissimilar to the dominant Soviet interpretation that workers left to their own devices naturally inclined to reformist and economist views and required the intervention

³ M.S. Ol'minskii, 'Probel v nashei istorii,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva k Soiuzu Bor'by*, Rostov-on-Don, 1921, p.5.

⁴ In terms of western historical treatments of the Petersburg workers' organisations of the 1880s and early 1890s, see Richard Pipes, *Social Democracy and the St. Petersburg Labor Movement, 1885-1897*, Cambridge, Mass., 1963; Allan K. Wildman, *The Making of a Workers' revolution: Russian Social Democracy, 1891-1903*, Chicago and London, 1967; Norman Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats: The Russian Revolutionary Movement Under Alexander III*, Camb., Mass, 1983.

⁵ Richard Pipes, 1963, p.116.

of the conscious Party to ensure the fulfilment of their ‘historic’ role. In contrast to such views of Petersburg *worker-intelligenty* as passive and reformist, I shall argue that from their first stirrings with the Chaikovkists through to the formation of the Petersburg Union of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working-class in late 1895, many *worker-intelligenty* not simply absorbed political and social ideas but sought to put these into practice, in the process operating in a highly political and, in the context of autocratic Russia, a revolutionary manner.⁶

The Soviet contention that the Petersburg workers’ organisations were often guilty of ‘trade unionist’ and neo-Economist deviations from the prescribed Leninist path of worker development and ‘true’ class consciousness also represents an erroneous reading of the motivations of the emerging *worker-intelligenty*. From the 1870s onwards, successive cohorts of *worker-intelligenty* developed their own organisational forms to promote worker militancy and through their workers’ funds sought to take an active part in supporting strikes involving the mass of ‘unenlightened’ workers. It is no coincidence that control over workers’ funds, culminating in the controversies over ‘Economism’ at the very end of the century, would become a line in the sand for the *worker-intelligenty* who regarded workers’ funds not as a means to promote the self-development of a small group of advanced workers but rather as to their aspiration of leading the emerging mass workers’ movement.⁷

The thesis combines an examination of the collective mentalities of *worker-intelligenty* and how these workers related to wider social and cultural developments, whilst at the same time seeking to ascertain from individual life-narratives of a number of worker activists

⁶ Unlike Pipes, Wildman recognises the often revolutionary nature of worker activism and its tendency towards worker autonomy in the late 1890s. However, this does not prevent him from concluding on the basis of a brief examination of the first half of the 1890s, that for this period he endorses Pipes’ conclusions. [Wildman, 1967, pp.28-29]. Michael Share’s doctoral thesis on the Petersburg workers’ organisation of the early 1890s sees the Petersburg Workers’ organisation essentially as ‘*a labor association which had the potential of becoming an embryonic trade union*’ and leading workers associated with it tragic figures unable to fulfil what Share regards as a natural development to become reformist labour organisers: ‘*The workers’ intelligentsia was clearly the best able, most educated part of the working class and most concerned over the formation of trade unions. They could have become leaders of the workers’ movement. Several of their Western counterparts had become [such] leaders.*’ Michael Share, *The Central Workers’ Circle of St. Petersburg, 1889-1894*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison. 1984. In contrast, Naimark attributes the Petersburg workers’ movement of the early 1890s with a definite social-democratic orientation but views it as essentially as the worker section of a single social-democratic organisation associated with Mikhail Brusnev with a tendency to avoid involvement in industrial conflicts, focusing rather on intensive study in a limited number of workers’ circles. Naimark, 1983, pp.156-173.

⁷ For a statement of the standard Soviet interpretation involving a major conflict between workers and intelligentsia over the control of workers funds involving Lenin in 1895, see E.A. Korol’chuk and E. Sokolova, *Khronika revoliutsionnogo rabochego dvizheniia v Peterburga, Vol. I*, Leningrad, 1940, p.192; and for Pipes view of the issue, see Pipes, 1963, pp.77-88.

key moments in the formation of their identity as *worker-intelligents*. The complex set of relationships between *worker-intelligents* and the mass of factory workers leads to an exploration of wider considerations including worker attitudes to authority, religion, popular culture, alcohol, and sexuality and gender issues. Within the emerging working-class a series of contradictory realities had to be negotiated, urban/rural, worker/peasant, skilled/unskilled, secular/religious and modern/traditional. Individual workers were caught between these polarities that were being played out in new urban environments that provided the contested arenas through which individual and group identities became defined. Within such contested realities how did factory workers individually and collectively view themselves: what factors shaped their values, beliefs and attitudes, and by what processes did they begin to construct social and cultural identities, value and belief systems, within what remained for many a dichotomous universe in which a linear journey from field and factory was a rare occurrence? The answers to such questions are undoubtedly contingent upon the outcome of identity conflicts reflecting regional, religious, cultural, gender, and other realities. An additional issue arising from these, concerns the degree to which *worker-intelligents* adopted an ideological class-identity from their exposure to external theoretical constructs rather than this being a reflection of actual experiences as workers in factories. Recent conceptualisations of Russian workers by historians such as Reginald Zelnik, Mark Steinberg and Steve Smith will necessarily inform the answers to such questions as through their research they have revealed the complex and often contradictory paths taken by workers in their attempts to come to terms with their subordinate social status and the complexities of modernity, introducing more nuanced interpretations of the process of working-class and identity formation by reconstructing the discourses and responses of workers to the challenges faced in rapidly modernising and industrialising cities. Whilst such historians have reminded us that a number of different processes apart from those ‘*directly related to wage labour and capitalist production*’ were at play in late 19th century Petersburg, there remains a distinctive sense that the experience of work associated with an evolving capitalist system constituted a dominant reality for many workers. Smith recognised the ‘*shift away from the construction of class identity is not intended to deny that the experience of work under industrial capitalism, together with . . . poverty and suffering that typified the lives of those compelled to sell their labour-power, were the primary forces shaping worker identities.*’⁸ In this sense the workplace remains the ultimate crucible in which identities were formed

⁸ S.A. Smith, *Revolution and the People in Russia and China*, 2008, p.7.

with worker's social identity being 'overdetermined' by the discourse on class emanating from workplace experiences.⁹

Building on the work of these and other historians, I will argue that Petersburg *worker-intelligenty* discourses with different social groups enabled them to construct their own narratives and appear as major actors by dint of their own efforts. This perspective on the *worker-intelligenty* should enable a more authentic representation of worker voices to be heard, whilst recognising that any reconstruction can only be an approximation of the unique realities that they alone experienced. It was on the basis of these experiences and their own understandings of what was taking place around them, albeit informed by the knowledge they assiduously sought to acquire from a variety of sources, that they endeavoured to create their own 'class' identity and give substance to their role in the unfolding historical dramas of late imperial Russia.

The thesis is organised into two discrete sections. The first section is concerned with ideas of class formation and experience of industrialisation in Petersburg, a process that created irresistible pressures in government for education and cultural initiatives aimed at workers and how these, in turn, helped to form a definite cadre of *worker-intelligenty* by the last decades of the 19th century. By examining theoretical constructs of class and consciousness along with a number of primarily social determinants, a nuanced perspective on the emergence of worker-identities in Petersburg by the late 1890s should emerge and assist in illuminating the actual history of the development of worker-groups from the 1870s onwards. Part two reviews in detail this actual history considering in turn the evolution of

⁹ Reginald Zelnik, Mark Steinberg, Steve Smith and others have illuminated the process by which peasant workers arriving in large industrial cities made the transition to become 'conscious' and revolutionary workers. In particular, Zelnik challenged the conventional wisdom that located the formation of the Russian working-class within a peasant to proletarian paradigm in which proletarian consciousness and worker identity was defined by the degree to which workers had broken with the land, setting out 'to complicate' this by investigating the life stories of individuals who actually walked such paths. Such 'stories' confirmed that the peasant/proletarian dichotomy represented an over-simplification and, whilst never losing sight of wider social and intellectual contexts, raised the question of what further readings of workers' experiences beyond the field and the factory are needed to enable historians 'to make sense of the revolutions in their values that preceded revolutions in the streets?' [R. Zelnik, 'On the Eve: Life Histories and Identities of Some Revolutionary Workers, 1870-1905,' *Making Workers Soviet. Power, Class, and Identity*, Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny [eds.], (Ithaca, 1994). See also, Reginald Zelnik, 'Russian Bebelers. An Introduction to the Memoirs of Semen Kanatchikov and Matvei Fisher,' *Russian Review*, Vol.36, Nos.3 and 4, 1976; Mark Steinberg, *Moral Communities. The Culture of Class relations in the Russian Printing Industry, 1867-1907*; Vanguard Workers and the Morality of Class, in Siegelbaum and Suny [eds.], 1994, and *Proletarian Imagination. Self, Modernity and the Sacred in Russia, 1910-1925*, 2002; S.A. Smith, *Revolution and the People in Russia and China*, 2008.

worker organisations from their origins in the 1870s, through the 1880s with Tochisskii and the involvement of Polish social-democrats, to the formation and the activities of the Petersburg Central Workers' Circles up to its final demise in the wake of arrests in late 1895. By this date an identifiable radical *worker-intelligenty* with its own conception of itself and a clear sense of its tasks in relation to the broader ranks of the working-class had become visible, exchanging the dark and hidden confines of the study-circle to engage in more open struggles involving the mass of its fellow workers.

SECTION I.

Chapter 2.

Marxist Narratives of Class and Consciousness

Marx – Determinism and the Proletariat

Marx believed that social class was determined by relationship to the means of production with class division and conflict arising from irreconcilable economic interests that constituted the basic engine of social change. With the advent of capitalism there was an intensification of class antagonisms with society fracturing ‘*into two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeoisie and proletariat,*’¹ with the bourgeoisie [capitalists] owning and controlling capital deployed to purchase the labour of workers as a commodity, extract surplus value thereby accumulating ever more capital. For Marx, this process resulted in a class of propertyless workers, the proletariat, whose sole means of existence was to sell their labour to capitalists. Recurrent crises of overproduction and intensive exploitation of workers combined to produce ever sharper contradictions between the interests of capital and labour. The contradictory essence of this relationship produced class conflicts and the eventual overthrow of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat. The unfolding of the historical process is encapsulated in a developmental logic in which the proletariat combining together to oppose capitalist exploitation appear on the historical stage as ‘*gravediggers*’ destined to overthrow capitalism and establish socialism.²

Marx introduced several contingent factors into this deterministic process, the most important of which involved the distinction between a *class in itself* [i.e. defined by its economic position in relation to the means of production] and a *class for itself* [i.e. a historical agent consciously engaged in struggle against an antagonistic class]. In essence the proletariat was formed as an economic entity through capitalist development, but only became ‘conscious’ in their struggle against employers, a struggle encompassing both economic and political dimensions.³ Although Marx recognised that individuals exercise some autonomy in their actions, he believed that they operate in a social context where ultimately institutions and ideas were shaped by economic relations that determined human consciousness and actions. As Marx noted in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

¹ *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels, Selected Works, London, 1970, p.36.

² *Ibid*, pp.45-46.

³ Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, New York, 1963, pp.172-173.

*Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please, they do not make it in circumstances chosen by themselves.*⁴

This view of the world found expression in Marx's famous *Base/Superstructure* paradigm, designed to show that social being was ultimately the determinant of consciousness. Marx described this paradigm as '*the guiding principle*' underpinning his work and it was this conceptualisation of social change that would become enshrined as the predominant Marxian narrative in the process of working-class formation and the creation of class consciousness.⁵

Marx's view of the proletariat as the creators of socialism, however, contained an inherent contradiction that would haunt revolutionary Marxism for over a century. Improvements in technology and division of labour resulted in deskilling of workers as reduction in labour costs led to more skilled and predominantly male workers being replaced by cheaper sources of labour power in the form of women, children, and migrant workers who in the Marxian hierarchy of consciousness were frequently less conscious. This resulted in a degraded pool of proletarians many of whom were inevitably consigned to the reserve army of the unemployed. Despite this wholly pessimistic prognosis, this fragmented and pauperised class was given historic responsibility to lead humanity from '*the realm of necessity into freedom.*' To ensure this, Marx and his subsequent followers conjured up a *deus-ex-machina* - radical intellectuals who understanding the laws of historical development [i.e. Marxism] consciously chose to identify with the proletariat and altruistically guide it towards the promised land of socialism. Inherent in Marx's theories was the notion that a group of déclassé bourgeois intellectuals would appear to offer 'theoretical' guidance and support thereby ensuring that workers did not stray from their historically determined path. The exact nature of the relationship between such renegade bourgeois intelligentsia and the proletariat was never articulated by Marx, bequeathing a dilemma which in the Russian context at the end of the 19th century would become acute.⁶

⁴ Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, London, 1970, p.96.

⁵ Karl Marx, *Preface to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, London, 1970, pp. 181-182.

⁶ The idea that a section of the intelligentsia would break away from the bourgeois order and support the struggles of the proletariat is referred to explicitly in the Manifesto where Marx and Engels write:

Finally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the progress of dissolution going on within the ruling class, in fact within the whole range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands. Just as, therefore, at an earlier period, a section of the nobility went over to the bourgeoisie, so now a portion of the bourgeoisie goes over to the proletariat, and in particular, a portion of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole. [Ibid, p.44]

The Russian Contribution

Plekhanov

Historical necessity based on objective laws of development became the dominant feature of Second International Marxism, of which Plekhanov was the leading Russian exponent. Plekhanov's Marxism developed in response to Russian *Narodism* that disparaged the objectification of history and elevated human will as the key determinant of social development. Action by critically thinking and morally motivated individuals became imperative in Russia to abort the horrors of capitalism. Plekhanov initially adhered to the *Narodniki* belief in the viability of the peasant commune as a basis for socialism, but once persuaded that the commune was disintegrating under market pressures, he embraced Marxism, rejecting any possibility of a unique Russian path to socialism and became an adherent of a universalistic historical development that necessarily involved a period of bourgeois dominance to allow capitalism to develop in Russia. His only concession was that bourgeois domination might be shortened as Russian workers had the possibility of developing class consciousness earlier than their western counterparts. Notwithstanding this, Plekhanov believed that a period of capitalism was inevitable and should not be challenged by revolutionary adventurism involving seizure of power by an elite acting in the name of the people. Plekhanov defended his views on the basis of necessity and dismissed concerns over human suffering caused by capitalist development as the necessary result of the ineluctable workings of the laws of history.

Plekhanov's views of the working-class reflected his belief that classes could only act in accordance with objective laws of historical development and advocated that a Marxist intelligentsia instruct the working-class to understand its historic role by instilling in it consciousness of its destiny: class consciousness did not develop organically but was dependent on being introduced by an external agent, the radical intelligentsia. In *Socialism and the Political Struggle*, Plekhanov argued that the strength of the working-class depended on political consciousness and organisation and that these elements must be introduced by a socialist intelligentsia that would become the *de facto* leader of the working-class in a future emancipation movement.⁷ Thus, hegemony of the intelligentsia over the working-class became paramount, a position reflected in the first Programme of the Emancipation of Labour Group, that stated that it was '*only through the intermediary*

⁷ G.V. Plekhanov, 'Socialism and the Political Struggle,' *Selected Philosophical Works, Vol. I*, London, 1977, p.102.

of [the intelligentsia] that the people can take part in the progressive strivings of civilised humanity.’⁸

Workers’ political struggle led by the intelligentsia became a totemic feature of early Russian Marxism. The winning of political freedom was seen as a necessary stage for the development of socialist propaganda and raising the consciousness of workers. Without this, the majority of Russian workers would continue to languish in a state of retarded development and as a result of the country’s low economic base there was ‘no early possibility of a socialist government in Russia.’⁹ All spontaneous or ‘unhistorical’ actions were banished from Plekhanov’s universe of the ‘necessary’, categorised as counterproductive since they would delay progress towards the ultimate and predetermined socialist goal that could only arise in accordance with the laws of historical development.

Lenin

Plekhanov’s Marxism had a deep influence on the next generation of Russian Marxists including Lenin who developed ideas on the role of the intelligentsia in the political struggle and the workers’ movement. Lenin’s views on the role of the intelligentsia should not be seen as an aberration, but an attempt to reconcile a dilemma that was afflicting international Marxism. The problematic concerned how to reconcile the dichotomy between the proletariat as a class ‘*in itself*’ and its need to become a class ‘*for itself*’ and to identify the agency to bring about this transformation. By the late 1890s, Lenin’s assumptions about workers were severely challenged. Bernstein’s revisionism challenged the assumption that revolutionary consciousness amongst workers was axiomatic, producing evidence that many workers were rejecting revolutionary ideologies. Almost simultaneously, the development within the Russian movement of *workerist* tendencies that rejected intelligentsia hegemony and insisted on waging economic struggles caused major shockwaves within Russian Marxism. The aspiration amongst many *worker-intelligent* that the workers’ movement should be autonomous created profound alarm for Lenin as it was precisely such ‘*conscious*’ workers that were envisaged as the conduit to the mass workers’ movement. This rejection of the intelligentsia posed a threat to its entire revolutionary world view, raising the spectre that revolutionary class-consciousness was far from being an inevitable product of social being and that multiple worker identities and

⁸ ‘Programme of the Social Democratic Emancipation of Labour Group,’ in *ibid*, pp.359-363.

⁹ G.V. Plekhanov, ‘Socialism and the Political Struggle,’ in *ibid*, p.96.

behaviours were possible. For Lenin, these developments undermined his positivistic belief system in the inevitability of the development of working-class consciousness and induced a profound ideological crisis that found its ultimate expression in *What is to be Done?*

Lenin had already outlined his response to these challenges in *Iskra* in 1900 in an article entitled *The Urgent Tasks of Our Movement* where he asserted that the Party was responsible for representing the true interests of workers, leading them towards the fulfilment their political tasks. Without guidance, the labour movement had a tendency to follow at the ‘tail’ of non-revolutionary parties. Lenin already envisaged the formation of a revolutionary party whose task is to ‘instil’ socialist ideas and consciousness into the proletariat and lead the spontaneous workers’ movement.¹⁰ Two years before *What is to be Done?*, the relationship between the intelligentsia and the mass of workers was described in terms of a consciousness/spontaneity paradigm, in which success of the labour movement was dependent upon the formation of a centralised party designed to unite the intelligentsia with an advanced stratum of conscious workers selected for their level of political awareness to become full-time party workers and leaders of the proletarian masses.

These ideas were to be developed in *What is to be Done?*¹¹ in which Lenin advocated the establishment of a party of conscious revolutionaries united in a vanguard party with the express aim of preventing a mass workers’ movement succumbing to reformist, trade union based activities. This nightmare scenario was based on the fear that workers would be diverted from their preordained historical path towards socialism. Accepting that the workers’ movement stood at a crossroads with the danger of choosing a path that would result in its ‘subordination to bourgeois ideology,’ Lenin insisted that the Party’s task was to prevent this by engaging in the most resolute ‘struggle with spontaneity, in order to divert the working-class movement from the spontaneous striving of trade-unionism to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie.’¹²

Lenin continued to recognise the critical requirement for the Party to have a cadre of ‘class conscious workers’ [*worker-intelligenty*], assigned the vital task of disseminating the ‘true’

¹⁰ V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 5th ed., Moscow, 1958, Vol. 4, 371-77.

¹¹ Reginald E. Zelnik. ‘Worry about Workers,’ *Extending the Borders of Russian History. Essays in Honor of Alfred L. Reiber*, [ed.] Marsha Siiefert, 2003, pp.205-226.

¹² V.I. Lenin, 1958, Vol. 6. For continuities in Lenin’s ideas on the role of ‘The Party’ with Karl Kautsky, see Hal Draper, ‘The Myth of Lenin’s ‘Concept of the Party’: Or What They Did to What is to be Done?’, *Historical Materialism*, Vol. 4, Issue 1, 1999, pp.187-214, and Lars Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered*, Leiden, 2006.

class position amongst workers as they ‘*understand the movement of their class, its essence, its goals and objectives, its conditions and practical forms.*’¹³ In a tribute to the *worker-intelligent* Ivan Babushkin killed during the 1905 Revolution, Lenin later explained the importance of the revolutionary worker-intelligentsia in promoting revolution:

*had it not been for the tireless, heroically persistent work of such militants among the proletarian masses the RSDLP could not have existed ten months let alone ten years. Thanks only to the activities of such militants, thanks only to their support, the RSDLP developed by 1905 into a Party which became inseparably fused with the proletariat in the great days of October and December.*¹⁴

In this way Lenin elevated the role in the party of a small group of conscious workers, an elite within the class, that could act as the conductors of revolutionary ideology to the mass of workers.

In a recent study Lars Lih, contextualising how Lenin arrived at the positions set out in *What is to be Done?*, seeks to demonstrate that Lenin was a consistent ‘Erfurtian’ Marxist and a consistent disciple of Karl Kautsky. Given this, Lenin’s view of the potential of the Russian working-class remained positive and that the nature of the party elaborated in *What is to be Done?* provided opportunities for conscious [‘*purposive*’] workers to exercise a defining role in its development. Taking Semen Kanatchikov as an archetype of the ‘*purposive worker*’, Lih identifies this group as central figures in the Bolshevik revolutionary narrative.¹⁵ For Lenin, such workers epitomised a true proletarian essence and were the natural leaders of the workers’ movement and needed to be incorporated into The Party to ensure that their role was imbued with and performed in accordance with Leninist ideologically correct positions. In the critical period before and after the penning of *What is to be Done?*, Lenin paid particular attention to the emerging group of *worker-intelligentsy* and sought to capture them for his version of Social-Democracy. Explicitly addressing this group Lenin recognises that:

In Russia this 'worker intelligentsia' already exists, and we must make every effort to ensure that their ranks are continually broadened, that their high intellectual needs

¹³ Ibid, Vol. 10, p.355.

¹⁴ V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 16, Moscow, 1974, pp. 361-364.

¹⁵ Lars Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered*, 2006, pp. 339ff.

*are fully met, that out of their ranks come the leader/guides of the Russian Social-Democratic Worker Party.... [to enable them] to take into its own hands the cause of the Russian workers, and therefore, the cause of the Russian revolution.*¹⁶

Whilst Lenin encouraged the inclusion of ‘*purposive*’ workers into the party, there remained a sense that such workers metamorphosed into a species of *intelligenty*, divorced from the mass workers’ movement, destined to become full-time revolutionaries whose identities and beliefs came to mirror those of their *intelligenty* comrades rather than an expression of the working-class milieu from which they had emerged. Indeed, in *What is to be Done?*, Lenin is explicit that conscious workers within the vanguard party are involved not because they are workers but because they have assimilated and can disseminate correct knowledge; they are Party members not on account of their worker origins but ‘*as theoreticians of socialism.*’



Semen Kanatchikov

Since the development of consciousness was the overarching objective of ‘The Party’, Lenin could assert that awareness of the proletariat’s consciousness rather than actual social position was the determinant of proletarian identity. Through the introduction of The Party as the agency to effect revolutionary transformation, Lenin raised voluntarism to centre stage. Whilst capitalism was portrayed as an objective process creating the preconditions for socialism, a worker-class as a determined entity, it remained a social

¹⁶ V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 5th ed., Moscow, 1958-1965, Vol. IV, p.269.

grouping that by itself could not achieve its historic mission. To overcome this, a Marxian ethic based on the invention of an agent imbued with freedom of action was required, necessitating a reinvention of the proletariat essence in a Party composed of professional revolutionaries whose mission was to instil into an unconscious mass of workers a desire for freedom, thereby effecting revolutionary transformation in a deterministic historical process. The Party consisted of the bearers of the true knowledge, bringers of light, ultimately it was their consciousness [mind] grafted onto the proletariat [body] that would ensure salvation.¹⁷

Bogdanov

Within Russian Marxism an alternative vision of proletarian consciousness and the intelligentsia emerged in the early 20th century associated with Aleksandr Bogdanov. Bogdanov believed that experience formed the basis of knowledge and that the proletariat through its daily existence experienced and absorbed the realities of economic and social relations.

*It is the proletarian, not the member of the intelligentsia, who becomes aware of the discrepancy between the point of view of the producer and the point of view of the employer. It is the proletarian again who feels most acutely the subordination of ideas to economic interests and relations; the intelligentsia is actually inclined in the opposite direction, toward impractical day dreaming.*¹⁸

For Bogdanov, worker-action represented a form of ‘*historical subjectivism*’ incompatible with Marxist concepts such as the ‘objective laws of history.’ From this, Bogdanov could ascribe superstructural factors a greater influence than in conventional Marxism. In particular, technology and ideology were seen as instrumental in shaping class consciousness; ideology was a defining category to ‘*regulate and control all the practical life of society*’, critical in both revolutionary struggle and future reconstruction of society.¹⁹ Class consciousness could not be reduced to a mechanistic understanding of a historical mission but was part of a continuum through which proletarian culture was actively created; the socialist struggle could not be equated solely with a war against capitalism but involved conscious development of socialist relationships in daily life as part of the

¹⁷ See Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light. Class Consciousness and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia*, Pittsburg, 2000, for a linguistically driven interpretation of the ideologies of Russian Marxism.

¹⁸ A.A. Bogdanov, *Kul'turnye zadachi nashego vremeni*, Moscow 1911, pp.25-26.

¹⁹ A.A. Bogdanov, "Programma kul'tury," in *Voprosy sotsializma* (Moscow, 1918), pp.54-56, 62-63

creation of a socialist culture.²⁰ In contrast to Lenin, Bogdanov viewed revolutionary struggles of workers as a dynamic eventuating process through which workers themselves continuously engendered new cultural forms through the bourgeois and socialist phases of development.

For Bogdanov, the authoritarian basis of bourgeois society, based on a dualistic separation between intellectual labour and material labour, would be replaced by collective proletarian consciousness, a fusion of the ideal and the real and expressed in proletarian culture. It was only with the development of proletarian consciousness that the historically divisive authoritarian dualism of spirit [ideal] and matter [real] would be overcome. This process ultimately led to the disappearance of the intelligentsia as a social group, as the self-appointed guardians of knowledge, with workers themselves assuming control over the generation of intellectual and cultural production to complement their control over material production, creating socialist consciousness in which knowledge and labour are unified within class consciousness proletarians.

In the development of Bogdanov's thought his experiences with workers' groups in Tula in the 1890s was pivotal. The *worker-intelligentsy* in Tula had been deeply influenced by workers exiled from Petersburg in the early 1890s who had developed a specific notion of worker hegemony in the working-class movement in their activities in the workers' organisation in the capital in the late 1880s. Exposure to a well-defined form of workerist ideology left a lasting impression on Bogdanov and convinced him that the primary task of the radical intelligentsia was to develop specifically proletarian values and culture within the working-class to allow workers to become the conscious creators of a new ideology.²¹ In Bogdanov's schema, the activity of Social-Democrats focused on promoting principles of socialism and developing a comprehensive class consciousness amongst workers to create fully conscious socialist workers capable of leading the workers in their future struggles. Such a 'worker-intelligentsia' rooted in the working-class environment was considered the ideal representation of collective consciousness that would over time create a truly proletarian culture. Bogdanov envisaged a role for the intelligentsia as a cadre of technical workers to provide knowledge and support to workers so that they could develop a proletarian worldview and understand how to apply technology to refine the labour process to hasten the development of proletarian cultural consciousness.

²⁰ A.A. Bogdanov, *Programma kul'tury*, p. 50; *Sotsializm v nastoiashchern, Vpered*, No. 2, February 1911, p.68

²¹ J.D. White, 'Bogdanov in Tula,' *Studies in Soviet Thought*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1981.



Aleksandr Bogdanov

In contrast to Lenin, Bogdanov envisaged working-class consciousness as the polar opposite of a category imported through an intelligentsia that claimed an exclusive understanding of objective truth. Bogdanov was scathing about Lenin's belief that 'true' class consciousness could be imposed by an elite Party, viewing it as symptomatic of authoritarianism within bourgeois society, metaphorically depicting it as a vampire draining workers' blood and depriving them of the opportunity to realise proletarian culture.²² The Party's role was not domination of the class but a supportive and ultimately subordinate ally staffed by '*organic intellectuals*' from amongst the workers who understood proletarian cultural values. Despite pragmatic concessions to the intelligentsia, Bogdanov's thought was founded on the development of genuine self-activity of workers as representing the raw material for the creation of the '*New Man*,' transcending an authoritarian dualism of spirit and matter inherent in bourgeois culture and thus liberating workers from the intellectual dominance of the intelligentsia. Whilst Bogdanov developed his ideas and conceptualisations of the working-class subsequent to the period discussed in this thesis, the importance of the existence of the '*ideal*' type of proletarian envisioned by Bogdanov within a cadre of active *worker-intelligenty* provided a material basis for the development of his ideology. In this sense, the archetype of the emerging Petersburg worker-intelligent became enshrined within an ideological schematic that placed emphasis

²² See A. Bogdanov, 'Vera i nauka,' in Bogdanov, *Padenie velikogofetishizma* (Moscow, 1910), p.223. The vampire metaphor was frequently deployed by workers associated with both the narodovol'tsy and later social democratic groups both in relation to capitalist factory owners as well as 'priveleged' society that was seen as a parasitic element living at the expense of workers.

on proletarian education and development that would find expression in the Party schools at Capri and Bologna and in some senses in the development of the Proletkult movement.²³

Conclusion

A necessitarian view of historical development predominated within Marxism finding articulation in the thought of both Plekhanov and Lenin. Yet within this objectivist paradigm, a more voluntarist revision emerged that considered that the working-class could not fulfil its historically predestined role without the intervention and direction of the Marxist intelligentsia. This became an article of faith for Lenin, enshrined in the Party as the ‘true’ expression of the proletariat. An ‘intelligentsia’ possessing ‘true’ knowledge of the laws of history would define revolutionary consciousness and ensure that the workers’ movement engaged in a political struggle to overthrow the autocracy and establish political freedom as a necessary stage towards socialism. The hegemony of an ‘intelligentsia’ over workers became institutionalised in the concept of a centralised party in which *worker-intelligentsy* who demonstrated a correct understanding of revolutionary ideology could join, but not as workers, but as professional revolutionaries. In other words, the intelligentsia both defined the tasks of the class and the very nature of the class itself. In this doubly reductionist vision, workers’ being was determined by an objective historical process and their consciousness imparted to create an idealised construct, with any deviation from this being condemned as ‘backward’ or ‘false.’

In the years up to 1905, whilst a discourse based on intelligentsia hegemony represented the dominant tendency within Russian Marxism, an alternative approach was developed by Bogdanov who viewed the intelligentsia as a facilitating ally, assisting workers develop knowledge to remake culture in a proletarian construct based on the integration of mind and body, intellect and labour. This intellectual conceptualisation was founded on a belief in the primacy of collective experience for developing class consciousness. Bogdanov saw the intelligentsia as an enabling agency to create a cadre of working-class leaders equipped to recreate political and cultural forms. This approach not only valued the

²³ On the subsequent development of Bogdanov’s theories, see Jutta Scherrer, ‘The Cultural Hegemony of the Proletariat: The Origins of Bogdanov’s Vision of Proletarian Culture,’ *Studies in History*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1989): 195–210, ‘The relationship between the Intelligentsia and Workers: The Case of the Party Schools in Capri and Bologna,’ *Workers and Intelligentsia in Late Imperial Russia Realities, Representations, Reflections*, Berkeley, 1999; Zenia A. Sochor, *Revolution and Culture: The Bogdanov-Lenin Controversy*, New York, 1988.

collective experience of the worker but regarded it as the foundation for constructing a proletarian culture based on an ideological as much as a material basis.

The struggles and beliefs of worker-radicals from the 1870s through to the 1920s suggest that many were motivated by a similar desire to create a worker-type corresponding to Bogdanov's vision. Whilst in the decades examined in this study, workers were unable to give full expression to proletarian cultural hegemony, their intellectual strivings and instinctive actions based on the notion that the liberation of workers must be a matter for workers themselves points to a deeper aspiration for worker self-liberation and control that challenged the concept of intelligentsia hegemony over the workers' movement. Throughout the thesis it will be seen that the Petersburg *worker-intelligentsy* conformed in many senses to a Bogdanovist conception of proletarian values and represented an '*ideal*' synthesis of intellect and labour expressed in their commitment to knowledge acquisition to enable them to establish a proletarian hegemony over the workers' movement. In this sense they represented the prototypes of the future socialist utopia envisioned by Bogdanov and the adherents of *Proletkult*.

Chapter 3.

Petersburg Industrialisation and the Formation of a Working-Class

In the final decades of the 19th century Petersburg became transformed from a largely administrative and mercantile centre into a burgeoning modern metropolis with a rapidly expanding industrial sector. Between 1869 and 1900 the city's population doubled from 718,000 to 1,439,000, whilst the proportion of the city's residents classified as belonging to the peasant estate [*sosloviia*] increased from 31% to 63.1%, to reach over 900,000.¹ Even more remarkable was the growth in the number of factory workers, growing almost seven-fold, from 35,000 in 1867 to over 250,000 by the end of the century.² Although this growth was significant, workers still constituted a relatively small proportion of the city's population, around 18% by 1900. As the city's industrial base developed the city centre became surrounded by masses of factory chimneys belching out smoke and fumes, merging imperceptibly with the fogs and mists from the Neva as eerily portrayed by Andrei Bely in his symbolist and atmospheric novel Petersburg. Vast working-class neighbourhoods formed housing thousands of workers in poor quality and overcrowded conditions, lacking basic social and recreational infrastructures and segregated by the river and canals from the imperial and cultural heart of the city.³ During the 1890s the population of the Vyborg Side increased by nearly 70%, whilst the Nevskii Gate region increased by almost 60%. As a newly arrived worker in the capital at the end of the 1890s, Kanatchikov left a graphic account of the Nevskii Gate region:

.... no matter which way you turned, you saw all kinds of factories and workshops everywhere. An entire forest of enormous factory chimneys spewing forth clouds of black smoke, which covered the already gray Petersburg sky. Factory buildings, houses, streets, and people moving rapidly about - all were covered by a thick layer of soot. Massive rhythmic noises resounded from every direction: the rumble of the huge shafts that rolled red-hot iron bars; the blows of the steam hammer, which made the earth tremble; the ponderous sound of panting locomotives. And

¹ A.G. Rashin, *Formirovanie rabochego klassa Rossii*, Moscow, 1958, p.354

² This figure is derived from James Bater, *St. Petersburg. Industrialisation and Change*, 1976, p.91 and Gerald Surh, *1905 in St. Petersburg: Labor, Society, and Revolution*, (Stanford, 1989), pp.9-10.

³ Cf. Bater, 1976, Chapter 5, 'The Culmination of Capitalism.'

*suspended in the air above all these other sounds was the unbroken hum of riveting of enormous steam boilers, which lay on the ground like giant caterpillars.*⁴

When Martov became involved with workers from the Putilov factory in 1895, he described the Narvskii Gate district as being entirely dominated by the factory with its workers living in their own world, cut off in large part from the rest of the city.⁵

Between 1870 and 1900 the composition of factory population underwent a significant change. In 1867, textile workers formed the largest grouping, representing 36% of the capital's factory workers. By 1900 metal/machine workers predominated, with one-third of workers, increasing from 10,160 in 1867 to around 80,000 in 1900, whilst the proportion of textile workers had reduced to around 12%, to 30,000.⁶ The growth in the number of metalworkers resulted from government stimulated industrial growth in two main sectors, armaments and railway construction. A first major spurt of growth came in the 1860s and first half of the 1870s, sparked by the combined effect of national humiliation in the Crimean War and the Emancipation of the Serfs in 1861. Both the modernisation of Russia's military and the expansion of railways depended heavily on domestic steel production and resulted in the expansion or establishment of a number of major military-industrial conglomerates either within or just outside the city during the 1860s. In his landmark study *St. Petersburg*, James Bater concluded that '*resurgent investment in industry during the second half of the sixties combined with the repercussions of the Emancipation of the Serfs in 1861 heralded an era of rapid urban industrialisation the like of which had no parallel in the city's history.*'⁷

A second period of industrial expansion was inaugurated in the early 1890s, associated with Sergei Witte's tenure as Finance Minister. Challenged by the domestic catastrophe of widespread famine in 1891-1892 and the perpetuation of Russian economic and military inferiority, Witte embarked on breakneck industrialisation based on railroad construction and rearmament, supported by monetary reform to attract foreign investment. This boom intensified iron and steel, shipbuilding and armaments production alongside a newer focus on machine-construction, electrical engineering, and chemicals. The 1890s saw a

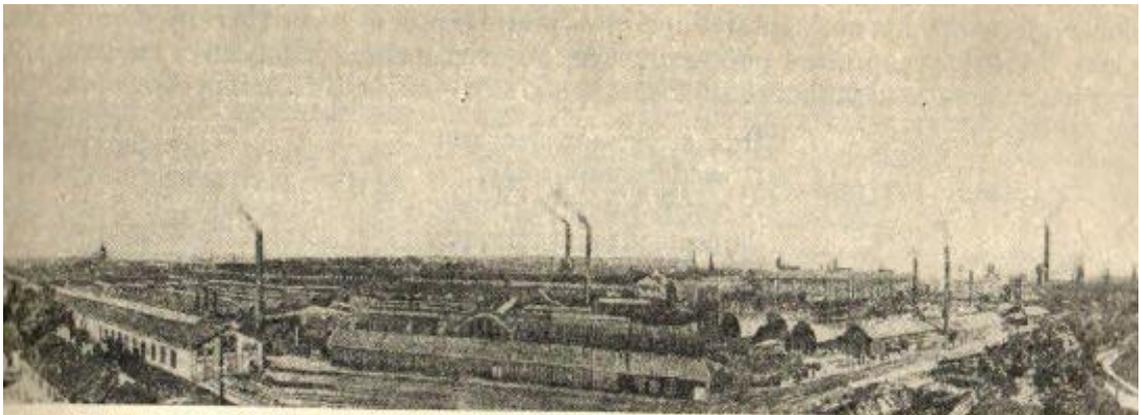
⁴ *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia: The Autobiography of Semen Ivanovich Kanatchikov*. Edited by R. E. Zelnik. Stanford, 1986, pp.83-84.

⁵ Iu O Martov, *Zapiski sotsial-demokrata*, Moscow, 2004, p.182.

⁶ James Bater, 1976, p.93; S. Kogan-Bernshtein, *Chislennost'*, *sostav i polozenie peterburgskikh rabochikh*, St. Petersburg, 1910, p.74.

⁷ Bater, 1976, p.85.

consolidation of a process of individual plants integrating production processes within a single enterprise. Industrial enterprises established their own iron foundries, steel-smelters, rolling-mills, machine shops, shipbuilding facilities and electrical departments, transforming them into industrial giants with huge turnovers and mass workforces. By 1895 over 75% of metalworkers in the capital were employed in factories employing over 500 workers and by 1901 the largest 16 factories employed over 47,000 workers, with the largest six enterprises alone accounting for 34,600 workers or around 44% of the city's metalworkers. By far and away the largest of these was the Putilov factory, employing 12,441 workers in 1901, an increase of nearly 9,000 since 1891.⁸



Putilov Factory, c 1900.

An important factor in Petersburg's industrial development was the role of the state in promoting a metalworking sector that was hugely dependent on state orders and subsidisation. Many factories were established and managed by the state, and even those in private ownership, such as the Putilov factory, were entwined in mutual dependency with government. Such dependency and the absence of an internal domestic market resulted in frequent changes in production processes to accommodate the vagaries of state priorities. Relationships between industry and state also engendered corruption and chronic inefficiency as employers failed to seek costs efficiencies and simply continued to pass costs onto the treasury.⁹ Almost total reliance on the state also made metalworking factories vulnerable to reduced government expenditure on railroads and armaments as occurred in both the late 1870s and again at the turn of the 20th century when reduced orders resulted in mass redundancies and serious threats to social order.

⁸ Fedor A. Bulkin, (Semenov), 'Ekonomicheskoe polozhenie rabochikh metallistov do 1905 goda,' *Arkhiv istorii truda v Rossii*, kn. 9 (1923), pp.77-98.

⁹ Heather Hogan, *Forging Revolution. Metalworkers, Managers, and the State in St. Petersburg, 1890-1914*, 1993, p.28.

The concentration of metalworkers in large industrial plants has been highlighted by many commentators, with Soviet historians equating size of enterprise with the development of class-consciousness. It is important to recognise however, that such factories were in fact a series of discrete workshops and that there were high levels of stratification both within and between workshops in the same factory.¹⁰ Although an identification of workers as a part of a larger collective entity was beginning to emerge by the late 1890s, workers seeing themselves as *Putilovtsy* or *Semiannkovtsy*, what was more evident was the identification with an individual workshop, as for example the machine workshop of the Baltic factory or the instrument workshop of the Patronnyi factory or with workers in similar workshops or trades in other factories.¹¹



Putilov Mechanical Workshop, c 1900

It has been customary to contrast the metalworking sector [*zavodskie*] with a lighter industrial group of factories [*fabrichnye*] involved in textile and clothing production, tobacco, food processing and paper manufacture that by 1900 still constituted over two thirds of the capital's factory population. Whilst many clothing factories were small, the spinning and weaving manufacture was dominated by a number of large factories employing over 1000 workers. Factories such as the Thornton and Maksvel [Petrovskaia and Spasskaia] factories in the Nevskii Gate, the Sampsonievskii and Chesher factories on the Vyborg Side and the New Cotton Mills on the Obvodnyi Canal all employed over 1000

¹⁰ P. Timofeev, 'What the Factory Worker Lives By,' in Victoria Bonnell [ed.] *The Russian Worker. Life and Labor under the Tsarist Regime*, 1983, pp.73-74.

¹¹ William Rosenberg, 'Workers and Workers' Control in the Russian Revolution,' *History Workshop Journal*, No. 5, Spring 1978; Steve Smith, 'Craft Consciousness, Class Consciousness: Petrograd 1917,' *History Workshop Journal*, No.11 Spring 1981.

workers, with an average number of textile workers per enterprise in 1900 of 727.¹² In contrast to the metalworking sector however, the overwhelming majority of workers in textile and other factories in the light industrial sector were unskilled and differentiation was predominantly on the basis of age and gender.

The most significant difference between the two major industrial sectors involved the employment of women workers. By the end of the century, women constituted around 16.5% of the capital's factory workforce. Within textile factories however, women represented a large and increasing proportion of the workforce, rising from 42.6% in 1881 to 55.6% by 1900.¹³ In certain branches of production, such as tobacco and porcelain, many factories employed predominantly women workers. In contrast, in metalworking factories women workers were virtually non-existent. Although the sheer physical prowess required in heavy industries disadvantaged women workers, exclusion was as much to do with cultural attitudes towards women, as work undertaken by women in many other sectors was physically demanding with many women being subjected to verbal and physical forms of sexual abuse.

Unskilled '*fabrichnye*' workers were paid significantly less than workers in the metalworking sector, reflecting in part the fact that women and juveniles in the textile and light industrial factories were paid lower-rates than their male equivalents. The average annual wage for textile workers in 1900 was around 230 roubles compared to 408 roubles for workers in the metal working sector.¹⁴ Textile workers also worked considerably longer hours, with a textile mill-hand working up to 15 hours, on occasion longer, at a time when metalworkers generally worked around 11 hours. The excessive length of the working-day was the major grievance of textile workers involved in the famous Petersburg textile workers' strikes in 1896-97.¹⁵ Many textile workers looked with envy and hostility towards the '*privileged*' conditions of metalworkers. A group of textile workers contrasted their position to that of the metalworkers when questioned by government officials charged with investigating the 1896 strikes, declaring that '*we are not those fitters and turners from the machine planrs; they finish work at the plant, come home and immediately eat a bowl of*

¹² S.N. Semanov, *Peterburgskie rabochie nakanune pervoi russkoi revoliutsii*, Moscow, 1966; S. Kogan-Bernshtein, 1910, p.97.

¹³ S. Kogan-Bernshtein, 1910, p.77; M. Solodnikova, 'Rabochii v svete statistiki (Svodnye dannye o roste promyshlennogo proletariata za gody voyny i revoliutsii preimushchestvenno v Petrograde)', *Arkhiv istorii truda v Rossii*, No. 9, Pëtrograd, 1923, p.23.

¹⁴ *Istoriia rabochikh Leningrada, Tom. I, 1703-Fevral 1917*, Leningrad, 1972, p.185.

¹⁵ On the 1896 Petersburg textile strikes see Surh, 1989 and Semanov, 1966.

*kasha; but we come home after dragging ourselves around the factory all day long completely worn out and with no thought of food as we have no appetite.’*¹⁶

Yet it is an oversimplification to compare *zavodskie* metalworkers and *fabricnyye* textile workers as two exclusive categories of workers. Within metalworking factories there were significant variations between wage-rates at different factories and wages within individual factories. In 1901, the average monthly wage of workers employed in 15 major metalworking factories was 36 roubles. But this masks huge wage differentials between skilled and unskilled workers, with skilled workers earning on average 52 roubles a month compared to 17 roubles 30 kopeks for unskilled workers. There were also considerable differentials between the pay-rates at individual factories ranging from a monthly average wage of 46½ roubles at the Nobel factory to 31¼ roubles at the Baird factory. Given that an unskilled metal worker at the Obukhov factory earned around 15 roubles a month in 1901 and only slightly more at the Nevskii [Semiannikov] and Baltic plants, many unskilled male textile workers earned comparable wages. The key determinants of wage levels were gender, age and, critically, skill levels.¹⁷

One of the most contentious and recurring questions arising out of Petersburg industrialisation was whether factory workers by the turn of the 20th century were becoming a hereditary proletariat or whether they remained essentially peasants temporarily relocated into factories. A striking feature of the growth of Petersburg was the rise in the number of people recorded as belonging to the peasant estate [*sosloviia*], who constituted the overwhelming majority of industrial workers who had arrived as peasant migrants seeking work in the city. Many of these migrants travelled long-distances to find work in the capital. Around 660,000 [73%] of the peasant population of the city were born outside Petersburg *guberniia*, with only around 160,000 of this number being drawn from *guberniias* adjacent to Petersburg. This meant that nearly half a million peasants in the city originated in *guberniias* a considerable distance from the capital, making it impossible to return to their native villages on a regular basis.¹⁸

¹⁶ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom IV, Chast. 1, 1895-1897*, 1961, pp.232-233.

¹⁷ The above figures on wage rates of metal workers are taken from *Arkhiv istorii truda v Rossii*, No. 9, 1923.

¹⁸ Cf. Surh, 1989, p.13; Bater, 1976, pp.309-312; D.G. Kutsentov, ‘Naselenie Peterburga. Polozhenie peterburgskikh rabochikh,’ *Ocherki istorii Leningrada. T. 3*, Leningrad, 1956, p.175.

A recent study of peasant migration to Petersburg by Evel Economakis addresses the question of the extent to which peasant migrants to the capital had lost their ties with their native villages by the early 20th century.¹⁹ Economakis demonstrates that local conditions in the main migrant sending areas largely 'determined' the extent and tempo of labour migration and the type of work they carried out in the city. The relative prosperity of Iaroslavl' peasants along with the presence of well-developed rural cottage industries, meant that attachment to their native villages tended to be greater, their migration more likely to be of a temporary duration and the work they undertook in the city less likely to be in factories. Tver', the largest source of migrant labour into the capital, was characterised by an impoverished rural economy and little handicraft work making it more probable that Tver' migrants and migrants from similar *guberniias* such as Pskov would settle in the capital on a longer-term basis, work in factories and become the nucleus of the emerging Petersburg working-class. From a study of factory registers listing originating *guberniias* of peasants working in a cross-section of metalworking and textile factories after 1905, Economakis demonstrates that a high proportion of workers came from these impoverished central *guberniias*. Given, the combination of distance and lack of sustainable means of earning a living from agriculture or handicraft work in their homeland, many peasant migrants who ventured into the capital seeking work, realistically had little prospect of returning to their villages on a regular basis. As a result, Petersburg had the largest percentage of factory workers who lived all year in the city with rapidly weakening their ties with villages and the rural economy.²⁰

Migration was a continuous and accelerating process and many workers would be relatively new to the city. Many such workers retained peasant customs and attitudes and this imparted a peasant colouring to the city, especially in working-class districts where migrants tended to congregate. Indeed, descriptions of working-class life emphasise peasant customs, dress and links with the countryside amongst industrial workers in the late 19th century. The metalworker Shapovalov recalled that the majority of unskilled workers in the 1890s dressed little differently from peasants, wearing their hair in a traditional peasant style bowl-cut with many returning to their villages for field work.²¹ In addition, migration was a two-way process, with many new peasant migrants arriving in

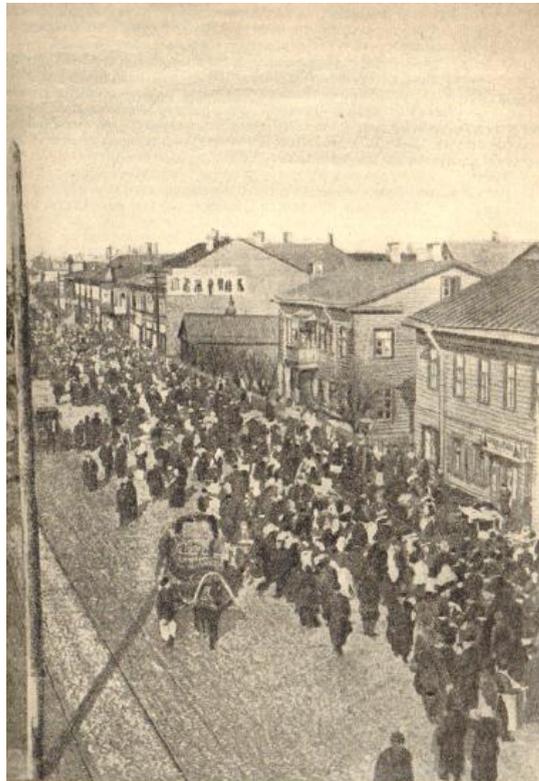
¹⁹ Evel G. Economakis, *From Peasant to Petersburg*, New York, 1998.

²⁰ *Ibid.*; Rashin, 1958, p.565.

²¹ A. S. Shapovalov, 'Po doroge k marksizmu,' *Proletarskii prolog*, Leningrad, 1983, p. 258; see also Ivan Babushkin, *Recollections of Ivan Vasilyevich Babushkin*, Moscow, 1957, pp.39-40.

the capital each year whilst a proportion of longer-term residents would return to the villages, thereby diluting the numbers of urbanised workers.

The psychological and emotional impact of abandoning villages to live in the city can hardly be overstated, representing a major transition involving a dislocation of traditional social and familial relations and inducing a profound sense of psychological displacement. One Putilov worker recalled how he was totally overwhelmed by Petersburg on his arrival in 1897, contrasting the anonymity and his isolation in the Narvskii Gate with his native village where he knew everybody, was part of a community and felt ‘crushed’ by the masses of people, a surging sea of unfamiliar humanity going hurriedly about their own business and overwhelming a newcomer to the city.²²



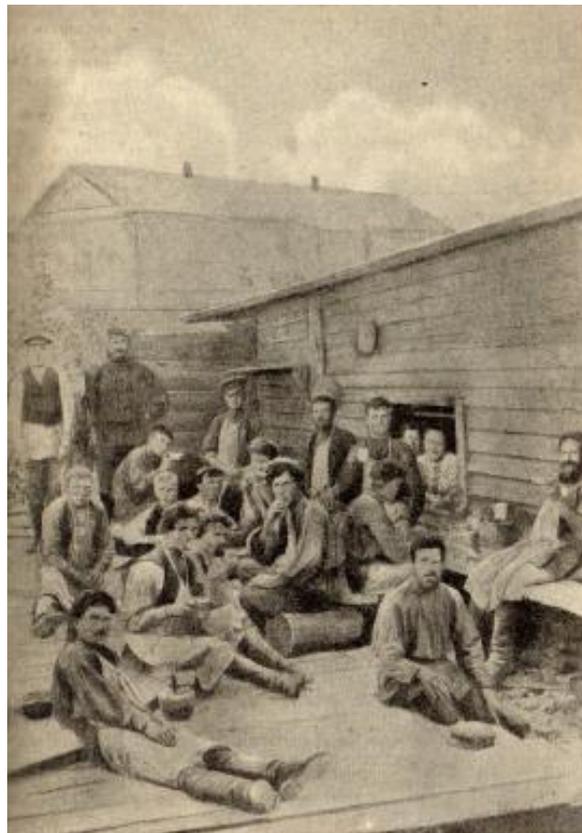
Daily Life on the Petergofsk Highway

In this context, a common way for migrants to ameliorate this sense of isolation was to use kinship and native-place ties. Kanatchikov on his arrival in Moscow in the mid-1890s joined a communal *artel'* composed of fellow countrymen [*zemliaki*] who lived in a large rented room. Such arrangements perpetuated rural patriarchal relations as the elder in

²² A.M. Buiko, *Put' rabochego. Zapiski starogo bol'shevika*, Moscow, 1934, pp.9-10; S.I. Kanatchikov, 1986, pp.7-8.

charge assumed a similar authority-role as that vested in the head of patriarchal households in the villages. One metalworker described a workers' *artel*' whose living accommodation

*consisted of a large smoke-blackened room with two windows. At one time, wallpaper had covered the walls, but now it was torn away, revealing plain board walls underneath. Hordes of cockroaches were crawling along the walls... [that] were lined with wooden bunks, obviously the main haven of bedbugs. In the centre of the room was a long trestle table and two equally long benches. There was a small kerosene lamp hanging between the windows. Underneath the lamp was a cheap print of the Tsar's family. A holy icon, blackened with age, hung in the corner. The kitchen, which also served as an entrance hall, was off to one side of the room and contained the cook's bed. That was all the furniture for eighteen people.'*²³



Workers' Artel at the Putilov Factory

Such native-place loyalties ran deep in the psyche of migrant workers with connections based on village, district, and *guberniia* constituting an important dimension of workplace

²³ P. Timofeev, 'What the Factory Worker Lives By,' in Bonnell [ed.] *The Russian Worker. Life and Labor under the Tsarist Regime*, Berkeley, 1983, pp.78-79. See Robert Johnson, *Peasants and Proletarians. The Working Class of Moscow in the Late 19th Century*, 1979 [especially Chapter 4, Migration and regional Loyalties, pp.67-79] and S.A. Smith, *Revolution and The People in Russia and China*, 2008, pp. 37-68, for informative analyses on the role of native-place networks in the transition to urban living.

identity. Recruitment of workers was often in the gift of foremen who frequently applied native-place loyalties in employing workers. A picture of the pervasive nature of regional networks at the Baltic Shipyards in the late 1880s was given by the worker Vladimir Fomin who recalled that in certain workshops workers from a few rural districts predominated as senior foremen and ‘*stariki*’ [elders] would recruit on the basis of kinship and village ties. Such arrangements gave rise to constant feuds based on regional affiliations between Riazantsy, Pskovtsy and the natives of Novgorod.²⁴ The domination of workers from specific localities was still prevalent in the shipyard 15 years later when Timofeev confirmed that the workforce of one large workshop was drawn entirely from two districts in Tver’ *guberniia* where the foremen originated.²⁵

Many employers also actively fostered regional associations, as for example the owners of the Thornton factory who recruited workers predominately from specific districts in Smolensk *guberniia* to create identity based on local customs that they believed would make their workforce more compliant, wedded to traditional concepts of religion and authority. Similarly, at the Naval Ministry’s Obukhov works there was a tradition of recruiting relatives or friends of a privileged stratum of workers, a policy which produced a largely acquiescent workforce up to the mid 1890s when the necessity of recruiting a mass intake of younger workers to fulfil large contracts upset this equilibrium.²⁶ At both the Putilov and Semiannikov factories, many workers were recruited as members of regional *artels* with matters of labour discipline, control, meeting production targets and remuneration left in the hands of the *artel*’ leader.²⁷

For many migrants the transition into factory employment was a gradual one, taking many months, if not years. Casual employment in docks, construction, barge haulers, carriers and the numerous peddling and hawking activities around the capital initially absorbed countless newcomers into the city.²⁸ Even peasants who migrated with the specific intention of working in factories often found themselves at the mercy of the vicissitudes of market conditions and the extent of their *zemliachestvo* and native place contacts. Zakhar Trifonov who made the migratory trek to the capital in the late 1880s on the promise from

²⁴ V.V. Fomin, ‘Vospominaniia o podpol’noi rabote revoliutsionnykh kruzhkov Baltiiskom zavode,’ in E.A. Korol’chuk [ed.] *V nachale puti*, Leningrad, 1975, pp.198-200.

²⁵ P. Timofeev, in Bonnell, 1983, p.76.

²⁶ M. Rozanov, *Obukhovtsy. Istoriiia zavoda ‘Bol’shevik’, 1863-1938*, Leningrad, 1938, pp.79, 99; A.V. Shotman, *Zapiski starogo bol’shevika*, Leningrad, 1963, pp. 32-33.

²⁷ M. Mitel’man, B. Glebov, A. Ul’ianskii, *Istoriiia Putilovskogo zavoda*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1939, p.24; Ivan Babushkin, *Recollections of Ivan Babushkin*, Moscow, 1957, pp.27-28.

²⁸ See Evel Ekonomakis, 1998, for an analysis of the correlation between factory employment and migrating peasants from *guberniia* with relatively well developed kustari and handicraft industries.

a family contact that he could find him work in the Petersburg Wagon Workshops in the Nevskii Gate discovered that his acquaintance was unable to fulfil his promise leaving Trifonov with an unpleasant dilemma.

My brain was turning over a depressing thought: do I leave Piter, towards which all through my youth in the countryside I had cherished a dream. One evening Minkin [his acquaintance from the village] told me that on the Shlisselburg Highway at the basin of Aleksandrovsk plant a new wooden bridge was to be built, the contractor was seeking to hire workers..... Early the next morning I arranged with the contractor and began to work on the bridge as a carpenter. The icy winds from the Neva as I carried the bridge spans chilled me to the bone. The thoughts in my head became frozen and my only wish was the desire to hurry into a warm room.²⁹

After enduring several months of construction work, Trifonov eventually found employment at the large Aleksandrovsk steel works where despite the harsh discipline imposed by the foremen in the carriage workshops he nonetheless regarded the day he began work in the factory as ‘*a most auspicious day.*’

Despite the fluidity of the industrial workforce in which migrant peasants predominated, Fomin compared it to the ‘ebb and flow of the sea’, there was also a sizeable number of workers who were city-born workers, or who had started work in factories at a young age, or who were long-term migrants who had worked many years in industrial enterprises. In 1902, a survey of 11,000 textile workers found that 36 percent had worked over five years at the same factory, whilst at the large Baltic shipyards in 1906, 34.7 percent of workers had been employed for over 10 years.³⁰ One sign that regional loyalties were beginning to break down is provided by a Putilov worker who, in contrast to Fomin’s account of ten years earlier, described regular organised mass ‘fistfights’ between groups of young male workers from the factory being organised not on the basis of regional affiliations but by workshop or street of residence.³¹ This identification with an urban locale or workplace is perhaps indicative of a shift amongst younger workers who saw their primary loyalties no

²⁹ Z.T. Trifonov, ‘Vospominaniia,’ *Avangard. Vospominaniia i dokumenty peterskikh rabochikh 1890-kh godov*, 1990, p.302.

³⁰ Rashin, 1958, pp.502-504.

³¹ A.M. Buiko, *Put’ rabochego. Zapiski starogo bol’shevika*, Moscow, 1934, pp.15-16.

longer subsumed within extended kinship and regional identities but with their immediate urban environments.

A final source, of labour for the Petersburg factories was children of existing factory workers. This hereditary cadre of workers was noted as early as 1874 when one observer reported that there were workers *'who had lived for decades in factories, they brought their wives and families and go back to the villages only since they are numbered as members of the rural society and have to pay duties to it, furthermore we know that in our Petersburg factories more than one generation of factory workers have grown up and gone down the same road as their fathers.'*³² Whilst many city-born workers would for legal purposes be classified as peasants, they represented an authentic worker-class with only tenuous links with the countryside, a countryside they often knew only second-hand, as in the case of the Petersburg metalworker Aleksei Buzinov, through vodka inspired nostalgic elegies from his father about his native Smolensk.³³ It is no coincidence that such workers grew up disdainful of workers who retained aspects of peasant lifestyles and links to the land, referring to them as *'country bumpkins'* who would be working *'at the factory today, but tomorrow they will go to peck the land with an ancient wooden plough.'*³⁴

As with other aspects of working-class formation, there was a correlation between skill-acquisition with ties to the rural economy and a repudiation of peasant culture and attitudes. Timofeev described how many skilled workmen regarded connections with the land as an inconvenience having decisively broken with the rural economy:

*There are many skilled workers who have never seen a wooden plough and do not have the slightest idea how to plant wheat because they have lived in a town and worked in a factory for the past twenty-five to thirty years. Their only connection with the village comes when they need to obtain a passport or when they have to pay taxes for land which is nominally theirs but is actually worked by other people.*³⁵

Although the majority of married workers to the end of the 19th century were separated from their wives and families who lived in the countryside, it is significant that the 1897 census revealed that 31% of metalworkers in the capital lived with wives and families [the

³² Cited in E.A. Korol'chuk, 'Ob osobennostiakh ekspluatitsii i stachechnoi bor'by peterburgskogo proletariata [70-90-e gody xix v],' *Istoricheskii zapiski*, Vol.89, Moscow 1972, p.159.

³³ Aleksei Buzinov, *Za Nevskoi zastavoi*, Moscow, 1930, p.11.

³⁴ *ibid*, pp.20-21.

³⁵ P. Timofeev, in Bonnell, 1983, p.83.

corresponding figure for textile workers was 13%].³⁶ As being settled with a family is a reliable indicator of a fixed population, the presence of a sizable pool of hereditary workers marks an important development in the establishment of a self-sustaining urban proletariat, the hereditary cadre beloved of Soviet historians. At the Putilov factory in the early 1890s hereditary workers with minimal links to the land comprised a significant proportion of the workforce. In this and other large metalworking plants second or third generation metal workers were not uncommon.³⁷ In a similar way many skilled workers at the Obukhov plant were the sons of existing workers who had no connection with the rural economy. The formation of such ‘hereditary’ workers amongst skilled sections of the capital’s metal workers was also observed in the Nevskii Gate by a medical practitioner in 1901 who commented that such factories employed many workers who were settled with their families and that it was common for the children to become factory workers in the same factory as their fathers.³⁸ Yet the numbers of such workers although growing remained a small proportion of the industrial working-class that was dominated up to 1900 and beyond with first generation peasant migrants who were still in the process of adjusting to life in an industrial city.

As with many cities undergoing rapid industrialisation, Petersburg in the late 19th century was dominated by younger age groups. By 1900, 63% of the city’s population was under the age of 30, with the majority of migrants into the city being young. A zemstvo researcher in Kostroma *guberniia* in the late 1890s recounted how many young lads implored their parents to send them to Petersburg factories, with many parents acceding ‘*to avoid severe reproaches and quarrels later.*’³⁹ The young age profile of factory workers represented an important dimension in growing discontent within the industrial workforce. As the number of younger workers increased, workforces became less attached to traditional patriarchal values and less deferential to authority resulting in more frequent challenges to the factory and social order. This ‘insubordinate’ behaviour amongst young workers was in the eyes of the authorities related to an increasing breakdown of authority within the workplace. One factory owner complained:

workers aged seventeen to nineteen spend money on vodka, tobacco and women ... and are a burden to their families and a blight on factories. Whoever has followed

³⁶ S.N. Semanov, *Peterburgskie rabochie nakanune pervoi russkoi revoliutsii*, p. 49.

³⁷ Mitel’man, et.al., 1939, p.45.

³⁸ Cited in L.M. Ivanov, *Istoria Rabochego Klassa Rossii, 1861-1900 gg.*, Moscow, 1971.

³⁹ M.I. Tugan-Baranovskii, *The Russian Factory*, Berkeley, 1970, pp.409-410.

*strikes in factories ... recognises that most instigators come from the ranks of these workers..... These youths, who are granted the same rights as older workers, have a penchant for all sorts of disorder which serves them as entertainment and amusement.*⁴⁰

At the Kolpine munitions factory, groups of young apprentices during the second half of the 1890s engaged in systematic acts of disobedience and *'in the evening would wind up older workers, who were inveterate abusers of young workers and warn them about their bad tempers.'* Those who failed to take heed of the warning had to be given a harsher lesson and one of these 'youngsters' conceded that they would often beat up their elders.⁴¹ The moral panic over 'hooliganism' at the turn of the century was part of a wider social fragmentation in which young workers were often openly disrespectful of their elders both within the workplace and outside the factories. In the opinion of Joan Neuberger, the destabilisation that characterised political and social life in the early years of the 20th century was mirrored by fears of a breakdown of social order that took a concrete form in the shape of young, usually working-class hooligans.⁴²

Conclusion

There was no consistent pathway for migrant-workers making the transition from peasant to industrial workers. From the 1860s industrialisation threw up a complex and differential process of demographic and cultural change that over the next half century exposed ever increasing numbers of peasant-migrants to new experiences and values in urban environments. Migrants interacted increasingly with a core of already urbanised workers and other city dwellers in their lives outwith the workplace. It was the dynamic of such relationships that caused many migrants to shed their peasant mentalities and to assume those of an industrial worker. Yet the growth of an urbanised industrial workforce was not a continuous, uninterrupted process. Rather it occurred through a series of waves, reflecting periods of economic growth that drew migrants into the towns and carried surplus labour back to the countryside during period of recession, the 'ebb and flow' observed by Vladimir Fomin at the Baltic Shipyards. Cumulatively, however, each new wave of economic growth saw the recruitment of larger numbers of inexperienced peasant-

⁴⁰ Cited in Ekonomakis, 1998, p.119.

⁴¹ I.K. Mikhailov, 'Chetvert' veka podpol'shchika,' E.R. Ol'khovskii [ed.], *Avangard. Vospominaniia i dokumenty peterskikh rabochikh 1890-kh godov*, Leningrad, 1990, p. 191.

⁴² Joan Neuberger, *Hooliganism-Crime, Culture, and Power in St. Petersburg, 1900-1914*, Berkeley, 1993.

workers. Neat labels such as peasant or proletarian fail to do justice to the complex consciousness of peasant recruits into factories who often brought with them a deep-seated hatred for traditional authority that when combined with new oppressions in the factories created a potentially volatile social grouping that defies simple categorisation. For many migrant workers, a desire to embrace modernity coexisted alongside the reality that their families continued to live in the villages, a fact that tied them to peasant culture that often remained a point of reference in the city.

Within the city, there were a series of deep fault lines running through the industrial workforce that produced a high-degree of stratification amongst workers. The divisions included the well-known split between workers in the metalworking [*zavodskie*] and textile [*fabrichnye*] sectors, although this was primarily related to skill levels, with stratification within metalworking factories as pronounced between the 'cold' skilled workshops and the 'hot' metal smelting and foundries. In many cases, skill levels related to the degree of assimilation into the urban environment and the broader cultural life of the city. Yet while skilled workers generally adapted quicker and more fully to their urban surrounds, by the end of the century increasing numbers of younger workers irrespective of skill were deliberately seeking out the new range of experiences on offer on the city and showing marked degrees of urbanisation and the marks of modernity. During both the 1870s and 1890s when Petersburg experienced large influxes of peasants to provide labour for the city's burgeoning industrial development, small groups of mainly male, skilled metalworkers sought to understand their previous and current experiences by embracing new discourses centred on class and modernity that would result in their transformation through the embrace of a specifically constructed worker-identity and consciousness. For many this process was facilitated by the availability of new cultural and educational opportunities available in the city that provided the basis and experiences that helped shape their quest for new identities as modern industrial workers.

Chapter 4.

Culture, Education and the Petersburg Working Class

Introduction

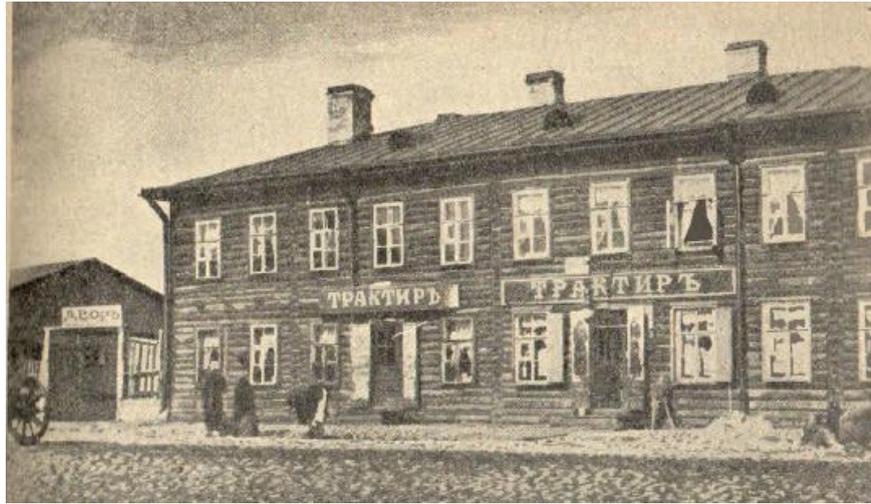
With the emergence of an expanding factory population government became concerned to promote improvements in the moral character of workers. As common in late Tsarist Russia, policy was shaped by a number of different and, at times, conflicting objectives. One significant factor was connected with a desire to combat degradation and debauchery amongst the labouring poor, associated with a perennial fear of the emergence of a landless proletariat akin to Western Europe. Bearing the hallmarks of a moral crusade to 'improve' the labouring poor, government instituted measures to divert 'the lower classes' from the pernicious temptations on offer to illiterate and susceptible workers.

The scale of the challenge was formidable, in 1865 there were well in excess of 3,000 drinking establishments in Petersburg, with one tavern for around every 200 residents in working-class areas of the city and in the immediate vicinity of the Putilov factory alone at the beginning of the 1870s there were over 50 taverns.¹ Easily available alcohol in combination with the desperate working and living conditions fuelled an epidemic of drunkenness and associated crime with arrests for drunkenness reaching almost 35,000 a year by the end of the decade. Such drunkenness and debauchery concerned the Tsar, who, in 1866, instructed the Police to take '*vigorous measures*' to prevent the growing social disorders associated with this level of '*debauchery, depravity and particularly drunkenness.*'² Alcohol fuelled 'debauchery' had not reduced by the late 1870s with a police report from 1877 commenting on how it was impossible to walk along the streets around the Obvodnyi Canal without being confronted by hordes of drunken workers who in the absence of alternative 'entertainments' frequented taverns and brothels to engage in all manners of lewdness and alcoholic abuse to escape from the dreariness of factory and *artel*'.³

¹ Reginald Zelnik, *Labor and Society in Tsarist Russia: The Factory Workers of St. Petersburg, 1855-1870*, Stanford, 1971; V.F. Shishkin, *Tak skladyvalas' revoliutsionnaia moral'*, Moscow, 1967, pp.54-55.

² *Dnevnik P. A. Valueva Ministra Vnutrennikh Del, Vol. I: 1861-1864 gg. Vol. II: 1865-1876 gg.*, ed. P. A. Zaionchkovskii. Moscow, 1961, p.474.

³ *Stanovlenie revoliutsionnykh traditsii piterskogo proletariata*, [ed.], A.N. Tsamutali, Leningrad, 1987, pp.212-213.



Tavern in the Narvskii Gate

By the 1890s there was little sign of the ‘moral improvement’ desired by the authorities. Working-class neighbourhoods housed hundreds of drinking dens where workers on pay-days would drink themselves into unconsciousness. Contemporary accounts and memoirs abound with stories of wives and children entreating husbands and fathers to leave taverns, invariably to no avail. Drunkenness frequently led to street fights and brutal attacks by drunken husbands on their wives and children. The extent of alcohol abuse amongst workers was captured a few years later by metalworker Buzinov who recalled that up to one third of workers were ‘total drunks’ whilst the vast majority of the remainder drank heavily on a regular basis. Buzinov continued that ‘for virtually all [workers] vodka defined the content of their life’ and that the lives of the great majority of workers ‘ran along a river bed filled with vodka.’ In the absence of cultural outlets, many workers sought solace in the local church that was appropriately named the ‘Chapel of All Who Sorrow.’⁴ But religious piety was no guarantee of sobriety and many workers after attending Church and taking Holy Communion would indulge excessive drinking. The metalworker Shapovalov vividly recalled how his pious father would return home drunk after attending Church and be physically sick in a bucket, emptying the contents of his stomach, ‘vodka mixed with the Holy Eucharist, the body of Christ.’⁵ The image conjured up by the young ‘conscious’ worker Shapovalov of a religious and drunken worker suffering the debilitating effects of alcohol abuse with the mind-numbing influence of religion represented a graphic metaphor of social and religious forces combining to reduce a worker to a dependent creature powerless to shape his own destiny. A priest involved in charitable work amongst Petersburg workers at the turn of the century painted a vivid

⁴ Aleksei Buzinov, 1930, pp.22-26.

⁵ A.S. Shapovalov, *Po doroge k marksizmu: Vospominaniia rabochego-revoliutsionera*, Moscow, 1922, pp.9-10.

picture of how the worker ‘regards his only day off not for sensible relaxation and the satisfaction of spiritual interests, but for deafening hypnosis, [for] shaking, senseless revelry, [for] alcoholic stupefaction.’⁶

Drink also played an important role in factory life becoming an accepted part of the work culture and relations within the factory. Many workers recount ‘initiation’ rites involving a liberal use of alcohol. It was often impossible to get a job without supplying the foreman with presents of vodka, as Shapovalov discovered when he attempted to get a job for a fellow worker-revolutionary in an iron foundry and discovered that the going rate for hiring was two bottles of vodka.⁷ The engineer Timofeev described the promiscuous consumption of vodka as part of a series of ritualistic rites within the factory ranging from a worker starting a new job, the appointment of a foreman or factory elder, the completion of an order, or most common the end of the Saturday shift or the eve of a holiday at which times mass collective binges were indulged in by workers.⁸ Refusal to participate in such rites represented a public repudiation of the dominant cultural morés of the workplace and opened the *worker-intelligent* to ostracism, persecution from vindictive foremen and/or workmates and suspicion of being a ‘socialist’ or subversive. Shapovalov relates how he had been forced to quit jobs at several factories for his refusal to take part in such customs but had eventually to ‘swallow’ his pride when took a job at a metal factory on the Vyborg Side and reluctantly contributed money to enable the celebration of his arrival at the factory.⁹

Social and Cultural Responses

In response to drunkenness and depravity, there was an upsurge in educational, cultural and recreational initiatives to raise the moral and cultural level of the working population. Many of these initiatives were heavily laced with religious overtones, designed to prevent workers succumbing to one of the twin evils that the authorities believed lurked in every alleyway of the capital, alcohol, drunkenness and associated moral depravity on the one hand, and godless materialism, socialism and subversion on the other. But alongside overtly religious initiatives, a series of government-sponsored and private philanthropic

⁶ Cited in Page Herrlinger, ‘Orthodoxy and the Experience of Factory Life in St. Petersburg, 1881-1905,’ in Michael Melancon and Alice Pate [eds.], *New Labor History, Worker identity and Experience in Russia, 1840-1918*, Bloomington, Indiana, 2002, p.51.

⁷ A.S. Shapovalov, 1983, pp.161-162.

⁸ P. Timofeev, op. cit., 1983, pp.93-95.

⁹ A.S. Shapovalov, ‘Na puti k marksizmu,’ in E.R. Ol’kovskii [ed.], *Avangard*, 1990, p.261. One of the colloquial names for such initiations was ‘the swallowing.’

educational and cultural opportunities were available for working people. In addition to the popular *'besedy'* ['conversations'] organised by Orthodox Church missions and temperance societies, public lectures, libraries and reading rooms, popular theatres, tea-rooms and musical evenings became increasingly available within working-class districts.¹⁰ The popularity of such initiatives can be gauged by the fact that attendance at lectures in Petersburg organised by the Petersburg Permanent Commission between 1887 and 1894 attracted an audience of over 360,000.¹¹ Many lectures on a range of scientific, literary, historical and artistic subjects were held in working-class suburbs and factory dining-rooms, drawing large numbers of workers. Regular lectures were held at the Obukhov factory where lectures and 'magic lantern' presentations were arranged on diverse topics such as the origins of the world or the works of Gogol or other Russian writers.¹² Whilst such lectures provided workers with knowledge, the authorities continued to view their primary purpose *'to provide the people with moral, rational activity; stimulate among them love for the Orthodox Church, the tsar, and the fatherland; develop their understanding of the Christian duties of man; and disseminate available and useful knowledge.'*¹³

An even more overt attempt to reinforce the religious beliefs of working people and instil devotion to Tsar was evident in the initiatives of the Orthodox Church. In the mid-1860s, clergy were instructed to direct sermons against the *'pernicious tendencies that were drawing the people toward poverty, illness, and vice.'*¹⁴ From the early 1880s, religious 'missions' were organised targeting working-class districts and, in conjunction with the Temperance Societies, sought to provide for the spiritual and cultural needs of workers. The Society for the dissemination of religious-moral enlightenment by 1900 had branches

¹⁰ There is a considerable literature on cultural initiatives aimed at industrial workers in late Tsarist Russia. These include Page Herrlinger, *Working Souls. Russian Orthodoxy and Factory Labor in St. Petersburg, 1881-1917*, Bloomington, Indiana, 2007; Gary Thurston, 'The Impact of Russian Popular Theatre, 1886-1915,' *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 55, No. 2, June 1983, pp. 237-267; E. Anthony Swift-Workers, 'Theater and Proletarian Culture in Pre-revolutionary Russia,' *Russian History*, Vol.23, Nos.1-4, 1996, pp. 67-94; Al'bin M. Konechnyi, 'Shows for the People: Amusement Parks in 19th Century Petersburg,' *Cultures in Flux*, [ed.], Mark D. Steinberg and Stephen P. Frank, Princeton U.P., 1994 pp. 121-130; Madhavan K. Palat, 'Casting Workers as an Estate in Late Imperial Russia,' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 8, 2, Spring 2007, pp.307-48.

¹¹ L.M. Ivanov, 'Ideologicheskoe vozdeistvie na proletariat tsarizma i burzhuazii Rossiiskii proletariat,' *Oblik Bor'ba Gegemoniia*, Moscow, 1970, p.331

¹² V.I. Pernafor, '7 maia 1901 goda ha obukhovskom zavode,' *Proletarskii prolog. Vospominaniia uchastnikov revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia v peterburge v 1883-1904 godakh*, [ed.] E.R. Ol'kovskii, Lenizdat, 1983, p. 249.

¹³ 'Rules for the Commission for Public Lectures in Moscow, 1874,' cited in Madhavan K. Palat, 2007, p.335.

¹⁴ Reginald Zelnik, *Labor and Society*, 1971, p.256.

operating in 15 separate factories.¹⁵ Many workers petitioned their employers to allow 'besedy' in factories and workers at the Maksvel cotton factory in the Nevskii Gate persuaded their employer to construct a building for the mission's religious and cultural activities.¹⁶ Such 'besedy' reinforced the Church's traditional message of the virtues of poverty and piety; workers at the Maksvel factory were instructed that *'true happiness of the individual lies not in wealth or in sinful, sensual amusements, but rather, in living union with God, in obedience to Christ's Church, and in reconciling oneself to one's own conscience.'*¹⁷ For many workers mission activities offered an escape from the travails of daily-life as well as creating a common bond amongst fellow believers. As a young man Shapovalov was an active member of a Temperance Society. He later explained that his motivation was to escape boredom and drudgery of factory life where he *'felt like a caged bird'*. As a temperance and Christian proselytiser, Shapovalov preached an explicitly egalitarian doctrine that reflected ancient Christian ideals of a world free from wealth and poverty.¹⁸ Perhaps Shapovalov was unusual in his emphasis on the egalitarian aspects of the mission's work, although a number of priests involved in working-class neighbourhoods sought to ameliorate the worst excesses of exploitation of workers and, without condoning them, were sympathetic to their protests.¹⁹

As well as this staple diet of religious fare, Petersburg workers were provided with secular cultural alternatives and popular entertainments, many supported by factory owners. At the forefront of this provision was the factory owner Nikolai Vargunin who, in the early 1880s, established the Nevskii Society for the Organisation of Popular Recreations that included a popular theatre, organised excursions, dances and musical evenings. Vargunin's aim was *'to help provide local working population with moral, temperate and cheap entertainments'* offering workers alternatives to taverns that for many provided the only escape from the grim realities of factory and city living.²⁰ Other 'entertainments' quickly followed with popular theatres being established on Vasil'evskii and Galernyi Islands and from the mid 1890s a number of 'Narod'nyi-Dom' [*Peoples' Houses*] offering cultural, educational and recreational activities to promote intellectual development and protect the moral vulnerabilities of workers. Teachers from Sunday Schools also began to

¹⁵ Madhavan K. Palat, 2007, p.325.

¹⁶ Page Herrlinger, 2007, p.53.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.47.

¹⁸ A.S. Shapovalov, 1922, p.26.

¹⁹ See Page Herrlinger, 2007, for a discussion of the writings and activities of mission priests such as Father Ornatkii, and the links between priests involved in the missions with Father Gapon.

²⁰ E. P. Karpov, 'Desiatiletie narodnykh gulianit za Nevskoiu zastavoii: Ocherki deiatel'nosti Nevskogo obshchestva ustrofstva narodnykh razvlechenir (St. Petersburg, 1895), p. 7, cited in Thurston, 1983, p.258.

organise outings to theatres and art galleries, activities greatly valued by worker pupils.²¹ Visits to art galleries by workers became a regular pastime of many workers seeking 'self-improvement, donning their 'Sunday best' to venture into the hallowed portals of the Hermitage and other galleries.

As worker-militancy grew during the 1890s, factories paid greater attention to ensuring that workers had access to a variety of recreational activities. At the Obukhov Works management arranged orchestral concerts and dances in the staff canteen.²² Similarly, at the Sestroretskii armaments factory a reading room, workers' orchestra, choir and a dance company were set up and consolidated into a '*Narodnyi-Dom*' to provide entertainments for the thousands of workers and their families in the settlement.²³ Not all such initiatives however, were organised on an official basis. In the late 1890s, students at the Petersburg conservatory arranged regular musical and literary evenings for workers in the Nevskii Gate.²⁴

Petersburg radical workers also sought to organise cultural initiatives. In the late 1880s, a drama group was established by radical workers at the Baltic Shipyards that proved extremely popular and was a means of extending the influence of circle workers.²⁵ Within Vargunin's Nevskii Society, workers formed a group that put on plays and evolved a specifically working-class ethos to their productions. Similar acting groups emerged amongst skilled workers at the Obukhov and other factories that developed their own repertoire based on workers' lives. There was a close affinity between the emerging workers' theatre movement and radical *worker-intelligenty*, drawn largely from the same social group of young skilled, more affluent and generally male workers interested in art and literature who regarded themselves as the 'conscious' representation of the working-class.²⁶

Although many workers demonstrated a thirst for cultural life, many barriers remained that prevented access to what the capital had to offer. At a most basic level, actual provision

²¹ A. Kuz'min, 'Vospominaniia o vechernei voskresnoi shkole za Nevskoi zastavoi,' *Avangard*, 1990, p.327; A.P. Zarubkin, 'Moia uchitel'nitsa,' *Avangard*, 1990, p. 288.

²² E.R. Ol'khovskii, *Avangard*, 1990, p.224.

²³ V.A. and I.A. Emel'ianov, 'Selo sestroretsk 1890-1907gg.,' *Avangard*, 1990, p.216; *Sestroretskii instrumental'nyi zavod imeni Voskova: ocherki, dokumenty, vospominaniia*, Chapter 2.

²⁴ N.E. Burenin, 'Pamiatnye gody,' *Proletarskii prolog*, Moscow, 1983, pp.312 ff.

²⁵ V.V. Fomin, in *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.210-211.

²⁶ E. Anthony Swift, 'Workers, Theater and Proletarian Culture in Pre-revolutionary Russia,' *Russian History*, Vol.23, Nos.1-4, 1996, p. 75; Aleksei Buzinov, 1930, pp. 69, 71-73; K. V. Skorobogatov, *Zhizn' i stsena*, Leningrad, 1970, p.50.

remained small both in terms of the populations served and in comparison to other 'entertainments' on offer to workers. When Kanatchikov arrived in the Nevskii Gate he described the area as being '*replete with inns, beer halls, taverns, and churches, but no cultural institutions of any kind to be seen. For a population of 60,000 there were only two shabby theatres.*'²⁷ Describing the situation in the Narvskii Gate around the same time, a Putilov worker, related that for most workers '*there was no possibility of any kind of cultural pastimes and no one knew how to use the little free time they had.*'²⁸

Even workers determined to break out of this slough of despondency were often faced with hostility and incomprehension from official society. In some respects an informal form of cultural apartheid was enforced that effectively debarred workers from partaking in culture and leisure amenities, particularly in the city centre. As a recent migrant to the city, the worker Zakhar Trifonov, was ejected from the Summer Gardens in the city centre by patrolling police officers. When he told his workmates, they were amused informing him the Summer Gardens were for the '*well to do*' who dress in the '*German style*', that anyone dressed as a worker would inevitably suffer Trifonov's fate. Undeterred, Trifonov spent a large part of his next wage on acquiring '*German*' clothes and on his next day off casually sauntered into the Gardens, walking past the policeman who a few days earlier had thrown him out. Admiring a statue of Krylov, Trifonov wondered what the famous compiler of fables would have made of his predicament and mused that he perhaps would have penned a fable entitled '*Russian Germans.*'²⁹

Educational Responses.

As industrialisation gathered pace, government and factory owners recognised the need to provide educational opportunities for workers. Education for workers was never enthusiastically championed by government as a whole, reflected in the fact that it was subject to numerous restrictions and supervision from religious bodies and always vulnerable to the vicissitudes of government policy that remained predominantly focused on preventing subversion. Yet despite government reluctance, workers' educational initiatives were increasingly sanctioned as a response to two major and inter-related pressures confronting Russian society that demanded a resolution. The first concerned the prevalence of drunkenness outlined above that many in government saw as indicative that

²⁷ S.I. Kanatchikov, 1986, p. 95.

²⁸ A.M. Buiko, 1934, pp.10, 11.

