

**IMPACT OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY ON  
THE EMERGENCE OF THE COMMUNIST  
MOVEMENT IN NINETEENTH CENTURY  
RUSSIA**

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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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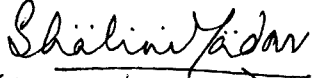
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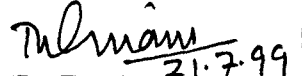
## CERTIFICATE

It is certified that the dissertation entitled, **The Impact Of Social Democracy On The Emergence Of The Communist Movement In Nineteenth Century Russia**, submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Degree of **Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.)**, is my own work and has not been previously submitted for any degree of this University or any other University.

  
(SHALINI YADAV)  
Candidate's signature.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
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## PREFACE

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Though the October Revolution (1917) played a historical role in spreading the Communist ideology throughout the world, however the situation in which the Communist movement emerged in Russia itself was initially created not by the pure Marxist ideology, but by the social democracy. It is a well known fact that the Tsarist Russia was a typical feudal society where there was no scope of any kind of democratic movement in the real sense. Under these circumstances the idea of French Revolution influenced the minds of intellectuals and other social thinkers through out the world. The Russian intellectuals particularly the army officers who were stationed in other parts of Europe following their assigned duties, were the first people to bring the idea of French Revolution in Russia. These army officers proved to be the springboard of social democracy in Russia through their revolutionary revolt known as the Decembrist movement during 1820's and 1830's.

The beginning of the idea of contemporary democracy appeared with the beginning of the capitalist penetration of the old feudal society during the reign of Nicholas I. Though influenced by German philosophy and the French Utopians, the Russian democratic thought from its very inception sharply criticised capitalism. Russian democratic thought included a political protest against the autocracy along with the social protest against the principles of capitalist economy. And the critique of capitalism gradually paved the path towards embracing the socialist ideas.

The crushing of the Decembrist rising which had involved a vague talk of constitutional government, the prospects of liberating the serfs and the means of educating public opinion, and the subsequent control over the civil society through censorship and officialdom only aided the rise of revolutionary spirit and ideas. In the new world of romanticism such problems as the true nature of nations and the character of their

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missions in history came to the fore. In 1836, Peter Chaadaev argued that Russia had no past, no present and no future. Subsequent intellectuals based their belief of Russia's unique position and future on this.

Russian intellectual life grew apace in the 1840's and 1850's. The Slavophiles, a group of romantic intellectuals with landlords and scholars as its leading members, formulated an ideology centred on their belief in the superior nature and supreme historical mission of Orthodoxy and of Russia. Placing their faith in ancient Russian institutions of the peasant commune and the *zemski sobor*, they rejected Western constitutional and other legalistic and formalistic devices.

Sharing similar assumptions of German idealistic philosophy as the Slavophiles but in marked contrast were the Westemers. Ranging from diverse social backgrounds, they criticised the Russian system and wanted Russia to follow the Western example. The radical Westemers, largely through Hegelianism and Left Hegelianism came to challenge religion, society and the entire Russian and European system and to call for a revolution. While Belinsky gave a legacy of evaluating artistic works through political and social criteria, Herzen and anarchist Bakunin gradually came to regard the peasant commune as a superior institution for the social transformation of Russia.

The Decembrist movement laid the foundation of future social democracy in Russia and its most historic impact could be seen in the abolition of serfdom through the emancipation decree of 1861. We find that most of the social and political organisations as well as the beginning of the publication of many newspapers and journals could be possible in Tsarist Russia solely because of the emancipation decree. The Narodniks (Populists) played an epoch making role in strengthening the social democracy during

the last quarter of nineteenth century. Many of the Narodnik leaders later on became the founders of the Communist movement in Russia. The Russian revolutionaries who were living abroad, published newspapers and journals to propagate the idea of revolution within Russia. The activities of these Russian migrants strengthened those revolutionaries who were preparing for revolution within Russia.

Plekhanov, Peter Struve, Axelrod, Martov, Lenin, Vera Zasulich and many others played historic roles in strengthening the ideas of revolution beyond social democracy. Behind this background, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) was formed in 1898 in Minsk. Practically it was RSDLP, which laid the foundation of systematic Communist movement in Russia that led to the victory of the October Revolution.

This study is an attempt to trace how the Russian societal conditions unleashed a tide of revolutionary thought and activities beginning from the Decembrist movement and culminating in the foundation of the RSDLP in Minsk in 1898 and the publication of Iskra in 1900, the vanguard of Marxist thought.

I am deeply indebted to my supervisor an eminent and experienced teacher Dr. Tulsiram for guiding me in this research project right from the stage of its conception to that of completion of the study.

I am also indebted to my parents, brother and sisters and Chintu, Goldy, Faisal, Padma and Roopa for their unstinted support and love.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

# **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY IN RUSSIA**

Modern Russia's culture, religion, law, written language, and sense of political and national community originated in the Kievan Russia of the ninth to the thirteenth centuries. Benefiting from its close cultural and religious ties with Byzantium and from its control of the river trade route between the Black Sea and Scandinavia, Kievan Russia flourished between the tenth and twelfth centuries and attained a level of civilization and economic and social development that compared favorably with that of contemporary Western Europe. However, in the latter part of the eleventh century Kievan Russia began to decline politically and economically due to "internal political weaknesses, shifting trade patterns in the Mediterranean and northern Europe, and growing pressure by nomads on the Kievan state's eastern and southern frontier".<sup>1</sup> Sacked in 1240 by the Mongols, and ruled thence for many centuries by the Tatars, the successor states of Kiev were absorbed into the domain of Ivan the third of Moscow before the end of fifteenth century. He then officially proclaimed himself to be the "sovereign of all Russia" by the "grace of God and through what he claimed to be the inheritance of his ancestors".<sup>2</sup>

During the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Muscovite state gradually perfected the political and social system that was to provide it with the soldiers, money and leadership it needed in order to defeat the various rivals (Tatars to the South and east, Germans or Swedes on the Baltic, and Poles to the West) Frequent wars required civil administrators and army officers which led the Muscovite rulers to create a new group of "serving people" called *pomeshchiki* who were assigned land contingent on the military and administrative services they performed for the tsar. The need of the *pomeshchiki* to support themselves and the state in order to finance wars and the operations of

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<sup>1</sup> Edward C. Thaden, *Russia Since 1801* (New York, 1971), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.2.



tsar. The need of the *pomeshchiki* to support themselves and the state in order to finance wars and the operations of government, led in an agrarian society, to the creation of serfs; peasants tied to the soil.

By the seventeenth century the characteristic features of traditional Russian society were clearly discernible. At the head of the society was the tsar considered an autocratic ruler, the protector of the orthodox faith, and the defender of the interests of the Russian state and people. Muscovite Russia was a service state, and the tsar's subjects - the gentry serfs, state peasants, townsmen, and clergy - all had their respective duties and obligations. The gentry served the tsar as army officers and civil administrators, receiving in exchange control of a large part of land and of the serf population. The peasants cultivated the land, to which they were bound either by their service status or by tax obligations. They were also subject to corporal punishment, compulsory labor, and military service as common soldiers. The townsmen provided the Muscovite state with needed artisan, trading, and entrepreneurial skills, but the freedom of movement and rights of most of them were limited by obligations similar to that of the peasants. The clergy though generally excused from the service and the obligations of other groups of the population, occupied a position inferior to that of the gentry and often found it difficult to escape the arbitrary acts of gentry landowners and state officials.<sup>3</sup> In the seventeenth century traditional Russian society was profoundly influenced by closer contacts with the political cultural world of Western Europe. It was especially through the intermediary of Poland and the Ukraine (which until 1667

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<sup>3</sup> For details please see: n.1; L. Kochan and R. Abraham, *The Making of Modern Russia* (The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1983); Marc Raeff, "Imperial Russia; Peter I to Nicholas I", in R. Auty and D. Obolensky, ed., *An Introduction to Russian History* (Cambridge, 1976); and M.T. Florinsky, *Russia: A Short History* (London, 1969).

belonged to Poland) that western cultural influences then penetrated into Muscovy. The Kiev Theological Academy, founded in the second quarter of the seventeenth century, was the first institution of higher learning, which helped to reorganize higher education in Muscovite Russia according to the pattern then prevalent in the Jesuit Colleges of Poland and Western Europe.<sup>4</sup> However in persecuting the old believers who opposed Patriarch Nikon's reforms of the Russian Orthodox Church, and later on Peter the Great's replacement of the traditional Russian Orthodox Patriarchate with a new "Most Holy All-Ruling Synod" (a minor department of the secular bureaucracy) only subjected the church to effective state control.

Peter the Great (1672-1725) not only introduced European political institutions into Russia but also obliged his subjects to accept the manner of dress and social customs then prevalent in the West. He made it obligatory for every member of the gentry to serve in the army or bureaucracy and to acquire an education. The constant wars also saw the recruitment of thousands of men from non privileged groups into the army and navy. Peter's Table of Ranks enabled many commoners too to acquire hereditary gentry status by attaining commissioned officer rank in the army or the eighth rank in the civil service.

Obligatory service was abolished in 1762, and the power of the gentry landowners over the serfs was significantly extended by the latter part of the eighteenth century as managers of their estates, collectors of poll-tax and defenders of public order in the countryside. During the reign of Catherine II (1762-1796) the *Dvorianstvo* Charter of 1785 consolidated the position of the gentry in Russian society by assuring them such rights and privileges as corporate status, participation in elective institutions of local government, the inviolability of person and property, and exemption from obligatory state service, corporal punishment, and personal

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<sup>4</sup> Thaden, n.1, p.3.

taxation. These seem to have been intended by Catherine's government mainly as a means of encouraging a minority of sophisticated and well-educated members of the upper class to serve the state as instruments of enlightenment and modernization in Russia.<sup>5</sup>

But the government only encouraged gentry participation in public affairs within the framework afforded by traditional Russian autocracy. Intolerant of criticism of herself or of official policies, Catherine herself disregarded the promised inviolability of person and property of the gentry by arresting outstanding independent-minded writers of her time N.I. Novikov and A.D. Radishchev, for expressing their views on burning issues of the time (serfdom in the case of Radischev). Catherine II's law "On the Administration of the *Gubernii*s" introduced the element of elective gentry officers into Russian local government but also subordinated the activities of these officers to the control and supervision of governors and other bureaucratic agents of the Russian autocrat. She failed to establish the rule of law in Russia and her local government reform of 1775 represented only a first step in the direction of developing a legal and bureaucratic system that would serve as an effective instrument of power for the Russian autocrat.<sup>6</sup>

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the term "peasants" was used to describe the rural population subject to the poll tax. The two principal groups of peasants: serfs, or peasants living on the estates of the nobility, and state peasants, or peasants living on state-owned land, both paid the poll tax, provided recruits for the armed forces, and performed other obligations for the state - the billet, repair of roads, supply of lodgings and means of transportation for government officials, and the like. The essential difference between the two was that while the state peasants were permanently attached to their allotments and could not be sold

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.6.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.7.

without the land; the serfs, on the other hand, could be removed from the land by their owners and could be sold or otherwise disposed of as any other movable property.