²⁹ Z.T. Trifonov, 'Vospominaniia,' in *Avangard*, 1990, pp.305-306.

workers were succumbing to the feared depravity associated with the curse of proletarianisation. By providing basic education, including a strong religious and moral component, it was hoped to reinforce traditional values of obedience and respect for authority and divert workers from the pernicious frequenting of taverns and brothels. A second consideration was an imperative to create a literate and skilled workforce capable of working effectively in modern industrial factories. Advocates of industrialisation within government recognised the need to train workers equipped with the skills and knowledge to compete with foreign competitors. Nowhere was this imperative more keenly felt than within government ministries responsible for the defence of the empire. The War and Naval Ministries, generally supported by the Ministry of Finance, from the late 1850s were at the forefront of Russia's industrialisation drive and the concomitant need to create a literate, skilled and sober workforce.³⁰

The first educational initiative aimed at workers emerged in the Sunday School movement, a voluntary initiative by liberal intelligentsia, that by 1860 had established 23 schools in the capital.³¹ Before long, however, the Schools provoked concerns in government and by 1861 a priest was appointed to each school to oversee the curriculum and ‘*safeguard the truths of the Orthodox faith.*’³² The Minister of Internal Affairs reported in 1862 that although the schools had been officially approved only to teach literacy, arithmetic and religion, many of the schools had been actively teaching history, geography, science, and, in some instances, ‘subversive’ subjects such as political economy.³³ In spring 1862 the government acted against the schools using as a pretext the arrest of two workers for spreading anti-religious propaganda as an excuse to close all the schools.³⁴

It was left to the Ministry of War to promote educational reform and technical education through the establishment of a parallel educational system. Military schools and colleges adopted a liberal teaching curriculum, incurring the wrath of conservatives led by Education Minister Tolstoi, who sought to link this to increasing student radicalism and

³⁰ P.A. Zaionchkovskii, *Voennye reformy 1860-1870 godov v Rossii*. Moscow, 1952; A J Rieber, ‘Interest Group Politics in the Era of the Great Reforms,’ Eklof, B., Bushnell J. and Zakharova, L. (eds.), *Russia's Great Reforms, 1855-1881*, (Bloomington, 1994); Daniel T. Orlovsky, *The Limits of Reform: The Ministry of Internal Affairs in Imperial Russia, 1802-1881*, Harvard UP, 1981.

³¹ On the Sunday School movement in the late 1850s/early 1860s see Ia. V. Abramov, *Nashi voskresenye shkoly. Ikh proshloe i nastoiashchee*, St. Petersburg, 1900, pp.24 ff; Reginald Zelnik, 1971, Chapter 5 and ‘The Sunday School Movement in Russia, 1859-1862,’ *Journal of Modern History*, Vol.27, No. 2, June 1965.

³² ‘Voskresnye shkoly,’ *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, 7, F. A. Brokhaus i I. A. Efron, St. Petersburg, 1895, 256-257

³³ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom. II, Chast I*, p.591.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.592; Reginald Zelnik, 1971, pp.190-193.

social unrest.³⁵ Reflecting a commitment to industrial modernisation, the initiative in developing worker education came from the Ministries of War and Naval Affairs. In 1867, the Ministry of Naval Affairs opened a school for the children of shipyard workers at its Kronshtadt yard to provide a broad general and technical education before they entered the yards as apprentices.³⁶ In 1869 the commander of the Kolpine Izhorsk naval factory requested resources to improve education for the 320 pupils at the factory school. In January 1870, a report on the school highlighted the fact that since its opening over 1500 workers had graduated to work in the factory and former pupils comprised around half the current workforce, constituting ‘*the best workers.*’ The report requested that the school open a separate Sunday and evening school for adult workers as ‘*in the absence of appropriate entertainments in Kolpino such study would prove to be of enormous benefit in both a scientific and moral sense.*’³⁷

By the mid-1860s many Petersburg industrialists advocated technical education for workers. In 1866 the government approved the establishment of the Imperial Russian Technical Society to promote industry. Government officials, including its secretary E.N. Andreev from the Ministry of Finance and Chairman Baron Del’vig, Chief Inspector of Railroads, played a prominent role in the Society.³⁸ In a remarkable volte-face, in 1867 government authorised the Society to establish Sunday Schools for workers, entrusting industrialists with teaching literacy and technical skills to create a cadre of skilled workers to man heavy industry in the capital. This represented a major concession from government, recognising that Russia’s current labour force was ill-suited and ill-equipped to meet the discipline of modern industrial production.

In 1869 the Society opened its first school at the Warsaw Railway workshops to provide workers ‘*with the opportunity to acquire certain skills necessary for their way of life*’ and as well as the mandatory teaching of scriptures and basic literacy, subjects included arithmetic, history, geography, physics, chemistry, geometry, mechanics and technical

³⁵ Alfred J. Rieber, 1994, pp.74-75; L.E. Shishko, ‘Sergei Kravchinskii i kruzhok chaikovtsev,’ in *Sobr. Poln. Soch., T.IV*, Moscow-Petrograd., 1918.

³⁶ *Stanovlenie revoliutsionnykh traditsii piterskogo proletariata*, [ed.], A.N. Tsamutali, Leninigrad, 1987, pp.105-106.

³⁷ *Ibid*, pp.111-113.

³⁸ On the formation of the Technical Society, see Reginald Zelnik, 1971, pp.284 ff, and ‘To the Unaccustomed Eye’, *Russian History*, Vol.24, 1989, Nos. 2-4, pp.297-326; E.A. Korol’chuk, ‘Ob osobennostiakh ekspluatitsii i stachechnoi bor’by peterburgskogo proletariata [70-90-e gody xix v],’ *Istoricheskii zapiski*, Vol.89, Moscow 1972, pp.163-171.

drawing.³⁹ The industrial schools represented a compromise in which government authorised workers' education in return for a commitment from industrialists to instil religiosity and morality into their worker charges. At a major Congress of Manufacturers in 1870 the basis of this concordat was stated explicitly, with the Congress agreeing that religion and morality were essential for social peace, the promotion of sobriety and improving worker efficiency.⁴⁰

By the mid-1870s, the Technical Society had put in place the foundations of what would become a network of educational provision for workers in the capital. In his annual report for 1875 the Society's Chairman provided a breakdown of the Society's educational work in the capital. The Society had established six schools with a total of 774 pupils, spending 8492 roubles on educational work in 1873-1874, supplemented by donations from factory owners and grants from the Ministry of War and the state-owned Expedition for the Preparation of State Papers. The report highlighted the need to ensure that workers' children progressed to attend special classes for adult workers where in conjunction with training in factories they would be taught *'the scientific explanation of these productive methods through basic laws of physics, chemistry and mechanics, that at the same time with the teaching of technical drawing would allow the possibility to create from them excellent skilled workers.'*⁴¹

The impact of educational initiatives on workers was evident at the War Ministry's Patronnyi cartridge factory on Vasil'evskii Island. In 1873 the Technical Society established a school at the factory

to deliver elementary education to workers..... as well as their children and to communicate useful information for the more conscious application by workers in this designated part of the city of their jobs through (the provision) of evening and Sunday courses for the workers of both sexes and their children.

³⁹ *Stanovlenie revoliutsionnykh traditsii peterskogo proletariata*, [ed.], A.N. Tsamutali, Leningrad, 1987, p.106.

⁴⁰ *Protokoly i stenograficheskie otchety pervogo Vserossiiskogo s'ezda fabrikantov, zavodchikov i lits, interesuiushchihhsia otechestvennoi promyshlennost'iu*, St. Petersburg, 1870, p.16; *Trudy s'ezda glavnykh po mashinstoitel'noi promyshlennosti deiatelei*, vyp.2. *Zhurnal obshchikh sobranii*, cited in Reginald Zelnik, 1970.

⁴¹ *Stanovlenie revoliutsionnykh traditsii peterskogo proletariata*, [ed.], A.N. Tsamutali, Leningrad, 1987, pp.172-174.

In its first session, the school had 221 pupils.⁴² Such schools offered not only educational opportunities but also a forum where workers could meet with sympathetic members of the intelligentsia and begin to explore their role in the rapidly changing world around them. The success of the Patronnyi School is illustrated by the fact that the Society quickly followed the opening of the Patronnyi School with schools at two other military run factories on the Vyborg Side.⁴³ Although established for educational purposes, the Patronnyi Schools provided wider opportunities for workers. Army officers involved in the management of the Patronnyi and other military factories encouraged workers to use libraries, set up consumer co-operative societies to enable workers to purchase foodstuffs and establish mutual-aid savings schemes all of which provided workers with access to radical ideas.⁴⁴ In one of a number of initiatives, during 1873-74 lectures on German Social-Democracy were provided to workers at the Patronnyi factories by Colonel Arkadii Faletskii.⁴⁵

Given this permissive environment towards education and worker self-organisation it is no coincidence that the Patronnyi factories produced highly developed workers who would be amongst the foremost organisers of a radical network of worker-activists during the 1870s. In many instances factory schools provided an initial forum to promote the development of radical ideas and when these could not be satisfied in official schools, many workers sought other outlets to meet their desire for knowledge and in this way entered into relationships with radical-*intelligenty*.

During the rest of the decade, demand for workers' education increased. In autumn 1879, the Petersburg City Duma opened new Sunday Schools on the Vyborg Side and the Narvskii Gate for young factory workers. The schools were so oversubscribed that many workers had to be turned away. A report to the Duma indicated that the schools were having a positive impact and identified a large unmet need for education amongst workers, noting that *'it is evident from [workers'] petitions that the need for education is increasingly spreading amongst the people, and that it is necessary for the city to meet the*

⁴² Ibid, pp.135-136; pp.236-237.

⁴³ E. Andreev, 'Vvedenie,' *Otchety shkol dlia rabochikh i ikh detei...za 1873-74 uchebnyi god* (St. Petersburg, 1873), cited in Zelnik, 'Workers and Intelligentsia in the 1870s: The Politics of Sociability,' in Zelnik [ed.], *Workers and Intelligentsia in Late Imperial Russia*, Berkeley, 1999, pp.22-23.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Vladimir Burtsev, 'Severnyi soiuz russkikh rabochikh,' *Byloe*, No.1, 1906, p.170.

desires of people.' The Duma recommended that ten further schools be opened across the capital.⁴⁶

Knowledge acquisition was beginning to be seen by some workers as a powerful weapon to both understanding and changing the world. Knowledge would enable workers to escape from the ignorance of tradition, become part of the modern world and through education become 'men' rather than beasts, valued for their brains as well as their brawn. Workers' education was given an official stimulus under 1887 legislation that encouraged Sunday Schools in factory premises and working-class districts. Schools were now able to offer a broader curriculum reflecting the need for a more literate, educated and technically skilled workforce. By the early 1890s however, the authorities were again concerned that educational provision for workers had gone too far in a secular and liberal direction and in 1891 the Ministry of Education reasserted Church control over education in workers' schools stipulating that all schools must have courses approved and supervised by the diocesan authorities with much greater emphasis on teaching 'God's Law.'⁴⁷

In line with this conservative approach, many factory owners saw factory schools as a means to reinforce religious and patriarchal attitudes to authority and adhered assiduously to the restrictive curriculum and educational objectives set out by the authorities. Many factory owners voiced concerns at the dangers inherent in allowing workers access to education. The owner of the Thornton factory wrote to the principal of the Smolensk school reminding him that *'your goal is to imbue [workers] with a sense of diligence, a commitment to the correct way of life, to instil in them a habit of obedience to the general rules and laws. Since lessons include teaching the law of God, we must hope that the clergy do not miss the opportunity to impress upon young people the necessity to obey spiritual demands with their whole hearts.'*⁴⁸ Krupskaia described the Thornton textile factory school where students from the Theological Academy were employed to teach basic scripture and religious devotion and her indignation when she discovered that textbooks used by the Theological students contained, in her view, *'Black Hundred nonsense, the lives of the saints and other rubbish'*.⁴⁹ Many Thornton workers preferred to attend the more secular classes at the Smolensk Evening School on the other side of the

⁴⁶ *Stanovlenie revoliutsionnykh traditsii piterskogo proletariata*, [ed.], A.N. Tsamutali, Leningrad, 1987, pp. 303-304.

⁴⁷ Ia. V. Abramov, 1900, pp.83, 299, 318.

⁴⁸ Cited in M.G. Skorodnikov, 1970, pp.42-43.

⁴⁹ N.K. Krupskaia, 'Piat' let raboty v vechernikh Smolenskikh klassakh,' *Pedagogicheskie sochineniia v desiati tomakh, Tom.I*, Moscow, 1957, p.41.

Neva, often crossing melting ice on the river to avail themselves of lessons offered by Krupskaja and her colleagues.⁵⁰ When an Evening-Sunday School opened at the Obukhov steel works in 1891, its stated aim was to ‘*provide the workmen with necessary knowledge for them to adopt a proper attitude towards their work*’ and to instil such an ethos students from the Theological Academy were invited to provide religious ‘*besedy*’ to workers. The Deputy Director of the plant personally developed the curriculum in an effort to prevent ‘subversive’ doctrines being introduced into the factory through the school.⁵¹

The industrial boom of the 1890s, creating a need for an ever-increasing number of skilled workers, forced many industrialists to introduce a broader-based curriculum to equip workers with skills and knowledge for life in an increasingly modern metropolis. By 1895, 35 schools were organised in factories, holding classes on both Sundays and in the evenings. In a manner reminiscent of state factories in the 1870s, to meet the increasingly technical specifications for armament manufacture, management of the Sestroretsk plant in the late 1890s petitioned government to open an industrial school to provide a three-year apprenticeship programme. Apprentices would receive intensive technical training, including technical drawing, arithmetic, geometry, physics, and electrical engineering. This ambitious educational programme was hindered by the fact that the majority of children leaving the local ‘*narodnyi*’ schools were considered insufficiently prepared to enter the industrial school. In order to remedy this, the management and workers co-operated to fund additional lessons at local schools, with the workers at the plant agreeing to contribute one day’s pay each year for this initiative. Here was an example of workers not simply paying lip-service to education but being prepared to make a material contribution to improve the teaching provided for factory children.⁵²

In a similar manner, at the Kolpine industrial complex the school for workers’ children underwent ‘modernisation’ in the 1890s with the arrival of a new plant Director, General Bykov. On his first inspection, Bykov encountered unsystematic teaching based on religious instruction, rote-learning and rowdiness bordering on hooliganism on the part of the pupils on whom frequent punishments were inflicted. Shocked by what he had seen, Bykov revised the curriculum to include a mixture of academic, technical and recreational activities, including sailing, horticulture and the provision of a gymnasium to channel the

⁵⁰ Ibid, pp.41-42; M.G. Skorodnikov, *Ocherk istorii priadil'no-tkatskoi fabрики ' Rabochii*, Leningrad, 1970, p.43.

⁵¹ M. Rozanov, *Obukhovtsy*, 1938, p.60.

⁵² *Sestroretskii instrumental'nyi zavod*, 1968, pp.118-119, 120-121.

obvious exuberant spirits of the young pupils. Pupils now attended practical lessons in the factory workshops each day to become familiar with the working environment they would enter on completing school. A pupil at the school at this time recounted the impact made by Bykov:

*The whole system of teaching changed: for example, in physics a student had to identify the weight and volume of metal; during geometry the geometric shapes and angles were calculated. In the summer we had swimming lessons. And throughout the year there were no punishments for misbehaviour – the school had been converted for work..... Evening courses were organised on a variety of [general and technical] subjects: one - for senior school students, the other - for those who have already finished school and were working in the factory.*⁵³

Even at the traditionally conservative Obukhov School, pressures to create a skilled workforce ensured the introduction of technical-scientific subjects that resulted in progressive ideas becoming accessible to workers. Many Obukhov workers through the 1890s took advantage of technical courses and each year the school had many more applicants than places, even after expanding the number of classes and moving to a larger building in the factory. One worker who enrolled at the school to gain theoretical knowledge needed for the complex designs of machine production, characterised the majority of the teachers at the end of the 1890s as ‘*progressive intellectuals*’ who taught workers ‘*to hate the Tsarist regime...(along with) the history of social movements in Europe and Russia.*’ In less than 10 years, teaching at the Obukhov School had changed from religious based instruction by theological students to scientific teaching, accompanied by a discourse between radical-*intelligent*y and workers engendering opposition to the factory and political regimes.⁵⁴

One of the oldest and most successful schools was at the Baltic Shipyards on Vasil’evskii Island. Established in the 1870s, largely on the initiative of workers, by the 1880s the School offered 50 educational apprenticeships for boys of 12 and upwards each year. The three-year course included education classes in literature, history, geography, mathematics, technical drawing and engineering theory, practical placements in various workshops of the plant, as well as religious teaching and choral singing. Although both the plant manager

⁵³ I K Mikhailov, ‘Chetvert’ veka podpol’shchika,’ *Avangard*, 1990, pp.186-187.

⁵⁴ S.N. Sulimov, ‘Vospominaniia Obukhovtisa [1900-1903 gg],’ *Proletarskii prolog*, 1983, pp.244-245; V.I. Pernafor, ‘7 maia 1901 goda na obukhovskom zavode,’ *ibid*, pp.249-250.

and the educational authorities placed emphasis on the religious aspect, including study and examination of two theological volumes entitled *'How we are dead when we live'* and *'How we will live when we are dead'*, the school principal Timofei Budrin succeeded in ensuring a balanced curriculum that was appreciated by his young charges.⁵⁵

Konstantin Norinskii who was a pupil at the school left an explicit account of the enlightened educational regime instituted by Budrin who he characterised as a *'great teacher'* seeking to *'instil in pupils a good start [to life] and denouncing vice, he imparted in us a desire to do good. He taught us to understand critically our environment; awakening in us a love of the science we were being taught.'*⁵⁶



Timofei Budrin.

In marked contrast to Budrin's approach, Norinskii and his fellow pupils failed to appreciate scripture lessons from an 'archdeacon' who taught mechanically by rote-learning. Many pupils skipped these classes, earning them the wrath of the priest who threatened to disqualify them from sitting their final examination and only the intervention by Budrin enabled the 'rebels' to sit the exam enabling them to enter the factory to continue their apprenticeship under the tutelage of skilled workers. It was a matter of some pride to Norinskii and confirmation of the 'enlightened' education that the Baltic

⁵⁵ S.I. Dmitriev, *Tekhnicheskaiia shkola Baltiiskogo sudostroitel'nogo i mekhanichiskogo zavoda*, St. Petersburg, 1912.

⁵⁶ K.M. Norinskii, *Pod nadzorom politsii [Vospominaniia]*, Moscow, 1974, p.15.

apprentices received from Budrin that from his graduating class of 1887, 10 out of 40 became revolutionaries.⁵⁷



Pupils at Baltic Technical School, 1890s

In addition to factory-based schools, Sunday Schools continued to be provided by private philanthropic initiatives or the Imperial Russian Technical Society. Perhaps the best known of these was the Smolensk [Kornilov] School in the Nevskii Gate, founded in 1883, on the initiative of Vargunin who had also bestowed on the workers of the Nevskii Gate the Society for Popular Recreations. Initially intended exclusively for male workers, the school soon opened a women's section and during the first decade over 7300 pupils had passed through its portals.⁵⁸ An early history of the Sunday Schools left no doubt about the beneficial effects of the school:

In addition to the direct influence on students attending the school, it affects the behaviour of the whole population of the [Shlissel'burg] Highway, introducing into it a new understanding and awareness of the importance of science and of people who strive for knowledge. In their composition, the schools gather together the best elements of the working population who then naturally exert a further influence on their surrounding environment. The schools enjoy great respect not only from students attending them, but also amongst the whole population of the Highway and this respect is transferred to the people who work in the schools. I have had occasion more than once to speak with representatives of the population of the Highway about the Sunday Schools and was amazed by the reverent attitude with which they spoke

⁵⁷ K.M. Norinskii, 'Moi vospiminaniia,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva k Soiuzu Bor'by*, Rostov on Don, 1921, p.9.

⁵⁸ Ia,V, Abramov, 1900, pp.103-104.

*about these institutions, all spoke eloquently about students at the schools or had only heard good things about the school's activities.*⁵⁹



Kornilov-Smolensk Sunday School

Many Schools fostered a collective identity amongst workers. In pursuit of this, schools would stage regular celebrations, bringing together the entire school, fostering a belief amongst workers that they were part of a wider community. Trifonov recalled the atmosphere at the Smolensk School on its tenth anniversary in 1893 when all the students celebrated an important milestone not just in the life of the school but in their own development.⁶⁰ Abramov wrote that celebrations were held in nearly all schools and were:

*an essential attribute since they bring an exciting element into the life of the school, serve to bring teachers and students closer together and give the latter one of the most vivid of memories of the time they spent in school.*⁶¹

For many workers, schools offered educational opportunities that helped them make sense of an alien and incomprehensible world. The Putilov worker Buiko recalled that young workers from the Narvskii Gate went to classes to acquire a technical education, general literacy and become 'cultured.'⁶² As the objective of many workers was primarily educational, some workers objected to the politicising that became prevalent in the schools. Conflicts with radical workers who regarded the schools as an opportunity for anti-government activities and recruiting workers into circles were not unknown. Vasilii

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.107.

⁶⁰ Z.T. Trifonov, 'Vospominaniia,' in *Avangard*, 1990, pp.313-314.

⁶¹ Ia.V. Abramov, 1900, p.338.

⁶² A.M. Buiko, 1934, p.20.

Shelgunov encountered stiff opposition in his attempts to radicalise workers at the Obukhov School in 1894. The ‘*aristocrats*’, as Shelgunov dubbed them, rejected circle propaganda and challenged Shelgunov, claiming Obukhov workers were not interested in his type of ‘*study*’ and that he was wasting his time looking for recruits to workers’ circles at the school.⁶³

Indeed, many workers saw study as offering hope for ‘social betterment.’ A number of worker-students did ‘escape’ from manual labour, becoming factory supervisors or clerical workers. For a small group, the schools opened up a rare opportunity for social mobility, as can be seen in the example of the worker Zakhar Trifonov who, after six years study at the Smolensk School, went on to become a rural primary school-teacher.⁶⁴ Whilst Trifonov’s case is far from typical and his memoir indicates the determination and luck involved in seeing his studies through to this end, what is indisputable is that for many workers the Schools were a means to a possible end, i.e. to improve their material position. For many workers, the attainment of literacy skills was achievement enough, for others technical skills could mean employment opportunities and for still others the schools provided a sense of identity as belonging to a distinct social group in the process of defining itself through education. Yet for every Trifonov there were doubtless countless pupils who did not fulfil their potential. When Trifonov visited his mentor Abramov to tell him he was going to become a teacher, the older man reflected on many former pupils. Recalling one ‘star student’ who he had believed would go on to make a useful contribution to society, Abramov told Trifonov that one day whilst walking outside the city he came across a drunken man lying on the grass beside a ‘worn-out woman.’ When the teacher saw the man’s face he was grief-stricken to discover it was his former protégé and before the latter could recognise him, he hurried away from such a ‘*defamatory image of man.*’⁶⁵

No doubt Abramov witnessed many workers who had embraced education but had succumbed to the temptations of city life or unable to cope with the unremitting poverty and oppression of factory life sought refuge in drink. Despite such disappointments, the teachers continued their mission to raise the intellectual level of workers. Their devotion was valued by pupils and virtually all workers who left memoirs about the schools are fulsome in their praise for teachers who were seen as sacrificing so much on their behalf.

⁶³ M. Rozanov, *Obukhovtsy*, 1938, p.62.

⁶⁴ Z.T. Trifonov, ‘Vospominaniia,’ *Avangard*, 1990, pp.323-324.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, pp.324-325.

When Vargunin died in 1897 workers across the Nevskii Gate were devastated, Kuz'min recalling *'the sorrow that befell students At the funeral there were thousands of people, and at the grave many workers made speeches about his untimely death and the work that he had carried out for the benefit of workers.'*⁶⁶ Combining their appreciation with their fervent hopes that God would look after the deceased philanthropist's spirit as well as providing good health and long lives to their teachers, the workers' tribute is a peculiar blend of gratitude to the man who had provided them with educational opportunities along with an implicit recognition that God had moved him and the teachers to bring enlightenment to workers.⁶⁷

Despite the high regard in which schools were held and the impressive number of workers who studied in them, worker-students represented only a small proportion of the workers. Many workers remained ignorant of the very existence of the schools. The Semiannikov worker Buzinov recalled that the mass of workers remained indifferent to the schools and that he only found out about them after he had worked at the factory for over five years. Given the relatively small number of places at the schools, workers who acquired an education through them could *'only ever be a drop in the ocean'* and for many young workers 'book learning' held little attraction compared to the easily available alternatives of drinking and womanising in taverns and brothels.⁶⁸

For many other workers exhaustion was a real deterrent. A significant number of workers who made the commitment to attend schools after long working hours must have succumbed to exhaustion and fallen asleep during lessons. Babushkin recounts that sheer physical fatigue prevented many workers enrolling in the schools. As an active champion of education, Babushkin encouraged workers at the Semiannikov factory to enrol for classes. But although he persuaded a number to attend schools, he conceded that the physical demands made by factories allied to additional mandatory evening, night and Sunday shifts prevalent in many factories precluded participation by many workers in educational activities.⁶⁹ 'Overtime' was a major constraint, but despite this workers found ways of continuing education. Groups of workers from the Obukhov and Aleksandrovsk steel works formed small study groups amongst themselves to discuss subjects taught at the local evening school. They were assisted in this by sympathetic teachers who were

⁶⁶ A Kuz'min, 'Vospominaniia o vechernei voskresnoi shkole za Nevskoi zastavoi,' *Avangard*, 1990, p.327.

⁶⁷ Ia.V. Abramov, 1900, pp.107-108.

⁶⁸ Aleksei Buzinov, 1930, pp.19ff.

⁶⁹ *Recollections of Ivan Vasilyevich Babushkin*, Moscow, 1957, pp.46, 60.

available to answer queries and provide study materials.⁷⁰ For other workers a fortunate coincidence enabled them to progress their studies. Such was the case with Trifonov, who experienced great difficulty in persuading his foreman to exempt him from working evenings to attend classes. It was only when a graduate from the Technological Institute supportive of workers' education was appointed manager of the workshop that the attitude towards education changed and from then on Trifonov experienced no difficulties from his previously obstructive foreman.⁷¹

Beyond these factors, a potent deterrent preventing workers' involvement in education was fear of being seen as a 'rebel', identified as a troublemaker that could result in victimisation at work or attract the attention of the police. In a pamphlet based on real events, a Thornton factory worker described the impact of illegal leaflets at the factory. The factory manager becomes aware that seditious proclamations are being distributed in the factory. On learning this, he summons informants to his office and after severely reprimanding them for not informing him earlier demands to know who is distributing the leaflets. The sheepish informants reply that '*Sunday Schoolists*' are responsible. At once the manager orders that the 'students' are marched into his office where he proceeds to harangue them as '*scum, rebels, [who] want to incite a rising in the factory with your leaflets. I'll show you dirty people; you'll rot in prison, rounded up to be sent to Siberia.*' Yet not having any evidence, the 'students' escape with a dressing down and warned that they will be closely watched in the future. Given this reprieve several 'students' stopped attending Sunday School, fearful that attendance would result in their dismissal from the factory or worse.⁷²

Other workers highlighted the inherent dangers of being 'students' and a pervasive fear amongst workers who attended Sunday Schools that they would be marked out by factory police and at any disturbance be sacked or arrested.⁷³ One worker related how the police intimidated 'students' by congregating outside the school and threatening workers as they left classes. One unfortunate worker challenged by a policeman and asked in an insulting manner why a common worker wanted to study, sneeringly adding whether he had pretensions to be a minister of the state. When the worker replied that unlike ministers all

⁷⁰ V.I. Pernafor, '7 maia 1901 goda na obukhovskom zavode,' *Proletarskii prolog. Vospominaniia uchastnikov revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia v peterburge v 1883-1904 godakh*, [ed.] E.R. Ol'kovskii, Leningrad, 1983, p.249.

⁷¹ Z.T. Trifonov, 'Vospominaniia,' *Avangard*, 1990, pp.311-312.

⁷² S. Orlov, 'Zapretnye listki [Is vospominaniia rabochego],' *Avangard*, 1990, pp.421-429.

⁷³ Prokofev, 'Vospominaniia o smolenskoi shkole,' *Avangard*, 1990, p.330.

he wanted to be was competent at his job, the worker was arrested and deported to his home *guberniia*.⁷⁴ It was also standard practice for police to ask workers if they attended Sunday school and if they answered in the affirmative then this made them suspect of involvement in revolutionary politics and subject to a formal investigation.⁷⁵

Despite such overt ‘intimidation,’ many workers assiduously attended the Sunday Schools where their exposure to secular education and science contributed to a general loss of faith and belief in God. One worker recalled that all the workers who began to study with him at the Smolensk school started as ‘*true believers*’ but by the end of their study they had ceased to believe.⁷⁶ Such an outcome was not necessarily the product of overtly anti-religious teaching, but was most often the product of exposure to science that workers found incompatible with the beliefs instilled through Church teachings.

Whilst Sunday Schools were undoubtedly a vehicle for worker-radicalisation, in many instances this was an unexpected consequence with many workers attending primarily to obtain education and the motivation of the majority of teachers was not a desire to radicalise their protégés. The worker Vasilii Shelgunov characterised two distinct approaches towards workers’ education amongst the teachers:

*One faction considered that the major task was simply to teach workers literacy, to raise their cultural level; the other faction..... desired to link the study of workers in the schools with their day-to-day lives. Naturally, teachers who adhered to the latter persuasion tried to make use of every opportunity to provide workers with a comprehensive knowledge drawn from examples from their own environments.*⁷⁷

In essence this reflected a division between a liberal-culturalist tendency, intent on developing workers as socially responsible citizens and a more radical wing that saw within the working-class a force that could reshape society. A typical representative of the first tendency was undoubtedly the leading teacher at the Smolensk School Avramov who was committed to promoting understanding of natural, scientific and social phenomena to

⁷⁴ A P Zarubkin, ‘Moia uchitel'nitsa,’ *Avangard*, 1990, p.288.

⁷⁵ E.P. Onufriev, ‘Na urokakh skladyvalis' i krepli nashi revoliutsionnye ubezhdeniia,’ *Proletarskii prolog*, 1983, p.197.

⁷⁶ A Kuz'min, ‘Vospominaniia o vechernei voskresnoi shkole za Nevskoi zastavoi,’ *Avangard*, 1990, p.328.

⁷⁷ V.A. Shelgunov, ‘Moi Vospominaniia o vostresykh skholakh,’ in *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.336.

workers at the school.⁷⁸ Such a philosophy in the prevailing political conditions represented a challenge to traditional authority, yet teachers such as Avramov were careful to remain within the bounds of legality, determined to disseminate knowledge and understanding but never inciting pupils to illegal activities. As Krupskaja indicated Avramov was '*a stranger to politics*' but dedicated his life to the education of workers.⁷⁹ Avramov's approach reflected a rationalistic belief in progress based on an assumption that by introducing workers dispassionately to knowledge this would have a positive and enlightening influence on their environment and over time raise the moral, cultural and material level of the working-class.

Although teachers like Avramov were respected by pupils and revolutionary teachers, during the 1890s an increasing number of teachers became committed to using education to incite workers to challenge existing economic and political systems. Such teachers were most prominent in the Smolensk School in the Nevskii Gate and at the Glazovskaia Sunday School. Praskov'ia Kudelli who taught at both schools indicated that whilst initially many radical teachers were sympathetic to *Narodniki* doctrines, through the 1890s a more definite social-democratic orientation became noticeable. Yet, irrespective of their precise ideological persuasion, the majority of teachers shared a common opposition to the autocracy and wanted to bring about political reform.⁸⁰

Cultural and educational opportunities for workers in the capital played an important role in the creation and development of a *worker-intelligenty*. Seen by increasing numbers of workers as providing both the essential knowledge and skills for living in a modern industrial city as well as opening new horizons beyond the narrow, traditional confines of home and workplace, various educational and cultural opportunities available in Petersburg helped both define workers as a distinct social group and from within this group enable a small number to acquire the means to emerge from the masses and announce their individual and collective identities.

⁷⁸ E.P. Onufriev, 'Na urokakh skladyvalis' i krepli nashi revoliutsionnye ubezhdeniia,' *Proletarskii prolog*, 1983, p.196.

⁷⁹ N.K. Krupskaja, 'Piat' let raboty v vechernikh Smolenskikh klassakh,' *Pedagogicheskie sochineniia v desiati tomakh, Tom.I*, Moscow, 1957, p.44.

⁸⁰ P.F. Kudelli, 'Dom N.2 65 po Shlissel'burgskomu traktu,' *Proletarskii prolog*, Leningrad, 1983, p.190.

Chapter 5.

The *Worker-intelligenty*

Before examining the emergence and development of workers' groups in Petersburg, it is important to define the radical *worker-intelligenty*, its composition, characteristics and key relationships within the working-class and with the radical *intelligenty*. Early pioneering analyses of the *worker-intelligenty* were carried out in the first decades of the 20th century by the social-democratic activist L.M. Kleinbort. For Kleinbort the phenomenon of the *worker-intelligenty* emerged during the 1890s and made its first dramatic appearance during the revolution of 1905 when an intermediate strata of workers began to act in the social arena linking the ideological theories of socialism with masses of workers.¹ Kleinbort believed that the development of this *worker-intelligenty* was rooted in the educational and cultural opportunities that began to be available to workers from the 1870s and which rapidly expanded during the 1890s. The social researcher Nikolai Rubakin at the end of the 1890s demonstrated that a specific *worker-intelligenty* existed in Petersburg who craved both knowledge and practical means to raise the intellectual and moral level of the class of factory workers as a whole. Rubakin noted that it was not unusual to see a worker with a book beside his machine and that during his few brief moments of rest amidst the noise of the machines it was profoundly moving to watch him read a few pages.² By the early years of the 20th century this social group was becoming more and more noticeable with Kleinbort observing that such workers sacrifice all other aspects of life, shun normal pleasures and escapes and exhibit a kind of '*morbid enthusiasm*' for knowledge through their agonising thirst for books.³ Rubakin also noted that the *worker-intelligenty* '*demonstrated their own Weltschmerz, a world-weariness concerning the state of the world, with their own principled style in promoting their own values.*'⁴

Despite the alienation that many *worker-intelligenty* experienced from most of their fellow workers and their comparatively small numbers during the period under consideration,

¹ L.M. Kleinbort, *Ocherki rabochei intelligentsia, T.I*, Petrograd, 1923, p.11. For a recent review of the development of the *worker-intelligenty* see E.R. Ol'khovskii, 'Formirovanie rabochei intelligentsii v Rossii,' *Rabochie i intelligentsia Rossii v epokhu reform i revoliutsii, 1861 – Fevral' 1917*. St. Petersburg, 1997, pp. 77-95.

² N.A. Rubakin, *Etiudy o russkoi chitaiushchei publike. Fakty, tsifry i nabliudeniia*, St. Petersburg, 1895, p.192, 193; 'Is Zhizni rabochei intelligentsii,' *Mir bozhii*, March 1896.

³ L.M. Kleinbort, 'Novyi chitatel', *Sovremennyi mir*, 1914, No.5, p.109.

⁴ N.A. Rubakin, 'Is Zhizni rabochei intelligentsii,' *Mir bozhii*, March 1896, p.20

their influence and significance in forming a specific worker-identity was considerable. At the end of the 1870s there were probably around 500 worker-activists involved in some way with the Northern Union of Russian Workers. At the beginning of the 1890s, an *intelligenty*-propagandist closely involved with workers' circles estimated that there were around 1000 *worker-intelligenty* in the capital, many of whom would have had some connection with radical workers' circles.⁵ By the mid-1890s, Konstantin Takhtarev estimated that about 1% of factory workers constituted a radical worker-intelligentsia, equating to somewhere in the region of 1800 to 2000, with around half of these associated with revolutionary workers' circles.⁶ In his memoirs Iulii Martov noted high concentrations of such workers in various districts of the capital, highlighting workers from the Baltic Shipyards on Vasil'evskii Island where a large concentration of students and foreigners influenced the creation of many 'Europeanised', cultured workers. Similar groupings of workers could be found in both the Narvskii and Nevskii Gate districts, in the latter many workers at the Obukhov factory were, according to Martov, highly urbanised and indistinguishable from students.⁷

To a significant degree the *worker-intelligenty* was the product of two inter-related processes: the first had a material basis in the labour process through skill differentiation amongst Petersburg factory workers, whilst the second formed part of an ideological construct of an 'ideal' worker type introduced into the workers' environment by radical *intelligenty* but critically assimilated and developed by groups of workers themselves. In this section we shall explore how these twin processes interacted, reinforcing each other to produce an ideologically constructed *worker-intelligent* type that remained rooted in the material conditions of Petersburg factory life, a hybrid creation often existing in a twilight and shadowy world, tenuously linked to the mass of their fellow workers and entwined in a often fractious relationship with the intelligentsia.

From the first contacts between radical *intelligenty* and Petersburg factory workers in the early 1870s, a dualistic theoretical construct was created that divided workers into two almost hermetically distinct groups, unskilled *fabrichnye* workers, working mainly in textile factories, and skilled *zavodskie* workers employed in heavy metalworking plants. In the early 1870s, *Narodniki* propagandists attached a series of social and cultural

⁵ V.V. Bartenev, 'Is vospominanii peterburzhtsa vo vtoroi polovine 80-kh godov,' *Minuyshie gody*, 1908, no. 10, p. 185.

⁶ K.M. Takhtarev, *Rabochee dvizhenie v Peterburge, 1893-1901 gg.*, Leningrad, 1924.

⁷ Iu.O. Martov, *Zapiska sotsial-demokrata*, Moscow, 2004, pp.182-183.

attributes and values to these two groups: *fabrichnye* workers were characterised as being largely illiterate, unskilled, communal, temporarily resident in the capital and retaining close links with the countryside, whilst *zavodskie* workers were literate, possessed an industrial skill or craft, generally permanently resident in the capital and largely assimilated into urban life.⁸ One Narodniki *propagandist* who had links with both *fabrichnye* and *zavodskie* workers characterised the differences in a statement to police following his arrest in 1874:

*Zavodskie workers bear the hallmark of urban civilisation. They eat very well, do not live in artels with the masses, but individually, particularly workers from mechanical workshops. They do not drink excessively and in general maintain a decent appearance. In contrast, fabrichnye workers eat in the manner of the countryside, live crudely without exception in artels and drink excessively.*⁹

Inherent in this Narodniki characterisation of the two groups was the belief that since *zavodskie* workers ‘bore the hallmark of urban civilisation’ they were both ideologically and culturally incapable of being revolutionary and acting as a bridge into the peasant world to incite the mass rural uprising central to Narodniki revolutionary doctrines. Such a dualistic characterisation of urban factory workers became enshrined in Kropotkin’s programmatic statement of the Chaikovskist group in 1873, later reflected in his Memoirs where he recounted that *zavodskie* workers were dismissive of *fabrichnye* workers and ‘were in no haste to become martyrs to the socialist cause.’¹⁰ Kropotkin’s dismissal of the revolutionary potential of *zavodskie* workers reveals the ideological underpinning for the subsequent Narodniki privileging of *fabrichnye* workers, who were seen as semi-peasant workers retaining the ‘social spirit’ of the peasant and who could be utilised by the Narodniki *intelligenty* to foster rebellion in the countryside.¹¹

On the basis of this polarised paradigm, the first generation of Russian Marxists would create a competing narrative around the formation of the Russian revolutionary worker that

⁸ N.A. Charushin, *O dalekom proshlom*, Moscow, 1973, p.127

⁹ A.V. Nizovkin, cited in Sh.M. Levin, ‘Kruzhok chaikovtsev i propaganda sredi peterburgskikh rabochikh v nachale 1870-kh gg.’, *Katorga i ssylka*, No. 12 [61], 1929, p.9.

¹⁰ Kropotkin’s manifesto ‘Must We Occupy Ourselves with an Examination of the Ideal of a Future System?’ is reprinted in translation in Martin A. Miller [ed.], *Selected Writings on Anarchism and Revolution*, 1970, pp.100ff. For the background to the Manifesto see Martin Miller, ‘Ideological Conflicts in Russian Populism: The Revolutionary Manifestos of the Chaikovskiy Circle, 1869-1874,’ *Slavic Review*, Vol. 29, No. 1, March 1970, pp. 1-21.

¹¹ P.A. Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 1968, New York, pp.325-326.

became the normative discourse in Leninist and Soviet interpretations of the Russian working-class. In 1892 Plekhanov published a retrospective account of the Petersburg workers' movement of the 1870s, *Russkii rabochii v revoliutsionnom dvizhenie*.¹² Beginning from the *Narodniki* division of the factory workforce into *fabrichnye* and *zavodskie*, Plekhanov reworked the dichotomy to reflect his now Marxist schemata of historical social development. In Plekhanov's revision, *Narodniki* privileging of *fabrichnye* as the revolutionary grouping was turned upside down, so that skilled and cultured *zavodskie* workers came to represent the advanced section of the working-class with their representatives in the 1870s lauded as the pioneers of proletarian consciousness. In Plekhanov's deterministic reading such workers were the products of industrial development, their social position made them instinctively Marxian before a Marxist party existed and thus estranged them from *Narodniki* peasant-centred ideologists. Plekhanov was at pains to establish a historical narrative that linked advanced representatives of the working-class with Marxist socialism, the skilled *zavodskie* of the 1870s as the prototypical examples of conscious worker-revolutionaries already '*completely assimilated into the conditions of urban life [and] in the majority of instances having a highly unfavourable view of the countryside.*'¹³

In effect Plekhanov had devised a 'mythical' historical path for workers to attain revolutionary consciousness. Still adhering to *Narodniki* distinctions, workers fell into two distinct categories: the first were unskilled workers in textile mills, food and animal processing or in the 'hot' metal trades as smiths or smelters, characterised by lack of education and cultural development that condemned them to ideological backwardness and moral depravity. The second type was the '*zavodskie*', skilled craftsman such as lathe operators, pattern makers, machine fitters, boilermakers and machine operators, employed in the so-called 'cold' workshops of metalworking factories who, in addition to industrial skills, possessed high levels of literacy, were concerned with self-development and critical of existing social and political systems. This latter aspect made them susceptible to revolutionary propaganda and therefore, the natural target of revolutionary propagandists from the intelligentsia. Mobility between the two groups was rare and the characteristics of the two groups quickly became established as the dominant Marxist paradigm to explain the development, or absence, of revolutionary consciousness. Consciousness of their historical role was seen to reside within *zavodskie* workers who would act as the bridge

¹² Plekhanov's memoir account was first published in Geneva in 1892 and reprinted in 1902. It was subsequently republished in Plekhanov, *Sochineniia*, 1923, T. III, Moscow-Petrograd, 1923, pp.121-205.

¹³ G.V. Plekhanov, *Sochineniia*, T. III, 1923, p.133.

between the Marxist revolutionary intelligentsia and the mass of workers, a natural leadership cadre of the class bearing the hallmarks of both workers and *intelligenty*. As Reginald Zelnik observed ‘*what was implied by the juxtaposition of *fabrichnye* and *zavodskie* was a pathway of disembodied consciousness, an organisational chart of intellectual and moral hierarchy.*’¹⁴

Like many ‘myths,’ however, the idealised representation of the *worker-intelligenty* had a substantial basis in reality. In Petersburg, the emerging working-class was marked by high levels of stratification, identified and categorised by *Narodniki* propagandists of the 1870s. Although representing a considerable simplification, the division between unskilled *fabrichnye* and skilled *zavodskie* workers constituted one of several fault lines running through the working-class. If the category of the skilled *zavodskie* metalworker did represent a discrete component within the industrial workforce and had acquired a number of attributes that made it the source for the emerging *worker-intelligenty*, then as we have seen it stood apart not simply from the *fabrichnye* category of textile workers but also from the overwhelming majority of Petersburg factory workers, including substantial sections of workers in the metalworking sector.

Yet the potential to become a member of this elite group was invariably contingent on material considerations that undoubtedly privileged skilled *zavodskie* workers. Worker stratification based on skill, education, adaptation to city life within the metalworking sector represented a fundamental aspect of the self-identification of the *worker-intelligenty* that often developed amongst workers within a particular ‘shop’ [*tsekh*]. Such workers often sought support and reinforcement of their emerging identities with similar workers in other factories rather than seeking to embrace the mass workforce of an entire factory. Many industrial processes in Petersburg factories continued to rely on handicraft methods of production that placed a premium on the skills of turners, pattern-makers, machine-fitters, and carpenters. This created a sense of pride amongst skilled workers in their craftsmanship within an overall labour process that in many fundamental ways still resembled that of an artisanal workshop.

¹⁴ Reginald E, Zelnik, ‘On the Eve: Life Histories and Identities of Some Revolutionary Workers, 1870-1905,’ in Siegelbaum and Suny [ed], *Making Workers Soviet: Power, Class and Identity*, 1994, p.31.



Pattern Making Workshop, Baltic Shipyards, 1903.

Pride, bordering on vanity, of skilled craftsmen is a recurring theme in memoirs of metalworkers as with the Putilov worker Buiko, who recounted that if a worker was not seen as a good craftsman he was deemed inferior and that a young apprentice had to demonstrate mastery of his craft before a skilled worker would condescend to speak to him on equal terms. The novice would be unceremoniously told *'first learn how to hold a hammer and use a chisel and a knife, then you can begin to argue like a man who has something to teach others.'*¹⁵ It was the possession of a metalworking skill or comparable trade that was a key defining characteristic of the *worker-intelligenty*. Skill level was a crucial differentiating factor and its importance in constructing a sense of individual worth and conferring a degree of independence, not just through material rewards but possession of a degree of control over production processes. Such workers were no mere cogs in a machine as Heather Hogan noted in her study of Petersburg metalworkers:

*Master of a trade, he was typically master of his own work-life. Indispensable to the process of production, fully literate and able to earn a decent income, his skills gave him an autonomy and a sense of self-worth that was not shared by the unskilled laborer who could be replaced at the whim of an employer.*¹⁶

For the skilled worker this separated him from the majority of other metalworkers, condemned to toil in the merciless heat and fumes of the so-called 'hot' shops, where worth was determined purely by physical strength and muscularity and not on mental calculation and precision. A young worker who initially felt privileged to work in the

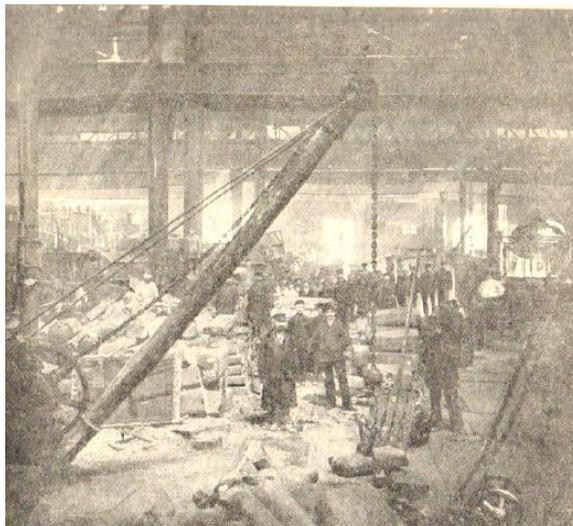
¹⁵ A.M. Buiko, 1934, pp.13-14.

¹⁶ Heather Hogan, 1993, p.21.

foundry at the Semiannikov factory soon experienced the hierarchical world within the factory and found himself looking enviously at skilled workers who seemed to inhabit a different world:

I felt that workers of machine shops - fitters and turners – looked down on me. After this, I clearly distinguished the humble position of workers in hot shops: the foundry, rolling, and blacksmith shops. Among them I saw more uncouth and clumsy people, both in appearance and speech. In each individual face.... crude features showed through clearly, which said that in their work strength predominated and not a quickness of wit. I also saw that beside an experienced founder, even a shabby fitter seemed an educated and thoughtful person. The fitter held his head higher, was sharper and keener in his speech. He was able to fit in a dozen words with a bit of irony, while the founder found time for only one, 'yes and well,' something very simple. With the fitter, you were automatically inclined to talk about things in general and not only about wages. In a word, the machine-shop worker was already not that semi-raw material of the foundry and blacksmith shops, but seemed to have passed through an exacting, shaping action from machine tools and instruments.¹⁷

In describing the skilled metalworker as having been finely shaped through an 'exacting' refinement, Buzinov gave linguistic form to a process that had been in train from the 1860s that by the 1890s had created a small but well-honed and clearly defined group of skilled workers that would form the nucleus of the Petersburg *worker-intelligenty*.



Open-hearth Furnace, Putilov Factory

¹⁷ Aleksei Buzinov, 1930, pp.20-21.

This refining process centred as it was on skilled metalworkers represented an exclusively male world. As such, one of the most salient legacies that *zavodskie* workers bequeathed to radical workers' circles was a chronic gender imbalance, creating a world where few women could enter and from the small number that did perhaps only three or four had any major influence. In Petersburg, the actual number of women in metalworking factories was as low as 29 in 1885 whilst by 1900 women still only accounted for 0.8% of the workforce.¹⁸ Women's exclusion from the male-dominated metalworking sector was in part due to the emphasis on strength in production processes, allied to a series of male restrictive practices that sought to defend their elite status operating within a culture of masculinity characterised by excessive drinking, physical strength, crude and sexually suggestive language and boasting about sexual conquests and prowess. Metalworking was one of several 'homosocial' sectors, often complemented by the tavern and the single sex *artel'* in which many men lived, that reinforced traditional and patriarchal notions of masculinity, albeit within a new urban environment.¹⁹ Given, the high correlation between the *worker-intelligenty*, workers' circles and skilled metalworkers drawn from 'cold' workshops, it is unsurprising that very few women workers became involved in the circle movement.

The comparatively high earnings of skilled metalworkers enabled them to enjoy a standard of living that must have appeared affluent to unskilled workers in both textile and metalworking factories. Skilled workers were able to afford better accommodation, renting individual rooms, eat well and buy items such as books and fashionable clothing that the majority of workers regarded as luxuries.²⁰ Many observers from the 1870s onwards commented on living accommodation of *worker-intelligenty*, all of them stressing that compared to the mass of unskilled workers it was spacious, well furnished, with walls lined with bookshelves filled with social journals, classic literary works, scientific and historical studies. A key feature, frequently noted in such apartments, was their light and spacious quality that had both a practical function in providing sufficient space for circle meetings of up to ten people as well as a symbolic statement that such workers had emerged into the light, from where they could continue their enlightenment by taking advantage of educational and cultural opportunities in the capital. Such apartments were a statement of both the individuality of their occupants as well as a declaration of their

¹⁸ A.G. Rashin, 1958, p.220.

¹⁹ S.A. Smith, 'Masculinity in Transition: Peasant Migrants to Late Imperial Petersburg,' in *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture*, (eds.) Barbara Evans Clements, Rebecca Freidman and Dan Healy, New York, 2002, pp.94-112.

²⁰ *Recollections of Ivan Vasilyevich Babushkin*, Moscow, 1957, p.38.

difference from the mass of workers whose living conditions were dark, dirty, damp, overcrowded and collective. It was this contrast with the individual and well ordered lifestyles of skilled workers that caused a leading *worker-intelligenty* to remark that *fabrichnye* workers seemed to be like a ‘*different race*.’²¹

During the 1890s with the unprecedented growth of Petersburg metalworking factories the number of younger workers under 25 increased dramatically. This age-cohort was more literate, less attached to traditional values and less inclined to be deferential to authority. At the large Obukhov steel plant in the 1890s the rapid growth of the workforce, introduced a contingent of younger radical workers into an older workforce traditionally known for respecting authority and eschewing radical propaganda. This younger cohort quickly challenged the dominance of an older generation of conservative workers and turned the factory into one of the most militant in the capital in which a number of active and influential radical socialist workers’ circles operated.²² Younger workers also tended to embrace ‘modern’ aspects of city life and from amongst skilled metalworkers radical ideological doctrines that were at once modern and anti-authority proved popular. Again, it is significant, that the majority of participants in workers’ circles were young male workers under 25 who, as traditional patterns of authority were undermined in the city, became less inclined to accept the often arbitrary and unjust regimes existing in factories and wider society.

Most *worker-intelligenty* were drawn from the peasant *sosloviia*, with the majority having been born and brought up in *guberniias* outside the capital and thus, had direct experience of rural life and peasant customs before moving to the city. Many arrived in Petersburg at an early age, as for example, Vasilii Shelgunov born in Pskov *guberniia* but moved into the city at the age of ten in 1877 and was soon working in an iron foundry.²³ Another leading circle worker, Nikolai Bogdanov, was born in Vitebsk *guberniia* in 1870 but also moved to Petersburg as a young boy and by age 14 he was working as an apprentice in the Warsaw Railway Workshops.²⁴ Most of these young migrants had received elementary schooling in their villages although this experience was almost universally seen as negative

²¹ A. Fisher, *V Rossii i v Anglii. Nabludeniia i vospominaniia peterburgskogo rabocheho*, Moscow, 1922, p.17.

²² M. Rozanov, *Obukhovtsy*, 1938, p.99.

²³ V.A. Shelgunov, ‘Vospominaniia V.A. Shelgunov,’ *Ot gruppy Blagoeva k ‘Soiuza Bor’by*, Rostov on Don 1921, pp.52-53.

²⁴ M.S. Ol’minskii, ‘O vospominaniyakh N.D. Bogdanov,’ *Ot gruppy Blagoeva k ‘Soiuza Bor’by*, Rostov on Don, 1921, pp.39-40; *Deiateli revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia v Rossii. Bio-bibliograficheskii slovar’*, T. V, B.P. Kuz’min, V.I. Nevskii, et.al., eds., Moscow, 1927-1933, stb., pp.39-40. [Hereafter *Deiateli*..... T.].

and often described in fairly traumatic terms with ‘barbaric’ use of corporal punishment and a heavy emphasis on religious teaching.²⁵ A minority of *worker-intelligent* who were born in the city, such as Konstantin Norinskii, Ivan Keizer or Boris Zinov’ev, graduated through industrial schools that, in contrast to rural schooling, left a more positive imprint on their future identity and activities.²⁶

Petersburg had significant numbers of non-Russian workers, mainly Poles, Finns, Estonians, and Latvians, in addition to sizeable groups of Germans and Swedes. Although sharing a number of the attributes of the *worker-intelligent*, in that non-Russian workers were generally highly skilled, educated and often politically aware, it is perhaps surprising that they were not well represented within *worker-intelligent* circles. Foreign workers tended to form self-contained groups that were difficult to penetrate. Russian workers often conflated all foreign workers together under the general category of ‘*Germans*’, many of whom were mocked for their ‘bourgeois’ appearance, coming to work in starched shirts and on bicycles.²⁷ Buzinov recalls German and Polish workers at the Semiannikov factory who lived and ate well, looked healthy and dressed very differently from Russian workers in expensive and well-cut clothes. Commenting on their mutual-support networks, Buzinov noted that within the factory they formed ‘*one unified family*’ and were favoured by management for recruitment, a fact that stung Russian workers, creating hostility that was expressed in various derogatory nicknames given to ‘*Germans*’ fostering a lack of sociability between the two groups. In return many ‘*German*’ workers were contemptuous of the slovenly dress, shoddy workmanship and lack of culture of Russian workers and as Buzinov highlighted tended not to mix socially with Russian workers.²⁸

Despite this, several radical workers developed close contacts with ‘*German*’ workers. The most obvious example was Andrei Fisher, whose parents were both Germans, and throughout his involvement in the circle movement displayed attributes of a western worker. A close associate in the circle movement characterised Fisher as having ‘*German precision and cleanliness*’ and being fluent in German was able to read key socialist texts in the original.²⁹ It was probably due to Fisher’s ‘*German*’ attributes that throughout his revolutionary activities he was involved with foreign workers, studying political economy with a Swedish worker whilst an apprentice and later persuading an

²⁵ A.M. Buiko, 1930, p.7.

²⁶ K.M. Norinskii, 1974, pp.15-16.

²⁷ Semen Kanatchikov, 1986, p.90.

²⁸ Aleksei Buzinov, 1934, p.28; A.S. Shapovalov, 1922, p.18.

²⁹ K.M. Norinskii, 1974, p.25.

older ‘*German*’ turner at the factory where he was then working to host meetings of a workers’ circle.³⁰ Other workers also made friends with ‘*German*’ workers, usually on the basis of mutual respect for their work skills that proved useful on occasion for a ‘blacklisted’ worker finding employment, as when Shapovalov was hired at the Petersburg Metalworking factory through his friendship with a Finnish metalworker respected by management.³¹

Literacy was perhaps the most obvious prerequisite for membership of the *worker-intelligenty*. Among Petersburg metalworkers in 1897, the literacy rate was 73%, compared with 44% among textile workers.³² This figure included many small workshops so it is probable that the level in larger industrial metal factories was higher, as for example at the Erikson metalworking plant where over 85% of workers were literate at the beginning of the 20th century.³³ By the 1890s, it was almost mandatory to be literate to enter a skilled trade as Kanatchikov testified when he became a pattern maker at a Moscow factory.³⁴ There was also a direct correlation between literacy and age, with younger workers more likely to be literate than their older workmates. Amongst Petersburg metal workers, 84% of those aged 17 to 19 years were literate, compared to 63% aged over 40.³⁵ Metalworkers also had greater access to educational opportunities in the capital as industrial schools were more prevalent in metalworking factories.

Indeed, in many respects the most important distinguishing characteristic of the *worker-intelligenty* was its commitment to education and knowledge acquisition as the means for self and collective development. For many of *worker-intelligenty* a decisive moment in their transformation came with enrolment in a factory or Sunday-evening school, that was the greatest common point of reference for the group. Many contemporaries highlighted the role of Sunday Schools in radicalising sections of the Petersburg workforce.

At this time, the night school was a huge factor in revolutionary work among the workers. Under the control of cautious official inspectors, for a long time the Okhrana did not pay any attention, or rather, showed them so little attention, that

³⁰ A. Fisher, 1922, pp.8, 12.

³¹ A.S. Shapovalov, *Avangard*, 1990, p.260.

³² A.G. Rashin, 1958, p.591.

³³ U.A. Shuster, *Peterburgskie rabochie v 1905-1907 gg.*, Leningrad, 1976, p.52.

³⁴ In his memoir Semen Kanatchikov provides a detailed account of the process of becoming a pattern maker and the degree to which the pattern making workshop was regarded as the ‘aristocratic workshop’ in any factory. Kanatchikov, 1986, pp.14-20.

³⁵ S.N. Semanov, *Peterburgskie rabochie nakanune pervoi russkoi revoliutsii*, Moscow, 1966, p.55.

*revolutionaries could operate within them. Under the guise of teaching..... socialist teachers gained access to workers and provided them with elements of materialist philosophy along with their school certificates.*³⁶

A leading Soviet historian of the Petersburg workers' movement estimated that over 90% of workers involved in the revolutionary movement in the mid-1890s attended Sunday Schools.³⁷ Sunday Schools were used by leading workers and their *intelligenty*-teachers as recruiting grounds through which '*promising*' workers could be recruited into workers' circles, in the words of the leading worker-radical Ivan Babushkin as '*a place where the sheep could be separated from the goats.*'³⁸

Increasing evidence of the subversive nature of Sunday Schools caused the authorities to view them with suspicion and resulted in intensified surveillance. In March 1895, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Durnovo, wrote to the Procurator General of the Holy Synod, Pobedonostsev, expressing concerns that politically unreliable individuals were infiltrating the Schools. This was tantamount to an official rebuke to the institution responsible for approving and monitoring the curricula of schools, which in Durnovo's eyes had failed to fulfil its responsibilities to ensure that the schools instilled obedience and respect for authority.³⁹ Revealing a total lack of confidence in the diocesan authorities, Durnovo indicated that courses designed to promote the ideas of Marx were being taught and that this had escaped the notice of the spiritual mentors of the schools who had failed '*to detect the elements of Social-Democratic propaganda contained in lectures.*'⁴⁰ In an obvious attempt to lock the stable door after the horse had bolted, Durnovo instructed Pobedonostsev to institute a detailed check on persons authorised to teach in Sunday Schools, to take active measures to remove anyone suspected of political unreliability and report them immediately to the local police.⁴¹

Despite Durnovo's strictures, the schools continued to function as a revolutionary nursery. Lepeshinskii indicates that all revolutionary groups '*fed*' on the schools throughout 1895 and 1896.⁴² Yet despite police surveillance and closer supervision, their role in producing

³⁶ P.L. Lepeshinskii, *Na povorote. (Ot kontsa 80-kh godov k 1905 g.)*, Moscow, 1955, p.31.

³⁷ E.A. Korol'chuk, *Istoricheskii zapiski*, Vol. 89, 1972, p.171.

³⁸ *Recollections of Ivan Vasilyevich Babushkin*, Moscow, 1957, pp.55-56.

³⁹ Durnovo's letter of 18 March 1895 is reprinted in *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke*, T. IV, Ch. 1, pp. 821-824

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.823.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, pp.824-825.

⁴² P.L. Lepeshinskii, 1955, p.32.

worker-revolutionaries if anything intensified. At the beginning of the 20th century the head of the Gendarmerie, reported to the Tsar:

*Over the past three or four years the good-natured Russian lad has been turned into a particular type of semi-literate intelligent, who considers it his duty to deny religion and the family, scorn the law, disobey and sneer at the authorities..... [Such workers are] dominating all the remaining inert mass of workers by terrorising them. The majority of worker-agitators and ringleaders of all kinds of strikes have attended Sunday schools.*⁴³

Shapovalov, whose exposure to science and political radicalism at evening school led him to reject the religion of his fathers, the politics of autocracy and the very essence of being a Russian to become a Bolshevik, described the ideological impact of attending Sunday School:

*Orthodoxy, tsarism, Great Russian chauvinism, Russian poddyovkas [a light coat] and sheepskin coats, long beards and bobbed hair - all of this became hateful to me. Everything new and good, I thought, must be taken from the West.....*⁴⁴

Thus, for some workers, the schools destroyed virtually all sense of previous traditional and Russian identity, enabling workers to embrace an iconoclastic modernism opening them to becoming the ‘*apostles*’ of a socialist creed of which they saw themselves as the archetypes of the ‘*new man.*’

If the *worker-intelligenty* was shaped by certain material factors involving industrial skills, disposable income, literacy and education, that was biased towards young male workers to the exclusion of women, then it also reflected certain cultural values and attitudinal beliefs that further distanced them from the mass of workers. Surrounded by ignorance, superstition, violence and drunkenness, many *worker-intelligenty* developed a counter-culture in which enlightenment, rational restraint and sobriety distinguished them from their fellow workers. Nowhere was this more apparent than in their almost puritanical rejection of alcohol and drunkenness. In response to what they saw as a sea of depravity in which the majority of workers were drowning, many *worker-intelligenty* reacted with a

⁴³ M. Syromiatnikova, ‘Rabochee dvizhenie na zavodakh Peterburga v mae 1901 g.,’ *Krasnyi arkhiv*, No.3 (76) 1936, p.66.

⁴⁴ A.S. Shapovalov, 1922, p.46.

combination of contempt and moral opprobrium. *Worker-intelligent* active in circles exerted powerful peer pressure to abstain from alcohol and circle members who transgressed this code were regarded as fundamentally flawed. This judgemental approach is demonstrated in Babushkin's memoirs where he recalled the sense of disappointment and disapproval towards the older and more experienced circle worker Petr Morozov's inclination to imbibe a glass [or two] of vodka. Babushkin sanctimoniously commented that he believed that '*no conscious socialist should drink vodka, and even condemned smoking. At that time we propagated morality in the strictest sense of the word.*'⁴⁵ Radicalised workers however, were not immune from 'squandering' monies on alcohol. A number of workers involved in circles in the Nevskii Gate in 1895 took money for renting rooms and supporting 'needy' comrades from the *intelligent* only to spend it in taverns and gambling on games of billiards which led to their strong condemnation from other radical workers.⁴⁶

The source of this condemnatory approach amongst *worker-intelligent* was often personal. Many circle workers had witnessed devastation heaped on their families by alcohol abuse by their fathers. Shelgunov recalled that his father was a constant and despotic drunkard who abused his mother, contributing to her early death.⁴⁷ In a similar way Buzinov recalled the alcoholic excesses of his father, whilst Ivan Keizer, whose father was a goldsmith in a Petersburg workshop, was brought up in severe poverty, as his father would regularly indulge in binge drinking sessions, squandering all the family's money.⁴⁸

Another distinguishing feature of the *worker-intelligent* was the small number that married or had relationships with women. Few women workers acquired anything remotely approaching the level of education and culture that characterised the *worker-intelligent* and, as they were mostly concentrated in the textile, tobacco and unskilled sectors of industry, inhabited a different world from the skilled and increasingly modern *worker-intelligent*. But the absence of relationships with women can be seen as symptomatic of a deeper cultural rejection: women were generally regarded as being intellectually inferior, more religious, a distraction from revolutionary activities and seldom were allowed admission into the inner sanctums of the *worker-intelligent* world, the workshop, the

⁴⁵ *Recollections of Ivan Vasilyevich Babushkin*, Moscow, 1957, p.51.

⁴⁶ 'Doklad po delu o voznikshikh v S.-Peterburge v 1894 i 1895 godakh prestupnykh kruzhek lits, imenuiushchikh sebja 'sotsial-demokratami'', in *Glavnoe upravlenie arkhivnym delom, Sbornik materialov i statei, I* [Moscow] 1921), pp.117-118.

⁴⁷ V.A. Shelgunov, *Ot gruppy Blagoeva....*, 1921, p.54.

⁴⁸ Aleksei Buzinov, 1930, p.11; A. Fisher, 1922, p.28.

circle or advanced educational classes. In this way the *worker-intelligenty* operated in almost an entirely male-dominated universe that despite their ‘modernity’ remained imbued with traditional patriarchal beliefs concerning women and their place in a hierarchical world that the radical world of the circles did little to change. An indication of the projection of patriarchal attitudes towards women amongst ‘progressive’ workers is evident from the reaction of a workers’ circle involving Babushkin in 1894. When two young women textile workers asked to attend circle meetings they were informed that this was not possible as they would distract male members of the group, with one worker going so far as saying that if they attended he would not be responsible for his actions. Such overt discrimination and sexism based on sexual stereotyping of women is illustrative of the gender-bias at play in circles that was a reflection of the male dominated world of metalworking factories.⁴⁹ A few years later, a Petersburg workers’ circle in which Kanatchikov was a member ‘allowed’ two women textile workers to join their discussions. Their introduction was a revelation to Kanatchikov who conceded that at this time ‘*as was customary in a workers’ milieu ... we looked upon the woman worker as a creature of a lower order ... [with] no interest in any higher matters, [who] was incapable of struggling for ideals, was always a hindrance, an encumbrance in the life of a conscious worker.*’ Given this attitude, Kanatchikov was astonished when the women proved themselves to be fully conscious and argued logically.⁵⁰

For *worker-intelligenty* who married, their beliefs and activities frequently resulted in domestic strife. Kanatchikov recounted that such marriages inevitably led to domestic conflicts because ‘*the wife, who was almost always backward and uncultured did not share his [her husband’s] ideals, feared and hated his friends, nagged him, and cursed his unproductive expenditures on books and other cultural and revolutionary things.*’⁵¹ In such an atmosphere of internecine domestic warfare, few marriages could survive. Typical in this regard was the marriage of the circle worker Funtikov who was subjected to frequent berating from his religious wife, until he eventually snapped, threw the family icons into the fire and separated from his wife and family, devoting himself to circle work to which he donated his savings of 200 roubles.⁵²

⁴⁹ *Recollections of Ivan Vasilyevich Babushkin*, Moscow, 1957, pp.76-77.

⁵⁰ Semen Kanatchikov, 1986, p.95.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.102.

⁵² K.M. Norinskii, ‘Moi Vospominaniia,’ *Ot gruppy Blagoeva....*, 1921, p.13.

It is rare for any worker memoirs to dwell on or even mention relationships with women. The few that allude to the subject generally refer to the small number of women workers led by Vera Karelina and Anna Boldyreva who gained access to the closed male circle world in the early 1890s, recalling a number of innocent mixed sex ‘evenings.’ It is significant that several women workers involved in these circles married male circle members, and, as Konstantin Norinskii alludes to in his memoirs, eased ‘the burden’ of being a radical *worker-intelligent*.⁵³ One of the few hints of a repressed sexual longing and envy of the sexuality of ordinary workers was provided by the metalworker Shapovalov. One evening, during the 1896 textile strikes, Shapovalov delivered leaflets to the Voronin textile factory. This necessitated him taking a ferry across the Neva where he encountered a group of young women textile workers who throughout the journey behaved in an overtly sexual and suggestive manner towards the young and obviously sexually inexperienced Shapovalov. Terrified that the women would molest him and discover the leaflets concealed on his person, Shapovalov leapt off the ferry as soon as it had docked and ran as fast as he could to the room of his contact to deliver the leaflets. His contact turned out to be a junior office worker married to ‘*an extremely attractive young weaver*’, the latter responsible for distributing leaflets at the factory. Observing the contentment in the young married couple, on his departure Shapovalov reflected on the sexual inhibitions of the young women workers on the ferry, wondered why he felt so lonely and why there was ‘*no tall, slender and beautiful woman*’ such as the wife of the clerk at the Voronin factory in his life.⁵⁴



A.S. Shapovalov

⁵³ Ibid, p.18.

⁵⁴ A.S. Shapovalov, *Avangard*, 1990, p.271.

In this, Shapovalov perhaps betrays a wider sense of frustration within the radical *worker-intelligenty* who had suppressed sexual desire for an ascetic and generally celibate lifestyle that was at significant variance with the sexual morés of their fellow workers. The unrestrainedly suggestive flirtation of the young female workers towards Shapovalov appears to have awakened a deeply repressed longing that the *worker-intelligenty* had foresworn, a self-denial that excluded them, as with their repudiation of alcohol, from a great deal of the normal day-to-day discourse in the workplace that revolved around women and drink. After beginning work as a young foundry worker at the age of 14, Buzinov became involved in excessive drinking and unbridled sexual release. In his memoir, he gives an account of how each pay-day he would ‘binge’ with a few of his work mates, moving from restaurant to tavern and dancing before invariably ending up in one of the many brothels in the Nevskii Gate. The cynical and abusive relationships with women inherent on such nights was subsequently savoured in minutest detail over the next few days in the foundry, swapping experiences with friends and reliving the details [that could be remembered or invented] of the latest debaucheries. As if reinforcing the distance between such activities and the world of the *worker-intelligenty*, Buzinov concedes that at this stage, in line with the vast majority of workers, he shunned any cultural or educational activities in pursuit of wine, women and song.⁵⁵

Estranged from the social morés of the mass of workers, the *worker-intelligenty* were inclined to seek refuge in their own company, exercising a form of self-imposed internal exile from the very class that an increasing number viewed through their adoption of Marxist inspired ideological constructs as the engine of social progress. For such *worker-intelligenty*, Marxism and other socialist doctrines provided a reference point, created a sense of belonging in a world that was increasingly alien to them, and gave them belief in their own self-worth, reinforcing their embrace of the modern and, crucially, elevating their role as agents of social change and improvement for their entire class from which they were socially and culturally estranged.

Whilst bearing in mind Reginald Zelnik’s caution that each *worker-intelligenty* travelled his own unique path that precluded any ‘ideal type’ or well traversed highway, nonetheless the radical *worker-intelligenty* who operated in workers’ circles shared several common

⁵⁵ Aleksei Buzinov, 1930, p.26.

and defining characteristics that allows for a degree of generalisation.⁵⁶ In his 1987 sociological study of *'autocratic capitalism'*, Tim McDaniel provides an outline of a number of defining aspects of the 'conscious' worker in late Tsarist Russia. Building on McDaniel's categorisation, we shall set out the parameters that helped to create the self-definition of the radical *worker-intelligenty*.⁵⁷

It is important to recognise that becoming a radical *worker-intelligent* involved metaphoric rebirth. This was not some incremental shift in attitudes and beliefs but a fundamental recasting of the very nature of a worker, involving a repudiation of all previously held attitudes and absorption into a new world inhabited by co-believers initiated into the mysteries of the new faith through workers' circle where the lives of the *worker-intelligenty* found their expression. Becoming a radical *worker-intelligent* involved a conscious rejection of traditional authority in the form of religion and the Tsar.⁵⁸ These two traditional pillars of authority were inextricably linked in the hierarchical and patriarchal world of late 19th century Russia. Based upon obedience, humility and passivity, the doctrines of the Orthodox Church elevated suffering in this world to a necessary virtue, suffering that would be compensated for in a future life, and that salvation of mortal man was based on submission to traditional authority vested in the Tsar. It is difficult to overstate the importance of the undermining religious belief in the process of the radicalisation of the *worker-intelligenty*. Exposure to scientific theories either from the radical-*intelligenty* or in educational classes resulted in a loss of belief in God and a rejection of the Orthodox doctrines of submission and obedience to authority.

Within the circles, much propaganda focused on scientific studies to refute the religious foundations of faith. Boldyreva emphasised that science lectures were fundamental as they provided workers with answers to questions on the natural world and taught them that true knowledge resided in a materialist worldview and not in '*fairy-tales*' of priests.⁵⁹ Workers often persisted, sometimes to the irritation of *intelligenty*-propagandists, in wishing to discuss science and how this refuted belief in God. Lepeshinskii recalled that in the mid-1890s he had difficulty in getting workers to discuss their exploitation by capitalists as they were more interested in questions relating to the origin of the world and how they could

⁵⁶ Reginald Zelnik, 'On the Eve', [1994] for a 'reading' of various paths towards revolution travelled by a number of radical *worker-intelligenty*.

⁵⁷ Tim McDaniel, *Autocracy Capitalism and Revolution in Russia*, Berkeley, 1987, pp.183-212.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.187.

⁵⁹ A.G. Boldyreva, 'Minuvshie gody,' *V nachale puti*. 1975, p.258.

use this in workplace arguments to undermine faith of their fellow workers.⁶⁰ Shapovalov provides a detailed account of his loss of faith through exposure to science. From being a devout Christian involved in the work of Father Slepian's mission amongst the workers, through attending evening classes Shapovalov suffered a crisis of faith, resulting in abandonment of his religion and the adoption of revolutionary politics. In his account, Shapovalov recalled that as a young man he studied the Gospels but '*then studied astronomy and geology and became convinced that all the stories about god are priestly fables,*' enabling him to reject the symbols of his previous faith as '*stupid superstition*' and to embrace '*with the same enthusiasm that I had previously quoted the Holy Word.... to speak out against the great, terrible, age-old deceptions.*'⁶¹ Shapovalov makes explicit the link between his studies of Darwin and loss of religious beliefs:

*comparing the conclusions of science to Bible stories, I definitively arrived at the view that there was no God, God had not created man, but rather priests had thought up the conception of God to deceive the people.*⁶²

For many workers, once science had undermined their faith, the whole spiritual and moral edifice created by the Church collapsed, leading to their rejection of an omnipotent and beneficent creator and making suffering in this world as no longer justifiable. In this way, they came to understand that they were victims of a deception perpetrated by the powerful to ensure the subjugation of the working masses. From this, it was a small step to becoming a worker-revolutionary determined to ensure salvation for workers on this earth.

In late 19th century Russia, rejection of religion was an overtly political act as the state order was based on the assertion that the Tsar and his authority were divinely ordained. In denying God, the *worker-intelligenty* were explicitly rejecting the theocratic basis of Tsarist rule that was exposed as being part of an coherent system of repression designed to keep the working masses subordinate to their political masters and in economic subjugation to their capitalist bosses. Radical teachers in workers' schools sought to undermine the legitimacy of the Tsarist regime in the eyes of the *worker-intelligenty*. Many workers left descriptions of the impact on them of political education received in schools. Trifonov recalled history lessons given by E.N. Shchepkina that, in contrast to the teaching he had received in rural primary school, paid no attention to princes but rather

⁶⁰ P.L. Lepeshinskii, 1955, pp.30-31.

⁶¹ A.S. Shapovalov, 1922, pp.36-40.

⁶² *Ibid*, p.40.

emphasised the development of classes within Russia over several centuries.⁶³ Anti-monarchical teaching guaranteed to send a chill down the backs of Tsarist officials became a feature in some schools. At both the Smolesnk and Obukhov schools a radical chemistry teacher, transformed lessons on the French chemist Lavoiser, executed during the French Revolution, into discussions on the Revolution itself, recounting to his worker pupils how the French people had executed their monarch. Nearer to home, a maths lesson became a lecture on the *narodovol'tsy* regicides, whilst the teacher at the Glazovskaia School told a class that the French Revolution broke out in 1789 and then pointedly asked her pupils to discuss when the Russian revolution will occur?⁶⁴ During the 1890s radical teachers introduced workers directly to the ideas of Marx and other socialist thinkers. Nadezhda Krupskaiia recounted how she was able without mentioning Marx's name to explain Marxist ideas, convinced that the experiences of workers in factories reinforced her basic messages.⁶⁵ Both Krupskaiia and Kudelli described how they used subjects such as 'economic geography' to introduce workers to different concepts of government, trade unions, and revolutionary movements.⁶⁶ In a similar way at the Obukhov School, the social-democratic teacher Aleksandra Kalmykova whilst ostensibly teaching geography transformed her class into a discussion on the lives of Petersburg workers and the various methods factory owners used to ensure their maximum exploitation.⁶⁷

Increasingly *worker-intelligent* witnessed the Tsarist state defending capitalist bosses whose rapacious exploitation of workers resulted in their destitution and degradation. In such a situation, it did not take a huge leap of imagination or intellect for the *worker-intelligent* to reject Tsarist legitimacy that both perpetuated worker exploitation and denied rights enjoyed by workers in other countries, coercing them to live in 'darkness' by depriving them of the means of their self-development. Given this, the radical *worker-intelligent* concluded that the Tsarist state and its representatives in the bureaucracy and police were as much their enemy as their employers resulting in many embracing the demand for fundamental political as well as social and economic reforms.

⁶³ Z T Trifonov, 'Vospominaniia,' *Avangard*, 1990, p.309.

⁶⁴ *Shkola vzposlykh*, 1938, No. 10, p. 54, cited in Skorodnikov, 1970, p.43; S.N. Sulimov, 'Vospominaniia Obukhovtsa,' *Proletarskii prolog*, 1983, p.245.

⁶⁵ N.K. Krupskaiia, 1957, p.20.

⁶⁶ P F Kudelli, 'Dom No.65 po Shlissel'burgskomu traktu,' *Proletarskii prolog*, 1983, p.194; N.K. Krupskaiia, 1957, p.45.

⁶⁷ M. Rozanov, *Obukhovtsy*, 1938, p.60.

But beyond rejecting traditional concepts of authority, what distinguished the radical *worker-intelligenty* was the development of an intrinsic individual self-worth that refused to accept the subservient status ascribed to workers under the existing political and economic regimes, a sense of *self* based on an innate concept of justice and a profound recognition of right and wrong. Such morally based beliefs informed *worker-intelligenty* outrage against ill-treatment or condescension by representatives of authority whether foremen in the workshop, police officers in the street or members of ‘polite’ society at social events. A leading worker-radical from the 1870s, Semen Volkov, epitomised this refusal to accept insults from figures of authority. Describing how he arrived in Petersburg in 1873 after an already eventful employment history, Volkov sought work at a railway depot. On asking to see the foreman he was told by a guard that he was unavailable as the previous day he had got drunk and assaulted two workers. An incredulous Volkov asked if the workers had not beaten up the foreman in retaliation but was told that workers had no right to attack a foreman or manager and that he should not bother coming back as his belligerence disqualified him from employment at the workshop.⁶⁸ Whilst many workers passively accepted that ill-treatment from foremen and authority figures in the factories was part of a natural order, by the 1890s more and more workers were beginning to regard this as an unacceptable abuse. Zakhar Trifonov who began work at the Aleksandrov steel works in the early 1890s recalled his indignation at witnessing the tyranny of foremen over the mass of workers in his workshop. Describing a common scene in the workshop, Trifonov recalled one foreman who would creep through the workshop.

He would stop at a wagon being built and stare at someone with his dark eyes, and the worker would fidget furtively under his gaze, glancing at the foreman, but the victim was doomed. A black cloud of silence and then the wind rises, slowly seizing the victim by the collar and raising his huge right fist, like a sledge hammer, would bring it down with his full weight five or six times on the neck of the worker who collapsed under the burden of strokes tearfully begging the foreman ‘Nikolai Ivanovich! Nikolai Ivanovich!’ The foreman like the black cloud then silently sailed on. To see such a beating disgusted and aroused a feeling of disgust towards the victim, who, for a few minutes was unable to work, sitting at a box, stroking his

⁶⁸ S.K. Volkov, ‘Avtobiografiia rabocheho-revoliutsionera 60-70-kh godov XIX veka,’ *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.143-144.

*neck, saying tearfully: 'What a devil! but at least it is good that he only beats you and then it is all over, he does not penalise you for errors in work.'*⁶⁹

In the mid-1890s, Shapovalov describes how he fell asleep at his machine to be rudely awakened by a foreman who proceeded to abuse him verbally before striking him hard in the stomach. Shapovalov recounts that he was about to '*smash his head*' with his hammer but in a moment of reflection, caused by his desperate need for a job to support his mother and younger siblings allied to his role as an agitator in the factory, he endured 'this cruel insult,' but the next day took his 'revenge' by distributing agitational leaflets throughout the factory.⁷⁰

There are many accounts of workers getting their own back on vindictive foreman and supervisors who represented the most obvious and hated symbol of arbitrary exploitation. Ivan Mikhailov who worked at the Kolpine munitions factory recalled how as a young apprentice he worked under a drunken foreman who beat apprentices for minor misdemeanours. On one occasion Mikhailov was singled out and told to sweep out the entire workshop. Although still an apprentice, he regarded this as an affront to his dignity, refused and despite being fined a day's wages for his insubordination achieved instant respect from his fellow workers for having stood up against an unjust imposition. Mikhailov indicated that his '*rebelliousness was directed against the rudeness and the insults of bosses, be they large or small.*'⁷¹ Although not confined to the *worker-intelligently*, demands for just treatment and respect as human-beings reflected a growing awareness of individual and collective self-worth and a refusal to tolerate abusive treatment. Inflicting a form of retributory justice was resorted to by many *worker-intelligently*. Kanatchikov recounts how he and another radicalised worker after being subjected to 'unjust' fines by a particular foremen not only quit their jobs in the factory but conceived and implemented a brutal attack on him '*to teach him a lesson,*' an act that won them accolades from their former workmates but which also resulted in a period in jail for the perpetrators.⁷² Similarly, the Putilov worker Buiko described a number of methods adopted by workers to get their own back, ranging from the frequently mentioned '*wheel-barrowing*' to selective beatings inflicted by groups of workers on particularly hated foremen. One particularly cruel act of revenge exacted on the 'most hateful' persecutors

⁶⁹ Z.T. Trifonov, 'Vospominaniia,' *Avangard*, 1990, pp..303-304.

⁷⁰ A.S. Shapovalov, *Avangard*, 1990, pp.263-264.

⁷¹ I.K. Mikhailov, *Avangard*, 1990, p. 191.

⁷² S. I. Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia*, trans. and ed. Reginald Zelnik, Stanford, 1986, pp.88-89.

involved workers sending a ‘special gift’ in the form of a coffin to the house of their oppressor on the day of a family celebration as a warning that their oppression of workers would not go unpunished.⁷³

Amongst radicalised workers a code of honour also operated. Workers involved in circles organised by the Putilov worker Boris Zinov’ev on hearing of his mistreatment in prison were so outraged by this that they exacted revenge by launching a campaign of violent attacks on policemen and authority figures in the Narvksii Gate, culminating in the death of one policeman at the hands of the radical workers Nikolai Panin and Oscar Engberg.⁷⁴ Subsequently exiled to Eastern Siberia, Panin and Engberg came under Lenin’s influence, the latter personally instilling a more ‘disciplined’ approach to class struggle amongst these rebellious young workers. Educated and radicalised workers akin to Panin and Engberg who believed that workers must inflict their own ‘rough justice’ on authority figures through acts of personal violence represented a significant tendency within the workers’ movement from the mid-1870s, regarding such acts as a legitimate form of class struggle and celebrated beating up or killing a policeman as an important ‘victory.’⁷⁵

For many *worker-intelligenty* it was this innate moral code based on a sense of justice that predisposed them to reject factory authority and the dominant economic relationships within capitalist production even before being exposed to radical ideological critiques from *intelligenty* teachers. Having experienced the humiliation inherent in the factory system and rankled by its obvious injustice, many *worker-intelligenty* sought out and embraced ideological doctrines that both opposed the prevailing capitalist system as well as providing a rational model of social change and transformation. Although various *Narodniki* tendencies were closely involved with workers’ circles, it is not surprising that ultimately it was the ideas of Marxist propagandists that were most appealing and seductive to the *worker-intelligenty*. In Marxism, they found not only a doctrine that privileged workers but also validated their role as the advanced representatives of the class, simultaneously reinforcing their belief in rational progress as well as elevating their role as historic agents of change. *Worker-intelligenty* embraced their historic role of giving form to the working-class, a class still largely wallowing in darkness and ignorance and hence

⁷³ A.M. Buiko, 1934, pp.18-19. See S.A. Smith, ‘Workers and Supervisors: St. Petersburg 1905-1917 and Shanghai 1895-1927,’ *Past and Present*, No.139, May 1993, for a discussion on relations between workers and foremen in St. Petersburg factories.

⁷⁴ M.I. Mitel’man, 1939, pp.123ff.

⁷⁵ S. I. Kanatchikov, 1986, p.153.

their focus on education and knowledge as key weapons in their struggle against employers and its autocratic supporters.

In order to accomplish what they increasingly accepted as their historic mission, radical Petersburg workers almost from their first circles recognised that they needed to create their own organisational forms. In this goal they were consistently guided by the ‘Marxist’ model of the German Social Democratic Party. The German Party not only provided the organisational form that Petersburg workers hoped to create, but also an inspiration drawn from working-class leaders such as August Bebel who was to become a role model for many Russian workers. It is no coincidence that Mikhail Brusnev, a Marxist *intelligenty* propagandist closely associated with the *worker-intelligenty*, stated that ‘*Bebel was the workers’ ideal*’, an ideal type on whom they modelled their actions and behaviour.⁷⁶ Radical workers in the late 1870s took the first steps towards emulating their German counterparts through the Northern Union of Russian Workers, largely modelled on the German SPD’s Gotha programme of 1875. In his 1891 May-Day speech, the leading circle worker Fedor Afanas’ev spoke passionately that despite their small numbers leading Russian workers must follow the example of their German counterparts. Afanas’ev described how the mass movement of workers in Germany had originated in the struggles of small groups who on becoming aware of ‘*their human rights began to communicate their beliefs to other workers.*’⁷⁷

The *worker-intelligenty* was focused on knowledge, self-discipline, organisation, and worker leadership. Knowledge undermined the age-old faith in God and the Tsar, showing the *worker-intelligenty* a rational model for social progress in which workers were destined to play the leading role but, in order to accomplish this, the *worker-intelligenty* had to act for a class that remained in large part submerged in ignorance. This demanded that they assume the mantle, in religious terminology ‘*carry the cross*’, for their entire class, exercise self-restraint, subordinate their much vaunted individuality to the greater, collective good of an ‘ideal’ class, and through their sacrifice lay the foundations for subsequent workers’ organisations that in time would assume leadership of a mass workers’ movement and win essential political freedoms, enabling the class to organise openly on a mass basis.

⁷⁶ M.I. Brusnev, ‘Vozniknovenie pervykh sotsial-demokraticheskikh organisatsii,’ *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, No. 2 [14], pp.19-20.

⁷⁷ ‘Rechi rabochikh na pervomaiskom sobranii 1891 g.,’ reprinted in *Ot gruppy Blagoeva...*, 1921, p.121.

Whilst at times modelling themselves on their *intelligenty*-teachers, deep within many of the *worker-intelligenty* lurked a hostility towards the ‘privileged’ intelligentsia world, that was often an expression of an inherent sense that the values of the world of work were fundamentally different [real] and superior to the world of the intelligentsia [artificial]. Kanatchikov recounted how an ‘intellectually developed’ worker, Langeld, consciously repudiated the world of culture. On one occasion, at an *intelligenty* soirée to which workers had been invited, he declared:

Love, music, poetry.....they all may be very fine things, but they aren't accessible to us workers. Right now all these things are for idlers, parasites and loafers. ⁷⁸

When challenged by the *intelligenty*, Langeld retorted that they were incapable of empathy with workers as they had ‘*never been inside our skins*’ and proceeded to describe the physical labour he undertook day-in, day-out that made such demands that ‘*when you get home after a day like that it isn't love, poetry, or music you look for, it's your bed.... How can the worker comprehend your Onegin and Lenskii, who become more enraged as they grow more prosperous? They should be sent to a factory to fit some cylinders to a vise; and I'd put your Tatiana and your Olga to work at a loom, amid the dust and dirt, and let the foreman make fun of them. Then let's see what kind of songs they'd sing.*’ ⁷⁹ Langeld's articulation of an incipient *workerist* rejection of an effete *intelligenty* world with its concomitant glorification of the virtues of physical labour could lead to a denial of the world of high culture, seen as the preserve of ‘idlers.’ In this, Langeld was articulating a worker alienation from the world of the spirit, expressing the dominance of a material world, however sordid and dehumanising, and that the workers’ struggle for survival in such a world left no time for what was regarded as frivolous and disingenuous worlds glimpsed in paintings, songs and poetry. In a fundamental way such workers were making an unequivocal statement that the cultural world was an artificial construct of the privileged classes from which they chose to dissociate. This was a conscious repudiation of the world of high aesthetic culture in favour of a world where the values of physical strength and material reality were seen as superior to the ‘artificial unreality’ of the *intelligenty*'s cultural universe. Even the most developed *worker-intelligenty* admired the physical strength and ‘manliness’ characteristic of many metalworkers. Physical strength was at times seen as a ‘badge of honour,’ with both Aleksei Fisher and Konstantin

⁷⁸ Semen Kanatchikov, 1986, p.106.

⁷⁹ Ibid, pp.106-107.

Norinskii commenting favourably on the '*Herculian*' and immense power of the Baltic Shipyard worker Ivan Egorov.⁸⁰

It is possible to get a unique insight into the self-representation of a Petersburg worker that demonstrates how one *worker-intelligent* saw in almost dialectical terms the transformation of workers from an experiential to a transcendental form, from current suffering to future redemption. In 1893, the Sunday school teacher Nadezhda Krupskaja arranged for a group of workers to view a painting by the realist artist Nikolai Ge who the workers were also able to meet. The painting was entitled '*Christ and the Robber*' and had become a *cause-celebre* as a short time before the Tsar had denounced it as an affront to Orthodoxy. Ge's face of Christ portrays a world-weary and haggard man on the cross, gazing beyond the face of a self-confident and somewhat smug looking man, the Robber, staring at the crucified figure. On viewing of the painting, the worker Funtikov became absorbed in it and described how in Christ's face he saw the suffering of a worker overseen by a capitalist 'robber,' with Christ's eyes looking beyond, expressing a search for salvation through socialism. On hearing this, Ge hugged Funtikov and declared that he had intuitively understood the depth of suffering he was trying to depict because of his experience as a worker. Ge recounted that he had been seeking to convey how men were robbed of their souls in the course of their struggle for existence. The artist now felt humble that a worker had grasped this and recognised that in their lives they confronted the shadow of death on a daily basis. Funtikov's response to the painting so impressed Ge that he arranged for the workers to be given signed prints of the painting that would later puzzle the police when several workers in the group were arrested for activities in workers' circles and were found in possession of Ge's painting.⁸¹

⁸⁰ A. Fisher, *V Rossi ii v Anglii*, 1922, p.12; K.M. Norinskii, *Pod nadzorom politsii [Vospominaniia]*, 1974, p.37.

⁸¹ N.K. Krupskaja, 1957, pp.50-51.



Nikolai Ge: 'Christ and the Robber.'

Funtikov's reaction to the painting reveals the primacy of workers' experience essential to an understanding of suffering, seeing in the face of Christ their own self-image. In a similar way to Langeld's dismissal of the *intelligenty*-world as an artificial construct, unknowable since it was incapable of being experienced by workers, Funtikov gave expression to a belief that art should depict life in its raw and brutal reality. Such art had meaning for workers as it revealed day-to-day sufferings, looking death in the eye and beyond this seeking to find their own path to 'salvation.' As Christ looked beyond his suffering to find redemption, so workers must look beyond their current torments to recognise how they could change current reality. This involved simultaneously an experiential understanding of the sufferings of workers along with an understanding of the nature of the social and political order that produced such suffering, transcending this reality to be reborn as 'new men', the creators of a new reality and world order.

Given that in this view of workers as the creators of their own salvation based on their own material experiences as workers, a fundamental question for the *worker-intelligenty* remained unresolved at the end of the 19th century, namely its relationship with the radical intelligentsia and the related issue concerning the ultimate leadership of the workers' movement. From virtually the first contacts between radical intelligentsia and workers, significant numbers of workers consciously sought to emulate their *intelligenty* teachers,

captivated by their possession of the knowledge workers deemed essential for development and inspired by their devotion to the cause of raising workers from their ignorance to become conscious representatives of their class. Contacts with the intelligenty *quite* literally opened the eyes of workers, as one leading worker signed a pamphlet he had written ‘*from a worker who has received his sight.*’⁸²

Knowledge received from the *intelligenty* revealed a vision of a new and a better world to the *worker-intelligenty*, a world where being a worker was regarded not just as an honourable state but, within the Marxist catechism, a representative of the ultimate revolutionary class. As such *intelligenty* propagandists were often endowed with mystical qualities, prophetic bearers of the message foretelling workers’ liberation. For Vladimir Fomin, and his co-circle workers at the Baltic Shipyards ‘*the intelligenty propagandists were like messengers from another world, a world alien to us, a world where workers had the right to struggle openly.*’⁸³ In introducing workers to new visions of the future, giving their dreams substance, workers often betrayed an almost sycophantic gratitude towards their *intelligenty* teachers. An *intelligenty* propagandist involved with workers’ groups in the mid-1890s described the workers as being filled with ‘*ecstatic gratitude*’ and regarded their *intelligenty* teachers as ‘*kind masters*’, reflecting an almost still subservient master-serf relationship.⁸⁴

Yet, despite their often expressed admiration towards the radical intelligenty, the vast majority of *worker-intelligenty* never forgot that they were first and foremost workers and as such frequently found *intelligenty* attitudes and expectations at variance with their own experiences and aspirations for the workers’ movement. Such differences created deep tensions within the *worker-intelligenty*, tensions that recurred repeatedly in the course of the emergence and development of Petersburg workers’ groups. At one very basic, yet profound level, these differences were a manifestation of the gulf in social status and cultural levels between workers and their *intelligenty* contacts. Russia remained a strictly hierarchical society with differences between social groupings effectively cast in stone. Social roles, habits, behaviours were ascribed in various codes, manual labourers were subordinate and were expected to show respect and gratitude to their ‘teachers’, a respect that was duly given by the *worker-intelligenty*, but, in common with subordinate groups in other social settings, this was often accompanied by a sullen and bitter resentment towards

⁸² Ivan Keizer, *Bratsy-tovarishchii, Avangard*, 1990, pp.28-36.

⁸³ V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.188.

⁸⁴ B.I. Gorev, *Iz partiinogo proshlogo*, Leningrad, 1924, p.31.

social superiors. Such ingrained resentment could be fuelled by high-handed and condescending approaches adopted by some *intelligenty* propagandists towards worker-pupils. One propagandist expounding the need for workers to overthrow the government and establish a democratic order when challenged by a worker who argued that the ‘rich’ [*bogatyi*] would never allow this was told to his face to shut up as he was ‘stupid.’⁸⁵

Given the social distance between the two groups and the at times arrogance of *intelligenty* propagandists towards workers, degrees of awkwardness, tensions and resentments were inevitable. One *worker-intelligenty* noted that workers ‘*recognised that what separated us from the intelligenty were our conditions and forms of life and upbringing.*’⁸⁶ Whilst often imitating their *intelligenty* mentors, workers were often uncomfortable in the company of their ‘betters’ and wherever possible shunned social contact outwith the study circle. On the occasions when this did occur, workers after their ordeal ‘*would breathe a sigh of relief and laugh at our hosts’ lack of understanding of our lives as workers and at their alien way of life and thinking.*’⁸⁷ Such mocking of the intelligentsia, sometimes gave way to open hostility. A common cause for this related to the belief amongst many *worker-intelligenty* that ‘revolution’ was a hobby for student-radicals, departing every summer for their vacations and abandoning their worker protégés. One of the first generation of radicalised workers recalled that leading workers already ‘*treated the intelligentsia with hardly any reverence..... [since] we already knew that students completing their courses of study would be enticed away to the public feast and forget everything they said to us.*’⁸⁸

In fact, the relationship reflected a volatile ‘love-hate’ relationship, with workers often showing deepest admiration and loyalty to their *intelligenty*-teachers whilst on other occasions expressing resentment and reacting with hostility towards *intelligenty*. Gorev who described the ‘*ecstatic gratitude*’ of workers towards *intelligenty*, also highlighted the ‘*scepticism, distrust.... and on occasion latent hostility*’ that was shown towards members of the *intelligenty*. Such sentiments were apparent in one Baltic Shipyard worker who complained that the *intelligenty* ‘*wished to obtain political freedom on the backs of the workers for their own or group interests*’ and that they showed a lack of trust towards workers by hiding behind a series of false identities that, for this worker at least, revealed

⁸⁵ ‘Doklad po delu o voznikshikh v S.-Peterburge v 1894 i 1895 godakh prestupnykh kruzhkakh lits, imenuiushchikh sebia ‘sotsial-demokratami’’, in *Glavnoe upravlenie arkhivnym delom, Sbornik materialov i statei, I* [Moscow] 1921), p.123.

⁸⁶ A. Fisher, 1922, p.23.

⁸⁷ Semen Kanatchikov, 1986, p.105.

⁸⁸ D N Smirnov, ‘Na Trubochnom zavode v proshlom,’ *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.158.

their inherently false nature.⁸⁹ Such virulent anti-intelligentsia views can be seen as a precursor of the ideology of Jan Machajski that would develop in the early 20th century.⁹⁰

Negative reactions and hostility were not related to any particular ideological orientation or individual. Rather, they were the product of a fundamental structural paradox that confronted the *worker-intelligenty*, namely, the more they came to see themselves as leading representatives of a working-class, destined to play a central role in the forthcoming revolution, the more *intelligenty* attempts to direct them rankled, yet, recognising their own intellectual underdevelopment, not to mention that of the broader class, they recognised their continued dependency on the *intelligenty* as the source of the knowledge deemed essential for their own self-development and that of their class. These tensions were exacerbated as many *worker-intelligenty* regarded the *intelligenty* as a non-class in Marxist terms, a temporary ally, destined to disappear when the *worker-intelligenty* assumed the role of knowledge provider for the working-class and became agents of social change, based on the theories they had ‘received’ as truth from their *intelligenty* teachers.

Yet beyond this vacillation between deeply reverential or sullenly resentful attitudes towards the *intelligenty*, the very fact of operating in an illegal environment almost automatically created a division between workers and *intelligenty* in organisational terms that mirrored wider social divisions in society. Underground conditions tended towards a division of labour with workers operating at local levels whilst *intelligenty* monopolised leadership and strategic roles. This reinforced both the *intelligenty* presumption of leadership in the workers’ movement, whilst fanning flames of resentment and often provoking open hostility towards the *intelligenty* from *worker-intelligenty*. All of this, as Allan Wildman demonstrated in the lead-up to the creation of *Iskra* and the II Party Congress, created a downwards spiral of mutual ill-will between sections of the two groups, reinforcing in the minds of certain *intelligenty* that workers were motivated by concerns about status within the movement, confirming that workers were incapable of playing leadership and strategic roles and should be excluded from such positions.⁹¹ Notwithstanding Wildman’s insightful analysis of worker/intelligentsia conflicts at

⁸⁹ B.I. Gorev, 1924, pp.31-32.

⁹⁰ On ‘Makhaevism’, see Marshall S. Shatz, *Jan Waclaw Machajski: A Radical Critic of the Russian Intelligentsia and Socialism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989); Paul Avrich, “What Is ‘Makhaevism’?,” *Soviet Studies* 17 (1965), pp.66–75; Anthony D’Agostino, “Intelligentsia Socialism and the ‘Workers’ Revolution’: The Views of J. W. Machajski,” *International Review of Social History* 14 (1969), pp.54–89.

⁹¹ Allan K Wildman, *The Making of a workers’ revolution*, 1967, pp.89-96.

a slightly later date, in the period up to 1895 the relationship reflected a complex and real psychological dilemma for the workers, how to assimilate the intelligence of the *intelligenty* into the essence of a worker whilst remaining a worker.

Perhaps the most coherent expression of this dilemma confronting the first two generations of *worker-intelligenty* was articulated by Andrei Fisher. Whilst a leading member of the Petersburg Central Workers' Circle between 1892 and 1894, Fisher had been at the forefront within Petersburg workers' circles to develop a cadre of 'conscious *worker-intelligenty*' with the clear aim of making the workers' movement self-sufficient, able to function without *intelligenty* propagandists. By the time of his arrest and exile in 1894 Fisher had concluded that '*the aura of 'holiness' [sanctity] of the intelligentsia had faded and I decided in my future activities to have as little cause with them as possible.*'⁹² Yet, on further reflection in exile, he realised that such a course was impossible as '*the workers' liberation movement needs defectors from the bourgeoisie; they are needed as a fish needs water. Deserters from the bourgeoisie who have burnt their boats - this is the revolutionary yeast for the workers' movement. Without deserters from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat, the working-class would not have had the literature that it had then.*'⁹³ In this passage, Fisher describes an epiphany, the dawning of a realisation that the workers' revolution was dependent on essential knowledge required by workers and provided by that very group of déclasséd *intelligenty* identified by Marx as introducing the idea of socialism into the ranks of the working-class. Fisher recognised that the very nature of being a worker precluded the possession and development of such ideas from within the class; oppressed in factories, with a narrow outlook and with only access to unsystematic education, workers were unable to reach true understanding of their class nature. Those workers such as Bebel who achieved such an understanding did so by abandoning the factory and the workers' environment to become in effect *intelligenty*. This led Fisher to conclude that in the absence of '*intelligenty deserters*' [mentioning Marx, Engels, Lassalle and Liebknecht as prime examples] there could be no revolutionary workers' movement and that even a worker-leader such as Bebel could only play a leadership role after he ceased being a worker.⁹⁴

⁹² A. Fisher, 1922, p.42.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p.43.



Andrei Fisher

Whilst it is tempting to treat Fisher's account as a *post-hoc* rationalisation reflecting the then dominant Leninist interpretation of the role of the Party and 'professional' revolutionaries as the external bearer of enlightenment to workers, this would belittle the genuine soul-searching and anguished reflections of workers confronting their relationship with the *intelligenty* in real time. It was in real struggles of succeeding cadres of advanced workers from the early 1870s that they sought to resolve this dilemma and in the process shape their own worker identity. They recognised that this identity was being created in discourse with and modelled in part on the radical *intelligenty*, but that it also in large part reflected their own belief that they were the agents of mass social change; that they were actively involved in a fundamental process of socio-historic development in which their role was to mould the mass of 'unenlightened' workers in their own image, a task that they fervently believed that only they and not a *déclassé intelligenty* could accomplish.

For much of the period under review, the radical *worker-intelligenty* operated within the confines of a self-contained universe, only rarely seeking to enter the wider public arena. The world of the radical *worker-intelligenty* resembled at times a closed sect and its adherents exhibited traits and behaviours characteristic of secret societies. This was doubtless a reflection of the environment in which they operated, circles were illegal, involvement risked loss of job, prison and exile, but it was also in part a defensive mechanism through which circle membership came to define a worker's identity, circles

providing both structure and meaning for those who entered them and a brief escape from an alien and hostile external world.

In seeking to understand the radical *worker-intelligenty*, it is crucial to recognise the role that one specific organisational form had in nurturing, supporting and in a sense defining the *worker-intelligenty*, the workers' circle [*kruzhok*]. Reginald Zelnik characterised the *kruzhok* as '*the most durable institution*' in the lives of the *worker-intelligenty*, an institution that through succeeding generations of worker activists provided a focal point for their activity, providing companionship and mutual support in a world where they were perpetual outsiders.⁹⁵ Receiving the knowledge vital for their quest to make sense of the world around them, reflecting on events occurring in factories and workshops, the *kruzhok* enabled workers within a bounded and 'safe' space to construct their own moral universe with its own rules and obligations. It is no accident that anyone who transgressed the mutual obligations of the *kruzhok* and informed to the police or betrayed comrades during police investigation was anathematised and in the 1870s frequently subject to acts of violence. For its members, the *kruzhok* was equivalent to a surrogate family with bonds of filial loyalty transcending all other commitments. Within the *kruzhok*, older workers almost naturally assumed the role of an absent father for younger members who experienced feelings akin to bereavement when such father figures were arrested, as Babushkin and other circle members testified.⁹⁶

Being a radical *worker-intelligenty* was in many senses akin to being a member of a secret sect and, in common with sects, the *kruzhok* served a dual function, both to initiate new members into the inner workings of the circle and to consolidate shared bonds, responsibilities of membership and identity for those accepted into the group. In this sense, although circles are often described in terms of the education of workers, their true purpose involved their indoctrination with specific knowledge based on the '*true*' laws of social development, the way the capitalist system exploited them and how they could liberate themselves and their class from exploitation and achieve their own and humanity's salvation. Petr Moiseenko, when first inducted into workers' study circles in the winter of 1874-75, describes the experience in terms analogous to religious experience, declaring that he had now entered '*the holy of holies.*'⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Reginald Zelnik, 'On the Eve,' in Siegelbaum and Suny [eds.], 1994, p.64.

⁹⁶ *Recollections of Ivan Vasilyevich Babushkin*, Moscow, 1957, p.46.

⁹⁷ P.A. Moiseenko, *Vospominaniia starogo revoliutsionera*, Moscow, 1966, pp.17-18.

Whilst borrowing from, and sometimes imitating, their *intelligenty* mentors, nonetheless it was as workers that they created their own discourse within the *kruzhok*, found their authentic voice in their own words. For, whatever else, the *kruzhok* was dominated by the spoken word, it introduced and consolidated a language of class amongst groups of workers, a language that gave shape to their very being and future dreams and aspirations. Nocturnal strivings of the *kruzhkovtsy* for knowledge and understanding, the assimilation of concepts and thoughts from other worlds, worlds previously unknown or unknowable to them and from which they were often excluded, enabled them to envision an alternative way of being and to dream, to recognise their worth as workers and human beings. Thus, for circle workers the long hours spent in cold, dark rooms, studying subjects and texts normally the preserve of the intelligentsia and educated society in itself represented a definite form of liberation and fostered a sense of worker identity and self-value often denied them in their everyday lives. The description of circle workers enjoying the forbidden fruit of knowledge was captured by the worker A.A. Solov'ev:

*In the remote darkness of the harbour, in a dark room, the laws of the universe and of human society were studied. Somewhere far off, where the frost sparkled on the Neva, a cabman shouted, people out for a good time met and made merry, but within the Gavanskii [Harbour] group during these hours another life was lived. ... Cosmography and Darwinism were studied in the circles, the Manifesto, Plekhanov's pamphlets, and publications of the Emancipation of Labour group were read.*⁹⁸

In this way, small groups of Petersburg workers found solace and reached understanding. It may be conjecture, but perhaps workers did not attend study circles to be instructed in how the bourgeoisie exploited them that they experienced in their daily lives. What they took from the circles was a sense that there was another world beyond the crass exploitation they endured and that they themselves as workers could begin to articulate and expound on their own behalf their vision of the future world. As Jacques Rancière noted in his study of Parisian worker writers in France in the 1830s and 1840s, the very process of workers appropriating for themselves powers traditionally reserved for others, taking ownership of the word and written text was a profoundly liberating and self-identifying process.

⁹⁸ Cited in R.A. Kazakevich, *Sotsial-demokraticheskie organisatsii Peterburga*, Leningrad, 1960, p.143.

.....[workers seek] to appropriate for themselves the night of those who can stay awake, the language of those who do not have to beg, and the image of those that do not need to be flattered..... We must examine the mixed scene in which some workers, with complicity of intellectuals who have gone out to meet them, perhaps wish to expropriate their role, replay and shift the old myth about who has the right to speak for others by trying their hand at words and theories from on high.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Jacques Rancière, *La nuit des prolétaires: Archives du rêve ouvrier* (Paris, 1981) English Translation *Nights of Labor, The Workers Dream in 19th Century France*, translated from the French by John Drury, Temple UP, 1989, pp.22-23.

SECTION II.

Chapter 6.

The Petersburg Workers' Organisation of the 1870s

Introduction

During the 1870s members of the *Narodniki intelligenty* developed and sustained systematic contacts with groups of Petersburg factory workers, introducing them to ideas from western socialist thinkers, ideas that would be instrumental in shaping their ideological outlooks. Beyond this, many workers saw in their radical teachers a model to emulate, responding to the knowledge and altruism of their young mentors with a combination of admiration and gratitude. But these initial exchanges were also characterised by the first signs of tension, as skilled and already urbanised workers began to react negatively to the intelligentsia's dreams of a peasant-focused revolution and asserted an identity that differentiated them markedly from the mass of semi-peasant and unskilled workers. These tensions would lead workers to assert their independence from the *Narodniki intelligenty*, developing their own organisational forms that reflected their view of themselves as urban workers. Whilst realising that they needed *intelligenty*-propagandists for knowledge and support, workers' groups skilfully negotiated their way between conflicting ideological *intelligenty*-groupings, selecting what best suited the current moment from various *intelligenty* factions.

Whilst this radicalised *worker-intelligenty* jealously guarded their lead role in the workers' organisation, they recognised the imperative to reach out to the mass of illiterate and unskilled workers and give voice to their demands for economic and social improvements. In the course of the 1870s, workers' groups created the Northern Union of Russian Workers, an inclusive workers' organisation that sought to embrace all workers and to lead the struggles of semi-peasant workers in textile factories. Workers within the Union advanced the imperative of winning broad political rights in order that they could evolve a mass workers' party similar to the German Social-Democratic Party. In unequivocally articulating their commitment to political freedom, the Northern Union consciously broke with the dominant ideological paradigm of *Narodism*, wedded as it was to an agrarian, social revolution with its rejection of political revolution as a bourgeois deception.

In this section I shall explore the genesis and evolution of a small group of predominantly *zavodskie* workers, from their initial contacts with members of the radical Chaikovskist *intelligenty* circle through to the flowering of the first specifically workers' organisation in

the capital in the Northern Union.¹ In a recent doctoral thesis Jeff Meadowcroft analyzes the seminal influence of the speech of the worker Petr Alekseev during the ‘Trial of the 50’ in 1877 demonstrating that this speech and subsequent worker memoirs from the 1870 enabled a specific worker voice to be articulated that both encapsulated the conscious individual activism of such workers whilst also reflecting a passive sense of ‘victimhood’ shared by the mass of their fellow workers and the millions of peasants across Russia.² In the development of the Petersburg workers’ movement of the 1870s there was often a tragic interplay between individual activism and victimhood, culminating in acts of conscious self-sacrifice that saw many advanced *worker-intelligenty* of 1870s embrace the terrorist struggles of Narodnaia Volia.

The Chaikovkist Discovery of Workers

Systematic contacts between workers and radical *intelligenty* began in the early 1870s when the Chaikovkist Circle became involved with small groups of workers. Although, the main emphasis of the Chaikovkists was self-education amongst students, there was a continuous focus by circle members on the ‘*rabochee delo.*’ This was reflected in the group’s first programme of 1871 that contains a section on urban workers, advocating preparing workers for strike action and developing a culture of resistance in factories.³ Initially, Chaikovkists made contact with *fabrichnye* workers through official Sunday

¹ There has surprisingly been comparatively little research on the development of the first Petersburg workers’ organisation in the 1870s. The notable exceptions are the leading Soviet historian E.A. Korol’chuk who published a major study on the organisation, *Severnyi soiuz russkikh rabochikh’ i revoliutsionnoe rabochee dvizhenie 70-kh godov XIX v. v Peterburge*, Leningrad, 1946 [subsequently republished in an abbreviated form as *Severnyi soiuz russkikh rabochikh’ i rabochee dvizhenie 70-kh godov XIX v v Peterburge*, Moscow, 1971] and a series of insightful articles by Reginald Zelnik including ‘Populists and Workers. The First Encounters between Populist Students and Industrial Workers in St. Petersburg, 1871-74,’ *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 24 October 1972; ‘Russian Workers and the Revolutionary Movement,’ *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 6 Winter 1972-73; ‘To the Unaccustomed Eye’: Religion and Irreligion in the Experience of St. Petersburg Workers in the 1870s, *Russian History/Histoire russe*, Vol. 16, 1989; ‘Before Class: The Fostering of a Worker Revolutionary, the Construction of His Memoir,’ *Russian History/Histoire russe*, Vol. 20, 1993, ‘On the Eve: Life Histories and Identities of Some Revolutionary Workers, 1870-1905,’ in *Making Workers Soviet*. Edited by L. Siegelbaum and R. Suny, 1995; ‘Workers and Intelligentsia in the 1870s: The Politics of Sociability,’ in Zelnik [ed.], *Workers and Intelligentsia in Late Imperial Russia: Realities, Representations, Reflections*, Berkeley, 1999. Other useful information on the early workers’ groups in the capital can be found in more general studies of the Narodniki and narodovol’tsy movements such as S.S. Volk, *Narodnaia Volia, 1879-1882*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1966 and Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution. A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia*, New York, 1960.

² Jeff R. Meadowcroft, *The history and historiography of the Russian worker-revolutionaries of the 1870s*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2011.

³ ‘Ocherk istorii kruzhka ‘chaikovtsev’ [1869-1872 gg]’ in B.S. Itenberg [ed.], *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo, 70-kh godov XIX veka, T.I, 1870-1875*, Moscow, 1964, pp.202-204. The programme of the Circle was published in ‘Programma dlia kruzhkov samoobruaovaniia i prakticheskoi deiatel’nosti,’ ed. Ia. B[aum], *Katorga i ssylka*, 1930, No. 6, pp.95-106.

Schools and were involved in providing basic literacy.⁴ Propagandists found their pupils showed little interest in socialism but became animated when conversations turned to questions concerning land, exploitation of workers and the oppression of the ‘*narod*’ in both town and countryside. From these conversations propagandists gradually introduced social issues into discussions, although they had to tread a fine line without offending the strong loyalty felt by their pupils towards the Tsar. It was the similar in respect of religion where attacking priests was acceptable but denial of God was taboo. Yet despite this, one propagandist recalled how workers over several months became ‘*transformed from their customary narrow minded prejudices into critical and often into revolutionary inclined people.*’⁵

For many years historians concurred that the primary objective of the Chaikovkists was to create socialist propagandists amongst textile workers who retained close links with their villages and could be used to carry socialist ideas to the countryside.⁶ This interpretation, derived largely from a narrative created by members of the circle⁷, was challenged in the mid-1980s by Pamela Sears McKinsey who demonstrated that until autumn 1873 the Chaikovkists gave little thought to extending propaganda to the countryside. Rather, it was a growing antagonism towards them from skilled *zavodskie* metalworkers and the unsolicited departure for the countryside of a number of their leading worker-acolytes that generated the idea of transferring the focus from factories to villages.⁸ One propagandist recalled that the impetus towards the countryside was provided by a number of ‘*prepared*’ workers disillusioned with the potential amongst factory workers who left to radicalise the peasantry.⁹ Their departure coincided with several *intelligenty* members leaving to work in rural areas, resulting in the circle, re-orientating its work towards developing semi-peasant *fabrichnye* workers as conduits of socialist propaganda to rural peasants.¹⁰

⁴ S.S. Sinegub, ‘Vospominaniia chaikovtsov’, *Byloe*, 1906, No.8; L.E.Shishko, ‘Sergei Kravchinskii i kruzhok chaikovtsev,’ in *Sobr. Poln. Soch., T.IV*, Moscow-Petrograd, 1918; N.A.Charushin, *O dalekom proshlom*, Moscow, 1973, p.143.

⁵ N.A. Charushin, 1973, pp.143-144.

⁶ Sh.M. Levin, ‘K kharakteristike ideologii Chaikovtsev’ in Charushin, 1973, pp.299-338; F. Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, pp.512-515.

⁷ S.S. Sinegub, ‘Vospominaniia chaikovtsov,’ *Byloe*, No.8, 1906, pp.51-52 for a classic expression of this view.

⁸ Pamela Sears McKinsey, ‘From City Workers to Peasantry. The Beginning of the Russian Movement To the People,’ *Slavic Review*, Vol.38, No.4, 1979, pp.629-649.

⁹ L.E. Shishko, ‘Sergei Kravchinskii i kruzhok chaikovtsev,’ 1918, p. 28; ‘Obituary for Grigorii Krylov’ in *Vpered!*, 1876.

¹⁰ L.E. Shihsko, 1918, pp.28-29.

This reorientation towards peasant revolution was reflected in Kropotkin's draft programme for the Chaikovkists in November 1873.¹¹ As Reginald Zelnik pointed out, Kropotkin's justification for peasant-based revolution incited by propagandised peasant-workers reflected a self-reinforcing syllogism, namely, '*peasants are revolutionary - fabrichnye are peasants - fabrichnye are revolutionary.*' This was reinforced by a second syllogism: '*permanent urbanised workers are reformist - Russian zavodskie are urbanised workers - zavodskie can be discounted as being reformist.*'¹² By this means, Kropotkin discounted the revolutionary potential of *zavodskie* workers and whilst subsequent *Narodniki* sought to rebuild bridges to *zavodskie* groups few managed to get beyond tactical considerations, endeavouring to relate to them as either a convenient link with the peasantry or as shock-troops to be deployed to promote a seizure of power designed to usher in a broader peasant revolution, a tendency that reached its apogee with *Narodnaia Volia*.

The Genesis of the Petersburg Workers' Organisation

Whilst Kropotkin's programme contributed to a final break between *zavodskie* workers and Chaikovkists, for some time relations between the two groups had been strained, revealing the seeds of future *worker-intelligent* conflicts and early indications of the workers' quest for autonomy. Contacts between the Chaikovkists and metalworkers began in 1871 when Chaikovkists made contact with a group of around 30 workers mainly from the Patronnyi munitions factory on the Vyborg Side.¹³ Before becoming involved with Chaikovkist propagandists, this group assiduously engaged in educational activities, accessing a well stocked library at the factory and through officer-cadets from the Mikhailovskii Artillery School on placements at the factory maintained contacts with radical *intelligent*.¹⁴

This first *zavodskie* circle already displayed features that distinguished it from *fabrichnye* circles. First, the workers possessed a good level of education, either through attending factory schools, such as Aleksei and Petr Peterson at the Izhorsk Naval Yards, or receiving elementary schooling in their villages, such as Viktor Obnorskii and Sergei Vinogradov, or

¹¹ N.A. Charushin, 1973, pp.204-205. On Kropotkin's manifesto and the background see Martin Miller, 'Ideological Conflicts in Russian Populism: The Revolutionary Manifestos of the Chaikovskii Circle, 1869-1874,' *Slavic Review*, Vol. 29, No. 1, March 1970, pp. 1-21.

¹² Reginald Zelnik, 'Populists and Workers. The First Encounters between Populist Students and Industrial Workers in St. Petersburg, 1871-74,' *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 24, October 1972, p.258.

¹³ P.A. Kropotkin, *Zapiski revoliutsionera*, Moscow, 1929, p.325; N.A. Charushin, 1973, pp.127-128.

¹⁴ M. Bortnik, 'V 70-e i 80-e gody na Trubochnom zavode,' *Krasnaia letopis'*, No.2, 1928, p. 178.

Karl Ivanainen who studied at the Finnish School in Petersburg.¹⁵ Before coming into contact with *intelligenty*, they were politically aware, reading Chernyshevskii and Lassalle independently and studying scientific subjects and social issues.¹⁶ Members of the circle were provided with revolutionary materials by students on placement from the Technological Institute, who arranged for Chaikovkists to lecture workers on natural science and Russian history.¹⁷ A second distinguishing feature of the circle was that it was already moving beyond propaganda to apply socialist ideas in practice. During 1871, workers established a cobblers' workshop on the principles of a producers' association, emulating the ideas of Proudhon and Louis Blanc recently popularised in Russia through Mikhailov's pamphlet on Productive Associations. The workshop, operated by the metalworker Stepan Mitrofanov, also acted as the organisational centre for *zavodskie* workers, providing a place for them to meet Chaikovkist *intelligenty*. A similar workshop was established at around the same time on Vasil'evskii Island.¹⁸

The involvement of these *zavodskie* with the Chaikovkist students Anatolii Serdiukov and Aleksandr Nizovkin was a momentous moment, as through these contacts they began to construct the basis for their own specifically workers' organisation. An almost contemporaneous history of the Chaikovskii circle recognised Serdiukov's role, noting that *'from the very beginning of his participation in the [Chaikovskii] circle, Serdiukov protested against exclusive activity among the students [made] the first attempts of the circle to carry out work with workers and soon attracted a significant number of followers.'*¹⁹ In early 1872, Serdiukov suggested the formation of a workers' library with donations from the Chaikovkists including Marx's *Capital*, Louis Blanc's *Histories of the Great French Revolution* and *The Revolutions of 1848*, Lanzhol's *History of the Paris Commune*, and Lassalle's *Selected Works*.²⁰ The significance of the library lay not just in allowing workers access to illegal books but, more importantly, formed the basis of the first worker controlled organisation supported by a library fund into which members contributed 2% of their wages. This created a focal point for their endeavours and an institution that they regarded as their own. Although initially Nizovkin acted as 'librarian',

¹⁵ *Deiateli....., T. II*, stb.195-6 and 479-81; *Deiateli....T. III*, stb. 1060-63, 1066-69.

¹⁶ L.E. Shishko, 'Sergei Kravchinskii i kruzhok chaikovtsev'; N.A. Charushin, 1973, p.128.

¹⁷ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. II, Chast I*, p.454; *Deiateli....., T. II*, stb., 788.

¹⁸ E.A. Korol'chuk and E. Sokolova, *Khronika revoliutsionnogo rabocheho dvizheniia v Peterburge. Vol.1, 1870-1904 gg.*, Leningrad, 1940, pp.72-73.

¹⁹ 'Obshchii ocherk Zhizni Peterburgskogo radikal'nogo studenchestva v 1869-1871 godakh' in B.S. Itenberg [ed.], *Revoliutsionnoe Narodnichestvo 70-kh godov XIX veka, T.I, 1870-1875 gg*, Moscow, 1964, p.234.

²⁰ E.A. Korol'chuk, *Severnyi Soiuz Russkikh Rabochikh i revoliutsionnoe rabochee dvizhenie 70-kh godov XIX v. v Peterburge*, Leningrad, 1946, pp.47-48; N.A. Charushin, 1973, p.146.

the involvement of workers in funding the expansion of the library indicated a shift in power between *intelligenty* and workers, with the latter increasingly expressing their desire to control their activities.

It quickly became evident to the Chaikovkists that they were dealing with a quite unexpected phenomenon in respect of *zavodskie* workers. Here were workers asserting their own values, taking pride in their status as skilled industrial workers, reacting with negatively to any suggestion that they abandon their urban lives to promote a peasant based revolution. The Patronnyi workers possessed high levels of skill and proficiency, manufacturing precision pieces for modern armaments of foreign design.²¹ Such workers already saw themselves as an elite group, and their assertion of this identity along with their determination to study issues that reflected their specific interests quickly disabused the Chaikovkists that they could be moulded into their ideal '*peasant-worker*'. This independent tendency and refusal to be 'cannon-fodder' for *intelligenty* revolutionary dreams created tensions from the beginning of the relationship. Nizovkin told the police that the Chaikovkists were cool towards skilled metalworkers, considering them poor revolutionary material.²² Such judgements were a reflection of a different conception of revolution that *zavodskie* workers were developing and, given their subsequent histories of prison and exile for their beliefs, there is no justification for Kropotkin's later accusation that they were '*in no haste to become martyrs to the socialist cause.*'²³

In early 1873, the *zavodskie* circle expanded when the Patronnyi factory opened a new section on Vasil'evskii Island for precision toolmaking. Several skilled toolmakers transferred to the Vasil'evskii section where they recommenced propaganda activities. It is significant that Semen Volkov states that when he joined the circle on Vasil'evskii Island in early 1873 it was part of a wider workers' union, suggesting that *zavodskie* workers' groups had already acquired a degree of independence and were seeking to begin to emulate the unions of Western Europe that they had read about.²⁴ Volkov's suggestion that an embryonic 'workers' union' existed is supported by his fellow worker Dmitrii Smirnov, who described a large meeting of workers from the Patronnyi factory above the Petushok tavern in April 1873. Smirnov recalled that at this exclusively workers' meeting it was agreed to establish a section of the library and fund for Vasil'evskii island and, in

²¹ Joseph Bradley, *Guns for the Tsar*, DeKalb, 1990, pp.160-166.

²² Sh.M. Levin, 'Kruzhok chaikovtsev i propaganda sredi peterburgskikh rabochikh v nachale 1870-kh gg.,' *Katorga i ssylka* 12 [61], 1929, p.9

²³ P.A. Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, New York, 1968, p.325.

²⁴ S.K. Volkov, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.144.

statement that had more than symbolic value, decided that henceforth they would be responsible for their own self-education, implying that they regarded dependence on the *intelligenty* as a thing of the past.²⁵ Subscriptions for the fund were agreed at 1 rouble and Smirnov as treasurer collected over 30 roubles from participating workers. Retiring to the downstairs tavern, the workers toasted their achievement with vodka, an achievement which involved the creation of ‘*Russia’s first political organisation that was not just for workers but by them.*’²⁶

The Chaikovkist Charushin recalled that the *zavodskie* group constituted a ‘workers’ aristocracy’ and frequently acted in a condescending manner towards unskilled *fabrichnye* workers whom they referred to contemptuously as a ‘rabble’ [*shpane*], whilst his fellow propagandist Shishko observed that they were much more independent and maintained a clear separation from the mass of factory workers.²⁷ The Chaikovkists soon concluded that the *zavodskie* were a distinct urban-oriented group and this accelerated their change of focus towards unskilled workers whom they regarded as ‘semi-peasants.’ As a result, they increasingly distanced themselves from skilled metalworkers who they believed already constituted a westernised working-class and in Kropotkin’s characterisation fundamentally reformist.²⁸ Such privileging of the rural over the urban, the peasant over the factory worker and the unskilled over the skilled, coinciding as it did with the growth amongst sections of skilled *zavodskie* workers of their own distinct identity centred on their role in the labour process and assimilation into the urban environment, could only eventually lead to antagonisms and confrontations between *zavodskie* groups and the Chaikovkist *intelligenty*.

During 1873, the embryonic workers’ organisation established links with circles in the Narvskii Gate region²⁹, while contacts were made with workers at the Izhorsk armaments factory through Aleksei and Petr Peterson who had been brought up in Kolpine.³⁰ The Petersons and other *zavodskie* workers frequently visited Kolpine and helped local workers establish a circle affiliated to the *zavodskie* network, supplying them with books for their library.³¹ But the most significant expansion occurred in the Nevskii Gate. In summer

²⁵ D.N. Smirnov, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.154.

²⁶ Reginald Zelnik, ‘Workers and Intelligentsia in the 1870s: The Politics of Sociability,’ 1999, p.30.

²⁷ N.A. Charushin, 1973, p.195; L.E. Shishko, Kravchinskii, 1918, p.31.

²⁸ S.S. Sinegub, 1906, p.52.

²⁹ Nizovkin’s statement of 27 March 1875 in *Revoliutsionnoe Narodnichestvo*, T.I, pp.249-250; Deiateli, II, 400.

³⁰ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke*, T.II, Chast 2, p.717.

³¹ *Deiateli.....*, T. III, stb., 1663; Sh.M. Levin, *Katorga i Ssylka*, 1929, No.12 [61].

1873, several Patronnyi workers transferred to work at the Semiannikov [Nevskii] plant, where they linked up with Mark Malinovskii, a leading worker propagandist in the Nevskii Gate. In common with other *zavodskie* groups, a library and fund were quickly established, with books contributed from the large library of the Vyborg circle. The decision to supply the Nevskii circle with books was taken by workers as their *intelligenty* mentor Nizovkin was opposed to splitting up the main library.³² Nizovkin later stated that ‘workers themselves... developed the work of the library, took care of it in order to expand it.’³³ The determination of *zavodskie* workers to expand their organisation through the library, despite opposition from their closest *intelligenty* advisor, is further indication of their growing independence.

During 1873 the rift between the two groups widened. Increasingly *zavodskie* workers carried out their own propaganda and agitation seeking new recruits to their cause. Intensive propaganda was carried out at the Semiannikov factory where, as one worker told the police, the *zavodskie* workers Bachin and Miaznikov openly discussed the relationship between labour and capital and how the workers needed to organise unions and seize control of the factories.³⁴ Shishko confirmed this autonomous activities of the Nevskii *zavodskie* workers, recalling that by summer 1873 they constituted ‘a well organised and self-sufficient group with their own fund and library, and whilst remaining in contact with the revolutionaries from the *intelligenty* were much more independent than the groups of *fabrichnye* workers.’³⁵

Considerable evidence exists that indicates that *zavodskie* workers were already articulating a species of ‘workerism’ based on class exclusiveness. In one example of hostility towards the *intelligenty*, Bachin told workmates that ‘he scorned Prince Kropotkin’ and that workers should ‘take books from students but when they begin to spout nonsense then we must beat them up.’ Bachin also declared that Chaikovkists were ‘landowners and students, people who are not workers whilst amongst those who meet with Nizovkin all are workers.’³⁶ Another Semiannikov worker stated that the Chaikovkists are ‘on the other side from us....not telling us what they do but demanding to

³² *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T.II, Chast 2, p.*

³³ E.A. Korol’chuk, 1946, p.43.

³⁴ *Stanovlenie revoliutsionnykh traditsii peterskogo proletariata*, [ed.], A.N. Tsamutali, 1987, pp.154-155.

³⁵ L.E. Shishko, 1918,

³⁶ *Gosudarstvennye prestupleniia v Rossii v XIX veke*, [ed.] B. Basil’evskogo [V. Bogucharskogo], T. III, p. 51

know all that we do.'³⁷ This animosity even involved public humiliation of *intelligenty*-propagandists. When a student-propagandist entered the Semiannikov factory and told workers to struggle with landowners he was seized by workers who covered his face in grease and chased him from the workshop. Whilst this may have been an expression of innate lower-class hostility towards the privileged classes it can also be read as an indication by workers that they already did not need students telling them what to do.³⁸

This growing disenchantment of workers was exacerbated by the decision of leading Chaikovkists to abandon urban propaganda in favour of work amongst the peasantry. In what must have seemed like a calculated insult to the *zavodskie* group, one of their leading members, Mikhail Orlov, was enticed by *intelligenty* propagandists to leave the Semiannikov factory to carry out propaganda amongst the peasantry. Orlov's departure was felt as a betrayal that was intensified a short time later by '*the sudden and mysterious disappearance of Viktor Obnorskii*' for Odessa with the Chaikovkist Lisovskii in autumn 1873.³⁹ These developments, in the context of the Chaikovkist's new-found enthusiasm for peasant-based revolution, could only be construed as a calculated challenge to the *zavodskie*'s growing belief that they and not peasants represented the future. As urban workers they rejected any suggestion that they cast off their new-found identity as skilled workers within an urban environment, to sacrifice themselves and their collective future on a futile peasant-based revolution. In response to what they perceived as an attempt by *intelligenty* to rob them of their newly acquired status as workers, the *zavodskie* from autumn 1873 asserted their independence and took steps to formalise their own organisation.

The Workers Initial Quest for Independence.

The animosity between *zavodskie* workers and Chaikovkists has frequently been attributed to the malevolent influence of Aleksandr Nizovkin. According to this interpretation, Nizovkin, being denied admission into the inner sanctum of the Chaikovskii circle, in a fit of spite sowed dissension amongst *zavodskie* circles and succeeded in turning them against their erstwhile teachers.⁴⁰ This interpretation is far too simplistic, ascribing to Nizovkin an ability to influence impressionable workers, conveniently ignoring that fact that *zavodskie*

³⁷ Sh.M. Levin, 'Kruzhok chaikovtsev i propaganda sredi peterburgskikh rabochikh v nachale 1870-kh gg.,' *Katorga i ssylka*, No.12, [61], 1929, p.24.

³⁸ N.K. Bukh, *Vospominaniia*, Moscow, 1927 p.51.

³⁹ Reginald Zelnik, 'Workers and Intelligentsia in the 1870s. The Politics of Sociability,' 1999, pp.31-36.

⁴⁰ N.A. Charushin, 1973, pp.147-148; L.E. Shishko, Kravchinskii, 1918.

workers from the very inception of their circles already indicated the direction they were determined to pursue with or without the assistance of the *intelligenty*.

By autumn 1873, *zavodskie* circles were well-established in several districts with a network of libraries and funds to support their activities. Nizovkin testified to the police that by winter 1873 the workers on their own initiative arranged meetings to develop their cause and ‘*had fully assimilated the concept of solidarity and wished to develop close relationships between each other. Workers’ meetings began to take place on a regular basis, debates on the labour question were arranged, revolutionary songs sung.*’⁴¹ In late 1873, workers consolidated their circles into a unified workers’ organisation that was formally constituted at a large meeting of workers from across the capital on 31 December 1873 held in the room of Dmitrii Smirnov, Semen Volkov and Aleksei Peterson on Vasil’evskii Island. As well as agreeing to develop the library, supported by a subscription of 1% of wages of all circle members, the meeting also agreed an additional subscription of 1% to establish a mutual-aid fund to support families of arrested workers and members who became unemployed. This new focus was undoubtedly connected with the recent arrest of workers in the Nevskii Gate and awareness that several factories had recently made workers redundant due to reductions in state orders. Volkov was elected treasurer of the library fund, Smirnov the librarian, and Aleskei Lavrov, from the Semiannikov factory, the treasurer of the mutual-aid fund, significantly named the ‘*oppositional fund.*’⁴²

During early 1874, further meetings were held involving new recruits and circles from other districts including the Narvskii Gate and Kolpine.⁴³ One major outstanding issue involved a final break with Chaikovkists. That this in fact was merely formalising an existing reality is evidenced by the fact that in November 1873 a member of the Chaikovkist circle was unceremoniously told by the workers to leave a meeting on the grounds that they did not wish to work with anyone who was not a worker or who did not support their cause.⁴⁴ This formula left the workers free to work with *intelligenty* who they considered sympathetic to their aims for autonomy, including both Nizovkin and members of a Lavrovist propaganda group led by Vasilii Ivanovskii that now included Serdiukov who had been in close contact with the original *zavodskie* circle in 1871-72.

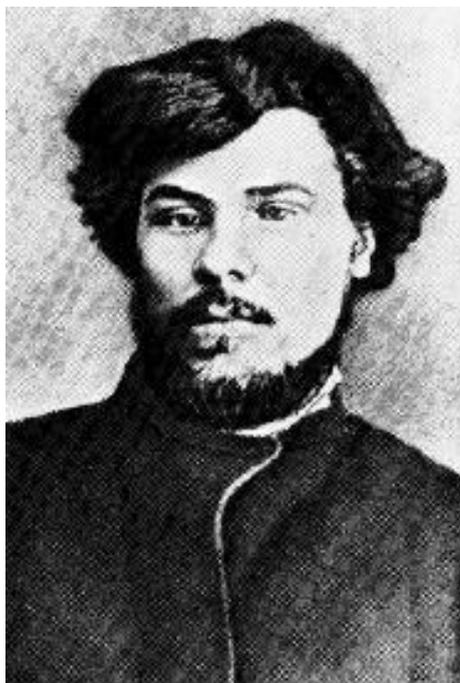
⁴¹ Cited in Korol’chuk, 1946, p.44.

⁴² On this so-called ‘Elka’ Meeting, *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom II, Chast 1*, pp.456–57, 466–67; Korol’chuk, 1946, p.43.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p.44; Levin, *Katorga i ssylka*, 1929, No.12 [61], p.22.

⁴⁴ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom II, Chast 1*, p.457.

The final break came at an organisational meeting on 3rd March 1874 in a conspiratorial room organised by the Lavrovist group where the weaver Petr Alekseev, later to deliver a famous speech at his trial in 1877, and other *fabrichnye* workers were living.⁴⁵ It is significant that Alekseev and other weavers were involved in the meeting, providing evidence that the *zavodskie* were prepared to include *fabrichnye* workers in their organisation and indicating that the only criteria involved were that workers were educated and sympathetic to the ‘workers’ cause.’ This goes a considerable way to disproving the assertion of *Narodniki* activists that *zavodskie* workers were contemptuous of *fabrichnye* workers and rejected their involvement on the grounds of their intellectual superiority and status within the industrial hierarchy. As the subsequent development of the Petersburg workers’ organisation would demonstrate, *zavodskie* workers were more than prepared to involve *fabrichnye* workers in their organisation and to support their struggles.⁴⁶



Petr Alekseev

During his interrogation, Nizovkin provided the authorities with a full description of the 3rd March meeting, much of which was corroborated in statements by the worker Mitrofanov. Over 30 workers from various districts of the capital attended the meeting.⁴⁷ Nizovkin

⁴⁵ Alekseev who later would be immortalised in workers’ revolutionary history through his speech at the ‘Trial of the 50’ in 1877 began his revolutionary career in 1873 as a member of a workers’ circle organised by the Ivanovskii group.

⁴⁶ B.S. Itenberg, [ed.], *Revoliutsionnoe Narodnichestvo*, T.I, Moscow, 1964, p.248.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.250; Nizovkin’s several statements given tot the police during investigation are reproduced by Itenberg; *Deiateli....., T. III*, stb. 1292

identified four main workers' groups, in addition to Alekseev and other weavers who lived in the rooms where the meeting took place. The four *zavodskie* groups corresponded to the four major industrial districts of the capital and reflected the scale of the workers' organisation. The first group based around Mitrofanov and Vinogradov was composed of workers from the Vyborg Side, the nucleus of the original Patronnyi circle. The second group, including Volkov, Smirnov and the Peterson brothers, were all from the Vasil'evskii Island section of the Patronnyi factory. The third group consisted of workers largely unknown to Nizovkin, although the one worker he does identify worked at the Warsaw Railway workshops and another who he included in the Vasil'evskii Island group was by this time working at the Putilov factory close to the Warsaw railway workshops so it probable that the third group consisted of representatives from the Narvskii Gate district. The final and largest group was from the Nevskii Gate and included Bachin, Adamov, Miasnikov and Ivanainen and was composed of workers from both the Semiannikov factory and the neighbouring Aleksandrovskii plant.⁴⁸

In his statement to the police, Mitrofanov emphasised that the workers unanimously agreed to sever all contact with the Chaikovkists, citing as the reason that the Chaikovkists incited workers [*constantly stirring them up*] and that all the workers receive from them were *'empty promises.'*⁴⁹ The phrase *'stirring them up'* related to their emphasis on inciting *fabrichnye* workers with the aim of persuading them to return to the countryside to spread sedition amongst the peasantry. Rejecting the Chaikovkists for their *'empty promises'* and failure to recognise the new realities facing industrial workers, *zavodskie* workers demonstrated that they were seeking support to come to terms with the industrial transformation and 'modernity' developing in the capital not to seek a return to some lost rural and communal past. Throughout the 1870s, the *zavodskie* workers would work with *intelligenty* who could help them make better sense of these new realities and offer a means of improving their situation, both at a personal level through education and at a wider collective level by helping them construct a workers' organisation, but were not prepared to act as passive accomplices of the *intelligenty* in ventures that were not in their interest as workers and which they deemed would result in failure.

Shortly after the meeting on 3rd March, many leading *zavodskie* workers were arrested. From the outset of the investigation, the authorities were convinced that they were dealing

⁴⁸ B.S. Itenberg, [ed.], *Revoliutsionnoe Narodnichestvo, T.I*, Moscow, 1964, pp.249-250.

⁴⁹ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom II, Chast I*, pp.438-440.

with a discrete workers' party, distinct in composition and ideology from the Chaikovkists. The Chief Prosecutor notified the Ministry of Justice soon after the arrests:

*in addition to the Chaikovkist party, another party had formed, consisting almost exclusively of workers in which the sole intelligenty activist was the student from the Medical-Surgical Academy Aleksandr Nizovkin. Adherents of this party.... did not have close links with the Chaikovkists and acted completely separately from them. The most prominent and developed individuals from the workers in this party were the brothers Aleksei and Petr Peterson, Smirnov, Volkov, Lavrov, Mitrofanov and Vingradov....*⁵⁰

Despite their often fractious relationship with the Chaikovkists, the latter had provided *zavodskie* workers with intellectual resources to conceptualise and challenge the dominant economic and political realities that confronted them as workers. The ideas made accessible to workers through the *intelligenty* enabled the beginnings of a discourse based on class to develop and was a critical factor in enabling their self-definition and identity as industrial workers. By 1873, according to Nizovkin, such workers '*were already interpreting social questions, understood the concept of the working-class and sympathised with and aspired to ideas from abroad.*'⁵¹ Whilst workers sought to translate these initial understandings into forms that would reflect their own experiences of their class position, they willingly accepted a degree of dependence on the *intelligenty*. But already this was not a passive acceptance of *intelligenty* hegemony and theories over their own experiences and aspirations. Workers were already striving to emerge from the shadow of the *intelligenty* and to become a genuine '*worker-intelligentsia.*' An account written a few years after these events does indeed characterise these workers as a '*worker-intelligentsia*' and in many senses the designation epitomised the real life struggles of this group of *zavodskie* workers, struggles that involved them in an ambiguous relationship with the radical *intelligentsia* who generally continued to claim a monopoly over the control and dissemination of 'correct' ideas to the working or labouring classes. This already conflicted relationship accounts for the rejection of the Chaikovkists' words as '*empty promises*' and was epitomised in Bachin's exhortations to workers that they should take the books [and ideas] from the students but to beat them up when they spoke nonsense and his general advice to workers '*to beware of educated people.*'

⁵⁰ *Stanovlenie revoliutsionnykh traditsii piterskogo proletariata*, [ed.], A.N. Tsamutali, 1987, pp.143-145.

⁵¹ E.A. Korol'chuk, *Severnyi Soiuz Russkikh Rabochikh i revoliutsionnoe rabochee dvizhenie 70-kh godov VIX v. v Peterburge*, Moscow, 1971, p.30.

Immediately after the arrests, survivors of the Patronnyi circles on Vasil'evskii Island signalled their intent to exact vengeance on suspected informers. A Third Section report drew attention to a meeting of Patronnyi workers in April 1874 that discussed recent arrests and agreed to draw up 'a suspect list' with the aim of removing suspected police agents from the factory.⁵² This is the first indication that self-defence against informers was necessary for the workers' organisation, a tendency that would result by 1877 in the formation of a militant workers' section dedicated to ruthless and bloody reprisals against police agents within the workers' environment.

Most arrested workers were treated comparatively leniently and released within a few months, although some like the Semiannikov worker, Mark Malinovskii, arrested in November 1873 and accused of insulting the Tsar in front of workers at the factory, was sentenced to seven years hard labour, whilst the most militant workers such as Semen Volkov, Ignatii Bachin and Aleksei Peterson were to remain in prison for nearly two years.⁵³ A number of workers on release went abroad, including Karl Ivanainen, to become acquainted with the workers' movement in western countries at first hand, before returning to Russia to share their knowledge and recommence their activities in workers' groups.⁵⁴

Worker-intelligent narratives from the 1870s



Dmitrii Smirnov

In many senses the prototypical radical *worker-intelligent* can already be identified in this initial cohort of *zavodskie* workers. From the brief accounts by Dmitrii Smirnov and Semen Volkov of their experiences in Petersburg in the 1870s, it is possible to reconstruct

⁵² *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom II, Chast I*, pp.470, 471.

⁵³ *Vpered!*, 15 January 1875, No.1, p.6; *Deiateli...., T. II*, stb. 216 *T. III*, stb. 1166-1169.

⁵⁴ *Vpered!*, 1875, No.3; D.N. Smirnov, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.156.

something of the attitudes and beliefs of this first generation of worker-radicals.⁵⁵ It is possible to see in these two leading workers, a number of critical aspects of the development of a specific worker-identity and how a small group of workers through their experiences in factories and exposure to radical ideas created the foundations of the first workers' organisation in the capital.

Smirnov, the son of a Kostroma serf, arrived to work in the capital as a thirteen year old in the early 1860s, already having been taught basic literacy by his father. He became apprentice to a locksmith and in the mid-1860s went to work as a metalworker in the expanding armaments sector at the Patronnyi Munitions factory on the Vyborg Side. In the early 1870s having spent around 10 years working in one of the most advanced factories in the capital, he came into contact with radical *intelligenty* from whom he and a number of his colleagues at the Patronnyi factory learnt of the lives and struggles of German workers and how the latter organised workers' unions to defend their economic interests and fight for political rights.⁵⁶ Workers such as Smirnov, although still young, were thoroughly urbanised by the time of their initial contacts with radical *intelligenty*.

In contrast to Smirnov, Volkov's journey to becoming a Petersburg *zavodskie* worker was more varied. Although registered as a Gomel *meshchanin* [petty-bourgeois urban dweller], Volkov was born into a serf family in a village in Simbirsk *guberniia* where his father was a carpenter. Taught to read at a village school, in 1861, at the age of 16, Volkov went to work as a *fabrichnye* worker at a local woollen mill but quickly abandoned his life as a *fabrichnye* worker, whose lives he found '*materially and spiritually impoverished.*'⁵⁷ Moving to Simbirsk he became an apprentice locksmith and then found work in a foundry. In the first of many disputes with employers, the impetuous Volkov left the foundry after threatening to attack his employer with a stick after the latter had verbally abused him. Settling in Kazan, Volkov worked as a machinist in a metalworking factory and became involved in an *intelligenty* circle seeking to disseminate collectivist ideas in the Volga region. By the early 1870s, Volkov was working in Saratov in railway construction, where he again was involved in a dispute with his employers over the non-payment of wages and

⁵⁵ Volkov dictated his memoir on his deathbed in 1924 and it was eventually published under the title 'Avtobiografiia rabochego-revoliutsionera 60-70-kh godov xix veka' in *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp. 141-50. An autobiographical note on Volkov is found in *Deiateli....*, vyp.2.1. stb.216-17. Smirnov's memoir was first published in M. Bortnik, 'V 70-e i 80-e gody na Trubochnom zavode,' *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1928, no. 2 [53] and subsequently republished in *V nachale puti*, 1975, in a slightly rearranged and abbreviated form, pp.151-59.

⁵⁶ D.N. Smirnov, 1975, p.152.

⁵⁷ S.K. Volkov, 1975, pp.141-142.

sacked for insubordination. Following this, Volkov moved to Petersburg where he sought work in a railway workshop. On asking to see the foreman, he was informed that he was unavailable as he was drunk and had assaulted two workers. An incredulous Volkov asked if the workers had not retaliated but was told that workers had no right to attack a foreman and that told not to bother returning to look for a job in the workshops.⁵⁸ Soon after Volkov found work at the Patronnyi Cartridge factory on Vasil'evskii Island in early 1873, where Smirnov and a number of other radical *zavodskie* workers were working, who Volkov described as '*the flower of the Petersburg workforce in their intellectual development and amongst whom collective ideas were very strongly developed.*'⁵⁹

From Volkov's early and eventful employment history, a picture emerges of a worker already exposed to radical ideas, motivated by a powerful sense of his own dignity and a refusal to tolerate abuses by employers. Behind his somewhat '*primitive belligerence*' lay a predilection to challenge injustice from authority figures. This instinctual rebellion against perceived transgressions of a moral code of justice when combined with the evolving worker identities and collectivist ethos already apparent amongst sections of the Patronnyi workforce would form the basis for the emergence of the workers' organisation in the capital.

During late 1873/early 1874, Smirnov and Volkov shared an apartment on Vasil'evskii Island that was the headquarters of the *zavodskie* workers' organisation of which Volkov became treasurer and Smirnov head librarian. Although both were arrested in March 1874, on release from prison they resumed revolutionary activities and were at the centre of the workers who during 1876 formed the nucleus of the future Northern Union of Russian Workers. Plekhanov who knew both Smirnov and Volkov during 1876 described them as the best, most trustworthy and influential of the Petersburg worker-elite, conforming almost exactly to the archetype of the *zavodskie* worker he subsequently would idealise. Their skilled status in the munitions factory meant that they were '*bogachi*' [rich], earning up to 3 roubles a day, living in a comfortable apartment, buying many books and dressing like '*dandies.*' This latter trait was criticised by certain radical *intelligenty* intent on propagating an ascetic '*lack of needs*' as the basis for socialism.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Ibid, pp.143-144.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.144.

⁶⁰ G.V. Plekhanov, *Russkii rabochii.....*, in *Sochineniia*, T.III, 1923, p.132.

There were certain contradictions in the attitudes of workers such as Smirnov and Volkov towards the radical-*intelligenty* that demonstrate their conflicted personalities. At times an almost deferential respect is shown to the *intelligenty*, ‘they were gentlemen, whilst we were workers’⁶¹, along with a refusal to believe that one of their most respected propagandists, Nizovkin, could betrayed the workers’ group to the police.⁶² This sits alongside Smirnov’s assertion that the workers already knew that the students on completion their studies would abandon workers and resume their privileged lives.⁶³ Further evidence of their conflicted personalities is apparent in that for some time both Volkov and Smirnov retained a degree of sympathy with the peasantry. After his release from prison in 1874 Smirnov, in common with several other members of the *zavodskie* group, returned to his native village. Such ‘returns’ however, only served to reinforce their fast evolving view of themselves as workers and led to a final disillusionment with peasants as the motive force for revolution. Most workers quickly returned to the city where they resumed their revolutionary activities amongst workers. In this context, it is telling that when in 1876 Smirnov again returned to his native village to renew his passport he recorded his alienation from rural life in a letter to a friend in Petersburg:

*I have been living in the country for three weeks, but everything is as alien as in the depths of the forest. I sit alone mostly in the house; I sleep and read. When I go out into the street it is completely alien In the entire neighbourhood I know only my own family. There is not a single school and no one even contemplates establishing one. It is all very sad.*⁶⁴

In a similar way, another *zavodskie* worker told Plekhanov following his return to his native village that his propaganda would focus on urban workers and that he would never return to the countryside as he considered that ‘the peasants are like sheep and will never be revolutionaries.’⁶⁵

From their own accounts and Plekhanov’s recollections, there seems little doubt that workers such as Volkov and Smirnov by the mid-1870s were well on the path to becoming fully-fledged industrial workers operating on the basis of a specific worker-identity. Such

⁶¹ D.N. Smirnov, *Krasnaia letopis’*, 1928, pp.222-223.

⁶² Ibid, p.215.

⁶³ D.N. Smirnov, 1975, p.158.

⁶⁴ Cited in E.A. Korol’chuk, *Severnyi soiuz....*, 1971, p.50.

⁶⁵ G.V. Plekhanov, ‘Russkii rabochii....’, in *Sochineniia, T.III*, 1923, pp.134-135; G. Golosov, ‘K biografii odnogo is osnovatelei Severnogo-russkogo rabocheho soiuz’a,’ *Katorga i ssylka*, No.6 (13), 1924, p.55.

an identity derived from their experiences in factories as well as an avid reading of western socialist literature, especially the works of Ferdinand Lassalle. This first generation of radical workers treated as gospel Lassalle's dictum that '*labour is the source of all value and culture.*'⁶⁶ Whilst in the Peter-Paul Fortress in 1874, Volkov, when inadvertently gaining access to a room where forbidden books were held, without hesitation, chose a volume by Lassalle which he smuggled out, kept secret and read assiduously in his cell.⁶⁷

Throughout their revolutionary activity, the focus of Smirnov and Volkov was on building a workers' organisation, evident when in autumn 1876 the authorities uncovered subversive activities amongst workers at the Sestroretskii munitions factory. This involved the distribution of illegal literature including copies of the Lavrovist newspaper *Vpered!* amongst workers. On investigation it was discovered that these works were supplied by Smirnov and Volkov who had organised a circle linked to the main workers' organisation in the capital. For this propaganda Volkov and Smirnov were rearrested in November 1876 and subsequently exiled from Petersburg in May 1877.⁶⁸

As the biographies of Volkov and Smirnov illustrate by the mid-1870s small numbers of workers had already assimilated ideas that privileged industrial workers over peasants and had determined to create their own workers' union, already discounting the peasantry as a revolutionary force. Although respectful and recognising their continued need to work closely with *intelligent* propagandists, this did not blind them to the reality that such propagandists were a temporary feature within the workers' movement and that they needed to become responsible for developing their own movement. Well-read and well-paid, enjoying comfortable life-styles, Smirnov, Volkov and their associates devoted themselves to laying the foundations of the first workers' organisation in the capital, a fact recognised in 1874 by the Chief Prosecutor of the Petersburg District Court who identified Volkov and Smirnov as amongst '*the most prominent and developed workers' who had formed a workers' party.*'⁶⁹

⁶⁶ L.E. Shishko, *Sobr. Soch.*, T. IV, 1918, p.145; P.A. Kropotkin, *Zapiski revoliutsionera*, M.1929., T.1, p.220.

⁶⁷ S.K. Volkov, 1975, pp.144-145.

⁶⁸ *Stanovlenie revoliutsionnykh traditsii peterskogo proletariata*, [ed.], A.N. Tsamutali, 1987, pp.208-209.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, pp.143-145.

The Lavrovist Contribution.

A key role in the re-emergence of a *zavodskie* workers' organisation in 1875-76 was played by Petersburg Lavrovists led by Lev Ginzburg and Anton Taksis.⁷⁰ In early 1875 *Vpered!* published an account of the '*zavodskie*' organisation providing details on the workers' libraries and mutual-aid fund which it reported were both controlled by workers.⁷¹ A few months later *Vpered!* reported that '*intelligenty-workers understand the necessity of uniting their forces into an organisation*' and that work amongst such workers is more successful than amongst the '*privileged intelligentsia.*'⁷² Petr Lavrov would later recognise the contribution of the Petersburg Lavrovists to the workers' movement in the capital by writing that '*significant advances were made in these years [1874-75] amongst urban workers. It was precisely at this time that the basis of a socialist workers' group was firmly established.*'⁷³

The literature introduced into the workers' environment by the Lavrovists was particularly significant. The future leading Social-Democrat, Iurii Steklov, considered that the Lavrovists played an important role by popularising Marxist ideas and introducing the history and activities of German Social Democracy which had a profound influence on the development workers' movement.⁷⁴ Through such reading workers were able to identify themselves and their emerging struggles in relation to an archetype of the conscious industrial worker as well as what would become their ideal form of workers' organisation in the German Social-Democratic Party. Another significant influence was information in *Vpered!* on the formation of the first workers' organisation in Russia, the South Russian Union of Workers in Odessa between 1874 to 1876.⁷⁵ The importance of the Odessa Union was emphasised by Lavrov in a letter to a colleague in which he wrote:

this matter is very serious, and given this aspiration towards organisation [on the part of workers] it is necessary that you take immediate advantage of this: a whole

⁷⁰ *Vpered! 1873-1877. From the Archives of Valerian Nikolaevich Smirnov*, Edited by Boris Sapir, Volume I 'On the History of *Vpered!*, Dordrecht, Holland, 1970, pp.227, 272ff, 310-312; Philip Pomper, *Peter Lavrov and the Russian Revolutionary Movement*, Chicago, 1972, Chapter 6; B.S. Itenberg, *P.L. Lavrov v russkom revoliutsionnom dvizhenii*, Moscow, 1988, Chapter 5.

⁷¹ *Vpered!*, 15 February 1875, No.3, p.76.

⁷² *Vpered!*, 1 May 1875, No.8, pp.238-241 and 15 March 1875, No.5, p.145.

⁷³ P.L. Lavrov, *Narodniki-propagandisty*, Moscow, 1925, pp.213-214.

⁷⁴ Iu. M. Steklov, *Bortsy za sotsializm, T. II.*, Moscow, 1918.

⁷⁵ Cf. B.S. Itenberg, *Iuzhnorossiiskii soiuz rabochikh: vozniknovenie i deiatel'nost*, Moscow, 1954.

*federation of genuine workers with sections in three cities [Petersburg, Moscow and Odessa] with a social revolutionary programme must be prepared.*⁷⁶

This positive assessment of the South Russian Workers' Union was shared by Lavrov's close associate Valerian Smirnov who considered that it represented a '*workers union aiming at revolution for the first time in Russia's history.*'⁷⁷ For the remainder of the 1870s, Smirnov would promote the formation of independent workers' organisations in Russia and influence the Petersburg workers' movement.

A concomitant of this ambition to create a workers' party was a clear rejection of *intelligenty*-led organisations. In early 1876 Valerian Smirnov wrote that he would willingly subordinate himself to a workers' organisation and in a barbed comment towards the radical *intelligenty* observed that '*an organisation of the privileged has no authority for me. They are capable of doing a lot of stupid things.*'⁷⁸ This rejection of *intelligenty* hegemony over the workers' movement had already been forcibly expressed by Smirnov in an influential article in 1874 in an article in *Vpered!* entitled '*Revolutionaries from the Privileged Milieu,*' an article that the leading *zavodskie* workers would undoubtedly have been familiar.⁷⁹ The article represented a sustained critique of revolutionaries from privileged backgrounds motivated by a sentimental love of the '*narod*', arguing explicitly that '*only working people can destroy decaying state institutions; only its hands and its ideas and on its will can be created a new human society on the ruins of the old.*'⁸⁰ What is significant is that within the privileged minority Smirnov included the revolutionary intelligentsia who were categorised as temporary residents within the revolution, destined to resume privileged lifestyles and exploitation of the people. In Smirnov's opinion:

*... After several years this 'flower of the Russian land' will abandon strong roots in the soil: after several years these thousands of young people will populate all spheres of the numerous organs of the state of the Russian Empire. ... They will become part of the oppressive army of exploiters and blood suckers of the narod, the convinced enemy of social revolution.*⁸¹

⁷⁶ *Is arkhiva V.N. Smirnova*, T.II, p.395.

⁷⁷ Letter from Smirnov to R. Idel'son, 20 January 1876 in *ibid.*

⁷⁸ Letter from Smirnov to R. Idel'son, 5 February 1876 in *ibid.*, p.269.

⁷⁹ *Vpered!*, T.II, 1873, pp.121-154.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.124

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.130

In the final analysis, such ‘pseudo-revolutionaries’, were incapable of feeling the ‘*diabolical nature of workers’ lives*’ and even the minority who suffer for the cause of the narod were dismissed, since their most likely punishment would be administrative exile, a punishment that bore no comparison to the day-to-day sufferings of the people.

Despite this, Smirnov recognised that a few ‘privileged’ revolutionaries could become genuine revolutionaries by ‘*merging*’ with the people and experiencing the realities of the life of labouring people. Such revolutionaries must be ‘reborn’ and experience an internal revolution, casting off their previous egotistical desires and bourgeois lifestyles. In a final peroration, Smirnov challenged revolutionary *intelligenty* to abandon egoism and narrow self-interest:

Let them go to the factory, the workshop; let them be convinced by their own experiences, and that beside each of them be placed the inscription - ‘abandon hope all that enter here.’ Let them see with their own eyes how value is created and how only its producers, the workers, are slowly dying, exhausted by continuous labour.... Let them hear with their own ears the monotonous, heart rending cries of the endless and worthless suffering of working people. Let them trudge with tired feet to a hovel at the edge of town, to a cellar or an attic, a night shelter – let them pass hours outside with those who are diseased and who hide like destitute swine. Let them peep into taverns, eating houses where they take the last kopeks remaining after high fines from worker’s wages, where they take from the destitute their half-kopeks and in the absence of these their rags. Let them experience what the so-called life of working people is like.⁸²

Whilst Smirnov’s article can be read in part as an anticipation of the ‘*khozhdenie v narod*’, it also reflected a tendency of some revolutionaries to work as manual workers. During the 1870s the number of *intelligenty* working in factories would increase, with a number including Andrei Presniakov emerging as leading activists in the Petersburg workers’ organisation. For Petersburg *zavodskie* workers, in the mid-1870s seeking to resurrect their organisation, Smirnov’s strictures on the nature of *intelligenty* revolutionaries must have struck a chord, echoing the opinion of Dmitrii Smirnov that workers knew that ‘*students on*

⁸² Ibid, p.150.

completing their courses of study would be enticed away to the public feast and forget everything they said to us.’⁸³

Warnings regarding the potentially duplicitous nature of the *intelligenty* doubtless fuelled worker mistrust of the intelligentsia whilst the availability of *Vpered!* familiarised them with workers’ struggles in other countries and German Social Democracy provided them with an organisational model. Acquaintance with models from abroad was strengthened by the return of Viktor Obnorskii to Petersburg in late 1874 who brought firsthand accounts of developments in social-democratic movements in the west.⁸⁴ On his return, Obnorskii worked at the Semiannikov factory where he discussed ‘*the unjust and oppressive actions of government*’ and the necessity for workers to challenge the government and create a new social order based on equality.⁸⁵

The Revival of the Workers’ Organisation

In winter 1875, the Patronnyi factory worker Dmitrii Smirnov rented a large room on Vasil’evskii Island that acted as a conspiratorial centre for the re-emerging workers’ organisation. On his release from prison on 9th February 1876, Semen Volkov moved into Smirnov’s apartment and resumed work at the Patronnyi factory. Volkov recalled that shortly after his release he attended a meeting at Finnskii Bay at which over 100 workers met with the *zemlevol’tsy* Natanson and Plekhanov.⁸⁶ Plekhanov recounted that by this time propaganda assumed a broad character across Petersburg and outlying industrial suburbs.⁸⁷ Immediately after Volkov’s release from prison, a major meeting between *zavodskie* workers and representatives of the two *intelligenty* tendencies, the Lavrovist ‘*preparationists*’ and the Bakunist *buntarists*, took place.⁸⁸ From Plekhanov’s description of this meeting, it is clear that the workers were assessing the suitability of different *intelligenty* groups for future work with their emerging organisation. Plekhanov characterised the workers attending as the best and most influential worker-revolutionaries, testifying that they rejected the *buntarists* and reacted angrily when it was suggested that ‘propaganda’ lacked revolutionary substance. Volkov declared that it was disgraceful that

⁸³ D.N. Smirnov, 1975, p.158.

⁸⁴ V.I. Nevskii, ‘Viktor Pavlovich Obnorskii,’ *Istoriko revoliutsionnykh sbornik, T.III*, 1926, pp.16-18; *Deiateli....., T.III*, 1061-1063.

⁸⁵ ‘Accusatory Indictment in the Case of Kronshhtadt meshanin Viktor Obnorskii, P.N. Peterson and the Tver peasant Ia.P. Smirnov, 31 May 1880,’ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. III, Ch. 2*, pp.260-268.

⁸⁶ S.K. Volkov, 1975, p.147.

⁸⁷ G.V. Plekhanov, *Sochineniia, Tom III*, p.147.

⁸⁸ E.A. Korol’chuk, 1946 for a convincing dating of this meeting.

intelligenty said such things, pointedly reminding them that they ‘*had studied through five classes*’ [completed their secondary education] while many workers were still ‘*unable even to open a school door.*’ Continuing, Volkov emphasised the importance of education for workers, declaring that without knowledge life is impossible. Another Patronnyi worker declared that little would be achieved if workers remained uneducated.⁸⁹ The meeting agreed a compromise, the Lavrovists would continue propaganda activity but that workers would be ‘supportive’ of attempts at more direct forms of agitation amongst the workers when conditions allowed. It is clear that the *zavodskie* workers wished above all else to promote knowledge acquisition amongst its members, hence their preference for propaganda, but kept their options open and were prepared to utilise *intelligenty* from either faction in pursuit of their aspiration to create a workers’ organisation.

The establishment of a definite workers’ organisation has conventionally been dated to late 1877, when Stepan Khalturin and Viktor Obnorskii merged a number of disparate workers’ groups across the city.⁹⁰ Yet there is compelling evidence that a city-wide workers’ organisation existed as early as winter 1875-76. Official documents relating to a group named the ‘*Obshchestvo Druzei,*’ operating in Petersburg from late 1875 through to 1877, indicate that an active workers’ centre was operating independently from the *intelligenty* propagandists in the city.⁹¹ From statements of workers accused in connection with this group, it is apparent that from April 1876 a focal point for the activities of *zavodskie* workers was the room of the Baltic Shipyard worker Anton Karpov where workers from all districts of the capital including Smirnov, Volkov, Ivanainen, Iakovlev, Obruchnikov, Shkalov, Forsman, Presniakov, Shmidt, Lisin and the Peterson brothers attended regular meetings. Karpov’s wife testified that her husband met with up to 20 workers every Sunday to read revolutionary literature including *Vpered!* At the first meeting in Karpov’s room, workers agreed to establish a library with Smirnov and Volkov being assigned responsibility for this venture and members agreeing to pay 1 rouble each month. In essence, this represented a reconstitution of the previous workers’ fund and library that had been a central feature of the *zavodskie* workers’ organisation during 1873-1874 and was the direct successor to the central workers’ group that had developed by March 1874,

⁸⁹ G.V. Plekhanov, *Sochineniia, Tom III*, 1923, pp.130-131.

⁹⁰ Cf. Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, 1966, Chapter 19, The Working Class Movement, pp. 538ff; E.A. Korol’chuk, 1946, 1971. A typical Soviet chronology was set out in *Istoriia rabochikh Leningrada, Tom I*, where it is asserted that Khalturin and Obnorskii in the autumn of 1877 created the Northern Union of Russian Workers. Leningrad, 1972, p.160.

⁹¹ Information on this alleged Society and the role of the workers within it can be found in ‘Zakliuchenie prokurora Peterburgskoi sudebnoi palaty Fuksa, po delu ‘Obshchestvo druzei ot 10 dekabria 1877,’ in *Istoriiko-revoliutsionnyi sbornik, T.III*, 1926, pp.63-107.

consisting as it did of a number of the *zavodskie* activists from 1872-74 who were associated with a network of circles across the capital.⁹²

This group was also the direct forebear of the Northern Union of Russian Workers. In one of the earliest articles on the Union, Vladimir Burtsev claimed it was established in late 1877 by a core group of Aleksei Peterson, Volkov, Smirnov, Vinogradov, Vasilii Miaznikov, Bachin, and Obnorskii. If it was these named *zavodskie* workers who formed the nucleus of the Union, then this could only have occurred between September and November 1876, as Bachin only returned to Petersburg from exile in September, Volkov and Smirnov were rearrested in November 1876 and were not at liberty during the whole of 1877, whilst Obnorskii went abroad for a second time also in November 1876.⁹³ A further indication that 1876 saw the formation of the Union is contained in Volkov's memoir where he recalled that during his eight months at liberty in Petersburg in 1876 with Obnorskii, Khalturin, and other workers he was involved in establishing the Northern Union.⁹⁴ This dating is also confirmed in an article on Bachin that cites a letter from Obnorskii to Lavrov stating that during winter 1876 Petersburg *zavodskie* workers '*formed a federation amongst themselves, with an elected central council, entirely independent from the intelligentsia.*'⁹⁵

Plekhanov recalled that in 1876 experienced revolutionary workers known as '*the elders*' had formed the core of a workers' organisation. These 'elders' vetted *intelligenty*-propagandists and operated on a strict conspiratorial basis. Plekhanov continues:

*The guidance of local workers' circles.... was the responsibility of a centrally selected workers' group. The intelligentsia did not interfere in the matter of these local circles, restricting itself to supplying them with literature and assistance, arranging secret rooms for meetings. Each local circle through its own forces recruited new members, who were informed that other similar circles existed in Petersburg, but where was known only to members of the central workers' nucleus, who met every Sunday at a general meeting.*⁹⁶

⁹² See Karpov's testimony in *ibid*, pp.79-86.

⁹³ See *Deiateli....T.II, stb.92-93,216-2217; Deiateli..., T.III, 1060-63,1530-32. 1981-82*; V.I. Nevskii, 'Viktor Pavlovich Obnorskii,' in *Istoriko revoliutsionnykh sbornik, T.III, 1926.*

⁹⁴ S.N. Volkov, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.148.

⁹⁵ G. Golosov, 'K biografii odnogo is osnovatelei Severnogo-russkogo rabocheho soiuzha,' *Katorga i Ssylka*, No.6 (13), 1924, p.56.

⁹⁶ G.V. Plekhanov, *Sochineniia, Tom III, 1923, p.148.*

From the above, there can be little doubt that the ‘*central workers’ nucleus*’ was the group that met every Sunday in Karpov’s room on Vasil’evskii Island that quickly evolved into the famous Northern Union of Russian Workers. By establishing this earlier formation and activities of a Petersburg workers’ organisation, it is possible to trace direct continuity between the first groups of *zavodskie* workers operating at the Patronnyi factories from the early 1870s through to the very end of the decade. Such a reassessment of the longevity and influence of the Petersburg *zavodskie* workers’ organisation introduces a radically new dimension in the historiography of the Northern Union enabling it to be seen as the culmination of a lengthy period of worker self-organisation from the early 1870s.

Workers’ statements in the case of the ‘*Obshchestvo družei*’ and memoir accounts enables an exploration of the evolving relationship between leading workers and different *intelligenty* factions. Although *buntarist zemlevol’tsy* were involved with workers, the latter rejected their revolutionary schematic. One worker told the police that workers refused to accept a proposal from Mark Natanson, a leading member of Zemlia i Volia, that they go the countryside to foment discontent and as a result the workers ‘*wished to end relations with Natanson as he was irritating them with his suggestions that they engage in rebellion.*’⁹⁷ In contrast, *zemlevol’tsy* who emphasised propaganda amongst urban workers and spoke of the workers’ movements abroad received a sympathetic hearing.⁹⁸ In fact in a sophisticated management the *intelligenty*, workers played *zemlevol’tsy* against Lavrovists to achieve the type of propaganda they required. This is confirmed by the *zemlevol’tsev* Rusanov who recalled that on one occasion he attended a workers’ meeting with a Lavrovist acquaintance. A short time later, he went with a *zemlevol’tsev* to what he thought was a different workers’ group only to discover that it was the same group of workers he had previously visited with his Lavrovist friend. Rusanov deduced ‘*that both Lavrovists and buntarists were simultaneously engaged with these workers. The ‘intelligent’ workers.... were not perturbed at this state of affairs and were perfectly happy with such competition between the propagandists.*’⁹⁹

The autonomy exercised by the Petersburg workers’ organisation by 1876 enables a reassessment of what has been conventionally seen as one of the most emblematic moments in the emergence of the Russian working-class movement, the Kazan Square

⁹⁷ ‘Zakliuchenie prokurora Peterburgskoi sudebnoi palaty Fuksa, po delu ‘Obshchestvo družei ot 10 dekabria 1877,’ in *Istoriko-revoliutsionnyi sbornik, T.III*, 1926, p.106.

⁹⁸ N.S. Rusanov, *Iz moikh vospominanii*, Berlin, 1923, p.153.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p.124.

Demonstration of 6th December 1876. In autumn 1876, *zemlevol'tsy* and the central workers' group discussed staging a demonstration at Kazan Cathedral involving *intelligenty* and workers. Plekhanov claims that the suggestion for this came from workers, but Karpov's testimony to the police is unambiguous that the suggestion originated with *zemlevol'tsy* to show support for imprisoned radicals.¹⁰⁰ Following initial discussions with workers, the *zemlevol'tsy* proceeded with the organisation of the proposed demonstration with a final decision taken only on the evening before the demonstration. Petr Moiseenko, a textile worker involved in this meeting, recalled:

*At the meeting there were many intelligentsia, and almost no workers. Much was said and argued, especially by Plekhanov and Bogoliubov.... They [the intelligentsia] decided to proceed with the demonstration. They gave us [workers] an order, to gather as many people as possible. But a misunderstanding or error occurred. Some comrades were notified, that [the demonstration would take place] in Isaakievskii cathedral, so that at the Kazan demonstration there were not more than 300 people.*¹⁰¹

Contrary to standard Soviet accounts, the demonstration was poorly attended by workers with the overwhelming majority of leading *zavodskie* workers choosing not to attend perceiving that this was a deliberately conceived *buntarist* provocation that could destroy their fragile organisation.¹⁰² Although generally portrayed as a demonstration showing increasing awareness amongst Petersburg workers, the events of 6th December 1876 had little to do with the emerging workers' organisation.¹⁰³

An insight into workers' attitudes following the Kazan Square demonstration and their determination to develop on their own initiative is found in correspondence to *Vpered!* written a few days after 6th December 1876. The unknown correspondent, whose informant was 'an *intelligenty* worker from the circles', relates that Petersburg workers viewed the *intelligenty* with severe suspicion and that workers are 'sick to death with

¹⁰⁰ 'Zakliuchenie prokurora....' in *Istoriko-revoliutsionnyi sbornik, T.III*, 1926, pp.92, 94.

¹⁰¹ P.A. Moiseenko, *Vospominaniia starogo revoliutsionera*, Moscow, 1966, p.19.