The financial obligations of the state peasants also consisted of the *obrok*, an annual payment in the nature of rent for their allotments. Serfs on private estates paid either *barshchina* or *obrok*. Under *barshchina* the land of an estate was divided into two parts: one farmed for the benefit of the estate owner by servile labor, and the other part farmed by the serfs on their own account. Under the *obrok* system serfs paid to their masters an annual tribute (*obrok*) but did not perform services. While the *obrok* of the state peasants determined by a government agency was relatively moderate and stable, the *obrok* of the serfs and other exactions imposed on them by their masters were not regulated by law.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the burden of the peasants, especially the serfs, increased. The lavish gifts of state lands to their favorites by the Russian rulers reduced the state peasants living on these estates to the status of serfs. Towards the end of the century, serfdom was introduced in the Ukraine and in other southern territories.

The emancipation of the nobility from the obligation of compulsory service generated persistent rumors that the serfs were soon to be set free. Instead came rigorous exactions. There were frequent scattered peasant uprisings, which culminated in the great revolt led by Emilian Pugachev. The Pugachev uprising originated in the Volga region, which harbored masses of destitute and desperate humanity-runaway serfs, old-believers escaping religious persecution, Cossacks nursing grudges against Russian authorities, and native tribes (Bashkir, Tatar, Kirghiz) displaced by Russian settlers.<sup>7</sup> The ferocity, short-lived success, and ultimate failure of the rebellion were typical of the Russian peasant movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

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<sup>7</sup> M.T. Florinsky, *Russia: A Short History* (London, 1969), pp.227-228.

The lot of the peasant was hard, not least because of his great tax burdens - the result of Peter's fiscal measures. The modernization and maintenance of a large military establishment, the country's involvement in numerous wars, the expenses of the most lavish and spendthrift court in Europe, the huge largesse dispensed to the guard regiments and the courtiers - all these made for an ever-growing budget. It in turn required a constant rise in direct taxes, especially the capitation tax that fell heavily (if not exclusively) on the peasantry.<sup>8</sup>

The cultural westernization initiated in Peter the Great's time received further stimulus during Catherine's reign. The lack of schools in Russia and their low scholastic standards gave rise to the trend of children of the upper class studying abroad or having foreign tutors, usually French or Swiss, many being men of liberal or radical leanings. The example was set by the empress, who entrusted the education of the favorite grandson, the future Emperor Alexander I, to Cesar La Harpe, the well-known Swiss statesman. The result was that many young Russians were brought up on ideas which were not easily reconcilable with the conditions in their homeland.<sup>9</sup> This situation explains much in the intellectual history of the nineteenth century.

Catherine II was passionate about intellectual life in all its forms. She encouraged systematic use of new teaching methods based on the writings of Locke, Wieland, Basedow, and also, without acknowledgement, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. New academies and boarding schools were set up for children of the nobility, and the corps of cadets was extended to the provinces. The University of Moscow was revitalized by the appointment of Russian professors; nobles were encouraged, by the creation of a special gymnasium and by the prospect of special career preferment upon graduation, to attend courses. The Academy of Sciences was reformed and essentially converted

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<sup>8</sup> M. Raeff, in R. Auty and D. Obolensky, ed., n.3, p.156.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.105.

into a research center.<sup>10</sup>

Literature and theater encouraged by Catherine II, followed contemporary Western models in adopting a didactic, moralizing tone intended to develop a cultivated elite whose highest ideal would be one of social utility and service. In 1783 Catherine abolished the state monopoly on publishing and authorized the establishment of private presses and publishing houses. Her censorship policy was relatively wild. N.I. Novikov's work in publishing provided the background for the establishment of "societies of thought" and for the encouragement of translations from Western literature, it also helped to spread western philosophical and religious ideas and practices.<sup>11</sup> The circulation of Voltaire's works, and the *Encyclopedia*, and Blackstone's *Commentaries*, and *L'Esprit des Lois*, the Russians studying abroad - made it a question of time before some attempt would be made to apply to the Russian reality some of the ideas garnered in Leipzig, Paris, Geneva, Dresden. The uncompromising nature of contemporary social reality only led court critics such as Novikov to move away from the enlightened rationalism of Voltaire into the mystic liberalism of Free masonry. It was here that the intelligentsia-to-be, first acquired the habits of solidarity, independent thought and organization that characterized them throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

The intellectual life in Russia changed as it became possible for cultivated people living in the provinces to maintain contact with another. The acts of 1775 and 1785 encouraged the landed nobility to spend more time in their residences in the countryside. With the advance in the cultural life, a provincial society began to develop. This society saw itself as independent of the state and its members developed a new sense of identity and solidarity no longer

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.105.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pp.105-106.

<sup>12</sup> L. Kochan and R. Abraham, n.3, p.145.

based on state service.<sup>13</sup> However, the contradiction between, on the one hand, Catherine's intention to assign to the social "orders" and corporate groupings an economic and administrative role designed to serve the needs of the state and, on the other hand, the individualistic and centrifugal tendencies of cultural and intellectual life was the underlying cause of the conflict between state and society that began to develop at the end of Catherine II's reign.

While service obligations engendered an ethos of loyalty towards the government, Western education, especially the new teaching methods which gave priority to the moral and cultural responsibility of the individual helped shape the ideals of the new elite: devotion to the life of the mind and the service of the people. The efforts of the empress and the other leading proponents of the enlightenment in Russia most notably Novikov, Fonvizin, Krylov, Radischev, and Karamzin - all aimed to educate active individuals, loyal and patriotic subjects, who would have an acute sense of their moral obligations not only to the sovereign and the empire but to all of Russian society, including the peasantry.<sup>14</sup>

Yet nobles in state service were rootless and alienated men who, out of touch with the people, did not share their culture and literally as well as figuratively, spoke a different language. The decree of 1762, which freed the nobility from obligatory service to the state, allowed the nobles to spend longer periods of time in the countryside. The cultivated elite, or at least its most advanced and liberal members turned their efforts to a new task of serving the people as moral guides and spiritual and cultural teachers. Though the people were at first barely conscious of the change, yet the first tentative steps in this direction were the harbinger of the growth of a new critical attitude towards the imperial

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<sup>13</sup>M. Raeff, *Understanding Imperial Russia: State and Society in the Old Regime*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer, (New York, 1984), p.107.

<sup>14</sup>Isabel de Madriaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, (London, 1981), p.541.

establishment and particularly the government.<sup>15</sup> Thus, within the elite of Russian society, there began to develop the seeds of future dissidence and even subversion.

In such a scenario, the French revolution was enthusiastically welcomed by many people in St. Petersburg. Segur, the French Minister, saw passersby in the streets of the capital excitedly embracing each other when news came of the fall of the Bastille. Catherine's initially cautious reaction towards the French revolution mirrored that of the European aristocracy, as did her horror as all forms of established authority began to crumble and royal heads to roll. She broke off all diplomatic relations with France, put all French -speaking foreigners under police supervision; stopped the sale of the Encyclopedia and confiscated a new Russian translation of Voltaire's works. But by now the damage was done - not so much by actual revolution, but by the slowly gathering impact of French liberal ideas.<sup>16</sup>

Individualism in intellectual and ethical life was the result of changes in Russian society that had been encouraged by Peter's reforms and Catherine's legislative program. But the activism of Masons like Novikov in the areas of culture, religion, and social life - an activism wholly in keeping with Western ideals of spiritual and intellectual individualism - ran counter to the material interests of much of society and, in particular, to the limited objectives that the empress had laid down. This explains why Catherine opposed the establishment of community based charitable organizations and efforts to assist the needy independent of government supervision. Behind this was also her belief that such activities were a potential source of subversion, like that responsible for the recent revolutions in France and the low countries.<sup>17</sup> Here are the first signs of mutual misunderstanding that marked the relations between the

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<sup>15</sup>M. Raeff, n.13, p.109.

<sup>16</sup>See L. Kochan and R. Abraham, n.3, pp.145-146.

<sup>17</sup>M. Raeff, n.13, p.110.



autocratic government and the intellectual elite. Though not averse to the development of growing numbers of cultivated individuals; patriotic, morally responsible and contributing to the growth of the nation, the Russian rulers were against individual social, cultural and moral commitments leading to the development of independent institutions not subject to government control. Accordingly, some of the outstanding representatives of the cultural elite like Novikov and Radischev were dealt with severely. Alexander Radischev, sent by Catherine to study at Leipzig University and influenced by Rousseau, Mably and Helvetius, was exiled to Siberia for presenting a picture of the Russian serf overcome by the tragic results of autocratic rule in his work, *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*. This exile heralded the breach between the autocracy and educated men and women of independent mind that came final around 1840.<sup>18</sup>

The realization of the irreconcilability of the moral teachings and intellectual standards of the European enlightenment (whether in French or English rational philosophical form or the German spiritual-sentimental form and the autocracy and the arbitrary, personalized authority wielded by the agents of the tsar, marks the birth of the Russian intelligentsia.<sup>19</sup> By the end of Catherine II's reign, the blueprint for a civil society in Russia minus the necessary social institutions, and the intelligentsia, the critical tinge of the ruling class and cultural elite and a fertile ground for the growth of ideology, was almost fully constituted, thanks to the state policies instituted by Peter the Great and continued, with new methods, by Catherine II.

However, the challenge that Russia faced at the beginning of the nineteenth century was; how to bridge the chasm which had appeared between, on the one side, civil society and the intelligentsia and, on the other side, the autocratic state, which worked hard to circumscribe the area

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<sup>18</sup>L. Kochan and R. Abraham, n.3, pp.146-147.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid, p.148.

of permissible independent activities.