¹⁰² *Istoriia rabochikh Leningrada, Tom I*, claims that around 250 workers attended [p.157], whilst Venturi cites a similar number. It is likely that no more than 40 actual factory workers, including a sizable contingent from the Baltic Shipyards associated with Plekhanov, attended with the vast majority of participants coming from the radical *intelligenty* and student bodies. This assertion can be justified by an examination of the estate status of those arrested and tried in connection with the demonstration, around 75% were *intelligenty* and only six workers. See Pamela Sears McKinsey, 'The Kazan Square Demonstration and the Conflict Between Russian Workers and *Intelligenty*,' *Slavic Review*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 1985, pp.83-103.

¹⁰³ On the background to the demonstration and the events on the day see E.A. Korol'chuk, [ed.], *Pervaia rabochaia demonstratsiia v Rossii*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1927.

squabbles and discord between the parties; they are fed up with being blind tools in the hands of the propagandists or buntovshchikov, who try to outdo each other and to play a leading role in all matters' The correspondent continued:

amongst themselves workers have formed a type of federation with an elected and central sovet, entirely independent of links with them [the intelligenty], following only their own path. This opinion was reinforced following the 'Kazanki.' By now it had become clear to leading Petersburg workers that involvement of the intelligenty was a hindrance to their development. The workers concluded on the basis of the Kazan Square fiasco which they regarded as an attempt by the buntarists to orchestrate a 'putsch' and which they claim as a mockery to call it a socialist demonstration, that henceforth demonstrations should be prepared ... on different principles, on issues relevant to workers and in workers' districts, with broader causes and without interference of the intelligentsia.

Even more significant is the assertion that the intelligentsia was seen as having a 'corrupting influence' on workers, showing contempt for them by their 'pressure' to persuade them to return to the countryside to agitate amongst the peasantry.¹⁰⁴

By now, the mere thought of going to work amongst the peasantry was anathema to *zavodskie* workers' groups. A strong expression of this was found in the statements of Ignatii Bachin. Following arrest in 1874, Bachin spent two years in prison and then returned to his village to renew his passport. His experience in his native village reinforced his alienation and rejection of the countryside. During 1877 Bachin went to Rostov-on-Don where he sought to persuade workers to form an independent workers' federation in alliance with the Petersburg workers' organisation, telling them that Petersburg workers were in charge of their own affairs and denounced the intelligentsia as 'an abnormal phenomenon' in the workers' environment who must never be leaders of the workers' movement.¹⁰⁵

Following the Kazan Square demonstration, Zemlia i Volia in Petersburg was seriously weakened, with Natanson remaining as the only member of the organisation with contacts

¹⁰⁴ *From the Archives of Valerian Nikolaevich Smirnov*, ed., Boris Sapir, T.II, Documents [D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht-Holland], [1970]. Appendix 6. Document: 'The Kazan Demonstration' [Unpublished correspondence, 1877], pp.520-521.

¹⁰⁵ M.R. Popov, 'Iz moego revoliutsionnogo proshlogo', *Byloe*, May 1907, p.292.

amongst workers. Responding to a complaint that workers would not meet with him, Andrei Presniakov now involved in the workers' centre angrily declared that *'we do not need you' [the intelligenty].'*¹⁰⁶ Despite this expression of worker confidence, police pursuing leads from Kazan Square had started to arrest leading workers, resulting in the case of the *'Obshchestvo druzei.'* In May 1877, Presniakov wrote in an unsophisticated coded letter:

*there is panic amongst us [workers] – our spirits are low due to frequent outbreaks of typhus. N... [the worker Kuznetsov] has become seriously ill, and three others quickly followed him to hospital, and the next day three or four more.... There is a rumour that there is an ulcer [traitor] within the society who has caused all this. I also have one foot in the grave, bloodhounds are on my scent.*¹⁰⁷

Presniakov revealed continuing tensions between workers and *intelligenty*-propagandists [who he contemptuously refers to as 'the generals'] declaring that *a 'struggle is being waged against the generals; our forces are uniting and ... the generals are in hiding, reluctant to show themselves.'* Reiterating the comments in the letter to *Vpered!* in the aftermath of Kazan Square, Presniakov continued that there were many workers demanding *'the complete banishment of the generals in view of the fact that they corrupt both individuals and the common cause.'*¹⁰⁸

Towards Worker Militancy.

Arrests following the Kazan Square demonstration had an unexpected consequence of bringing one section of workers closer to a group within Zemlia i Volia advocating violence against police spies and informers. In response to increasing police surveillance, in spring 1877 Presniakov along with several worker associates formed a special *'Rabochii Komitet'* to combat police informers. In May 1877 one of Presniakov's associates, Arkhipov-Korsikov, told the worker Egorov that they knew who the spies were and that they would be dealt with. Not long after this Egorov was arrested and was reluctant to cooperate with the police as Korsikov had warned workers that if any of them *'blabbed'* they would get a bullet in the head. This message was reinforced in the most graphic way when

¹⁰⁶ 'Zakliuchenie prokurora.....' in *Istoriko-revoliutsionnyi sbornik, T.III, 1926, p.89.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid, pp.77-78.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid, p.78.*

on 19th July 1877 Sharashkin who had been identified as a police informer [*the ulcer*] was stabbed to death by members of the Komitet and his body dumped in the Neva. ¹⁰⁹



A.K. Presniakov

The emergence of this militant workers' group led to a rapprochement between sections of the workers' organisation and the *zemlevol'tsy* who around the same time organised a '*Disorganisatovskaia grupp*a' to free arrested revolutionaries and as a defence against spies and traitors. ¹¹⁰ This second aim coincided with the objectives of the '*Rabochii Komitet*' and during 1877 through the *zemlevol'tsev* student Nikolai Tiutchev the two groups effectively merged into a single '*boevyi druzhina*' focusing activities on eliminating police spies within the workers' environment. ¹¹¹ In August 1877 a police agent, reported that at the Baltic shipyards a worker informed him pointedly that as regards '*the wolves [police agents] who betray workers, they [the Komitet] had a single aim – to kill the wolves, after which they would deal with the government.*' ¹¹² In October 1877, Presniakov and Tiutchev murdered another police agent, Kir Belanov. ¹¹³

Despite threats of reprisals, the police succeeded in turning some workers to betray their comrades involved in propaganda activities. One such worker was the Baltic Shipyard worker Ivan Grossman who was arrested for being implicated in the killing of Belanov. Grossman made a full confession and in return for immunity became an informer

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, pp.88-89.

¹¹⁰ O.V. Aptekman, *Obshchestvo 'Zemlia i Volia' 70-kh gg*, 1924, pp.195-197.

¹¹¹ N.S. Tiutchev, *Revoliutsionnoe dvizheniia 1870-1878 gg. [Stat'i po arkhivnym materialam.]* Redaktsiia A.V. Pribyleva. Moscow 1925, pp.16-17.

¹¹² Ibid, p.23.

¹¹³ *Deiateli...., T.III*, stb. 1772-1775; *Stanovlenie revoliutsionnykh traditsii peterskogo proletariata*, [ed.], A.N. Tsamutali, 1987, pp.267-268.

providing the police with information that led to the arrest of Presniakov and Tiutchev. His treachery was suspected by workers at the Baltic shipyards who threatened to take revenge since 'one of our best comrades [Tiutchev] has been taken.'¹¹⁴ Although the 'boevyi druzhina' was seriously weakened, it did succeed in April 1878 in effecting Presniakov's escape from custody. Presniakov and many of the workers involved in the *druzhina* would later find a more conducive home for their activities in Narodnaia Volia, indicative of continuity from one section of the Petersburg workers' organisation into the organised terrorist struggle of the period 1879 to 1881. A leading historian of Narodnaia Volia observed that self-defensive struggles by Petersburg workers in 1877 provided an example to later *narodovol'tsy* and served as the model for Zheliabov's 'rabochii druzhiny.'¹¹⁵ In some sense the violent response of workers reflected a more militant mood within the worker's organisation resulting from a significant change in the personal composition of the organisation as towards the end of 1876/beginning of 1877 many original members were replaced by younger and less patient spirits.

Despite the change in personnel, the Patronnyi factory on Vasil'evskii Island remained at the centre of the development of the workers' organisation. In autumn 1877, the Patronnyi workers' group was led by Karl Ivanainen, Anton Gorodnich, Semen Ievlev, and Dmitrii Churkin. This experienced group was joined by the *zemlevol'tsev* Nikolai Tiutchev who according to the III Section in autumn 1877 abandoned his studies and took a job at the factory as a timekeeper.¹¹⁶ On 7th December 1877, an explosion at the factory killed four workers and seriously injured many more, two of whom died the following day.¹¹⁷ Following the explosion, the workers responded angrily and the factory circle drafted a proclamation indicting management for a callous disregard for workers' safety. Through Tiutchev, this proclamation was quickly printed on the *zemlevol'tsy* printing press and copies distributed around the factory.¹¹⁸

Subsequent events demonstrate the manner in which leading workers used the *intelligent* radicals in pursuit of their own objectives. The injured workers had been taken to the

¹¹⁴ N.S. Tiutchev, 1925, p.24.

¹¹⁵ S S Valk, *Narodnaia Volia*, Moscow, 1966, pp.284-285.

¹¹⁶ *Deiateli...., T. II*, stb. 301, 479-81, 508; *Deiateli...., T.III*, stb. 1980-81; Tiutchev, 1925; Bortnik, *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1928.

¹¹⁷ G.V. Plekhanov, *Sochineniia, Tom III*, pp.155ff.

¹¹⁸ This leaflet drawn up by the workers was entitled 'To the Workers of the Patronnyi factory from Comrades.' A second leaflet written by Plekhanov entitled 'To the Workers of the Patronnyi factory' appeared some days later. Both documents are reprinted in *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom II, Chast 2*, pp.206-208.

Tuchkov hospital where they received poor care, with the injured being left outside in extreme cold. Khalturin, emerging as a leading worker organiser, visited the hospital after which he went to the Patronnyi factory and discussed with the factory circle how workers should respond. The Patronnyi circle proposed a demonstration at the funeral in line with the sentiment expressed in the letter to *Vpered!* following the Kazan Square demonstration that future worker demonstrations should reflect ‘*issues relevant to workers and in workers’ districts, with broader causes and without the interference of the intelligentsia.*’

¹¹⁹ The workers discussed their intentions with both Lavrovists and *zemlevol'tsy* and were aggrieved that their closest Lavrovist allies cautioned against a demonstration. Undeterred the workers went ahead and invited several *zemlevol'tsy* including the later leading narodovol'tsev Valerian Ossinski to attend the funerals on the Sunday following the explosion. A large crowd of workers and representatives from workers’ circles across the city marched to the cemetery being joined on route by a handful of *zemlevol'tsy* who were subject to some abuse from workers due to their ‘bourgeois’ dress and demeanour. ¹²⁰ It was estimated that over 1000 workers attended, with a Patronnyi worker delivering an oration which pointedly drew attention to the fact that ‘*today we are burying six of our dead, who were not killed by the Turks but by our so called protective authorities.*’ ¹²¹

The Incorporation of Fabrichnye Workers into the Workers’ Organisation

As the decade developed the Petersburg workers’ organisation sought to develop contacts with workers in textile factories. Contacts between the *zavodskie* and *fabrichnye* workers are evident from the case of the ‘*Obshchestvo druzei*’ which indicates that at the first organisational meeting of the reformed *zavodskie* workers’ group held in Karpov’s room in April 1876 four textile workers from the Thornton factory were present. After this however, these textile workers appear not to have been directly involved, perhaps feeling intimidated by the greater knowledge and experience of the *zavodskie* representatives. ¹²²

A sense of the textile workers involvement in radical workers’ circles in the mid-1870s can also be gleaned from the memoirs of the worker-revolutionary Petr Moiseenko, a peasant from Smolensk *guberniia*, who arrived in Petersburg in the summer of 1874 having already

¹¹⁹ *Vpered!, 1873-1877 [From the Archives of Valerian Nikolaevich Smirnov]*, pp.520-521.

¹²⁰ G.V. Plekhanov, *Sochineniia*, T. III, 1923, p.156.

¹²¹ The funeral took place during the Russo-Turkish War and at these words the police and factory guards attempted to seize the speaker but a crowd of workers formed a shield around the speaker who escaped. [*Krasanaia letopis'*, 1928, No.2 [26], pp.202-203; Plekhanov, *Sochineniia* T.III, 1923, pp.156-157.]

¹²² ‘*Zakliuchenie prokurora.....*’ in *Istoriko-revoliutsionnyi sbornik*, T.III, 1926, p.89.

shed his religious beliefs through observing the dissolute behaviour of monks and exposure to illegal literature whilst working in textile factories in Orekhov-Zuevo in the early 1870s. From the time of his arrival in Petersburg, Moiseenko was involved with textile workers in a *zemliachestvo* of Smolensk workers who had previously been exposed to radical propaganda.¹²³ Shortly after beginning work at the Shaw factory in the Narvskii Gate, Moiseenko became involved in a strike at the factory.¹²⁴ Moiseenko quickly became involved in illegal meetings held in the rooms of radical students, one of whom was the then student Andrei Presniakov. A little later, Moiseenko relates that the *intelligenty* set up a 'special circle' for young textile workers in the Narvskii Gate indicating propaganda work amongst the textile workers through 1875/1876.¹²⁵



Petr Moiseenko

It was through these *intelligenty* contacts that Moiseenko became involved with active members of the Petersburg *zavodskie* workers' organisation. In addition, to Presniakov, Moiseenko was also in contact with workers involved in the central workers' group that met in Karpov's room on Vasil'evskii Island during 1876 indicating a connection between textile workers and the leading *zavodskie* centre.¹²⁶ The importance that Moiseenko was beginning to assume as a conduit between *zavodskie* workers and textile workers can be gauged from the fact that Presniakov invited him, along with his comrade Pavel Fedorov who worked at the New Cotton Mills on the Obvodnyi Canal, to attend the meeting

¹²³ P.A. Moiseenko, *Vospominaniia starogo revoliutsionera*, Moscow, 1966, pp.15-17.

¹²⁴ For a description of the strike at the Shaw factory in November 1874 see the article in *Vpered! 1 May 1875*, No.8, p.240.

¹²⁵ P.A. Moiseenko, 1966, pp.17-18.

¹²⁶ 'Zakliuchenie prokurora.....' in *Istoriko-revoliutsionnyi sbornik, T.III*, 1926, pp.64-68.

between *intelligenty* and workers on the eve of the Kazan Square demonstration. Following the meeting, Moiseenko and Fedorov were delegated to encourage as many of their fellow workers as possible to attend the demonstration.¹²⁷

Moiseenko's memoirs also reveal the development of an influential textile workers' group active during 1877 involved in self-education circles, reading amongst other items Petr Alekseev's and Sofia Bardina's speeches at the Trial of the 50.¹²⁸ Moiseenko claims that he criticised the *intelligenty* propagandists involved with the circle, asserting that workers were being given simple material to study, resulting in the *intelligenty* being told that workers needed more advanced and serious books to read.¹²⁹ Towards the end of 1877, representatives from textile workers' circles from various districts met. Four of the workers specifically mentioned in Moiseenko's memoirs as attending this meeting had a lengthy involvement in workers' radical circles demonstrating continuity with earlier workers' activities and the emergence of a leadership cadre within the textile workers of the capital.¹³⁰ What is perhaps most significant is that the initiative for this meeting came from the Northern Union and involved Khalturin and Obnorskii and that it occurred immediately before the first major textile strike in the capital since 1870. The meeting provides evidence that the Union was already in close dialogue with textile workers' groups and engaged in a process to involve them in the *zavodskie* workers' organisation.

The Workers' Organisation and the Petersburg Textile Strikes of 1878-1879.

Around the time *zavodskie* workers were incorporating textile worker-representatives into their organisation, the management at the New Cotton Mills on the Obvodnyi Canal introduced revised work practices resulting in significant wage reductions and deterioration in conditions of work. These changes provided an entry for the workers' organisation to become involved in a mass struggle of textile workers. Moiseenko claims that the Union, aware of growing discontent, directed him to work at the Mills and incite workers to strike. Although Moiseenko perhaps over-states his role in the outbreak of the strike, it is possible

¹²⁷ P.A. Moiseenko, 1966, p.19 and 'Revoliutsionnoe dvizheniia 1870-1879 sredi rabochikh Peterburga,' in *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.168-169; the latter being originally published in *Letopis' revoliutsii*, Kharkov, 1923, providing some material not contained in Moiseenko's memoirs.]

¹²⁸ P.A. Moiseenko, 1975, p.175.

¹²⁹ P.A. Moiseenko, 1966, p.22.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, p.23. At the meeting were Moiseenko and Abramnikov [a veteran from the Diakov circles] representing workers from the Obvodnyi Canal, whilst Shtripan-Savel'ev [aka. Ivanov] and Aleksei Fedorov [both of whom had been in contact with the Chaikovkists] represented the workers from the Narvskii Gate factories.

to detect the hand of the workers' organisation in 'encouraging' an already discontented workforce to strike.¹³¹

On 27th February 1878, many Mill workers refused to work and the next day the entire workforce went on strike, an action that in the view of the Petersburg Governor was provoked by new English management's inability to communicate with workers and the imposition of a 25% wage reduction.¹³² From the outset, the strikers appear to have had a plan of action that eschewed violence, a set of coherent demands and a determination to present these to the Tsarevich at the Anchikov Palace.¹³³ It has been customary to regard this latter as an indication of a naive peasant-worker belief in the beneficial nature of the imperial family who on becoming aware of the workers' demands would institute remedial action. Yet, it is evident that the workers, having drawn up their demands, introduced the petition to force concessions. When the workers' demands were rejected, they immediately threatened to take their grievances to the Tsarevich, causing the Governor to persuade management to make concessions to placate the workers. A contemporary account of the strike describes a planned escalation of the dispute that belies any notion that this was a spontaneous act of supplication to the royal family.

Management initially refused to discuss worker grievances but when they indicated that they intended to petition the Tsarevich the Petersburg Governor, Kozlov, quickly visited the factory to persuade the crowd to disperse, telling them their demands would be met if they selected a small number of delegates for negotiations. An understanding was reached between workers and Kozlov and they abandoned their plan to march on the Palace.¹³⁴

As a result of Kozlov's intervention, management were 'leant on' to make concessions that satisfied the workers who agreed to return to work.¹³⁵ The truce brokered by Kozlov however, quickly unravelled as management reneged on the agreement resulting in further work-stoppages. Disturbances at the factory were reported by the Minister of Internal Affairs on 9th March with incitement by some workers to persuade others not to work. Amongst the workers detained in connection with this were two workers with a long history of involvement in radical circles, Aleksei Fedorov, who had attended the textile

¹³¹ Ibid, pp.23-24.

¹³² *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom II, Chast 2*, pp.220-221.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid, pp.222-223.

¹³⁵ Ibid, p.223.

workers meeting with Obnorskii and Khalturin, and Semen Vasil'ev who had been involved with *zemlevol'tsy* propagandists in Samara in early 1877.¹³⁶ Increasingly alarmed, the authorities instructed management to notify workers of improved conditions of work. When this was issued however, it proposed only minor improvements for spinners with virtually no concessions to weavers resulting in a resumption of the strike on 13th March.¹³⁷

On 16th March, the strikers marched to the Anichkov Palace to present their grievances to the Tsarevich. Outside the Palace they were met by Governor Kozlov and a large contingent of police.¹³⁸ Moiseenko later recounted his discussion with Kozlov, a discussion that reveals the breakdown of dialogue between the authorities and workers. Kozlov ordered the workers to disperse, return to work, declaring that the Tsarevich could not help them. Moiseenko, acting the traditional role of supplicant, responded saying that the workers had come in good faith '*to beg for their needs to be met*' as they were starving and could not live under oppressive factory owners. Peremptorily dismissing this plea, the Governor suggested that if workers were dissatisfied they should find work in other factories, and, after Moiseenko had pointed out that conditions were the same in other factories, Kozlov advised the workers to return to their villages. In what was becoming a circular discussion, Moiseenko responded that workers had left their villages because of hardship, to earn money to support their families and pay taxes. Growing impatient at the audacity of a worker to bandy words with a representative of the regime, Kozlov ordered Moiseenko's arrest. Taking the petition, Kozlov ordered the workers to disperse and, despite the arrest of their leader, the workers peacefully obeyed. After seeing the Tsarevich, Kozlov returned to Moiseenko and told him he was free to go reiterating that the Tsarevich could not help the workers. Signaling the collapse of dialogue between state power and the workers, Moiseenko said: '*if this is all you intelligent people have to tell workers then you have nothing to say to us.*' Moiseenko's final words to the Governor echoed sentiments expressed in the petition that declared that if their demands were not met workers would know '*that we have no one in whom we can hope, that no one will defend us, and that we must trust in ourselves and our own arms.*'¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Ibid, pp.225-226.

¹³⁷ Ibid, pp.228-229.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p.230.

¹³⁹ P.A. Moiseenko, 1975, pp.171-173.

Plekhanov observed that as a result of the strike many ‘*grey workers*’ concluded that the authorities were hand-in-glove with factory owners and would always protect the interests of the latter.¹⁴⁰ Kozlov concluded that although management was responsible for provoking the strike expressed concern that ‘*criminal propaganda had taken deep root amongst fabrichnye workers at this factory and that in the future it will be necessary to keep a vigilant watch on them.*’¹⁴¹ Police reports highlighted a student meeting at the Medical-Surgical Academy where students spoke of worker enthusiasm for subversive literature, including the works of Marx, and how these had ‘*produced indignation against the owners of the textile factories.*’¹⁴² If this seems slightly fanciful, it does find an echo in Plekhanov’s account where he noted that a leading worker at the factory [probably Moiseenko] at the beginning of the strike proudly, if somewhat incoherently, gave a lecture to workers on Marx’s theory of surplus value.

During the strike, the *zemlevol'tsy* published a proclamation addressed to all Petersburg workers. Since the language of the proclamation is simple and colloquial, it is probable that it was written by a member of the workers’ organisation, a suggestion reinforced by the similarity in its messages to the core messages in the Northern Union’s subsequent agitational literature. The leaflet opens with a recitation, not dissimilar to Moiseenko’s statement to the Governor, of the pressures that drive peasants to work in the factories where they are defenceless as factory bosses ruthlessly exploit them. Declaring that ‘*may the souls of the rich rot in hell,*’ the proclamation exhorts workers to join the union and act in concert as it is only through such action that they will escape ‘*the bondage of the bosses.*’ Comparing Kozlov’s recent duplicity in promising to improve the workers’ conditions, but renegeing on this, to tricks of a ‘*card shark*’, the proclamation concluded that through mutual support their cause will grow strong, ending with the simple message – ‘*Two in distress makes sorrow less!*’¹⁴³

There is little doubt that workers associated with workers’ organisation played a role in the strike giving it a direction generally absent in industrial conflicts at this time. Throughout, the strike was conducted peacefully, with Tsarist officials commenting on the unusual orderly behaviour of strikers. Although suspected informers were removed from taverns, a process no doubt involving threats, there are no reports of violence being used, the mere

¹⁴⁰ G.V. Plekhanov, *Sochineniia*, T.III, 1923, pp.160-170.

¹⁴¹ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke*, Tom II, Chast 2, p.231.

¹⁴² *Stanovlenie revoliutsionnykh traditsii peterskogo proletariata*, [ed.], A.N. Tsamutali, 1987, pp.220-221.

¹⁴³ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke*, Tom II, Chast 2, pp.238-239.

mention of the activities of the ‘*Rabochii Komitet*’ being probably sufficient to scare off informers. During the strike all decisions were taken by workers, from drawing up their demands, insisting on petitioning the Tsarevich, the initial negotiations with Kozlov, agitation for the strike’s continuation and the final workers’ march to the Anchikov Palace. Add to this, the likelihood that the proclamation was the product of the workers’ organisation, then it is possible to conclude that the strike represented its first involvement in a mass workers’ action. Workers were willing to enlist support from sympathetic *intelligenty* groups, in this case *Zemlia i Volia* to maximise financial support for the strikers and enable the printing of articles on the strike in underground newspapers. Information on the strike was sent to leading public figures as part of a wider strategy to win support in liberal circles. Finally, the impotence of the authorities to intervene to improve workers’ conditions demonstrated to workers that they should not expect any assistance from the regime. If this had been a primary objective of the Union, then it was an undoubted success and as Plekhanov recounted, after the strike workers wryly observed that going to see the heir was a waste of shoe leather.¹⁴⁴

Following the strike, workers at the New Cotton Mills were involved in sporadic unrest during the remainder of 1878.¹⁴⁵ As a result, Union activists renewed agitation, extending their network to include other factories in the Narvskii Gate and the nearby village of Ekateringof.¹⁴⁶ Moiseenko’s activities were noted in a report to the Third Section of 12th January 1879 detailing the activities a worker named Anismov [the name adopted by Moiseenko on his illegal return to Petersburg following his exile for involvement in the March 1878 strike] who arranged a meeting on 7th January of around 30 workers from various factories to discuss further strikes. Several workers involved were veterans of the workers’ movement and now active members of the Northern Union.¹⁴⁷

The dismissal of 44 weavers at the New Cotton Mills on 15th January for allegedly failing to meet production targets proved the final straw for workers who feared that management intended to replace adult male weavers with women and children to make the workforce more compliant and reduce costs.¹⁴⁸ At the news of the sackings many workers walked out, encouraged by young workers including Moiseenko and Luk Ivanov.¹⁴⁹ Eyewitness

¹⁴⁴ G.V. Plekhanov, *Sochineniia*, T.III, 1923, p.171

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.174; *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke*, Tom II, Chast 2, pp.234, 302

¹⁴⁶ P.A. Moiseenko, 1966, p.35.

¹⁴⁷ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke*, Tom II, Chast 2, pp.304-305.

¹⁴⁸ G.V. Plekhanov, *Sochineniia*, T.III, 1923, p.175.

¹⁴⁹ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke*, Tom II, Chast 2, pp. 332-334, 335.

reports suggest that agitators resorted to intimidation to induce some workers to strike and later to prevent others returning to work. Indeed, throughout the second strike intimidation and violence was never far from the surface. On 16th January, the police reported that Moiseenko delivered an inflammatory speech urging workers to ‘*kill and tear government agents to pieces.*’¹⁵⁰ Moiseenko concedes that there was an undercurrent of violence when he related that at a meeting with Khalturin and other leaders of the Union on 16th January he asked for weapons as the strike organisers felt at risk.¹⁵¹ Khalturin gave Moiseenko his own dagger and promised to supply other knives. Khalturin’s dagger would be wielded in earnest during a workers’ demonstration on 18th January when Moiseenko stabbed a policeman and official reports confirm many workers armed with knives attacking gendarmes.¹⁵²

Yet violence during the strike appears to have been targeted and part of a plan, indicating a degree of organisation. Immediately after the walk-out, strike leaders composed a list of demands including reinstatement of dismissed weavers, an increase in wages, reduction in the working day, abolition of deductions and the removal of a number of foremen who ‘abused workers.’¹⁵³ These demands were given by Moiseenko to a Lavrovist *intelligent* for publication in a Union proclamation to all Petersburg workers informing them of the strike and seeking support.¹⁵⁴ Following this, strike leaders contacted neighbouring factories to incite workers to join the strike, resulting in workers from the nearby Shaw factory coming out on strike with almost identical demands.¹⁵⁵ By the 17th January, the authorities were concerned that strike contagion could affect factories across the city. Fearing the spread of the strikes, Chief of Police Ridinger requested permission to deploy troops in factory districts to disperse crowds of workers suspected of fomenting further disorders, a tactic that appears to have prevented workers at the Ekateringoskii works joining the strike.¹⁵⁶

Despite this show of force, the organisers remained intent on spreading the strike. On receiving the printed proclamation, strike leaders began its dissemination across the city.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ P.A. Moiseenko, 1966, p.36.

¹⁵² *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom II, Chast 2*, pp.313-14, pp.333-34.

¹⁵³ G.V. Plekhanov, *Sochineniia, T.III*, 1923, p.175; Moiseenko, 1966, p.35; *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom II, Chast 2*, Testominy of Abakumov.

¹⁵⁴ ‘Ot tkachei Novoi bumagopryadil’ni, chto na novoi kanave, k rabochim vsekh fabrik i zavodov’, January 16 1879, reprinted in *Byloe*, 1906, No.1, pp.183-184.

¹⁵⁵ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom II, Chast 2*, pp.319-322, pp.351-356; Moiseenko, 1966, pp.36-38.

¹⁵⁶ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom II, Chast 2*, pp.323-327, 312, 321.

When an active member of the Union from the Sampsonievskii factory on the Vyborg Side, was arrested on 18th January he was found in possession of 34 copies of the proclamation.¹⁵⁷ In a statement to the police, one worker described how Moiseenko issued the proclamation to groups of workers directing them to incite workers to strike. Luk Ivanov [Abramenkov] and other workers from the New Cotton Mills took copies to the Maksvel textile works in the Nevskii Gate where they pasted copies on the factory walls and incited local workers. Other workers on the Vyborg Side took advantage of the fear of strikes to win improvements in their conditions of labour, workers at the Cheshher factory gaining 3 kopeks per piece on their piece rates.¹⁵⁸ Ridinger reported to the Governor that worker unrest on the Vyborg Side had resulted from a delegation of striking workers and reinforced his request to deploy military forces to prevent any further ‘copycat’ actions.¹⁵⁹



Leaflet of Northern Union to All Petersburg Workers

Strike leaders sought to repeat a demonstration at the Tsarevich’s Palace. Several workers testified that this proposal came from Moiseenko and three ‘unknown’ workers who had arrived at the factory bringing the ‘weapons’ promised by Khalturin. On 17th January, several hundred workers attempted to march towards the city centre along the Fontanke but were met by a large force of police who forcibly broke up the protest with many workers injured and over 50 arrested, although Moiseenko and other strike leaders escaped after offering fierce resistance.¹⁶⁰ The following day, the authorities arrested the ringleaders and a number of *intelligenty* supporters. The most significant arrests took place in the Kolomenskii district where the police broke up a delegate meeting of 14 textile workers

¹⁵⁷ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom II, Chast 2*, pp.351-356.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, pp.334-336; G.V. Plekhanov, *Sochineniia, T.III*, 1923, p.177.

¹⁵⁹ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom II, Chast 2*, pp.323-327.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, pp.313-314; P.A. Moiseenko, 1966, p.39; G.V. Plekhanov, *Sochineniia, T.III*, 1923 p.178.

from factories across the city that had been convened by Moiseenko to extend the strikes. Amongst the items discovered at this meeting were explosives, daggers, and proclamations including the address to the Tsarevich. The discovery of explosives is an indication that workers were contemplating more direct forms of action, perhaps in imitation of the wave of terror attacks by *zemlevol'tsy* on senior government personnel that had begun during 1878 and provides further evidence that some workers were prepared to embrace terror, a path that a number would actively take in late 1879 when workers who survived the police purge on the Union joined Narodnaia Volia.¹⁶¹

An initial investigation into the strikes recognised that the workers' actions had '*acquired a frightening and threatening character*' and alluded to an intermediary force between *intelligenty* and workers '*distinguished by their development, abilities, and other factors*' that was beginning to have a significant influence on the masses. The authorities could not yet imagine this force acting independently of the *intelligenty* but had identified an organised group of radicalised workers determined to direct workers' struggles, a group that had already was pursuing its own aims against employers and their state backers.¹⁶² *Zavodskie* activists from the Northern Union were involved with striking workers in both 1878 and 1879. Police investigations revealed that Dmitri Churkin, a leading member of the Patronnyi workers' circle on Vasil'evskii island and long-time associate of Viktor Obnorskii, played a leading role in workers' meetings in early 1878 that discussed the strike at the New Cotton Mills and was particularly critical of the actions of the foreign factory owners and managers asserting that this was a sign of foreign capitalist exploitation.¹⁶³ In February 1879, Churkin was arrested in connection with the strike at the New Cotton Mill where he had been observed on a number of occasions. Like an increasing number of leading workers, the authorities were no longer inclined towards their previous leniency and for his involvement in the workers' organisation Churkin was sentenced to five years hard labour in Eastern Siberia.¹⁶⁴ Moiseenko's meetings with Khalturin and leading members of the Union during the strike and the presence of the three 'unknown workers' bringing weapons at a strike meeting on 16th January all point to a considerable involvement from the Union during the textile strikes of January 1879.

¹⁶¹ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom II, Chast 2*, pp.316-317.

¹⁶² *Stanovlenie revoliutsionnykh traditsii piterskogo proletariata*, [ed.], A.N. Tsamutali, 1987, pp.264-265.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, pp.224-225.

¹⁶⁴ *Deiateli...., T.III*, stb. 1981-82



Dmitri Churkin

The increased threat from radicalised workers ‘inciting’ the mass of workers to take industrial action is confirmed in the judicial proceedings in connection with the January 1879 strikes. In contrast to earlier official assertions that malevolent external influences provoked the strike, the case against the ‘ringleaders’ reflected the central role of workers in the alleged ‘conspiracy.’ The legal process culminated in October 1879 when 12 workers and two *intelligenty* supporters from the Petersburg Lavrovist group, were sentenced, four workers including Moiseenko being given harsh sentences of exile to Eastern Siberia for five years. All four were active members of the Northern Union as were several others of the accused. In his report, the Minister of Justice concluded that the 1879 strikes were not the result of worker grievances and spontaneous discontent but had been carefully nurtured over a lengthy period and had taken place according to a preconceived plan. For the authorities the strikes were the product of ‘*malevolent incitement by alien persons who used dissatisfaction on the part of workers as a means to achieve their criminal aims. The simultaneous strikes at two factories, the common nature of the workers’ demands, their common meetings, handwritten protests, printed proclamations constitutes evidence indicating... the existence of a secret organisation which guided the semi-literate working people and which pursued criminal aims.*’ As this was the considered conclusion in a process in which 12 workers had been identified and found guilty as the core instigators of the strikes, the only possible conclusion was this was the work of a worker-led organisation.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom. II, Chast 2, pp.351-356.*

The Northern Union of Russian Workers

An indication of the maturity of the workers' organisation came on 12th January 1879 when it formally adopted the name the Northern Union of Russian Workers and issued its programme agreed over two meetings at the end of December 1878 by the organisation's 'General Assembly.'¹⁶⁶ A central representative group [*'komitet'*] consisting of ten members representing various districts of the capital would oversee the work of the Union, with a larger 'General Assembly' of members meeting once a month to review the actions of the *'komitet'* and discuss future plans. As in the initial *zavodskie* circles, the organisational pivot remained the workers' fund and library, overseen by the *'komitet'*, that provided the glue binding various circles together, re-emphasising the organisation's commitment to knowledge acquisition essential for a revolutionary-worker. Similarly, the fund was envisaged both as a resource to build the workers' library but also to provide assistance to workers during strikes and to give financial aid to the families of arrested workers.

In its preamble, the programme declared that political and economic oppression and material deprivation can no longer be endured as they sap the *'spiritual strength'* of workers and that a Union of Workers has been established to unite *'the forces of the urban and rural working populations to explain their interests, aims and aspirations, and will serve as a secure protection in the struggle with social injustice and will give it the organic internal bond that it needs for the successful conduct of the struggle.'* Although mentioning the *'rural working population,'* the programme was categorical that it was a working-class organisation, only workers who were committed to promoting the Union's objectives could become members on the written recommendation of two existing members.

The main authors of the programme were Khalturin and Obnorskii, the latter indicating that the programme was modelled on Western European Social-Democratic parties, in particular the German SDP.¹⁶⁷ Beyond this two major influences are obvious. The first was the long-standing attraction of Petersburg workers to Lavrovist ideas. Building on earlier contacts, Khalturin developed a close working relationship with the Petersburg Lavrovist group, one of whom, Murashkintsev expressed delight at the programme in which the *'preparationist'* approach of the Lavrovists was clearly favoured over the

¹⁶⁶ The Programme of the Union was first republished Vladimir Burtsev, 'Severnyi Soiuz Russkikh Rabochikh. [Stranitsa is istorii rabocheho dvizheniia v Rossii],' *Byloe*, No.1, 1906, pp.179-182; subsequently it was reprinted in Korol'chuk, 1946, pp.247-25 and in *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom. II, Chast 2*, pp.325-328.

¹⁶⁷ E.A. Korol'chuk, *Severnyi Soiuz Russkikh Rabochikh i revoliutsionnoe rabochee dvizhenie 70-kh godov VIX v. v Peterburge*, Leningrad, 1946, p.248.

buntarist promotion of immediate social revolution. Whilst abroad, Obnorskii was in close contact with Lavrov and with other leading Lavrovists.¹⁶⁸ During his final trip abroad in 1878, Obnorskii renewed his acquaintance with the Lavrovist Shiriaev who had earlier been active in Petersburg workers' circles and following this visited Lavrov in Paris, the latter having been briefed that Obnorskii would present plans for a workers' organisation.¹⁶⁹ Subsequently, Plekhanov emphasised that Lavrovists exerted a significant influence on the programme, asserting that their great merit was influencing Petersburg workers towards a political struggle rather than social revolution in which the interests of the peasantry would be paramount.

*The Lavrovists were positive in that they represented..... the western European labour movement and under their influence workers could better evaluate their own political tasks. If, in the programme of the Northern Union of Russian Workers worked out in winter 1878-1879, a social-democratic note strongly resounds, then....to a significant extent it is necessary to ascribe this to the influence of the Lavrovists.*¹⁷⁰

During Obnorskii's several trips abroad he familiarised himself with the programmes of western workers' organisations. Aksel'rod who met Obnorskii confirms that he was intent on identifying the most appropriate programme for Petersburg workers' circles and that he travelled abroad as the '*representative of the Petersburg circles which at the end of 1878 adopted the name of the Northern Union of Russian Workers.*'¹⁷¹ One of the programmes that Obnorskii would have undoubtedly discussed was the 1875 Gotha Programme of the German Social-Democratic Party. As this programme was subject to considerable debate across Europe and as one of its key architects was the worker-socialist August Bebel, already a role model for Petersburg workers, it would have figured prominently in Obnorskii's discussions. Indeed, the Union's programme owed much more to the Lassallean influenced Gotha Programme, rather than the earlier and more Marxist oriented Eisenach Programme of 1869.¹⁷² Both programmes had been published in *Vpered!*, so undoubtedly Petersburg workers were aware of their nature and their preference for the Lassallian variant offers an important pointer to the ideological orientation of the Union.

¹⁶⁸ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom II, Chast 2*, pp.250-252.

¹⁶⁹ V. Burtsev, 1906, p.176; *Deiateli...., T.III*, col.1061-1063.

¹⁷⁰ G.V. Plekhanov, *Sochineniia, T. III*, 1923, p.142.

¹⁷¹ P.A. Aksel'rod, *Perezhitoe i peredumanno, T.I*. Berlin, 1923, p.299.

¹⁷² E.A. Korol'chuk, 1946, pp.210-215.



Viktor Obnorskii

From their inception, *zavodskie* circles had shown a deep interest in the ideas of Ferdinand Lassalle.¹⁷³ In his study on Obnorskii, Nevskii highlights the importance on Lassalle's 1862 '*The Workingman's Programme*' [Arbeiter Programm] on members of the *zavodskie* circles.¹⁷⁴ The central idea of Lassalle's programme was the belief that the working-class would become dominant through winning political freedom and taking control of the state to effect social and economic reforms. As Lassalle asserted '*the people must therefore at all times regard universal and direct suffrage as its indispensable political weapon, as the most fundamental and important of its demands.*'¹⁷⁵ If political struggle was the means, then the underlying motivation was rooted in a deep sense of justice. Regarding the working-class the basis for a new moral community, Lassalle imbued his political ideology with a fundamental moral imperative.¹⁷⁶ In contrast to 'bourgeois society' that allocated unlimited profits derived from labour to a few individuals, the moral obligation of a workers' society was to promote socially useful services, i.e. a morality based on the collective interests to usher in a new era of culture and science representing the highest pinnacle of civilisation. Lassalle advocated that workers capture state power through universal suffrage, transforming society through a series of federated workers' co-operatives funded by the state as producers' associations. It is not difficult to detect Lassallean influences in the Union's programme. In a clear reference to Lassalle and the role of the state in funding productive associations, the programme called for free credit for workers' associations and peasant communes.

¹⁷³ L.E. Shishko, *Sobr. Soch.*, T. IV, 1918, p.145; P.A. Kropotkin, *Zapiski revoliutsionera*, Moscow 1929, T.1, p.220.

¹⁷⁴ V.I. Nevskii, 'Viktor Pavlovich Obnorskii,' *Istoriko revoliutsionnykh sbornik*, T.III, 1926, p.15.

¹⁷⁵ Ferdinand Lassalle, *The Workingman's Programme*, London, 1884, pp.45-6.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.48.

After declaring its objectives as overthrowing existing political and economic orders, the abolition of all private property, the creation of a federation of self-governing communes and worker-producer associations, the Union's programme threw down the gauntlet to *Narodniki* social-revolutionaries by declaring that '*political freedom assures for each person independence of beliefs and actions and above all the resolution of the social question.*' By elevating the political over the social revolution, the Union set itself on a collision course with the *zemlevol'tsy* who regarded social revolution as paramount.

Almost immediately after the publication of the programme, the ideological tensions with the *zemlevol'tsy* became public through the *zemlevol'tsy* response written by Dmitrii Klements, the former Chaikovkist and now leading member of *Zemlia i Volia*. Published as the lead article of *Zemlia i Volia* on 20th February 1879, Klements launched a fierce attack on the programme, accusing it of ignoring the peasantry and, through its adherence to political programmes imitating European socialist parties, guilty of subordinating social revolution to achieving 'bourgeois' political freedoms.¹⁷⁷ In the next issue of *Zemlia i Volia*, the Union replied through Khalturin, who admitted the programme reflected the workers status as '*city dwellers.*' Khalturin's response, emphasising the focus on urban workers, is indicative of the dominant realities of the factory and the city that had shaped the political and social outlook of Petersburg workers. On the second charge of privileging political over social revolution, Khalturin was unapologetic, explicitly recognising that workers' experiences had convinced them that only '*political freedom can guarantee us and our organisation from the tyranny of the authorities and allow us to progress our concept of the world in the right direction and to carry out our propaganda with greater success. And so, wishing to maximise our efforts and obtain quicker success, we demand this freedom, we demand abolition of various restrictive regulations and codes ... and that this freedom is a very important condition for a rapid revolution and a sensible resolution of the social issues.*'¹⁷⁸ By reiterating the primacy of political freedom and making it a precondition for social revolution, the workers clearly indicated that they had rejected the schema of revolution advocated by the *Narodniki* intelligenty and were dedicated to pursuing their own path based on winning democratic freedoms that would enable them to create a social-democratic political party on Western European model. Writing a few years later, Plekhanov observed:

¹⁷⁷ *Revoliutsionnaia zhurnalistska semidesiatikh godov*, Rostov in Don, 1920, p.220.

¹⁷⁸ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom II, Chast 2*, pp.243-247.

in 1878 when advanced Petersburg workers organised the Northern Union, they expressed in their programme the conviction that economic liberation of the ‘toilers’ was directly linked with their political liberation. They believed this, despite the fact that socialists from the so-called intelligentsia advised them that workers had no interest whatsoever in political questions....¹⁷⁹



Programme of the Northern Union

A recurrent theme of the morality and justice of the workers’ cause runs through the programme and other publications of the Union that echo both Lavrov’s and Lassalle’s teachings on the moral imperative to create a just and socially progressive community based on collective values. Redolent with Christian symbolism of blood sacrifice, the programme contains several references to Christ, and throughout there is a pervasive sense that leading members of the Union have assumed a task of evangelising a gospel in a manner akin to early Christian martyrs. In an explicit reference to the apostles, the programme declares that:

*We are also called upon to preach, we are also summoned to be apostles of a new, but in essence only the misunderstood and forgotten, teaching of Christ. We shall be persecuted as the first Christians were persecuted; we shall be beaten and taunted, but we shall be undaunted and we shall not be ashamed of their desecrations, because this animosity towards us demonstrates weakness in the struggle with the moral greatness of ideas, in the struggle with the force that we represent.*¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ G.V. Plekhanov, ‘Pis’mo k peterburgskim rabochim kruzham’, *Rabochii, Gazeta partii Russkikh sotsial-demokratov [Blagoevtsii] 1885*, [ed.], N.L. Sergievskii, Leningrad, 1928, p.59.

¹⁸⁰ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. II, Ch.2*, pp.327-28.

The programme builds to a crescendo, becoming almost messianic, with the Union assuming the role as the agent for '*renewing the world*' and resurrecting the '*great teachings of Christ on brotherhood and equality.*' At times the programme assumes eschatological dimensions with members having a '*sacred duty*' to agitate amongst the working masses as their names will go down in history and be '*revered as apostles of the evangelical truth.*' Workers in a spirit of a contemporary crusade were exhorted to take up the '*spiritual sword of truth and go forward to preach the [new] gospel.*' One of the first printed proclamations of the Union, issued during the January 1879 textile workers' strikes, pledged that the Union was ready to '*sacrifice all for them in pursuit of their just cause.*'¹⁸¹

To illustrate the moral justness of their cause, the Union continually juxtaposed the moral dissoluteness of government, bureaucracy, capitalists and landowners with the moral purity and selfless nature of the worker-members of the Union. The programme juxtaposes the rich, wallowing in luxury and depravity at the expense of the misery endured by workers whose labour is mercilessly exploited to satisfy the lewd behaviours of the privileged minority, with the morally asceticism of the advanced representatives of the working-class, i.e. members of the Union. Salvation at both an individual and collective level was portrayed as being dependent upon the moral rectitude of workers in their struggles and the commitment to acquiring knowledge from which they derived their strength. Reiterating that workers are a constant prey for the parasitic rich with their blood being sapped by vampires from the upper classes, workers were urged to unite with a single purpose, in a common workers' union to enable them '*to go forward as one and which no force could resist.*'¹⁸² Throughout the Union's language and imagery reflects a religious symbolism, presenting in graphic language almost apocalyptic visions of blood sacrifices by workers in order that through their suffering the class will find redemption. The morally pure example set by the small group of advanced workers was presented as an essential sacrifice that would ensure the creation of a new moral order for the benefit of the worker producers of the wealth of society.

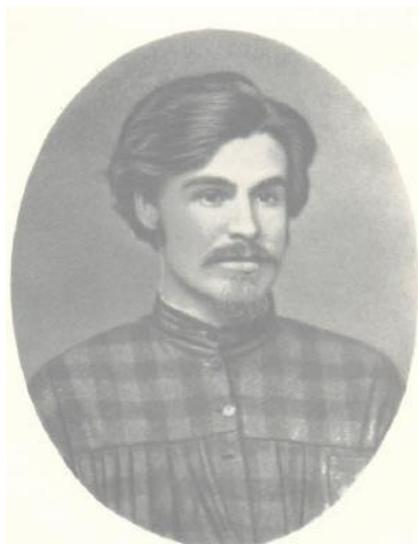
Zenith and Demise

Despite the extravagant rhetoric of the Union, its actual numeric strength remained small. Based on numbers derived from Khalturin's letter in response to Klements, historians have

¹⁸¹ V. Burtsev, 1906, pp.182-183; *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom II, Chast 2*, pp.328-329.

¹⁸² 'Rabochaia Zaria No.1,' 15 February 1880, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, No.3, 1921, pp.122-124; *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom II, Chast 2*, pp.272-274.

generally have put a figure of around 200 full-members with a similar number of associate-members being trained by experienced workers for a future role in its development,. Yet contemporaries, as well as the police, believed that the Union had a larger membership. Kravchinskii claimed that the Union commanded at least 1000 workers across the capital, whilst police reports, even allowing for a degree of exaggeration, indicate substantial support in factories. Irrespective of actual numbers, during the first half of 1879 the Union's influence ran deep within Petersburg factories.



Stepan Khalturin

An insight into the Union's influence is found in information from a Narodnaia Volia mole, Kletochnikov, who had infiltrated the III Section.¹⁸³ Kletochnikov's 'inside' information indicates that an active cell of workers continued to operate at the Patronnyi factory on Vasil'evskii Island throughout 1879 with illegal meetings organised amongst workers of the various sections of the Patronnyi factory and that the advanced workers from the factory were openly conducting agitation in taverns on Vasil'evskii island.¹⁸⁴ Despite arrests in the wake of the New Cotton Mills strikes, the activity of the Union continued in the Narvskii Gate through cells at the Putilov and Baird factories and at the Baltic Shipyards on Vasil'evskii Island across the Neva. At the Putilov factory, former students from the Technological Institute who had become workers were closely associated with the Union. A police agent report in February 1879 identified this cell as responsible for disturbances in the steel-furnaces and wagon-shop over piece rates and distributing leaflets inciting workers against foremen in the factory. The agent noted that these

¹⁸³ *Arkhiv 'Zemli i Voli' i Narodnoi Voli'*, Moscow 1930. p.169.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, pp.172, 167.

disturbances were ‘*homebred*’, i.e. emanating from within the factory.¹⁸⁵ Copies of the Union’s programme freely circulated amongst workers in the assembly workshop at the Baird factory where workers openly expressed confidence in a general outbreak of disorders amongst workers across the capital.¹⁸⁶ In March/April 1879, the authorities uncovered a network of workers involved in agitation at the Baltic Shipyards,¹⁸⁷ with the Third Section reporting considerable unrest amongst workers at Shipyards and that it was vital that the ‘*illegal worker representatives*’ [i.e. members of the Union] inciting the workforce be removed.¹⁸⁸ By the end of April the Governor was informing the Minister of Internal Affairs in a state of alarm that the level of anti-government agitation amongst Baltic workers had developed to such a degree that an armed uprising could not be ruled out.¹⁸⁹ Other workers’ cells were known to be operating in 1879 at the Golubev factory on the Vyborg Side and the New Admiralty shipyards, both circles linked directly with Khalturin who had worked at these plants.¹⁹⁰

During the first half of 1879 within the large mechanical factories in the Nevskii Gate workers’ circles were also active. According to Kletochnikov’s information, ‘*a large section of the workers at the Obukhov zavode adhere to socialism*’¹⁹¹, whilst at the nearby Petersburg Metalworking factory the worker-activist Aleksandr Bogdanovich organised ‘*revolutionary*’ meetings of young workers.¹⁹² But the focal point for labour unrest in the area remained the Semiannikov factory where an active workers’ cell operated throughout 1878-1879. At the end of January, police reported that workers were agitating for strikes in response to the announcement of wage reduction and redundancies. The authorities had little doubt that these workers were well-organised, in possession of illegal literature and were part of a wider network both in the factory and across the district.¹⁹³ Another agent report on 4th March, identified regular ‘*political*’ meetings amongst workers involving workers from the Semiannikov factory and the adjacent Aleksandrovskii Works, organised by the worker Osip Levkovich, who announced to workers that he belonged to the Northern Union.¹⁹⁴ In response to increasing agitation along the Shlissel’burg Road, at the end of March 1879 the Petersburg Police Chief, Ridinger compiled a list of 15 ‘*suspect*’

¹⁸⁵ *Stanovlenie revoliutsionnykh traditsii piterskogo proletariata*, [ed.], A.N. Tsamutali, 1987, pp.252-253.

¹⁸⁶ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom II, Chast 2*, pp.249-250.

¹⁸⁷ *Arkhiv 'Zemli i Voli' i Narodnoi Voli'*, 1930, p.169.

¹⁸⁸ *Stanovlenie revoliutsionnykh traditsii piterskogo proletariata*, [ed.], A.N. Tsamutali, 1987, p.258.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.266.

¹⁹⁰ Iu. Polevoi, *Stepan Khalturin*, Moscow 1979.

¹⁹¹ *Arkhiv 'Zemli i Voli' i Narodnoi Voli'*, 1930, p.218.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, pp.263-264.

¹⁹³ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom II, Chast 2*, pp.358-359.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.362-363.

workers in the region, including Levkovich and Vasilii Iuurtsev, who he considered so dangerous that they were deported immediately from the capital.¹⁹⁵ Levkovich and Iurtsev were in fact already well-known to Ridinger as when he visited the Nevskii factory in early March they had been ‘*impudent*’ telling him now they understood what ‘*scoundrels like him did to pass the time*’, i.e. harass workers.¹⁹⁶

Alarmed at the growing influence of the Union and unrest amongst workers, occurring at the same time as the campaign of assassinations of government officials by Zemlia i Volia, the police began to take concerted action against the workers’ organisation. Three of the most experienced and influential worker revolutionaries Obnorskii, Petr Petersen and Iakov Smirnov were arrested at the end of January. Obnorskii’s and Peterson’s arrest represented a severe blow to the Union as not only was Obnorskii a principle ideologist of the Union and an archetypal European style ‘*worker-intelligent*’, but with their seizure the direct links with the very first *zavodskie* circles was finally severed. Amongst other leading workers arrested in late 1878 and early 1879 were Bachin, Gorodnich, Ivanainen, Miaznikov, A.N.Peterson, Stepanov, Stul’tsev, Forsman and Churkin. The arrests coincided with an economic recession that saw mass dismissals of workers that also had a serious affect on the Union, as employers and police used redundancies to sack and deport workers suspected of involvement in the workers’ organisation. Police repression was further intensified in a crackdown in the wake of the first attempt on the life of the Tsar in April 1879. Korol’chuk estimates that in the first few months of 1879 over 700 workers were exiled from Petersburg on suspicion posing a threat to the social order; many undoubtedly members of the Union.¹⁹⁷ Losses on such a scale would have had a serious impact on a mature organisation, but for the fledgling workers’ organisation they were all but fatal and by autumn 1879 from the Union’s leadership only Khalturin and a hard core of worker-activists at the Patronnyi factory remained active.

In one last gesture, in autumn 1879 Khalturin pressed on with creating an independent worker’s printing-press and newspaper. Turning to the *intelligenty*, particularly Plekhanov, Khalturin obtained the equipment and by early winter had set up a printing press.¹⁹⁸ Delegated into the hands of inexperienced workers, against the odds they succeeded in printing the Union’s newspaper *Rabochaia Zaria* in February 1880. Shortly after this, the

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, pp.366-368.

¹⁹⁶ *Stanovlenie revoliutsionnykh traditsii piterskogo proletariata*, [ed.], A.N. Tsamutali, 1987, p.270.

¹⁹⁷ E.A. Korol’chuk, 1946,

¹⁹⁸ G.V. Plekhanov, *Sochineniia*, T. III, 1923, p.203.

printers were arrested and with this the last cell of the Union was destroyed.¹⁹⁹ By this time however, Khalturin, Presniakov and other surviving members of the workers' organisation had concluded that given the prevailing political repression any attempt to organise a workers' union was doomed and that in the short-term workers must support political terror orchestrated by Narodnaia Volia in an attempt to win broader political freedoms they regarded as essential to enable a workers' organisation to operate freely at a future date.

Conclusion

In the end the conjuncture of a severe economic downturn that disproportionately affected Petersburg metalworking factories allied with the intense repression associated with the terror campaigns waged on government by initially Zemlia i Volia and subsequently Narodnaia Volia combined to destroy any possibility of an independent workers' organisation in Petersburg. Despite its collapse and the arrest and exiling of virtually all the leading *zavodskie* activists, the Petersburg workers' organisation of the 1870s demonstrated that workers through their own efforts could establish and develop their organisational forms and operate on the basis of autonomy from *intelligenty* radicals. Through their endeavours a small core of radicalised *zavodskie* workers originating amongst the highly skilled and specialist metalworkers from the Patronnyi factories had developed and created the basis for the archetype of the radical *worker-intelligent*. This archetype was of historic significance as it would constitute the basis for Plekhanov's subsequent categorisation of the skilled and well-read *zavodskie* worker a historical agent of change, enshrining in Marxist discourse on the working-class a specific worker-type who not only would become the instrument to realize the socialist future but also the prototype of the 'ideal' proletarian man.

¹⁹⁹ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, Tom II, Chast 2*, pp.275-278.

Chapter 7.

Revival of the Petersburg Workers' Organisation in the 1880s

Introduction

Following the collapse of the Northern Union in 1879, the small numbers of surviving workers engaged in revolutionary politics were incorporated into Narodnaia Volia. In general, Narodnaia Volia was inimical to any expression of a specifically worker-organisation outwith the Party and to any notion of a mass revolutionary process in which workers would act as the leading force. The repression that followed in the wake of the assassination of Aleksandr II in March 1881 cast a shadow over revolutionary politics in the capital and although a number of *narodovol'tsy* groups continued to engage with small groups of workers up to the end of 1880s their influence on shaping the development of a sustainable working-class movement was minimal.¹

In the aftermath of the demise of Narodnaia Volia, the first specifically Marxist social-democratic groups emerged both inside and outside of Russia. The ideological evolution of Plekhanov and a small group of *zemlevol'tsy* activists from *Narodism* to Marxism, their formation of the Emancipation of Labour Group [GEL] in 1883 and their ideological battles with *narodovol'tsy* and Lavrovist tendencies in exile to establish the hegemony of Marxist socialism within the radical *intelligenty* has been well documented and will not be

¹ In the aftermath of the assassination of Aleksandr II in March 1881 workers' groups associated with both *Narodnaia Volia* and *Cherny Peredel* suffered serious arrests and many radicalised workers involved in their organisations were exiled from the capital. Despite this, in the period up to 1884 both *Narodnaia Volia* and *Cherny Peredel* activists continued to organise amongst Petersburg workers with the groups associated with the *narodovol'tsy* Flerov and Bodaev in particular succeeding in organising a significant number of circles focusing on creating independent workers' groups in systematic propaganda of revolutionary ideas took place. The collapse of Iakobovich's *Young Narodovol'tsy* in 1884 associated with the betrayals of the provocateur Degaev however marked the effective end of organised *narodovol'tsy* activity amongst Petersburg workers until the early 1890s when the Petersburg *Gruppa Narodovol'tsev* established a network of organised circles across the capital. On the period following the collapse of 1881 see *Narodovol'tsy posle 1-go marta 1881 goda*, A.I. Iakimova-Dikovskaia, M.F. Frolenko, et.al., eds. Moscow, 1928; *Narodovol'tsy 80-kh i 90-kh godov*, A.I. Iakimova-Dikovskaia, M.F. Frolenko, et.al., eds. Moscow, 1929; I.I. Popov, *Minuvshee i perezhitoe. Vospominaniia za 50 let. Part 1: Destvo i gody bor'by*. [2nd ed.], Leningrad., 1924. A number of secondary accounts by western historians also deal with this period including Norman Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats and The Russian Revolutionary Movement Under Alexander III*, 1983, 'The Workers' Section and the Challenge of the 'Young Narodnaia Volia', 1881-1884.' *Russian Review*, Vol.37, No.3, July, 1978; Derek Offord, *The Russian Revolutionary Movement in the 1880s*, Cambridge, 1986; Deborah Pearl, *Revolutionaries and Workers: A Study of Revolutionary Propaganda among Russian Workers, 1880-1892*, PhD Thesis, University of California, Berkely, 1984 and 'From Worker To Revolutionary. The Making of Worker Narodovol'tsy,' *Russian History*, Vol.23, Nos.1-4, 1996.

rehearsed here.² Within Petersburg, a group of radical *intelligenty* initially centred round Dmitrii Blagoev formed the Party of the Russian Social Democrats that maintained relatively close contacts with the GEL. Although it established contacts with workers it was unable to consolidate these into an effective workers' organisation and throughout operated primarily as an *intelligenty*-focused organisation for the dissemination of Marxist and other socialist ideas.³

In the period between the collapse of the Northern Union and the emergence of a coherent workers' organisation at the end of the 1880s two groupings engaged systematically with Petersburg workers and developed an ideological and organisational framework that workers could subsequently adapt as a basis for their own organisation and activities. These two groupings are the *Tovarishchestvo sankt-peterburgskikh masterovykh* [*The Tochisskii Group*] and a group composed of largely Polish Social-Democratic students based at the Petersburg Technological Institute.

Pavel Tochisskii and Worker Primacy

If the emergence of the GEL and The Party of the Russian Social Democrats heralded the beginning of Marxist hegemony within the Russian revolutionary movement, then the *Tovarishchestvo sankt-peterburgskikh masterovykh* represented a fundamental restatement of the worker-ethos that inspired the *zavodskie* groups that culminated in the Northern Union.⁴ The focus of this new organisation was not on fomenting violent

² See, for example, L. Deich, 'Chernyi Peredel', in *Istoriko-revoliutsionnyi sbornik. T.II*, 1924; V.I. Nevskii, *Ot 'Zemli i Voli' k gruppe 'Osvobozhdenie truda'*, Moscow, 1930; N.L. Sergievskii, 'Gruppa 'Osvobozhdenie Truda' i marksistskie kruzheniia', in *Istoriko-revoliutsionnye sbornik. T. II. L.*, 1924; G.S. Zhukov, *Peterburgskie marksisty i gruppa 'Osvobozhdenie Truda'*, 1975; Leopold Haimson, 1955; Baron, Samuel H. *Plekhanov: The Father of Russian Marxism*. 1963; Abraham Ascher, Pavel Axelrod and the Development of Menshevism, Cambridge, 1972.

³ On The Party of the Russian Social-democrats [the Blagoev Group] see N____skii, B. [B. Nikolaevskii]. 'K istorii 'partii russkikh sotsial-demokratov' v 1884-86 g.' *Katorga i ssylka*, No. 5 [54], 1929; Nikolaevskii, B.I. 'Programma pervogo v Rossii s.-d. Kruzheniia.' *Byloe*, No.7 [13], 1918; V.I. Nevskii, 'K istorii 'Partii russkikh sotsial-demokratov' [Blagoevskaiia gruppa]', *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, No.5, 1922; N.L. Sergievskii, *Partiia russkikh sotsial-demokratov: Gruppa Blagoeva*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1929, 'Plekhanov i gruppa Blagoeva.' *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, No.8 [79], 1928, 'Dmitr Blagoev v Peterburge [1880-1885 gg.]', *Krasnaia letopis'*, No.2 [11], 1924. The works by Pearl, Naimark and Offord cited in Footnote 1 above also deal with the party of the Russian Social-democrats.

⁴ The most important primary source on the Tochisskii Society is found in a lengthy official report [TsGAOR, f.102, 3 d-vo, 1892, d.1112, Vol.1, pp.2-72] reprinted by N.L. Sergievskii, 'Doklad departamenta politicii ministru vnutrennikh del [po delu syna otstavnogo polkovnika Pavla Avgusta Rene-Boleslava-Liudviga Liudvigova Tochisskogo id r.]', *Krasnaia letopis'*, No.7, 1923, pp.344-388. According to Sergievskii other materials and evidence connected with the case were destroyed in 1910. N.L. Sergievskii, 'O kruzhenii Tochisskogo', *Krasnaia letopis'*, No.7 [1923], p.342.

revolution or seizure of state power, but rather the development of small groups of well-educated workers to create the nucleus of an organised workers' movement focused on improving the social conditions of workers. Initially, the Society adopted the name of *The Society to Assist in the Raising of the Material, Intellectual, and Moral Level of the Working-Class in Russia*, a title that captured the essence of its philosophy and activities. Adopting the approach advocated for revolutionaries by Valerian Smirnov, the Society was formed by a small group of *intelligenty* who abandoned their privileged status to work in factories. Led by Pavel Tochisskii, this group was joined by a number of women studying on *Bestuzhevskii* courses and a group of workers with a pre-existing history of involvement in workers' circles.



Pavel Tochisskii

Although a number of the leading members of the Society were connected with student circles, the organisation represented a new orientation in 1880s Petersburg, as it did not develop out of student politics and/or the *narodovol'tsy* tradition, both of which Tochisskii and his followers strongly rejected. It is difficult to understate the importance of Tochisskii's activities and influence in period between 1885 and 1888 when he was active amongst Petersburg workers. During this time along with a number of close worker associates Tochisskii established a bicameral organisational framework based on a rigid separation of worker and *intelligenty* sections, a focus on worker education and development, the importance of the workers' fund as a unifying mechanism for workers across different regions, an emphasis on conspiracy and a refutation of terrorist tactics that would become staple features of workers' organisations for the next decade. But above all

else, Tochisskii instilled in his worker associates the primacy of worker hegemony and autonomy within the workers' movement alongside a concomitant subordinate role for *intelligenty* as supporters rather than leaders of worker organisations. This resonated with many *worker-intelligenty* and became the most distinguishing feature of the Petersburg workers' movement up to 1900. Given this emphasis on worker hegemony it is one of the great ironies of the Russian working-class movement that this attribute was articulated and practised by a person whose origins were distinctly '*privileged*.'

From Tochisskii's background it is possible to identify several decisive moments in his development that would shape his activities in Petersburg and which influenced the subsequent development of the Petersburg workers' organisation. Tochisskii was born in 1864, the son of a Russianised Pole, who was an officer in the Russian army, and a French noblewoman, and brought up in the town of Ekaterinburg in Perm *guberniia*. His father was governor of Ekaterinburg prison where political prisoners in transit to exile were often held. This exposed Tochisskii from an early age to firsthand experience of the beliefs and suffering of revolutionaries imprisoned for their opposition to the autocracy. Whilst still in secondary school he formed a self-education circle to study the works of Russian radicals and western socialists such as Ferdinand Lassalle. This resulted in bitter arguments with his father, leading to his complete repudiation of his father and his authoritarian personal and political beliefs. Abandoning his studies at the local gymnasium, Tochisskii took a factory job, later moving to work in the Ekaterinburg Railway workshops. This early exposure to the life of factory workers had a decisive influence on his beliefs. Tochisskii's sister, Maria Lebedeva, relates how as a worker in Ekaterinburg he came under the influence of an English worker who captured the young Tochisskii's imagination with stories about workers in England and how they organised trades-unions to improve their conditions.⁵ This approach struck a chord with Tochisskii and in combination with his experience of working-class life '*gave him an understanding of the onerous existence and a personal empathy with his new found comrades.*'⁶

In summer 1884, Tochisskii's sister Maria moved to Petersburg and enrolled in the Higher Courses for women. Tochisskii joined his sister in the capital towards the end of 1884 and immediately enrolled at in evening classes on the Vyborg Side to study metalworking. At

⁵ Lebedeva [Tochisskaia], M. 'K biografii P.V. Tochiskkogo [vospominaniia sestry],' *Istoriki-revoliutsionnyi sbornik, Vol.III*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1926, p.297.

⁶ A. Breitfus, 'Tochiskii i ego kruzhek,' *Krasnaia letopis'*, No.7, 1923, p.325.

the evening school, Tochisskii met Dmitri Lazarev and they quickly formed a friendship that was central to Tochisskii's activities in Petersburg. The two new friends found work at the Baird metalworking factory in the Narvskii Gate and soon were organising workers' circles in the factory. Both Tochisskii and Lazarev, the son of a nobleman who had also renounced his privileged status to work in a Petersburg factory, consciously chose to become workers and adopt a proletarian identity, becoming *worker-intelligenty* through a form of 'class suicide,' in order to develop the education and organisation of workers. This conceptualisation was not as some adjunct to the revolutionary struggles of the intelligentsia but as a means for workers through their own efforts to improve their working conditions and cultural level.

During the first half of 1885, Tochisskii embarked on establishing a genuine workers' organisation. Building on his experiences as a worker in both Ekaterinburg and Petersburg, Tochisskii established contacts amongst workers and formed alliances with sympathetic *intelligenty* groups that could support his scheme to create an organisation that would not only promote the educational needs of workers but in which they would play a lead role. After his arrival in the capital, Maria introduced her brother to her student associates, providing Tochisskii with an entry into wider revolutionary circles of the Petersburg *intelligenty*.⁷ The first such group that Tochisskii came into contact with was the Perm student *zemliachestvo*. Although students of a *narodovol'tsy* persuasion predominated in the *zemliachestvo*, Maria indicates that within it Tochisskii found a small group sympathetic to social-democratic ideas.⁸

The Perm Student Zemliachestvo

Within the Perm *zemliachestvo* Tochisskii encountered several students who sought to establish mutual-aid and educational societies for workers. Although largely overlooked in the development of Marxist groups in Russia, the emergent social-democratic tendency within this *zemliachestvo* had important connections with two leading Marxist oriented organisations in Petersburg in the 1880s, the Party of the Social Democrats and the Tochisskii Society.⁹ The origins of this 'Marxist' tendency within the *zemliachestvo* go back to a student circle in Perm in the Urals in the early 1880s engaged in work amongst

⁷ M. Lebedeva, 1926.

⁸ Ibid, p.297.

⁹ See G.S. Zhuikov, *Peterburgskie marksisty i Gruppy 'Osvobozhdenie Truda'*, Leningrad, 1975, for a discussion of the significance of the Perm student *zemliachestvo*, pp.159-164.

students and workers. In the capital members of this group deepened their studies of the labour question and studied works by Marx.¹⁰ Members of the *zemliachestvo*, particularly Vladimir Barybin, were also instrumental in the formation in 1883 of the Petersburg Student Corporation uniting students from a number of *zemliachestva* who believed that Narodnaia Volia offered no solutions to Russia's social and economic development. The activities of the Corporation, suggest that Barybin and his associates had adopted aspects of social-democratic ideology and were seeking to develop their activities based on establishing a network of workers' groups.¹¹ In January 1886 Barybin submitted a proposal to the Petersburg Governor to establish a legal workers' society, *Obshchestva Vzaimnost*, claiming a potential membership of over 200 workers in the Nevskii Gate. Aware of Barybin's anti-government opinions, this application was refused, the Governor considering it a legal front for a subversive workers' organisation. This assessment was accurate as the police subsequently discovered a secret set of regulations for the Society indicating that it aimed to support workers in struggles with employers and to provide assistance to arrested workers.¹² Barybin was arrested in spring 1886 and exiled to Tver' guberniia.¹³ Following this, leadership of the *Obshchestva Vzaimnost* was taken over by members of the Perm *zemliachestvo* more sympathetic to the *narodovol'tsy*.¹⁴ By summer 1886, Tochisskii himself had established contacts amongst workers and assisted by two surviving worker-oriented members of the Perm *zemliachestvo*, N.S Shavalevskii and F. Volkov, formed an organisation known as the '*Tovarishchestvo vzaimoposhchi*', almost identical to the name given by Barybin to his organisation. Tochisskii's organisation also retained the direction of Barybin's original society, specifically focused on raising the educational and material conditions of workers in order that they could better resist their capitalist employers and form workers' unions.¹⁵

The Formation of the Tochisskii Organisation

From his arrival in Petersburg, Tochisskii endeavoured to create workers' circles in which the workers themselves took the lead role. During 1886, Tochisskii drew up the '*Ustav*' [Rules] for a workers' society that would continue the approach adopted by Barybin. Lazarev told the police in 1888 that the Society operated in strict adherence to this '*Ustav*'

¹⁰ L.V.Rabinovich, 'Permskii kruzhok revolyutsionnykh narodnikov,' *Iz istorii Urala. Sbornik*, Sverdlovsk 1960, pp.226-239.

¹¹ G.S. Zhuikov, 1975, p.188.

¹² *Obzor vazhneishikh doznanii za 1887 g.* p.71.

¹³ *Deiateli...., T. IV*, stb. 207-209.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, T.IV, stb. 1577-79.

¹⁵ Elisaveta Danilova, testimony to Police in *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1923, No.7. p.355.

of which there was a single copy kept by Tochisskii.¹⁶ The '*Ustav*' was adopted at the first general meeting of the Society in autumn 1886 and from its inception pursued its basic aim of raising the material and the intellectual level of the working-class, to be achieved through the establishment of a workers' library, the active organisation of study circles, the distribution of literature in factories, and the organisation of a mutual-aid fund.¹⁷ *Intelligenty* members actively canvassed for support for the organisation from 'liberal society', obtaining donations of money and books for the library from amongst other the factory philanthropist Nikolai Vargunin and Petr Lavrov's daughter.¹⁸ Yet within the '*Ustav*' there was also a commitment to more active workers' struggles with the recognition that the most important means of improving the material position of the workers was through the organisation of strikes and 'collective protests.'¹⁹

In Tochisskii's conception, the Society was an exclusively worker organisation. To achieve this, the '*Ustav*' stipulated that the Society be divided into *intelligenty* and worker sections. Tochisskii envisaged that ideological, political and organisational decisions be vested in the workers' section, with the *intelligenty* section playing a supportive role in winning recruits, collecting money and obtaining literature for workers. In this schema it is possible to see a formalisation of the relationship between workers and *intelligenty* that had formed the basis of links in the 1870s between *zavodskie* workers and various *intelligenty* groups. *Intelligenty* members operated under Tochisskii's direction and supported the main function of the organisation, i.e. propaganda work in the workers' circles. The workers' tier was led by a workers' committee led by Tochisskii and his closest worker associates including Lazarev, who supported the activities of a leading cadre of workers that included a number who would later play a leadership role in the Central Workers' Circle [CWC] connected with the Social-Democratic student organisation associated with Mikhail Brusnev.

The Political and Ideological Views of the Tochisskii Organisation

Given the extreme secrecy that was the hallmark of the Tochisskii organisation, no substantive programmatical documents are extant and very few participants in the group left memoirs describing its activities. Nonetheless, the police investigation of 1888 into

¹⁶ 'Doklad Departamenta Politsii ministru vnutrennikh del.,' *Krasnaia Letopis'*, 1923, No.7, pp.355-356.

¹⁷ Ibid, pp.362, 367.

¹⁸ A. Breitfus, *Krasnaia letopis'*, No.7, 1923, pp.327-328.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.328.

the activities of the *intelligenty* section was published in *Krasnaia letopis'* in 1923 and provides important material that allows an insight into the organisation and permits some conclusions on its nature to be drawn. It appears that Tochisskii developed his views on workers independently from any theoretical study but rather through practical experience as a worker in discourse with other workers. This is confirmed by a leading *intelligenty* member of the organisation, Andrei Breitfus, who claimed that Tochisskii's ideas developed independently before he was familiar with Plekhanov's writings. Breitfus also claimed that Tochisskii and his associates were initially completely unaware of the existence of The Party of the Russian Social Democrats, developed their organisation outwith its influence, and had no direct links with the social-democratic emigration.²⁰

Tochisskii viewed industrial workers as the only social force capable of effecting social and political change in Russia. His almost deification of the industrial proletariat was matched by an intense suspicion, almost pathological hostility, towards the intelligentsia who he regarded as instinctively bourgeois in outlook and destined to betray the working-class in favour of bourgeois political reforms that would do nothing to alleviate the position of workers. A common thread running through Tochisskii's thought and practice was a strong motivation to distance workers from the intelligentsia who he regarded as a temporary ally in the workers' movement and who could contaminate workers who had lengthy exposure to them.²¹ In the final analysis, Tochisskii believed that the development of workers' consciousness was largely a self-generated phenomenon that could not be introduced by an external agency and that the cause of the workers' liberation was a matter for workers themselves. The immediate aim of the Society was to create amongst a small group of workers the nucleus of a *worker-intelligenty* to control the organisation and establish a genuine workers' party.

Tochisskii and his closest associates believed that urban workers represented the only progressive force in Russian society and was dismissive of the *narodovol'tsy* for continuing to see the intelligentsia as the motive force for social change. Breitfus recalled that Tochisskii's views on social change necessarily involved a '*profound movement of the popular masses*' and that in Russia only the working-class could actively oppose the existing order and that '*all revolutionaries who ignore this class, by throwing themselves first into a peasant-based and then an intelligenty-based movement, have sinned and*

²⁰ Ibid, p.335.

²¹ Ibid, p.326.

continue to commit a great sin.'²² Industrial workers therefore, should be the focus of activity to enable workers to fulfil their 'potential' and prepare them for the forthcoming struggle against employers and the government. The role of the true revolutionary was to merge with workers, engage in education and propaganda amongst his/her worker peers and encourage the development of consciousness amongst the working-class as a prelude for that class taking its struggle into its own hands. Tochisskii believed that this process of education would be carried out primarily on the ground of the immediate economic struggle of the workers. Tochisskii's schema involved an implicit assumption that there was an almost natural progression from economic to political struggle as part of a continuous process. Such views strongly resembled subsequent agitational theory as well having certain connotations that suggest Tochisskii as a forerunner of 'Economism.'

Since the current level of culture and consciousness amongst workers was low, Tochisskii recognised that the working-class required initial support from the intelligentsia to develop. Here Tochisskii confronted an awkward dilemma: on the one hand the *intelligenty* was needed to help workers create their own organisations, yet for Tochisskii the *intelligenty* was seen as being ideologically bourgeois by nature. Therefore, although reluctant to ascribe the *intelligenty* with a leading role, Tochisskii recognised that, given their current stage of development, workers needed support, although he remained unequivocal that *intelligenty* involvement would be temporary and targeted specifically towards making them superfluous through the creation of a *worker-intelligenty* to lead an independent worker organisation.

*Tochisskii considered that the intelligentsia was a temporary guest in the revolution, because he understood revolution as a social movement. He frequently stated, 'you (intelligentsia) will be with us (workers) up until the first revolution, when the constitution you need will be forced from government, but following this our paths will sharply diverge.' No less often Tochisskii would adapt the words of Christ, that 'before the cock crows three times, you (the intelligentsia) will betray me (the worker) on three occasions.'*²³

Such antipathy towards *intelligenty* was also expressed by other leading members of the Society. Elizaveta Danilova stated unambiguously that the intelligentsia were harmful to

²² Ibid, p.325.

²³ Ibid, p.326.

the working-class and lengthy exposure to the *intelligenty* corrupted workers.²⁴ Such attitudes determined the role envisaged for the *intelligenty* members of the Society. In the absence of a *worker-intelligenty*, a limited amount of propaganda work amongst the workers was undertaken by *intelligenty* members, but this was strictly supervised and their main function remained to support propaganda work carried out by worker members.²⁵

In his statement to the police, Lazarev confirmed that the Society's aim was to form workers' unions and that this was seen as a prelude to a campaign of strikes against employers.²⁶ This was also reiterated by Danilova who told the police that the exploitation of labour by capital was unjust and that workers must develop strikes as the means to struggle against the twin enemies of government and capitalists, who she contemptuously referred to as '*two fat bullocks*.'²⁷ It is evident that propaganda amongst workers aimed to create the basis for a militant workers' organisation. When Danilova was arrested she was found in possession of a handwritten notebook in which she developed her views on the workers' struggle. Rejecting any notion that there could be an understanding between workers and employers, Danilova argued that only through direct action could workers overcome their capitalist exploiters. In graphic language she called on workers to wage a struggle against their employers and the government which defends their interests, comparing this struggle as akin to a surgeon removing diseased limbs.²⁸ Both Danilova and Lazarev also appear to have been sympathetic to the Lassallean concept of workers' productive associations and make reference to the positive features of such associations in improving the position of workers, with Danilova claiming that they were a form of organisation that could challenge the existing order and replace capitalism.²⁹

An important aspect of the Tochisskii Society that differentiated it from virtually all other revolutionary groups operating in the mid 1880s was its total hostility to any form of terror. When Breitfus first met Tochisskii in 1885 it was his unwavering opposition to terror that struck him most forcibly.

At this time, I was under the strong spell of Narodovol'tsy ideas, captivated by the heroic and glorious struggle of Narodovol'tsy against the authorities. At this time, it

²⁴ *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1923, No.7, p.350.

²⁵ Letter from Maria Tochisskaia to Elisaveta Danilova, *Krasnia letopis'*, 1923, No.7.

²⁶ *Ibid*, pp.355-56.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.347.

²⁸ *Ibid*, pp.349-350.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p.355.

*seemed to me that the theories of the revolutionary Narodniki were the alpha and the omega of human knowledge. Therefore, when I encountered in Tochisskii a severe critic of the Narodovo'ltzy I was astounded and intrigued. I was amazed by his totally negative attitude towards terror, which I considered as the apogee of heroism. However, Tochisskii said that terror was quite simply egoism, its practitioners merely thirsted for glory, and that in the final analysis terror was simply a means for the rising bourgeois class to obtain power.*³⁰

Similarly Danilova rejected terror since it provoked government repression thereby preventing the development of a mass workers' movement and advocated that the role of revolutionaries was 'to teach the people to think, to unify them, and only then will the government fall into our hands.'³¹

The Activity of the Tochisskii Organisation

Within a short time of his arrival in the capital, Tochisskii had recruited a number of workers to his cause through contacts at the Technical School and workers at the Baird zavode. These initial contacts included Egor Klimanov, Nils Vasil'ev, Vasilii Buianov and Gavril Mefodiev. It is significant that all these workers had been previously involved in workers' circles organised by *intelligenty* groups and with the aid of these experienced circle workers, Tochisskii organised propaganda circles across the capital. These circles were 'primary' circles where general education was carried out and workers were introduced gradually to socialist literature. Circles for more advanced workers, such as Klimanov, Mefodiev and Buianov, were also organised and in these Marxist and other socialist literature was intensively studied.³² A number of advanced workers also received one-to-one tuition from an *intelligenty* member of the Society to prepare them to carry out propaganda independently in workers' circles. Andrei Breitfus, for example, worked intensively with the Baltic shipyard worker Ivan Timofeev and through this the latter developed into one of the most effective disseminators of socialist ideas amongst Petersburg workers.³³ Norinskii who became involved with Timofeev in 1887 as an apprentice at the shipyards, recalled that Timofeev would gather a group of workers

³⁰ A. Breitfus, 1923, p.326.

³¹ *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1923, No.7, p.347.

³² A. Breitfus, 1923, p.330.

³³ *Ibid*, p.337.

together in the workers' club', the toilets, and read and explain excerpts from works such as Diksztajn's popular account of Marx's *Capital*, *Kto chem Zhivet?*³⁴

Breitfus left a description of Tochisskii's propaganda methods. Dressed like a worker and speaking in language that workers could relate to, Tochisskii, on meeting a worker who he sensed might be sympathetic would engage him in casual conversation, perhaps going for a cup of tea in a tearoom. None of his contacts ever sensed that he came from an *intelligenty* background so well had he assimilated into the workers' environment. Studiously avoiding any talk of politics or revolution, he would gradually gather a group of workers together and form a circle. Although cautious by nature, Tochisskii seemed intuitively to identify sympathetic workers, but generally avoided recruiting workers who had been involved with the *narodovol'tsy* as 'he believed them to be tainted with revolutionary adventurism' that could threaten the organisation by attracting the attention of police spies. Tochisskii rarely used illegal materials, relying on newspaper articles describing labour conditions or the workers' movement in other countries or simply through his own propaganda skills.³⁵ One of the most important features of this propaganda was that it was also carried out by workers in accordance with the Society's aim of developing future leaders of the working-class. It is known that Klimanov, Mefodiev, Timofeev, and Nikolai Bogdanov by 1886-1887 were recruiting workers into the Society and carrying out quite sophisticated propaganda work in circles without any direct input from *intelligenty* propagandists.

Tochisskii assiduously avoided discussion of revolutionary action and insisted that this was a fundamental operating principle for all propagandists involved with the Society. Any discussion of terror, including economic or factory based terror, was totally prohibited. There is evidence that Tochisskii's views on terror were in tune with the views of leading workers with whom his organisation was involved. One worker recalled that in a circle he attended a *narodovol'tsev* tried to incite workers to support killing the tsar. One of the workers responded, telling the propagandist that it was futile to incite workers and make them angry. He bluntly reminded the propagandist that workers attended the circle 'to learn from you' and that when they had learnt everything they needed to know, then if it was necessary to become angry they would do so on their own and on issues that mattered to them.³⁶ Such an effective put-down of an *intelligenty* propagandist reveals a

³⁴ K.M. Norinskii, 'Moi vospominaniia,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva*....., 1921, pp.10-11.

³⁵ A. Breitfus, 1923, p.324.

³⁶ V.A. Shelgunov, 'Rabochie na puti k marksizmu,' *Staryi bol'shevik*, No 2 (5), Moscow, 1933, reprinted in *Avangard*, 1990, p.342.

characteristic attitude of advanced workers to both the nature of circle study and more crucially their motivation for attending.

Tochisskii and his worker associates established a series of contacts with workers in a number of factories, particularly in Nevskii Gate,³⁷ whilst Klimanov carried out invaluable propaganda at the Expedition for the Preparation of State Papers where he worked as a blacksmith. Workers from the Patronnyi factory on the Vyborg Side were brought into the Society's activities through Nil Vasil'ev, a survivor of circles from the 1870s. As the organisation developed, it established a strong base amongst workers at the Baltic shipyards on Vasilevskii Island through Ivan Timofeev. In a new departure, Tochisskaia and Danilova carried out propaganda work with women workers from the Laferm tobacco factory on Vasilevskii Island, the first consistent approach to propagandising Petersburg women workers.³⁸ Circles that were part of the Society's network were also formed on the Vyborg and Petersburg Sides. In the Obvodnyi Canal district and at the Rubber Works circles were organised that involved subsequent leading worker-activists, Gavril Mefodiev and Vladimir Proshin.³⁹

The Society created an extensive library for propaganda work that was divided into two sections: a legal and an illegal section.⁴⁰ One of the major accusations levelled at members of the Society related to the illegal library that proved to the authorities that the Society was involved in anti-government propaganda amongst workers.⁴¹ Included in this section were a significant number of Marxist works including multiple copies of *The Communist Manifesto*, *Our Differences* and *Rabochii*, the newspaper of the Party of The Russian Social-Democrats. Breitfus indicates that workers enjoyed reading more popular pamphlets such as Bakh's *Tsar Golod* and Diksztajn's *Kto chem Zhivet?* with theoretical works only used in circles under the direct guidance of a leading member of the Society or one of the already well-educated *worker-intelligenty*.

³⁷ N.L. Sergievskii, 'K voprosu o vozraste Leningradskoi organisatsii VKP (b),' *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1930, No.2 (35), p.15.

³⁸ A. Breitfus, 1923, pp.337-338.

³⁹ E.A. Korol'chuk, 'Vvedenie,' *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.72.

⁴⁰ *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1923, No.7 pp.372-3; Breitfus, 1923, pp.329-330.

⁴¹ *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1923, No.7, p.384.

The Fall of Tochisskii

Tensions between the *intelligenty* and worker sections were evident almost from the inception of the Society, as not all *intelligenty* members endorsed Tochisskii's views on its aims and harboured resentments around the subsidiary role envisaged for them. These tensions appeared at the very first meeting at which the 'Ustav' was discussed. Breitfus recalled that at the meeting the 'Ustav' was subject to two amendments, the first established an illegal section in the library while the second authorised a fund specifically to aid political exiles and arrested workers. Significantly, Tochisskii opposed both these amendments '*fearing that they would increase the overtly illegal activity of the group and inevitably lead to police retribution*' as well as diverting workers from serious study aimed at creating the *worker-intelligenty* - the primary aim of the Society.⁴²

Tochisskii's suspicions of the *intelligenty* section did not diminish and by early 1888 he resolved to move against the *intelligenty* section, led by the Breitfus brothers who retained contacts with narodovol'tsy *sympathisers*. To this end, in January 1888 Tochisskii convened a general meeting of the Society at which he proposed to remove *intelligenty* members from all contact with workers and to relegate them to passive sympathisers, in effect transforming the Society into a purely workers' organisation.⁴³ This meeting proved inconclusive but marked the end of Tochisskii's tenure as leader of the group as he was already under police surveillance and a few days later, along with his key supporters Lazarev and Danilova, he was arrested. In retrospect, his attempt to introduce changes in the way the group operated was motivated by his desire to ensure that it retained an exclusively worker orientation that he believed would be in danger when he was no longer directing the organisation. A subsequent meeting confirmed Ludwig Breitfus as the Society's new leader and agreed a significant revision of the Society's rules, establishing a single-tier organisation. Tochisskii, from exile, opposed these changes as he feared that they would lead to the destruction of the Society, simply because '*the intelligentsia cannot possibly care about the goals of the circle as much as workers.*' Tochisskii's prediction proved true as by September 1888 the police uncovered the activity of *intelligenty* members and arrested them.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid, p.334.

⁴³ Korol'chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika revoliutsionnogo rabocheho dvizheniia v Peterburge. Vol.1, 1870-1904 gg.*, Leningrad, 1940, p.135; A. Breitfus, 1923, pp.336-339.

⁴⁴ *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1923, No.7, pp.384, 386.

Tochisskii's insistence that the Society operate on the basis of extreme secrecy amongst workers was vindicated, as from the 11 members of the Society arrested by the police only one was a worker. This is of crucial importance as it enabled the survival of a core group of workers who had already developed as *worker-intelligent* under Tochisskii's tutelage to remain at liberty and regroup to form the nucleus for the next stage of the development of the workers' movement in the capital - the Central Workers' Circle. Strict conspiracy surrounding the library also allowed it to remain undetected and transfer into the safe-keeping of the Baltic Shipyard worker Ivan Timofeev. Through Timofeev this vital resource continued to be available to workers and would be an important element in the next phase of development of the workers' movement in Petersburg.⁴⁵

The Legacy of the Tochisskii Organisation

Tochisskii and his associates focused their activities on raising the intellectual level of workers. Tochisskii's sister confirmed this when she penned a short biographical sketch of her brother in the 1920s, emphasising that whilst Tochisskii carried out extensive propaganda amongst workers, this was towards their organisation around economic issues and his *modus operandi* always avoided overt political opposition to the regime.⁴⁶ Andrei Breitfus also recalled that in Tochisskii's propaganda among workers, '*there was not a single word about revolution.*'⁴⁷ Tochisskii was well aware that in the prevailing climate of police repression any overt manifestation of political opposition would lead to arrests amongst workers, setting back the development of the workers' movement he was committed to building. For Tochisskii the absolute priority was to protect the fragile shoots of the *worker-intelligent* so that they could develop their own specifically worker organisation. The only way to ensure the survival of this emerging worker-elite was to focus activity on cultural and economic study in the firm expectation that through this the workers themselves would reach a realisation of their subsequent organisational tasks.

Tochisskii's endeavours to protect workers from the depredations of the police were successful. The intensive police investigation into the Society implicated only four workers and only one of these was identified and arrested. The others were simply referred to by their conspiratorial nicknames, 'Klim', 'Semen', and 'Fomich', remained at liberty when the Society was destroyed in autumn 1888. It is possible to identify these workers:

⁴⁵ A. Breitfus, *Krasnaia letopis'*, No.7, 1923, p.334.

⁴⁶ Lebedeva, *Istoriko-revoliutsionnye Sbornik, T. III*, 1926, p.298.

⁴⁷ A. Breitfus, 1923, p.326.

Klim was Egor Afanas'ev-Klimanov; Semen was M. Stefanenkov, a metalworker from the Baltic Shipyards who according to Ludwig Breitfus was the equal to Klimanov as a leading member of the worker-section of the Society; whilst Fominch was Aleksander Filimonov a young worker from the Kartochnyi works in the Nevskii Gate.⁴⁸ These workers along with others involved with the Society continued propaganda work in workers' circles and would be part of the nucleus of workers who would form the basis for Petersburg Central Workers' Circle [CWC].

The workers' section of the Society operated independently from the *intelligenty* section and from this organisational model leading workers involved with Tochisskii absorbed organisational principles that they would apply in subsequent work during the 1890s. Foremost amongst these was the need for workers to maintain organisational independence and to operate through a central workers' circle that would direct the work of a network of circles across the capital. In this schema, the *intelligenty* were assigned the important, but subordinate, role as the providers of the knowledge required by workers to develop as natural leaders of the working-class. The rationale of the leading worker group was simple and essentially an experiential one: they came from the working-class and retained close contacts with working-class life. Given this, they believed they understood the expectations, hopes and prejudices of their fellow workers, empathised with them and through this direct connection would be able to influence workers, win their trust and respect and through time lead their struggles for a better life.

Another lesson leading workers learnt from Tochisskii was that maintaining a strict organisational separation between the *intelligenty* and workers would reduce the likelihood of arrest, as they were all too aware that too close an association with *intelligenty* radicals quickly brought down the wrath of the authorities and led to imprisonment and exile. Tochisskii reinforced amongst his worker-disciples that too great a focus on purely illegal revolutionary literature, especially *narodovol'tsy* literature advocating terror, was more likely to attract the attention of police and make workers' groups susceptible to infiltration by informers with harsher sentences when the group was destroyed. The focus on educational and developmental propaganda work in workers' circles advocated by Tochisskii was to remain an important, but not exclusive, aspect of the work of the CWC in the early 1890s and in this the influence of Tochisskii is apparent.

⁴⁸ Iu. Polevoi, *Zarozhdenie marksizma v Rossii, 1883-1894 gg*, Moscow, 1959, p.327; *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1923, No.7, p.353; N.L. Sergievskii, *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1930, No.2. (35), p.15.

Although the CWC did not display the same degree of animosity and suspicion towards the *intelligenty* as Tochisskii, the workers who graduated from the Society were unambiguous that their alliance with the radical *intelligenty* was temporary, that *intelligenty* propagandists would be replaced by genuine workers as soon as a critical mass of educated workers had been trained to assume their roles. Indeed, most of the leading members of the Central Student Circle that was to become closely allied with the CWC after the destruction of the Tochisskii Society willingly supported and accepted such a subordinate function.⁴⁹ The leading Soviet historian of the 1920s, Sergievskii considered that the historical significance of the Tochisskii Society was its commitment to preparing a cadre of *worker-intelligenty* who would be able to lead the mass of the workers in their decisive struggle against both Tsardom and capitalism.⁵⁰ A similar significance was attached to the Tochisskii Society by a leading Menshevik, Fedor Dan:

*From the early circles the 'Association of Petersburg Workmen' founded in 1886 by Pavel Varfolomevich Tochisskii acquired great significance in the subsequent history of Russian Social-Democracy..... The most characteristic mark of its progress was its strong scepticism towards the intelligentsia..... The organisation itself was divided into two separate parts - worker and intelligenty, as a result of which when the police destroyed the 'Association' in 1888 many workers remained at liberty, who subsequently played no small role in the Social-Democratic movement.*⁵¹

Indeed, the names of the workers radicalised through their involvement with Tochisskii reads like a roll-call of the most pre-eminent of the first generation of worker social democrats in Russia: Egor Afanas'ev-Klimanov, Vasili Shelgunov, Nikolai Bogdavov, Vasily Buianov, Gavril Mefodiev, Aleksei Karelin, Ivan Timofeev, Vladimir Fomin, Aleksander Filimonov, Vladimir Proshin and others. This core group of worker-activists was not deterred or deflected by arrests of their comrades in the Society and continued co-ordinating workers' circles across the city, guaranteeing a direct continuity between the Tochisskii Society and the Petersburg CWC.

Given the significant common worker membership between the Tochisskii Society and the subsequent Petersburg Central Workers' Circle, there is an important continuity both in

⁴⁹ M.I. Brusnev, 'Pervye revolyutsionnye shagi L. Krasina,' *Leonid Borisovich Krasin ('Nikitich')*. *Gody podpol'nia. Sbornik vospominanii, statei i dokumentov*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1928, p.69.

⁵⁰ N.L. Sergievskii, 'Gruppa Osvobozhdenie Truda i marksistskie kruzhki,' *Istoriko-revoliutsionnye Sbornik, T. II*, p.120.

⁵¹ F.I. Dan, *Proiskhozhdenie Bol'shevisma*, New York, 1946, p.213.

terms of personnel and ideas between the two groups, a fact that had hitherto been largely overlooked in a historical narrative that sees Russian social-democracy emerging and developing through a series of *intelligenty* led groups – Blagoev, Tochisskii, Brusnev, Radchenko, Lenin – and which pays minimal attention to the core group of worker-activists who continued their organisational focus regardless of the removal of their assumed *intelligenty* leaders. Such a narrative ignores both the continuity between various supposed phases in social-democratic development in Petersburg and fails to see that beneath the surface of the *intelligenty* activists a vibrant and coherent workers' organisation capable of reproducing a cadre of leading worker activists continued to exist and develop in accordance with their own priorities.

The Polish Connection

Soon after Tochisskii's arrest this core group of worker-activists made contact with groups of Polish *intelligenty* activists and by mid-1888 had formed an alliance with Polish students centred on the Technological Institute. It was the coalescence of Polish revolutionary students with the core group of workers schooled in the *Tovarishchestvo sankt-peterburgskikh masterovykh* that created the potent mix that would result in the formation of the first genuinely worker led social-democratic organisation in Russia, the Petersburg Central Workers' Circle.

Within the workers' circles organised by Tochisskii, one the most active *intelligenty* propagandists was Gurii Pietrowski who survived the arrests of members of the Society and was able to provide a vital link between the first Russian Social-Democratic groups, the CWC and the *intelligenty* group associated with it that included Brusnev and Golubev. Based on research in the 1920s on early Russian Social-Democracy, the Soviet historian N.L. Sergievskii concluded that during the second half of the 1880s a loose network of social-democratically inclined revolutionaries gradually coalesced into an embryonic organising centre for the co-ordination of propaganda amongst workers and that in this Polish students played a leading part.⁵² Unfortunately Sergievskii's account provided little precise detail, allowing his thesis to be largely discounted in the following decades. This was primarily due to a reluctance by Soviet scholars to attribute an influential role to Polish radicals in the development of Russian social-democracy and because the ideological and practical approach of the emerging organising centre for workers'

⁵² N.L. Sergievskii, *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1930, No.2 (45), pp.11, 13-15.

propaganda identified by Sergievskii ascribed the leading role in the organisation of workers to workers themselves. This ran contrary to the dominant Soviet narrative that the revolutionary intelligentsia played a critical role in raising the workers to consciousness of their class tasks. This ideologically derived narrative assumed greater importance for early Petersburg social-democratic groups as it would be precisely in such *intelligenty* groups whose lineage could be traced back to the mid-1880s that Lenin cut his revolutionary teeth, involved with the remnants of an organisation that operated on an approach that was diametrically opposed to his own concept of Party organisation and the leading role of revolutionary ‘intelligentsia’ within it.

Only belatedly did Soviet historians explore the Polish connections within Russian Social-Democracy. In the 1970s A.M. Orekhov investigated Polish activity and influence on both the practice and ideology of the pioneers of Marxism within Russia.⁵³ Orekhov’s studies built on work carried in Poland on the relationship between Polish students and early Russian Social-Democracy, the most important of which was Zygmunt Lukawski’s 1970 study *Polacy w rosyjskim ruchu sojaldemokratycznym w latach 1883-1893*. Based on this research it is possible to put flesh on the bones of Sergievskii’s cryptic observations and reveal continuity in terms of both personnel and ideology between the first Petersburg social-democratic groups and the later so-called Brusnev organisation, a group widely accepted as the progenitor of the Leninist Petersburg Union of Struggle.

To understand Polish influence it is necessary to examine Polish participation in higher education during the 1880s. Educational opportunities within Poland were limited, with only two higher educational institutions operating, both of which were seen by Poles to be instruments of Russianisation. Access to universities within Russia was also limited, with strict quotas on Polish students, resulting in many Polish students gravitating to more practically oriented institutions such as the Petersburg Technological Institute. The Institute had been established in the late 1820s to provide technical education and drew a high proportion of students from lower middle-class groups with significant numbers from Poland, Lithuania and the Ukraine.⁵⁴ Many young Poles attracted to Petersburg brought a strong antipathy towards the Tsarist regime that was pursuing anti-Polish policies in their country. In both national and social composition therefore, the Technological Institute was

⁵³ A.M. Orkehov, *Sotsial-Demokraticheskoe dvizhenie v Rossii i Pol'skie revoliutsionery 1887-1893 gg.*, Moscow, 1973 and *Uchastaii pol'skikh studentov v sotsial-demokraticheskoi propaganda v Peterburge*, Moscow, 1979.

⁵⁴ Richard Pipes, 1963, p.18.

markedly different from Petersburg University. The differences were also reflected in political affiliations, with University students inclined to support *Narodniki* and *Narodovol'tsy* groups whereas Technologists gravitated more towards Marxist social-democracy, favouring work amongst urban workers.

By the 1880s, Polish industrialisation was far in advance of Russia and this, allied to the extensive links between members of the Polish *Proletariat Party* and urban workers, made propaganda work in workers' circles an almost natural outlet for revolutionary action by Polish students in Petersburg. This tendency was reinforced by the fact that courses at the Technological Institute involved students undertaking practical assignments in factories, giving them direct access to workers and enabling them to begin to establish a revolutionary discourse with workers. Leonid Krasin, a student at the Institute in the late 1880s, recalled that it was through such contacts that an interest in the labour questions and the workers' movement was awakened in many technologists.⁵⁵ The more practically inclined technologists who understood industrial production processes and what workers actually did in factories were far better able to relate to workers and had readymade topics to discuss with them. This sharply differentiated technologists from university and other student radicals who did not share any common points of reference and often appeared bookish and distant to workers giving rise to frequent misunderstandings and antagonisms.

Education at the Technological Institute also reinforced an attraction towards Marxist theories, based as they were on industrialisation and the development of technological innovation as a progressive force towards socialism. Such a 'modernist' ideology chimed with their practical experiences and aspirations and was far removed from the realities of the Russian countryside and political doctrines based on building socialism on archaic peasant-based institutions. By the late 1880s, this potent mix of nationalist resentment and Marxist ideology existed in a significant number of Polish students studying at the Institute and formed a ready pool of radical activists seeking to channel their opposition to the government through propaganda amongst workers.⁵⁶

Given this, it is not surprising that the student circles that formed a social-democratic centre in the late 1880s originated in circles in which Poles played a dominant role. One

⁵⁵ L.B. Krasin, 'Iz vospominanii peterburgskogo tekhnologa,' *Leonid Borisovich Krasin [Nikitich]. Gody podpol'ia*, Moscow-Leningrad., 1928, pp.56-57.

⁵⁶ See M.L. Rapoport, *Tekhnologicheskii Institut Imeni Leningradikogo Soteta*, Leningrad, 1928, pp.269-309, for a discussion on revolutionary organisations at the Technological Institute.

such circle was associated with Gabriel and Julia Rodziewicz that began life as a *narodovol'tsy* group in 1885 amongst Polish students at the University and the Medical-Surgical Academy. It is probable that this group had links to the *Narodovol'tsy* Terrorist Fraction but, surviving the purge that followed the events of 1 March 1887, during the same year recruited additional Polish students from the Technological Institute including Bronislaw Lelewel and Anton Kosinski. In his memoirs, Lelewel is explicit that as a precondition for joining the circle, he insisted that it renounce terror and focus on propaganda amongst workers.⁵⁷ With Lelewel's arrival, who Krasin recalled was a committed Marxist, the character of the Rodziewicz circle assumed a definite social-democratic colouring and began to carry out propaganda in workers' circles.⁵⁸ A second Polish circle at the Technological Institute was organised by the Gurii Pietrowski during 1887 with the specific intention of undertaking propaganda in workers' circles. By this stage Pietrowski was a seasoned propagandist having been associated with both the Party of the Russian Social-Democrats and circles organised by Tochisskii between 1885 and 1887.⁵⁹ Given the co-existence of two groups with similar aims and ideology, now consisting largely of Polish students at the Technological Institute, their merger in March 1888 was unsurprising.

Coincidentally, this merger happened at around the same time that the Tochisskii Society was experiencing arrests amongst its *intelligenty* members that inhibited the continuation of propaganda amongst workers' circles at its previous level. In autumn 1888, when Maria Tochisskaia returned to Petersburg after an absence of several several months, she discovered that only Ludwig and Eduard Breitfus from the organisation remained involved with workers. Lebedeva recalled that surviving members of the Society decided to merge their remaining workers' circles with circles organised by Pietrowski. Meetings involving Ludwig Breitfus and Tochisskaia with Pietrowski took place during autumn 1888 to finalise this transfer.⁶⁰ Lebedeva's testimony demonstrates that through Pietrowski a significant section of the workers' organisation that formed part of the Tochisskii group became directly linked to the emerging Polish social-democratic organisation in the capital.

⁵⁷ B. Lelewel, 'Przyczynek do dziejow udzialu Polakow w rosyjskim ruchu rewolucyjnym (1886-1890),' *Niepodleglosc*, 1 (24), 1934, p.138. I wish to thank Dr James D. White for making available to me a number of translations from Polish that inform this section.

⁵⁸ L.B. Krasin, 1928, p.57.

⁵⁹ N.L. Sergievskii, *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1930, No.2, p.20; R.A.Kazakevich, *Sotsial demokraticheskie organizatsii v Peterburge*, Leningrad, 1960, pp.70,73.

⁶⁰ M. Lebedeva [Tochisskaia], *Istoriko revoliutsionnye Sbornik, T. III*, 1926, p.298.

Further evidence that continuing activity amongst workers' groups was connected to earlier work by the Tochisskii Society is found in a letter from Ludwig Breitfus to Tochisskii in exile in Zhitomir in June 1888. Breitfus reports that Ivan Timofeev had made a great many converts at the Baltic shipyards and that the workers 'Sem' [Stefanenkov] and 'Klim' [Afanas'ev] were spreading social-democratic ideas with '*astonishing zeal*.'⁶¹ It is known that Lelewel was involved in circles at the Baltic shipyards organised by Timofeev from the end of 1887 and in early 1888 became a close associate of another leading worker in the Tochisskii circles, Gavril Mefodiev in circles operating in the Warsaw Railway Workshops.⁶² The rapid growth of propaganda work during 1888 is confirmed by Lelewel who claimed that by the end of the year the Polish social-democratic circle was involved with several dozen workers' circles across the capital.⁶³ Such a proliferation of circles could only have been achieved through the assimilation of a substantial number of pre-existing workers' circles into the new social-democratic group, i.e. circles that previously formed part of the Tochisskii organisation.

In his memoirs, the Baltic shipyard worker Vladimir Fomin provided a revealing account of the circle in which Lelewel, nicknamed 'Pavel Ivanovich', carried out propaganda work during 1887/88. Fomin confirms that the circle was initially organised by Ivan Timofeev and initially included Fomin plus the workers Petr Evgrafov, Ivan Egorov, Konstantin Kupriianov and Mikhail Stefanenkov. This initial group was joined in early 1888 by amongst others Konstantin Norinskii, Andrei Fischer and Petr Keizo and was the circle which maintained and developed the library inherited from the Tochisskii organisation. What is remarkable is that this one circle included at least nine workers who would play a major role in the formation and development of the CWC. Fomin also confirms the extent to which Polish students were instrumental in the circle's development:

From the very beginning and subsequently, circles at the Baltic shipyards worked under the guidance of Poles who had links with Germany and were therefore in close contact with developments in social-democracy abroad and who had a thorough grasp of social-democratic theory. Throughout the period that our circle operated for over two-thirds of the time it was Polish students who worked with us

⁶¹ *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1923, No.7, pp.353-354.

⁶² R.A. Kazakevich, 1960, p.129.

⁶³ B. Lelewel, 1934.

Lelewel, Bankowski, Kosinski, Buraczewski, Tsviinski [Cywinski]... all worked with our group. ⁶⁴

It is also possible to get an understanding of the nature of the propaganda work carried out by Polish technologists. One of the members of the Polish group, Buraczewski, took over a circle at the Putilov factory in 1889 that included the worker-activists Vasiliï Buianov and P.K. Pobedimskii. The circle met once a week and discussed material presented by Buraczewski on the position of workers in Western Europe, how they organised strike struggles and workers' political parties. Responding positively to the idea of strikes to win improvements in working conditions, the workers established a mutual-aid fund with a longer term aim of creating a strike fund at the factory and elected Buianov as treasurer. ⁶⁵ In a significant development, Buraczewski took advantage of the fact that one member of the circle was Polish to develop contacts amongst Polish and Lithuanian workers in the factory and establish a circle amongst them in which he undertook propaganda in Polish using Polish socialist literature published by the *Proletariat Party*. ⁶⁶ From this it is evident that propaganda work undertaken by Polish technologists quickly evolved beyond the purely educational and cultural and was working towards fomenting strikes and the establishment of a specifically workers' organisation.

The expansion of propaganda work and the assimilation of circles from the Tochisskii Society resulted in joint meeting of propagandists and leading workers in October 1888. An Okhrana report on the meeting indicated that it agreed to intensify work in workers' circles and introduce more illegal works into propaganda. It is significant that the agent's report makes specific mention of Lavrov's *Historical letters* as a key work for systematic study in workers' circles, confirming that an important goal of propaganda work remained the creation of a cadre of '*critically thinking*' worker-intelligent prepared to take over leadership of the workers' movement in the fullness of time. The meeting also decided to establish a number of safe rooms to hold workers' meetings. ⁶⁷

Given that by the autumn of 1888 a cadre of experienced worker-activists from the Tochisskii organisation that placed an absolute priority on the leading role of workers, it is inconceivable that such workers would meekly defer to youthful *intelligent* in a relatively

⁶⁴ V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.186.

⁶⁵ Korol'chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika*...., Leningrad, 1940, p.148.

⁶⁶ N.L. Sergievskii, *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1930, p.24; R.A. Kazakevich, 1960, p.132; Z. Lukawski, *Polacy w rosyjskim ruchu sojaldemokratycznym w latach 1883-1893*, Krakow, 1970, p.37.

⁶⁷ A.M. Orekhov, 1979, pp.27-28.

new organisation on major organisational and practical questions. In turn, the Polish students knew that the Polish Socialist Party *Proletariat* was organised on a dualistic structure with complementary *intelligenty* and workers' centres and would therefore, be familiar with and supportive of an independent workers' centre. An additional similarity with the Polish organisational structure was to be put in place shortly after when the CWC co-opted a member of the *intelligenty* circle in an identical manner to their Polish counterparts.⁶⁸ By this stage, propaganda work had grown to such an extent that the central *intelligenty* group needed to supplement its ranks and recruited a number of new Polish propagandists, including Waclaw Cywinski who would remain as a key *intelligenty* influence for the CWC up to 1893. By this stage, the composition of the central *intelligenty* group comprised 11 members of whom seven were Poles, three Russian and one Ukrainian whilst eight were students at the Technological Institute.⁶⁹

By early 1889, a coherent social-democratic organisation was operating in Petersburg, characterised by a high degree of continuity from preceding groups and with Polish students from the Technological Institute playing a leading role in its organising centre. Golubev who was to enter the *intelligenty*-centre in late 1889 confirmed that it was composed mainly of technology students who had rejected terror and considered the formation of an independent workers' party a priority, emphasising that the organisation which he joined had '*as a symbol of their faith the independence of the workers' movement*' and saw the role of the intelligentsia as that of '*a servant to the workers' movement and of a purely temporary nature.*'⁷⁰ Such a view of the relationship between *intelligenty* and workers could have been a direct quotation from Tochisskii demonstrating the durability of the concept of worker-led and autonomous organisational structures from the 1880s into the 1890s. Similarly, Mikhail Brusnev, co-opted into the *intelligenty*-centre in autumn 1889, related how from 1888 he had been involved in social-democratic work amongst workers that formed part of a large organisation involving students from the Technological Institute that had the aim of preparing from amongst the workers the conscious future leaders of the labour movement.⁷¹ It is clear that both Golubev and Brusnev joined a pre-existing social-democratic organisation in Petersburg in 1889 whose origins go back to the mid-1880s that also had direct links with worker-oriented groups such as the Tochisskii organisation dating back to the mid-1880s.

⁶⁸ Z. Lukawski, 1970, p.35.

⁶⁹ A.M. Orekhov, 1973, p.145.

⁷⁰ V.S. Golubev, 'Stranichka is istorii rabocheho dvizheniia,' *Byloe*, 1906, No.12, p.111.

⁷¹ M.I. Brusnev, *Proletarskia revoliutsiia*, 1923, p.19.

Whilst it may be overstating the case to claim, as Sergievskii did, that the Tochisskii Society formed part of a single larger organisation directing social-democratic activities amongst workers across Petersburg during the second half of the 1880s, it seems clear that a well-established network of both formal and informal contacts between *intelligenty* and workers existed that enabled propaganda activity to continue relatively smoothly during these years despite frequent arrests and changes in *intelligenty* personnel. The threads linking earlier social-democratic activities with Polish students from the Technological Institute bound the participants together if not in a single organisation then at least in a common enterprise, based on a shared philosophy and approach in which the concept of service to the working-class, preparing a nucleus of future worker leaders and a commitment to cede control to its leading worker-representatives as soon as possible formed the core principles that informed their work. By the time Brusnev and Golubev joined the *intelligenty* centre, a strong organisational foundation had been laid and the tangible results of several years involvement with workers in the capital were becoming visible as the workers emerged from the shadows and through their own Central Workers' Circle began to assume a more direct control over social-democratic activity across the capital.

Chapter 8.

The Central Workers' Circle: First Phase 1889-1892

Introduction

In conjunction with the social-democratic student group based in the Technological Institute the network of workers' circles established by Tochisskii expanded so that by 1889 around 30 circles were operating across the capital. During 1889, through an initiative by Egor Afanas'ev-Klimanov these circles were increasingly integrated into a single organisational framework co-ordinated by workers. The first organisational framework was developed through the formation in summer 1889 of an illegal mutual-aid society organised by Klimanov that took the name *Bor'ba* that quickly evolved into the Central Workers' Circle [CWC] in early 1890. Before reviewing the history of the CWC, a brief examination of the activities of one of its leading architects, Egor Afanas'ev-Klimanov, will enable an understanding of the motivations of leading workers involved in its creation.

Egor Afanas'ev-Klimanov and Worker Hegemony

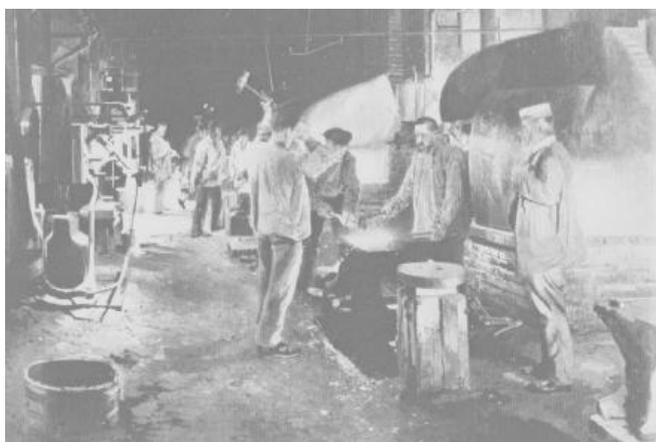


Egor Afanas'ev-Klimanov

Whilst the creation of the CWC was undoubtedly a collective endeavour reflecting a shared approach to leadership, perhaps one worker in particular epitomised its philosophy and provided personal continuity with the Tochisskii Society – Egor Afanas'ev-Klimanov. [Hereafter Klimanov to distinguish him from another leading CWC member, the weaver,

Fedor Afanas'ev, who also had a brother active in the circle movement named Egor]. Born in 1866 into a peasant family in the Gdovsk district of Pskov *guberniia*, Klimanov, like many of his *worker-intelligent* contemporaries, arrived in Petersburg in the early 1880s as a young teenager to work as an apprentice in the blacksmith's shop at the Expedition for the Preparation of State Papers, located on the Fontanke, near the Narvskii Gate, where he would continue to work up until his first arrest in June 1892. Enrolling at the evening school organised by the Technical Society at the factory, Klimanov was quickly inducted into illegal workers' circles organised by the Party of the Social-Democrats.¹

Around 1886 Klimanov was recruited by Tochisskii to lead workers' circles and continuing to attend the Technical School began to recruit other young workers into the organisation. One such worker was the young Vasilii Shelgunov who was given illegal literature and then introduced into a small workers' circle led by Klimanov. Shelgunov recalled that one of the first books Klimanov provided him with was Volume I of Marx's *Capital*. Confessing that he was unable to make head or tail of Marx's theories, Klimanov took pity on the young novice and gave him Diksztajn's *Kto chem Zhivet?* that provided in readily understandable language explanations of key Marxist concepts particularly how workers created value through their labour and how capitalists exploited them.²



Blacksmith's Workshop at the Nobel factory, c 1890

Between 1886 and 1888, Klimanov was one of Tochisskii's most trusted and closest worker-associates and following Tochisskii's arrest in early 1888 played a leading role in developing the circle movement and in establishing connections with Polish social-

¹ *Deiateli....., T.V.*, stb. 158-160.

² V.A. Shelgunov, 'Vospominaniia V.A. Shelgunov,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva....., 1921*, pp.53-54 and 'Rabochie na puti k marksizmu,' *Avangard*, 1990, p.60.

democrats from the Technological Institute. When *intelligent* propagandists involved in the social-democratic centre met Klimanov towards the end of the 1880s they were struck by his strong identification with the working-class. Sviatlovskii recounted that at this time he was completely urbanised and ‘*considered himself to be a true member of the working class,*’ quickly assimilating Marxist teachings, reading systematically to work out ‘*a natural scientific worldview and the political and economic symbols of faith for a Marxist revolutionary.*’³

Klimanov’s self-identification as a worker accounts his burning aspiration for radical workers to be recognised as a discrete force in society. From very early in his revolutionary career, Klimanov sought opportunities for workers to enter the public sphere and be part of the discourse around change and development in Russia. On the tenth anniversary of the poet Nekrasov’s death in January 1888, Klimanov led a small delegation of worker-students to a demonstration at the poet’s grave in the Volkovo cemetery where they participated in a public demonstration along with students and other members of radical society.⁴ In spring 1889, the radical publicist Saltykov-Shchedrin died. Students, *intelligent*, literati planned the funeral. Klimanov and leading circle-workers insisted on a presence and a group of workers attended the funeral, taking a prominent place in the funeral procession along with students and members of the literati.⁵

A few months later, the founder of the evening-classes organised by the Technical Society, E.N. Andreev, died and again Klimanov was instrumental along with the print-worker Aleksei Karelin in organising a sizable contingent of workers to attend his funeral. Following the funeral, Klimanov arranged a meeting of workers in a nearby tavern who agreed to establish a legal mutual-aid society, similar to those advocated by Barybin and Tochisskii. As previously, the authorities refused permission, despite Klimanov’s best endeavours to provide a cloak of respectability for the project by enlisting the support of local clergy.⁶ Whilst there can be little doubt that Klimanov’s intentions for the society were not entirely legal, he was motivated by his conviction that workers must be visible to broader society, acting for themselves and involved in determining their own future.

³ V.V. Sviatlovskii, ‘K istorii pervogo maia [1890-1893 gg.]’, *Byloe*, No.16, 1921, p.171.

⁴ V.A. Shelgunov, ‘Vospominaniia V.A. Shelgunov,’ *Ot gruppy Blagoeva....*, 1921, p.54; V.V. Sviatlovskii, ‘Na zare Rossiiskoi sotsial-demokratii,’ *Byloe*, 1922, No.19, pp.145; Korol’chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika....*, 1940, p.141.

⁵ V.S. Golubev, ‘Stranichka iz istorii rabocheho dvizheniia,’ *Byloe*, 1906, No.12, p.110.

⁶ V.S. Shelgunov, 1921, p.54; V.V. Sviatlovskii, 1922, pp.144, 145; Korol’chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika....*, 1940, pp.146-147.

Given this, Klimanov and his associates were prepared to consider operating through legally sanctioned channels and is perhaps indicative that a consistent motif in worker-activity remained raising the intellectual and moral level of workers by whatever means possible. One propagandist recounted that the workers were ‘dismayed’ at the rejection of their society and strengthened their resolve to develop their ideas for worker improvement through illegal means.⁷

With legal avenues blocked, Klimanov and leading workers redoubled their efforts to form a workers’ organisation to represent circles across the capital. Shelgunov recalled that following the refusal to allow a legal society, an illegal society named ‘*Bor’ba*’ was established with the aim of ‘enlightening’ workers by carrying out propaganda. Members would pay 25 kopeks per month in dues with Klimanov as its treasurer and chief organiser. Shortly after this meeting, Shelgunov was conscripted to the army but maintained contact with the group and recalled a meeting of around 30 workers in autumn 1889 to discuss the extension of propaganda circles associated with ‘*Bor’ba*’ and at which Klimanov and Vladimir Proshin made speeches.⁸

‘*Bor’ba*’ quickly became the basis of the Central Workers’ Circle, of which Klimanov became treasurer in 1890. Between 1890 and 1892, Klimanov continued to press for a more visible presence of workers in social affairs and was instrumental in persuading the CWC to send an address from workers to the dying publicist N.V. Shelgunov in April 1891, acting as one of the four-worker delegation that took the address to Shelgunov’s house. On the death of the publicist soon after, Klimanov advocated that the workers’ organisation be represented at the funeral.⁹ In his speech at the first May-Day event less than a month after the Shelgunov funeral, Klimanov indicated that the workers’ intervention was part of a deliberate strategy ‘*to draw the attention of society to the workers’ question,*’ which he considered had been successfully achieved.¹⁰

As with other ‘public’ appearances of workers, Klimanov was instrumental in both organising the 1891 May-Day, identifying a suitable location, delivering one of the four speeches and hosting a May-Day ‘evening’ for around 70 workers in his apartment to

⁷ V.V. Sviatlovskii, 1922, pp.144-145.

⁸ V.A. Shelgunov, 1921, pp.54-55.

⁹ V.S. Golubev, *Byloe*, 1906, p.119; V M Karelina, ‘Vospominaniia o podpol’nykh rabochikh kruzhhkakh Brusnevskoi organisatsii,’ first published in *Krasnaia letopis’*, No.4, 1922, reprinted in *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.281.

¹⁰ ‘Rech rabochikh na pervomaiskom sobranii 1891 g.,’ *Ot gruppy Blagoeva....*, 1921, p.123.

reinforce a sense of common purpose amongst circle workers. One worker present at this event recalled that when they left this gathering workers felt a great enthusiasm with which to continue their cause and quickly to achieve their goals.¹¹

Like a number of other leading CWC members, Klimanov encouraged and supported the formation of circles amongst women workers, working closely with Vera Karelina, Anna Boldyreva and Natalia Grigor'eva in their work amongst women workers. For a period he attended the circles organised by Grigor'eva, partly to support her development as a propagandist, but also to monitor the circle as Grigor'eva was known to have certain *narodovol'tsy* sympathies. Klimanov like his former mentor Tochisskii had an extremely hostile view towards the *narodovol'tsy* who he believed were seeking to divert workers from their priority task of organising a workers' organisation to protect workers' interest.

Although extremely hostile to Narodnaia Volia and utterly committed to worker hegemony, Klimanov recognised the need for support of sympathetic *intelligenty*. As a member of Tochisskii's Society, Klimanov, according to the police reports, accepted that:

..... [since] there is still not a workers' intelligentsia, the former [intelligentsia] must direct the choice of books, set up libraries, and impart and disseminate knowledge. Moreover, to do this it is usually necessary to obtain funds, which is easier for the intelligentsia due to the erroneous value placed on intellectual labour [in relation to] physical labour.....¹²

Throughout Klimanov's involvement with the CWC up to his final arrest and exile from Petersburg in 1895 his primary focus was on building a workers' organisation and creating the worker-intelligentsia necessary to assume leadership of a broader workers' movement. In his May-Day speech of 1892 Klimanov called on workers to unite to strengthen their forces, reminding workers that their 'salvation' rested in their own hands but this required 'a united and disciplined workers' organisation.'¹³ A number of his contemporaries highlighted his organisational qualities, his pupil Shelgunov recalling that Klimanov was a good organiser and agitator, but was not distinguished by his erudition, and spoke 'from

¹¹ M.I. Brusnev, 'Vozniknovenie pervykh sotsial-demokraticheskikh organisatsii,' *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, No.2 [14], p.27; V.M. Karelina, 'Leonid Borisovich Krasin – propagandist i organisatsei rabochikh kruzhek,' *Leonid Borisovich Krasin ['Nikitich'], Gody podpol'ia. Sbornik vospominanii, statei i dokumentov*, [ed.], M.N. Liadov and S.M. Pozner, Moscow-Leningrad, 1928, p. 91; A. Fisher, *V Rossi ii v Anglii*, 1922, pp.13-14.

¹² *Krasnaia letopis'*, No. 7 1923, p.357.

¹³ Cited in A.M. Orkehov, 1979, p.144.

the gut.’¹⁴ This focus on organisation was matched by his commitment to knowledge, but knowledge designed for a specific purpose. Sviatlovskii recounted how Klimanov would often emphasise that the CWC wanted ‘workers to be able to substantiate their beliefs and to be certain of the correctness of their actions’, essentially being schooled in Marxist theory and the practice of western social-democratic political parties.¹⁵ This was reflected in Klimanov’s insistence in early 1892 that all members of the CWC attend an advanced study-group led by the Cywinski at which study focused on Engel’s *Origins of the Family*, works by Marx, and Plekhanov and the history of revolutionary movements abroad and in Russia.¹⁶ Whilst, in common with other members of the CWC, Klimanov ‘did not recognise an opposition between workers and intelligenty’¹⁷ he was committed to developing a workers’ organisation led by ‘advanced workers’ whose responsibility was to explain to the mass of workers the causes of their ‘wretched conditions’ under ‘the yoke of the capitalist system’ and how through their own organisation they could escape from such oppression.¹⁸ Klimanov had no doubt that this would involve violent revolution against the Tsarist regime that protected the interests of the capitalists and that workers must respond to the violence of the state with violence, declaring in his 1892 speech that ‘we [the workers] will pull down force only by the use of force.’

In many senses Klimanov represented one of the most consistent worker-revolutionaries produced by the circle movement. Boldyreva described him as a ‘coherent revolutionary activist [who] devoted his whole life to the revolutionary cause’, displaying ‘iron will, boundless energy and decisiveness.’¹⁹ In a heartfelt tribute, another organiser of women’s circles wrote:

This was a wonderful man. Although in scholarship he yielded to other leading workers, such as Bogdanov or Mefodiev, he made up for it with his unusually good qualities, particular conviction, devotion to the cause, by his ability to approach people and by striking beauty of his spirit. Through this he succeeded in attracting great loyalty, particularly amongst women and weavers. Then what was missing from him in the sense of knowledge, he more than made up with his sincerity, and if he yielded in theory to some metalworkers, who in general were the most developed

¹⁴ V.A. Shelgunov, 1921, p.55.

¹⁵ V.V. Sviatlovskii, 1922, pp.142-143.

¹⁶ A.M. Orekhov, 1979, pp.132-133.

¹⁷ V.V. Sviatlovskii, 1922, p.146.

¹⁸ ‘Rech rabochikh na pervomaiskom sobranii 1891 g.’, *Ot gruppy Blagoeva...*, 1921, pp.122-123.

¹⁹ A.G Bolydreva, ‘Minuvshie gody,’ *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.261.

of all workers, he more than compensated for this as an organiser and practitioner, in which he was most distinguished. ²⁰

Following his first arrest in June 1892, Klimanov continued to play an intermittent role in the development of the workers' organisation, helping to reactivate the CWC after his release in September 1892 and again following another period of imprisonment in 1894 organising circles at the Putilov factory where he was instrumental in inciting a strike in summer 1894. Rearrested following this strike, and released for a brief period in early 1895 he again was involved in a strike at the Baird iron workers before being exiled to Vologda *guberniia* for five years in 1895. On completion of his exile Klimanov continued to play an active role in the workers' movement until his death in 1918. ²¹

The Formation of the Central Workers' Circle

By the end of 1889 the concept of a workers' organisation had firmly taken root amongst leading workers, supported by a group of intelligently *propagandists*. From late 1889 Brusnev and others in the *intelligenty* centre increasingly supported the creation of a leading workers' centre to direct the activities of the entire circle movement. This workers' centre would be responsible for leadership and direction of the organisation, leaving the *intelligenty* *propagandists* to carry out propaganda in circles organised by the workers. As envisaged by Tochisskii, the *intelligenty* would act as a skilled resource to raise the intellectual level and awareness of workers but, crucially, it would be the workers who would direct and supervise *intelligenty* activities and their degree of involvement with workers.

In order to translate this shared aspiration into an organisational reality, in the autumn of 1889 Klimanov, Karelin, Mefodiev and Bogdanov rented an apartment in Sivkov Lane on the corner of Zabalkanskii Prospekt, near the Obvodnyi Canal, to host meetings of leading-worker representatives. This apartment would become the nerve centre for the workers' organisation and for nearly two years functioned as the headquarters of the circle

²⁰ V.M. Karelina, 'Vospominaniia, ' *Krasnaia letopis* ', No.4, 1922, p.14.

²¹ For Klimanov's subsequent revolutionary activities see *Deiateli...., T.V*, pp.158-160; V. I. Nevskii, *Ocherki po istorii Rossiiskoi kommunisticheskoi partii, T. I* (2nd ed., Moscow, 1925), pp. 300-310; James D White, 'The Sormovo-Nikolaev Zemlyachestvo in the February Revolution,' *Soviet Studies*, Vol.31, No.4, 1979, pp.475-504; P. I. Spiridonov, 'Russkii rabochii i revoliutsioner Egor Klimanov', *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, 1968, No. 8, p. 200.

movement. ²² Gavril Mefodiev moved into this apartment where meetings of the CWC were held up until his arrest in April 1891.

At the end of 1889/early 1890, two important organisational meetings were arranged. The first was held in Mefodiev's apartment, with a follow-up meeting in early 1890 in the room of the Baltic Shipyard worker Vladimir Fomin on Vasil'evskii Island. These meetings involved representatives from circles across the capital and formalised the establishment of the CWC and adopted the '*Ustav*' [Rules] governing the organisation drafted by a collective of workers including Fomin. ²³ According to Fomin, the organisational phase in the development of the organisation lasted six months, over the winter of 1889-90. The proposed rules were hotly debated and revised with discussions lasting until the early hours. Fomin recalled that he wrote '*screeds*' on organisational arrangements for the circles and it is evident that the workers devoted careful attention to the proposed rules for their nascent organisation. ²⁴ It is significant that the two meetings at which the rules were drawn up and debated were held without any involvement from the *intelligenty*.

In the early 1970s, two Soviet historians, P.G. Lapshina and G.S. Zhuikov, rediscovered the '*Ustav*' of a Petersburg workers' organisation from the early 1890s and subjected it to a careful analysis. Although not all historians [Orekhov, 1979] accepted the validity of the '*Ustav Rabochii Gruppy*' as a document relating to the CWC, it is entirely consistent with the views and beliefs of the workers involved in the circle movement. ²⁵ According to Lapshina and Zhuikov, the '*Ustav*' was formally adopted in May 1890, coinciding with statements from memoir sources that the organisational debates in the CWC lasted around six months with the rules being formally adopted in early summer of 1890. ²⁶ The organisation established by leading Petersburg workers in late 1889/early 1890 has customarily been known as the Petersburg Central Workers' Circle, but the '*Ustav*' discovered by Lapshina and Zhuikov is entitled '*Ustav rabochii gruppy russkikh sotsial-demokratov*', suggesting that the workers involved were intent on establishing a worker-led organisation that adhered to social-democratic principles. The aims of the organisation were set out in its first sentence that declared:

²² A.S. Karelin, 'Vospominaniia o rabochikh kruzhkakh Brusnevskoi organizatsii,' *V nachale puti*, Moscow 1975, p.245; Korol'chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika*....., 1940, p.147.

²³ M.S. Ol'minskii, 'O vospominaniakh N.D. Bogdanova,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva*....., 1921, p. 41; V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.219-220.

²⁴ *Ibid*, pp.219-220.

²⁵ P.G. Lapshina and G. S. Zhuikov, 'Novoe o deyatel'nosti grupp Blagoeva, Tochisskogo i Brusnev,' *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, 1971. No.7. pp.78-80.

²⁶ V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.219; M.I. Brusnev, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, p.23.

*The Group aims to unite Petersburg workers for a struggle [to win] the political and economic liberation of the working class.*²⁷

Analysis of the '*Ustav*' reveals many points of similarity with the organisational model established by the Tochisskii Society, suggesting that workers who had been involved with Tochiiskii had a hand in it. In line with the Tochisskii organisation, the workers' group established two categories of membership: active and collaborating members, with the '*Ustav*' stating that '*only workers can be active members of the Group*' and that collaborating members were essentially identified as being drawn from sympathetic *intelligenty*, precisely the demarcation insisted upon by Tochiiskii.

In the first section, the principles for organising workers' circles were laid out. Only active members, i.e. workers, could establish circles but they did not have authority to introduce new members, who had to be vetted and agreed by the central *Komitet*, on the recommendation of two existing circle members. Within each circle an organiser and deputy were identified whose tasks included:

- leading circle studies,
- establishing a workers' fund and circle library,
- receiving and distributing proclamations and leaflets,
- collecting information on conditions in factories,
- passing on instructions from the *Komitet*, and
- supervising activity of circle members.

Each circle had a maximum of 10 members. When a circle reached 10 members, it divided into two with the nominated deputy-organiser assuming responsibility for the newly formed circle. When a number of circles had developed within a specific region, a regional organiser was appointed to oversee the work of all circles operating in the region.

A specific section of the '*Ustav*' was concerned with workers' funds that were to be established in all circles with monies collected intended to support arrested members and their families, members who became unemployed, victimised by management or involved in strikes. Each circle member earning up to 30 roubles paid 2% of his wages, whilst workers earning over 30 roubles a month paid 3% into the circle funds. A quarter of the

²⁷ P.G. Lapshina and G. S. Zhuikov, 1971, p.78.

proceeds of circle funds were transferred into a central fund, overseen by the *Komitet*, and supplemented by lotteries, subscriptions and collections at special evenings organised on behalf of the workers' organisation. Half the funds held by the *Komitet* went into a strike fund, the rest divided between publishing proclamations and leaflets, buying literature for study circles, and assisting members of the organisation.

A section of the '*Ustav*' was devoted to the responsibilities of the *Komitet*, specifying that it was to consist of seven members, five of whom maintained contact with local circles, the remaining two concerned exclusively with general affairs of the organisation and directing activities of collaborating members [the *intelligenty*]. Brusnev indicated that the CWC had eight members, but significantly this included a representative of the *intelligenty* circle who attended meetings in an advisory capacity but was not specifically mentioned in the '*Ustav*' drawn up by the workers.²⁸

The *Komitet* directed local circles, supplying literature, issuing proclamations and leaflets, overseeing the composition and activities of circles and maintaining contacts with other political groups and parties. Information gathered by members concerning working conditions in factories was passed to the *Komitet* for leaflets and proclamations, clearly anticipating the agitational literature aimed at the mass of workers, an approach later adopted by Lenin and the Union of Struggle.²⁹ It is clear that the *Komitet* was the focal point of the organisation. Such a role is consistent with Brusnev's assertion that the CWC '*was a genuine central committee, in the tasks of which propaganda was only a part, and many of the members of this committee did not engage in propaganda, several of them were prohibited from this.*'³⁰

The relationship of the Workers' Group and the *intelligenty* is not specifically addressed in the '*Ustav*'. From *intelligenty* memoirs it has generally been considered that a member of the Central *Intelligenty* Circle was nominated as a full and equal member of the CWC.³¹ Yet the '*Ustav*' makes no reference to an *intelligenty* representative on the *Komitet*; rather it emphasises that it should oversee the activities of 'collaborating' *intelligenty* members. Whilst there is no dispute that during its existence the CWC regularly included a

²⁸ M.I. Brusnev, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, p.23.

²⁹ P.G. Lapshina and G. S. Zhuikov, 1971, pp.78-80.

³⁰ Korol'chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika.....*, 1940, pp.152-153.

³¹ Cf. M.I. Brusnev, 1923, Golubev, 1906, Sviatlovskii, 1922, Aleksandrov [Ol'minskii], M.S. 'Gruppa narodovol'tsev [1891-1894 gg.]', *Byloe*, No.11, November 1906.

representative from the *intelligenty*, this should be seen as a liaison role, representing an effective way of collaborating with *intelligenty*-propagandists who were required to provide both literary materials for the workers' organisation and act as propagandists in the circles. The '*Ustav*' had many similarities with the organisational structures established by the Tochisskii Society, a fact emphasised by Lapshina and Zhuikov when they concluded that "*it is clear that the 'birth marks' of the Tovarishhchestvo s-peterburgskikh masterovykh' were evident in the views of the Rabochaia Gruppy in regard to worker relationships with the intelligenty.*"³²

By spring 1890, a group of leading workers was meeting on a regular basis and had in effect become the Central Workers' *Komitet* [CWC]. The initial CWC consisted of seven members, each representing a specific region or group of factories. The city was divided into a number of regions, each having a representative on the central workers' group.³³ Shortly before the establishment of the CWC, circles in the Nevskii Gate district, centred on the Obukhov factory were broken up by the police with the arrest of around 15 workers, including the Obukhov leader Khlopov.³⁴ To restore links, the CWC sent to the district Nikolai Bogdanov, who subsequently described his mission:

*At this time we [the workers' organisation] suffered our first losses; our comrade, the worker, Klopov was arrested in the Nevskii Gate. With his arrest we needed to repair our links with the Nevskii region..... At this time I was working on steam-engines for the Tsarskosel'skii railway workshops and transferred to work as a metalworker at the Kartochnyi factory in the Nevskii Gate. Klopov managed to send me the name of a contact who worked at the Obukhov zavode from prison and through him I succeeded in reuniting our fledgling organisation with the Nevskii Gate.*³⁵

At its inception, the CWC consisted of Fedor Afanas'ev (representing Vasil'evskii Ostrov), N.D. Bogdanov (Nevskii Gate), Klimanov (Expedition for the Preparation of state Papers and the Franco-Russian [Baird] factory), Mefodiev (the Warsaw Railway Workshops), Evgrafov (the New Admiralty Shipyards and the Port), Buianov (Putilov factory and the Narvskii Gate) and Fomin (Baltic Shipyard circles). Bogdanov was elected secretary and

³² P.G. Lapshina and G. S. Zhuikov, 1971, p.80.

³³ M. Ol'minskii, 'O vospominaniakh N.D. Bogdanov,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.41.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.42; V.S. Golubev, *Byloe*, 1906, pp.113-114.

³⁵ N.D. Bogdanov, *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, pp.41-42.

Klimanov treasurer, both assuming the city-wide remit set out in the *'Ustav'*, with remaining members having oversight of practical work of a specific district.³⁶ Shortly after its formation Natalia Grigor'eva was co-opted onto the CWC both to represent the emerging womens' circles and the Vyborg Side. Subsequently, other women workers would be involved, with both Karelina and Boldyreva representing specific districts at various times between 1891 and 1893. The CWC did not have a designated leader; rather it operated as a collective with no one member being given or assuming overall responsibility for directing the organisation.³⁷ Finally, the CWC invited a member of the *intelligenty*-centre to attend meetings to fulfil a liaison function. It is important to stress that the workers invited a specific *intelligenty* representative to attend its meetings who they knew and trusted and it was not within the gift of the Central *Intelligenty* Circle to nominate or replace this individual.

Fomin indicates that the initial CWC was elected by circles within their region.³⁸ However, thereafter, the workers' organisation operated on the basis of co-optation with circle leaders and regional co-ordinators being appointed by the *Komitet*. According to Bogdanov this was dictated by conspiratorial considerations and reflected the impossibility of operating in an open manner within an environment pervaded by police informers.³⁹ The use of co-optation was confirmed by Aleksandrov [Ol'minskii] who on his return to Petersburg in 1890 found that *'the CWC was operating with the city divided into regions, with one representative from each region on the CWC and that these representatives were not elected by the region, but selected by the central circle from amongst workers of a given region, that is they were co-opted.'*⁴⁰

Meeting once a week, the CWC's basic task was to ensure propaganda work based on a standard programme agreed with *intelligenty*-propagandists. Brusnev confirms that the CWC oversaw propaganda across an ever increasing number of circles and ensured a high degree of organisation and continuity in study. By autumn 1890

the whole of network of workers' circles had been reconstructed on new principles: each circle had been given its own leader or organiser from amongst workers [and had] set up a local fund from the dues of its members. Circle funds made a

³⁶ N.D. Bogdanov in *Ot gruppy Blagoeva*, p. 41.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p.41.

³⁸ V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.219-220.

³⁹ N.D. Bogdanov, *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.41.

⁴⁰ M.S. Aleksandrov [Ol'Minskii], *Byloe*, 1906, p.7.

monthly contribution to a central fund with remaining money being spent on books, to support strikes and other more local needs. At the head of the entire organisation stood a committee of workers' representatives from the regions and one representative of the intelligentsia. ⁴¹

The entire organisation was committed to expanding the network of circles by actively promoting and encouraging the establishment of new workers' circles. Circle members in existing circles were regularly instructed by the CWC to move jobs to establish new circles in factories hitherto unaffected by propaganda. Karelina describes the role and influence of older weavers Fedor Afanas'ev and Dorofei Nikitich in recruiting textile workers in the Vyborg Side and recruiting them into circles. ⁴² Both Karelina and Boldyreva switched factories on at least two occasions to help establish new circles of textile workers. ⁴³ A particularly important role in spreading the circle movement involved transferring workers from the well-established circles at the Baltic Shipyards to other factories. The circle worker Evgrafov and a number of other young radicalised workers from the Shipyards were sent to work at the New Admiralty shipyards across the Neva to bolster circles in the Narvskii Gate following arrests at the Putilov factory. Around the same time Andrei Fisher moved to work on the Petersburg Side to spread propaganda amongst workers in this district. ⁴⁴ Egorov explicitly stated in his memoirs that Baltic workers deliberately moved to new factories to develop circles and spread propaganda to other factories and to reorientate circles that were '*not necessarily motivated to embrace the masses ... as we [i.e. Baltic workers] were beginning to do.*' ⁴⁵

The Ideology of the Circle Movement

Consistent with the lack of recognition of an independent workers' organisation in Petersburg in the first half of the 1890s, the politico-ideological views of the workers involved have similarly been largely overlooked, generally being subsumed under the rubric of the views of Brusnev and other prominent *intelligent* representatives. ⁴⁶ By

⁴¹ M.I. Brusnev, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, p.23.

⁴² V.M. Karelina, *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.277-278.

⁴³ Cf. N.D. Bogdanov, *Ot gruppy Blagoeva...., 1921*; A.G. Boldyreva, *V nachale puti*, 1975; V.M. Karelina, *V nachale puti*, 1975.

⁴⁴ A. Fisher, 1922, p.14.

⁴⁵ I.I. Egorov, 'Iz vospominanii o rabochikh kruzhakh v Peterburge 1888-1892 godov,' *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.240.

⁴⁶ R.A. Kazakevich, *Sotsial-demokraticheskie organisatsii Peterburga*, Leningrad, 1960, Chapter 5 is representative of this approach, whilst N.A. Naimark, 1983, echoing Pipes earlier assertions regards the CWC and workers' circles and their ideology as essentially non-revolutionary in nature.

analysing the speeches of leading circle members delivered at May-Day events in 1891 and 1892, the few proclamations issued by the CWC and a judicious reading of memoir materials it is possible to piece together the ideology that guided the workers' organisation and refute the conventional view that the CWC essentially reflected a culturalist and non-revolutionary tendency.

A strong internationalist character infused the speeches and proclamations reflecting an immense pride that within two years of May-Day being designated as an international workers' holiday Petersburg workers were organising the first May-Day in Russia outside Poland. In 1892 Petersburg workers expressed solidarity with Polish workers and commended them for their earlier May-Day celebrations and their struggles with their common Tsarist oppressor. A major theme in virtually all the extant May-Day speeches is an explicit call to workers to unite to emulate the struggles of western workers, echoing a major focus within study circles where discussion of workers' movements in other countries and their struggles against economic and political oppression was a consistent theme. In 1891, Fedor Afanas'ev spoke passionately that despite their small numbers leading Russian workers must follow the example of their German counterparts, describing how the mass workers' movement in Germany had originated in struggles of small groups of workers who on becoming aware of '*their human rights began to communicate their beliefs to other workers.*'⁴⁷ In his memoirs, Ivan Egorov related how circle members from as early as 1889 carefully monitored the progress of the German workers and assiduously modelled themselves on German social-democrats such as Lassalle and Bebel.⁴⁸ This was confirmed by Brusnev who testified that like their predecessors in the 1870s the model workers consciously aspired to was the German Social-Democratic Workers' Party, spending much time in discussing speeches of German deputies in the Reichstag and that '*Bebel was the workers' ideal*', an ideal type on whom workers modelled their actions and behaviour.⁴⁹ The success of the German SPD in not only winning economic improvements but in forming a highly successful political movement acted as a powerful exemplar to Petersburg workers who were committed to creating the basis for such a Party in Russia. Evgrafov declared in 1892 that Russian workers

are motivated by the same desire to struggle, as our brothers, western workers. Many of them, in Germany alone more than one and half million.... have achieved a

⁴⁷ 'Rech rabochikh na pervomaiskom sobranii 1891 g.', *Ot gruppy Blagoeva....*, 1921, p.121.

⁴⁸ I.I. Egorov, *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.238, 239.

⁴⁹ M.I. Brusnev, *Proletarskaia revoliusiia*, 1923, p.20.

*degree of participation in the government of the state. Their elected representatives in Parliament look after their estate, and therefore participation of workers in the west will make things even better for them, will produce frequent and more secure reforms for the benefit of the working class.*⁵⁰

In line with their commitment to the German model, a priority for the advanced workers was to lay the foundations for the emergence of a Russian Workers' Party. In 1891, Bogdanov emphasised the imperative of developing a workers' organisation, declaring that workers must pursue this goal irrespective of threats or intimidation from government. Klimanov's speech for the 1892 May-Day issued a rallying call to workers to unite to strengthen their forces, reminding workers that their '*salvation*' rested in their own hands but this required '*a united and disciplined organisation of workers.*'⁵¹ The leading *worker-intelligenty* were convinced that the absence of a workers' organisation was one the main reasons for the continued economic and political oppression of the Russian people, with Fedor Afanas'ev in his 1891 speech telling of how the German workers had overcome government persecution to create '*a single, indivisible union*' of workers.

This united and disciplined workers' organisation was necessary to combat the predatory economic exploitation of workers. In 1891 Klimanov spoke of the arbitrary exploitation of workers who on account of their down-trodden condition are unable to resist the '*brazen*' exactions of factory owners who behave like '*pitiless vultures.*'⁵² In 1892 the rhetoric against employers was even more strident. In one of the two speeches from the 1892 May-Day that have survived, Evgrafov declared that capitalists '*exclusively monopolise the combined forces of the country, iron, steam and our labour and condemn to misery thousands of workers who only wish to obtain work.*'⁵³ Evgrafov graphically described how capitalists wallow in luxury while workers who create wealth endure cold and hunger, resulting in death for many from starvation and disease. After describing the living and working conditions of workers, Evgrafov issued a strong moral condemnation of capitalism declaring that it was quite simply wrong that any human being should be forced to exist under such conditions. The conviction that the current economic order was corrupt and evil formed a starting point for the workers' oppositional politics.

⁵⁰ S.N.Valk, 'Materialy k istorii Pervogo Maya v Rossii,' *Krasnaia letopis*, 1922, No.4. pp.285-286.

⁵¹ Cited in A.M. Orkehov, 1979, p.144.

⁵² 'Rech rabochikh na pervomaiskom sobranii 1891 g.,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.123.

⁵³ S.N.Valk, *Krasnaia letopis*, 1922, no.4. pp.285-286.

It is evident that the workers had assimilated the Marxist concept that labour was the source of value and that factory owners exploited workers by extracting surplus labour and retaining this as profit. Workers involved in more advanced circles engaged in systematic study of Marx's economic works, whilst popularisations of Marxist theory in pamphlets such as Diksztajn's *Kto chem zhivet?* were widely used in circles. Handwritten proclamations discovered at the time of Bogdanov's arrest in November 1891 present the onerous conditions of Russian workers as the consequence of factory employers retaining as profits, wealth created through the labour of the workers, whilst Klimanov defined the capitalist system as a '*system by which all the products of the labour of workers are sold by the factory owner for his own profit while the workers for their labour are paid barely enough to keep them from starving to death.*'⁵⁴

Yet the Petersburg workers were all too acutely aware that a workers' organisation focused on combating the excesses of capitalist bosses would inevitably bring the wrath of the Tsarist authorities down on the heads of workers. Both the May-Day speeches and surviving proclamations are infused with a sense of outrage that the government not only supports employers but fiercely represses attempts by workers to improve their conditions of labour and life. In a proclamation issued by the CWC in April 1892 in solidarity with striking textile workers in Lodz, workers describe how the Tsar and the government had '*freed*' the Russian people from serfdom '*only to deliver us into the hands of capitalists and factory owners, on whose demands he sends against us whole regiments of soldiers and Cossacks.*'⁵⁵ The alliance between government and factory owners was emphasised by Vasilii Proshin in 1891, who reminded workers that every attempt to improve their conditions is seen as rebellion to which the authorities respond with '*the bayonet, the birch, Siberia, prison, hard labour and, of course, Cossack whips*', resulting in the whole of Russia being deafened by the cries and wails of the oppressed people. In one speech from 1892 which has not survived, the police reported that the worker Pashin declared that '*our damned tsarism persecutes us with its spies and bureaucrats, wherever it feels its thousand year authority is diminishing*' and that workers are forced '*to crawl and prostrate ourselves before them [factory owners], to rot somewhere in a damp hole, and all for a piece of bread, and these carnivorous beasts headed by the orthodox Tsar in brazen*

⁵⁴ 'Doklad departamenta politzii po delu Nikolai dement'evich Bogdanov i Aleksandr Sergeevich Filimonov, 20 iuliiia 1892g,' *Istoriko revoliutsionnykh Sbornik, T.II*, pp.205-206; 'Rech rabochikh na pervomaiskom sobranii 1891 g.,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.122.

⁵⁵ Reprinted in *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. III, Ch. 2*, p.130.

fashion mock us, promising us an afterlife in paradise.'⁵⁶ Leading Petersburg workers equated the Orthodox Church's teachings on acceptance of one's lot in this life as another device designed to emasculate resistance to the intolerable working and living conditions endured by the Russian people. This theme also found expression in Proshin's speech in 1891 when he declared:

*They tell us that that this is how it has to be. ... for how many centuries have they been feeding us with the idea of patience and hope for the Kingdom of God so that they could live in peace and drink our blood! No, it is bad to believe in these fairy tales.*⁵⁷

Any notion that the leading Petersburg workers eschewed the idea of violent revolution is dispelled in the May-Day speeches. In 1892, Klimanov declared that it was necessary to respond to violence inflicted on workers by the state with violence, whilst the proclamation to Polish workers written a few weeks earlier adopted an even more strident tone calling for a revolution to overthrow and kill the Tsar in order to enable the Polish and Russian workers *'to bask in the sun of the socialist order'* as the proclamation somewhat grandiosely describes the utopian endpoint of their struggle. The proclamation continued that the new century *'will see the dawn of a new social order, where all people, all nations will be brothers, where there will be no national hatred ... and the overthrow of the tsar who for long has retained power through troops and through them dominated the people.'*

⁵⁸ Expressing anger and outrage at their economic exploitation and political repression, many of the statements of the workers' organisation are filled with a virulent anti-government rhetoric and a call to arms to overthrow a corrupt and morally indefensible regime.

Yet whilst at times exulting in an almost messianic glorification of violence as a necessary purification of the social and political system, representing a maximalist approach, within the May-Day speeches there also emerges a more gradualist tendency focusing on the need for workers to unite to win essential political freedoms enjoyed by workers in the west. In the late 1920s, Brusnev conceded that workers paid little attention to the mechanics and stages of revolution in Russia. Questions of whether the workers would seize power directly or usher in a period of bourgeois domination were not actively discussed by the

⁵⁶ Cited in A.M. Orkehov, 1979, p.145.

⁵⁷ 'Rech rabochikh na pervomaiskom sobranii 1891 g.,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.127.

⁵⁸ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. III, Ch. 2*, p.130.

workers. According to Brusnev, workers focused on achieving political rights through a political revolution with the establishment of a Parliamentary democracy to enable a workers' political party to become a major force in society as had occurred in Germany.⁵⁹ The belief that economic agitation alone would not radically improve the position of workers is evident in the speeches of Klimanov. In both 1891 and 1892, whilst emphasising the need for Russian workers to develop an organisation and support strikes, he recognised that such methods alone would not emancipate the workers *'from the yoke of capital.'* What was needed was a struggle by a workers' party to win political rights, to force a constitution from the government which, as in Western Europe, would make it much easier for workers to engage in successful struggles against economic exploitation.



The concept of a united workers' party was a reflection of the Petersburg workers' organisation's adherence to one over-riding maxim - that the liberation of the workers must be a matter for workers themselves and that to achieve this education and self-development were essential. Evgrafov called on workers to study in order to organise *'our dark brothers,'* whilst Bogdanov directly linked success of the workers' organisation with *'improving ourselves and other [workers] both intellectually and morally in order to act more energetically so that people around us see us honourable and brave people, regard us with greater trust and set us up as an example to themselves and others.'*⁶⁰ This commitment to intellectual and moral development of workers was a direct throwback to Tochisskii, and even Lavrov, providing another indication that workers were motivated by a commitment to a universalistic doctrine of human rights that were blatantly disregarded by the existing economic and political order. Bogdanov concluded his 1891 speech with a

⁵⁹ Cf. A.M. Orekhov, 1979, p.89.

⁶⁰ S.N.Valk, *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1922, no.4. pp.285-286; 'Rech rabochikh na pervomaiskom sobranii 1891 g.,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva....*, 1921, p.125.

reiteration of the combined power of knowledge and morality in pursuit of a morally just society:

*The success of the advancement and organisation of workers depends exclusively on our knowledge and energy, and therefore, comrades, it is our duty, as honourable and intelligent people, to prepare ourselves.... as experienced propagandists and organisers for the social-democratic cause and as energetic fighters for the rights of man and for an enlightened future.*⁶¹

Knowledge acquisition was seen as vital for workers to carry out propaganda in study circles and take their message of enlightenment to the dark masses of uneducated workers. As Evgrafov stated '*in this way, the liberation of the people will become their own concern, as only in this way will they be liberated.*'⁶²

The workers were appreciative of efforts by a minority of *intelligenty* to fight on their behalf, with several speeches referring to their sufferings in prison and exile. Yet the workers realised, as Fedor Afanas'ev observed, that the overwhelming majority of the contemporary *intelligenty* conveniently ignore and turn a blind eye to the conditions under which workers live and that they are in effect a '*parasitic element*' in society who merely consume the produce of the workers' labour.⁶³ Given this, there was a powerful imperative for workers not rely on other groups for help in their struggles and that workers themselves must assume a leadership role. This became a virtual imperative and the task was presented in terms of a moral duty, in terms almost identical to the Northern Union, for advanced workers to achieve the destruction of the tsarist police regime.⁶⁴ In terms reminiscent of Lavrov's plea to *intelligenty*-propagandists of the 1870s to repay their moral debt to the people, leading Petersburg workers assumed the mantle of responsibility for advancing the cause of all workers. Recognising that the mass of workers were not yet in a position to challenge their economic exploitation, Klimanov told workers in 1891 that it was the advanced workers' responsibility to explain to workers why they were suffering in such wretched conditions and show them how they could begin to escape from them. In 1891, Fedor Afanas'ev also told workers that they should enjoy the fruits of the wealth produced by their labour and that '*labour is the motor of all human progress, that it is the creator of*

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² S.N.Valk, *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1922, no.4. pp.285-286.

⁶³ 'Rech rabochikh na pervomaiskom sobranii 1891 g.,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva....*, 1921, pp.121-122.

⁶⁴ Cited in A.M. Orekhov, 1979, p.145.

*all science, art and inventions.*⁶⁵ Significantly, Afanas'ev emphasises that it is the immediate task of 'advanced workers' to make the mass of workers conscious of their role as the producers of all material and intellectual wealth and of their historic role as the motive force of human progress so that *'no army will be able to restrain them from their self-liberation.'*



Fedor Afanas'ev ['Otets']

Nikolai Bogdanov

Nikolai Bogdanov's speech as Secretary of the CWC to the May-Day meeting of 1891 presented the necessity of winning political reform as a priority for Petersburg workers. From the surviving speeches, Bogdanov's is the closest approximation to a programmatic statement of the workers' organisation.⁶⁶ Asserting that workers' sufferings are the result of inequities inherent in the existing economic order that must be replaced by *'a better and more just socialist order'*, Bogdanov emphasised that this can only be achieved when workers had won political rights through the application of *'organised force whose demands the government would be unable to reject.'* The demands that Bogdanov sets out are a classic statement of 'bourgeois' political freedoms, including a constitution enshrining the election of a legislative assembly by universal suffrage and that guarantees freedom of expression, the press, assembly, organisation, religion, free elementary education and trial by jury. In a sign that even with these freedoms workers retained a deep mistrust of authority, Bogdanov called for a drastic reduction in the size of the standing army and a provision that soldiers should serve in their local areas so that troops

⁶⁵ 'Rech rabochikh na pervomaiskom sobranii 1891 g.,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva....*, 1921, pp.121-122.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, pp.123-125.

would not act against people known to them. Bogdanov considered that *'once we possess such rights we can elect deputies who will draft and approve laws for the benefit of the majority of the people and reject laws which exist to their detriment. In this way we shall have an opportunity to transform the whole of existing economic order into a better and more just one.'* In Bogdanov's developmental schema a united party of workers would force political concessions from government with the aim of using reforms to transform economic and social relations towards a more equitable and just organisation of society.

From surviving documents it is difficult to get any precise idea of how the workers envisioned a future socialist order. In Bogdanov's speech the only concrete proposals concerning a future socialist economic order involved the state placing all land into public ownership [nationalisation] and letting it out to groups of peasants to work. Similarly, Bogdanov envisions that workers and peasants will be able to access state credits to organise productive *artels* to run factories and farms. Such views reflect the continuing influence of Lassalle and it is no coincidence that amongst the materials seized by the police when they arrested Bogdanov was a pamphlet by Plekhanov on Lassalle and manuscript notes copied from works by Lassalle.⁶⁷ In his memoirs Egorov recalled that from his first involvement in circles in 1889 works by Lassalle were assiduously read and their ideas *'strongly engaged us and excited us.'*⁶⁸

Whilst not describing a future socialist order, Bogdanov refers his audience to two works that they should read: Schaffle's *The Essentials of Socialism* and Edward Bellamy's utopian novel *Looking Backward*. Bellamy, an American lawyer, published his novel *Looking Backward* in 1887 in which he tells the story of a young man who falls asleep in 1887 to wake up in Boston in the year 2000. By this date the world had been transformed into a socialist utopia that is explained to the bemused newcomer by a doctor who shows him the social and economic advances inherent in the organisation of a socialist society. This includes technological advances allowing for short working hours, instantaneous visual and audio communications, retirement at the age of 45 and public dining halls to feed the whole community. Productive processes are collectively owned and goods are equally distributed among the citizens. If Bellamy presented a futuristic socialist utopia, Schaffle, a representative of the German Katheder-socialist school committed to state intervention to improve material and social conditions of workers, described in some detail

⁶⁷ 'Doklad departamenta politicii po delu Nikolai dement'evich Bogdanov i Aleksandr Sergeevich Filimonov, 20 iuliiia 1892g,' *Istoriko-revoliutsionnykh Sbornik, T.II*, p.205.

⁶⁸ I.I. Egorov, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.239.

a rationally planned and collectivist organisation of production and distribution. Schaffle's 1874 work *The Essentials of Socialism* was popular in workers' circles as it contained both a critique of existing capitalist society along with a description of a future collectivist society. As described by Schaffle, a socialist system is based on '*collective instead of private ownership of all instruments of production; organisation of labour by society, instead of distracting competition of private capitalists public organisation of the labour of all on the basis of the collective ownership of all the working materials of social labour; and, finally, distribution of collective output of manufacture in proportion to the value and amount of work done by each worker.*'⁶⁹ Bogdanov's reference to these works demonstrates the eclectic range of influences on the ideas of the leading members of the workers' organisation. Engels considered Schaffle's 'socialism' as '*merely a feudal reaction*' to the development of capitalism based on a gradualist, evolutionary approach whilst Bellamy's work is focused on a liberated human personality in which greed, malice, falsehood and even insanity have been transcended as human beings no longer need to compete to meet their basic needs. Perhaps, in the final analysis it was this aspect involving the recreation of humanity as integrated components in a unified, collectivist vision of future society that struck a chord with the advanced workers, allowing them to envision a future where work represented an organised social force for the good of all.

In reading the speeches of Petersburg workers an overwhelming sense of optimism and belief that they were engaged in a morally just cause in which they would emerge victorious despite all odds shines through. Combining a universalistic moral critique of Tsarist society and the advocacy of equality and human rights with the exclusive language of class and the historic role of the proletariat, the Petersburg workers were only too aware of the combined power of the autocratic state and capitalist factory owners ranged against them, and the inevitable retribution which would be visited upon them for opposing the existing economic and political orders. Signaling their defiance, the *worker-intelligenty* declared their belief in a vision of historical progress through a revolutionary overthrow of the existing regime, a revolution in which workers were the historic agency, being convinced that despite their small numbers they would eventually prevail. A sense of this revolutionary passion allied to the commitment to education in the cause of liberation of the working-class illuminates Evgrafov's speech at the 1892 May-Day celebration. After denouncing factory owners and the Tsarist regime that supports them, Evgrafov declares:

⁶⁹ Cited from Richard M. Ebeling, *Austrian Economics and the Political Economy of Freedom*, Cheltenham, 2003, p.108.

*We will throw off and crush these parasites! They are hundreds and we are millions, but we still do not have the force because we are dark and unorganised, so therefore, brothers let us study and develop in order quickly to unite into such solid ranks as our brothers, the western workers. Let us study in order.....to learn and to organise our dark brothers, so that we will be in a condition to conduct circles instead of the intelligentsia who will become superfluous. In this way, the liberation of the people will become their own concern, as only in this way will they be liberated.*⁷⁰

Relationships between Workers and Intelligenty

Before reviewing the activities of the workers' organisation, it is important to examine the relationship between the workers and *intelligenty* to understand the basis on which these two groups worked together. Leading workers were undoubtedly influenced by the young *intelligenty*-propagandists with whom they worked. Golubev, Brusnev, Krasin, Cywinski and others were dedicated to developing worker-autonomy and leadership of the nascent workers' organisation. Any suggestion that Brusnev and his fellow propagandists were engaged in a purely cultural and educational project is dispelled in letters sent by Brusnev to his fellow propagandist Sivokhin from Moscow in late 1891/early 1892. In response to Sivokhin's frustration with propaganda work and a desire for more direct action, Brusnev replied that propaganda was designed to produce agitation carried out by a united and organised working-class that Brusnev considered '*the only revolutionary class.*'⁷¹

Intelligenty-propagandists would also have been influenced by their close involvement with leading workers, reinforcing their already strong conviction that through such workers the entire working-class could be organised to lead a struggle against Tsardom and lay the basis for a future socialist society. The relationship between workers and *intelligenty* was based on a shared conviction that the working-class alone represented a historically progressive class and that the task of propaganda was to create through well-developed, conscious workers the means to destroy the despotic Tsarist regime.

In reviewing radical worker/*intelligenty* relations, it should be recognised that the relationship generally was characterised by shared aims that promoted mutual respect and trust at a personal and organisational level. Memoirs left by both workers and *intelligenty*

⁷⁰ S.N.Valk, *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1922, no.4. pp.285-286.

⁷¹ V.Iu. Samedov, 'Vazhnyi istochnik dlya isucheniya ideologii gruppy Brusneva,' *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, 1968, No.11, pp.108-110.

confirm that the relationship between the two groups was friendly and based on an ethos of genuine collaboration. Karelina recalled that *'we [workers] lived on very friendly terms with intelligenty, they treated us in a straightforward way, when we met them by chance they would embrace us, and in circle study we paid careful attention to what they said and treated their opinions with respect.'*⁷² Similarly, Fomin described how the *intelligenty* propagandists in circles instilled a sense of optimism and faith in the future for workers who were at times defeatist, ground down by their day-to-day struggles.

*Relationships between kruzhekovtsy and intelligenty-propagandists were extremely good. The kruzhekovtsy were 'boiled in the same stew as the working masses.' They were little given to moods of optimism: on the contrary, daily struggles produced a kind of pessimism that did not foster a positive outlook. Propagandists inspired the kruzhekovtsy and through all their efforts attempted to raise the spirits of circle members.... They raised the mood of the kruzhekovtsy, infused new energy and circle members left study meetings with their hopes raised.*⁷³

Bogdanov who had organised a circle from the mid-1880s without *intelligenty* recounted his delight when he finally made contact with the *intelligenty* centre and a Polish student from the Technological Institute was allocated to carry out propaganda in the circle.⁷⁴

In a similar vein, memoirs of a number of *intelligenty*-propagandists are filled with glowing testimonials of the resolute character, energy and commitment of workers involved in circles. Krasin recalled that Fedor Afanas'ev devoted his whole life to the organisation of workers and with boundless energy carried out agitation amongst less developed workers, organising circles and using events from workers' daily lives to demonstrate the need to unite in struggle against factory bosses and government.⁷⁵ Sviatlovskii described Klimanov as a man who loved to debate with both workers and *intelligenty* and who did not recognise any opposition between workers and *intelligenty*.⁷⁶ Even allowing for the passage of time between the events described and recording most such memoirs, as well as recognising the political context of 1920s Soviet Russia when most memoirs were recorded, the unanimity of mutual respect and genuine affection resonates.

⁷² V.M. Karelina, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.276.

⁷³ V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.189-190.

⁷⁴ N.D. Bogdanov, *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.41

⁷⁵ L.B. Krasin, 'Delo davno minuvskikh drei,' *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, No.3 [15], p.11.

⁷⁶ V.V. Sviatlovskii, *Byloe*, 1922, p.146.

A number of factors contributed to this fruitful collaboration. In the first instance, workers' circles generally worked for long periods with the same propagandist. Fomin describes how over a two-year period the influential Baltic Shipyard circle worked exclusively with Golubev, building up mutual trust and friendship.⁷⁷ Related to this, the CWC carefully vetted and matched propagandists to specific circles, overseeing the work of propagandists to ensure they did not stray from their prescribed role or unnecessarily incite workers. The CWC took its role of supervising *intelligenty*-propagandists extremely seriously. On one occasion, when the CWC discovered that a circle on its own initiative had recruited an 'unknown' propagandist, it 'instructed' the *intelligenty* representative on the CWC, Brusnev, to find out who this was and to ascertain whether he was 'reliable'. Once Brusnev vouched for the 'reliability' of the propagandist despite his *narodovol'tsy* sympathies, the CWC permitted the new propagandist to work with the circle as there was a general shortage of experienced propagandists following a wave of arrests amongst the *intelligenty*.⁷⁸ The unknown propagandist in question was the *narodovol'tsev* Aleksandrov who had recently returned from exile and on meeting an old worker acquaintance from earlier activity in the capital had been invited to visit a circle in the Narvskii Gate.

Strict conspiracy contributed to the longevity of the workers' organisation and fostered good relations between workers and *intelligenty*. Sviatlovskii recalled that it was only when he became a propagandist in a womens' circle at the Rubber factory that he discovered that several *intelligenty* were also actively working with other circles in the area but their names remained unknown to him.⁷⁹ When Krasin became involved in the *intelligenty* centre he was told little about the extent of its activities with workers and worked through only one worker contact, the CWC representative for the Vyborg Side, Fedor Afanas'ev.⁸⁰ *Intelligenty*-propagandists were referred to by nicknames with their true identity only known to a handful of trusted workers and frequently disguised themselves as workers to prevent being noticed by police informers. Such subterfuge was necessary as to appear as a student in a workers' area was to invite arrest as well helping to break down some of the social barriers and make communication easier.

Whilst these organisational and conspiratorial aspects helped build trust, the primary reason for the success of the partnership between workers and *intelligenty* was their shared

⁷⁷ V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.185.

⁷⁸ M.I. Brusnev, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, pp.26-27; M.S. Ol'minskii, 'Davnie sviazi,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva...*, 1921; M.S. Aleksandrov [Ol'minskii], *Byloe*, 1906, p.8.

⁷⁹ V.V. Sviatlovskii, *Byloe*, 1922, pp.147-148.

⁸⁰ L.B. Krasin, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, pp.9, 16.

understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of the two groups and their agreement on the nature of the workers' movement. Leading workers were convinced that the working-class was in the process of becoming the leading revolutionary force in Russia and set themselves the aim of increasing the number of 'conscious' workers so that in time the role of the *intelligenty* within the movement would become redundant. This view was shared by Brusnev and other members of the *intelligenty* centre. Brusnev maintained '*that the entire future belongs to workers, to activists from within their environment*' and that '*only the workers will be able to produce the genuine future revolutionary activist.*' In accordance with this, the role of the *intelligenty* within the circle movement was accepted as temporary and their involvement intended to impart knowledge to workers so that they would understand their prescribed historic mission to liberate themselves from both autocratic repression and capitalist exploitation. At the heart of this belief was the conviction expressed by Brusnev that the organisation considered '*the emancipation of the workers is a matter for the workers themselves.*' This permeated all the activity of circles, representing the shared ethos of the Petersburg workers' and the *intelligenty* social-democratic organisations. Workers and *intelligenty* pursued a shared objective, expressed by Brusnev as '*creating from participants in workers' circles fully developed and conscious social-democrats able to replace intelligenty propagandists in everything.*'⁸¹

As well as a shared ideological perspective on the self-emancipation of the working-class, the shortage of *intelligenty*-propagandists led to an acceleration in the development of worker-propagandists to assume a lead role in circle study with workers. This shortage of *intelligenty* was due in part to frequent arrests of members of the *intelligenty* centre, often for involvement in student politics or events unrelated to the workers' movement. An additional factor however, was a lack of sympathetic *intelligenty* with the skills, aptitude and commitment to become involved in what was a serious criminal offence punishable by imprisonment and lengthy exile. It is again testament to the organisational and persuasive capabilities of leading workers that a number of *intelligenty*-propagandists were recruited for circle work not through the efforts of the *intelligenty* centre but through direct contact from workers. Both Brusnev and Sviatlovskii recalled that Klimanov in particular was adept at identifying sympathetic *intelligenty* and introducing them into circle work.⁸²

⁸¹ M.I. Brusnev, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, p.21.

⁸² *Ibid*, p.26; V.V. Sviatlovskii, *Byloe*, 1922, p.146.

By mid-1890, two discrete organisations sharing a common aim had been firmly established in Petersburg – the Central Workers’ Circle co-ordinating the network of workers’ circles and a Social-Democratic Central *Intelligently* Group. Although both groups were centrally directed and have generally been seen as essentially two sections of a single organisation, known as the Brusnev Organisation, they were in fact separate and independent entities sharing common objectives. The single organisational link was the presence of one *intelligently* representative at meetings of the CWC. During the life of the CWC four representatives from the *intelligently*-centre were invited to attend CWC meetings: initially the University student Golubev, followed by the technologist Brusnev, then the *narodovol’tsev* Aleksandrov [Ol’minskii] and finally the Polish technologist Cywinski. Whilst Golubev and Brusnev inclined towards Social-Democracy, Aleksandrov remained committed to the *Narodovol’tsy*, and Cywinski whilst adhering to certain social-democratic positions advocated a Blanquist style seizure of power by a revolutionary elite.

Rather than seeing the *intelligently* representatives as directing the CWC and the circle movement, their role was that of an advisor and supporter who had access to resources required by workers. This explains why following Brusnev’s departure for Moscow in 1892 his place on the CWC was taken by the *narodovol’tsev* Aleksandrov and not a member of the social-democratic *intelligently* centre. Aleksandrov’s selection has puzzled many observers, but is indicative of a pragmatic approach adopted by the CWC. Aleksandrov’s co-option is explained by the workers’ aspiration to access the printing press being established by the Petersburg *narodovol’tsy* at the time of Aleksandrov’s inclusion in the CWC. Through Aleksandrov, the CWC hoped to publish their own propaganda materials and develop literature aimed at less developed workers. The *narodovol’tsy* press was the only illegal printing facility operating in the capital and in 1893 did print materials written by Petersburg workers. Around the time of Aleksandrov’s co-option, the CWC and the collaborating *intelligently* had attempted to establish a regular newspaper for less advanced workers through duplicating handwritten materials. This was a labour intensive and unsatisfactory process from the point of view of both quantity and quality and leading workers harboured aspirations to publish a workers’ newspaper to communicate with many more workers.

Neither the *intelligently* representative on the CWC nor the Central *Intelligently* Circle directed the workers’ organisation which throughout its history acted autonomously and took all major decisions on its own initiative. According to the schema devised by

Brusnev and his *intelligenty* associates, their role was ‘*purely pedagogical.*’ There were clear echoes of Lavrovist propaganda of the 1870s where young *intelligenty* dedicated themselves to raising the cultural level of the narod. There were, however, more immediate ideological influences emanating from the Marxist emigration in Switzerland that influenced the ideological concept of the *worker-intelligenty*. Aleksandrov recalled that an article published by Vera Zasulich in the theoretical journal of the Marxist emigration, *Sotsial-Demokrat*, in early 1890 entitled *Revoliutsionery iz burzhuaiznoi sredy*, made a ‘huge impression’ on Petersburg social-democrats.