The reign of Paul I, despite its brevity, had a strong influence on the policies of Paul's successor, Alexander I, and on the thinking of the intellectual elite. Despite some tentative steps towards social reform (including a limit of three days per week on labor owned by tenants to their lord and then restoring the right of individuals to petition the emperor) Paul's regime was repressive and capricious, especially for the cultural elite of the nation. His obsession with military trivia earned him the hostility of the officers of the gears, and his friendly gestures to the peasants, irritated the nobility.<sup>20</sup>

Intellectuals saw the reign of Paul I as especially tyrannical. Paul carried to ridiculous lengths the measures to protect Russia against the germs of the French Revolution, by forbidding not only foods and ideas, but even fashions alleged to be "revolutionary" in origin. Under the fierce censorship, literature and education suffered greatly. Under these circumstances the news, of Paul's assassination was received by the cultivated elite and most of officialdom, with indecent glee. But Paul's capricious rule had exposed the vulnerability of all cultural and political gains of the past and this spurred positive reaction on the part of both government and the cultural elite upon Alexander I's accession to the throne.<sup>21</sup>

The coup marked the beginning of a new phase in the evolution of Russian politics. Henceforth assassinations took place in open streets and were no longer the prerogatives of palace cliques and guard officers. This widened concern with politics, aided by the Napoleonic Wars, symptomatized the new age. In foreign policy it saw the growth of Russia from a European power into a world power, culturally it saw an unprecedented flowering of thought and literature; in economic

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<sup>20</sup>M. Raeff, *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth Century Nobility* (New York, 1966), p.122.

<sup>21</sup> L Kochan and R. Abraham, n.3, p.149.

life, there was a significant increase in urbanization and industrialization; politically, it saw the growth of a revolutionary movement that at first embraced a few scattered individuals, but later coalesced into highly organized parties. The common factor in all these developments was that they called in question the continued existence of the autocracy in its hitherto existing form.<sup>22</sup>

The government made a series of administrative and political changes that helped shape further social and intellectual developments. The policy of Alexander I was designed to establish an administrative system that would draw its personnel from elite groups within the society, groups that would be allowed to act independently of the government in the cultural sphere and other areas. His programs of "constitutional" reform were in fact plans to rationalize the structure of the bureaucracy and increase its efficiency.<sup>23</sup> A reputed liberal, Alexander in his early years, abolished the security police, removed the ban on foreign travel for the nobility and permitted the importation of foreign publications. The attempts at constitutional reform under Speransky aimed at reconciling the autocracy with a system of law by introducing the separation of legislative, executive and judicial powers. These would function under the prerogatives of the autocracy which in turn would to a small extent be limited by a State Duma elected on a property franchise, totally excluding the serfs.<sup>24</sup> The Permanent Council set up in 1801 for this purpose replacing the state council, however enjoyed little freedom of deliberation.<sup>25</sup> Possessing merely advisory powers, it was no curb on the autocracy. The reorganization of the ministries, though leading to a modernization of the Imperial bureaucracy,

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid, p.149.

<sup>23</sup>M. Raeff, n.20, p.127.

<sup>24</sup>L. Kochan and R. Abraham, n.3, p.155.

<sup>25</sup>P. Dukes, *A History of Russia, Medieval, Modern, Contemporary, C.882-1996*, (London, 1998), p.124.

could not cure it of its corruption, irresponsibility and inefficiency.

In the economic and social spheres, responding to the influence of Adam Smith's ideas and of *laissez-faire* liberalism, Alexander I, seeking to create conditions favourable to economic growth, encouraged private enterprise. The government also resorted to protectionism through subsidies in order to tackle Russia's lack of capital and managerial talent. The policy bore fruit and Russia saw a rapid expansion of textile industry and greater exploitation of raw materials. The situation enabled the more dynamic segments of the popular classes, particularly the Old Believers, to establish networks of communication and sources of credit which in turn contributed to the rapid growth of mass-consumption industries. These developments in the economy helped to enlarge the sphere of action open to individuals. Common activities aided the formation of new forms of solidarity, and new groups arose to meet new needs. Thus a civil society developed around material interests, complementing the society that had formed around shared cultural and intellectual interests.<sup>26</sup>

However since most of the industrial labor was employed from the state peasants and the serfs, serfdom was an obstacle to social and economic modernization. Examining the question of serfdom, Alexander I saw reconciliation of two objectives as the solution. First, the economic and administrative status of state peasants had to be improved and they had to be protected against becoming serfs under private landowners (as gifts of the sovereign). Second, a way had to be found to allow landowners to free their serfs on terms that would guarantee the former serfs both personal liberty and e

the monarch would give away only the usufruct (*arenda*) of certain populated lands which bestowed upon the former only the right to income from the land and not over the land itself or its inhabitants, which would remain the property of the state. Though advertisements for serf sales were banned; this law was barely obeyed. Private arrangements between serfs and their masters were legalized in some circumstances, such as those envisaged by the "free farmers" decree of 1803 but this remained a largely symbolic gesture of no real benefit to any one. Between 1816 and 1819, the emancipation without land of serfs in the Baltic region only increased their exploitation by landlords who were the only prospective employers in the region. Due to this experience, from 1820 onwards, all proposals to emancipate the serfs agreed that the serfs could not be freed without also being given enough land to earn a living.<sup>27</sup> However, influenced by his 'unofficial committee', Alexander I believed that such a step as the emancipation of the serfs must be considered only as a remote possibility.<sup>28</sup>

The above discussion points to the pivotal role property relations were destined to play in Russian history from this time onward. Trade and the sale of rights to land and to the labor of others called for clarification of existing laws governing property and persons. The need for a comprehensive code of law began to be felt. Thus, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, commissions were appointed on a number of occasions to look into the codification of Russian law. Though the commissions set out to elaborate new legal standards, based on other modern legal codes, such as the Civil Code of France, the next logical step of formulating a truly useful and comprehensive legal code, was never taken.<sup>29</sup>

These modest policies of reform, nevertheless stirred up considerable opposition in the conservative circles influenced by men who had been high-ranking officials under Catherine II

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<sup>27</sup>M. Raeff, n.13, pp.121-122.

<sup>28</sup>P. Dukes, n.25, p.124.

<sup>29</sup>M. Raeff, n.13, p.124.

brought up in the intellectual traditions of cameralism and the German *Aufklärung* and were attracted by the manners and political values of the Whig aristocracy in England.\* Mostly belonging to the Senate, they hoped to use that institution in order to thwart the attempts of the emperor's youthful advisers to shift supremacy from the elitist Senate to the bureaucracy which was more socially diverse in its composition. Fearing that the bureaucracy would likely become the blind agent of imperial despotism, they argued in favour of an institutionalization of the supreme authority and thus ultimately undermined the basis of personal rule and helped pave the way for a system of government based on fixed and stable laws guaranteed by an institution.<sup>30</sup>

The rapid development of Russian civil society in Alexander's reign was marked by new political ideas, some critical, some supportive of the established order. A stronger and more important opposition had greater repercussions on public life. The innovativeness of political thought and the growth of civil society which proved to be irreversible had a decisive impact on Russian history down to the end of the nineteenth century and even beyond.

Russian cultural life in the first quarter of the nineteenth century differed from the previous century in an important respect: increasing "professionalization" of culture.<sup>31</sup> Intellectual and artistic life ceased to be the exclusive province of a handful of amateurs. Specialization and professionalization are apparent in every area, including state service, the work that occupied most members of the elite. This was a major change. The growth of a civil society distinct from the administrative and military establishment and the court was due to the mutual reinforcing processes of increased specialization in the state service and the

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<sup>30</sup>Please See M. Raeff, n.13; L. Kochan and R. Abraham, n.3; Thaden, n.1.

<sup>31</sup>M. Raeff, n.13, p.129.

increased professionalization of intellectual life.<sup>32</sup>

Specialization and professionalization were encouraged by changes in public education. Attending public schools became a norm among the nobility. The reasonably structured curriculum, the teaching that only a cultured life based on a sound education was worth living all saw a rise in the number of universities. Graduates of the boarding schools enrolled in the University of Moscow or went abroad to specialize in the social sciences and humanities. The universities of Moscow, Kazan, Kharkov, Derpt and Vilno helped train an intellectual aristocracy in the provinces.<sup>33</sup> Various professional schools such as the lycee at Tsarskoe Selo, the Army Medical School and the Institute of Jurisprudence were also set up by the government.<sup>34</sup>

These changes in the educational system were sought to be synchronized with those in the bureaucracy. The increasing complexity of the administration and the increasingly better educated elites required greater professionalization of the civil service. This led to the decree in 1809 that a certain level of education, would be required for access to the higher ranks of the imperial bureaucracy. Amidst furore, these laws were toned down but were gradually, systematically and rigorously enforced. Older civil servants who found it more difficult to meet the new requirements, found their way to promotion blocked.

In the first few decades of the nineteenth century a professionalized intellectual life began to develop outside the schools and universities. Members of the social elite, along with a few representatives of the "masses", enthusiastically threw themselves into intellectual and "academic" activities. Alongside the universities and academies there grew up various cultural organizations and groups with a passionate interest in culture or scholarship.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid, p.129.

<sup>33</sup> L. Kochan and R. Abraham, n.3; and P. Dukes, n.25.

<sup>34</sup>M. Raeff, n.13, p.131.

Many of these, a result of private initiative hoped to avoid state control and played an important part in the development of civil society in Russia.<sup>35</sup>

These developments owed much to the literary and philosophical circles founded by members of the younger generation, which helped to shape that generation's spiritual and intellectual development. By 1800 student "circles" at the University of Moscow and the academy of the corps of cadets were not merely "clubs" that made student life more agreeable and amusing. In the circles young intellectuals first discovered the ethical and intellectual principles from which their social and spiritual ideals later derived.<sup>36</sup> However, isolation from the Russian society and self-absorption were the byproducts of their privileged environment. They criticized the system and protested against the iniquity they saw around them and thus displayed high moral standards, often serving as examples for others. But few succeeded in joining their own society and often lost themselves in mere ideology.

Replacing the state in spreading the latest European ideas and fashions, by the 1820-30, the interest of the circles shifted under the influence of German idealism and *Naturphilosophie* from romanticism to metaphysics, aesthetics, and the philosophy of history. Until the 1830s, however, the circles had no ideological ambitions. But, by merely enhancing the aesthetic and spiritual lives of their members, they sent a fresh vitality to Russian intellectual life, which for the first time moved outside the confines of the state service and the court. Intellectuals emerged as a distinctive social group.<sup>37</sup> Society, having freed itself from the ties of etiquette, no longer merely meant high society. Clubs graduated from being merely recreational centers to places of exchanging information and ideas on arts and literature. The Masonic Lodges, were no longer primarily charitable

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid, pp.133-136.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid, p.138.