*Although absolutism was still in full bloom in Russia, Zasulich’s article was accepted as the theoretical explication of the Russian intelligentsia. It was decided..... that in future the intelligentsia would not be ideologues of the working-class, that the present social-democratic students would be the last of the Mochicans (from the intelligentsia) of social-democratism in Russia, and that therefore they must devote all their efforts to creating Russian Bebels from the workers’ environment.*⁸³

Again emphasising that the emancipation of workers must be a matter for workers themselves, Zasulich argued along similar lines to Tochisskii that on the basis of western experience revolutionary youth from privileged backgrounds were only revolutionary until autocracy was overthrown, after which they became adherents of bourgeois democracy. Western workers had learnt through the bitter experience of betrayal to become self-reliant, to establish their own political organisations and that the Russian radical intelligentsia had to emulate western radicals of 1848 in ‘*stimulating in them an interest in intellectual matters*’ and to facilitate ‘*the interaction between revolutionary ideas and the revolutionary class*’ [i.e. the proletariat].⁸⁴ Accepting Zasulich’s analysis, young social-democrats in the capital dedicated themselves to providing small groups of advanced workers with a comprehensive social-democratic education. In line with this, the *intelligenty* under Brusnev’s guidance developed a programme of study to guide propaganda work in the circles reflecting a pedagogical imperative designed to create fully-formed and conscious social-democratic workers – the future leaders of a proletarian-socialist revolution.

⁸³ M.S. Aleksandrov, *Byloe*, 1906, p.9.

⁸⁴ V.I. Zasulich, ‘Revoliutsionery iz buruaznoi sredy,’ *Sbornik statei*, 2 vols., St. Petersburg, 1907, T. II, pp.14-15. For a broader analysis of Zasulich’s political thought see Jay Bergman, ‘The Political Thought of Vera Zasulich,’ *Slavic Review*, Vol.38, No.2, June 1979, pp.243-258.

Zasulich's article had been preceded a year earlier by Aksel'rod's *The Tasks of the Worker Intelligentsia in Russia* that defined the *worker-intelligenty* and elaborated its tasks, setting out a view of a genuine workers' party in Russia and its relationship with the radical intelligentsia.⁸⁵ In Aksel'rod's conceptualisation, *worker-intelligenty* consisted of educated workers who worked in factories and had fully assimilated radical social-democratic ideas but on no account should include former workers who had abandoned industrial labour for professional political activities. By the end of the 1880s, Aksel'rod was convinced that '*a small layer of more or less developed people capable of a much greater conscious attitude towards social issues than the many millioned mass of their deprived fellow workers*' existed in Russia.⁸⁶ This 'layer' of workers was charged with carrying out socialist propaganda amongst the mass of workers, '*to take into your own hands the political awakening of the oppressed and deprived masses of Russia.*' In a significant reversal of the subordinate role that workers had hitherto been placed in *intelligenty* schematics of revolution, Aksel'rod called on the radical intelligentsia to realise that it is not the workers who should be supporting their struggles with autocracy '*but, on the contrary, they who should support workers in the struggle for the political emancipation of the Russian people.*'

To achieve this, Aksel'rod reiterated that leading workers must create a single Socialist Workers' party led by *worker-intelligenty* that would attract the support from the best sections of the radical intelligentsia. Predicting the evolution of the agitational tactics that would develop amongst social-democrats, Aksel'rod envisaged that, given their status as factory workers, the *worker-intelligenty* would foment discontent based on specific economic grievances, using these to incite strikes resulting in workers becoming directly involved in political confrontation with the government. Such a course would instil in the mass of workers a recognition of the need for political freedoms. In the wake of the Petersburg May-Day events of 1891 and 1892, Aksel'rod became more convinced that this strata of the *worker-intelligenty* was beginning to play a significant role in Russian social and political life, an *intelligenty* that was '*closely and organically linked with its class, [and was] fully conscious of its obligation toward the oppressed masses*' and had embarked on the path towards the liberation of the whole working-class. Such a view was intrinsic to Brusnev and his associates in the Petersburg *intelligenty* centre and formed the

⁸⁵ Pavel Aksel'rod, 'Zadachi rabochei intelligentsii v Rossii. Pis'mo k russkim rabochim,' *Sotsialist*, No. 1, 1889; reprinted in *Nashi protivniki*, Moscow 1928; Harding and Taylor, 1983 provide a partial English translation, pp. 113-119.

⁸⁶ P.B. Aksel'rod, 'Zadachi rabochei intelligentsia v Rossii,' *Nashi protivniki*, 1928, pp.168-169.

ideological basis of their activities. Throughout the period from 1889 to mid-1892 the leading workers' quest for knowledge and self-development and the *intelligenty's* aspiration to create a cadre of conscious social-democratic workers were in almost perfect alignment and it was this that enabled a mutually advantageous collaboration to develop and flourish in what in retrospect was the 'golden age' of the *kruzhkovshchina*.

Study and Propaganda Work in the Circles

In line with this shared worker and *intelligenty* imperative, the Petersburg workers' organisation concentrated its effort on propaganda work in workers' study circles. Analysis of propaganda work carried out in circles under the guidance of the CWC reveals a number of intrinsic characteristics of the workers' organisation that again refutes the conventional narrative that circle study was aimed primarily at self-development and was carried out to promote individual improvement. At the core of the CWC's approach to study was the fundamental belief of Klimanov and his worker associates that intensive study was essential to create the new *worker-intelligenty* whose mission was to lead the boarder mass of workers in a combined political and economic struggle.

The formation of the CWC and the formalisation of relations between workers and the *intelligenty* centre allowed a prolonged period of systematic study in workers' circles to ensue. By 1890 Brusnev confirmed that he was conducting study with the circle of workers from the Baltic Shipyards on the basis of a programme that included '*world affairs, history and political economy*' and that much time was devoted to discussions on political themes, the position of workers, the question of the organisation of workers and the struggle for a better future.⁸⁷ Both Brusnev and Golubev relate how suitable social-democratic literature was in short supply necessitating structured lectures and conversations describing the capitalist system of production, how workers created value, and concepts of socialism.⁸⁸

Following the formation of the CWC, the *intelligenty* was 'authorised' to develop a study programme that was worked out over several meetings, a copy of which was discovered by the police in Brusnev's possession at the time of his arrest in 1892. This represented an exceptionally ambitious prospectus and would have taken a lengthy period to complete.

⁸⁷ M.I. Brsunev, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, p.20.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p.20; V.S. Golubev, *Byloe*, 1906, p.112.

The rationale behind the programme as an active weapon for struggle was articulated by Krasin who summarised its aims as follows:

*The group attempted to make workers fully aware of the ideas of socialism to prepare active leaders of the working-class who would be able to operate in different circumstances in the struggle with capital and the autocracy. It was necessary to acquaint them with the basis of natural science, in particular with the theory of evolution, moving on from evolution of the planetary system to the evolution of the organic world, to the evolution of human societies and their institutions.*⁸⁹

The programme is worth setting out in full as it reflects this sense of a naturalistic progressive evolution, an evolution from darkness into light. Containing ten sections designed to create the fully formed *worker-intelligent*, the programme was designed in line with the vision of the future social-democratic workers' movement in which completely developed and conscious social-democrats, would replace *intelligently-propagandists*.

I. Reading, writing and thinking.

II. Chemistry, physics, botany, zoology, physiology, anatomy, hygiene: briefly, geology, cosmography and astronomy. Differing theories of the formation of the earth and origin of the universe.

III. The theory of Darwin, the theory of the origin and development of organisms and the origin of man.

IV. The history of culture. The period of savagery and the period of barbarism. The life of man in each of these periods (his food, pursuits, family, habits, laws, beliefs, property, social life and the full communism of the time) and the evolution of all this, the development and evolution of power, religion, morality, the family and property. The dependence of all aspects of human life on the economic situation. The period of civilisation. A similar, but more detailed, study of this period with the addition of political history of ancient and modern peoples - and in this context the whole evolution of all aspects of the life of the Russian people - and especially Russian history. The history of science, philosophy, discoveries and inventions.

V. Political economy. The history of the development of the forms of organising labour (slavery, feudalism, capitalism, the inevitable evolution of the latter in the direction of collectivism). The history of political economy.

VI. The position and history of the peasants in Russia and in the West. The commune, artel, allotments, foodstuffs and taxes. Banks - for the peasantry (and the nobility). Migration, schism and sectarianism.

VII. The position of the working-class in Russia and the West. The history of the workers' movement in the light of the theories of various reformers. Palliatives in the workers' question (producers' and consumers' societies, etc.), factory legislation.

⁸⁹ L.B. Krasin, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, p.14.

VIII. *The history of the social movement in Europe and, in the fullest and greatest detail, in Russia (NV). The contemporary position and significance of all the classes in Russia (the nobility, clergy, bourgeoisie, peasantry and workers; the bureaucracy, army and government).*

IX. *Economic policy and its history in the West and in Russia. The essence of socialism.*

X. *The full, detailed, and precisely and definitely substantiated programme of minimum demands for the present time.*⁹⁰

Writing in 1906, Golubev recounted that several *intelligenty*-propagandists regarded this ‘*maximum*’ programme with some misgivings, considering it too scholastic as well as unrealistically protracted. A major concern was that it could create in workers a fetishisation of education for its own sake and engender passivity amongst the *worker-intelligenty*. Indeed, such worker-types undoubtedly existed, ‘*who read a great deal, saw a great deal of the propagandists, attended several circles, but in the end had great scepticism in relations with the labour movement, and did almost nothing practical. We regarded this type negatively and tried to arrange our affairs so that we would not assist the formation of such passive types.*’⁹¹ Such a characterisation formed the basis of critiques of the *kruzhkovtsy*, from Lenin as early as 1895 through to later Soviet and western scholars, who shared a perception that the circle study-programme was recipe for self-development and abrogation of the *worker-intelligenty*’s wider responsibilities to the class. Whilst undoubtedly a number of workers did become detached from the mass of workers, the actual development of the workers’ organisation up to 1895 refutes the accusation that circle study was inimical to workers behaving in a revolutionary manner.

It is important to engage with the programme on the basis that it was created and applied during the first half of the 1890s. In this sense, the programme should be seen as providing a framework for study to be conducted in accordance with the exigencies of the moment, the interests and needs of the circle members, and the aptitudes of the *intelligenty* [or in some cases the worker] propagandist. Brusnev was at pains to emphasise that the programme was not intended to apply to all participants in all circles. Rather, ‘*it was intended only for selected workers and represented a maximum programme.*’⁹² Indeed from available evidence, a process of ‘mixing and matching’ and concentration on specific aspects to address the evolving state of the workers’ movement largely determined topics under active discussion. It is perhaps more useful to view the programme as setting out an

⁹⁰ The Programme is reproduced in *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, pp.85-86.

⁹¹ V.S. Golubev, *Byloe*, 1906, pp.115-116.

⁹² M.I. Brusnev, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, p.20.

ideal, the comprehensive knowledge base essential to create the ideal revolutionary proletarian capable of acting in full consciousness of his class-role that due to the realities of life in Tsarist Russia only a small number of workers would ever be likely to realise. What is important is not the practicality or otherwise of the programme, but the underlying philosophical and political assumptions that speak to the fusion of the proletariat with the intelligentsia to form the composite *worker-intelligent* destined to use knowledge of his class position to transform reality in his new image. In this reading the programme was not simply a literal artefact, but rather should be viewed in metaphoric terms, symbolising the ambition of the workers' organisation to create through knowledge and understanding of science and social evolution the first representatives of a species of proletarian superhero, the putative leaders of the historically privileged working-class.

Reflecting Brusnev's contention that the programme was not regarded as a universally applicable model, circles divided into the following types:

Basic-level circles to impart basic literacy and numeracy and familiarise workers with minimum demands for political reform and economic improvement. These circles introduced workers with low levels of education to radical ideas and according to Brusnev, usually developed after an event in factory or a strike.⁹³ Golubev observed that work in these circles with 'unprepared' workers often assumed an 'agitational' character as workers frequently raised issues concerning abuses in factories, living and working conditions and the onerous position of workers. In this way, basic circles helped radicalise workers allowing discussion of more overtly political issues to be introduced.⁹⁴ Basic-level circles were frequently led by *worker-intelligent* reflecting the CWC's [and Aksel'rod's] belief that workers were able to relate to and radicalise ordinary workers far better than *intelligent*.

Intermediate-level circles designed for literate workers who had gained an understanding of the position of the working-class where science, history and political economy were taught with considerable focus on the development of the labour movement abroad. Workers from basic-level circles often graduated to intermediate level circles as described by Anna Boldyreva who when beginning work at the New Cotton Mills joined a circle of textile workers and after a period was 'selected' by Fedor Afanas'ev to move into a circle

⁹³ Cited in E.A. Korol'chuk, 'Peredovye proletarii Peterburga.' *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.78-79.

⁹⁴ V.S. Golubev, *Byloe*, 1906, p.112.

led by Leonid Krasin.⁹⁵ Krasin described study in this circle, highlighting political aspects of the work, beginning by describing position of the working-class using published reports of Factory Inspector Ianzhul on the poverty and oppressed condition of Russian workers. He recalled that from such discussions workers realised the need to struggle to improve their economic position following examples from Western Europe and became critical of the autocracy that was seen to support capitalists against workers.⁹⁶ Propagandists in intermediate-circles were initially drawn from the *intelligenty*, but increasingly advanced workers assumed such roles, especially following arrests or when students disappeared ‘on vacation.’ In 1890, the Baltic worker Aleksei Fisher transferred to work at a factory on the Petersburg Side, quickly establishing a new circle in which his former the Baltic Shipyard worker comrade Ivan Egorov acted as the propagandist. Fisher recalled with some pride that no *intelligenty* ever visited this circle and that Egorov was very erudite and knowledgeable and instructed the workers on Lassalle’s *Programma rabochikh*.⁹⁷

Higher-Level Circles were instituted by the CWC specifically to train worker-propagandists to undertake propaganda in intermediate-level circles. Study in higher-levels circles was restricted to the worker leadership and focused on specifically political education with the intensive study of Marx and Engels, GEL publications and western social-democratic theorists. Brusnev recalled that in higher-level circles workers ‘*received final preparation... in order that they would become independent leaders and propagandists.*’⁹⁸ Work in higher circles was intense and took place at least twice a week and was led by a small number of *intelligenty*, including at different times Brusnev, Krasin, and Cywinski.⁹⁹

The conventional view epitomised by Pipes [1963] that circles were exclusively engaged in cultural and largely innocuous study aimed at raising the educational level of the workers involved is refuted by analysing what actually took place in the circles and the extent to which workers were radicalised as a result of their involvement. Egorov confirmed that by 1890 the circles at the Baltic Shipyards had assumed a definite social-democratic colouring with works by Marx being studied under the supervision of an *intelligenty*-propagandist. Most circles devoted a great deal of time to the study of Marx’s theory of surplus value to demonstrate to workers how they created wealth which was appropriated

⁹⁵ A.G. Bolydrev, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.257.

⁹⁶ L.B. Krasin, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, op.cit. p.14.

⁹⁷ A. Fisher, *V Rossi ii v Anglii*, 1922, pp.12-13.

⁹⁸ Cf. R.A. Kazakevich, 1960, pp.139 ff.

⁹⁹ V.M. Karelina, *Krasnaia letopis*, 1922, p.16.

by their employers. In circles, workers were told how the ownership of the means of production and its concentration in the hands of a few capitalists was the direct consequence of the dominance of capital over labour, and that this explained the division of society into the exploiting and the exploited classes. An increasing number of workers were directly exposed to works by Marx and Engels.¹⁰⁰

In 1893, the *intelligenty*-propagandist Cywinski was arrested. As part of their investigation the police uncovered a network of circles in which Cywinski had been involved and arrested a number of workers including CWC members Klimanov and Proshin. Statements given by Cywinski and arrested workers reveal the extent to which circle propaganda by 1892 was being used explicitly to incite workers to organise and engage in economic struggles against the current order. One worker described Cywinski's approach in the circle, describing how at the first meeting he read and explained the works of Darwin on the origins of man. Later he spoke of the development of human society, but mainly spoke about position of the working-class in Russia and Western Europe, showing that western workers were in a better position owing to the fact that they were organised, had workers' funds that enabled them to survive during strikes and to wage struggles with capitalists. Cywinski told workers that Russian workers would only achieve an improvement in their position through similar disorders.¹⁰¹ This emphasis on workers becoming involved in economic struggles as a means towards a realization that the government supported their employers and that a political struggle was also essential was the *raison d'être* of propaganda. This approach was an intrinsic component of the ideology of the workers' organisation, a component evident from its first stirrings and would continue at all stages of development of the organisation to the end of 1895 when leading workers successfully achieved a degree of merger with an emerging mass industrial movement.

Women's Circles

The overwhelming majority of workers involved in the circle movement were male. Yet at an early stage in the organisation's development, a conscious initiative to involve women workers in study circles was discernible, resulting in the establishment of a number of circles specifically for women workers. Whilst there had been a certain engagement with women workers within the *Tochisskii* organisation, the first concentrated approach to

¹⁰⁰ I.I. Egorov, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.239; V.A. Shelgunov, 'Rabochie na puti k marksizmu,' *Avangard*, 1990, p.62-63.

¹⁰¹ Cited in A.M. Orekhov, 1979, p.128.

involving women occurred under the aegis of the CWC with several of the most influential workers playing a prominent role in recruiting women into the organisation and supporting them to set up circles.

Women workers were recruited from two main sources. The first was from the Imperial State Orphanage amongst young women who had been ‘farmed’ out in their early teens as domestic servants or unskilled workers in textile factories. Vera Karelina was typical of how young women brought up in orphanages became involved in the circle movement. As an older teenager whilst still in the orphanage, Karelina became acquainted with workers in the circle movement including Nikolai Bogdanov who, after providing her with reading materials, introduced her into an existing workers’ circle in the area.¹⁰² Bogdanov already had acquired a reputation for supporting orphans working as domestic servants at a school for the daughters of the nobility on Vasil’evskii Island where they were subjected to regular floggings and punishments for minor infringements of the harsh working regime at the school. In 1887, the orphans protested at their intolerable conditions and led by Bogdanov and Natalia Aleksandrova [Grigor’eva], a *narodovol’tsy* sympathiser, refused to work. In the end however, the young rebels were compelled to resume their duties and suffered severe punishments for their defiance.¹⁰³ With the recruitment of Karelina into the organisation along with Bogdanov’s reputation for supporting the orphans, during 1889 and 1890 a number of former orphans now working in textile factories along the Obvodnyi Canal became involved in the circles.

Fedor Afanas’ev was the second major recruiter of women into circles. Afanas’ev used his popularity amongst textile workers across the city to identify possible recruits and after a period of individual nurturing either by himself or his associates would gradually introduce them into existing circles. This approach was seen in the case of Anna Boldyreva [Gavrilova] who was tutored by a number of leading workers, introduced into circles involved in teaching basic literacy before eventually joining a circle of workers from the New Cotton Mills in 1890 in which Leonid Krasin carried out overt socialist propaganda.¹⁰⁴ Several other women workers including domestic servants and seamstresses were recruited in this manner, so that by 1890 around 25 women workers, either former charges of the orphanages or women recruited directly by Afanas’ev were associated with the circle movement.

¹⁰² V.M. Karelina, *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.283-284.

¹⁰³ A.G. Boldyreva, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.263.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p.259.

Following the arrest of Gavril Mefodiev for his involvement in the Shelgunov demonstration in April 1891, a new conspiratorial room for the organisation was required. An indication of the increasing role of women is evident in that this task was delegated to Karelina and Boldryeva who in May 1891 rented an apartment in Glazovoi Street in the Narvskii Gate which quickly became the focal point for organisational meetings of the CWC and allowed an advanced women's circle to meet regularly. This circle was directed by the women themselves and consisted of textile workers from the New Cotton Mills and women workers from the nearby Rubber Works. It is significant that the women arranged for women propagandists to conduct study sessions, initially E.G. Barteneva a leading radical socialist involved in the Second International and subsequently the *kursistki* L. Milovidova and A. Kugusheva.¹⁰⁵ Sofia Aleksandrova (Ol'minskaia) also acted as a propagandist to this circle after being introduced to it by Bogdanov. Study in this circle was rigorous, with the women studying works by Marx, articles by Pisarev, Chernyshevskii and Shelgunov, as well as the history of the Russian revolutionary struggles. A great deal of attention was devoted to religious issues and Barteneva enthralled her young pupils with tales of Western Europe and how women workers in foreign countries engaged in struggles for both political freedom and their rights as women.¹⁰⁶ Over the next year other women's circles were set up across Petersburg. In the Nevskii Gate, Bogdanov and Filimonov actively carried out propaganda amongst women workers at the Kartochnyi factory [again significantly a factory that received a high proportion of its workers from orphanages] and established a small group of women workers that studied Chernyshevskii's *Chto delat?*, works by Pisarev and read revolutionary poems including one about the 1870s woman revolutionary Sofia Bardina which Bogdanov used to demonstrate that women had been active in the revolutionary movement in preceding decades.¹⁰⁷

Sviatlovskii recalled Karelina as a literate and intelligent young woman with a passionate concern about social issues and the position of women workers who was tireless in her efforts in the organisation.¹⁰⁸ Although it is not possible to detect a specifically feminist agenda in the work of the women involved in the circles, workers such as Karelina and

¹⁰⁵ V.M. Karelina, *Sbornik Leonid Borisovich Krasin*, 1928, p.91.

¹⁰⁶ I.S. Khishnik-Vetrov, *Russkie deiatel'nitsy Pervogo Internatsionala i Parishskoi Kommuny*. A.V. Zhaklar, E.L. Dmitriev, E.G. Barteneva. Moscow-Leningrad, 1964, p.247.

¹⁰⁷ 'Doklad departamenta politsii po delu Nikolai Dement'evich Bogdanov i Aleksandr Sergeevich Filimonov, 20 iuliiia 1892g,' *Istoriko revoliutsionnykh Sbornik, T.II*, pp. 204, 208-209.

¹⁰⁸ V.V. Sviatlovskii, *Byloe*, 1922, p.147.

Boldryeva devoted much time to teaching basic literacy to other women workers either individually or in small groups in their apartment.¹⁰⁹ Norinskii and other leading male workers recalled their women colleagues with great affection, stating that they were motivated by an overwhelming desire to gain knowledge and understanding of their harsh life and to struggle for freedom.¹¹⁰ Leading male workers on the CWC seem to have been involved in mentoring of a number of the women participants in the circles.

Women were also involved in the work from the CWC from its inception, with Natalia Grigor'eva attending initial CWC meetings, followed by Karelina and Boldryeva who both served on the CWC.¹¹¹ It should be stressed that these women were not representing womens' circles as such, but attended on the basis of full equality for the contribution they could make to the overall movement. Although it appears that no women took part in either the Shelgunov demonstration, for reasons connected with strict work regimes in textile factories, or the initial May-Day celebration in 1891, they played prominent part in other events including the evening May-Day gathering in 1891 and at the May-Day event in 1892 at which Boldryeva delivered a speech on behalf of Natalia Grigor'eva.¹¹²

If the workers' clubs in the toilets of larger mechanical factories offered an opportunity for debate and discussion on political issues, in textile factories with much stricter work regimes opportunities for overt discussion between circle workers and the mass of women workers were more limited. Karelina recalled that in the textile factories workers were constantly watched to ensure that they did not talk to one another or congregate in the small and filthy toilets. This meant that workers did not have a spare moment and had no chance to read books or newspapers during working time. Women workers were unable to bring newspapers such as *Russkie Vedomosti* to which they had a pooled subscription to work, as if a foreman saw a worker with a printed leaflet or even a scrap of paper such as a bread wrapper this would be seized and scrutinised and the worker fined.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, V.M. Karelina, *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1922, p.286.

¹¹⁰ K.M. Norinskii, *Moi vospominaniia, Ot gruppy Blagoeva....*, 1921, p.16.

¹¹¹ V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.220; M.S. Aleksandrov, *Byloe*, 1906, p.8.

¹¹² A.G. Boldryeva, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.264.

¹¹³ V.M. Karelina, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.279.

*Vera Karelina**Anna Boldyreva*

Women workers such as Karelina also played an important conciliation role between active male circle workers and their wives, seeking to reassure the latter that their husband's activities in circles involving young women workers were not of a sexual nature and to try to persuade wives to support their husband's revolutionary activities. Karelina recalled:

At this time there were few conscious men but the women married to them were almost always illiterate and feared for their families. Even amongst us young women involved in circles jealousies arouse, jealousy was a worse enemy than the police. Every spare moment a man either read a book or went out, especially on Sundays or holidays, and spent little time with his wife, not telling her where he was going, where he had been or what he did. Most certainly suspicions developed amongst the simple women. Wives sometime complained to me about their husbands whilst husbands frequently asked me to talk to their wives and to explain to them about politics so that they would not be jealous of me, a young girl. The wives would however, ask what reasons can a young girl have to be with a married man? ¹¹⁴

Klimanov's wife in particular appear to have been extremely aggrieved at her husband spending so much time with circles of young, unattached women workers. At first she was 'unappeasable' and it was only after Karelina and other members of the womens' circles made a special effort to befriend and involve her that she was reassured that her husband's revolutionary activities in the circle did not have some ulterior sexual motivation. ¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Ibid, pp.283-284.

¹¹⁵ V.M. Karelina, 'Vospominaniia o podpol'nykh rabochikh kruzkh Brusnevskoi organisatsii [1889-1892gg]' in [ed.], E.A. Korol'chuk, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p284.

Karelina, Boldyreva and Grigor'eva were arrested and exiled for their involvement in workers' circles. Following exile they all resumed political activities although they adopted different paths towards achieving the goals which they had worked towards in the early 1890s. Consistent with her earlier adherence to the *narodovol'tsy*, Grigor'eva joined the SRs and was imprisoned in Odessa during the 1905 Revolution. Boldyreva became a Bol'shevik and was elected to the Petersburg Soviet in 1905, playing a leading role in the Party up to 1917 and beyond. Karelina and her husband, Aleskei, were leading activists in the Gapon movement, like Boldyreva, was elected to the Petersburg Soviet in 1905, and subsequently was active in the legal trade union and co-operative movements.¹¹⁶

Relationships between the Workers' Organisation and other Workers

Whilst many studies of the workers' movement have focused on the relationship between the emerging *worker-intelligenty* and the radical intelligentsia this has invariably been to the detriment of analysing the relationships between the *worker-intelligenty* and the mass of industrial workers in factories and working-class districts. In order to form a deeper understanding of the *worker-intelligenty*, it is essential to view this group not solely through its engagement with radical-*intelligenty* groups, in a sense through the prism of a reified intellectual construct, or even through speeches or leaflets produced by the CWC, but rather as real workers interacting in real time and real situations with other sections of the working-class.

In reconstructing a picture of these relationships, the following section will draw heavily on the memoirs of the Baltic Shipyard worker Vladimir Fomin, as well as other workers who left accounts of how they operated within the workplace environment. Fomin describes how circle members lived and operated on '*two fronts*'; the first involved weekly study in a circle with an *intelligenty*-propagandist in which the workers were often passive recipients of knowledge. It was in the arena of '*the second front*' that circle members acquired a living vitality. In Fomin's words they were transformed into independent creators who had to adapt to the workers' environment and operate amongst diverse groups, many of whom were hostile and antagonistic towards their aims. It was to this aspect that '*all creative work and all energy of circle members were poured*', with circle

¹¹⁶ On Boldyreva see *Deiateli...*, T. V, stb.420-1; for Karelina see biographical notes in Korol'chuk, *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.405-406; for Grigor'eva see *Materialy dlia biograficheskogo slovaria sotsial-demokratov*.

study seen as a means to enable them to undertake what they regarded as the most important work of the circle. In this second element *'life itself confronted the kruzhkovtsy, complete with obstacles, unpredictability and with its numerous contradictions. This was the very life that the kruzhkovtsy had to transform in their image.'*¹¹⁷ Aleksei Karelin recalled that the *kruzhkovtsy* had an influence far beyond anything that envisaged by the group of *intelligenty-propagandists* as their *'auditorium was the whole factory, and not simply a circle of 4 or 5 people as with the intelligentsia.'*¹¹⁸



Vladimir Fomin

According to Fomin, a coherent approach was evolved and refined by *kruzhkovtsy* through sometimes painful engagement with the mass of workers. Within large industrial complexes such as the Baltic Shipyards with over 2150 workers in 1890, organised into several discrete production processes, skilled circle workers actively sought to take their message into workshops hitherto unaffected by circle propaganda. Fomin, Egorov, Norinskii and other circle members from the engineering workshop used every opportunity when sent to repair or install machinery in other workshops to engage in propaganda and agitational activity. In this way they linked workers in the carpentry workshop into the

¹¹⁷ V.V. Fomin, 'Vospominaniia o podpol'noi rabote revolyutsionnykh kruzhkov na Baltiiskom zavode i ob umstvennykh techeniyakh vnuti kruzhkov za period s 1887 po 1893 god,' *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.186.

¹¹⁸ 'Pervyi vecher vospominanii uchastnikov sotsial-demokratov kruzhkov kontsa 80-kh godov - nachala 90-kh godov (zapis). Vistuplenie A.E. Karelina, cited in E.A. Korol'chuk, 'Peredovye proletarii Peterburga,' *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.81.

work of the circles.¹¹⁹ Often circle members were treated cautiously by workers afraid of management, terrified by the police and lacking any great trust in their fellow workers who they believed were incapable engaging in collective struggles. On many occasions, circle workers witnessed worker fury over management actions or foreman abuse but despite their best endeavours were unable to organise strikes because the majority of workers believed that these would only result in vindictive reprisals by management and ‘instigators’ being arrested and exiled.

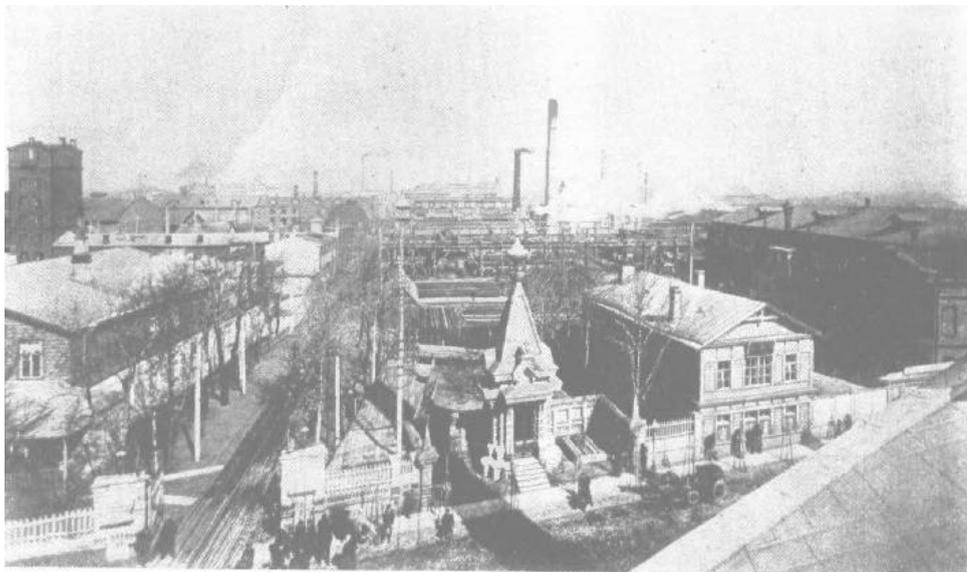
Despite this, Fomin considered that one of the objectives of workplace discussions was to create awareness that strikes could achieve economic improvements for workers. There were probably only a small number of more experienced circle workers actively involved in this embryonic agitational work but their influence over time on a large number of workers could be significant. Fomin and other memoirists recall each new contact for the *kruzhkovtsy* presented a riddle, with no indication of whether the worker being approached would turn out to be a friend or a foe or, as Fomin indicates, in the majority of cases, merely indifferent.¹²⁰ In such situations, circle members had to skilfully steer conversations towards issues and concerns relevant to workers enabling them over a period to introduce ideas relating to their treatment in the factory and how this might be improved. During conversations, *kruzhkovtsy* frequently alluded to improvements won by western workers through workers’ organisations and strikes.

In certain workshops, advanced workers appear to have encountered little interference from factory management in their subversive contacts with the mass of workers. Whilst certain precautions were no doubt observed, a number of circle workers appear to have behaved with almost complete impunity on the shop-floor. This may have reflected a view within management that the activities of the *kruzhkovtsy* acted as a restraining influence on workers whose first reaction in disputes was often a resort to violence. A predisposition to violence on the part of workers certainly existed at the Baltic Shipyards where the workers’ instinct was encapsulated in common expressions such as ‘*reply to violence with violence*’ and ‘*stick a knife in the side*’ of an unpopular foreman. Slogans like this were used to intimidate foremen and other management representatives on the shop-floor. Fomin comments that such views were endemic and resulted from a lack of organisation amongst workers who bore long-held grudges against injustices and oppression inherent in the work

¹¹⁹ V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.197.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p.190.

regime and resorted to threatening and abusive language as they had no other outlet for their anger. ¹²¹



Baltic Shipyards, c 1890

A commonly-used approach to engage with less developed and often hostile workers was to strike up conversations in factory toilets - the ‘workers’ clubs.’ One older worker at the Baltic Shipyards, Ivan Krutov, proved himself expert in debating in ‘workers’ club.’ Norinskii recalled every day he could be found disputing with workers on any topic. Darwin’s theory of evolution was a recurring theme and Krutov expended much energy persuading religious workers that man was ‘descended from apes.’ Norinskii recalled during these discussions ‘when imparting knowledge to his listeners Krutov became transformed: he underwent rejuvenation, prepared to embrace and kiss anyone who shared his views or indeed anyone who understood him.’ ¹²² Such activities in the latrines were known to factory management who on occasion attempted to curtail them by sending foremen and their assistants to patrol lavatory blocks but this appears to have had little effect in inhibiting lively debates. Fomin recalled that heated discussions took place in the ‘club’ that was considered as the most suitable place to carry out propaganda work as *kruzhkovtsy* could mingle with masses of workers without drawing attention to themselves. If at any time, the presence of a foreman was too intrusive, workers resorted to coded or Aesopian language to disguise their conversations. The Baltic shipyard worker Gavril

¹²¹ Ibid, p.214.

¹²² K.M. Norinskii, ‘Moi vospominaniia,’ *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, pp.12-13.

Maliar was particularly adept in this technique and managed to hold subversive conversations with other workers in coded speech.¹²³

Dinner-breaks afforded another opportunity to engage with workers. Iakovlev recalled that circle activists at the Siemens and Gal'sk factory frequently used this time to carry out agitation, with a topical subject for discussion being agreed in advance and a debate staged with speakers for and against. This attracted significant groups of workers who listened to anti-government opinions.¹²⁴ Many workers would visit local taverns, eating houses or eat their dinner-meal at their workbench. Circle members would frequent these places during the break to distribute literature, establish new acquaintances, and discuss current matters. Many workers from factories on Vasil'evskii Island went to charity dining rooms that also gave the *kruzhkovtsy* opportunities to meet workers from factories where there were no circles.¹²⁵ Another opportunity to carry out propaganda presented itself during night shifts as usually foremen would hang-around until about 11:00 pm after which they invariably disappeared into the offices and slept till morning. In the absence of direct supervision, the shop-floor became the domain of radical workers who were able to move around unhindered, discuss worker grievances and have time for deeper '*philosophical reflection and discussion.*'

Certain groups however, proved difficult for the *kruzhkovtsy* to find a common basis for discourse. Discussions were not always peaceful and open hostility was shown to *kruzhkovtsy* by workers, many of whom continued to retain a deep faith in the tsar and religion. Often such workers reacted angrily, sometimes violently, to having their beliefs challenged by younger '*students*' and '*Godless socialists*' who wished to '*kill the tsar.*' Engaging with such workers involved radicalised workers treading a fine line between criticising state and church in discussing political and social issues but having to refrain from challenging the tsar or God: as a number of radical workers observed '*the cup can be broken but the samovar must be left alone.*'¹²⁶

Workers employed in the shipbuilding sections of the Baltic plant were typical in this respect and posed a serious challenge to the *kruzhkovtsy*. These workers were generally illiterate and many retained close connections with the countryside. Fomin describes how

¹²³ V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.211.

¹²⁴ I.I. Iakovlev, 'Vospominaniia o V I Lenine i peterburgskom Soiuzhe bor'by,' *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.358.

¹²⁵ V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.201.

¹²⁶ P.A. Moiseenko, *Vospominaniia staorgo revoliutsionera*, Moscow, 1966, p.24; S.I. Kanatchikov, 1986, p.96.

the views of such workers reflected their rural backgrounds with strong animosities between them and more urbanised workers from the mechanical workshops. The latter often ridiculed unskilled shipyard workers on account of their appearance, customs and manners which showed little influence of urban life. Shipyard workers also retained religious beliefs and as a result it proved almost impossible for the *kruzhkovtsy* to engage productively with them. One circle member succeeded in arranging a meeting with a group of shipyard workers by promising to read them religious tales by Tolstoy. When the workers gathered and heard a story depicting dreadful material and spiritual suffering of ordinary peasants, the advanced worker was shocked that this provoked howls of laughter from his audience who regarded the misfortunes and despair described as an amusing but a normal state of affairs, rejoicing in the plight of their unfortunate peers.¹²⁷

Fomin concedes that many older workers did not see anything relevant in the ideas being advocated by the *kruzhkovtsy* or any practical way in which these ideas would benefit workers and believed, through direct experience with previous radical workers who had 'disappeared' from the factory, that no good could come from opposing the authorities.¹²⁸ In a similar fashion, Babushkin recalled how when he began work at the Kronstadt Torpedo Works in the late 1880s there was much talk of earlier workers who had been involved in *narodovol'tsy* circles and whilst some workers held a sneaking admiration for them, it was generally held that becoming a socialist and reading books inevitably brought misfortune, evidenced by a young fitter at the works who had suffered a nervous breakdown after being victimised by police and management for his socialist beliefs.¹²⁹

Amongst older workers in the Shipyards, there were some who had been exposed to earlier revolutionary propaganda but were no longer involved in the circle movement and, in contrast to their earlier radicalism, were now '*postepennovtsemi*' [gradualists], sceptical about oppositional activity due to what they perceived to be the 'ignorance' prevalent amongst workers and the political repression they had witnessed firsthand in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Fomin considered that such 'gradualists' were well-developed workers who no longer risked involvement in circles that would place themselves and their families in danger. They were '*the ideological enemies of the kruzhkovtsy who asserted that without constant struggle with the authorities nothing would be achieved. The gradualists*

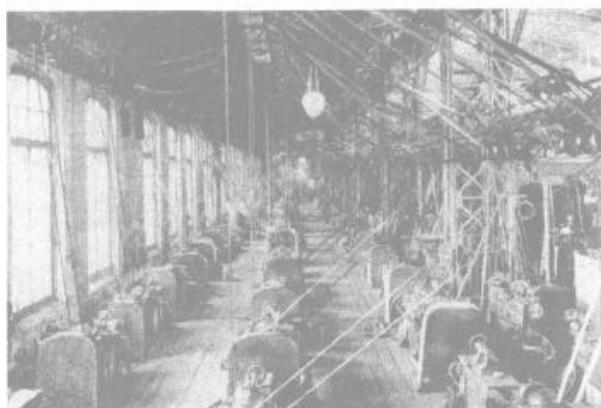
¹²⁷ V.V.Fomin, *V nachale puti*, p.199.

¹²⁸ Ibid, p.193.

¹²⁹ *Recollections of Ivan Vasilyevich Babushkin*, Moscow, 1957, pp.23-24.

often referred to *kruzhkovtsy* as ‘bluebirds who intend to set the sea aflame.’¹³⁰ Despite this, ‘gradualists’ were sympathetic and supportive of workers involved in circles and amongst the first to contribute financially to support arrested workers.

Discussions around a workers’ bench were not uncommon with various subterfuges employed to dupe foremen, workers ostensibly discussing technical problems during which various topical issues were discussed. Senior workers would use this approach to discuss ‘radical’ issues with young apprentices under their supervision and identify potential recruits for study circles. Ivan Timofeev, in the mechanical workshops of the Baltic Shipyards, was particularly adept at this and succeeded in recruiting many young apprentices in the workshops into the work of revolutionary circles. Norinskii described how Timofeev gradually sounded out an apprentice and when confident that he was reliable began to lend him books from the collection he had acquired from the *Tochisskii* organisation. Norinskii receiving such books was given strict instructions not to show them to anyone and after a while he was introduced into a circle led by Timofeev in which systematic study took place.¹³¹



Machine Workshop and Lathe Operating Workshop, Baltic Shipyards.

¹³⁰ V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.181.

¹³¹ K.M. Norinskii, ‘Moi vospominaniia,’ *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.8.

Leading circle workers also had a broader vision of fostering a co-operative ethos to improve the position of workers. On a day-to-day basis the *kruzhkovtsy* encountered a combination of apathy, hostility and fear in the mass of the workers. Reflecting on this, circle workers sought to establish worker-run initiatives in which more workers could participate in collective endeavour. Such initiatives have largely been overlooked by historians, with the result that an important dimension of the work of *worker-intelligenty* to foster socialist relationships within existing social relationships has been missed.¹³² Circle members at the Baltic Shipyard were so concerned at the pernicious influence of alcohol and drunkenness amongst workers that they planned to establish a Temperance Society at the plant. When this proved impossible, due to government refusal to authorise the proposed society, workers developed proposals for a consumer co-operative to supply workers with cheap and wholesome foodstuffs. Once again they initially sought legal approval, but when this was refused they organised an illegal society. Co-operatives involving workers from the Putilov and the Obukhov factories were also organised around this time. Fomin, as organiser of the Baltic co-operative, bought bulk supplies of basic food items such as tea, coffee, flour, sugar, and macaroni, as well as tobacco and dispensed these from his room to co-operative members. Although only attracting a limited membership, the venture is indicative of an emerging counter-cultural and collectivist self-help ethos amongst circle workers reflecting their determination to find participative ways of improving the position of workers and involving them in collective ventures.¹³³

It is difficult to gauge the extent of the influence of circle workers on the mass of workers. One indication can be found in a fairly minor event at the Baltic Shipyards in 1890. At this time, the Shipyard Director was an ex- naval officer with 'liberal' ideas concerning worker-representation who had instituted a system of elected workshop representatives through whom management communicated with workers and who in turn could raise workers' shopfloor concerns. The mechanical workshop where several leading circle members worked was allocated two 'deputies' and the *kruzhkovtsy* put forward two members for election. They were opposed by other workers, including several 'gradualists' and management nominees, who Fomin disparagingly refers to as '*spineless creatures*.' After an intensive period of canvassing and hustings in the '*workers' club*,' the two representatives of the *kruzhkovtsy* were elected. Fomin and Egorov both refer to this event

¹³² R.A. Kazakevich, 1960, mentions the initiative at the Baltic Shipyards but sees it as an incidental activity of the circles at the shipyards.

¹³³ V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.217-291; see R.A. Kazakevich, 1960, pp.144-145.

as indicative that the *kruzhkovtsy's* efforts were bearing fruit and that their influence amongst a broader section of the workforce, albeit still within a largely skilled section of the workforce, was becoming more visible.¹³⁴

Influencing a broader group of workers in the prevailing circumstances was necessarily a gradual and iterative process. As a number of workers recalled much of this work remained unseen and was not reflected in any sudden upsurge of labour unrest. But the influence of leading worker-activists and their example within workshops, factories and working-class districts although intangible and unquantifiable did over time create within factories a tradition of radical engagement by workers with the authorities, a residual memory that the mass of workers came to respect, referring to previous exemplars of worker-revolutionaries who dedicated their lives to promoting workers' rights. As Fomin recalled:

*The kruzhkovtsy devoted much effort to work that did not produce immediate results and was often unseen. The process of instilling new ideas into the masses was gradual. The preparation of the masses was unobserved and unknown except for a very few people, but nevertheless the long and persistent struggle of the kruzhkovtsy bore fruit and little-by-little the mass of the workers joined the struggle. At workers' meetings supportive voices began to make themselves heard, more workers inclined to the side of the kruzhkovtsy and the number of workers associated with the kruzhkovtsy increased over time.*¹³⁵

The Activities of the Workers' Organisation

i) Involvement in Workers' Struggles

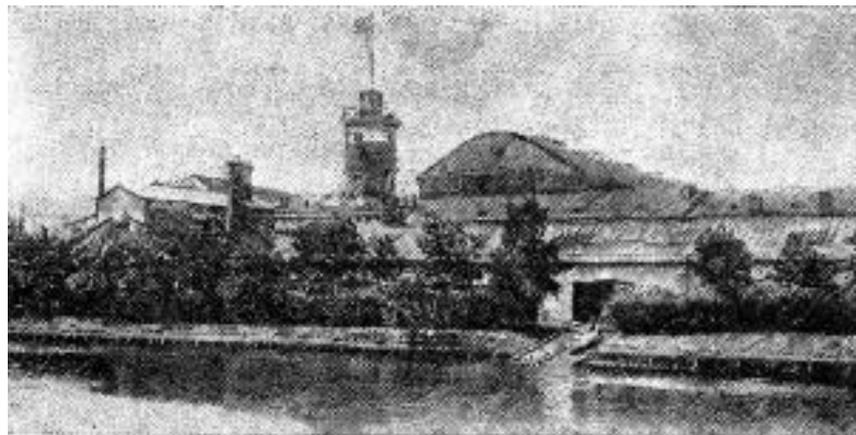
Following the consolidation of the workers' organisation during 1890, leading circle workers were intent on developing a more public profile and appear as workers on a more public stage. Fully conversant with the risks, nonetheless during 1891 they embarked on a series of overt interventions. During winter 1890-91 the workers' organisation were presented with their first opportunities to become involved in strikes when workers at the New Admiralty Shipyards and then the Thornton textile factory, went on strike. Whilst both strikes developed spontaneously with no direct involvement from the workers'

¹³⁴ V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.195-196; I.I. Egorov, 'Iz vospominanii o rabochikh kruzhakh v Peterburge 1888-1892 godov,' *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.238.

¹³⁵ V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.194.

organisation, its response to these workers' struggles represents a sign of a growing organisational maturity amongst the social-democratic forces in Petersburg.

In 1890, around 400 shipyard workers building the battleship, *Gangut*, at the New Admiralty Shipyards became increasingly dissatisfied over conditions of labour.¹³⁶ Members of the workers' circles at the Baltic Shipyards across the Neva were aware of this unrest as recently one of its leading members Petr Evgrafov had transferred to work at the New Admiralty yards. Whilst there is no indication that Evgrafov played any role in fomenting the disturbances, his presence at the New Admiralty gave the workers' organisation a reliable source of intelligence on the workers' mood. It is known that the Baltic Shipyard circles took a close interest in developments in the yard across the river, a police report at the end of 1890 referring to initial disturbances of New Admiralty workers being discussed in the Baltic circles with workers debating how they could support their fellow shipyard workers.¹³⁷



New Admiralty Shipyards

On 20th January 1891, the situation at the New Admiralty deteriorated when the yard's director, Admiral Verkhovskii, decreed that workers on the *Gangut* would have their wages cut with immediate effect and that a strict regime of fines would be enforced. When the workers were notified of these new conditions, disturbances broke out and the following day all workers stopped work. Verkhovskii and the local police chief met the workers and tried to cajole and then intimidate them to resume work, but the strikers refused to work until their previous terms and conditions were reinstated.¹³⁸ Golubev set

¹³⁶ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. III, Ch. 2*, pp.51-52.

¹³⁷ V.S. Golubev, *Byloe*, 1906, p.117; A.M. Orkehov, 1979, pp.74-75.

¹³⁸ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. III, Ch.2*, p.53.

out the approach of the workers' organisation towards strikes in general and the strike at the New Admiralty in particular:

Our attitude to strikes was that we did not consider it possible to start strikes.... but if a strike broke out then we considered it necessary to intervene, to explain to workers the significance of strikes and also help conduct them. The strike at the New Admiralty arose without any influence from us. but we decided to take part in it in order not to miss an opportunity. ¹³⁹

At almost the same time as New Admiralty workers downed tools, a strike broke out amongst textile workers at the Thornton textile factory in the Nevskii Gate caused by a reduction in weavers' piece-rates. The factory on the far side of the Neva was not easily accessible to the workers' organisation although they did have a number of contacts with workers at the neighbouring Vargunin textile factory. With two significant strikes now taking place in the capital, the workers' organisation saw an opportunity to influence the mass struggles of workers. The CWC issued proclamations addressed to striking workers in each factory, commissioning their *intelligenty* partners to draft leaflets that were reviewed and agreed by the workers' centre before printing. In line with their general approach, leading workers remained in control throughout the process, effectively instructing the *intelligenty* to carry out a technical task. ¹⁴⁰ Krasin drafted the leaflet for the New Admiralty with information supplied by Evgrafov and a similar exercise was undertaken for the Thornton workers with a leaflet being drafted by Golubev. The leaflets were distributed at both factories or pasted on factory walls for workers to read and were welcomed by the strikers.

Unfortunately, no copies of either leaflet survive, but it seems they explained in simple language the interests and rights of workers and exposed the basis of capitalist exploitation.

¹⁴¹ Golubev recalled that the leaflets were also read by workers to groups of workers in other factories to explain the significance of strikes and to urge worker-solidarity. ¹⁴² Detailed political issues were avoided with a concentration on the particular issues at each factory and the justice of the workers' demands for improvements in their conditions, accompanied by an exhortation to continue their strikes until their demands were met.

¹³⁹ V.S. Golubev, *Byloe*, 1906, pp.117-118.

¹⁴⁰ M.S. Ol'minskii, 'Davnie sviazi,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.42.

¹⁴¹ M.I.Brusnev, 'Pervye revoliutsionnye shagi L. Krasin,' 1928, p.71.

¹⁴² V.S. Golubev, *Byloe*, 1906, p.111.

Bogdanov recalled that the leaflets also urged the workers to take co-ordinated action as part of a broader network of workers' groups across the capital so that their struggles against employers would be more effective. ¹⁴³ The efforts of the circle movement were noted by the police who reported that at the New Admiralty 'a proclamation appeared... among workers ... inciting them to support one another during the strike, in order to force the authorities to make the concessions they were demanding.' ¹⁴⁴

Realising that a key factor for success would be the ability of the strikers to prolong their strikes, the CWC and the *intelligenty* centre organised collections. As soon as the strikes broke out the *intelligenty* centre issued an appeal to society, requesting 'financial and moral support for the suffering workers.' ¹⁴⁵ Copies of this appeal were sent to the liberal press thereby ensuring that the strikes were reported and well-publicised. As a result, significant sums of money were received, Golubev claims around 600 roubles from intelligentsia sources, supplemented by contributions from the CWC Fund [300 roubles] plus collections taken at factories. To distribute the monies, the CWC sent worker representatives to the *artels* where strikers lived but on at least one occasion shipyard workers rebuffed them believing they had been sent by management to bribe them back to work. ¹⁴⁶ The distribution of money for shipyard workers was overcome through Egorov who provided addresses of striking workers and through careful and diplomatic discussions financial support was distributed, workers and their families receiving between 5 and 10 roubles. ¹⁴⁷ Thornton workers were provided with financial support by a member of the CWC [probably Fedor Afanas'ev who had worked at the nearby Vargunin factory and had extensive contacts amongst textile workers] and was warmly received by the textile workers. Although such financial support prolonged the strikes, after around a week workers at both factories were forced through hardship to return to work without concessions. The strikes occurred in winter, in the midst of a serious economic downturn and employers had a pool of unemployed labour available to replace the unskilled workers involved in the strikes, negating the strikers bargaining power. Police retribution followed swiftly with over 30 workers from the two factories identified as 'instigators' arrested and exiled from the capital. ¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ N.D. Bogdanov, 'O vospominaniiakh N D Bogdanova,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva*...., 1921, p.41.

¹⁴⁴ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. III, Ch. 2*, pp.51-52

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.52.

¹⁴⁶ V.S. Golubev, *Byloe*, 1906, p.117.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁴⁸ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. III, Ch. 2*, p.53.

Despite this, the experience gained in supporting ordinary workers was part of a longer-term process of the circle movement developing a specific worker-identity and to enable it to be seen to represent the needs of the mass of workers engaged in struggles with employers. This identity can be seen in the fact that leaflets issued during the strikes appeared under the banner of *'The Provisional Workers Committee,'* an obvious reference to the CWC. The involvement of the CWC in the strikes demonstrated that advanced workers understood the importance of responding to workers' day-to-day grievances and can be seen as an early forerunner of the agitational tactics adopted by social-democratic groups in the mid-1890s and a critical initial step of uniting the socialist aspirations of the advanced workers with the broader needs of the workers' movement.

During 1891-92, the CWC continued their involvement in industrial disputes. Around the time of the May-Day event in 1892, a strike broke out at the Mitrofanievskii Cotton Spinning Works in the Narvskii Gate that the police believed was incited by members of the workers' organisation. Although the workers' organisation was represented by a small circle at the factory, the immediate cause of the strike was a reduction in piece-rates due to poor quality cotton which reduced worker productivity.¹⁴⁹ During the strike, the CWC issued a leaflet distributed at several factories. A police report names a number of circle workers involved in the distribution of the leaflets and the CWC *intelligently* representative, Cywinskii, organising collections for striking workers amongst students. Leading workers were also involved in collecting money and at the conclusion of the strike the CWC provided financial support to the families of 19 workers arrested for instigating the strike.¹⁵⁰ The Mitrofanievskii strike and its repression caused considerable anger amongst Petersburg workers and the CWC through its support to the workers involved enhanced its reputation in the eyes of many of the capital's workers.

These interventions were not opportunistic attempts to intervene in spontaneous disturbances but rather represented the beginnings of a coherent approach designed to place leading circle workers at the head of the workers' movement. From their inception, the workers' organisation had at one eye on a longer-term goal of involvement in strike actions. Circles set up at the Putilov factory at the beginning of 1889 established workers' funds with the explicit aim of supporting workers involved in strike action to win

¹⁴⁹ F I Bodrov, 'Iz kratkoi avtobiografii,' *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.372-373.

¹⁵⁰ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke*, T. III, Ch. 2, pp.134-137.

improvements in their economic conditions.¹⁵¹ The Putilov example may have provided a model for introduction of the standard approach for circle funds that was incorporated into the *‘Ustav’* of the CWC as an original member of the CWC was the treasurer of the Putilov fund Vasiliu Buianov. Circle funds were intended to assist workers involved in strikes, while a half of the funds held by the CWC [*Komitet*] comprised a strike fund and the allocation of a sizable sum to support the 1891 strikes confirms that the CWC saw this as one of its main priorities. Korol’chuk and Soslova in their chronology of the Petersburg workers movement confirmed that throughout its existence, the CWC allocated large sums from its Central Fund to support striking or arrested workers and their families.¹⁵²

Further evidence indicating that leading *kruzhkovtsy* were actively engaged in incitement of workers to strike. When Nikolai Bogdanov and Aleksandr Filimonov were arrested at the end of November 1891, the police investigation uncovered their direct involvement in agitation amongst workers. During the arrests, the police seized a number of incriminating items including three proclamations, two in Bogdanov’s handwriting and one printed, in which the plight of workers is graphically described and compared unfavourably to the position of workers in the west. The handwritten proclamations were aimed at ordinary workers while the printed proclamation was also discovered in the possession of several other workers proving that it had a wider circulation. One manuscript proclamation spoke of the onerous position of Russian workers, their lack of political rights and the necessity for workers to escape from this position through industrial action against employers. A second proclamation called on workers to unite and challenge their economic oppression and lack of political rights, declaring that workers’ suffering arises from the existing economic order and it is necessary to engage in strikes with the ultimate aim of *‘establishing a socialist order in which there will be neither poverty nor wealth and everyone will enjoy happiness and satisfaction to an equal measure.’* The proclamation concludes that such a state will only be achieved when workers form a strong organisational force so that the government will be unable to refuse their demands. Workers at the Obukhov and other factories in the Nevskii Gate told the police investigation that Bogdanov and Filimonov actively propagated the views expressed in the proclamations inciting them to pursue a strike struggle. According to one Obukhov worker, Filimonov told him and other workers on several occasions that it was time for the Russian

¹⁵¹ Korol’chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika....*, 1940, p.146.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, p.175.

workers to organise, take strike action to reduce their working hours, increase wages and win political rights.¹⁵³

In their statements to the police, Bogdanov and Filimonov, whilst denying involvement with a workers' revolutionary group, nonetheless indicated that such a group existed. Bogdanov claiming that workers who had given him the proclamations suggested that as a more developed worker he should organise a '*Tovarishcheskoi gruppy*' with the aim of raising the intellectual and moral level of workers and improve their lives. Explaining his possession of illegal publications and the proclamations, Bogdanov stated that he had obtained these as he was '*seeking to discover ways of achieving a state order that would meet the needs of workers and through this look for opportunities to direct those who were progressing along a crooked path onto a straight path.*'

The proclamations penned by Bogdanov show that leading members of the CWC were actively pursuing agitational tactics. Although the proclamations continued to place a significant emphasis on educational development to ensure workers act from a basis of knowledge, the call for more direct collective action by workers is evidence that leading *kruzhkovtsy* were seeking to involve the mass of workers in struggles against both economic exploitation and political repression. Filimonov in his agitation amongst workers in the Nevskii Gate drew the explicit link between workers' economic and political struggles telling workers that:

*It is time for Russian workers to develop, organise, arrange strikes, gain broader rights, shorter working hours, increases in pay and through strikes also attempt to gain political rights - the establishment of a constitution, based on general electoral laws so that every worker can elect deputies from their own numbers to the governing body and so that these deputies will be able to represent the interests of their electors when laws are passed.*¹⁵⁴

The seriousness with which the authorities viewed threat to the autocratic order posed by Bogdanov and Filimonov was reflected in the fact that unlike most arrested workers who

¹⁵³ 'Doklad departamenta politsii.....,' in N.L. Sergievskii, *Gruppa Osvobozhdenie truda i marksistskie kruzhki, Istoriko-Revoliutsionnykh Sbornik, T.II*, pp.205-206.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p.209.

were exiled to their home *guberniia* they were sentenced to three months solitary confinement followed by eight months imprisonment and then exile outwith the capital.¹⁵⁵

ii] The Shelgunov Address and Worker Funeral Demonstration

Following the support for striking workers in 1891, the CWC sought other ways to intervene in public life. An opportunity presented itself in spring 1891 with the illness and subsequent death of the radical publicist N.V. Shelgunov. Shelgunov had been a leading radical figure for nearly 40 years, writing a great deal on the position of both the rural and urban poor. Karelina recalled that Shelgunov's works were greatly valued by workers and through them they had become acquainted with the life of workers in Western Europe.¹⁵⁶ When the CWC discovered that Shelgunov was gravely ill they agreed to send a delegation with an address from workers to the writer. Brusnev recounts that the *intelligenty*-propagandists opposed this, fearing that it would provoke police repression, but despite this, the workers insisted and eventually Golubev arranged an audience between a worker-delegation and the ailing writer.¹⁵⁷ The CWC drafted an address to Shelgunov at the end of March 1891 in their headquarters in Sivkov Lane.¹⁵⁸ Golubev confirmed that the address was written by workers, who then selected their delegation to present it to the writer. The chosen workers were the most senior members of the CWC; the group's secretary Nikolai Bogdanov, its treasurer Klimanov, the worker from the Narvskii Gate Gavril Mefodiev and the older textile worker Fedor Afanas'ev, the last being nominated with the honour of leading the delegation as the workers regarded him as their '*starosta*' [Elder] and affectionately referred to him as '*Otets*' [Father].¹⁵⁹ The workers called Shelgunov their '*dear teacher*', expressing their gratitude to him for highlighting the onerous conditions of Russian workers to wider society.

By studying and understanding your writings, just like our fellow workers in Western Europe, we have seen how to fight for our rights and to unite. From the example of workers in Western Europe, we understand how we, Russian workers, can expect nothing in real support from anyone except for ourselves to improve our position and achieve freedom.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, pp.213-214.

¹⁵⁶ V.M. Karelina, *Krasnaia letopis'*, 1922, p.274; V.S. Golubev, *Byloe*, 1906, p.119.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p.119; M.I. Brusnev, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, pp.25-26.

¹⁵⁸ V.M. Karelina, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.281.

¹⁵⁹ V.S. Golubev, *Byloe*, 1906, p.119.

Concluding their tribute, the CWC asserted that Shelgunov's writings had revealed to them *'the path to struggle.'* ¹⁶⁰

The workers' delegation accompanied by the *intelligenty* Golubev and Bartenev visited Shelgunov at his home and presented their address. Leading members of the intelligentsia were also present including the leading *Narodniki* publicist N.K. Mikhailovskii. Shelgunov greeted the workers who read their address and impressed all present, particularly the ailing author who with tears in his eyes told them that he was astonished to discover that well-educated workers had formed a workers' organisation. As the workers departed, Shelgunov embraced them, thanking them for their kind thoughts and indicating that he was glad to have learnt that his work had not been in vain and had influenced workers. ¹⁶¹ When the delegation returned, they reported to an enhanced meeting of the CWC, Karelina recalling their sombre mood, deeply affected by their visit to the seriously ill writer. ¹⁶²

The Shelgunov address and delegation had both a symbolic and real significance. By honouring a leading publicist inclined to *Narodism*, the workers indicated that they regarded anyone who supported their struggle and provided them with knowledge to challenge their oppression as an important ally. As a result of their visit, a number of articles on the 'workers' question appeared in the liberal press and the issue was actively discussed in liberal society. No doubt, Mikhailovskii's presence helped spread news of the workers intervention and their organisational objectives. ¹⁶³ With the Shelgunov address, the CWC declared its presence, emerging from the enclosed world of circles if not into full public view at least winning recognition as an organisation of workers for workers.

Shelgunov died on Friday, 12 April 1891. On learning of his death the CWC decided, without consultation with the *intelligenty*, that workers should be represented at his funeral.

¹⁶⁴ Again *intelligenty*-propagandists opposed worker involvement, strongly advising the CWC not to participate in the funeral. As Brusnev recalled, the *intelligenty* were fearful that such a public display would result in police action that could destroy the organisation.

¹⁶⁵ The workers however, were not to be deterred, and on Saturday 13th April agreed to

¹⁶⁰ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. III, Ch. 2*, pp.129-130.

¹⁶¹ V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.221-222.

¹⁶² V.M. Karelina, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.273.

¹⁶³ N.D. Bogdanov in *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.42.

¹⁶⁴ L.B. Krasin, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, p.17.

¹⁶⁵ M.I. Brusnev, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, p.25.

participate in the funeral and show their respect for Shelgunov by having a special wreath made to carry in procession. Bearing an elaborate design of oak leaves cast in metal with a plaque bearing the inscription ‘*To our Guide who showed us the way to Freedom and Brotherhood, from the Petersburg Workers*’ and adorned with red ribbons, the wreath was made by a circle member in a small foundry.¹⁶⁶

Recognising the risks involved, the CWC agreed to limit the number of workers attending, with each circle sending only two or three representatives. The funeral procession was initially scheduled for Sunday, 14th April, but the police fearing disturbances ordered that it be postponed until Monday, 15th April. As this was a workday, many workers, particularly women textile workers, were unable to attend as fines for absence were punitive and could give employers a reason to dismiss troublesome elements.¹⁶⁷ The authorities instructed employers to be vigilant and ensure workers turned up to work and to levy higher than normal fines for any absenteeism.¹⁶⁸ In the event, a significant number of workers attended the funeral; estimates vary from 70 to upwards of 150, with many other workers choosing to line the route of the procession to pay their respects.¹⁶⁹ Recognising the importance of workers’ presence, the funeral organisers allowed them to lead the procession along Nevskii Prospekt to Volkov cemetery, where the writer’s remains were interred.



Workers Leading the Funeral Procession of N.V. Shelgunov

¹⁶⁶ V.M. Karelina, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.281; K.M. Norinskii, ‘Moi vospominaniia,’ *Ot gruppy Blagoeva...*, 1921, p.12.

¹⁶⁷ V.M. Karelina, *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.282-283.

¹⁶⁸ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke*, T. III, Ch. 2, p.118.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Brusnev, 1923, Bogdanov, 1921, Norinskii, 1921.

The Shelgunov demonstration was the first major political demonstration in the capital for many years and marked a reawakening of public protest after a long period of quiescence during the reaction of the 1880s. The fact that industrial workers were literally at the forefront of this protest signalled the emergence of a new force that would henceforth play an increasing role in political protest and unrest. As the workers bearing their wreath marched in solemn procession through the city they created a powerful impression and both physically and symbolically announced their arrival on the political stage. The significance of the public display of workers was not lost on the authorities, being noted by the Petersburg Governor who in his report to the Tsar on the funeral wrote that workers' presence and their wreath attracted a great deal of attention as it was carried proudly aloft by workers.¹⁷⁰

A number of workers who participated in the funeral recalled the impression it made on the *kruzhkovtsy*. Up to this point, the movement had operated within isolated circles, with contacts between circles maintained through a small number of leading workers. Whilst the individual circles knew there were similar circles in other parts of the city, the gathering of a large number of members together was the first opportunity they had to identify personally with workers from different regions and participate in a broader movement.¹⁷¹ The young Baltic Shipyard worker Konstantin Norinskii described his elation at the experience of sharing the moment with other workers with whom he could identify and his deep pride at being asked to carry the wreath on behalf of the workers to the graveyard.¹⁷²

If the impact on the authorities and the workers was powerful, then the appearance of organised workers made a huge impact on society. To wider society, the dignified worker demonstration revealed a hitherto unknown and largely unrecognised world which was geographically close but socially light years distant. In a similar way to Shelgunov's surprise when visited by the workers' delegation, society was confronted with a new phenomenon in the form of articulate and organised workers representing a largely unknown world. Ol'minskii recalled *'the unprecedented appearance of workers at the funeral of the democratic-writer had a huge effect on the intelligentsia; before this time the intelligentsia did not believe in the existence amongst us of conscious workers.'*¹⁷³ This

¹⁷⁰ Report of Petersburg Governor, P.A. Gresser cited in A.M. Orekov, 1979, pp.78-79.

¹⁷¹ N.D. Bogdanov in *Ot gruppy Blagoeva....*, 1921, p.42.

¹⁷² K.M. Norinskii, 'Moi vospominaniia,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva....*, 1921, pp.12-13.

¹⁷³ M.S. Ol'minskii, 'Is vospominanii revoliutsionera,' *Rabochii mir*, 1919, No.4-5, p.15.

sense of discovery of a hidden world evoked a dual sense of fascination and excitement, captured a few years later when a member of the liberal intelligentsia described the impression made by workers at the funeral where their appearance *'lifted a curtain directly into another world, a world which was forbidden, but nonetheless desirable. A wave from a living sea broke over us, something seized our spirits strongly; their energy, courage, and thirst for struggle stirred us.... Many talked of it for a long time afterwards.'*¹⁷⁴

In the history of the Petersburg workers' organisation, the Shelgunov demonstration represented a watershed. Although workers, particularly Klimanov, had demonstrated earlier their desire to enter the public arena and obtain wider recognition in society, it was only with their visible presence in the Shelgunov procession that they succeeded in being seen as workers. In a profound sense, their emergence from an almost subterranean underworld where workers were seen as dark inhabitants, unmarked by culture or learning, into the full light of public view encouraged circle workers to develop their evolving identity as workers and seek to achieve greater recognition as part of the political struggle with the autocracy. Brusnev recalled:

*The participation of the workers in the Shelgunov demonstration had a great significance in the life of the [workers'] organisation: we had up till then carefully hidden ourselves in the underground, but now we loudly proclaimed our existence.*¹⁷⁵

But this emergence into the light came at a price. Applying new techniques of surveillance by photographing participants, the police actively monitored the procession leading to the arrest of a number of workers including the CWC member Gavril Mefodiev who was exiled from the capital. Mefodiev's loss was a major blow to the organisation as he was an experienced propagandist who maintained the organisation's headquarters in Sikov Lane which was now abandoned.¹⁷⁶ Leonid Krasin, his brother German, Vasili Bartenev, and other *intelligenty* recruited into circle work by Brusnev were also arrested in the wake of the demonstration. The loss of a significant number of *intelligenty*-propagandists, at the same time as the arrest of Vasili Golubev on an unrelated matter, whilst a short-term setback accelerated the process of leading workers taking responsibility for propaganda in the circles.

¹⁷⁴ V.E. Greshin, 'Shelgunovskaia demonstratsiia. (Vospominaniia sovremennika.)', *Minuvshie gody*, 1908, No. 11, p.28

¹⁷⁵ M.I. Brusnev, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, p.27.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.26; M.S. Aleksandrov, *Byloe*, 1906, pp.11-12; N.D. Bogdanov, *Ot gruppy Blagoeva....*, 1921, p.43; V.M. Karelina, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.283.

iii] The Workers' Organisation's Celebrations of May-Day

In the immediate aftermath of the Shelgunov demonstration, the CWC arranged a large meeting of representatives from across the city at which their resolve to continue to expand the organisation was discernible. The combination of elation at their success and anger at the arrests of their comrades strengthened their determination. Norinskii recalled that '*the Shelgunov demonstration... convinced us even more of the necessity to wage the struggle to the end.*'¹⁷⁷ In this spirit, workers agreed the momentous step of organising their own political demonstration to celebrate May-Day in 1891. The decision to stage the first May-Day celebration in Russia [outside Poland] was a statement by Petersburg workers that they identified with a broader, international workers' movement and was intended to raise awareness that as workers they shared a common identity with workers across international boundaries. The police certainly believed that the Petersburg May-Day event of 1891 was an expression of support for Polish workers.¹⁷⁸ A few months earlier, the CWC had contributed 600 roubles to the costs of printing the Protocols of the International Socialist Congress in Paris in 1889, the Congress at which May 1 had been designated an international workers' holiday.¹⁷⁹

The debate concerning the May-Day celebration, exposed rifts within the organisation. Brusnev confirmed long debates were held in the CWC and regional circles on whether the organisation should risk provoking a general *proval'* [collapse] by courting police attention.¹⁸⁰ Several cautious workers opposed to an open display were supported by *intelligenty*-propagandists whose long term plans to create 'Russian Bebels' would be jeopardised by mass arrests. In opposition to these cautious voices, many experienced workers led by Klimanov proposed that the traditional May Fair be used as a cover and that the *kruzhkovtsy* join in the celebrations in Ekateringofskii Park close to the Putilov factory thus involving ordinary workers in their celebration. In the end a compromise was reached, an open public demonstration of workers was rejected in favour of a smaller, secret gathering of selected circle members. Disagreement over the May-Day event was a sign that there were substantial differences on whether the movement was concerned with developing a cadre of educated and developed workers as almost mirror images of the *intelligenty*-propagandists or whether leading workers should become an active force with links to the broader mass of workers engaged in open struggle with the government.

¹⁷⁷ K.M. Norinskii, 'Moi vospominaniia,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva*....., 1921, p.12.

¹⁷⁸ *Obzor vazhneishikh doznanii*....., XVII, 1892-93, p.13

¹⁷⁹ M.S. Aleksandrov, *Byloe*, 1906, p.8; V.S. Golubev, *Byloe*, 1906, p.111; V.Iu.Samedov, 'Novyi istochnik dlya izucheniya ideologii i deiatel'nosti gruppy Brusneva', *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, 1970, no.11, pp.129-131.

¹⁸⁰ M.I. Brusnev, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, p.25.

Having agreed the nature of the May-Day event, the CWC delegated Klimanov and Brusnev to identify a secure location, set Sunday 5th May as the date for the celebration and nominated Klimanov, Fedor Afanas'ev, Bogdanov and Proshin to deliver speeches. Three of the workers speeches were subsequently approved by the CWC after some 'grammatical' amendments. Klimanov did not write his speech in advance but delivered it extemporaneously at the event. Brusnev confirms that all the speeches were a reflection of the views of the workers themselves, that the *intelligenty* had no input into the content of the speeches and only made minor stylistic amendments to Proshin's speech.¹⁸¹



May-Day 1891

The location selected for the event was Krestovskii Island, north of Vasil'evskii Island. On the morning of 5th May boats shuttled workers and three *intelligenty*-propagandists dressed in workmen's clothing [Brusnev, Cywinski and Sviatlovskii] to the island where for several hours workers enjoyed each other's company, had a picnic lunch and listened to the speeches delivered by the nominated workers.¹⁸² Bogdanov described lively debates between workers from different regions getting to know one another, discussing the future development of the organisation and looking forward to the day when they would be able to celebrate May-Day in public.¹⁸³ Brusnev believed that the event had a positive impact and confirmed that it was an important factor in uniting the diverse circles into a single organisation, continuing that '*not all members of our circles took part in the May-Day meeting. The committee did not wish to hold too large a meeting at first, through fear that*

¹⁸¹ V.M. Karelina, 1928, p.91; M.I. Brusnev, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, pp.27-28.

¹⁸² V.V. Sviatlovskii, *Byloe*, 1921, pp.172-173; S. Valk, 'Materialy k istorii pervogo maia v Rossii,' *Krasnaia letopis'*, No. 4, 1922, pp. 250-288; Brusnev, 1928, op.cit., p. 70; Kazakevich, 1960, pp. 166-167. In 1892 Brusnev told associates in Moscow that over 70 workers attended but by 1937 writing in Pravda claimed the over 200 people participated. Sviatlovskii estimated between 70 and 100 workers met, whilst worker memoirs estimate between 150 and 200. In what appears to be a puzzling omission none of the women circle members appear to have taken part in the 1891 May-Day; Karelina specifically stating that no women were involved. Karelina, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.289.

¹⁸³ N.D. Bogdanov, in *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.43.

they all might be taken by the police and therefore invited only the most experienced workers.'¹⁸⁴

The CWC appears to have recognised that the gathering on Krestovskii Island was only a partial fulfilment of the organisation's aim to unite larger groups of workers in a common event. In the evening of the same day they organised a large communal meeting in Klimanov's apartment at which over 70 workers, many of whom had not been involved in the earlier event, gathered and listened to speeches. Norinskii recalled Egorov's speech on the history of the liberation struggle that called on workers to form their own political organisation and to continue to be independent of all other groups [i.e. the *intelligenty*].¹⁸⁵ Significantly, a significant number of women attended this gathering, both circle members and the wives and girlfriends of a number of the workers. No *intelligenty* representatives were present at what was conceived as a part-social/part-political evening for workers. As with the earlier meeting, the evening gathering created a sense of enthusiasm and energised workers present who left confident in the future growth of their movement.¹⁸⁶

The 1891 May-Day celebrations represented the high water mark of the workers' organisation. A year later, a May-Day event was also organised but under significantly different circumstances. In 1891 the organisation celebrated May-Day shortly after it had received wide scale public recognition for its appearance at the Shelgunov funeral. By late 1891, the police had infiltrated the organisation and circle members had reverted to more conspiratorial methods of operation. The CWC had lost its secretary Bogdanov, arrested in November 1891, and Fedor Afanas'ev who transferred to Moscow to support Brusnev as part of plans to create a broader social-democratic organisation. Through intelligence sources, the police closely monitored the workers' organisation and were well-informed of the intention to hold a second May-Day. An Okhrana report related how during April workers' circles led by Petr Evgrafov in the Narvskii Gate and Fedor Pashin at the Baltic Shipyards discussed proposals to hold a May-Day event to support Polish strikers in Lodz and to foster closer links between Petersburg circles.¹⁸⁷

Despite this, the CWC decided to celebrate May-Day 1892. The now customary pattern of *intelligenty* opposition was repeated with Cywinski advising against this given increased

¹⁸⁴ M.I. Brusnev, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, p.28.

¹⁸⁵ K.M. Norinskii, 'Moi vospominaniia,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva*...., 1921, p.14; A. Fisher, *V Rossi ii v Anglii*, 1922, pp.13-14.

¹⁸⁶ A. Fisher, *V Rossi ii v Anglii*, 1922, pp.13-14.

¹⁸⁷ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke*, T. III, Ch. 2, pp.134-137.

police attention. Krestovskii Island was again selected for the meeting and workers speeches agreed in advance by the CWC and ‘polished’ but not changed in tone or content by Cywinski. As the police prevented a gathering around 1st May, the workers rescheduled for 24th May when a large number of workers assembled but scattered when the local landowner interrupted their meeting.¹⁸⁸ Klimanov was detained soon after this but undeterred the workers held a belated May-Day celebration on 28th June in the Volkov woods outside the city. Despite careful precautions, the police knew about the meeting but allowed it to proceed, taking note of those attending with a view to apprehending them later.¹⁸⁹ On 28th June, a significant number of workers gathered [estimates vary widely from 60 to 300] to hear eight workers deliver speeches.¹⁹⁰ Unlike the 1891 event, a significant number of women workers attended, including Karelina and Boldyreva, with women workers making a large red flag that they unfurled at the meeting and Boldyreva delivering one of the speeches.¹⁹¹ Given the inflammatory nature of the speeches, the police responded swiftly and in the early hours of 29th June arrests targeting the well-organised circles in the Baltic Shipyards took place. It is no coincidence that the police targeted Baltic workers as the most experienced workers in the belief that by removing this head they would emasculate remaining circles. Fomin poignantly recalled how, following his arrest on route to detention, he watched Baltic workers going to work in the early morning knowing that in a short-time his arrest would be the subject of passionate discussion throughout the yards.¹⁹² Further arrests followed during the first half of July with leading workers including Karelina, Boldyreva, Evgrafov, Luengov, Proshin, Keizo, Tumanov, Pashin and others taken into police custody.

With these arrests, the first period of the Petersburg workers’ organisation came to an end. Between 1889 and mid-1892, the CWC composed of highly developed and tactically astute workers supported by sympathetic *intelligenty* had created a city-wide workers’ organisation whose influence had begun to penetrate the mass of ordinary workers and be recognised within wider society. The arrests and exiling of the core leadership of the CWC in 1892 did not, however, destroy the organisation. An already developed cadre of successor-workers was on-hand to take over the reins of the organisation and soon regrouped and developed on the foundations laid by their predecessors, first by defining in

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.; V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.222; Sviatlovskii, *Byloe*, 1921, p.173.

¹⁸⁹ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke*, T. III, Ch. 2, pp.134-137.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.; V.M. Karelina, *Krasnaia letopis’*, 1922, p.17; V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.222.

¹⁹¹ V.M. Karelina, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.289.

¹⁹² V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.222-223.

more detail the nature and the role of the *worker-intelligenty* and then, in a final phase of the movement , seeking to place the organisation at the head of an emerging mass workers' movement in the capital.

Chapter 9.

The Central Workers Circle: The Second Phase: The *Worker-intelligenty* Defined, 1892-1894

Introduction

Although arrests following the 1892 May-Day celebrations had a serious effect on the workers' organisation, within a few months a new CWC had re-established contacts with workers' groups across the capital and with a Marxist oriented *intelligenty* group. Soviet historians viewed the demise of workers' circles in 1892 as a significant watershed, marking the end of the so-called Brusnev organisational period and the emergence from its ruins of an *intelligenty* circle composed of students from the Technological Institute led by Stepan Radchenko. The most detailed Soviet monograph on the Brusnev organisation by R.A. Kazakevich argues that the arrests of 1892 marked the end of the activities of the organisation and that continuity in social-democratic activities revolved around Radchenko's circle of '*Technologists*'.¹ Great significance subsequently would be attached to this '*Technologist*' group in Soviet historiography as its members would subsequently form the nucleus of the so-called group of '*Stariki*' *intelligenty* that Lenin joined on his arrival in Petersburg in autumn 1893.

In the Soviet narrative, Lenin's arrival introduced ideological clarity to the group and under his direction, the '*Technologists*' made the transition from the intensive development of *worker-intelligenty* in narrow study circles, now pejoratively characterised as the '*kruzhkovshchina*', to agitation on the basis of the immediate grievances of ordinary workers. This transition was given organisational form in the Petersburg Union of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working-class [henceforth Union of Struggle], regarded by Soviet historians as the first significant organisational step on the ladder towards the formation of the Bolshevik Party. Much Soviet and subsequent western historiography became fixated on the role and personality of Lenin, with events within the Petersburg workers' movement analyzed and interpreted against a normative and teleological perspective, being judged in relation to their contribution to the development or retardation of the formation of the Party. Such a magnification of Lenin's role diminishes the actual struggles of and debates within the workers' movement and with its *intelligenty* associates between 1892 and 1895, relegating them to a kind of incidental

¹ R.A. Kazakevich, 1960, pp.197-198.

mood music in a *post-hoc* mythic construction designed to create a master narrative in which Lenin appeared almost miraculously bearing a tablet of stone setting out the correct path for the workers' movement. Deviation from this path was regarded as apostasy, with adherents of alternative approaches subject to vilification and caricaturing of their views that were seen as representing dangerous deviations designed to deflect the working-class from its true historical mission.²

In contrast to this narrative, the period from mid-1892 saw workers not only re-established an effective city-wide organisation but also articulating their aspiration to create a hegemonic *worker-intelligenty* and, critically, setting out a precise basis for future relations with radical *intelligenty* from both the social-democratic and *narodovol'tsy* camps. This period also saw the publication of an important statement by a leading member of the reconstituted Central Workers' Circle, Ivan Keizer's pamphlet *Brat'sy-tovarishchii*, a pamphlet that represents a militant reassertion of the revolutionary credentials of the Petersburg workers' movement that should dispel any lingering suggestion that the circle movement was apolitical and reflected a quiescent tendency towards cultural self-development.

Re-establishment of the CWC

In the aftermath of the 1892 arrests, the workers' movement experienced a hiatus. Norinskii recalled that following the arrests [circle] '*work was temporarily suspended*' and that for several months surviving workers '*refrained from taking action*' as they suspected they were under police surveillance and, indeed, a number were subject to police raids, including the leading worker Andrei Fisher.³ Although circle workers at this time maintained a low profile, the workers' movement had not been destroyed and gradually regrouped. They were assisted in this by the return to Petersburg in September 1892 of Vasilii Shelgunov from military service and shortly after this a new CWC was formed.⁴ Shelgunov, a disciple of Klimanov, with Norinskii, Fisher and Keizer ensured direct continuity with the previous CWC. The new CWC was soon joined by the former Baltic Shipyard worker Sergei Funtikov from the Nevskii Gate and, for a short time by Vera

² With Lenin's arrival in Petersburg in autumn 1893 Soviet accounts of this later period of the workers' organisation tended to amplify his role and diminish the role of other, resulting in a narrative in which workers and *intelligenty* being are directed by Lenin along an almost predestined path.

³ K.M. Norinskii, 1974, p.38; A. Fisher, 1922, pp.16-17.

⁴ V.A. Shelgunov in *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.55; Korol'chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika.....*, 1940, p.167.

Karelina who had been released pending her exile to Kharkov. Through Karelina contacts were re-established with women workers on the Vyborg Side and in the factories along the Obvodnyi Canal.⁵ In order to avoid future disruption to its work, each member of the CWC identified a nominated deputy who was fully briefed on its work but did not engage directly in illegal activities, lessening the likelihood of arrest.⁶ During winter 1892-1893, there were visible signs of resurgent circle activity that was duly recorded by the authorities. The *Obzor vazneishikh doznanii* [OVD] for 1892-1893 noted that *'the workers' organisation in Petersburg.... despite searches and arrests has, however, not ceased its existence and from the autumn of 1892 the workers once again began to gather for meetings.'*⁷ By spring 1893 the new leadership was confident enough to arrange a May-Day meeting on Krestovskii Island. Although the meeting was quickly discovered and forced to disperse, Fisher indicated that more workers attended than had attended the 1892 May-Day event.⁸

Although a new leading group had now assumed responsibility, there was a clear sense of continuity, with several 'veteran' workers remaining involved throughout the period 1892 to 1895. Thus, Fedor Afanas'ev, who had avoided arrest following his mission to Moscow, returned to Petersburg at the end of summer 1892 and through Norinskii found work at the Baltic Shipyards. Norinskii recalled that:

*Fedor Afanas'evich quickly oriented himself to his new surroundings, and almost immediately began to establish links between individual comrades scattered across different areas of the capital. His personal example had an influence on the revival, pulled us up by the braces and in a short time he had produced tangible results.*⁹

Although Afanas'ev's activities were soon discovered by the police and to protect the re-emerging organisation he moved to another factory and was eventually arrested and exiled to Narva, he continued to maintain close contact with the Petersburg organisation and key

⁵ V.M. Karelina, *Krasnia letopis*, 1922, p.17.

⁶ A. Fisher, *V Rossi ii v Anglii*, 1922, p.23.

⁷ *Obzor vazneishikh doznanii 1892-1893, T.XVII*, pp.37-38.

⁸ A. Fisher, *V Rossi ii v Anglii, Moscow*, 1922, p.22. This would indicate an attendance in excess of 100 as estimates put the number attending the gathering at Krestovskii Island in 1892 at anything between 100 and 200. Kazakevich, 1961, p.171.

⁹ K.M. Norinskii, 'Moi vospominaniia,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva....*, 1921, pp.18-19.

activists such as Fisher and Babushkin right through to 1895 when he was finally imprisoned for revolutionary activities.¹⁰

In addition to Afanas'ev, a number of other 'veteran' workers avoided arrest in 1892 and resumed circle work. The Baltic Shipyard worker Konstantin Kuprianov, whose revolutionary activities dated back to Timofeev's circle of 1887, reassembled a circle in the Harbour whilst Fedor Pashin who had delivered an inflammatory speech to the 1892 May-Day, organised a circle of workers at the San-Gal'sk electrical factory on Vasil'evskii Island.¹¹ On his return to Petersburg, Shelgunov also made contact with the former CWC member Vladimir Proshin who retained contacts with the radical *intelligenty* and through him established links with the surviving member of the Brusnevtsy *intelligenty*-group Stepan Radchenko and a Polish group organised by the last *intelligenty* representative of the CWC, Cywinski.¹² Proshin's links with this latter group were important, as with their support he organised a number of circles in which propaganda was carried out by Polish social-democrats. These Polish propagandists soon merged with Radchenko's group and formed a new *intelligenty* centre to support the revived workers' organisation.¹³

Propaganda carried out in the re-emerging network of circles was far from academic but focused on promoting revolutionary activism. Following the model of Polish workers' funds, Polish propagandists drafted rules [*ustav*'] for a new workers' fund aimed at supporting striking workers and families of arrested workers. In June 1893, following his arrest, Proshin told the investigation that renewed propaganda focused on '*unequal division of wealth, exploitation by factory owners of workers and the necessity for workers to unite in defence of their interests, because the government was on the side of factory owners.*'¹⁴ Amongst works used in propaganda were translations of the Polish pamphlet '*Chto dolzhen znat' i pomnit kazhdyi rabochii*' and Diksztajn's '*Kto chem zhivet?*'¹⁵ Both pamphlets were staples of the circle movement and far removed from the peaceful pedagogy often ascribed to circle activity, indicating that workers looked towards the increasing industrial

¹⁰ Ibid, p.19; A. Fisher, 1922, pp.15, 27; *Recollections of Ivan Vasilyevich Babushkin*, Moscow, 1957, p.77. Babushkin indicates that Afanas'ev visited leading workers in 1895 'quite often' and that younger workers 'always listened to him with a special interest and accepted his advice as a representative of the generation they were seeking to emulate.'

¹¹ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. III, Ch.2*, pp.134-137; K.M. Norinskii, 'Moi vospominaniia,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.50.

¹² V.A. Shelgunov, *Vospominaniia, Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.55.

¹³ On the role of this group of Polish propagandists, see Orekhov, 1979, pp.149-153; *Deiateli.....*, T. V, stb. 85 on the leading Polish propagandist at the time Aliushkevich.

¹⁴ A.M. Orkehov, 1979, p.153.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 155-156.

militancy of Polish workers as a model for their future activities. The importance of the Polish influence can be discerned from the fact that when Klimanov was released from police detention in autumn 1892, he worked closely with Polish propagandists¹⁶ who in June 1893, along with several 'veteran' workers including Proshin, Evgrafov, Grigorii Lunegov and Klimanov were involved in planning a large gathering of workers.¹⁷ Alarmed at this prospect, the authorities arrested this group of experienced workers, fearing that their continued liberty posed a threat to the social order.¹⁸

With support from these 'veterans', the new CWC leadership during winter 1892-1893 systematically re-established a city-wide organisation. Shelgunov and Fisher adopted a peripatetic working existence, moving from factory to factory re-establishing broken connections and forming new circles. Particular attention was paid to re-integrating the two major industrial suburbs of the Narvskii and the Nevskii Gates where many previous contacts had been lost through the 1892 arrests. Fisher confirmed that the itinerant nature of his employment at this time was associated with re-establishing the workers' organisation, stating that his sojourn at the Semiannikov factory was to make contact with the former CWC workers Sergei Funtikov and the weaver Petr Morozov, the latter having extensive contacts with textile workers. Having successfully supported Funtikov and Morozov in the Nevskii Gate, Fisher moved to work at the Siemens and Gal'sk factory on Vasil'evskii Island where with Ivan Keizer he created a circle, enabling the latter to relocate to the New Admiralty Shipyards to reactivate circles that had become moribund. Fisher's role as an *eminence grise* is confirmed by the Siemens worker Ivan Iakovlev, who recalled that whilst he and Keizer carried out agitation amongst workers during their breaks, Fisher remained in the background, talking to individual workers, not attending all circle meetings and only intervening in workers' debates to reinforce the message that workers needed to unite to defend their rights and improve their position through strikes.¹⁹

Similarly, Shelgunov on his return to Petersburg chose to work at the Putilov factory in the Narvskii Gate. Shelgunov's choice was not accidental, as this area had been badly affected by the 1892 arrests.²⁰ The only leading circle worker to survive was the *Putilovtsy* Nikolai

¹⁶ 'Doklad po delu o voznikshikh v S. Peterburge v 1894 i 1895 godakh prestupnykh kruzhakh lits, imenuiushikh sebia 'sotsial-demokratami', 17 dekabriia 1896,' *Sbornik materialov i statei. Redaktsiia zhurnala 'Istoricheskii Arkhiv'*, 1921, pp. 144, 169

¹⁷ *Ibid.*; Orekhov, 1979, pp. 156-157.

¹⁸ *Obzor vazhneishikh doznanii, 1892-1893, T. XVII*, pp. 38-40, 278-280

¹⁹ I.I. Iakovlev, 'Vospominaniia o V I Lenine,' *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, 1959 No 6, p.101.

²⁰ On Shelgunov's activities, see M. Rozanov, *Vasilii Andreevich Shel'gunov*, Leningrad, 1966, p. 64.

Ivanov who temporarily joined a workers' circle at the Rubber Factory organised by one of Karelina's protégés, Fedosiia Dontsova (Norinskaia). Shelgunov assisted Ivanov to reassemble a circle at the factory. During 1893 it was reinforced by the return from exile of the experienced circle worker Nikolai Poletaev and in the autumn by Klimanov who began work at the factory.²¹ Both Shelgunov and Fisher, having successfully accomplished their mission of reintegrating the major industrial suburbs into the organisation to re-establish a city-wide organisation, joined Norinskii at the Baltic Shipyards, which again became the epi-centre of the workers' organisation.

Defining a Worker-intelligenty

A number of participants in circles operating at this time left descriptions of the nature of propaganda work involving advanced workers. Mikhail Sil'vin, a social-democratic propagandist from Radchenko's circle, worked with a circle of skilled metal workers from the New Admiralty Shipyards organised by Keizer during winter 1893-1894. The circle met every Sunday morning in a well-appointed room that '*conveyed the impression of the cultured, orderly way of life of the worker-intelligenty.....*'²² Whilst the subjects discussed varied, Sil'vin indicated two themes recurred on a regular basis. The first involved current events in the factories, such the arbitrariness of the Head of the Shipyards, Admiral Verkhovskii, dismissals at the Putilov and other factories, or reductions in wages. These 'bread and butter' concerns common to all workers were accompanied by an almost obsessive desire of workers to understand the '*origins of things*'. This could involve subjects as diverse as how the world came into existence, the origins of man, religious beliefs, social and political systems, tsarist and government authority and institutions, and capitalism. Seeking to understand the '*origins of things*' reveals an aspiration on the part of leading workers to deconstruct various mysteries and myths behind the realities they confronted in a rapidly developing modern urban world, to make sense of what appeared incomprehensible. It is perhaps a truism to say that in their own ways these workers were seeking to comprehend the world in order to begin the process of changing it, to construct their own alternative rational understanding in order to construct a specifically worker response to these issues and phenomena.

Sil'vin characterises these workers as '*worker-intellectuals*' whose aspiration was to become 'educated' and to understand the teachings of Marx and Engels '*in their entirety*.'

²¹ M. Mitel'man, et'al, 1939, pp.103-104.

²² M.A. Sil'vin, *Lenin v period zarozhdeniia partii. Vospominaniia*, Moscow, 1958, p.27.

This learning however, was not for its own sake but to spread these teachings amongst fellow workers. In an insight into the psyches of such workers, Sil'vin reveals that they '*never morally descended from the heights to which they had become elevated through their acceptance of this mission.*'²³ It is no coincidence that Sil'vin's language assumes an almost religious fervour, projecting onto advanced workers the sense that they were undertaking a sacred mission, a mission that having understood the world through the prism of Marx and Engels, having become 'enlightened, they had a duty to take 'this truth' into the 'dark' recesses of the world inhabited by their fellow workers. During Sil'vin's three years in the capital, he worked with many circles of skilled metalworkers and found that the '*nature of their interests was more or less identical*' and that the workers who attended these circles were '*pure proletarians*' who had long since severed all connections with the countryside and showed little or no concern with village life.²⁴ All of this is indicative of a developing perception amongst *kruzhkovtsy* that they were standard bearers of a new order in which their destiny was to lead the mass of workers from subjugation to the twin evils of autocracy and capitalism to a new world based on an equitable division of wealth produced by the labour of workers that should not be siphoned off by idle parasitic classes in a manner equivalent to their drinking the blood of the toiling poor.

Konstantin Norinskii and the Evolution of a Worker

The Baltic Shipyard worker Konstantin Norinskii in many ways typifies the type of *worker-intelligent* encountered by Sil'vin. A skilled machinist, born and brought up in Petersburg, in 1885 at the age of 13 Norinskii enrolled at the Technical School of the Baltic Shipyards and received his technical and general education under the protective gaze of the school's head Timofei Budrin. From his initial experiences at the School, Norinskii devoted himself to acquiring knowledge and throughout his life valued the tokens of his learning. He later recounted how one of his most treasured possessions was a six volume edition of Pushkin's works he had received from Budrin as a prize for attainment at the Baltic School and his genuine distress at losing these on the occasion of one of his many exiling for his political activities.²⁵

On completing the Baltic School, Norinskii became an apprentice in the machine shop in the Shipyards where he quickly came under the influence of the radical-worker Ivan

²³ Ibid, p.28.

²⁴ Ibid, p.31.

²⁵ K M Norinskii, *Pod nadzorom politsii [Vospominaniia]*, op.it., 1974, pp.15-17.

Timofeev who acted as the young apprentice's mentor carefully selecting books for his young charge to read and gradually introducing him into the influential workers' circle of Baltic workers that met in the Harbour district on Vasil'evskii Island. Following Timofeev's departure from the Shipyards in 1889, the Harbour circle was led by Vladimir Fomin who again took Norinskii under his wing.



Konstantin Norinskii, 1894.

The Harbour circle was probably the one circle that consistently sought to follow the intensive study regime set out in the CWC programme composed by Brusnev, enjoying the additional advantage of the Tochisskii library inherited by Timofeev that remained under its control until 1892. When Brusnev first became involved in the circle in 1889 he found a group of already well-educated and 'socialist' workers who used an extensive reading list as the basis for their study sessions.²⁶ Norinskii himself described study in the circle which met regularly in the evening for several hours as including cosmography, natural history, culture [Engels' *Origins of the Family*], Marxist political economy, and finally the history of political struggles in Europe and Russia, reading texts by Humbolt, Darwin, Lippert, Kliuchevskii, Marx and Engels.²⁷

²⁶ M.I. Brusnev, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, 1923, p.20; V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.187.

²⁷ K.M. Norinskii, 'Moi vospominaniia,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, pp.10-11, 47-48.

Although such intensive study was clearly designed to prepare a well-educated and developed worker, Norinskii quickly developed other attributes that quickly distinguished him within the overall workers' movement in the capital. Fomin recalled Norinskii as:

*a very sensitive man with a conscience. He was always one of the first to arrive at work in order to meet ordinary workers and select potential kruzhkovtsy from amongst them. He enjoyed the unremitting attention of the circle which always was influenced by him. If someone fell under the influence of bad company he always said reproachfully that 'it was our fault because we ignored him.' At his machine when the foreman was not about he had a continual stream of young workers. At home he organised a drama group. In summer he always arranged trips on canoes and through this extended the circle of kruzhkovtsy supporters. Norinskii was a zealous collector for the circle library - on every occasion he went to the Aleksandrovska market and bought books.*²⁸

Norinskii's easy sociability represented an important quality for the growing workers' organisation. Following the establishment of circles for young women workers, Norinskii devoted much time supporting their development and taking part in social events with the women participants. Such social events were an important component of the workers' organisation as young workers such as Norinskii increasingly chose to socialise and spend their free time with workers who shared their general sense of being workers, having their own discrete identity that was reinforced and validated in such small social events. This sense of belonging to a distinct social grouping accounts for the fact that many young workers attending such gatherings formed life-long relationships with young women workers involved in circles; both Norinskii and Ivan Keizer marrying women workers they met through social evenings arranged by Vera Karelina. Norinskii emphasises the importance of these women workers in creating a shared worker heritage through the relationships that blossomed through social gatherings, producing a distinct radical worker lineage that ensured important continuity across several generations of worker struggle:

The women, our new comrades, brought a new, living force [into the movement], exuding energy and, simultaneously, hate for their enemies, the possessing class, for all they personally and their mothers had endured..... They became mothers of a new generation of workers. And most important of all, they were able to ease family life

²⁸ V.V. Fomin, *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.210-211.

in difficult moments. The burden that usually fell on one pair of shoulders could now be shared by them as well. ²⁹

Fedosia Dontsova, who became Norinskii's wife, would play an important role in the Petersburg workers' movement up to 1895. ³⁰

Norinskii's growing potential in the movement was recognised when in April 1891 he was chosen as one of six workers given the honour of carrying the workers' wreath at the Shulgunov funeral. ³¹ Participating in the funeral and being selected to represent the workers made a strong impression on Norinskii who following the event became a convinced revolutionary, determined to wage a resolute struggle against the government for the rights of workers. Although actively involved in the May-Day events of both 1891 and 1892, Norinskii eluded arrest and played a leading role in re-establishing the CWC and contacts across the city. Norinskii was now leading the influential Harbour Circle and continuing to ensure that its focus remained on intensive study of theoretical texts. Along with Fisher, Shelgunov and Keizer on the CWC, Norinskii was instrumental in ensuring that knowledge acquisition remained a priority for the workers' organisation. In all probability, Norinskii represented the most assiduous supporter of theoretical study amongst the kruzhkovtsy and by 1893 perceived that this was under some threat as he recalled that around this time '*a group of people appeared who, to the detriment of knowledge, focused on the teaching of the history of the political struggle.*' ³² For Norinskii this threat from the Petersburg *Gruppa Narodovol'tsev* whose more confrontational approach in both economic and political matters, seeking to incite workers to industrial action and challenge the government. This development posed, in Norinskii's eyes, a real danger to the recovering workers' organisation that could deflect it from its primary task at this moment of preparing a cadre of *worker-intelligenty*.

Aware of his own continuing need for intellectual development, Norinskii during winter of 1893-94 undertook intensive personal study of the works of Marx with the social-democratic propagandist Sil'vin and, for a very brief period, Lenin. Focusing on Marx's *Capital*, Sil'vin 'taught' Norinskii over several months although as he confessed the pupil

²⁹ K.M. Norinskii, 'Moi vospominaniia,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.18.

³⁰ Cf. 'Doklad po delu o vznikshikh v S. Peterburge v 1894 i 1895 godakh prestupnykh kruzhakh lits, imenuiushikh sebia 'sotsial-demokratami', 17 dekabriia 1896,' *Sbornik materialov i statei. Redaktsiia zhurnala 'Istoricheskii Arkhiv'*, 1921, pp.107ff.

³¹ K.M. Norinskii, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.294.

³² K.M. Norinskii, 1974, p.39.

appeared to know as much, if not more, than his teacher. Sil'vin describes Norinskii as '*an intelligent worker*', '*a respectable and modest young man*' who although probably not receiving '*anything positive*' from the sessions remained polite and following his arrest in an expression of gratitude sent his teacher a small steel anvil with a hammer placed on it as a token of his appreciation.³³ Police photographs taken of Norinskii at the time of his arrest in May 1894 show a 'respectable' young man, who, with his pince-nez and mop of foppish hair could have been taken for a student, an image that perhaps had been cultivated by Norinskii in imitation of his student teachers.

Yet for all Norinskii's commitment to learning and knowledge this should not be seen as reflecting a passive acceptance of the fate of the workers. Following his arrest and exile to Ekaterinoslav, Norinskii immediately resumed revolutionary work, becoming involved in the local social-democratic organisation. Arrested again and exiled to Vologda *guberniia*, on completion of his sentence he returned to Ekaterinoslav where he was involved in the local committee of the RSDRP and over subsequent years as a Bolshevik was a leading activist in a number of provincial towns, returning to Petersburg after February 1917 and becoming a functionary in the Soviet state.³⁴

The Worker-intelligent – Realising the 'Dream'

Whilst Norinskii's development typified the maturation of the proletarian *worker-intelligent* type, perhaps the most coherent description of the advanced workers quest to create such an ideal type was found in the memoirs of Norinskii's fellow CWC member Andrei Fisher. For Fisher, circle propaganda was conceived and executed as part of a very deliberate strategy. Describing the period in summer 1893 when the *intelligenty* in their customary fashion had forsaken revolution for their dachas, Fisher and the new leadership of the CWC resolved that it was imperative almost immediately '*to develop a cadre of worker-intelligent*' to replace the radical *intelligenty*. To accomplish this they undertook intensive individual or small-group study sessions with specially selected *intelligenty* tutors to receive a '*final polishing*'. Fisher and Keizer on their own initiative sought out the future Menshevik Feodor Dan [Gurvich] with whom they studied works of Marx and other socialists. On Dan's departure from Petersburg, Fisher and Keizer resumed study on their own before each of the leading workers teamed up with returning students for more

³³ M.A. Sil'vin, 1958, p.29.

³⁴ On Norinskii's subsequent career as a revolutionary Bolshevik, see P. Donkov, 'Vvedenie' to Norinskii, 1974.

intensive one-to-one studies. During autumn and winter of 1893/94, Fisher studied with Starkov and later Lenin; Shelgunov with Krzhizhanovskii and Krasin; Norinskii with Sil'vin and later Vaneev, and Keizer initially with Starkov but finding the latter's teaching unsatisfactory with the then *Narodovol'tsev*, and future Bolshevik Mikhail Aleksandrov [Ol'minskii].³⁵

This commitment to intensive study has been interpreted either as evidence of a selfish desire on the part of leading workers for personal development resulting in an alienation from the of mass workers or was conceived by Lenin on his arrival in Petersburg to inculcate a correct understanding of Marx in the minds of an advanced strata of workers. Both interpretations fail to appreciate that intensive study undertaken by leading workers formed part of a calculated plan on their part to create a genuine *worker-intelligenty* capable of leading and directing the mass of workers in the short-term. Fisher is explicit that the motivation was part of the advanced workers' '*dream*' to become transformed into fully fledged '*worker-intelligenty*.'³⁶ For these workers, like their CWC predecessors, knowledge was never an end in itself but a means to a purpose, to lead workers' circles without being dependent upon the radical *intelligenty*.

By autumn 1893, whilst continuing individual tuition, leading workers began to translate their plans into practice. At this time, another long-standing circle member, Vladimir Kniazev, formed a workers' circle on the Petersburg Side that Fisher began to visit as a propagandist. Soon after this Fisher also began to lead propaganda in another circle and Keizer soon followed his friend's example and began to lead a circle organised by his brother, Petr.³⁷ Behind the workers' plan to transform themselves into a *worker-intelligenty* was a recognition that ultimately the interests of workers and *intelligenty* were different. Recalling this period, Fisher wrote:

*In general we recognised that what separated us from the intelligenty were our conditions and forms of life and upbringing. We recognised that we could work jointly, but not under their direction. We could not imagine that the intelligenty could represent us, that at any given moment they would do this or that as we prescribed.*³⁸

³⁵ A. Fisher, *V Rossi ii v Anglii*, 1922, pp. 19-20; V.A. Shelgunov, 'Vospominaniia,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, pp. 55-56; M.A. Sil'vin, 1958, pp. 29-30; K.M. Norinskii, 1974, p. 39.

³⁶ A. Fisher, 1922, p.20.

³⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 20-21.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p.23.

In 1976 Reginald Zelnik assessed Fisher's striving to become a 'Russian Bebel.'³⁹ Although Zelnik does not provide a detailed analysis of the Petersburg workers' organisation in this period, by focusing on Fisher's 'story' he reconstructs a personal narrative that informed the activities of the circle-workers, revealing the complex inter-relationships existing within the workers' movement and between its activists and the world of the radical-*intelligenty* and wider society. As we have seen, Fisher characterised this striving as a '*sacred dream to become worker-intelligenty*' and it is against this that the activities of the leading workers of this period should be judged. This aspiration led Fisher into a coherent critique of the social-democratic *intelligenty* and, whilst they could play an important support role, their involvement must be directed by *worker-intelligenty* who by acquiring the knowledge of the intelligentsia would combine the theoretical knowledge derived from the *intelligenty* with the instinctual attributes of the worker. It was this '*dream*' to fuse mind and body in the form of the advanced *worker-intelligent* that continued to characterise the workers' movement, reflected in the revived activities of its leading cadres, all of whom like their predecessors continued to work in factories.⁴⁰

Directing the Radical Intelligenty

Recognising that with their limited forces it would still take time to create a cadre of *worker-intelligenty*, Fisher and his associates carefully cultivated and managed their links with radical *intelligenty* of different persuasions, including the Petersburg *Gruppa Narodovol'tsev* that represented the strongest revolutionary group operating in the capital. In contrast to the well-organised *narodovol'tsy*, Sil'vin recalled that within Radchenko's group at this time there was little discernible direction and that the group did not operate on the basis of a coherent plan.⁴¹ In addition, Radchenko's ultra-cautious approach and obsessive conspiratorial methods ensured that the Social-Democrats maintained only limited contact with workers.⁴² Fisher confirms that the workers maintained close relations with the *narodovol'tsy* in part because they were the only radical group that possessed a printing press and could provide illegal literature for use in workers' circles.⁴³ Discussions between the CWC and the *narodovol'tsy* appear to have taken place on

³⁹ Reginald Zelnik, 'Russian Bebels, Part II,' *Russian Review*, Vol. 35, No. 4, October 1976, pp.417-447.

⁴⁰ On Fisher see also the informative article by David Saunders, 'A Russian Bebel Revisited. The Individuality of Heinrich Matthäus Fischer (1871-1935),' *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 82, No. 3, July 2004, pp. 625-654.

⁴¹ M.A. Sil'vin, 1958, pp.35-36.

⁴² On Radchenko's role and approach at this time see G.B. Krasin, 'Stepan Ivanovich Radchenko,' *Staryi bol'shevik*, No. 2, 1933, p. 187.

⁴³ A. Fisher, 1922, p.26.

publishing a workers' newspaper. In the event the *narodovol'tsy* published their *Rabochii Sbornik* without direct involvement of leading workers, most probably as a result of emerging differences of emphases in propaganda work during the winter of 1893-1894.⁴⁴

As several leading workers indicated there was an increasing rapprochement between the CWC and Radchenko's Social-Democratic group during winter 1893-94.⁴⁵ This rapprochement was primarily a reflection of the still parlous state of the workers' movement, a movement that following its painstaking efforts the CWC was reluctant to jeopardise by prematurely inciting worker unrest as increasingly advocated by the *narodovol'tsy*. Fisher described the attitudes of leading workers to the social-democrats and the *narodovol'tsy* and the differing emphases on propaganda and agitation:

*To us it seemed that narodovol'tsy were agitators and social-democrats propagandists. Both were necessary for the integrity of the workers' movement. Agitators – are a match that can ignite a powder keg, whilst propagandists are the hand producing the match. Propagandists must have a complete worldview, a precise understanding of the workers' question, in a word encyclopaedists, prepared to answer any question.... [whilst agitators] must operate on the basis of instinct, orators able to incite the masses to action and if necessary lead them. We anticipated that in a short time that it would be necessary to have both.*⁴⁶

As Fisher recognised, propaganda and agitation were not exclusive opposites, both were valid depending on circumstances, tactical responses rather than the ideologically based imperatives that much writing portrays them as. Norinskii recalled that by the end of 1893 'the majority of comrades were inclined to social-democracy.... [as] more developed workers could not agree with the tactics of the *narodovol'tsy*.'⁴⁷

Aleksandrov pointed out that the Petersburg *narodovol'tsy* were firmly on path from *Narodism* towards Marxism, a fact confirmed in that four out of the five members of the leading group in a relatively short period would become social-democrats.⁴⁸ From articles in the *narodovol'tsy Rabochii Sbornik*, it is clear that the group already advocated a more

⁴⁴ Footnote: the *Gruppa Narodovoltsev* did in fact publish a newspaper, *Rabochii Sbornik*, aimed at worker in April 1894 which included a fairly long article by Aleksandrov on a recent strike at the Voronin textile factory. The *Sbornik* is reprinted in *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. III, Ch. 2*, pp. 453-460, 605-607

⁴⁵ Cf memoirs of Fisher, Shelgunov, Norinskii, and Iakovlev etc.

⁴⁶ A. Fisher, 1922, p.24.

⁴⁷ K.M. Norinskii, 'Moi vospominaniia,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.17. My emphasis.

⁴⁸ M.S. Aleksandrov, *Byloe*, 1906, p.13.

confrontational approach and was rehearsing the 'agitational' approach soon to be set out in in Kremer's and Martov's *Ob agitatsii* and adopted by the Petersburg Social-Democrats in late 1895. Aleksandrov's article in the groups' *Rabochii Sbornik* describing a strike at the Voronin Textile Works called on advanced workers to take advantage of workers' grievances to incite strikes as every minor victory for workers frightens capitalists and gives workers confidence to unite to achieve their demands.⁴⁹ Whilst the CWC would have agreed with such sentiments, they considered it was still premature to engage in open conflicts with employers and government, conflicts which in a matter of days could lead to the collapse of the organisation and the arrest of the cadre of *worker-intelligenty* they were intent on creating. Such an outcome would represent a severe setback to the workers' organisation, depriving it of the *worker-intelligenty* leadership that Fisher and his comrades viewed as essential to its long-term development.

In addition to tactical issues, by the end of 1893 the CWC was determined to introduce consistency to propaganda in circles. Such consistency was subsequently stressed by Shelgunov who recounted how the differing approaches of social-democratic and *narodovol'tsy* propagandists created confusion amongst workers who witnessed the unedifying spectacle of *intelligenty*-propagandists engaging in slanging matches or hearing conflicting messages when a *narodovol'tsev* replaced a social-democrat in a circle or vice versa. Circle members often complained that '*we do not understand them, i.e. the intelligenty; some say one thing, some another.*'⁵⁰ Shelgunov compared the position of circle workers, particularly newer members, as analogous to '*wild game being hunted from two sides, on the one hand the narodovol'tsy and, on the other, the Marxists.*'⁵¹

In order that workers could resolve these issues, the CWC convened a meeting to which they invited *narodovol'tsy* and social-democrat representatives to decide which approach should be adopted in workers' circles. It is important to emphasise that it was the workers who summoned the *intelligenty* to attend, set out a clear agenda for discussion, and it was they who would decide which approach and which propagandists would have access to workers' circles. This was an unambiguous statement about control over and the nature of work in circles. In what proved to be the first of two meetings to decide these questions, the quartet of leading workers – Shelgunov, Norinskii, Fisher and Keizer –in February 1894 met in Shelgunov's room with Starkov and German Krasin from the social-

⁴⁹ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T.III, Ch. 2*, pp.458-459.

⁵⁰ V.A. Shelgunov, 'Rabochie na puti k marksizmu,' *Avangard*, 1990, p.63.

⁵¹ V.A. Shelgunov, 'Vospominaniia,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p. 56.

democrats, and the *narodovol'tsy* Sushchinskii and Fedulov. Both parties stated their case, with the *narodovol'tsy* making an impassioned case for a transition to an interventionist approach in labour disputes, urging the CWC to challenge more openly economic and political realities. In contrast, the social-democrats argued that it was premature to adopt such tactics and advocated a continuation of propaganda work but, reflecting the transition already made by leading workers, that propaganda be based on issues relevant to the day-to-day lives of workers.⁵² Norinskii indicated that on the day the *narodovol'tsy*'s case carried more conviction, but that the small group of workers present were reluctant to endorse any single approach and decided to convene a more representative meeting of leading workers to make final decisions.⁵³

On 8 April 1894, the meeting reconvened in the room of Fisher and Keizer involving around 20 of the most advanced Petersburg workers including the veteran circle worker Fedor Afanas'ev who had returned to Petersburg illegally from Narva for this meeting.⁵⁴ Again, the two factions outlined their approach, but on this occasion a large majority the workers decided to adopt the approach of the social-democrats. According to Norinskii, the decision reflected the belief that the development of the workers' movement should be based the creation of a core of well-educated and politically conscious workers and only after this had been achieved move to embrace the mass struggles of workers.⁵⁵ Although this meeting signalled the workers' preference for the social-democratic approach, they did not break-off relations with the *narodovol'tsy* but agreed to allow them to continue propaganda so long as they adhered to the line laid down by the CWC. Shelgunov emphasised that the meeting unanimously agreed that there would not be separate workers' circles organised by the *narodovol'tsy*, in effect *narodovol'tsy* circles would be subsumed into the workers' organisation. It is significant that the *narodovol'tsy* agreed to this and '*made concessions*' indicating that in the future they would '*work in circles according to the demands of the workers' group.*'⁵⁶ One worker who attended the second meeting recalled that it was agreed that the *narodovol'tsy* would be permitted to attend workers' circles but that they would be specifically invited by workers, talk only on topics suggested by workers and be supervised by a representative of the advanced workers.⁵⁷ To ensure compliance, the workers established a monitoring-group to oversee propaganda and to send

⁵² Ibid, p.56.

⁵³ K.M. Norinskii, 'Moi vospominaniia,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p. 17.

⁵⁴ A. Fisher, 'Podpol'e, ssylka, emigratsiia,' *Avangard*, 1990, p. 9.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.17.

⁵⁶ A. Fisher, 1922, p.25.

⁵⁷ I.I. Iakovlev, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.358.

an experienced worker to all circle meetings undertaken by *narodovol'tsy* propagandists 'to check' that they were adhering to the agreed programme and teaching only what had been approved by the workers' organisation.⁵⁸ It is significant that Ol'minskii as editor of the *Sbornik Ot gruppy Blagoeva k Soiuzu bor'by* [1921] inserted a footnote to Shelgunov's memoir indicating that such '*monitoring*' of all propagandists was effectively in place well before the meeting of 8 April.

An indication that *narodovol'tsy* workers' circles were absorbed into the workers' organisation is given by the leading independent propagandist Konstantin Takhtarev, who acted as a propagandist in a *narodovol'tsy* circle in early 1894. At the end of March he was instructed by the *narodovol'tsy* that he could no longer attend the circle because of deteriorating relations with 'social democrats.' However, after the meeting on 8th April he was permitted to return to encounter a bewildered group of workers who expressed astonishment that he had been removed and continued his propaganda based on the '*the central idea was that the workers' cause must be a cause for workers themselves, that all the best forces amongst the workers should be devoted to it, that our task was to devote all our efforts towards the creation of the cadres of the future workers' party.*'⁵⁹ This approach was fully consistent with the line agreed at the meeting of 8th April and thereafter Takhtarev, whilst never belonging to any specific faction, continued to work with workers' circles up to his arrest in December 1895.

Whilst the outcome of the debates between social-democrats and *narodovol'tsy* indicated that the workers' organisation was intent on monitoring the *narodovol'tsy*, the process was not simply a validation of the social-democratic approach. Rather, it represented a clear statement about who was in control of and who had authority within the workers' movement. It is a mistake to interpret the preference for the social-democratic approach as evidence that workers were somehow in thrall to social-democratic *intelligenty*. Throughout the debates the workers demonstrated their commitment to the principle of worker-autonomy that had guided the Petersburg workers' movement from the 1870s and, as Shelgunov, later a staunch Leninist, testified workers' hegemony over the movement was not compromised as a result of the debates with the *intelligenty*, observing that the outcome '*tightened the reins over the narodovol'tsy and gave the whip to the social*

⁵⁸ A. Fisher, 1922, p.25; V.A. Shelgunov, 'Vospominaniia,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.57 and 'Vospominaniia,' *Tvorchestvo*, No. 7 [10], 1920, p.8.

⁵⁹ 'Peterburzhets' [K.M. Takhtarev], *Ocherk peterburgskogo rabochego dvizheniia 90-kh godov*, London, 1902, p.9.

democrats.'⁶⁰ Fisher applies a similar metaphor [‘*Нам казалось, что одних нужно было взнудать, а других подхлестнуть*’] in his memoirs suggesting that this reflected a common phraseology used by workers to describe their relationship with the two *intelligent* factions.⁶¹

All leading workers who left memoirs emphasised that the debates were about establishing a framework to govern relationships between workers and *all intelligent*, a framework in which the workers' strategy of developing a cadre of revolutionary *worker-intelligent* would be prioritised and that the *intelligent* would follow the direction set by the CWC. The debates and their outcome should be read as evidence of the determination of leading workers to ensure that control resided not in any of the disparate *intelligent* groups but with workers and in common with their predecessors that the *intelligent* serve rather than direct the workers' movement.

It is ironic that the very moment of worker reassertion of control over the movement proved a somewhat Pyrrhic victory, as at the second debate two police agents were present, leading to a wave of arrests in late April/early May 1894 that removed virtually the entire leading nuclei of both the CWC and the *Gruppa Narodovol'tsev*. From the CWC only Shelgunov escaped detention; in all 29 leading workers were seized including Fisher, Keizer, Norinskii, Funtikov, Loginov, and Zhelabin. A short time afterwards, the leading textile worker and Nevskii Gate representative on the CWC Petr Morozov was detained.⁶² The Social-Democratic '*Technologists*' survived virtually unscathed, which at first sight seems surprising as one of the police informants, the dentist Mikhailov, was a member of the social-democratic delegation to the second debate and would undoubtedly have provided the authorities with 'chapter and verse' on the social-democratic group. One can only speculate that the social-democrats were allowed to remain at liberty because the police considered them less of a threat than either the workers' organisation or the *narodovol'tsy*. This is suggestive that the authorities considered that some form of joint action between workers and *narodovol'tsy* to incite industrial unrest remained a potential danger despite the cautious approach shown by the workers in relation to *narodovol'tsy* entreaties that they assume an active role in industrial struggles. Certainly, the authorities always considered the potential of a group of radicalised workers acting as mediators between the radical *intelligent* and the mass of workers as constituting a major threat to

⁶⁰ V.A. Shelgunov, 'Vospominaniia,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.57.

⁶¹ A. Fisher, 1922, p.25.

⁶² *Ibid*, p.26; M.S. Aleksandrov, *Byloe*, 1906, pp.24-26; K.M. Norinskii, 1974, p.44.

the social order and even a suspicion of this as a future possibility prompted them to nip such an alliance in the bud.

The Ideology of the Revived Workers' Organisation

Notwithstanding the CWC's cautious approach towards incitement of workers to strike, it remains important to ascertain whether the workers' organisation represented a reformist or revolutionary group. An important source for exploring the attitudes of leading workers is the single extant proclamation written by a member of the CWC between 1892 and 1894, Ivan Keizer's September 1893 pamphlet '*Brattsy-Tovarishchii!*'. When this proclamation is viewed in conjunction with propaganda materials used in workers' circles it is possible to reach a judgement to the degree of revolutionary commitment of the leading workers after 1892.⁶³

From the outset, Keizer emphasises that he is writing as a worker and not as a member of the *intelligenty*. This is important as Keizer begins by seeking entry into discussions that workers are having, asking them '*if you are talking, include me, my friends, in your friendly conversations, as I am just like you, a worker.*'⁶⁴ After establishing his worker credentials, Keizer draws attention to the government's budget for 1892 asking what happens to the multi-millions roubles raised by the state through taxation. Answering his own question, Keizer tells workers that it is almost in its entirety spent on the needs of the Tsar, the nobility and wealthy factory owners so that they can enjoy a '*perpetual carnival*'

⁶³ Until now, Keizer's pamphlet has been virtually ignored in studies on Russian radical workers in the 1890s. The pamphlet was first published with very little commentary in *Istoriki-revoliutsionnyi Sbornik*, T. I, Ptgd., 1924 and republished almost seven decades later in the collection *Avangard* [1990], edited by E.R. Ol'khovskii, again with a minimum of background or context. This lack of attention during the Soviet era can be attributed to the fact that it was published by the Petersburg *Narodovol'tsy* and to Keizer's alleged more sympathetic attitude towards this group, in contrast to the more social-democratic sympathies portrayed by Fisher, Shelgunov and Norinskii in their memoirs. Keizer was killed in Kharkov in 1920 fighting for the Bolsheviks during the Civil War and unlike his comrades on the CWC did not have an opportunity to provide a memoir account of his activities. His pamphlet however, represents an eloquent statement of his views at this time and given that from 1888 Fisher and Keizer almost continuously shared rooms and throughout this period invariably acted in tandem, it is inconceivable that they did not discuss the content of the pamphlet. We also know from the memoirs of both Fisher and Aleksandrov [Ol'minskii] that Keizer's pamphlet was widely used and well received in workers' circles of the time and that the work was published by the *narodovol'tsy* without any amendments despite the fact that the *Gruppa Narodovol'tsev* did not agree with some of its content. [Fisher, 1922, pp.6-24; M.S. Aleksandrov, *Byloe*, 1906, pp.12-13]. It is worth emphasising that Ol'minskii never claimed Keizer as a member of the *narodovol'tsy* workers' circles and throughout the period to May 1894 Keizer operated as one of the quartet of workers united in leadership of the workers' organisation.

⁶⁴ I.I. Keizer, '*Brattsy-Tovarishchii!*', *Avangard*, 1990, p.28.

whilst workers receiving miserable wages are taxed on everything they purchase for their basic survival. Launching a direct attack on the Tsar and the royal family, Keizer declares:

The sovereign himself takes a salary of 12 million roubles a year, whilst for maintaining his palaces and his many different servants [he takes] the same amount. In addition, his wife and children each receive an allowance and thank the lord for their good fortune. In an English bank they have more than 600 million [roubles] which they have accumulated from the starving people [narod]! In addition, we have many ministers, senators, aides etc, and each of them receives between 10 and 18 thousand roubles a year..... [as] it is much more pleasant for the Tsar to have around him perfumed nobles than workers soaked in their own blood. ⁶⁵

Keizer deploys the rhetorical device of comparing his vision of a society based on ‘honest’ labour where the state protects the weak and addresses social evils with the current state where the opposite of good government prevails. Under the current regime, *‘those who do nothing and contribute nothing live in clover.....and in every possible way torment the honest worker who works all his life like an ox, pays almost all he earns to the state, dresses in rags, lives throughout his life hand-to-mouth and.....has only black bread and then barely sufficient, all the time suffering insults and humiliations....’* ⁶⁶

Contrasting the luxurious lifestyles of the idle rich with the poverty and degradation of workers and peasants, Keizer reminds workers of the famine of 1891 dismissing any ‘superstitious’ notion that this represented ‘divine punishment’, showing that it was rather the result of ‘back breaking taxes and levies’ and the exhaustion of the little land the peasants have available to work. Land-exhaustion is attributed to government policy that forces peasants to sell their ‘beasts’ to pay taxes, with the result that land remains unfertilised. Drawing the link between rural poverty and peasant migration to cities in search of work that creates surplus labour, Keizer shows how this benefits factory owners who are able to reduce workers’ wages, threatening to replace them from the hordes of unemployed migrants begging for work outside factories. Workers are asked not to turn against migrant workers as the fault lies not with these ‘wretched people’ but with government that has ‘reduced people to such a miserable state that the poor man for a piece of bread is ready to enslave himself with any kind of onerous work. And the always

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.30.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p.31.

alert capitalists reap the benefit of this harvest of bondage!'⁶⁷ Keizer ends his diatribe against the rich by indicating that it is the so called '*fathers*' [the tsar, the nobility, the bureaucracy, the factory owners and the priests] that reap the benefit from the misery that they inflict on the people.

After graphically depicting the sufferings of the people, Keizer addresses how workers can extricate themselves from their onerous and miserable existence. Citing examples from Western Europe, where workers have organised '*syndicates*' to struggle against employers and where, despite the intervention of the authorities using armed force, they have won political freedoms. Keizer points out that the key to worker success lay in forming unions as '*everyone knows that it is easy to break a twig, but try to break a broom.*' Yet Russian workers '*remain in a wakeless slumber*' awaiting some miracle to improve their situation. Keizer therefore, summons workers to stop '*licking the feet of their oppressors*' and to challenge their employers and government. Cautioning the workers not to listen to sermons of the so called righteous, Keizer issues a rallying call to the workers:

*Wake up, Russian people! You have suffered enough in silence. The time is long overdue to arouse yourself from the sleep of ages, and although it will be painful to lift up your powerful shoulders and declare: I am human and want to live the life of a man and not an animal.....till now I have been a slave, I have lain in bondage chained to the tsar to satisfy the needs of capitalists. But I now want to be a free man. I do not want to sacrifice my daughters to the profane rich.*⁶⁸

Finally, in an echo of Petr Alekseev's speech in the Trial of the 50 in 1877, Keizer reminds workers that over recent years many people, i.e. the radical-*intelligenty*, have sacrificed themselves in defence of the oppressed, yet, despite this, many people vilify them calling them '*Godless rebels.*' In a manner reminiscent of the Northern Union, Keizer explicitly compares these champions of the workers to 'Christ' '*who with all his wisdom was crucified by those who would lose as a result of his teachings.*'⁶⁹ In this regard Keizer's tribute to the *intelligenty* [they are never mentioned by name] indicates that anti-*intelligenty* sentiment was not inherent in the workers' movement. But from this it is not possible to extrapolate a continuing dependency of the workers' movement on the *intelligenty*. Keizer is explicit that it is workers who must rise up and unite on the basis of

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.33.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.36.

⁶⁹ Ibid, pp.35-36.

their shared oppression to win freedom for themselves in a struggle in which the *intelligenty* will undoubtedly continue to enlighten the workers but in a capacity as allies rather than masters of the workers' movement.

Keizer's pamphlet represents a scathing indictment by one of the most conscious representatives of the Petersburg workers' organisation not just of the government but of the Tsar himself, holding him as '*father*' of the nation accountable for policies that have reduced workers and peasants alike to penury. Keizer skilfully points out to his worker audience the interconnections between government fiscal policy, the plight of Russian agriculture, peasant indebtedness, migration to cities, and the low wages of workers caused by the ever-present threat of unemployment. The Russian state is shown to represent the interests of factory owners who are an integral part of a social order in which idle rich live at the expense of workers whose continuing exploitation is guaranteed by the arms of the state.

In calling on workers to form militant unions to struggle with both employers and government, Keizer's pamphlet refutes any suggestion that circle workers were essentially apolitical and eschewed confrontation with the government. Drawing attention to the advances achieved by western workers through winning political freedoms, Keizer unambiguously incites Russian workers to emulate this and win political freedom as a prerequisite for improving their economic position. Finally, although arguing that Russian workers must win their rights for themselves, Keizer recognises the contribution of the *intelligenty* who had sacrificed themselves to enlighten workers. In this there is an explicit recognition that in future struggles, workers will continue to need *intelligenty* support but, as a long-standing member of the Petersburg circle movement, Keizer is equally insistent that it is for workers and not a small group of radicals to transform the state and society. In declaring this, Keizer rejects the elevation of the role of an elite revolutionary group to act on behalf of the mass of the *narod* as advocated by the *narodovol'tsy*, a fact that no doubt was one of the points of *narodovol'tsy*'s disagreement with the pamphlet.

In many senses, Keizer's pamphlet was as a continuation of earlier *Narodniki* critiques of Russian society, with an explicit recognition of the intrinsic moral superiority of human labour contrasted with the evils inherent in a system in which classes that do no work parasitically live off the 'toiling masses.' Although Keizer's analysis does not reflect a Marxist understanding of labour, he is convinced that it is only industrial workers that can

successfully challenge autocracy through political and economic struggles. Identifying himself as an enlightened worker [*one who has received his sight*], Keizer envisions Russian workers following the example of western workers and forming unions to further their cause. *Brattsy-Tovarishchii* should be read as a political statement with a capital 'P' and is difficult to reconcile with a view of the advanced layer of Petersburg workers as only interested in self-development and peaceful propaganda.

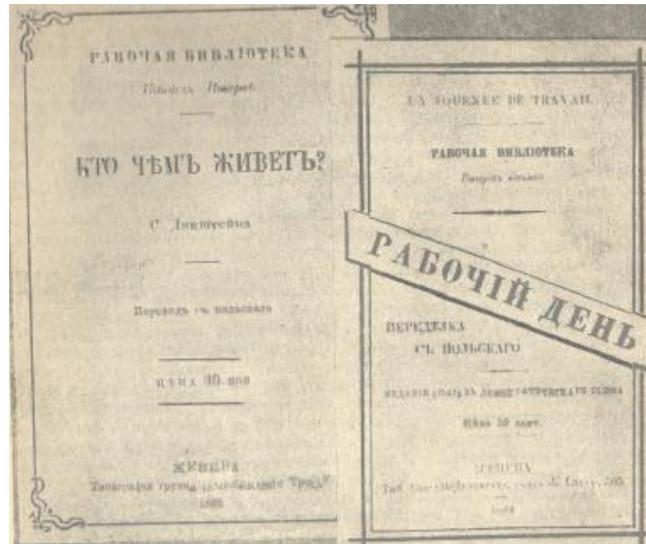
This interpretation is substantiated by revolutionary literature commonly used in circles during this period. From various police reports and the participant memoirs, circles were heavily dependent upon a comparatively small number of revolutionary pamphlets of which *'Chto dolzhen znat' i pomnit kazhdyi rabochii'*, Szymon Diksztajn's *'Kto chem zhivet'*, *'Rabochii den'*, and *'Tsar golod'* were the most prevalent.⁷⁰ It is not coincidental that the first three were translations of Polish socialist pamphlets whose main purpose was to explain basic concepts of Marxist political economy to workers. All three provided concrete illustrations of Marx's labour theory of value and how factory owners expropriate the labour of the workers realising vast profits and enriching themselves at the expense of workers who are consigned to ever-increasing poverty. With the exception of *Rabochii den'*, the other two Polish pamphlets had been long-used in workers' circles, in the mid 1880s a copy of *Kto chem zhivet* had been given to the Shelgunov by Klimanov when the young worker struggled to make sense of Marx's Capital.⁷¹ *Rabochii den'* was of a more recent vintage and reflected the demand of the Second International in 1889 for a universal eight hour working day. It was first recorded in Russia in 1894 and was then printed on a number of occasions by the Petersburg *narodovol'tsy* and widely disseminated in workers circles during 1894-1895.⁷² Making the link between excessive working-hours and the ignorance of the mass of workers explicit, *Rabochii den'* revealed to workers how they are kept in darkness *'because their life is spent either at the machine, or in the tavern or in a cold dark corner, with no books and no pleasures which would exert a beneficent influence on the character of a man so that he could be told apart from a wild beast!'* To escape from such material and spiritual impoverishment the pamphlet reiterated the standard rallying call for workers *'to join forces and do everything together, combine their limited separate resources and form a single enormous force so that they can then achieve a*

⁷⁰ Cf. 'Doklad po delu o voznikshikh v S. Peterburge v 1894 i 1895 godakh prestupnykh kruzhakh lits, imenuiushikh sebja 'sotsial-demokratami', 17 dekabriia 1896,' *Sbornik materialov i statei. Redaktsiia zhurnala 'Istoricheskii Arkhiv'*, 1921.

⁷¹ V.A. Shelgunov, *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.341-342.

⁷² 'Doklad po delu o voznikshikh v S. Peterburge v 1894 i 1895....,' 1921, pp. 96 ff. and passim.

*reduction in the working day, and, at the same time, alleviate, and bring light into their own difficult working life.'*⁷³



If these Polish pamphlets emphasised the exploitation of workers whose labour was the source of wealth in society and pointed to workers' unions and strike struggles as the solution, then '*Tsar golod*' as long standing *narodovol'tsy* propaganda resource introduced a much more explicit political dimension, inciting workers to struggle not just against their economic exploiters but the tsarist political system as a whole. Throughout this period '*Tsar golod*', written by the *narodovol'tsev* Bakh in the early 1880s, continued to be widely read in workers' circles. Its appeal lay in its personal narrative approach and colloquial language that allowed workers to identify with the situation in which they found themselves in factories. In a manner not dissimilar to Keizer's '*Brattsy-tovarishchii*', '*Tsar golod*' showed that workers were the producers of wealth and that the parasitic rich mercilessly robbed them, appealing to an innate sense of right and wrong and highlighting the fundamental contradiction in Russia between the rich and poor, between the masses of working people who '*sweat blood and die like flies from disease*' and the debauched upper classes who live in idle luxury of the labour of others.⁷⁴

Such pamphlets judiciously combined a popularisation of Marxist economic theory with moral indignation based on a dualistic concept of the '*idle rich*' supported by the corrupt Tsarist political regime living off the labour of the mass of exploited and suffering workers. These pamphlets were far removed from abstract academic treatises designed for

⁷³ *Rabochii den'* in Neil Harding and Richard Taylor [eds.] *Marxism in Russia. Selected Documents*, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 134, 138.

⁷⁴ For an analysis of '*Tsar golod*' and its enduring influence on radical circles, see Deborah Pearl, 'Political Economy for Workers: A. N. Bakh's *Tsar-Golod*,' *Slavic Review*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (Winter, 1990), pp. 768-778.

self-development, but were intended to enable workers not simply to understand the reality of their working lives, actively inciting them to challenge the inequities perpetrated on them by employers and government. Throughout these works, workers are implored to form militant workers' unions that not only struggle for economic improvement but also challenge the absence of political rights in Russia. As such, these were genuinely revolutionary works and their wide use and popularity in circles testimony that the much maligned *kruzhkovtsy* were neither the apolitical seekers after a pure knowledge as depicted by historians such as Pipes nor an elite group increasingly detached from the mass of workers as suggested in standard Soviet accounts. Rather, these Petersburg workers should be considered as genuine revolutionaries seeking knowledge of their position as workers in an emerging capitalist industrial order to organise workers for a struggle against both the exploitative labour process and the political system that supported employers against the workers. Fisher recalled in his memoirs how as part of their 'education' he and Keizer on their own would pour over Diksztajn's '*Kto chem zhivet*', using this and similar texts as the basis to understand capitalist exploitation and construct effective strategies to organise workers.⁷⁵

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the collapse of the CWC in June 1892 and the arrests of many leading workers across the capital, the process of re-establishing the organisation was gradual and, although supported by a number of more experienced circle workers who remained in Petersburg during the second half of 1892 and first months of 1893, was accomplished primarily through the efforts of a new leadership cohort of workers. Although workers such as Norinskii, Shelgunov, Fisher and Keizer by 1892 were already experienced *kruzhkovtsy*, they nonetheless, represented a new leadership cadre. Heavily influenced by the collapse of the organisation in 1892 they operated on a more cautious basis than their predecessors, generally shunning public displays and more overt interventions in industrial disputes between workers and employers to protect the re-established organisation. Their main focus was directed towards creating and nurturing a cadre of *worker-intelligenty* as part of a coherent strategy to take over responsibility for circle propaganda from radical members of the intelligentsia, thereby making the workers' movement genuinely independent. Paradoxically such an ambition initially created a greater reliance on *intelligenty*-propagandists to work with advanced workers in intensive study sessions and

⁷⁵ A. Fisher, 1922, p.19.

in individual tuition. Yet, clear in their intent, the CWC determined to reassert worker hegemony over the *intelligenty*, constructing a discourse with both social-democrats and *narodovol'tsy* to determine both the nature of circle propaganda and how this would be carried out. Whilst this resulted in endorsement of a more social-democratic approach based on in-depth propaganda focused on the realities of workers' lives with a concomitant refusal to sanction more radical approaches advocated by the *narodovol'tsy*, the debates and monitoring mechanism put in place by the CWC to oversee propaganda re-emphasised worker control and defined a framework for future relations with the *intelligenty* that would endure to the end of 1895 and the final demise of the CWC.

Although the debates with the *intelligenty* endorsed an approach based on propaganda, such propaganda was far from having an innocuous and purely educational flavour. Ivan Keizer produced an inflammatory pamphlet designed to enrage workers at their exploitation by a state-sponsored capitalist system, pointing out to workers the need to organise militant unions and prepare for a forthcoming struggle with employers and government. Circle workers received similar messages in the main works used in 'study' circles that emphasised both the economic basis of worker exploitation and the need for workers to struggle to win political rights through which they could organise and create a more socially just order. In this, the revised CWC and workers' circles were continuing an emphasis already apparent during the period of the first CWC that would continue during 1894-1895 as the workers' organisation took its first tentative steps to place itself at the head of an emerging mass workers' movement involving textile and other *fabrichnye* workers in the capital.

Chapter 10.

The Central Workers' Circle: The Final Phase. From Propaganda towards Agitation, 1894-1895

Introduction

As in June 1892, the arrests of leading workers in spring 1894 should not be seen as marking the end-point of the Petersburg workers' quest for organisational autonomy as suggested by Michael Share, who argued that after this '*an independent CWC never re-emerged*' and that henceforth workers '*followed the dictates of the social-democratic intelligentsia.*'¹ For Share, and many Soviet historians, from May 1894 onwards the workers' movement became synonymous with the group of '*Stariki*' *intelligenty* that evolved from Radchenko's group and was increasingly directed by Lenin. According to this interpretation, it was the '*Stariki*' that effected the transition from narrowly based intensive propaganda amongst a small elite group of skilled metalworkers to mass agitation focused on unskilled workers in textile and lighter industrial enterprises orchestrated by *intelligenty*-led Union of Struggle.

In opposition to this narrative, I will argue that during 1894/95 leading workers not only once again recreated an independent organisation but, on their own initiative, began to establish solid links with unskilled workers in textile and other factories and, in advance of *intelligenty* conversion to agitation, were at the forefront of advocating a more interventionist approach in industrial conflicts. Yet whilst making the transition to more overt forms of agitation, leading workers never lost sight of their original *raison d'être*, that in order to lead the workers' movement a coherent group of *worker-intelligenty* had to be created and as a result during the transition towards agitation advanced study in propaganda circles continued. As with Fisher and his comrades, for the new CWC leadership it was not a question of either propaganda or agitation; both were seen as a continuum of development, an interconnected process through which leading workers would begin to shape and direct the struggles of the mass of workers at opportune moments. Propaganda and agitation remained tactical constructs, the balance between the two varying as circumstances dictated. This understanding guided the circle movement in the final 18 months of its history.

¹ Michael Share, Ph.D Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1984.

It is possible to create an impression of the activity of the workers' organisation in this last period through police reports into the origins of the Union of Struggle supplemented by worker and *intelligenty* memoirs. Following arrests at the end of 1895/beginning of 1896, the police launched a thorough investigation into 'social-democratic' activities from autumn 1894, producing a detailed report revealing the extent of the activities of leading workers and radical *intelligenty* groups in the capital during 1894/1895.² Despite its tendency to conflate the activities of a number of *intelligenty*-groups, most notably a neo-*narodovol'tsy* group based around the Glazovskaia Sunday School and the 'Stariki' *intelligenty*, as well as attributing to the *intelligenty* a malevolent corrupting influence over impressionable workers [a tendency common in many official reports that consistently downplayed the ability of workers to act on their own initiative], the report nonetheless contains a wealth of information on the Petersburg workers' organisation and its relationships with various *intelligenty*-groups from which it is possible to reconstruct key moments in its history during the seminal period in the transition from propaganda to agitation.

Intelligenty Tendencies

Before analyzing this final phase of the workers' organisation, it is necessary to delineate the radical *intelligenty* groups involved with it during 1894/1895.

i) The Stariki Group of Social-Democrats

The 'Stariki' group evolved directly from Radchenko's 'Technologist' Group and during 1894-95. Its active members included, in addition to Radchenko, Lenin [Ul'ianov], Zaporozhets, Starkov, Vaneev, Krzhizhanovskii, Krasin and Malchenko. Initially, the group was known as either the Group of Social-Democrats or colloquially as 'Malchenko and Co' but from summer 1895 it became commonly known at the 'Stariki' *intelligenty* to differentiate it from a new social-democratic grouping to which the appellation 'Molodoi' *intelligenty* was ascribed. In autumn 1895, the 'Stariki' group was supplemented through its merger with a small group of social-democrats formed around Iulii Martov who had

² 'Doklad po delu o voznikshikh v S. Peterburge v 1894 i 1895 godakh prestupnykh kruzhakh lits, imenuiushchikh sebia 'sotsial-demokratov' [henceforth Doklad.....], 17 dekabriia 1896, reprinted in *Sbornik materialov i statei*, 1921, pp. 93-178. This important document was republished as an appendix to Volume 1 of the first edition of Lenin's *Collected Works* in 1924. Thereafter, it was never been republished during the Soviet period, a fact undoubtedly connected with the description of worker autonomy identified by the Department of Police at a time when later Leninist interpretations demanded presenting the dominance of Lenin over both the *intelligenty* and workers' movement in Petersburg.

returned to Petersburg at this time that included Liakhovskii, Gorev, and Gurvich [Dan].³ This unified group established a definite organisational structure to guide its activities and laid the foundations for the formation of the Petersburg Union of Struggle, a name adopted by the ‘*Stariki*’ who survived arrests of 8/9th December 1895.⁴

ii) *The Molodoi Social-democratic Group*

In spring 1895, a second social-democratic grouping emerged in the capital, consisting primarily of younger students from the Technological Institute led by Illarion Chernyshev that included Malishevskii, Muromov, Bogatyrev as well as the police agent Nikolai Mikhailov. Mikhailov’s presence in the group was a major reason that the ‘*Stariki*’ refused to allow the ‘*Molodoi*’ into their group, combined with a perceived arrogance and dictatorial approach [‘Bonapartism’] adopted by Chernyshev and a less conspiratorial approach to circle activity that was an anathema to many of the original ‘*stariki*’ particularly Radchenko.⁵ Martov recalled that the ‘*Molodoi*’ were passionate supporters of the Vil’no agitational programme, accusing the ‘*Stariki*’ of complacency for their reluctance to abandon conspiratorial methods and narrow forms of circle propaganda.⁶ Members of the ‘*Molodoi*’ group were christened the ‘*petukhi*’ [‘roosters’] by the leading Putilov workers seemingly on account of Chernyshev’s strutting arrogance.⁷

iii) *The ‘Narodovol’tsy’ Voznresniki Group*

Throughout 1894/1895, a reformed *narodovol’tsy* group was active amongst workers of the capital. In particular, a group of teachers at the Glazovskaia Sunday School near the Obvodnyi Canal [the so called ‘*Voznresniki*’] including Vera Sibeleva, Elizaveta Arginskaia, Elene Ustrogova, the Plaskin brothers, the doctor Bykovksii and the state official Pantelion Lepesinskii, developed extensive contacts and joint activities with members of the workers’ organisation. In addition, a number of workers who still adhered to the *narodovol’tsy* position, including Nikolai Poletaev at the Putilov factory and A.S. Shapovalov on the Vyborg Side, carried out propaganda and agitation amongst workers. For much of this period, the *narodovol’tsy* group worked hand-in-glove with the ‘*Stariki*’,

³ Lenin’s role in the formative period of the Union of Struggle is detailed in *Vladimir Il’ich Lenin, Biograficheskaia Khronika. T. I. 1870-1905*, Moscow, 1970 in the Chapters covering the years 1893 to 1895.

⁴ ‘Doklad.....,’ pp. 159-161 and passim; Martov, *Zapiski sotsial-demokrata*, Moscow, 2004, Chapter 8, pp.168-203..

⁵ V. Akimov, ‘A Short History of Russian Social Democracy,’ in Jonathan Frankel, *Vladimir Akimov and the Dilemmas of Russian Social democracy*, Cambridge, 1968, pp. 241-242.

⁶ ‘Doklad.....,’ p. 169 and passim; Iu.O. Martov, 2004; M.A. Sil’vin, 1958, p. 133; Akimov, 1968, pp. 241-242.

⁷ Iu.O. Martov, 2004, p.186.

exchanging propagandists, contacts amongst the workers and sharing literature. As the *narodovol'tsy* at this time remained the only radical group to operate a printing press, other radical groups and the workers' organisation were heavily dependent on them for literature as supplies of revolutionary materials from abroad remained irregular and unreliable.⁸

iv) 'The Obeziianami' and Konstantin Takhtarev

The final group involved a number of non-aligned propagandists who operated on an individual basis but who often maintained informal contacts with the other *intelligenty* groups. Such '*lone wolves*' included Konstantin Takhtarev, Aleksandr Nikitin and Katin-Iartsev who often co-operated with each other and shared circles and contacts amongst the workers to the extent that in official reports they were often seen as a single group led by Takhtarev and bearing the nickname 'the monkeys' [*obeziianami*], again ascribed to them by Putilov workers.⁹

A number of points in relation to these *intelligenty*-groups need to be emphasised. Firstly, with the exception of the '*Molodoi*', there was considerable interchange and co-operation between them. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly links between the '*Stariki*' and *narodovol'tsy* from the Glazovskaia School were particularly close, at times they appeared to be operating almost as a single organisation with '*stariki*' members heavily involved with propaganda organised through the *narodovol'tsy* teachers at the school.¹⁰ Indeed the detailed police investigation assumed that the '*Voznresniki*' were an integral part of the '*Stariki*' group. Secondly, as Babushkin pointed out, there were '*no sharp differences*' between social-democrats and *narodovol'tsy* propagandists with frequently propagandists from both groups working with the same circle.¹¹ Indeed, it would appear that by the beginning of 1895 most *narodovol'tsy* had to all intents and purposes adopted Marxist and social-democratic positions on a range of issues including a rejection of a unique Russia path of development, the hegemony of the working-class in the Russian revolutionary movement and the rejection of terror and conspiratorial seizure of state power as the basis of revolutionary action. At the same time, social-democrats increasingly moved towards accepting the *narodovol'tsy* position of more interventionist approaches by encouraging

⁸ 'Doklad.....,' pp. 161-163 and passim; P.N. Lepeshinskii, *Na Povorote*, Moscow, 1955, pp. 32-35, A. S. Shapovalov, 'Po doroge k marksizmu,' *Proletarskii prolog*, 1983, and 'Na puti k marksizmu,' *Avangard*, 1990.

⁹ 'Peterburzhets' [K.M. Takhtarev], *Ocherk peterskogo rabocheho dvizheniia 90-kh godov*, London, 1902, pp.4-10; Iu.O. Martov, 2004, p. 492.

¹⁰ 'Doklad.....,' pp. 93-94, 105-106, 111, 115 and passim

¹¹ *Recollections of Ivan Vasilyevich Babushkin*, Moscow, 1957, p.76.

workers to take industrial action on the basis of their immediate grievances. From the available evidence, there seems little doubt that the *narodovol'tsy* represented the most consistent *intelligenty* champions of the agitational tactic, urging workers to confront the oppression of factory owners by organising strikes. For example, in early 1895 Vera Sibeleva and other *narodovol'tsy* members discussed with a group of experienced workers from the workers' organisation the strike movement in the western *gubernii*s of Russia, encouraging them emulate strikes in the Vil'no area and for leading Petersburg workers to lead workers' struggles with both factory owners and the government.¹²

The Final Re-emergence of the Central Workers' Committee

If the police thought the arrests of May 1894 would destroy the workers' organisation they were not for the first time disappointed. In what must have seemed to be analogous to a struggle with a hydra-headed monster, no sooner had the authorities removed one leadership group than another almost instantly appeared to replace the severed head. The most eminent worker-activist to survive the latest purge was Vasili Shelgunov, who again played a significant role in re-establishing and refocusing the activity of the workers' movement. As Shelgunov subsequently became a loyal Party member, his role in the re-establishment of the CWC from autumn 1894 tended to be magnified in Soviet accounts.¹³ Whilst not downplaying Shelgunov's role, it is important to recognise that, as after the arrests of summer 1892, the resurrection of the workers' movement was a collective endeavour, involving both experienced workers some of whose involvement dated back to the late 1880s [in addition to Shelgunov the workers Antushevskii, Nikolai Ivanov, Fedosia Norinskaia [nee Dontsova], Ivan Iakovlev, Kurpianov, and Aleksandr Il'in fall into this category] with a younger cohort including Ivan Babushkin, Nikita Merkulov, Boris Zinov'ev, Petr Karamyshev, Gribakin and Vlas Shcheglov. In addition, a number of 'veterans' of the CWC including Klimanov, Fedor Afanas'ev, Vladimir Proshin, Nikolai Bogdanov and Ivan Keizer continued to be periodically involved with the workers' movement during these final phases, providing support and advice to younger comrades who had taken over leadership and direction of the movement.

Takhtarev testified that during summer 1894 an influential workers' group resumed activities, establishing a network of local circles that by autumn had merged into a

¹² 'Doklad.....', 1921, p.107.

¹³ See Korol'chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika.....*, 1940; E.A.Korol'chuk, 'Peredovye proletarii Peterburga v bor'be za soedinenie rabocheho dvizheniia s marksizmom,' *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.93 ff.

coherent organisation.¹⁴ During the summer/autumn of 1894, surviving workers worked almost entirely on their own initiative, re-establishing circles, recruiting new members and conducting circle propaganda. At this time, social-democratic propagandists were almost invisible, with Takhtarev claiming that in the huge Nevskii Gate industrial suburb he was the only propagandist active amongst workers. Shelgunov relates how he arranged a meeting with the elusive Radchenko to ask that the social-democrats provide propagandists for workers' circles and larger gatherings that the workers were planning, but the latter categorically refused, curtly replying that the workers would have to manage with their own resources.¹⁵ The situation had not improved appreciably by autumn when the leading workers Aleksandr Il'in and Vladimir Kniazev had to plead with Mikahil Sil'vin to provide a propagandist to instruct workers in political economy as they had been conducting study sessions in their circles for several months on their own and now urgently required additional support. Eventually, after several weeks, Sil'vin arranged for Lenin to attend this circle.¹⁶

Shelgunov, who following the arrests in spring 1894 moved to work at the Obukhov steel works in the Nevskii Gate, with the assistance of Babushkin and Merkulov, survivors from Funtikov's Semiannikov circle, quickly established a network of circles and by the end of the year at least 10 circles were again operating in the region.¹⁷ As after previous collapses, surviving workers made use of extensive contacts amongst workers who had previously been active in circles to rebuild the movement. Shelgunov made contact with the Obukhov worker Vasilii Iakovlev who had been involved in circles in the early 1890s, lodged with him, obtained employment in the Obukhov factory through him and with his support established a thriving circle at a factory which hitherto had proved immune to the efforts of radical workers to organise in it.¹⁸

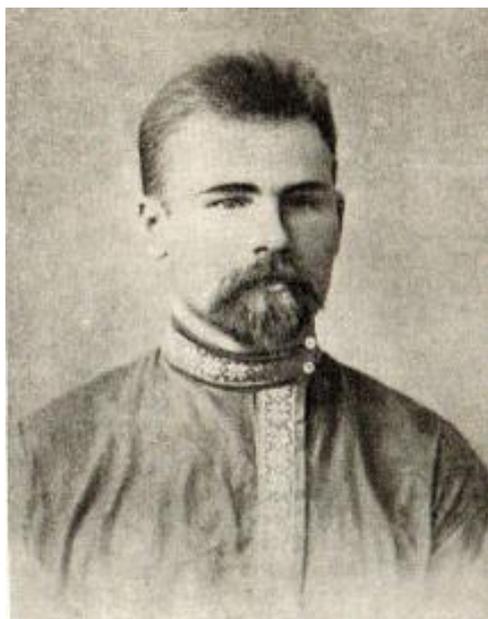
¹⁴ 'Peterburzhets' [K.M. Takhtarev], 1902, pp.7-9, 10-11.

¹⁵ V.A. Shelgunov, 'Vospominaniia V.A. Shelgunov,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva k Soiuzu Bor'by*, 1921, p.57.

¹⁶ A.P. Il'in, 'V.I. Ul'ianov v rabochikh kruzhkakh Peterburga v epokhu 'Soiuzu Bor'by za osvobozhdenie rabocheho klassa', *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.366-367.

¹⁷ Korol'chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika.....*, 1940, pp. 173-174; M. Rozanov, *Vasilii Andreevich Shel'gunov*, Leningrad, 1966, pp. 114-115.

¹⁸ Continuities with Shelgunov and subsequent episodes in the workers' movement at the factory were established through Iakovlev's daughters, who worked at the neighbouring Kartochnyi factory and who would play a leading role in the events surrounding the famous 'Obukhov Defence' in May 1901, M. Rozanov, *Obukhovtsy*, Leningrad, 1938, pp. 63 ff.



Vasilii Shelgunov

Shelgunov also indicated that during summer 1894 leading workers from across Petersburg held several meetings *'to discuss their winter campaign.'*¹⁹ These meetings culminated in autumn 1894 in a major gathering of over 20 workers in the room of the worker at the Siemens and Gal'sk factory Ivan Iakovlev on Vasil'evskii Island at which a central group to co-ordinate the activities of the circles across the capital was re-established. An initial group of four workers, Shelgunov [representing the Nevskii Gate], Iakovlev [Vasil'evskii island], Kniazev [the Petersburg and Vyborg Sides], and the Putilovtsy Nikolai Ivanov [the Narvskii Gate] were elected to form this reconstituted CWC.²⁰ Official reports confirm a noticeable increase in the network of workers' circles in the last months of 1894. Police investigations concluded that by the beginning of 1895 *'various workers' circles in different regions of the capital were formed – the Nevskii and Narvskii Gates, Vasil'evskii Island, the harbour and other places.'* The report identifies Shelgunov, Iakovlev, and Ivanov amongst others as being particularly active who whilst *'operating in various workers' circles.... maintained contact with each other, and thus formed a 'central workers' group.'*²¹

During this time, leading workers continued to undertake intensive studies as well as continuing the model of individual tuition with social-democratic *intelligenty* to nurture highly developed worker-propagandists for future leadership of the circles. During autumn

¹⁹ V.A. Shelgunov, 'Vospominaniia,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.57.

²⁰ Cf. Note of E.A. Korol'chuk in I.I. Iakovlev, *V nachale puti*, 1975, p. 422; 'Doklad.....,' 1921, p.110.

²¹ 'Doklad.....,' 1921, p. 94. See also the Police report dated 12 December 1896 which listed the names of 14 workers active in the central workers' organisation in early months of 1895, *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. IV, Ch.1*, 1961, p. 30.

1894, Shelgunov arranged for Iakovlev to visit Lenin to study Marx's *Capital*, as did the New Admiralty worker Aleksandr Il'in slightly later.²² Such study sessions were not a one-way transfer of knowledge from *intelligenty*-propagandists to supplicant workers who were passive recipients of received wisdom from *intelligenty* teachers. The sessions were used to provide *intelligenty* with up-to-date news on the workers' movement and the mood of workers in factories, as well as for leading workers to appraise the *intelligenty* with their views on the future direction of their movement. The relationship was in essence a dynamic one, involving the passing of vital information to be used in agitational work in the factories. Thus Il'in provided Lenin with intelligence on working conditions at the New Admiralty Shipyards, information that would be incorporated into a leaflet issued by the '*Stariki*' during a strike at the shipyards in February 1895.²³

Following the example of their predecessors, the leaders of the workers' organisation continued to work with a range of *intelligenty* groups and consistently refused to identify with one tendency. What mattered to them was that *intelligenty*-propagandists who gained access to workers' circles followed the line determined by leading workers, that they accepted the principle of worker hegemony over the movement, were able to provide the workers with resources, books, pamphlets and towards the end of the period leaflets to promote the organisation and recruit workers. During 1894-95, leading workers continued to 'vet' propagandists and monitor their activities. At the same meeting in early 1895 at which Sibeleva urged more militant industrial action one of the *narodovol'tsy* present declared intensive circle study to develop workers too protracted and suggested that in certain circumstances terror be used against the employers and government. This was met with strong objections from workers with the leading Putilov worker Nikolai Ivanov denouncing terror under any circumstances. It is significant that following this, in the detailed police report on the activities of the workers' circles terror is never again mentioned and that from this time Bykovskii seems to have been removed from the propagandists involved with the workers' circles.²⁴

²² Iakovlev, 'Vospominaniia o V.I. Lenine i peterburgskom 'Soyuz bor'by', *V nachale puti*, 1975, p.360; A.P. Il'in, 'V.I. Ul'anov v rabochikh kruzhkakh Peterburga v epokhu 'Soiuz Bor'by za osvobozhdenie rabocheho klassa', *V nachale puti*, 1975, pp.368-369.

²³ Lenin himself mentioned these 'sessions' with Il'in in *What is to be Done?*, where in a footnote he recalled that in the winter of 1894-1895 'I spent many weeks "examining" a worker, who would often visit me, regarding every aspect of the conditions prevailing in the enormous factory at which he was employed [and] managed to obtain material for a description (of one single factory!), but at the end of the interview the worker would wipe the sweat from his brow, and say to me smilingly: 'I find it easier to work overtime than to answer your questions.' *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, [4th Edition], Moscow, 1961, p.491

²⁴ 'Doklad.....', 1921, pp.107-108.

In summer 1895, a group of leading workers including Shelgunov, Babushkin, Iakovlev, Zinov'ev, Karamyshev and Merkulov arranged a meeting with Chernyshev and Malishevskii from the 'Molodoi' group. Unbeknownst to the *intelligenty*, this meeting was designed to assess the views of the 'Molodoi' and their suitability to become circle propagandists. After the *intelligenty* had presented their views, the workers showing scant regard for the feelings of their interviewees proceeded to dissect their presentations. When Chernyshev asked whether they were being examined, Shelgunov calmly replied that of course they were, telling him that the workers needed to ensure that all propaganda was consistent with the approach laid down by the workers' organisation.²⁵ Despite this, the propaganda of the 'Molodoi,' particularly Malishevskii, proved unsatisfactory, and the latter was soon replaced by Ul'ianov [Lenin] as propagandist for a circle organised by Nikita Merkulov in the Nevskii Gate.²⁶

Similar 'monitoring' was carried out on propagandists from the *narodovol'tsy* group with one propagandist from this group, the future Bolshevik and Soviet functionary Lepeshinskii, recalling that he was allocated a circle that included the leading worker Vasili Antushevskii. Lepeshinskii left a description of Antushevskii's role in the circle that leaves little doubt as to the supervisory role of the advanced worker. Although a veteran of the workers' movement, Antushevskii was described as:

*a young man of around 22 years of age who dressed with certain panache, often in shirt with collar and cuffs, and in his appearance had the look of an intelligenty. In the circle he played a role not so much an object of the socialist process, but as a subject educating the rest of the circle. As a 'conscious' [worker], I, as the propagandist, merely supplemented him. In all probability he had been assigned.....to watch me carefully, to see if I was up to the task. He was also responsible for the organisational side of the circle: designating the times and venues for meetings and ensuring that members of the group assembled taking due care.*²⁷

The above examples indicate that leading workers continued to exercise a strict control on both individuals permitted to carry out propaganda and the content and nature of the

²⁵ V.A. Shelgunov, 'Vospominaniia,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.57 and 'Politicheskoe razmezhevanie rabochikh,' [1930], in *Avangard*, 1990, p.65; Korol'chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika....*, op.cit., 1940, p.185.

²⁶ 'Doklad....,' 1921, p.145.

²⁷ P.N. Lepeshinskii, *Na povorote*, Moscow, 1955, p. 29.

propaganda carried out in circles. This was one manifestation of the continued autonomy of the workers' organisation during this period, a period which witnessed a significant change of approach from propaganda to the beginnings of agitation on the basis of everyday needs of the mass of workers. It has been the convention to see this shift as marking a radical break, with the majority of leading workers opposing agitation and seeking to preserve a narrow focus of intensive study in small circles. Such discontinuity between propaganda and agitation however, is based on a mistaken interpretation of the nature of the workers' organisation, ignoring evidence of the role played by the *worker-intelligenty* as leading advocates of the change in approach and the agency through which agitation was taken directly into many factories.

The Beginnings of the Agitational Approach

Notwithstanding a continued commitment to intensive study, as leading workers regrouped during the second half of 1894, a growing sense of militancy based on a recognition that the workers' organisation needed to reflect the demands of the mass of workers in both metalworking and textile factories became discernible. Soon after the May arrests, the Putilov factory witnessed an audacious intervention by *kruzhkovtsy* in an industrial dispute. This episode is all the more significant in that it was planned and executed by two 'veterans' of the circle movement, Nikolai Ivanov who had led the workers' circles at the Putilov factory from 1891 and Egor Klimanov who had resumed work at the factory in autumn 1893 following a brief period of detention in summer 1893. During winter 1893-1894, members of the Ivanov circle responded to wage-cuts imposed on workers at the factory with agitation calling on workers to resist these reductions. In June 1894, management announced a wage reduction of 10% for workers in the steel rolling-mill, an announcement that was met with anger amongst workers. Klimanov, utilising this unrest, immediately began to mingle with workers outside the rolling-mill during lunch breaks and identifying a number of workers who were most vocal in their protests began to encourage them to take strike action. The workers were initially suspicious but, on discovering that Klimanov worked at the factory, agreed to meet him and were persuaded to try to get all the workers in the mill to stop work. Over the next three days, with Afanas'ev's advice and encouragement, they succeeded in bringing all the workers in the rolling-mills out on strike on 25th June. Management quickly capitulated and revoked the wage reduction, but

the workers' victory was won at a price; Klimanov was identified as the instigator of the strike and was re-arrested and removed from direct involvement in the circle movement.²⁸

In retrospect Klimanov's incitement of the Putilov strike marked the beginning of a transition to a more visible involvement by the workers' organisation in the struggles of Petersburg workers. Following Klimanov's example, the movement again began to emerge from the hidden recesses where from 1892 it had effectively concealed its presence from the gaze of both the authorities and the mass of workers. Shelgunov recalled a meeting in autumn 1894 of the leading workers' group with '*Stariki*' *intelligenty* at which the Vil'no pamphlet '*Ob agitatsii*', just beginning to circulate in Petersburg, was discussed. Shelgunov reveals that the workers were sympathetic to the approach of the pamphlet, even suggesting that agitation be contingent on the '*immediate economic needs*' of workers rather than the more general statement contained in the pamphlet concerning their 'economic needs'.²⁹ It is significant that opposition to '*Ob agitatsii*' came not from workers but from *intelligenty*, including Herman Krasin who, continuing the line adopted by social-democratic propagandists in the debates with the *narodovol'tsy*, argued that it was premature to adopt agitation amongst the mass of workers. Several sources also record Radchenko's hostility to agitation during 1894-1895. Radchenko's position was that social-democrats should not waste their talents on '*struggles for boiling water*' [for workers' tea] and that agitation would only lead to destruction of both social-democratic and workers' organisations.³⁰ A second meeting between the *intelligenty* and leading workers was held in the apartment of Sil'vin and Vaneev in late 1894, this time involving Lenin, to seek agreement on agitation. Again the workers reiterated their support for agitation, a position endorsed by Lenin, but the '*Stariki*' as a group remained lukewarm to agitation right through to the autumn of 1895.³¹ All this is suggestive that during winter 1894-1895, leading workers were evolving a strategy based on the continued development of a cadre of *worker-intelligenty* alongside the beginnings of a more interventionist approach in the day-to-day lives of workers, with leading workers showing themselves prepared to advocate the immediate economic demands of the mass of workers.

Indeed, it is possible to argue that 1895 marks the beginning of a new phase in the Petersburg workers' organisation, a phase that over the next decade would witness leading

²⁸ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T.III, Ch.2*, p.642; V.V. Sviatlovskii, *Byloe*, 19221, p.172; Korol'chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika....*, 1940, p.174; M. Mitel'man et. al., 1939, pp.104-105.

²⁹ V.A. Shelgunov, 'Vospominaniia,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.57.

³⁰ M.A. Sil'vin, 1958, pp.90-91.

³¹ *Ibid.*

workers becoming directly involved in workers' struggles as in the 1896 textile strikes, the 1898 Defence of the 'Red House' at the barracks of the Maksvel factory, the Obukhov defence of May 1901, and culminating the mass labour protests leading up to Bloody Sunday and the 1905 Revolution. Whilst these latter developments remain outwith the scope of this study, we will argue that 1895 represents the beginning of a fusion of a specifically *worker-intelligenty* with a mass workers' movement, an aspiration that leading workers had been preparing for almost a decade through circle activity. This development should not be viewed as a radical break with the preceding period of the *kruzhkovshchina* but as its natural evolution, the denouement of self-education circles being achieved by workers themselves who were amongst the first to recognise the imperative of changing their tactics and approach to the mass workers' movement.



The Nevskii-Semiannikov Factory, c 1900

The need for a change in approach was reinforced by two outbreaks of industrial unrest in Petersburg at the end of 1894 and early 1895. At Christmas 1894, major discontent broke out at the Semiannikov factory where leading Petersburg workers had a significant presence. The disturbances involving the late payment of wages by management, a practice that had almost become institutionalised at the factory, took the leading workers by surprise and they played no part either in inciting the disturbances or directing them once they got underway. The 'riot' bore the hallmarks of a spontaneous '*bunt*', with workers lashing out violently, targeting objects of particular hatred, the factory shop and

setting fire to the residence of the plant manager.³² In the aftermath of the riot, Babushkin working with the *'Stariki'* organised the publication of a leaflet addressed to the Semiannikov workers. The leaflet was critical of *'educated'* workers at the factory where, despite continued outrages by management, the mass of workers were driven to resort to spontaneous acts of violence because *'educated workers had done nothing to ease the lot of workers resulting in the majority of workers being unable to conceive of any other method of struggle'* to challenge their oppressors.³³ The events at the Semiannikov factory brought home in the most graphic manner the lack of influence of leading workers on a mass workers' struggle.



Semiannikov Factory Shop

A few weeks later, workers at the New Admiralty shipyards stopped work for a week over an increase in the length of the working day, arbitrarily decreed by the yard's director Admiral Verkhovskii. On this occasion, there was a degree of intervention in the dispute by leading workers in the Shipyards with the strike showing a marked degree of organisation. On Monday, 6th February, workers were instructed that with immediate effect work would commence at 6:30 am, instead of 7:00 am as previously. On 7th February, around 100 workers ignoring this dictat arrived for work at the usual time of 7:00 am to discover they had been locked out. Being refused admission, they broke down

³² On the Semiannikov *'bunt'* and its aftermath, see *Raboochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T.III, Ch.2*, pp.542-544, plus eye-witness accounts from Ivan Babushkin, 1957, pp.68-74 and *'Peterburzhets'* [Konstantin Takhtarev], 1902, pp.12-14.

³³ S.N. Valk [ed.], *Listovki Peterburgskogo 'Soiuzs borby za osvobodzhenie rabocheho klassa' 1895-1897*, Moscow, 1934, pp.1-6.

the Gates and proceeded in an organised manner to visit various workshops persuading their workmates to stop work and by mid-morning the yard was at a standstill.³⁴ Thereafter, in contrast with events at the Semiannikov factory, the shipyard workers behaved in an orderly manner, presenting their demands in a coherent written manner to the authorities. On the arrival of the police, the strikers were declared ‘rebels’ but in response the workers were neither coerced in returning to work nor provoked into violence. A spokesman for the strikers emerged from the crowd and set out in a calm and dignified manner the workers’ grievances. When the police attempted to seize him, other workers quickly surrounded him enabling him to escape. On 9th February, a typewritten leaflet entitled ‘*Chego sleduet dobivat’sia portovym rabochim*’ circulated amongst strikers being distributed by, amongst others, a senior skilled worker with many years service.³⁵ The leaflet had again been published by the ‘*Stariki*’ group that had links with workers’ circle at the Shipyards, with Lenin, amongst others, conducting propaganda in a circle of workers at the yard from autumn 1894.³⁶

By the end of the week, management conceded the workers’ demands and the increase in working hours was rescinded. This victory achieved through a disciplined approach resonated amongst advanced workers across the capital and provided a model for future agitation, a model based on acting on immediate grievances of workers, setting out demands in a concise way through leaflets addressed to striking workers, and maintaining a peaceful and disciplined approach in the face of police provocations. Takhtarev who was a close observer of the dispute was in no doubt that the strike was organised by workers:

*It was evident that some people were guiding the movement. The workers standing for up to an hour outside the workshops demanding concessions slowly returned to their homes only at the whistle to stop work. On Wednesday it was the same story. On Thursday the management itself ordered the cessation of work on the pretext of the upcoming religious holiday of Lent and announced that on the resumption of work the old conditions would apply.*³⁷

This lesson was not lost on workers and during the remainder of 1895 they sought to refine and develop this approach. What is important is that this approach in practice developed amongst workers, initially in the dispute at the New Admiralty but subsequently adopted

³⁴ ‘Letuchii Listok, No. 23,’ 1895 in *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. IV, 1*, pp.11-12.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p.5.

³⁶ *Ibid*, pp.2-4.

³⁷ ‘Peterburzhets’ [Takhtarev], London, 1902, p.15.

by leading workers at the Putilov factory and then in concert with the ‘*stariki*’ applied on a mass scale at the Thornton textile and other factories at the end of the year.

The Workers Embrace Agitation



Boris Zinov'ev

The shift in the balance between theoretical study to prepare an elite *worker-intelligenty* and a more activist and interventionist approach towards inciting the mass struggle of workers was particularly discernible amongst groups of younger recruits into the worker's organisation, perhaps best exemplified by the young Putilov worker Boris Zinov'ev. In many respects Zinov'ev's early years shared many common characteristics with Norinskii. Just two years younger than Norinskii, Zinov'ev was born and brought up in Petersburg, his father an industrial worker at the Putilov factory where the young Zinov'ev attended the factory's industrial school, graduating to begin work as an apprentice lathe operator in the machine workshop of the factory in 1892. Zinov'ev also shared with Norinskii an almost unquenchable thirst for knowledge, avidly reading from a young age adventure novels by authors such as Fenimore Cooper, Lermontov's poetry, before moving on to tackle 'heavy' historical and philosophical works including Louis Blanc's *History of the French Revolution* and Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.³⁸ An *intelligenty*-propagandist who knew Zinov'ev noted with obvious appreciation that he was a '*townsman by birth*'

³⁸ M. Mitel'man, et.al, 1939, pp.107-108.

who was fully literate, had completed school, regularly reading newspapers and journals and able to hold his own in conversations with *intelligenty*.³⁹ By the age of 20 when he became involved in revolutionary workers' circles, Zinov'ev was already a well developed *worker-intelligenty* whose knowledge and understanding of complex philosophical texts astonished radical *intelligenty* who came into contact with him. Martov related how Zinov'ev would devour any socialist theoretical work he could find and was amazed at his degree of comprehension of 'difficult' texts such as Marx's *Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Right* and how he could deploy theory in debates with *Narodniki*.⁴⁰

Whilst Zinov'ev conceded nothing to earlier worker radicals in his intellectual development, his political involvement in workers' circles was characterised from its inception with a strong desire to involve the mass of workers. During the police investigation into social-democratic activities during 1894-95, Zinov'ev told the authorities that after reading Plekhanov's account of the struggles of Petersburg workers in the 1870s he was inspired to spread revolutionary ideas amongst '*the largest possible number of workers.*'⁴¹ By the stage he read Plekhanov's work on his Petersburg worker-revolutionary forebears, Zinov'ev had been recruited into workers' circles at the Putilov factory by Nikolai Ivanov, a close associate of Klimanov during the latter's period of work at the factory. It is not known whether Zinov'ev encountered Klimanov, who had been arrested in July 1894, but irrespective by autumn 1894 Zinov'ev was involved in the expanding circle movement across the Narvskii Gate.⁴² By spring 1895, he was the effective leader of the workers' movement in the district, not only organising a network of circles but increasingly intervening in the day-to-day life at the Putilov factory. Martov recalled that Zinov'ev was a '*born agitator*' showing a burning desire '*to engage in active struggles along with the masses and excited by opportunities to raise the masses into the broad arena of class struggle,*' whilst Sil'vin referred to Zinov'ev and his fellow *Putilovtsy* Petr Karamyshev as '*outstanding worker propagandists who were amongst the first worker-agitators.*'⁴³

Zinov'ev's ardent advocacy of agitation involved him in conflicts with more cautious spirits in the workers' organisation who argued for a continuation of the approach favoured by Norinskii and Fisher with a concentration on intensive circle study. Indeed, Zinov'ev

³⁹ M.A. Sil'vin, 1958, p.92.

⁴⁰ Iu.O. Martov, 2004, p.185.