<sup>37</sup>L. Kochan and R. Abraham, n.3. pp.163-164.



organizations like in the eighteenth century, but discreet meeting places that attracted members of the elite who wished to criticize the social and ethical character of the regime.<sup>38</sup> Young officers returning from the battlefield after 1815 followed the example of the *Tugendbund* in attempting to establish fraternal societies in the garrison towns and the capital, which were supposed to prepare their members for public service roles.<sup>39</sup>

As the forms of social life grew more various, society and the government establishment went their separate ways. Members of the elite now belonged to many different organizations and played different roles in each. These developments helped create a civil society distinct from the government and the court. In this changed setting many people realized what common interests and intellectual affinities they shared with others and began to cast about for an active role they might play in public life.<sup>40</sup> The war against Napoleon was the crucial factor, the seed around which civil society crystallized. A wave of patriotism swept over the nobility, especially in the provinces, and this, coupled with the emperor's appeal to every Russian to lend a hand in turning back the invader, welded the various elites into a single unit dedicated to a common cause, united by a fervent desire to serve the fatherland. Volunteering for the army many cultivated youths realized that they shared common intellectual, artistic, and cultural interests with others of their generation, even if the actual cultural level varied rather widely. Friendships formed in the army gave those who survived the impetus they needed to form new clubs and organizations and to cast about for ways to serve the public interest.<sup>41</sup> Such activities gave new life to civil society,

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<sup>38</sup>M. Raeff, n.13, pp.131-132.

<sup>39</sup>See M. Raeff, n.13; L. Kochan and R. Abraham, n.3; and P. Dukes, n.25.

<sup>40</sup>M. Raeff, n.13, p.134.

<sup>41</sup>Please See, M. Raeff, n.13; L. Kochan and R. Abraham, n.3; M.T. Florinsky, n.7; N.V. Riasanovsky, A

which after 1815 began to become aware of its own possibilities.

Another realization which heralded the dawn of a new era in the relationship between the elite and the people and had important historical consequences was the discovery by the elite youths that the peasants were human beings and patriotic Russians capable of constructive action, taking initiatives and ready to sacrifice their own good for the sake of their country and their compatriots. The elite youths saw that they must drop their sense of superiority and paternalistic attitude and put their education and know-how to serve the people, bringing material and technical assistance and simultaneously offering spiritual and moral leadership.<sup>42</sup> After the victories of 1815, civil society (informed public opinion) was no longer willing to make do with Masonic lodges, private clubs, and closed artistic and literary societies. People wanted to work openly in the public interest and wanted an acceptance of a new role for civil society like the one played by patriotic associations in Germany after the expulsion of the French. Young Russians, wanting an open participation in political and social life like the western and Central European elites became leaders of a movement to spread the new ideas and assisted in the administration of the country as unpaid experts.<sup>43</sup>

Officers on active duty attempted to raise the cultural level of their troops by setting up schools based on the Lancaster system, which offered a rudimentary education to a fairly large number of soldiers.<sup>44</sup> A society for prison reforms was set up. Young social activists went to work for the administration at the local level in positions concerned with general welfare, hoping to exert direct influence over a

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History of Russia, (Oxford University Press, 1972).

<sup>42</sup>M. Raeff, n.13, p.136.

<sup>43</sup>Please See, M. Raeff, n.13; L. Kochan and R. Abraham, n.3; M.T. Florinsky, n.7. N.V. Raisanovsky, n.41.

<sup>44</sup> Thaden, n.1, pp.86-87.

reform programme that would bring Russian society and the Russian economy into harmony with Central and Western Europe. The future Decembrist and poet K. Ryleev held an important position in the Russo-American company, which he hoped to use to influence Russian commercial and colonial policy.<sup>45</sup> Other well-known men of culture obtained posts in the civil service and the military and openly used these to further the cause of civil society.<sup>46</sup>

In the changed political climate, it was now possible to discuss issues of social structure and reorganization in the press and in public lectures. Academic publications placed the issue of serfdom on the agenda by discussing its economic character and considering the prospect of its abolition. Political systems, legal questions, and issues of political economy were discussed in journals and reviews. Foreign books and newspapers were fairly widely available and found ready readers. The group "Decembrists without December" refers to those cultivated members of the civil society who without joining the active violent Decembrists, helped foster the spiritual and material progress of Russia. It includes eminent figures such as Viazemsky, Orlov and Turgenev and others who as per Pushkin's biographies must have been a large and brilliant group.<sup>47</sup>

The important questions which concerned this movement were how to involve civil society in public life and enlist the aid of the younger generation in the modernization of Russia, how to transform Russian political life by changing the nature of authority and the way that authority was conceived.<sup>48</sup> The activists who donned public roles hoped to give Russia a more institutionalized system of government; a government of laws not men. They wanted to lay the foundations of a Russia where people would enjoy guarantees of personal

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<sup>45</sup>M. Raeff, n.13, p.140.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid, p.140.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid, p.138.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid, pp.138-140.

and career security, property rights, and freedom of thought and would play an active role in running the government. Affording greater autonomy to private as well as public activities, they would achieve the second objective of Peter the Great's revolution; to develop a nation of energetic, industrious people, who would develop the country's resources for the benefit of all.<sup>49</sup>

However, this emphasis on individual action was again stymied under Alexander I as it had been under Catherine II. The emperor went back to policies he had earlier condemned and abandoned efforts to foster a climate of mutual understanding between the state and the educated elite. The reactionary policy of the post-1815 period involved Arakcheev's brutal role, the prohibition and persecution of worthwhile civic organizations in every sphere; education, literature, welfare, etc. Public issues were declared out of bounds for private individuals and made a monopoly of the state.<sup>50</sup>

This crackdown on intellectual activity led to the creation of secret societies modeled after the Italian *carbonari* and the conspiratorial groups of officers in Italy and Spain. Organizers and leaders of these secret societies founded around 1820 involved themselves with developing a comprehensive *Weltanschauung* capable of explaining existing conditions and of showing the path to the future. However, but for one exception, no coherent and comprehensive ideology emerged from these efforts in Russia. The exception was Pavel Pestel, the founder of the Southern Society, who set forth a systematic, Jacobin-inspired program - a radical ideology.<sup>51</sup>



<sup>49</sup>Please See M. Raeff, n.13; L. Kochan and R. Abraham, n.3; and P. Dukes, n.25.

<sup>50</sup>Please See M. Raeff, n.13; L. Kochan and R. Abraham, n.3; P. Dukes, n.25; and also E.C. Thaden, n.1.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

# **DECEMBRISTS AND THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY**

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The opening years of the nineteenth century in Russia was the time when the cultural and educational reforms of Peter the Great, and Catherine began bearing fruit. The development of a civil society amongst the nobility, its reformist zeal inspired by the western education, and the unequal and inhuman burden of the peasantry (especially the system of serfdom) threw up a new self-questioning attitude among the Russian educated youth. Beginning from Pushkin's revolutionary spirit and poetry, inspiring a whole generation, this questioning attitude ignited a protest against the autocracy culminating in the Decembrist uprising of 1825. Though vague in its aims, the Decembrist movement opened the floodgates of Russian revolutionary movement.

As Alexander grew more and more engrossed in the campaign against Napoleon, as he fell more and more deeply under pietistic and mystical influences, as his self-appointed mission of European saviour absorbed him more and more passionately, his liberalism dwindled into a mere concern for the status-quo. He delegated his authority to honest but brutal martinets like Arakcheev, and reactionary cynics like Magnitsky were permitted to terrorize the universities. But Alexander's campaign against Napoleon had unintentionally given decisive impetus to a new generation of thinking Russians. These were the sons of those of the eighteenth century who had read the philosophes and drunk of the waters of the

Enlightenment<sup>1</sup>. They were Guards officers, landowning nobles, senior officials and professional men. But where the fathers had become critics through their reading, the sons had seen the west at first hand.

The Napoleonic Wars and the Russian entry into Paris brought large number of the educated nobility for the first time into immediate contact with unfamiliar conditions of a nature destined to arouse Russian self-doubt and self-criticism. Prince Volkovsky in his memoirs states, "The campaigns of 1812-14 brought Europe nearer to us, made us familiar with its forms of state, its public institutions, the rights of its people. By contrast with our state life, the laughably limited rights which our people possessed, the despotism of our regime first became truly present in our heart and understanding."<sup>2</sup> If even Poland and Finland had constitutions under Alexander I, why should not Russia also? Two other factors deepened the feeling of dissatisfaction, first, the further contrast between Russia's deplorable governmental system and her role at the Congress of Vienna as one of the great powers of Europe, and secondly, the sentiment of popular unity, generated by the national upsurge of 1812, which led in turn to the notion of a duty owed by the higher orders to the lower, and to the serfs in particular<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> L. Kochan and R. Abraham, *The Making of Modern Russia*, (The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1983), p.155.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.155.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p.156.

After Napoleon had been driven out of Russia the government soon resorted to restrictive and severe measures in response to unrest among the peasants and soldiers and conspiratorial activities among the gentry. Since gentry conspiracies did not assume menacing dimensions until around 1820, these measures were first felt by the lower classes. By 1813, Alexander ordered that discipline should be better observed and stricter drilling resumed in the army. Resentment against this tyrannicism, together with economic dislocation and additional financial burdens due to the war, increased peasant dissatisfaction and produced new peasant disturbances. An estimated 651 peasant disturbances occurred in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the Don Cossack being especially serious<sup>4</sup>.

The famous military colonies, conceived by Alexander and administered by Arakcheev, gave rise to additional unrest and discontent among both peasants and soldiers. Begun in 1810, by the end of Alexander I's reign, the military colonies included approximately one-third of the Russian army.<sup>5</sup> Facing the combined disadvantages of being soldier and peasant simultaneously, these peasant-soldiers resented the harsh military discipline and the regimentation of their daily existence. In the north, the colonists could no longer supplement their income through trading activities or seasonal work in factories.

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<sup>4</sup> E.C. Thaden, *Russia Since 1801*, (New York, 1971), p.85.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p.85.



Decembrist Nicholas Turgenev in his book *La. Russie et les Russes* (Paris, 1847) notes ,that, fearing further introduction of the colonies, the peasants often ceased harvesting when the emperor visited their area, reasoning that soon everything would be taken away from them<sup>6</sup>.

Much discontent was also evident among regular soldiers, who served 25 years in the army during the first part of the nineteenth century. In Western Europe, Russian soldiers had observed societies in which no serfdom existed and the common man lived freer and less hampered by officials and the ruling class than in Russia. Returning home they again experienced military regimentation, corporal punishment, and endless parades and drills. Soldiers registered their protest in several mutinies. The 1820 mutiny in the St. Petersburg Semenovskii regiment particularly shocked military authorities and Alexander, for ,this regiment was an elite outfit in which the tsar was an honorary colonel and had special confidence<sup>7</sup>. The mutiny began as a protest against the arbitrary policies and brutality of the commander, colonel Schwartz, and turned into an open mutiny after the authorities treacherously imprisoned a group of soldiers from the regiment with whom they began to negotiate. Alexander had the regiment dissolved and twenty four men of the military had to run the gauntlet

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.86.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 87

and 400 soldiers were sent to Siberian and other remote garrisons<sup>8</sup>.