⁴¹ 'Doklad....,' 1921, p.131.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Iu.O. Martov, 2004, p.184; M.A. Sil'vin, 1958, p.83.

became particularly zealous in support of agitation, Sil'vin relating that he was dismissive of the previous focus on almost exclusively propaganda, ridiculing some more cautious workers 'with their sermons on the slow and gradual accumulation of developed individuals.' Sil'vin continued that Zinov'ev 'stood for open agitation and engaged in it wherever [he] could, in factories, in taverns, in the streets, the rooms of workers and in factory barracks.'⁴⁴ After his arrest, Zinov'ev told the police that he argued within the workers' organisation that workers' circles on their own had no 'revolutionary benefit' as they did not reflect the mass struggles of workers and that the leading workers must focus on agitation amongst the masses, taking advantage of every conflict with factory owners, adding significantly that 'I had in mind that we, the most intelligent workers would stand at the head of the movement.'⁴⁵ In stating that the *worker-intelligenty* would lead a mass workers' movement, Zinov'ev was in his own way restating the fundamental premise that had guided the leading Petersburg workers from the late 1880s. Indeed, it is possible to hear in such an unambiguous statement of the relationship between leading workers and the mass of factory workers a definite echo of the *zavodskie* worker-revolutionaries of the 1870s who, mediated through Plekhanov, were a seminal influence on the ideas and activities of the young Zinov'ev. Zinoviev's assertion that 'the most-intelligent' workers were the natural leaders of the mass working-class movement also challenges the standard Soviet view of this young worker as a protégé of Lenin, almost appearing as a puppet in the hand of his *intelligenty*-master, carrying out *intelligenty* instructions to incite the mass of workers.⁴⁶ As we shall have occasion to observe, Zinov'ev and the other worker advocates of agitation came to their own realisation of the agitational approach independently and in advance of the 'Stariki' *intelligenty*, generally applying it on their own initiative and frequently dragging a reluctant *intelligenty* in their wake.

Zinov'ev was arrested on the night of 8/9th December 1895 along with many other leading workers and *intelligenty*-propagandists from the 'Stariki' group. Whilst held in the House of Preventive Detention in Petersburg for fourteen months, until exiled to Tver' in February 1897, Zinov'ev wrote a series of letters to his family revealing a more intimate side of a worker-revolutionary and showing aspects that are often absent in memoir accounts and official police documents. In the aftermath of his arrest, Zinov'ev wrote to his widowed mother on 21st December in almost desperate terms enquiring why she had not responded to his two previous letters but eschewing any sense of self-pity telling her

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.92.

⁴⁵ 'Doklad...', 1921, p.139

⁴⁶ See Mitel'man et.al., 1939, for such a view of Zinov'ev.

not to bring anything to him in prison, that all he wants is a letter from her. Yet, in the same letter in a post-script to his sister Olga, he demonstrates his thirst for knowledge asking that she bring him a copy of a physics text-book and some paper to make notes. In a later letter, he asks Olga to bring Beltov's [Plekhanov's] *The Development of the Monist View of History*, novels by Dostoevskii, and copies of the journal *Russkoe bogatstvo*, adding somewhat ironically that he will now have time to read such works.⁴⁷ Apart from books he insisted to his mother and family not to bring anything to him in prison as he was in 'a better position' than they are as he gets regular food and is warm, seeking to reassure his family again with a degree of irony that he almost welcomes being in prison as he is now 'resting' after nine years hard work at industrial school and factory.⁴⁸

On 12 January 1896, Zinov'ev writes again to his mother a heart-felt letter for her to remember him for what he is, as a small consolation for losing her son to the revolution and imprisonment. Obviously responding to a conversation with his mother during a recent prison visit, Zinov'ev tells her not to be ashamed of him or allow the 'cold and gnashing teeth' of people with prejudiced views about him affect her. Continuing, he tells her 'you cannot please everyone' and so long as she believes in her son she should not worry about other people's opinions. Zinov'ev conveys a fatalistic acceptance of imprisonment that was common to many worker-revolutionaries, 'prison must necessarily be endured', along with a determined refusal to accept that he has done anything that he should be ashamed of, asking 'where will I seek forgiveness when I am aware that I have only acted as I should have done, when I weighed every step?'⁴⁹ Whilst admitting that he may have 'made mistakes' in his revolutionary activities resulting in his current predicament, Zinov'ev emphasises that without taking risks nothing will be accomplished and, returning to his core message, repeats that he does not feel he could have acted otherwise given his beliefs, although he admits to feeling 'moral anguish' for his family's suffering. Zinov'ev considers that his time in prison allows him a much needed space for reflection:

*My stay here reminds me of a familiar feeling, as when you go on to a new road and are very tired, when you stop and stare back at the path behind. Such stops are useful to remember the path you have travelled and reach new understandings that you will be able to use on the road ahead.*⁵⁰

⁴⁷ B I Zinov'ev, 'Pis'ma podnym is tiur'my,' *Avangard*, 1990, p.110.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.107.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.108.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.109.

Zinov'ev's prison letters also reveal a number of interesting insights into the mentalities of skilled *zavodskie* workers. In the absence of his father, Zinov'ev shows that he takes his responsibility as the eldest son seriously both in terms of giving guidance to younger siblings but also seeking to ensure that his sister Olga receives wages he is due from the Putilov factory, advising her where to go and who to speak to to get several weeks earnings owed to him at the time of his arrest.⁵¹ Responding to news in a letter from his sister that his younger brother Shurka had started work in a factory, Zinov'ev offers him some brotherly advice that he should not over-exert himself, reminding him that he '*has to work for a century!*' After this gentle advice, Zinov'ev changes emphasis and tells his brother that he is not happy with the job he has taken in the factory, chiding him that '*drilling holes is very difficult, I know, you will learn nothing on locomotive tender assembly. Hurry up and get transferred to a lathe.*'⁵² Here Zinov'ev here reveals his continued adherence to the hierarchy of skills within the metalworking factory. As a lathe operator, Zinov'ev clearly saw this as one of the 'privileged' skills and hence his 'distress' that his brother had taken an 'inferior' job that he needed to escape from as soon as possible, telling him not to procrastinate and get himself a skilled occupation. Sending a message to another younger brother, Sergei, Zinov'ev reflects the importance attached by advanced workers to the acquisition of a good education advising his obviously somewhat errant younger brother that he must keep up with his studies and not 'fall behind' and in a later letter chiding him when he learns from his sister that he has not been studying – '*have you no shame?*'

Following his exiling to Tver', Zinov'ev soon became involved in local workers' social-democratic groups and was rearrested in 1899 for his involvement in the establishment of an illegal printing press. In prison he was badly abused and died shortly after in February 1900. Zinov'ev's brief involvement in the workers' revolutionary movement is significant as he represented one of the first active social-democratic workers to wholeheartedly embrace and put into practice the tactic of mass agitation during the evolution of a tendency within the workers' organisation to move beyond study circles characteristic of the movement up to 1894 and become directly involved in the struggles of the mass of workers.

⁵¹ Ibid, p.111.

⁵² Ibid.

A significant moment in the development of this more interventionist approach exemplified by Zinov'ev occurred in March-April 1895 when two meetings of the workers' organisation took place. These meetings symbolise both the continuity within the workers' organisation with earlier phases as well as marking a definite transition to a new more active phase in the movement's history personified by the emergence of a younger leadership cohort. Conscious of the importance of the decisions that they were about to take, the CWC arranged for one of the most eminent leaders of the early CWC, Nikolai Bogdanov, to visit Petersburg illegally from his exile in Voronezh to participate in these discussions. During the police investigation, it was discovered that in early 1895 Fedosia Donstova [Norinskii's wife] received regular visits from Shelgunov and other CWC members at her room on the Fontanke as part of a plan involving the imminent arrival in the capital of the former CWC secretary Nikolai Bogdanov. It was not coincidental that Dontsova was taken into the confidence of the CWC concerning Bogdanov's visit as she was one of the orphans from the State Orphanage recruited into the movement by Bogdanov and Vera Karelina at the beginning of the 1890s. Norinskaia was asked by Shelgunov to collect money to support Bogdanov during his stay in the capital. Following Bogdanov's arrival in early March, Shelgunov arranged for him to attend the meeting of the CWC held in Iakovlev's room on 5th March.⁵³ An initial police report into social-democratic activities in 1895 leaves no doubt that this was a defining meeting in the life of the CWC.

*From several meetings in Iakovlev's room, the one that occurred on 5th March merits particular attention. At this meeting at which Nikolai Bogdanov who had temporarily returned to Petersburg took part, the 'ustav' drafted by Nikolai Ivanov for a workers' mutual-aid fund was adopted and Ivanov elected treasurer. Later the worker Antushevskii read a printed narodovol'tsy pamphlet calling on the workers to wage a struggle with government in order to win political freedoms.*⁵⁴

Although not specified, it is probable that the pamphlet read by Antushevskii was Keizer's 'Brat'sy-tovarishchii' published by the narodovol'tsy in 1893, which Antushevskii is known to have used in other workers' circles.⁵⁵ The police were also convinced that Bogdanov's presence at this meeting was not fortuitous and still considered him as an

⁵³ 'Doklad....,' 1921, p.110.

⁵⁴ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. IV, Ch. 1*, 1961, p.32.

⁵⁵ 'Doklad....,' 1921, p.142.

integral member of the CWC.⁵⁶ Bogdanov had maintained regular contact with the Petersburg workers' movement after his arrest in 1891 and continued to receive financial support on his return to Voronezh, channelled through Norinskaia.⁵⁷

The re-establishment of a central workers' fund marked an important step in the consolidation of the revived workers' organisation. At the time of his arrest in December 1895, Antushevskii was found in possession of a manuscript programme in his own handwriting which encouraged workers to become involved in struggles with capitalism through strikes and to look for every possible opportunity to carry out agitation in the workplace on the basis of the workers' everyday grievances. Appended to this statement was an '*ustav*' for a workers' fund designed to provide support to striking workers and obtain agitational materials for workers' libraries. In addition, in the notebook were the outlines of two speeches to workers which Antushevskii had prepared both emphasising the exploitation of workers by employers and the government's support for the latter, pointing out that the interests of the state and capitalists were identical as the Tsar as head of state owned many factories making him the largest capitalist of all and that workers must direct their struggle directly against him and the government.⁵⁸ Whilst it cannot be definitively proved that the materials discovered on Antushevskii at the time of his arrest related to the meeting of 5th March they do provide an insight into the views of the workers' organisation during 1895, providing compelling evidence of an increasing willingness for leading workers to incite militant industrial action.

At the end of April, the CWC held a second meeting, reconvening to elect a new treasurer for the central workers' fund as Ivanov was temporarily leaving Petersburg. In his place, the CWC selected Zinov'ev as treasurer and the main liaison between the workers' centre and the *narodovol'tsy* group at the Glazovskaia School which was the main source of literature for the workers' circles.⁵⁹ The choice of Zinov'ev signals a generational change and is another indication that the more activist orientation represented by Zinov'ev was becoming increasingly influential within the CWC. Around this time, Takhtarev detected a perceptible shift amongst leading workers and a growing 'disenchantment' with purely study in circles based on an increasingly noticeable conviction that '*conscious workers must become more closely linked to the surrounding life [of workers], must actively relate*

⁵⁶ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. IV, Ch. 1*, 1961, p.30.

⁵⁷ 'Doklad....,' 1921, pp.110, 154.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.103.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.109; Korol'chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika....*, 1940, p.182.

to the needs and demands of the masses of workers and to the daily violations of their human rights [and] that they must participate in the life surrounding them.’⁶⁰ Such sentiment would crystallise in a short time into animosity in some sections of the workers’ movement with an exclusive focus on circle study with some workers openly declaring that circles only create ‘*intellectual Epicureans*’ and that they needed to be replaced with groups of activist workers who, following the example of Polish workers, would openly distribute agitational materials in the factories and incite workers to take strike action.⁶¹ The more interventionist approach championed by Zinov’ev did cause disquiet amongst a section of ‘older’ circle members. Sil’vin recalls that in early 1895 agitational tactics resulted in a number of the older workers leaving the movement to be replaced by new recruits who enthusiastically embraced agitation.

A number of meetings were arranged during summer/autumn of 1895 to discuss the agitational approach, the first of which in May involved a large meeting of worker representatives in the Udel’nyi woods on the Petersburg Side to which a few *intelligent* representatives from both the ‘*Stariki*’ and the *narodovol’tsy* were invited.⁶² The police agent Mikhailov recounted to the police a discussion he had at this time with Ivan Keizer who had been released from detention and resumed his revolutionary activities. Keizer told Mikhailov that workers were dissatisfied with the *Stariki*’s’ approach and had convened a meeting on the Petersburg Side involving around 40 workers and a number of *intelligent*-propagandists at which the workers decided to look for ways to incite workers to strike.⁶³ There is little doubt that Keizer was referring to the meeting held in the Udel’nyi woods described by Sil’vin.

A similar meeting took place in August 1895 involving only workers when Babushkin, Shelgunov, Keizer, Iakovlev, Kniazev, Zinov’ev, Karamyshev, Poletaev and other workers met to discuss future circle activities.⁶⁴ Babushkin left an account of this meeting, recalling heated exchanges on the future course of the movement and although there appears to have been a consensus that purely study circles were no longer sufficient and that broad engagement with the masses was necessary, how and when this was to be carried out remained a subject of some contention. According to Babushkin, Zinov’ev and Karamyshev ‘*attacked all and sundry, condemning everything and reproaching workers*

⁶⁰ ‘Peterburzhets’ [Takhtarev], 1902, pp.15-16.

⁶¹ Ibid, p.16.

⁶² M.A. Sil’vin, 1958, pp.91-92; ‘Doklad....’, 1921, p.95.

⁶³ Ibid, pp.138-139.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.138.

for being indifferent to new ideas.’⁶⁵ There is no doubt that this transition was painful and caused much heart-searching and conflicts of the type described by Babushkin. But reservations by workers such as Babushkin notwithstanding there is convincing evidence that by summer 1895 *kruzhkovtsy* were increasingly seeking opportunities to intervene in disputes between workers and management and were increasingly acting as agitators in the manner advocated by Zinov’ev.

Indeed, Zinov’ev’s support for agitation was not mere rhetoric and supported by a group of other young *Putilovtsy* he began a programme of intervention in and around the Putilov factory. According to Martov, Zinov’ev and his close associate Petr Karamyshev represented the soul of the revolutionary work in the Narvskii Gate and despite their youth were distinguished by political awareness and tactical understanding. By early 1895 Zinov’ev and Karmyshev had organised their own circles around the Putilov factory. During investigation, Zinov’ev admitted that in early 1895 he formed four separate circles in the Narvskii Gate. Zinov’ev’s and Karamyshev’s apartment became the headquarters of the workers’ movement in the area, frequented by many leading workers. Several workers investigated in connection with social-democratic activities provided statements that gave a flavour of Zinov’ev’s approach with one worker indicating that Zinov’ev and Karamyshev told workers that there would soon be an uprising by factory workers against their capitalist bosses and that workers from various factories across the city were uniting to co-ordinate this. They also stressed to workers in their circles that they should point out to them any ‘promising’ workers in the factory so that they could induct them into circles.⁶⁶

The two young *Putilovtsy* quickly made the transition from propaganda in circles to involvement in the affairs of the factory. One of the first opportunities to influence the mass of Putilov workers came in spring 1895 when Zinov’ev and Karamyshev led worker-discontent over the management sponsored consumer society operating the unpopular factory store that sold poor food at inflated prices. Despite being obligated to use the store, comparatively few workers [less than 1000 out of a workforce of around 7000 by the mid 1890s] held shares in the society due to their prohibitive cost and since only shareholders could be elected to the society’s board it was dominated by managerial staff. Some skilled and long-standing workers were shareholders and entitled to vote in elections for a new board scheduled for spring 1895. Taking up complaints about the shop and corruption

⁶⁵ *Recollections of Ivan Vasilyevich Babushkin*, Moscow, 1957, pp.78-79.

⁶⁶ ‘Doklad.....’ 1921, p.133.

within the society, Zinov'ev and Karamyshev led an active campaign against the society that won respect amongst workers. At the shareholders meeting, worker-shareholders criticised management and recounted the workers' complaints concerning the shop. A number of reforms were voted through and several workers were elected to the board.⁶⁷ Although the workers' triumph was short-lived, a few days later management threatened the newly-elected deputies with dismissal unless they resigned from the Board, the campaign raised the profile of the workers' organisation across the factory, revealing circle workers in a semi-public arena as defenders of the interests of the mass of workers, a stance that for the first time legitimised the actions of radical workers in the eyes of many workers. Martov commented that this '*experiment in worker participation*' demonstrated how imaginative Zinov'ev and Karamyshev were in involving the mass of workers in organised struggle.⁶⁸

Shortly after this Zinov'ev and Karamyshev became involved in an industrial dispute at the factory when management announced further wage reductions. Taking advantage of unrest in the rolling-mills, the *kruzhkovtsy*, emulating Klimanov the previous summer, began agitation in this section of the plant. On one occasion, a senior French manager in the rolling-mills discovered Zinov'ev inciting workers to strike. Challenging Zinov'ev and telling him to leave, the manager was astounded when Zinov'ev told him in effect to mind his own business and proceeded to talk with the workers.⁶⁹ After several days of such agitation in the rolling-mill, the workers came out on strike in mid-June. A police report singled out the role of the two young workers in this strike:

In June, learning of unrest amongst workers in the steel rolling workshop of the Putilov factory caused by a reduction in earnings, Zinov'ev and Karamyshev visited the workshop over a period of two weeks with the aim of carrying out agitation inciting workers to insist on their demand [that there should be no reductions]. Influenced by this agitation the workers went on strike....⁷⁰

As in the previous year, the proposed wage reduction was hastily withdrawn but, alarmed at the militancy of workers, management and police identified a number of 'troublemakers' who were exiled from the capital. Zinov'ev was also arrested but suspecting that the

⁶⁷ Iu.O. Martov, 2004, p.185; M. Mitel'man et.al., 1939, p.109.

⁶⁸ Iu.O. Martov, 2004, p.185; Korol'chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika...*, 1940, p.194.

⁶⁹ M. Mitel'man et.al., 1939, pp.109-110.

⁷⁰ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T.IV, Ch.I*, pp.34-35.

police would detain him up he transferred to another member of the circle revolutionary publications including copies of *The Communist manifesto*, 'Kto chem zhivet', and the *narodovol'tsy* journal *Letuchii listok*. In view of the lack of direct evidence, Zinov'ev was soon released to continue his revolutionary activities.⁷¹

No doubt the practical successes of the young Putilovtsty influenced the CWC to adopt more interventionist approaches. By late summer 1895, the workers' organisation had evolved a synthesis that achieved a balance between propaganda and agitation. Takhtarev described the final resolution of these two tactical approaches in the following way:

*circles were preserved but tactics needed to adapt to meet urgent needs at any given time. It was necessary to begin agitation, gathering workers together from a number of adjacent factories as well as arranging meetings of representatives from various workers' regions. It was essential that these meetings discuss the general and the specific position of the workers' cause. It was necessary to distribute literature in as large a quantity as possible. Circles remained but their significance changed. From now on their sole purpose was to act as a school for preparing conscious and educated agitators. Apart from this task circles had no other meaning. Agitators were needed for agitation; in order to produce agitators circles were required. This meant that circles must serve agitation.*⁷²

The timing of this final resolution of the balance between propaganda and agitation amongst leading workers is important, as it predates Lenin's return to Petersburg at the end of September 1895, a return that has been traditionally been seen as marking the beginning of the preparation for the 'Stariki's' agitational leafleting campaign targeting factories where the workers had gone on strike. It is clear from the chronology of workers' meetings from the preceding autumn and the Putilov interventions during 1895 that the workers' organisation had independently reached a position of supporting agitation and, contrary to conventional wisdom, were not reluctant guests at the consummation of the 'Stariki's' union with the mass struggles of workers.

Notwithstanding Lenin's support for agitation in late 1894, the 'Stariki' were the last of the *intelligenty* groups involved with the workers' movement to embrace agitation. Evidence of the leading workers frustration with the 'Stariki' over their tardiness in moving towards

⁷¹ 'Doklad....,' 1921, p.133; Korol'chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika....*, 1940, p.184.

⁷² 'Peterburzhets' [Takhtarev], 1902, p.17.

agitation can be found in descriptions of a meeting between leading workers including Shelgunov, Zinov'ev and Ivan Keizer with representatives of the '*Molodoi*' in August 1895. This meeting had been arranged by Keizer, who was now active in organising circles in Kolpine and where he had contact with '*Molodoi*' propagandists who indicated that they were prepared to 'bankroll' circles in the capital in return to being allowed to act as propagandists. As the '*Molodoi*' were convinced adherents of agitation, their leader Chernyshev sought to discover the workers' attitude to this and received assurances that the workers viewed agitation as entirely compatible with propaganda in the manner described by Takhtarev above. From Chernyshev's comments at this and other meetings, it is clear that the '*Molodoi*' held deep-seated grievances against the '*Stariki*' who they claimed were '*intriguing*' against them and slandering them amongst workers to prevent their involvement in circle work. It is no coincidence that shortly after this meeting, Shelgunov arranged for the 'trial' to assess the suitability of '*Molodoi*' propagandists mentioned above and that a number of circles were allocated to representatives from Chernyshev's group.⁷³ From Zinov'ev's account of this meeting it is evident that the '*Molodoi*' were critical of the '*Stariki*'s' continued emphasis on 'pure' propaganda and that in contrast to this stated their willingness to operate in a more agitational manner, an approach entirely consistent with the CWC's position by summer 1895. The willingness of the CWC to include '*Molodoi*' propagandists in its circles for the first time on the basis a more 'revolutionary' approach is indicative of the workers increasing distance from the '*Stariki*' who, in Lenin's absence abroad, remained wedded to more traditional propaganda based on in depth study of certain topics.

The '*Stariki*'s' adherence to less confrontational approaches was also confirmed by Martov in his description of negotiations held in October 1895 to merge his group with the '*Stariki*'. During the discussions, Martov found a '*kind of inertia*' amongst many '*Stariki*' that prevented them from breaking with narrow propaganda.⁷⁴ Indeed, it is probable that it was only the return of Lenin from abroad at the end of September 1895 and the introduction of the more activist approach of Martov that tipped the balance of the '*Stariki*' towards agitation. Martov, as a co-author of the '*Ob agitatsii*,' insisted that his agreement to join the '*Stariki*' was conditional on the group adopting this approach.⁷⁵ In the final months of 1895, the '*Stariki*' following the merger with Martov's group, embraced

⁷³ 'Doklad....,' 1921, p.138; V.A. Shelgunov, 'Vospominaniia,' *Ot gruppy Blagoeva.....*, 1921, p.57; Korol'chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika.....*, 1940, p.185.

⁷⁴ Iu.O. Martov, 2004, pp.172-173.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, pp.172-173; B.I. Gorev, *Iz partiinogo proshlogo. Vospominaniia 1895-1905*, Leningrad, 1924, pp.14-15; M.A. Sil'vin, 1958, p.102.

agitation and embarked on a campaign of supporting unrest in a number of specific factories. This conversion of the ‘*Stariki*’ was a reflection of both the leadership role of Lenin and Martov as well as the increasing pressure from leading workers that propaganda and agitational activities be combined in the manner that they had agreed at their summer meetings.

Workers Retain an Independent Focus

Before exploring the role of leading workers in the agitational campaign that culminated in the formation of the Petersburg Union of Struggle in mid-December 1895, it is necessary to consider the organisational structure agreed by the ‘*Stariki*’ in late October and how this related to the workers’ organisation. From the outset it should be recognised that workers were explicitly excluded in the organisational structures put in place by the ‘*Stariki*.’ As Martov testified, the enhanced ‘*Stariki*’ group, despite his protestations, consciously opted for an exclusively *intelligenty* organisation, refusing to admit workers on spurious grounds, such as their difficulty in attending meetings, concerns over susceptibility of workers to being police informants [despite evidence that informants were more likely to be recruited from the *intelligenty*] and their alleged adherence to propaganda.⁷⁶ It is probable that one unstated reason for the exclusion was that for many ‘*Stariki*’ schooled in the Radchenko ultra-conspiratorial model the thought of introducing independently-minded workers who had consistently demonstrated their unwillingness to follow the dictats of the *intelligenty* represented a challenge to their authority that they were not willing to countenance.

From the workers’ perspective, they also had no good reason to affiliate to only one of a number of competing *intelligenty*-groups, preferring to retain their independence. In their collective minds they adhered to Tochisskii’s dictum that the cause of workers’ liberation should be a matter for workers themselves and that *intelligenty*-groups should serve them and do their bidding and not vice versa. Such an approach is confirmed by Shelgunov who as a good Leninist could write in 1921 that the workers’ organisation existed completely independently of the evolving Union of Struggle, continuing to view the role of the *intelligenty* as ‘*enlighteners*’ of workers and to operate autonomously.⁷⁷

Given this, it is not surprising that the organisational arrangements reflected the traditional ‘bicameral’ approach dating back to the 1870s with separate workers’ and *intelligenty*-

⁷⁶ Iu.O. Martov, 2004, p.177.

⁷⁷ V.A. Shelgunov, ‘Vospominaniia,’ *Ot gruppy Blagoeva*....., 1921, p.58.

centres linked through liaison arrangements at both central and regional levels.⁷⁸ What is clear from the accounts of Shelgunov, Martov and Sil'vin as well as the official police reports is that the 'Stariki' central group of Lenin, Martov, Krzhizhanovskii, and Starkov met regularly with the CWC members Shelgunov, Babushkin, Zinov'ev, Keizer, and Iakovlev during the final months of 1895. According to the police, the responsibilities of this joint meeting were to oversee propagandists across the city, agree the composition of agitational leaflets and manage 'an agitational fund.'⁷⁹

As with previous relationships between workers and *intelligenty*, the 'fund' proved to be contentious. For leading workers control over their fund was seen as an almost totemic symbol of autonomy and emblematic of their leadership of the workers' movement. It is no accident that workers' funds would prove to be a major fault line in future controversies over 'Economism.' As indicated above, the 'ustav' for a fund seized from Antushevskii at his arrest demonstrated that workers saw funds as an important organising mechanism, designed to encourage workers to engage in strikes as through it strikers and the families of arrested workers would receive financial aid. Workers therefore, considered it vital that the control over funds and prioritisation of expenditure remained firmly within their control and that the central fund comprising donations from local funds was the basis for uniting disparate groups of workers across the city. The militant nature of circle funds was explicitly recognised by the authorities. The police report on the arrests of 8/9th December stated that '*the aim of these [workers'] circles in addition to propaganda of revolutionary ideas was the preparation of 'militant workers' groups'. Each circle had its own fund comprising monthly dues paid by circle members intended to support workers during strikes and to assist workers and their families arrested during strikes. The funds were constructed from monthly dues from members of the circle.*'⁸⁰

This concept of workers' funds was at variance with the views of the 'Stariki' [particularly Lenin] and became a major issue of contention between the workers and the 'Stariki'. Towards the end of October, the 'stariki' propagandist Zaporozhets had been dismissive of strike funds at a meeting in Zinov'ev's room arguing that participation in funds left workers open to arrest and called on workers to collect money to give to the *intelligenty* to

⁷⁸ Both Martov and Sil'vin describe the organisation of the revised 'Stariki' group, although there are certain differences in relation to the composition of the central *intelligenty*-group and the number of regions into which the city was sub-divided [three in the case of Martov, four according to Sil'vin], Iu.O. Martov, 2004, pp.178-179; M.A. Sil'vin, 1958, p.104.

⁷⁹ *Rabochee dvzihenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T.IV, Ch.1*, p.37.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

obtain literature for circles.⁸¹ This proved to be the opening salvo in a major dispute that erupted at a liaison meeting held in early November involving ten of the most senior workers and the central ‘*Stariki*’ group. Takhtarev who also attended the meeting writing in 1902 left a record of the discussion that took place.

*At this meeting the issue of a common Petersburg workers’ fund was discussed.... This issue was raised by workers from the Nevskii Gate. They insisted on the organisation of a common independent militant workers’ fund and advocated its need by claiming that it would serve as a means for further unification of workers.... Representatives from the intelligenty group had a negative attitude to such a fund as a method of uniting workers, and countered with a view that all money should go to them for a social-democratic fund from which they would grant sums to members of local groups based on the needs of the region. Discussions on the fund did not reach a conclusion, every one held to their own opinions, but the group of Nevskii workers decided to set up their own regional fund.*⁸²

Takhtarev’s account is revealing as he indicates that it was the Nevskii Gate workers that raised the issue and proceeded to establish an independent regional fund. Delegates from the Nevskii region included Shelgunov, Babushkin, Merkulov, and Gribakov, not only some of the most experienced workers but also workers who later would become loyal Bolsheviks. That they clearly opposed Lenin in this matter and adopted what Soviet historians would later characterise as the ‘*opportunist*’ line advocated by Takhtarev is indicative of the extent to which control of funds by workers was a touchstone that defined their independence from the *intelligenty*. The dispute between workers and the ‘*Stariki*’ concerning funds remained unresolved, as a further meeting involving the more diplomatic Krzhizhanovskii and Starkov to mend fences with the Nevskii Gate workers on 2nd December, failed to change the workers’ opinion that they should be in control of their funds and use them for their own and not for *intelligenty* objectives.⁸³

The Final Acts – Mass Agitation and the Primacy of Politics

If an impasse was reached on workers’ funds, co-operation between leading workers and the ‘*Stariki*’ on agitation through leaflets targeting grievances of workers in specific

⁸¹ ‘Doklad....,’ 1921, p.133.

⁸² K.M. Takhtarev, *Ocherk peterskogo rabochego dvizheniia 90-kh godov*, 2nd edition Leningrad, 1921, p.28.

⁸³ ‘Doklad....,’ 1921, p.121.

factories proved an undoubted success, establishing a model for engagement with the mass of workers that would be developed during the mass Petersburg textile strikes of 1896. What should be stressed however, is that this approach depended heavily on the mediation of advanced workers and relied almost exclusively on information gathered by circle members and passed on to the ‘*Stariki*’ literary group consisting of Lenin, Krzhizhanovskii and Starkov. Again, the police report of 12th December highlighted the role of a workers’ ‘*Komitet*’ that had the task of assembling information on working conditions in factories, identifying workers’ grievances and providing this information to the *intelligenty* Literary Group for the production of leaflets aimed at a mass audience of workers.⁸⁴

The agitational campaign in the late autumn of 1895 was targeted towards unskilled workers in textile and non-metalworking factories. It has been the conventional wisdom that the advanced cadre of skilled metalworkers involved in workers’ circles treated the mass of unskilled textile workers who retained many customs of the rural environment with a mixture of contempt and hostility and shunned contact with them. Yet both official reports into the unrest of 1895 and worker memoirs indicate that there were important and on-going contacts between the two groups and that several eminent circle members including Fedor Afanas’ev, Petr Morozov and Vera Karelina were themselves textile workers. Whilst not wishing to minimise the gulf separating the two groups, indeed Fisher saw unskilled textile workers as almost a ‘*different race*’, it is important to recognise that leading workers sought to build bridges into the world of the textile workers. Fisher, the epitomé of the urbane and highly educated ‘*zavodskie*’ worker, recalled how he visited the barracks of the Thornton workers to propagandise *fabrichnye* workers. In order to merely to make contact with textile workers Fisher had ‘*to obtain a pass and explain the reason for our visit... to a ‘Cerberus’ who guarded the gates*’ and having negotiated his way past the guards, proceeded to talk with a group of workers about socialism.⁸⁵ In a similar way, Babushkin visited the Maksvel factory barracks to make contact with textile workers with the aim of engaging in propaganda amongst them. In a graphic account of his visit Babushkin described his shock and anger at living conditions of textile workers. The rural dress, the behaviour of the workers, the various conversations taking place in regional dialects all combined to create an impression of a large village deep in the heart of rural Russia. Feeling outrage at the squalor and ignorance, Babushkin determined to struggle ‘*to*

⁸⁴ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T.IV, Ch.1, p.37.*

⁸⁵ A. Fisher, *V Rossii i v Anglii*, Moscow, 1922, p.17.

bring enlightenment into these dark places'.⁸⁶ Petr Morozov established several circles amongst textile workers, including a circle at the Thornton factory that included workers who would later be active in the strike at the factory in November 1895.⁸⁷ Morozov's circles represented an important moment in the workers' organisation as it would be precisely through workers involved in them that Shelgunov, Merkulov and other leading Nevskii Gate workers obtained entry into the world of textile workers, building a network of contacts that would provide information on working conditions in the factory and a leadership cadre amongst the textile workers during the strike.



Courtyard of a Petersburg Textile Factory Barracks

Indeed, the Thornton strike was the first opportunity for the *'Stariki'* and the CWC to target an active agitational and leaflet campaign towards a mass of unskilled textile workers. Prior to the outbreak of the strike, there had been considerable unease amongst workers at the factory over reductions in piece-rates and increased rents for barrack accommodation. When management announced a further cut in piece-rates for weavers on 5th November it sparked uproar amongst the workforce. That evening, a leaflet produced on the basis of information provided by the workers' organisation was issued by the *'Stariki'* entitled *'Chego trebuiut tkachi?'* and distributed by members of the workers' circles around the factory and barracks.⁸⁸ Influenced by this leaflet and promises by members of the workers' organisation of financial support, on the next day [6th November]

⁸⁶ *Recollections of Ivan Vasilyevich Babushkin*, Moscow, 1957, pp.38-43.

⁸⁷ 'Doklad....,' 1921, pp.117 ff.

⁸⁸ K.M. Takhtarev, 1921, pp.23-24; the leaflet written by Krzhishanovskii is not extant but its contents are described in S.N. Valk, *Listovki Soiuza bor'by....*, 1934, p.135 and *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii. 1895-fevral' 1917, Khronika, Vyp. I*, Moscow 1992, p.137.

the majority of weavers refused to work.⁸⁹ In response, the authorities adopted a carrot and stick approach: during the night of 6/7th November, 13 alleged ringleaders of the strike were arrested, but the following day management announced the withdrawal of the proposed wage reduction. Workers agreed to return to work on condition their arrested comrades were released and, when they received assurances on this, they resumed work from the beginning of the night shift on 7th November. A few days after the conclusion of the strike, the ‘*Stariki*’ published a leaflet written by Lenin entitled ‘*K rabochim i rabotnitsam fabriki Torntona*’ that contained a wealth of information mostly gathered by leading workers from weavers at the factory.⁹⁰

A number of aspects of the Thornton strike support the view that the workers’ organisation played an active agitational role in it. For several years, the workers’ organisation had maintained regular contacts with workers at this factory, initially through Morozov and, after his arrest in 1894, through the members of a circle he had established at the factory that remained active to the end of 1895.⁹¹ The leaders of this circle were in regular contact with Shelgunov and Merkulov, receiving money from the former to rent apartments for circle work.⁹² At the beginning of October 1895, the skilled metalworker and circle organiser in the Nevskii Gate, Nikita Merkulov on Shelgunov’s instructions, moved into one of the rented rooms with a weaver from the Thornton circle [Sergei Afanas’ev] located next to the factory and where Shelgunov and Babushkin organised meetings of textile workers at which Hauptman’s play ‘*The Weavers*’ was read with the explicit aim of inciting workers to take strike action.⁹³ Merkulov’s involvement with Thornton workers should be viewed as part of a coherent strategy by the workers’ organisation, carried out well in advance of any *intelligently* involvement in the Thornton strike to consolidate existing contacts at textile factories in the Nevskii Gate, collect information on working and living conditions and agitate for a strike.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.99.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p.99; Korol’chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika.....*, 1940, p.191; *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. IV, Ch. 1*, pp. 13-18 provides a copy of a fairly detailed report from the Factory Inspectorate on the causes and the course of the Thornton dispute; Lenin’s leaflet is reproduced in *ibid*, pp.22-25.

⁹¹ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. IV, Ch. 1*, p.38; Korol’chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika.....*, 1940, p.191.,’ 1921, pp.117ff.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid, pp.121-123. Hauptman’s play, published in translation by the Petersburg narodovol’tsy in 1894, deals with a violent revolt of Silesian weavers in the 1840s and was clearly designed to inflame the passions of the textile workers to whom it was read. On the role of Hauptman’s play as a staple of revolutionary propaganda despite its obvious divergence from the view of workers as disciplined, class conscious proletarians; see Zelnik, ‘Weber into Tkachi. On a Russian Reading of Hauptmann’s *The Weavers*’, in Laura Engelstein and Stephanie Sandler, *Self and Story in Russian History*, Cornell 2000, pp.217-241.

During and after the strike, members of the workers' organisation also played an important organising role. The fact that the '*Stariki*' were able to issue a leaflet protesting the wage reduction on the very day it was announced is an indication of fast footwork on the part of Merkulov and his associates to convey information to the *intelligenty*, arrange for them to print a leaflet and then have it distributed the same evening around the factory. This could only have been accomplished through the effective co-ordination of the process by *worker-intelligenty* in the Nevskii Gate. On the evening of 7th November, Lenin and Starkov visited Merkulov's room and transferred 40 roubles to be distributed to families of arrested workers. This support was consistent with the leading workers' belief that the organisation needed to demonstrate its support to workers arrested during strikes and although this money was received from the *intelligenty* the gesture demonstrated to the strikers that the workers' organisation with whom they were in contact was able to support workers during strikes.⁹⁴



Thornton Textile Factory

As with earlier strikes at the New Admiralty and the Putilov factory, the Thornton strike was characterised by a high level of discipline and a refusal by strikers to engage in acts of violence either towards individuals or property. Even when the authorities mounted a provocation by arresting 13 strikers, the workers behaved in a peaceful manner and resolutely refused to return to work until they had received a guarantee that their colleagues would be released. All this suggests a degree of organisation in the strike from workers associated with the workers' organisation. In this sense, the Thornton strike differed from the strike at the Laferm Tobacco factory on Vasil'evskii Island a few days

⁹⁴ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. IV, Ch. 1*, p.38; Korol'chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika.....*, 1940, p.191.

later during which the ‘*Stariki*’ also issued a leaflet but here there was a total absence of involvement from the workers’ organisation and considerable destruction of property and subsequent violence visited upon the striking female workers by the police.⁹⁵

Following the weavers’ return to work at the Thornton factory, the workers’ organisation arranged for two strikers to attend a meeting with *intelligenty* on 8th November.⁹⁶ Although Soviet sources stress that Lenin paid special attention to these workers, Babushkin and other eye-witnesses tell a different story, indicating that the weavers refused to divulge any information to the *intelligenty* and how the leading workers had to gather the information and pass it to Lenin for his leaflet published a few days later detailing the onerous conditions at the Thornton factory.⁹⁷ Lenin and Starkov visited Merkulov on 12th November bringing large quantities of the leaflet to be distributed around the factory. Merkulov passed these to Shelgunov and the Thornton worker, Volynkin, a long standing member of the workers’ circles at the factory, and the leaflets were duly distributed the next day.⁹⁸

Martov’s account of the strike at the Thornton factory leaves little doubt that it was an affair, if not conceived directly by the workers’ organisation, then implemented and carried through largely under their influence.

The stormy strike that broke out at the Thornton factory almost immediately came under the influence of our organisation. Our metalworkers along the Shlissel’burg Highway had connections with the Thornton workers.... At the first news of workers’ discontent in response to a lowering of their pay-rates, information on general conditions of workers at the factory was quickly collected by members of the organisation [i.e the metalworkers] who gained access to the strongly supervised barracks of the Thornton workers. Thanks to timeously delivered advice and support [again from the metalworkers], the strikers resisted the factory management’s

⁹⁵ On the Laferm strike, see *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. IV, Ch. 1*, 1961, pp.18-21, 26; M.A. Sil’vin, 1958, pp.108-110; Korol’chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika....*, 1940, pp.192-193. From these accounts it is evident that leading workers did not contact the striking women at the Laferm factory and that all dealings with them took place with members of the ‘*stariki*’, particularly Sil’vin.

⁹⁶ This was the same meeting described above at which the disagreement over the nature and use of funds took place.

⁹⁷ *Vladimir Il’ich Lenin, Biograficheskaya Khronika. T. I. 1870-1905*, Moscow, 1970, pp.108-109; I.V. Babushkin, 1957, p.82. Lenin’s information on conditions at the Thornton factory was supplemented by Krupskaya who disguised as a worker managed to access the barracks and collect information that she passed to Lenin. N.K. Krupskaya, *Memories of Lenin*, 1970, p.26.

⁹⁸ ‘Doklad....’, 1921, pp.117 ff.

*strategy that attempted to deceive the dark masses and won the promise of concessions.*⁹⁹

It is worth emphasising that in his 1921 account, when Takhtarev could mention names of workers involved without fear of reprisals from the authorities, he characterised these ‘*social-democratic metalworkers*’ of the Nevskii Gate involved with Shelgunov as operating with ‘*a significant degree of autonomy*’. Another group of workers from the same region who also co-operated with Shelgunov’s group eschewed entirely contact with *intelligenty*, a preference which earned them the nickname of the ‘*dikikh*’ [the wild].¹⁰⁰ All this points to the existence in the Nevskii Gate at the time of the Thornton strike of an active section of the workers’ organisation that, on the basis of contacts and knowledge of the world of the textile workers, was able to intervene in industrial conflicts between workers and employers. Through such a planned intervention in a strike that has assumed totemic status as marking the transition from propaganda to agitation, the ‘*Shlissel’burg metalworkers*’ demonstrated that the members of the workers’ organisation were more than prepared not just to support mass struggles of unskilled workers but were willing to direct and lead them. In the few brief weeks that the leaders of the CWC were to remain at liberty they indicated a growing boldness to demonstrate this willingness.

The impact of the Thornton strike was immediate and widespread, workers at the Laferm tobacco factory striking a few days later in protest at the introduction of new machinery that resulted in loss of earnings.¹⁰¹ In mid-November the workers at the Skorokhod Shoe Factory in the Narvskii Gate stopped work following deductions from their wages and an increase in rejected products by their supervisors. A leaflet written by the ‘*Starik*’ Zaporozhets on this occasion was based on information gathered by workers from the Putilov circle who also distributed it to striking workers.¹⁰² Shortly after this, Putilov workers aware of unrest at the nearby Kenig textile works invited workers from this factory to a meeting in Zinov’ev’s room. When Martov arrived at the meeting, he found himself the recipient of information on the Kenig workers’ grievances that the workers demanded be made into a leaflet for distribution at the factory. Whilst Martov agreed to this, the Kenig workers indicated that they were afraid of being victimised if they distributed it, as they were already considered as troublemakers. Initially Martov and

⁹⁹ Iu.O. Martov, 2004, p.180.

¹⁰⁰ K.M. Takhtarev, 1921, pp.17-18.

¹⁰¹ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. IV, Ch. 1*, p.26.

¹⁰² Korol’chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika...*, 1940, pp.193-194; *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii. 1895-fevral’ 1917. Khronika, Vyp. I*, Moscow 1992, p.101, 137; M. Mitel’man et.al., 1939, p.113.

Zaporozhets attempted to paste leaflets on the walls of the factory barracks, but they were ineffective as they were quickly removed by *dvorniki* and policemen. It was the *Putilovtsy* who on their own initiative eventually took control and ingeniously Zinov'ev and Karamyshev arranged to distribute them at the end of the day-shift, Karamyshev creating a diversion to draw the attention of factory guards whilst Zinov'ev scattered the leaflets amongst the departing workers.¹⁰³

It was also the *Putilovtsy* circle that broke new ground when at a circle meeting on 4th December, Zinov'ev presented Martov and Starkov with the text for a leaflet addressed to the workers in the Putilov locomotive workshop who had just suffered a wage reduction. Not only was this leaflet written by Zinov'ev, Martov was virtually instructed by him to get it printed immediately and that the workers would collect it the same evening and arrange its distribution to the workers the next day. As a result, Putilov workers in the locomotive workshop and the copper-plating shop stopped work demanding that wage reductions be rescinded. Zinov'ev's leaflet explicitly linked current struggles of workers with previous strikes at the factory, particularly a strike in 1885, when workers had successfully challenged wage reductions and the more recent examples of the 1894 and 1895 strikes in the steel rolling-mills. This was clearly an attempt to legitimise a tradition of struggle at the factory and to convince workers that they could successfully resist employers. Not content with this, Zinov'ev proposed to issue a leaflet to workers throughout the factory, but his plans were thwarted by his arrest on 8/9th December.¹⁰⁴ Zinov'ev's leaflet created a huge impression amongst the workers' organisation. Even Babushkin, who had previously crossed swords with the young *Putilovtsy*, was so impressed by it that he arranged for it to be pasted up in the lavatories at the Semiannikov factory where its presence became known with many workers gathering to read it.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, the enthusiasm for agitation had now seized even the most sceptical of the previous adherents of propaganda. Babushkin, himself, who a few months earlier had been sceptical, cautioning against too hasty a switch to mass agitation, described the movement during November 1895:

beginning from the Obodnyi Canal... right through to the whole of Aleksandrovsk village, there was not a single large mill or factory that was not covered by our

¹⁰³ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. IV, Ch. 1*, pp.198-199; Iu.O. Martov, 2004, pp.187-188; Korol'chuk and Sokolova, *Khronika...*, 1940, p.195; M. Mitel'man et.al., 1939, pp.113-114.

¹⁰⁴ B I Zinov'ev, 'K rabochim putilovskogo zavoda,' [4 Dec 1895], *Avangard*, 1990, pp.104-105; 'Doklad...', 1921, pp.135-136; *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke, T. IV, Ch. 1*, pp.26-28

¹⁰⁵ I.V. Babushkin, 1957, pp.82-83.

*illegal literature. This was due to the fact that we had our own people [i.e. workers] in all of them, particularly in the Pal' and Maksvel factories [in the Nevskii Gate]. Even if we lost one or two people from these places, the work would continue uninterrupted.*¹⁰⁶

The Last Rites of the Petersburg Workers' Organisation

Babushkin's optimistic assessment of the strength of the workers' organisation at the end of 1895 was in part delusional. As he had initially feared the entry of the workers' organisation into a public sphere through involvement in mass worker unrest provoked its ultimate demise. Unrest at the Thornton and other factories so alarmed the authorities that on the night of 8/9th December they arrested the majority of the '*Stariki*' and many leading workers including Shelgunov, Zinov'ev, Karamyshev, Merkulov, Iakovlev and Keizer. Shelgunov's arrest was particularly significant as with it the last connection with the original nucleus of workers associated with Tochisskii was broken and although not signalling the immediate death of the workers' organisation in many senses represented the final closure of a chapter in the Petersburg workers' organisation that had begun a decade earlier.

Despite the arrests, agitation did not cease immediately. Surviving members of the workers' organisation and *intelligenty* quickly regrouped, incorporating a number of members of the '*Molodoi*', to issue a number of proclamations for the first time bearing the imprint of the '*Petersburg Union of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class*', including the first leaflet addressed all Petersburg workers reassuring them that the arrests had not disrupted the work of the organisation and that its activities would continue. Representatives from the Union were active in a strike that broke out at the Lebedev textile works on the Vyborg Side where textile workers active in the workers' organisation worked. However, as a result of the arrest of their main contact in the Nevskii Gate workers' group they remained without support for several days until one of the workers made contact with a surviving associate of Shelgunov's who arranged for the *intelligenty* Liakhovskii to visit the workers and print a leaflet on their strike.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p.89.

¹⁰⁷ 'Doklad....', 1921, pp.150-151; Iu.O. Martov, 2004, pp.191-193.

Following the arrests, Martov re-established contact with the survivors of the Putilov circles, now led by Semen Shepelev who took the Union's proclamations and distributed them around the factory. Soon after, propagandists from the '*Molodoi*' group also became involved with Shepelev's circle and, following a meeting with the *Putilovtsy*, drafted a proclamation to the workers in the name of the Union of Struggle.¹⁰⁸ This proclamation, based heavily on the earlier leaflet composed by Zinov'ev, declared:

*Factory owners are always trying to reduce workers' wages, because they have only one aim – to make as much profit as possible. If workers do not fight, then they will necessarily die from hunger. There is nothing to hope for from the government: laws are not written for workers, but for capitalists. A strike at the factory in 1885 ended successfully, as has also happened in other Petersburg enterprises. It follows from this that we should stop work and demand our old wage-rates.*¹⁰⁹

At the beginning of 1896, Martov supplied the Shepelev circle with leaflets issued by the Union to be distributed on 3rd January as part of a co-ordinated campaign to reconnect with workers across a number of factories, claiming that the leaflets would be distributed at 20 factories.¹¹⁰ Martov and Sil'vin also contacted workers at the Baltic Shipyards led by Timofei Samokhin, a close associate of Zinov'ev, who survived the arrests, providing him with a significant quantity of the leaflets including the proclamation to all Petersburg workers of 15th December announcing the formation of the Union of Struggle and a leaflet written by Babushkin entitled '*What is a Socialist and a Political Criminal?*' that were distributed around the Baltic Shipyards.¹¹¹

A number of leading workers who survived the arrests of 8/9th December made one final attempt to reconstruct the CWC. On 23rd December, a meeting took place in the room of the New Admiralty worker Ivan Fedorov on Vasil'evskii Island involving representatives of the '*Molodoi*' group and workers from the Putilov factory [including Shepelev], the Baltic Shipyards, the New Admiralty and other factories. Samokhin who attended this meeting would subsequently tell the police that the meeting was convened jointly between the workers and the '*Molodoi*' to take stock of the remaining forces of the workers' organisation, restore circle work and that he was elected secretary of a new central

¹⁰⁸ 'Doklad....', 1921, p.145.

¹⁰⁹ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii. 1895-fevral' 1917. Khronika, Vyp. I*, Moscow 1992, p.132.

¹¹⁰ 'Doklad....', 1921, p.153.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, pp.147-151; K.A. Kuznetsov et. al., *Baltiiskii sudostroitel'nyi, 1856-1917*, Leningrad, 1970, pp.223-224; M.A. Sil'vin, 1958, p.125.

workers' group. It was also suggested that a workers' fund be established and as an initial contribution the *intelligenty* present made financial contributions. To progress the re-establishment of the CWC it was agreed to meet with other survivors including 'Stariki' representatives but before this could take place most of the participants in the meeting of 23rd December were arrested during the night of 4/5th January 1896, betrayed again by the dentist Mikhailov who had been involved in the meeting in Fedorov's room.¹¹²

In the brief period between the two sets of arrests, there was one final act by a leading member of the workers' organisation, an act that whilst demonstrating convincingly that the workers' organisation continued to articulate an overtly political opposition to the regime also represents a fitting epitaph for the Petersburg workers' organisation. One of the few leading workers to survive the first wave of arrests was Ivan Babushkin, a worker who, as we saw above, had initially adopted a sceptical attitude to agitation. At meeting with Martov and Liakhovskii shortly after the arrests of 8/9th December Babushkin reiterated his initial misgivings over agitation, lamenting that for the sake of scattering a few leaflets in a brief two month period '*the painstaking work over several years had been destroyed.*'¹¹³ Yet despite this, Babushkin seems to have concluded that workers could not now abandon agitation but that future leaflets must be overtly political in tone to rouse the mass of workers to defend 'socialists' from government persecution, telling Martov:

*If it is necessary to continue with leaflets then it is impossible to limit them to issues concerning fines, foremen/bosses and wage reduction. Given the arrests, everywhere around the factories they are now talking continuously about the 'sitsilisti' ['socialists']. It is essential to take advantage of interest in this and to put out a popular leaflet on socialism and the struggle for freedom.'*¹¹⁴

On saying this, he produced a sheet of paper on which he had written the text for a leaflet and demanded it be published by the 'Union of Struggle'. Martov submitted Babushkin's leaflet to a meeting of the *intelligenty* centre and although it was at first reluctant to print it, considering it '*too political*', it eventually agreed on the grounds that it had been written by a worker.¹¹⁵

¹¹² 'Doklad....', 1921, pp.147-148.

¹¹³ Iu.O. Martov, 2004, p.191.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p.191.

¹¹⁵ N.K. Krupskaja, *Memories of Lenin*, London, 1970, pp.27-28



Ivan Babushkin

Babushkin's short leaflet was entitled '*What is a Socialist and Political Offender?*' and was addressed to the mass of workers who still do not know what socialists stood for and sought to reveal to workers how they fought for the emancipation of oppressed working people from the yoke of capitalist owners, believing the government who denounced them as 'political offenders' and through '*ignorance*' betrayed them to the police. Babushkin told workers that they are only '*political offenders*' '*because they oppose the aims of our barbaric government, which defends the interests of factory owners and wants to squeeze the poor peasant and worker in his hands so as to deprive him of the last drops of his blood to satisfy the splendour and bestial whims of bureaucrats.*' Babushkin goes on to advise workers on how they can prevent a repetition of the events of 8/9th December declaring:

*We [workers] shall not.... submit to deceptive talk of those who hold us in the darkness of ignorance, we shall try to find out the truth for ourselves so that we shall move towards emancipation from our present condition of slavery. Our strength is great, nothing will stand in our way if we all march together arm in arm.*¹¹⁶

Babushkin's leaflet has been interpreted as a confession by a worker accepting responsibility on behalf of his class who through their ignorance had betrayed the radical

¹¹⁶ S.N. Valk, *Listovki peterburgskogo 'Soiuza bor'by za osvobozhdenie rabocheho klass'. 1895-1897 gg.*, Moscow, 1934, pp.20-21.

intelligenty who came to offer them salvation. In such an interpretation, the analogy with Christ's betrayal lurks not far below the surface. This interpretation is given some credence as Babushkin was one of the workers who most valued the education and enlightenment brought to the workers by the *intelligenty*. But it is a mistake simply to read Babushkin's leaflet as a statement of collective guilt for the arrest of members of the '*Stariki*', who ironically along with the leading workers had been betrayed by the *intelligent* Mikhailov. Irrespective, for Babushkin, the arrested workers were as equally '*socialist*' as the *intelligenty* seized at this time. It is no surprise therefore, that at the end of the leaflet, Babushkin reasserted the autonomy of the workers' struggle, calling on workers to find truth for themselves and that through their own forces unite to gain their emancipation. This was an essential restatement of the fundamental premise that had guided the Petersburg workers' organisation since its inception, namely that the workers must take responsibility for their own liberation and that whilst the radical *intelligenty* can support workers through education, they were, as Shelgunov reminded them in 1921, '*mere enlighteners*' of a class that had to emancipate itself.

It is fitting that the final act of the last active member of CWC was to deliver a political rallying call to his fellow workers and whilst recognising, as Petr Alekseev, Khalturin, Klimanov, Fedor Afanas'ev, Fomin, Norinskii, Fisher and countless other leading Petersburg workers before him, the contribution of *intelligenty*-propagandists, remind workers that ultimately they were responsible for their own destiny. Signing himself as '*Your comrade, a worker*', Babushkin symbolically on behalf of the preceding groups of circle workers bequeathed to the workers of Petersburg a final legacy, a legacy that a few months later in the summer of 1896 textile workers would assume through their mass strikes, conceived and carried through almost entirely on their own initiative that succeeded in wresting major concessions from a recalcitrant government.

Chapter 11.

Conclusion

Nearly 50 years ago E. P. Thompson revealed the importance of seeking to understand the meanings assigned to class relationships and how individuals themselves construct such relationships through their own concrete historical experiences. Through an examination of the specific combination of radical political traditions, the cultural and social changes experienced by ‘common people’ in late 18th and 19th century England and new social theories that simultaneously reflected social changes and helped create new understandings of peoples’ identities as ‘workers’, Thompson radically transformed historians’ understandings of the concept of class.¹

In Petersburg the last decades of the 19th century witnessed the emergence of a specific historical conjuncture combining forced industrialisation, rapid modernisation undermining traditional relationships and values, the availability of educational opportunities and vocational training for a section of a newly created industrial workforce, and the exposure of a cohort of skilled workers to socialist ideologies through contacts with the radical *intelligenty*. This conjuncture produced a small group of workers already possessing an innate sense of moral justice derived from pre-existing traditional values of right and wrong and a dualistic concept of ‘us’, the people, and ‘them,’ the masters/lords, who when confronted with a series of new social and political dynamics premised on the subordination of workers made them susceptible to new radical ideologies based on the exclusive discourses of class. Such workers embraced new conceptualisations of the working-class and in conjunction with their day-to-day experiences in workshop and city made the transition from a being member of the ‘*narod*’ to recognising their identities as workers and for some within this group moving to embrace a distinctive identity as a class-aware, or conscious, ‘proletarian.’

From the early 1870s, members of this emerging *worker-intelligenty* had been engaged in a dynamic relationship with members of the radical *intelligenty*, a relationship through which they received essential knowledge and theoretical socialist constructs necessary for them to create a socialist awareness of themselves as ‘conscious’ workers. But such ‘received’ wisdom was always mediated and modified in the cauldron of their daily experiences as factory workers, experiences through which they confronted not just the economic realities

¹ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 1963, Introduction.

of an exploitative and rapacious early industrial capitalism but also the often brutal and violent suppression of any form of worker by the Tsarist state. It was this combination of economic and political oppression that gave a particular moral flavouring to the ideas and views of the worker elite, beginning their opposition to existing realities not from externally derived theoretical socialist ideologies, but through a universalistic sense of right and wrong and human dignity, reflected in the demand for justice in social and political relations that pervades many of their public utterances and later strongly resounded in the memoirs of worker participants in Petersburg worker organisations.

From the 1870s, the Petersburg *worker-intelligenty* clearly emerged as a distinct social group endeavouring to create a specific worker-identity on its own terms. It was within small, often factory based, circles that young male workers created their sense of what being a worker meant. Oftentimes, this identity was created in opposition to the dominant ideological constructs of their *Narodniki* teachers and distanced them from the bulk of their ‘fellow’ factory workers. They became literate, skilled, cultured, urban, and political and as such sought to create their own organisational form that reflected these attributes rather than others that non-workers wished to project on to them. In their search for such forms they sought models from abroad, both in terms of individual types and collective groupings, finding in western socialism, in general, and German Social-Democracy, in particular, the path they wished to follow. Many observers compared these workers favourably to their western European counterparts; one *Narodniki* noting that they were well-educated and well-read people ‘*who have assimilated as much as western workers,*’ whilst a future founder member of the GEL on meeting Viktor Obnorskii regarded him as equal to the best representatives of the European working-class.² The Northern Union of Russian Workers was the organisational expression of the ambitions of workers such as Obnorskii, exclusively created for workers by workers, combining demands for economic and political reform and seeking to embrace less developed workers in the capital by actively participating in the struggles of textile workers at the end of the decade.

It would take the *worker-intelligenty* in Petersburg well over a decade after the collapse of the Northern Union to recreate a comparable worker-led organisation. Assimilating key concepts of worker autonomy from empathetic *intelligenty* propagandists and supported by small groups of social-democratic propagandists who recognised the centrality of worker leadership within their own movement, during the first half of the 1890s a series of

² ‘*Avtobiograficheskaia zapiska S. Shiriaev,*’ *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 1924, No.8, p.88.

radicalised *worker-intelligenty* sought to advance the cause of a working-class of which they saw themselves as advance representatives. Although interacting primarily with Marxist social-democrats, throughout this period the ideology and activities of the Central Workers' Circle remained based on an essentially moral critique of the existing political and social structures of Tsarism. Although the ideology of the CWC remained fairly eclectic, it operated on the consistent application of a number of inviolable principles:

1. that workers themselves must take the leadership role in workers' organisations;
2. education and self-development through systematic study was an essential component of workers self-organisation to create a cadre of future leaders of the workers' movement;
3. in connection with this, sympathetic radical *intelligenty* supporters were initially necessary in the development of the workers' organisation to provide knowledge and technical support;
4. leading circle workers sought to forge close links with the mass of factory workers, taking advantage of their economic grievances, to extend their influence and create networks of potential recruits to new circles including significantly circles of women workers;
5. in order to operate as an independent workers' organisation, the advanced workers advocated political freedoms in Russia to allow workers to develop as a progressive force in society;
6. in the absence of such political freedoms, the workers' organisation took every opportunity to advance into the public arena announcing its presence and its demands to a wider society that had hitherto been largely oblivious to its existence.

From 1892 to 1895, within the CWC a new cohort of leading workers developed two of the distinguishing characteristics of the Petersburg workers' organisation to new levels of sophistication. Firstly, in the period to spring 1894, the CWC focused its efforts on the creation of a cadre of well-developed *worker-intelligenty* as part of a coherent strategy to take over responsibility for circle propaganda from radical members of the intelligentsia, thereby making the workers' movement genuinely independent and responsible for its own destinies. Paradoxically this initially created a greater reliance on *intelligenty*-propagandists to work with leading workers in intensive study sessions. Yet, clear in their

intent, the CWC determined to reassert worker hegemony over the *intelligenty*, constructing a discourse with their *intelligenty* collaborators from both a social-democratic and a *narodovol'tsy* persuasion to determine both the nature of circle propaganda and how this would be carried out. Whilst this resulted in an endorsement of the social-democratic approach based on propaganda focused on the realities of workers' lives with a postponement at this juncture of interventionist approaches advocated by the *narodovol'tsy*, the debates and the monitoring mechanisms established by the CWC to oversee propaganda re-emphasised worker control of the movement and defined a framework for relations with the *intelligenty* that would endure through to the end of 1895 and the final demise of the CWC.

Secondly, in the last 18 months of its existence, the CWC itself, augmented by recruitment of younger and more militant workers, gradually began to adopt a more interventionist approach in industrial struggles, embracing key principles of agitation and seeking opportunities wherever possible to lead the mass struggles of workers on the basis of their '*immediate*' grievances and demands. In this new course, the CWC was ahead of most of their *intelligenty* collaborators, particularly the group of '*Stariki*' *intelligenty* with which Lenin was associated and in a real sense it was through their influence and examples that the future leaders of the Petersburg Union of Struggle began their famous agitational leafleting campaign of the late autumn of 1895, a campaign that was inconceivable without active support and advice of the Petersburg workers' organisation. By late 1895, the leading group of Petersburg *worker-intelligenty* had emerged from their enclosed circles and whilst still retaining a strong commitment education were determined to find ways to lead the struggles of the mass of workers, fulfilling a role that their theoretical studies over the previous quarter of a century had equipped them for.

Given the history of the evolution of the Petersburg *worker-intelligenty*, it is perhaps puzzling why so many leading *worker-intelligenty* involved in the Petersburg CWC appeared effortlessly to make the transition to become leading Bolshevik *praktiki*, supporters of a centralised party of conscious revolutionaries, a Party that ostensibly was based on Lenin's almost pathological distrust of independent worker initiative? Amongst the many *worker-intelligenty* who made this transition were Egor Afanas'ev-Klimanov, Fedor Afanas'ev, Vasili Biuanov, Gavril Mefod'ev, Anna Boldyreva, Vasili Shelgunov, Ivan Babushkin, Konstantin Norinskii, Ivan Keizer, Andrei Fisher, Nikolai Poletaev, Petr Gribakin, all of whom had been amongst the staunchest advocates of worker independence

and leadership of a specifically workers' party. Their recruitment and subsequent devotion to the centralised Leninist concept of the Party is stranger still given Lenin's actual involvement with the Petersburg *worker-intelligenty*. As shown in Chapter 10, it was on Lenin's insistence that no workers were admitted into the central group of the embryonic Union of Struggle. Similarly, in early 1897 when Lenin and his co-accused in the case of social-democratic propaganda amongst Petersburg workers were granted a few days freedom before being exiled to Siberia, it was again Lenin who strenuously opposed proposals developed by workers to establish an independent workers' organisation. When the matter was discussed in the exclusive *intelligenty* central group of the Union, Lenin insisted that the Union's central *intelligenty* group must exercise '*unquestioned leadership*' over the workers' movement.³ Aware of Lenin's strict centralism with its concomitant desire to control the workers' movement, how then can one account for the significant numbers of *worker-intelligenty* who chose to support Bolshevism?

The leading Menshevik Theodore Dan, who had been involved in the latter stages of the CWC's activities, ascribed the reason why such workers embraced Bolshevism as due in large part to the fact that the '*first generation of Social-Democratic workers... had come to Social-Democracy not through the 'practical' way of economic struggle but by the 'ideological' way of propaganda in small groups*', i.e. they had not engaged in the mass struggles of workers and remained wedded to a narrow, conspiratorial and centralist approach to revolutionary work.⁴ For Dan, in common with many subsequent historians, Lenin's model of the Party was based on the subordination of workers to the 'conscious' revolutionary intelligentsia, a reading of the Leninist Party that ignores repeated assertions by Lenin that the fundamental dichotomy lay between consciousness and recognition of the historic role of the proletariat as opposed to blindly following the spontaneous movement of workers. Lenin's categorisation of the development of worker-consciousness never envisaged a permanent monopoly of a purely elite intelligentsia group over workers. Indeed, he was at pains to emphasise that one of the main functions of the Party was to create an organisation of *professional revolutionaries* who Lenin believed would be recruited increasingly from amongst the advanced strata of the working-class, i.e. the

³ For accounts of this debate see K.M Takhtarev, 'Lenin i sotsial-demokratiicheskoe dvizhenie,' *Byloe*, No, 24 (1924), pp. 14-15; Iu.O. Martov, pp.316-317; B.I. Gorev, *Iz partiinogo proshlogo; Vospominaniia, 1895-1905*. Leningrad, 1924, p.37; A. Wildman, 1967, pp.97-100.

⁴ Theodore Dan: *The Origins of Bolshevism*. Edited and translated by Joel Carmichael, London, 1964, pp.211-212.

worker-intelligenty. In 1899, Lenin had set out his vision of the process of the proletarianisation of the Party:

*The history of the working-class movement in all countries shows that the better-situated strata of the working-class respond to ideas of socialism more rapidly and more easily. From among these come, in the main, advanced workers that every working-class movement brings to the fore, those who can win the confidence of the labouring masses, who devote themselves entirely to education and organisation of the proletariat, who accept socialism consciously, and who even elaborate independent socialist theories.... This 'working-class intelligentsia' already exists in Russia, and we must make every effort to ensure that its ranks are regularly reinforced, that its lofty mental requirements are met and that leaders of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party come from its ranks.*⁵

What was important to Lenin was not social origin but level of consciousness and awareness of the *ascribed* role of the proletariat in effecting revolutionary transformation. As set out in *What is to be Done?*, Lenin was striving to create an organisational structure based on local Party committees of professional revolutionaries and regarded it as irrelevant whether the members came from an *intelligenty* or a worker background.⁶

It is also important to recognise that consistently during the first years of the 20th century Lenin heaped vitriolic scorn on the performance of the radical intelligentsia, berating its failure to lead effectively the spontaneous upsurge of workers across Russia. It was a failure of the social-democratic leadership to provide a direction for the spontaneous worker protests that Lenin identified as the fundamental malaise afflicting the socialist movement in Russia. Spontaneity was running far ahead of the supposed conscious leadership, creating a situation that for Lenin was fraught the danger that non-social-democratic elements amongst the liberals and the emerging social revolutionaries would place themselves at the head of the revolutionary movement.⁷ For Lenin, such a disconnect between the conscious elements of revolution and the spontaneity of the masses necessitated a reorientation of the role of social-democratic revolutionaries to ensure that from within the growing spontaneous movement the most active workers were attracted into the Russian Social-Democratic Party. In *What is to be Done?* Lenin contrasts the

⁵ V.I. Lenin, 'A Retrograde Trend in Russian Social Democracy,' *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, pp. 280-81

⁶ V.I. Lenin, 'What is to be Done?,' *Ibid*, Vol. V, p.462.

⁷ Cf. *ibid*, pp. 373, 435.

dynamism of the revolutionary worker activists with the ineffectiveness of the intelligentsia.

*As the spontaneous rise of the movement becomes broader and deeper..... the working-class masses promote from their ranks not only an increasing number of talented agitators, but also talented organisers, propagandists, and 'practical workers' in the best sense of the term [of whom there are so few among our intellectuals who, for the most part, in the Russian manner, are somewhat careless and sluggish in their habits].*⁸

Such an indictment of the social-democratic intelligentsia must have struck a chord with many radical *worker-intelligenty*, reflecting their own experiences and reinforcing some of the instinctive prejudices against '*revolutionaries from a bourgeois environment.*' For many *worker-intelligenty* schooled in the harsh realities of organising workers' circles and agitation amongst 'backward' workers Lenin's prescription of a Party where ostensibly workers could rise to positions of responsibility and leadership would have held many attractions. Indeed, as David Lane pointed out in his analysis of the social origins of social-democratic activists, Bolshevism not only won support from many local worker-activists but also reflected a much greater proletarian bias amongst its leading cadres.⁹ The Bolshevik wing of the Social-Democratic Party privileged revolutionaries from a proletarian background, providing *worker-intelligenty* with a genuine sense that their experiences were not only valued but, critically, were the essential bridge between theory and practice, giving substance to the long-cherished dream of the first generations of *worker-intelligenty* that they were the natural leaders of their class. Lenin, recognising the unique position of *worker-intelligenty*, demanded in 1904 that as many class-conscious workers as possible be identified and recruited onto local committees to play a revolutionary leadership role and exploit their extensive contacts and knowledge of the workers' environment.¹⁰ Such a recognition of the importance of the '*organic*' intellectual stratum within the Russian working-class and Lenin's apparent willingness to enable it to play a leading role may account for the readiness of many of the Petersburg *worker-*

⁸ Ibid, p.473.

⁹ David Lane, *The Roots of Russian Communism: A Social and Historical Study of Russian Social-Democracy, 1898-1907*, 1968, pp. 46-51, 207-16.

¹⁰ V.I. Lenin, 'A Letter to a Comrade on Our Organisational Tasks,' *Collected Works, Vol. VI*, p. 237.

intelligenty to embrace Bolshevism and commit themselves to the life of the professional revolutionary. ¹¹

Perhaps many *worker-intelligenty* saw in Lenin's vision of the Party a vindication of both their elite status within the working-class and an opportunity to fulfil the crucial role as mediators between the *intelligenty* and workers, between mind and body, the role that they had sought to develop in Petersburg during the 1890s. Whilst the appeal of Bolshevism with its promise of workers accessing elevated positions within the Party undoubtedly attracted many, it carried the danger of divorcing *worker-intelligenty* from their working-class roots. The spectre arose of Russian Bebel's as the active mediators of socialism to workers, but no longer themselves as actual workers working with their hands as Akselrod had envisioned them, but transformed into species of intelligentsia who as Fisher noted no longer could be regarded as true workers but rather as workers who assumed the form of the intelligentsia to reach a 'true' understanding of socialism enshrined in a Party of conscious revolutionaries. ¹² In this sense, the dichotomy between mind and body, intellect and labour continued to privilege the *intelligenty* over the worker.

Irrespective of the future orientation of the *worker-intelligenty* by the mid-1890s within the Petersburg industrial working-class an 'organic' and revolutionary worker-intelligentsia had developed. Most certainly, the Tsarist authorities were in no doubt that such a group existed and posed a real and increasing threat to the social order. Police reports from 1892 observed that '*at the present time there reside in St. Petersburg many workers who have fully mastered revolutionary teachings*', and '*despite periodic arrests [worker propaganda] continues uninterruptedly and in place of the old leaders new ones emerge who incite dissatisfaction among workers.*' ¹³ This continuity of organisational activity by the advanced Petersburg *worker-intelligenty* during the first half of the 1890s is indicative

¹¹ For a detailed and perceptive analysis of the attraction of Bolshevism to many advanced workers see Henry Reichmann, 'On Kanatchikov's Bolshevism: Workers and *Intelligenty* in Lenin's What is to be Done?', *Russian History/Histoire russe*, Vol. 23, Nos. 1-4, 1996, pp.27-45. Lars Lih, 2006 also addresses this question in his discussion of the 'purposive' worker, pp.343-346 while Neil Harding, 1977, highlights Lenin's increasing exasperation with the failure of the radical intelligentsia leadership of the workers' movement in the first years of the 20th century.

¹² A. Fisher, *V Rossi ii v Anglii*, Moscow, 1922, p.42. For a particular insightful analysis of the dilemma faced by Fisher and other *worker-intelligenty*, see R. E. Zelnik, 'Russian Bebel's: An Introduction to the Memoirs of the Russian Workers Semen Kanatchikov and Matvei Fisher, Part II,' *Russian Review*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Oct., 1976), pp. 417-447.

¹³ *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke*, T. III, Ch.2, pp.134-137; *Obzor vashneishikh doznanii... za 1893, XVII*, p.3.

of a determination, not as some commentators would have it of indulging in narrow and selfish self-educational activities but rather, to translate the knowledge they had absorbed in their study circles into practice. What is critical is not simply that such workers had absorbed revolutionary theory from the *intelligenty* but that they had consciously embarked on a mission to combine within the form of a worker the attributes of both labour and intellect. For such workers any notion of *intelligenty* hegemony of their movement was tantamount to a continuation of the subordinate status ascribed to workers within the dominant hierarchies of Tsarist and bourgeois societies. Many advanced workers whose activities have been charted in the preceding chapters sought to appropriate the knowledge of the *intelligenty* into their own being as workers, not out of some selfish motivation in pursuit of self-development, but to assume a role that they believed they were destined historically to play, that of the organic leaders of their entire class. In this, they were required to emerge from the darkness of their study circles, to be visible and seen as bearers of the fruit of a knowledge forbidden by the Tsarist authorities, to enlighten the still largely ignorant mass of workers.

At the Petersburg workers May-Day celebration in 1891, Fedor Afanas'ev, himself not a skilled *zavodskie* worker but a weaver destined to die as a Bolshevik in a workers' uprising in Ivanovo-Voznesensk in 1905, gave voice to the underlying beliefs and values of the Petersburg workers' movement. Declaring that '*labour is the motor of all human progress, that it is the creator of all science, art and inventions*' and that the moral duty of advanced workers was to bring consciousness of this to the mass of workers so as to make them an irresistible social force, Afanas'ev gives powerful expression to the 'faith' that workers imbued with knowledge will ultimately triumph:

We need only arm ourselves with a powerful weapon - and this weapon is knowledge of the historical laws of the development of mankind - we have only to arm ourselves with this and we shall defeat the enemy everywhere. None of his acts of oppression - sending us back to our birthplaces, imprisoning us or even exiling us to Siberia - will take this weapon away from us. We shall find the field of victory everywhere, we shall transmit our knowledge in all directions: in our birthplaces to our peasants, in prison to the men detained there we shall explain that they too are human beings and

*are entitled to all human rights, so that they will recognise these rights, transmit their knowledge to others and organise them into groups.*¹⁴

The project that the Petersburg *worker-intelligenty* had undertaken involved them taking the light of knowledge into the grim factories and dark hovels where the mass of the emerging Petersburg proletariat eked out a miserable existence. Paraphrasing Jacques Rancière, the *worker-intelligenty* had embarked on a path to self- and class consciousness not through their realisation of the obvious fact that workers were brutally exploited but rather through ‘*a knowledge of the self that reveals to [them] beings dedicated to something else besides exploitation.*’¹⁵

¹⁴ ‘Rech rabochikh na pervomaiskom sobranii 1891 g.,’ *Ot gruppy Blagoeva k Soiuza Bor’by*, Rostov-on-Don, 1921, p.121.

¹⁵ J. Rancière, *The Nights of Labor: The Workers’ Dream in Nineteenth Century France*, translated from the French by John Drury, Temple UP, 1989, p.20.

Appendix A.

A Word on Sources

As the dissertation is essentially a reinterpretation of a number of standard narratives and interpretations on working-class formation and identity and how political consciousness developed amongst small groups of workers in Petersburg, I have relied on a number of diverse sources.

Documentary Materials

The first is a series of official police and judicial reports on aspects of working and living conditions of Petersburg factory workers, worker protests, workers' organisations and their relationships with a number of revolutionary groups. The annual official publication *Obzor vashneishikh doznanii po delam o gosudarstvennykh prestupleniakh proisvodivshikhsia v Zhandarmских Upravleniakh Imperii. Vols. I-XVII, 1881-1894*, provided important documentary information on a number of revolutionary groups and their activities. During the Soviet period several important collections of documents on the 'workers' movement' were published that proved invaluable in this study. The most important of these is the authoritative four volume, eight part collection, *Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*. Edited by A.M. Pankratova and L.M. Ivanov. [M.-L., 1950-1963]. This has been supplemented other collections including *Rabochee dvizhenie semidesiatykh godov*, ed., E.A. Korol'chuk, [Moscow, 1934], *Stanovlenie revoliutsionnykh traditsii peterskogo proletariata*, Ed., A.N. Tsamutali, [Lenizdat, 1987]; *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo 70-kh godov XIX veka. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, 2 vols. [Moscow, 1964-1965]. A collection of documents relating to the Tochisskii Society was published in *Krasnaia letopis'*, No.7, 1923, whilst an important source for the later period of the CWC activity can be found in 'Doklad po delu o voznikshikh v S.-Peterburge v 1894 i 1895 godakh prestupnykh kruzhekakh lits, imenuiushchikh sebia 'sotsial-demokratami' in *Glavnoe upravlenie arkhivnym delom, Sbornik materialov i statei*, [Moscow] 1921], whilst the 3 volume collection *Istoriko-revoliutsionnyi sbornik*, ed., V.I. Nevskii, Moscow-Leningrad, 1924-1926 contains an informative mixture of source material on the early history of both the workers' movement and revolutionary groupings plus a number of important commentaries. As most of these collections are concerned with periods and activities before Lenin's active involvement they constitute a more comprehensive and accurate reflection of worker activities than perhaps later collections. Correspondence between influential contemporaries on the workers' movement in Petersburg has also been accessed. These include the correspondence of P.L. Lavrov and his associate Valerian Smirnov, as well as letters between leading *zemlevol'tsy*, *narodovol'tsy* and later correspondence between members of the Emancipation of Labour group.

Memoirs

Documentary sources have been supplemented by various memoirs and autobiographies written in different periods by both worker and *intelligenty* participants in the movements described. Whilst aware of an often inherent ideological bias in many of these memoirs and the difficulties of over-reliance on such material, nonetheless, a judicious reading and comparison between memoir sources and official documents as well between various accounts of individuals involved in the same events can provide important confirmatory evidence on certain critical aspects of *worker-intelligenty* formation and attitudes. Such autobiographical accounts are often useful in describing key moments in the formation of identity and whilst such accounts may often have been 'sculpted' to conform to a particular ideologically driven narrative, nonetheless they can often shine a light into hidden recesses of the psychology of a worker at a particular moment of transition in his or her life or changes in how they perceived themselves and others.

During the 1920s in Soviet Russia there was a consistent drive by *Istpart* to record and document as many memoirs of participants in the workers' revolutionary movement as possible. One of the major initiators of this, Ol'minskii [Aleksandrov], himself an active participant in the workers' movement of the 1880s and 1890s, although anxious to validate a narrative that elevated the role of the Party nonetheless recognised the need to record as many disparate accounts as possible emphasising:

*Memoirs, testimony of eyewitnesses, tales of participants in the events have a huge significance as a source for historians. It is necessary to collect as many such stories as possible because one will correct and supplement or confirm another. By means of criticism of this material we will succeed all the easier to establish a true picture, through the numerous collections of eye witness accounts.*¹

I] Workers

A number of important collections of memoirs of Petersburg workers were published during the Soviet period. Of these four are of particular importance:

- i. *Ot gruppy Blagoeva k Soiuzu bor'by [1886-1894 gg]*. Rostov-on Don, 1921.
- ii. *V nachale puti*, 1975, [ed. E.A. Korol'chuk, L., 1975]
- iii. *Proletarskii prolog, [Vospominaniia uchastnikov revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia v peterburge v 1883-1904 godakh]* [ed. E.R. Ol'kovskii] Lenizdat, 1983
- iv. *Avangard. Vospominaniia i dokumenty peterskikh rabochikh 1890-kh godov*, [ed. E.R. Ol'khovskii], Lenizdat, 1990.

In addition, the individual editions of several workers' autobiographies represented a key source, including the memoirs of Petr Moiseenko, Ivan Babushkin, Vasiliu Shelgunov, Konstantin Norinskii, Andrei Fisher, Aleksei Buzinov, A.A. Shapovalov and A. Buiko.

Again, Ol'minskii considered that worker memoirs shed important light on the nature and activities of worker activists as '*the life of the Party intelligentsia has at least found a small reflection in the Party press, the history of worker social-democrats has almost no sources.*' According to Ol'minskii, history written from only official sources would be too one-sided as 'it inadequately reflected the movement amongst the workers.'²

II] Intelligenty

For the entire period under review, many of the members of the radical *intelligenty* involved with Petersburg workers left accounts of their own and worker activities. As very few workers from the 1870s wrote down their memoirs, *intelligenty* sources for this period are of particular importance. Plekhanov's account of Petersburg workers in the 1870s, *Russkii rabochii v revoliutsionnom dvizhenii*, is important as both a source of the events of this period as well as an ideological construction of an 'ideal' worker type. Similarly, in the 1890s a number of influential *intelligenty* including Mikhail Brusnev, Vasiliu Golubev, Leonid Krasin, Aleksandrov [Ol'minskii], V.V. Sviatlovskii, Mikhail Sil'vin, Iulii Martov and Nadezhda Krupskaiia all provide important descriptions of worker development and activities. One of the most revealing and useful *intelligenty* accounts was penned by Konstantin Takhtarev writing a few years after the events described, *Peterburzhets [Takhtarev], Ocherk' peterburgskogo rabochego dvizheniia 90-kh godov'*, [London 1902, subsequently reprinted in Soviet Russia in 1921 and 1924].

¹ *Ko vsem chlenom partii*, Moscow 1920. p.9

² *Otchet Istparta, Na pisan M.S. Ol'minskim, v prilozhenii k sborniku Iz epokhi Zvezdy i Pravdy*, 1921. Vyp.1. p. 189

Finally, the five volume biographical dictionary of Russian revolutionaries, *Deiateli revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia v Rossii. Bio-bibliograficheskii slovar'* [ed],. B.P. Kuz'min, V.I. Nevskii, Moscow, 1927-1933 provided important biographical information on many of the key workers and *intelligenty* involved in the narodniki and early social-democratic movements in Petersburg. It is unfortunate that the social-democratic entries to this source remained uncompleted, terminating at the letter 'T'.

Secondary Sources

I] Soviet Works

As indicated above, many Soviet works suffered from an over ideological approach that resulted in workers seldom being seen as operating independently from *intelligenty* radicals. Despite this, the studies of E.A. Korol'chuk on the Northern Union in the less ideologically contentious period of the 1870s, represent an important account of the first Petersburg workers' organisation, as in relation to the 1870s and *Narodniki intelligenty* it was permissible, if not desirable from a Soviet ideological perspective and following Plekhanov's master narrative, to show workers operating in a more independent light and being critical of *Narodniki* ideological constructs. [Korol'chuk, 'Iz istorii propagandy sredi rabochikh Peterburga v seredine 70-kh godov,' *Katorga i ssylka*, 1928, No. 1; 'Severnyi soiuz russkikh rabochikh' i revoliutsionnoe rabochee dvizhenie 70-kh godov XIX v. v Peterburge, L., 1946; 'Severnyi soiuz russkikh rabochikh' i rabochee dvizhenie 70-kh godov XIX v. v Peterburge, M., 1971]. Korol'chuk, in association with E. Sokolova also produced a valuable chronicle of the Petersburg workers' movement covering our period, *Khronika revoliutsionnogo rabocheho dvizheniia v Peterburge. Vol.1, 1870-1904 gg.*, Leningrad, 1940, that despite at times a somewhat tendentious recitation of 'official' Soviet narratives and an almost deification of Lenin in Petersburg from 1893, nonetheless provides a comprehensive listing of events involving workers.

During the 1920s, two Soviet historians, V.I. Nevskii and N.L. Sergievskii, being able to operate in an environment where official interpretations were still not completely cast in stone, provided a series of studies and articles into various aspects of the development of the Petersburg workers' movement. In the later Soviet period, Kazakevich's monograph on the Tochisskii and Brusnev organisations [*Sotsial-demokraticheskie organisatsii Peterburga kontsa 80-kh–nachale 90-kh godov [kruzheniia P.V. Tochisskogo i M.L. Brusneva]*, L., 1960], again contains useful material, albeit presented in a somewhat stultified and one-dimensional manner. In the 1970s, A.M. Orekhov produced two important monographs detailing the involvement of Polish radicals in the development of the Russian revolutionary and workers movement. [Orekhov, A.M., *Sotsial-demokraticheskoe dvizheniie v Rossi i pol'skie revoliutsionery*, M., 1973 and *Pervye marksisty v Rossii. Peterburgskii 'rabochii Soiuz' 1887-1893 gg.*, M., 1979]. Finally, in 1975, G.S. Zhuikov published a well-researched study, *Peterburgskie marksisty i gruppa 'Osvobodhenue Truda'*. L., 1975, that despite its emphasis on the social-democratic emigration contains extremely valuable information on relationships between various Petersburg groups and workers during the 1880s and 1890s.

II] Western Historians

Only a few Western historians have covered this period and topic in any great detail. Eminent amongst them is Reginald Zelnik for a series of studies on worker and *intelligenty* relationships, most notably his 1976 study 'Russian Bebels: An Introduction to the Memoirs of Semen Kanatchikov and Matvei Fisher,' *Russian Review*, Vol.36, Nos. 3 and 4, 1976. The works of Pipes, Wildman and Naimark mentioned in Chapter 1 cover some of the same period and issues raised in this thesis but arrive at significantly different conclusions and although Pipes recognises the independent element within the Petersburg *worker-intelligenty* he regards the group as essentially focused on self-development and inclined to a nascent trade unionism. Two doctoral

dissertations from the 1980s, Michael Share, *The Central Workers' Circle of St. Petersburg*, University of Wisconsin, 1984 and Deborah Lee Pearl, *Revolutionaries and Workers: A Study of Revolutionary Propaganda among Russian Workers, 1880-1892*, University of California, 1984 whilst covering some similar aspects of the present study arrive at different conclusions. Share essentially reflects Pipes' earlier interpretation of the Petersburg workers' group, seeing it as fundamentally reformist and largely subordinate to the radical intelligentsia, whilst Pearl's primary focus is on revolutionary propagandists from all radical *intelligent* groupings and the nature and content of the propaganda with which they were involved. Finally, a recent doctoral thesis by Jeffrey Meadowcroft, *The history and historiography of the Russian worker-revolutionaries of the 1870s*, University of Glasgow, 2011, imaginatively restores the 'workers' voice' revealing the connection between revolutionary thought and practice and illuminates the role of a number of individual workers in the socialist movement of the 1870s. As such, Meadowcroft's thesis shares a common focus on resurrecting the genuine voice of workers and the processes through which they arrived at their own self-definition and class understandings, in the process redefining on their own terms their relationships with radical *intelligent* groups.

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