Meanwhile, the smaller number of members of the nobility who had hoped that Alexander would bring reform to Russia, could only become alienated from the system as a whole when they realized that his early promise was not to be fulfilled. The roots of the Decembrist movement may be traced back to the late eighteenth century, when the first noble members of the intelligentsia aspired to apply the ideas of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution (and to a lesser extent the American Revolution) to their own fatherland. Strong elements are also to be found in it of Freemasonry and mysticism, and of early nineteenth century German idealistic philosophy and French Utopian Socialism. The Decembrist movement was not then apart from the mainstream of European development but very much in it; parallels are to be found in the German *Tugenbund*, the Italian *Carbonari*, and the Spanish liberal organizations.

The Spanish revolution in the early 1820's particularly attracted their attention because its leaders had staged a military coup d'etat. The initial success of the Spanish revolution seemed to demonstrate that a small group of determined officers could achieve

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

their ends through well-organized and resolute military action<sup>9</sup>.

During his interrogation after the crushing of the Decembrist uprising, Pestel's reply to the question of what influenced the uprising was, "This question must go beyond the realm of discussion about the secret society. Political books are in the hands of everyone; political science is taught and political news spreads everywhere. A survey of the events of 1812, 1813, 1814 and 1815, likewise of the preceding and following periods, will show how many thrones were toppled over, how many others were established, how many kingdoms were destroyed, and how many new ones were created; how many sovereigns were expelled, how many returned, or were invited to return and were then again driven out; how many revolutions were accomplished; how many coup d'e`tats carried out - all these events familiarized the minds of men with the idea of revolutions, with their possibilities, and with the favourable occasions on which to execute them. Besides that, every century has its peculiar characteristics : ours is marked by revolutionary ideas. The spirit of reform causes mental fermentation<sup>10</sup>. Thus, it becomes evident that external influence in terms of ideas was an important factor in the Decembrist uprising.

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<sup>9</sup> Please See P. Duker, *A History of Russia, Medieval, Modern, Contemporary*, c.882-1996(London,1998),p. 126.

<sup>10</sup> "The Decembrists, Extracts from Documents", in T.Riha, ed., *Readings in Russian Civilization* (Chicago, 1964), p. 296.

Alexander I, acclaimed as Europe's liberator and the arbiter of her fate, had upon returning among his own people after the Napoleonic war reverted to the role of an autocrat. The same man who had insisted that the Bourbons, whom he had restored, to the throne, grant a constitution to France, who was about to bestow representative institutions on his Polish subjects, continued to rule Russia as an absolute monarch. Nor did the emperor show any signs that he proposed to deal with the country's pressing social ailments. Most of Russia's peasants were serfs, the servile status of the majority of the nation being both a symptom and the prime cause of its backwardness. With the war's end, the young officers' professional life reverted to a routine of endless parades and drills. The more intellectually minded among them could not help reflecting how for all its military might, the empire, when it came to its political and social institutions, economy, and education, everything which meant civilization, lagged behind France and England and even the petty German principalities.

It was a fervent desire to cure Russia of such ills that led six young officers of the Imperial Guards in February 1816 to form a secret society. Called at first the Union of Salvation, it soon acquired a supplementary name, Society of True and Faithful Sons of the Fatherland. The initiative came from Alexander Nikolayevich Muraviev, at twenty-three years of age

already a colonel and much decorated veteran of the Napoleonic wars. His associates, all under thirty and also of noble birth, were Prince Serge Trubetskoy, Ivan Yakushkin, and three of Alexander's kinsmen and namesakes, among them Serge Muraviev - Apostol<sup>11</sup>.

By the end of its first year, the Union of Salvation had fourteen members, whose backgrounds were similar to those of the original six. Among them was Paul Pestel. Thinker and writer, as well as a practitioner of the conspiratorial craft, he stands first in the long line of revolutionaries who were both activists and theorists - the tradition which one day would produce Lenin. And, with his penchant for egalitarianism and authoritarianism, of all the Decembrists, Pestel comes closest to being a precursor of Bolshevism<sup>12</sup>. The secret society, in its organisation and structure, was modeled after a Masonic lodge, reflecting both its members' Masonic affiliations and an attempt to provide a protective colouring to what was already a budding political conspiracy.

At the end of its first year of existence, the society acquired a statute. Its members pledged to work for the introduction of a constitutional monarchy, for the abolition of serfdom, and to limit the influence of foreigners in the government. This was a novelty in

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<sup>11</sup> Adam. B. Ulam, *Russia's Failed Revolutions*, (London, 1981), p 6.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p.7.

Russian life; a formal program of political action developed not by the authorities, but by a group of private persons. The statute, even formulated a program smacking of subversion in that ,the Union of Salvation was to expand greatly its membership and to infiltrate the higher ranks of the military and civil bureaucracy. Upon the emperor's demise, the conspiracy would come into the open, and its members would refuse to swear allegiance to the new monarch until and unless he abolished autocracy and introduced a system of national representation.<sup>13</sup>

In the fall of 1816, Michael Lunin proposed the idea of regicide ,which was rejected by his comrades, arguing that Russia was far from ready for a revolution. The Decembrists viewed themselves primarily as reformers attuned to the political realities of Russian life. But this moderation was combined with a certain revolutionary impatience and desire for violence. Knowing that Russia was not ready for drastic changes, and it would require time and much patient work infiltrating the state machinery and educating what there was in the way of public opinion to prepare Russia for free institutions, they were also aware that the contest between freedom and autocracy could never be resolved through political

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.7.

bargaining and constitutional reforms, but only through struggle and an act of will<sup>14</sup>.

By 1818, however, the old secret society was dissolved by its now older and wiser members, seeking firmer foundations for their complex task. In its place, a new organization was created by the Decembrists, the Union of Welfare. A strong element of continuity persisted between the two unions; twenty two of the twenty nine founders of the new one had belonged to the old one. But the Union of Welfare, eschewing the explicitly conspiratorial and political character of its predecessor required merely a member's word of honor protecting the secrecy of the organisation instead of the old oath. The implications being, that nothing in the aims and laws of the new union, disrespected the faith, patriotic feelings, or social obligations of the Russians.

The statute of the Union was drafted by a committee of three, one of whose members was Michael Muraviev, and modeled after the constitution of *Tugenbund*, organised in Prussia in 1808.<sup>15</sup> *Tugenbund*, impeccably monarchist in its sentiments, sought to reform and modernize Prussian society. Retaining its revolutionary fervour, the proposed structure of the Union of Welfare featured an inner group composed of its original founders, which,

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<sup>14</sup> A.G Mazour, *The First Russian Revolution, 1825: Its Origin, Development and Significance* (California, 1963), p.27.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p.48.

under the name of the Basic Union, was to run the affairs of the secret society as a whole. Each member of the inner body was to organize a branch cell of at least ten, but not more than twenty, members. Only after the total membership of the Union of Welfare had grown considerably would non-founder members become eligible for election to the Basic Union and thus fully privy to the organization's policies and plans. The Decembrists' Basic Union then designated six of its members as its executive branch, called the Basic Council. The whole Union of Welfare was to be organized upon hierarchical and elitist lines with a pyramid like arrangement. This is a pattern similar to that found in the Populist conspiracies of the 1860s and 1870s, and it is fairly analogous to the clandestine Marxist cells in pre-1917 Russia.

The Green book, as its program was originally called, concentrated in four major areas. One was philanthropy. People involved in this field were to sponsor and join already existing organizations to relieve poverty, take care of the sick, improve the lot of prisoners, etc. Special attention was to be given to protect peasants from greedy landlords and relieving the condition of serfs. Those assigned to work in the field of public enlightenment were to seek control and give direction to the educational institutions. Literature and arts, the Union of Welfare believed, should be judged not primarily by aesthetic criteria but by the degree to which they inculcated socially useful ideas and patriotic feelings.



The third aim, was in the sphere of law and order. It was endeavoured to instill efficiency and humanity in the administration of justice and civil affairs and put the fear of God in the corrupt and indolent Russian bureaucrat. National economy was the fourth major thrust area wherein the Decembrists hoped to enlist people from the appropriate branches of the government and landlords with special knowledge of agronomy and also those from the lower orders, such as tradesmen and craftsmen. However, this unrealistic program was made impractical due to the vast distances of the pre-telegraph and pre-railway Russia. .

But there was another more secret part of the Green Book known to the inner core of the union's membership, which spelled out its political goals, reaffirming the secret society's determination to the Decembrists were unsure about the path to be pursued ; revolution or peaceful reform. Their revolutionary impatience was reigned in by the fear that by striking at the hated political system and its embodiment; the emperor, they might hurt Russia: Because, as its statute proclaimed, the ultimate aim of the Union of welfare was to bring the country "to the level of greatness and well being for which it had been destined by the Creator"<sup>16</sup>.

During the three years of its existence, the Union of Welfare could not even come close to achieving any of

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<sup>16</sup> A.B. Ulam, n.11, pp.15-18.

its objectives and though its membership expanded, some old members left it; either due to change of heart or due to fear of being caught by the government which had become aware of the group. New branches sprang up in St. Petersburg, Moscow and in several garrison towns, the most notable one being Tulchin, where Paul Pestel, increasingly acknowledged as the society's leading intellect, served at the headquarters of the second army. But the sum of the society's activity was rather meagre. Though the Decembrists promoted some literary and economic societies and discussion groups, castigated and wrote opprobrious poems about the main pillars of official reaction, notably Arackcheyev, subjected to criticism such historical and literary apologies of autocracy as Karamzin's famous *History of the Russian State*, all these activities fell far short of creating public opinion.

However, the Decembrists helped in setting up Lancaster schools through the Free Society for the Establishment of Schools based upon the method of Mutual Instruction. Count Michael Orlov, one of the founding members of the Union of Welfare, organized Lancaster schools for his soldiers both in Kiev and in Kishinev. Upon assuming command of an infantry division, Orlov refused to tolerate unfair treatment of soldiers by the officers. The man responsible for supervision of educational activities in the division, a member of the Union of Welfare, Vladimir Rayevsky was arrested in 1822

and charged with using his position to spread constitutional and egalitarian ideas among his soldier-pupils. After the Semyonovsky affair in 1820, Alexander authorized the use of political informers within the army and ordered special surveillance over the soldiers taught in Lancaster type schools. In 1822 an imperial rescript dissolved the Masonic Lodges and reemphasised the ban on all secret associations. But by then the Unions of Welfare too had been dissolved.

A meeting of the Basic Council of the Union plus a few other members in January 1820 discussed the relative advantages of the monarchical versus republican forms of government. Under Pestel's influence, all present voted for a republic and subsequently, reflecting on the implications of such a step, severed their connections with the secret society. In 1821, in another meeting in Moscow, faced with the choice between revolution or dissolution, the conference opted for the latter<sup>17</sup>. But this was meant as a ruse to deceive the government and its spies. The conspiracy was to go on in a different guise, and its goal was to be clearly revolutionary; the introduction of representative institutions through forcible means. But these people were inexperienced and unskilled in the revolutionary craft, a politically heterogeneous collection of individuals rather than an ideologically homogenous party. As Pestel was to testify before the commission investigating the December 14

uprising: "From the very beginning of the secret society not a single one of its rules would be consistently observed throughout its activities... very often something decided at one time would the very next day be again questioned and argued about. Everything would depend on the circumstances."<sup>18</sup>

The formal dissolution of the Union of Welfare was also done to rid the movement of people like Pestel, suspected of harbouring dictatorial ambitions and committed by now to republicanism, and those too conservative to use forcible means for the overthrow of the absolutist system<sup>19</sup>. However, Pestel proved more determined and by the very force of his personality managed to carry with him majority of the Decembrists in the south, when he intensified his conspiratorial activities.

Thus the Union of Welfare gave rise to two new secret societies, the Northern Society, centered in St. Petersburg and led by Nicholas Turgenev, a high official of the Ministry of Finance and Captain Nikita Muraviev; and the Southern Society, led by Pestel. Both societies maintained contact with each other and were committed to the overthrow of the autocratic system. But, while the Northerners wanted a constitutional monarchy as the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.24.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in A.B. Ulam, n.11, p.25.

<sup>19</sup> M. Raeff, ed., and intro., *The Decembrist Movement*, (New Jersey, 1966), p.32.

substitute, Pestel and his companions were firm proponents of a republic.

While the northerners toyed with the idea of replacing Alexander by his wife, Empress Elizabeth as the monarch, the Southerners contemplated assassination<sup>20</sup>. But, despite the hardening of their revolutionary resolve, the Decembrists made little progress towards their goal between 1821 and 1825. Unable to carry revolutionary agitation to the masses, the Decembrists, still dwelled on how to reach the common man's mind and undermine his allegedly blind trust in the tsar. Nikita Muraviev sought to do this by striking at the religious underpinning of political obedience. Muraviev's document; *A Curious Conversation* is the earliest example of the type of propaganda which would become quite widespread in the hands of the next revolutionary generation - the Populists. Religious arguments and historical examples are used to buttress the case for freedom and against autocracy :

“God granted freedom to man; should all men be free? Yes, without doubt. Are all people free? No, a small number of them enslaved the rest; [Because] the former have unjustly aspired to rule, while the latter have meanly acquiesced in the loss of natural human rights given by God Himself. One should establish rules or laws the way it was of old; [when] there were no autocratic

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.34.

sovereigns? The Monarch usurped absolute power, step by step, employing all kinds of deception.<sup>21</sup>

The Decembrists were clearly influenced by the example of the Spanish guerrillas in their war of national liberation against Napoleon. Assisted by Catholic priests they had used a similar religious motif in arousing their people to fight the French.<sup>22</sup>

After the dissolution of the Union of Welfare, committed to a revolutionary solution, the Decembrists were busy recruiting new members and drafting legislation for post-revolutionary Russia. They invested a great deal of time and energy in drafting and arguing about constitutional projects. They rejected power for its own sake and thus had to prove to themselves and to the world that their goal was a genuinely new social and political order, which would guarantee Russia's freedom and greatness. Influenced by romanticism, they believed that man is shaped by his environment, that the secret of individual and collective happiness reposes in wise and humane laws. The intellectuals among the Decembrists imbibed deeply of the writings of Montesquieu, Destutt de Tracy and Adam Smith and studied the laws of England and the United States Constitution<sup>23</sup>. The very word constitution suggested to many some miraculous blueprint which of and by itself could save Russia from the usual

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in A.B. Ulam, n.11, p.27.

<sup>22</sup> P. Dukes, n.9, p.126.

<sup>23</sup> A.B. Ulam, n.11, p.29.

pangs of a political upheaval and would usher in an era of freedom and prosperity. But even the most sober-minded and sophisticated of the conspirators believed that before destroying the old, they must set on a paper a clear and definitive blueprint of the new.

Nikita Muraviev's proposed constitution was originally drafted by him in 1821 and underwent several modifications designed to meet the criticisms of his fellow Decembrists. It began thus, "The experience of all nations and all times has proved that autocratic power has fatal consequences both for the rulers and the ruled. It is repugnant to the teachings of our holy faith and to the precepts of common sense"<sup>24</sup>. Comparing European countries with Russia, Muraviev believed that the while most of the former have achieved freedom under the law, Russians were more deserving of constitutional liberties than any other people. In a letter to Nicholas I, after the uprising, the Decembrist A. Bestuzhev remarks, "Did we free Europe in order to be ourselves placed in chains? Did we grant a constitution to France in order that we dare not talk about it, and did we buy at the price of blood priority among nations in order that we might be humiliated at home?"<sup>25</sup>

Along with federalism, Muraviev was a strong proponent of separation of powers. The document bears a

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.29.

<sup>25</sup> Extract from a letter of A. Bestuzhev to Nicholas I", in T. Riha, n.10, p.299.

strong imprint of the United States Constitution, especially when it comes to the mechanics of its federal structure. While the monarchical form is preserved in name, Muraviev's Russia would be in effect a crowned republic, "The Russian nation is free and independent. It cannot be the property of a person or of a family. The people are the source of supreme power. And to them belongs the sole right to formulate the fundamental law."<sup>26</sup> However, even though in the second version of his draft Muraviev abandoned the property requirements for citizenship and lowered those for holding various state and federal offices, but still his Russia would be ruled by the rich. Serfdom was to be abolished and the peasant would get the title to his dwellings and his household plot.

It was still some years before the term "Socialism" would come into use. Yet, in describing his political views to the investigating commission, Pestel used a formula quite similar to Marx's definition of class war; "It seemed to me that the main political tendency of our age is the struggle between the masses of the people and Aristocracies of all kinds, whether those based upon wealth or hereditary ones". This theme is evident in Pestel's writings too, "In many states which have representative institutions the right to vote belongs to the rich while the majority of the citizens are excluded. This way the aristocracy of wealth has simply replaced

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<sup>26</sup> A.G.. Mazour, n.14,p.73.



the feudal one, and the people in some ways are politically worse off than before because they are forcibly dependent upon plutocracy,<sup>27</sup> criticizing bourgeois constitutionalism. However he was not an economic egalitarian. But, he wanted political power and rights to be completely separated from any criteria of wealth and property. All class distinctions were to be abolished, everyone was to be equal before the law.

Pestel moved towards a radical solution to the serf problem in the second version of his project in 1824-25. Serfs would be emancipated immediately, and their allotments would come from the extracts of their masters, the wealthiest among the latter required to turn over half of their land without compensation. He advocates a semi-nationalization of land whereby all agricultural area of the country would be divided into two parts, one-half owned by the district and parceled out to individual cultivators, who would not be allowed to sell, lease or bequeath their share. The other half could be owned privately without any restrictions. This arrangement would guarantee some kind of social security, eliminate pauperism and provide a bond of social solidarity<sup>28</sup>. By the standards of the time, Pestel's approach was quite revolutionary.

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<sup>27</sup> Extracts from Pestel's Testimony in "The Decembrists", in T. Riha, n.10, pp. 295-297.

<sup>28</sup> A.B.Ulam, n.11, pp32-34.

Like the Jacobins of the French Revolution, Pestel saw no inconsistency between democracy and political intolerance and repression. There would be no room in his Russia for political parties or, in fact, for any associations not sponsored by the government. Pestel's is a welfare state; its orphans, indigent, and disabled are to be cared for by the community, and disabled are to be cared for by the community, more specifically by their particular districts, whether in special institutions or through subsidies.

His proposed constitution Pestel entitled *The Russian Justice (Pravda)*. Neither of its two variants is too explicit about the actual structure of the government. By 1822 when he wrote the first draft, Pestel was already a staunch republican and rejected the idea of property qualifications for voting. In 1825 he sketched a brief paper called "Mandate for the State Constitution". Here he prescribed a thoroughly democratic structure. The egalitarian and democratic rhetoric of Muraviev and Pestel also finds reflection in a letter of Kakhovsky to General Levashev during the investigation, "The people have conceived a sacred truth - that they do not exist for governments, but that governments must be organized for them."<sup>29</sup>

As December 14, 1825 approached, the two leading theorists and moving spirits of the conspiracy became

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<sup>29</sup> Extracts from Pestel's Testimony in "the Decembrists", in T. Riha, n.10, p.96.

disheartened . Between 1823 and 1825, there had been a considerable amount of talk about capturing the emperor and either forcing him to issue a Constitution, as most Northern confederates would have preferred, or doing away with him, the latter at least ostensibly the position of Pestel and his patrons in the south. In 1825, it was decided to capture Alexander during his expected attendance at the field maneuvers of the Third Army Corps in the fall of 1826, kill him and then the Third corps led by the Decembrists would march on to Kiev and Moscow. Other army units, it was expected, would join them. In the north, the revolutionary confederates would seize the capital, send other members of the imperial family abroad, and compel the senate to issue a proclamation legalizing the new regime. However, evidence points to how Pestel, practically on the one the eve of the fatal event, grew more and more irresolute and hesitant<sup>30</sup>.

Expanding its sphere of activity, for some time the Southern Society had contacts with a clandestine Polish organization seeking full independence for Poland. In January 1825, Pestel and Prince Serge Volkonsky met with its emissaries to see if they could work out a common plan of action. However, with both sides being less frank with each other, the discussions were inconclusive. Another secret organization of young officers among garrisons in the Ukraine, who were sons of impoverished landholders and petty officials, the United Slavs, became

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<sup>30</sup> A.B. Ulam, n.11, p.40.

known to some members of the Southern Society during summer maneuvers of the Third Army Corps in 1825. By the middle of September, the two secret societies coalesced. For all the class and the temperamental differences between the old and the new members, the accession of the United Slavs should have brought the Southern Society a considerable infusion of strength : some fifty young and energetic men. However, in the absence of a leadership capable of transforming revolutionary ideas and plans into revolutionary action, the agitators were incapable of effectively indoctrinating the soldiers.

But by 1825, the government, which had all along had intimations about the existence of the secret societies, had received a fuller picture of the conspiracy through its informers within the Southern Society. Had the tsarist regime been more efficient it could have moved against the plotters long before the uprising of December 14. But it is also certain that, but for the totally unanticipated death of Alexander in November, the conspirators would have been arrested long before August 1826 and the new regime of Nicholas I could have been spared the traumatic shock of the revolt.<sup>31</sup> As it was, the events of December 14, 1825 were to open a chasm between Russian society and the imperial government, which would never be bridged.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.45.

In 1823, the Northern Society had acquired a new member, who was to play a decisive role in the events, which triggered the uprising; the poet Kondrati Ryleyev. However, before Ryleyev who in 1825 had become one of the three member directorate of the Northern society, could formulate an actual blueprint and timetable of the uprising, on November 19 Alexander I expired in the southern city of Taganrog. There ensued two weeks of utter confusion during which Russia was without a ruler and the government paralyzed. Out of this chaos came the revolt. The indecisive, disorganized conspirators were propelled by the course of events and almost against their will, into action.

The cause of the confusion lay in the question of succession to the throne. The presumed heir to the childless Alexander was his brother, Grand Duke Constantine; the Russian commander-in-chief at Warsaw. However, based on Constantine's private letter to Alexander, in which the former offered to renounce his right to succession, Alexander had designated his next younger brother Nicholas<sup>3</sup> as his heir, but in an undisclosed document. A few days after the announcement of Alexander's death, the secret document became known to the emperor's dignitaries. But in the meantime they, as well as the army, had sworn allegiance to Emperor Constantine I. So did Nicholas, due to his unpopularity with the regiments of the Guards. Constantine however, refused to acknowledge that he was emperor, and to budge

from Warsaw or to make a public renunciation of the throne, bringing the whole government machinery to a standstill.

The Decembrists plunged into feverish discussions. Something was constructed of odds and ends of the previous plans for an uprising<sup>32</sup>. This was to be essentially a palace revolution with units of the Guards, officered by members of the secret society, carrying out the coup. The objective, however, would be to install a provisional regime which would summon a national assembly, which, in turn was to proclaim Russia a republic or a constitutional monarchy. The Decembrists decided to exploit Constantine's silence and persuade the soldiers that Nicholas was a usurper trying to wrest the crown from its rightful owner. Simultaneously with the coup, it was proposed to publish a manifesto instituting far-reaching reforms. The manifesto would immediately abolish serfdom, disband the military colonies and eliminate taxes and monopolies, especially burdensome to the lower classes. All citizens were to be equal before the law, trials with juries were to be made public, the length of military service was to be reduced from twenty five to fifteen years, a provision expected to gain wide support for coup among the soldiers.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> M. Raeff, n.19, p.73.

<sup>33</sup> A. Manifesto, Drawn by "Dictator" Trubetskoi on the Eve of December 14, 1825, in "The Decembrists", in T. Riha, n.10, pp.301-302.

No plans for a revolutionary uprising are ever worked out to the last detail, but with the Decembrists there was not only a divergence of opinion as to the best way to go about it but also as the day of decision approached, increasing and hearing doubts about the whole venture as the hour approached there were defections from the revolutionaries ranks. On December 9 the plans became known to the high officials, and the news reached the Decembrists through their sympathizers in the bureaucracy that Nicholas would be proclaimed emperor within a few days. They kept debating and procrastinating until it was almost too late. On December 13 it was learned that the next day officials and the army would be required to swear allegiance to Nicholas. It was decided that the next morning, Decembrist officers were to explain to their soldiers, when they assembled in the barracks for the oath, that Nicholas was usurper, and then they were to lead them in full battle array to the senate square. The rebel units assembled dignitaries to issue the revolutionaries' manifests.

However, it was undecided as to in whose name would the manifesto be issued. The conspirators, compounding their errors, entrusted the command of the military operation to Prince Serge Trubetskoy who had been quite dubious of the whole adventure.

On the morning of December 14 - an hour after the numbers of the Senate had already taken the Oath - some 3,000

soldiers, consisting of the Moscow regiment and a handful or two from other units, assembled in the Senate square, in the shadow of Falconets' great equestrian statue of Peter the Great. The leaders came and went, some returning to brood in desperate inertia on the scene, while others, including Tubetskoy, and second-in-command Alexander Bulatov stayed away., Ryleyev, as a civilian, could not take part in the military activities. Nothing passed during the bitterly cold hours of the morning and afternoon that bore the least resemblance to an insurrection. Formed into a square, their muskets loaded, the uncomprehending insurgent troops stamped 'their feet to keep warm and cheered for Constantine, divided by a short distance only from the loyal regiments, perhaps three times their number, drawn up in perhaps three times their number, drawn up in parade on the neighboring admiralty boulevard. Thousands of onlookers & food by. The governor of the capital, General Miloradovich, and the refusal of a hearing to Nicholas's intermediaries precipitated the end. Nicholas was slow to use force, but as the light fell the danger grew that the government troops might be rescued from their duty. Cannon were brought up and the order was given to fire. The first volley scattered the insurgents, and in an hour it was all over. The same strange fatalism which had kept them from storming their way to victory now kept the Decembrists from trying to escape apprehension and



prison. In some cases, they voluntarily surrendered to the authorities.<sup>34</sup>

The emperor Nicholas himself turned inquisitor cajoling, persuading, threatening and insulting he gained information from the competitors about the secret society. Overnight imperial aides raced to all corners of European Russia and Poland with orders to arrest and bring back under guard any and all who had had any connections with the Decembrist movement from the very movement of its inception. By the time the summons to revolt from St. Petersburg had reached the South the plot had been betrayed. Pestel was arrested a day before the insurrection in the capital, and the desperate attempts by Serge-Muraviev-Apostol at the head of the southern regiment to occupy Kiev was easily overcome.

Thus what started as a revolution resolved itself into what might be called an armed demonstration in the north, followed by an equally abortive uprising in the south. Yet despite its ephemeral character, the Decembrists effort illuminated the glaring weakness of the regime. Since the rebels belonged to the ruling class, if the initial attempt by the conspirators had succeeded, a substantial part of that class, and even of the bureaucracy, would have aligned itself on their sides<sup>35</sup>. Never again would

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<sup>34</sup>For Details Please See: A.B. Ulam, n.11; R. Charques, *A Short History of Russia*, (London,1959) ;Paul Dukes, n.9; A.G. Mazour, n.14.

<sup>35</sup> A.G. Mazour, n.14, p.123.

the tsarist government be able to count on the unquestioned allegiance of its people. To secure its alliance it would have to resort to creating an elaborate machinery of expression and that in turn would increase the alienation society and set the state for the most uninterrupted struggle between reaction and revolution which would be the main feature of Russian history until 1917.

While the officers who sided with Nicholas were rewarded with promotions and honors, the Decembrists guilty of treason, would by law be sent before the firing squads. But voices in Nicholas's entourage pleaded for a lenient treatment arguing that it would be politic for the emperor to begin his reign in a spirit of generosity and forgiveness<sup>36</sup>. Yet Nicholas chose to be most unforgiving. In a way the punishments meted out proved for Russia's future more opprobrious and fateful than would have been a wholesale execution. Few were punished with death, but most even on basis of tenuous or non-existent ties with the uprising were disgraced and exiled for life, their infamy and suffering in distant Siberia serving as a warning to any who might be tempted to follow them. In fact, Nicholas's decision, the result of the trauma he received on the day of the uprising led the judges to devise the manner of punishment which would secure the Decembrists place in history and the revolutionary legend. The memory of low amateurish was their rebellion

and how undignified their behavior after the defeat became blurred, and what the future generations would remember would be mainly their self-sacrifice and martyrdom.

Nicholas's assumption that he could shape posterity's judgement on the Decembrists is proved wrong even by his own official biographer<sup>37</sup>

"But whatever one's opinion about the movement represented by the Decembrists, however one might consider it as a mistake or a result of delusions, one cannot deny them one general characteristic. That characteristic was their readiness for self-sacrifice in the broadest sense of the word. Here [were people] who already had or were about to have brilliant careers, people who when it came to their professional duties acted according to their connections, were full of humanity and fairness, and who were deservedly trusted both by their subordinates as well as by others who depended upon them. The self sacrifice of the leaders [of the Decembrists] is all the more striking because hardly anyone among them counted on success, on the contrary they all were prepared to die for their convictions."

Neither the investigation nor the subsequent so-called trial bore the slightest resemblance to what could be described as judicial procedure. It proved fortunate for

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<sup>36</sup> A.B. Ulam, n.11, p.57..

<sup>37</sup> Nicholas K. Schilder, *Emperor Alexander I*, (St. Petersburg, 1905), p.435.

the legend of the Decembrists that the full test of their depositions before the investigating commission did not come to light until after 1917. It was not so much the brittleness of their revolutionary spirit, but their deep ambivalence about Russia and an absence in their experience of how to endure the consequences of the revolution's failure, which led many of them to indulge in self-accusations and repentance and to prostrate themselves before the man they had aimed to dethrone<sup>38</sup>. The prisoners were questioned endlessly about their knowledge of not only their own but also nay other secret societies and dissident groups in Russia and Poland. A theme which would continue to reverberate through similar proceedings down to the present was the authorities curiosity about any possible links between the Decembrists and revolutionary movements abroad, and the official incredulity that on their own and without some foreign provocation Russians could have revolted against their governmental.<sup>39</sup>

In stripping the Decembrists of their titled and estates and in forbidding their wives and children to follow them, except if they also chose perpetual exile<sup>40</sup>, the regime hoped to exercise dissent from society and to teach a lesson to the educated class. But in fact throughout the thirty years of reaction which was

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<sup>38</sup> For Details Please See the testimonies of the Decembrists in "The Decembrists", in T. Riha ,n.10, pp. 295-302.

<sup>39</sup> A.B Ulam, n.11, p.62.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p.63.

Nicholas's reign, the dwindling band of exiles in distant Siberia continued to weigh heavily on the nation's conscience, serving as a constant reminder for those at home that there could be a different Russia. If the pre-1825 period of the Decembrists activity resembled often of "adolescents' madcap games", then the effect of the legend into which they grew is also well expressed by Pushkin in his poetic message to them:

"Your mournful toil and high-minded aspirations will not have been in vain;

[Once your] heavy chains drop off and crumble the  
dungeon's walls,  
Freedom will greet you joyfully"<sup>41</sup>

Alexander Odoyevsky, a Decembrist answered Pushkin thus:

"Bard rest assured, we're proud of our fate and chains;  
Though locked in cells, as of old we laugh at the Tsar.  
Our mournful toil will not be in vain.  
Out of this spark will come a conflagration.  
And our people, their eyes opened, will gather under  
freedom's sacred banner."<sup>42</sup>

In 1900 a group of Russian Marxists, which included Lenin, chose *Iskra* (*The Spark*) as the name of their

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<sup>41</sup> A.S. Pushkin, *Works, II*, (Moscow, 1949), 7.

<sup>42</sup> *Poems and Letters* (Moscow, 1934), p.117.

revolutionary journal, and it would justify its device "out of this spark will come a conflagration"<sup>43</sup>.

The bare fact remains that on December 14 the conspirators almost willed their own defeat, and that the cost of the defeat was the eclipse of liberal hopes for a generation afterwards. That, however was not the only consequence of failure. Alexander Herzen, with whom the tradition of Russian revolutionary agitation begins, pointed the moral of this first attempted revolution in the empire of the tsars with a political programme. Theories, he said, inspire convictions, example shapes conduct.<sup>44</sup> The fate of the Decembrists in challenging the autocracy created a popular martyrology and a summons to action for the revolutionary movements which came after them.

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<sup>43</sup> A.B. Ulam, n.11, p.64.

<sup>44</sup> A. Walicki, *Russian Social Thought: An Introduction to the Intellectual History of Nineteenth Century Russia* (Oxford, 1975), p.92.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

# **RUSSIAN SOCIAL THINKERS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY**

To the new Tsar, twenty-nine year old Nicholas, the Decembrist revolt came as a traumatic shock. From the first, he was resolved to preserve the status quo intact. Not that Nicholas was not aware of all the abuses, injustices, and corruption stigmatized by the Decembrists. On the contrary, he took the greatest pain to familiarize himself with their criticisms, keeping a bound volume of their testimony on his desk for the rest of his life.<sup>1</sup> But he did very little about them. It was this Russian government that de Custine compared to 'the discipline of the camp - it is a state of siege become the normal state of society.'<sup>2</sup>

All criticism at any level but the topmost was stifled through the operation of the censorship and the closest possible supervision of the activities of the populace. The revolts of 1830-31 in Belgium, France and Poland, and the revolutions of 1848-9 throughout the continent, gave Nicholas renewed and reinforced incentive to preserve Russia inviolate.<sup>3</sup> The slogan 'Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality', coined by Count Uvarov, the Ministry of Education was intended to serve as an ideological dam that would hold back all critics of the existing order. Uvarov was quite frank about this: "If I can succeed in delaying for fifty years the kind of future that theories are brewing for Russia, I shall have preformed any duty and shall die in peace."<sup>4</sup> In one way or another a whole generation of Russian thinkers and writers suffered from this oppressive regime: Pushkin, Lermontov, Herzen, Belinsky, Turgenev, Bakunin, Dostoevsky - these were but a few of the most prominent. By the end of the regime the autocracy had virtually no supporters of any distinction among the intelligentsia.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> L. Kochan and R. Abraham, *The Making of Modern Russia*, (The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1983), p. 160.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 160.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 160.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 161.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 161.



After putting down the Decembrist uprising, the government of Nicholas I, energetically reasserted its control over the country. Every aspect of life in the empire was subjected to close scrutiny. The government's policy had a positive as well as a negative side. The negative side involved strict repression of any sign of dissidence or independent criticism. The positive side involved the bureaucracy in laying the groundwork for social and economic transformation. The tsar's first objective was to put an end to the educated elite's efforts to play an open and active role in the administration and political life of the country.<sup>6</sup> The administration and the police were reorganized; an effective repressive apparatus was created under the Third Section of his Imperial Majesty's Private chancery.

Meanwhile, Nicholas's government worked hard to prevent Western liberal ideas from gaining a foothold with the educated public. Censorship was extremely severe: anything suspicious or capable of being interpreted as adverse criticism of the existing state of affairs was proscribed. It became very difficult to import foreign publications, though controls were never carried to the absurd extremes they had reached under Paul I. The authorities did everything possible to prevent Russians from travelling to Europe, and all travelers were closely scrutinized. But students were regularly sent abroad, especially to Germany, for advanced education and many budding young intellectuals were able to travel to Europe and attend public course in the universities; among them were Stankevich, Granovsky, Bakunin and Botkin, to name a few.<sup>7</sup> Even though Herzen had difficult obtaining permission to go abroad, he was ultimately allowed to do so and even to take part of his fortune with him.

Far more serious was the prohibition of new newspapers and periodicals. After 1848 it became for all practical purposes impossible to establish a review or newspaper, and

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<sup>6</sup> M. Raeff, *Understanding Imperial Russia*, (New York, 1984), p. 147.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 148.

those that already existed were subjected to increasingly strict and repressive censorship. All writers worked in a climate of suspicion (the case of Pushkin is merely the best known illustration of what was a common plight), and this could not fail to have an impact on all forms of intellectual endeavour. There is no doubt that all intellectual, all those who took part in literary, artistic, religious, scientific, and academic life, whether inside the establishment or outside, felt that they were being watched, oppressed and persecuted.<sup>8</sup> Paradoxically, though, these constraints seem to have stimulated creativity and imagination in the arts and did not prevent the golden age of Russian literature from taking place-quite the contrary.

However, the educated elite and the nobility of whom the 1825 revolt had quite a fair proportion, suffered greatly in the area of universities, which was of paramount importance. The government reinstated and strengthened repressive measures against the universities first introduced by Alexander I, but now without the regressive, anti-intellectual mysticism. The statute of 1835 subjected the universities to close administrative scrutiny and severely limited faculty autonomy. The teaching of philosophy was initially restricted and then banned altogether, though professors continued to give public lectures that touched on philosophical subjects in the guise of methodological issues in the natural sciences. The ban on the teaching of philosophy and the cloud of suspicion that hung over the humanities in general saw many students driven to the natural sciences. As a temporary measure, the number of students admitted to the faculty of letters was reduced to 300 for the entire empire. Yet in spite of these police measures, university amphitheatres became public forums to which people flocked in the hope of hearing lectures of high moral and intellectual content, typified by Granovsky's courses at the university of Moscow.<sup>9</sup>

Though the twenties and thirties were dark years, but by

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 149.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pp. 149-150.

the mid 1840s, Russia had experienced twenty years of peace and stability. The natural, unavoidable result of this was that even Nicholas's despotism mellowed, the regime relaxed its grip a little. The effects of small changes, accumulating over the years, began to make themselves felt. The government contemplating small steps towards reforms and modernization, slackened vigilance against subversives. Change could be seen to be taking place and a new atmosphere prevailed in the social, economic and intellectual spheres.

Educational reform inaugurated social change. The impulse to reform came from Nicholas's wish to impose his authority more effectively by increasing the efficiency of his bureaucracy. This led him to sanction an expansion of higher education and improvement of the quality of its teaching, under the auspices of Count Uvarov. By the 1840s, the gymnasias and universities were turning out not just a larger number of educated Russians, but a larger number of those who could properly be called intelligentsia, i.e. people in whom an enlightened education had aroused a critical attitude to the regime and a predilection for the discussion of alternative ideas. Uvarov's reforms, in spite of a large number of restrictions, opened up the educational system to poorer gentry and a section of the non-noble classes (especially priest's sons). Education, forming a bridge between the lower and the upper caste led to the emergence of a new type of intelligentsia, whose members (known as *raznochintsy*) were poor, *declassé*, and in general, far more disaffected from the regime than the intelligentsia of the preceding generation.<sup>10</sup> Radischev and the Decembrists had possessed vision and courage but it was not until the 1840s that they became heroes for a significant section of society. Deferentially admired by the first fifteen years, somewhere around 1840, Nicholas began to be increasingly bitterly criticized by a

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<sup>10</sup> J. H. Seddon, *The Petrashevtsy: A Study of the Russian Revolutionaries of 1848*, (Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 5.

growing proportion of thinking Russian.<sup>11</sup> He had not changed but they had. The intelligentsia, as it was to be called, had become a tangible social reality, though it was not yet a class. In the absence of a 'bourgeois market ... providing a sufficient demand for trained intellectual labour and its products', the intelligentsia could only arise from the nobility and those members of other social groups who aspired to join them by assimilating their culture.<sup>12</sup>

The intellectuals could not avoid thinking about the contrast between the heightened Russian patriotism of 1812 and the liberation of Europe by Russia with the growing chorus of liberal European hostility towards Russian autocracy. They were aware of the moral, as well as the economic deficiencies of agrarian serfdom. Increasingly, rapid urbanization was failing to produce a more urbane society. On the contrary Russia's cities were fast becoming prototypes of today's agglomerations in the Third world: awesomely elegant centres surrounded by festering industrial suburbs patrolled by police spies. The discipline of service, while not entirely unjustified considering the upbringing of many Russians, was petty to the point of absurdity. It also reeked of corruption and oppression. The democratization of the intelligentsia was a slow process which did not immediately lead to the emergence of greater radicalism but it did widen the gulf between the rulers and their critics.<sup>13</sup> The very successes of early nineteenth century Russian culture, the emergence of a Russian academic and literary elite, and educated public and organs to save them, brought closer the day when government and intelligentsia would speak in mutually incomprehensible tongues. As Nicholas's reign drew on, he showed less interest in the popularity of himself and his ministers, while the intellectuals withdrew into their own isolated circles. The government's ideological bankruptcy became more and more evident, while the intellectuals turned to Utopias.

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<sup>11</sup> L. Kochan and R. Abraham, n.1, p. 165.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 165.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.166.

The mid-1840s were marked by an explosion, of new literary talent; the appearance of a new 'natural' style of literature; a new freedom and liveliness of intellectual discussion and debate, partly inspired by a new ease of availability of western ideas,<sup>14</sup> and channeled to an increasingly large educated public through the medium of the journal. It was literature that inspired most fear in the government. Literature is an impossibly difficult field to police and Russian writers and their readers soon mastered 'Aesopian' language of allusion in controversial matters. It was Vissarion Grigorievich Belinsky who welded the various criticisms into a coherent set of attitudes and transmitted them to the whole of the intelligentsia. It was under Belinsky's influence that Russian literature developed its characteristic identification with the life of society. No writer or social critic of the Russian nineteenth century with stood his influence.

Belinsky was born in 1810 (or 1811) in Finland, the son of a retired naval doctor. He won a government scholarship to the University of Moscow, where he almost starved, but studied unremittingly. In 1831, he was expelled from the University for having written a play denouncing Russian conditions. Nadezhdin, the professor of literature at the University and editor of Telescope, took Belinsky up and commissioned him to write reviews. Philosophically speaking, Belinsky moved from adherence to Hegel, Schelling and Fichte to sympathy with French and German utopian anarchists and socialists Feuerbach, Proudhon, Fourier, Louis Blanc and Saint Simon.<sup>15</sup> Crudely and roughly, this was equivalent to the transition from an uncritical acceptance of the status quo to a paramount concern for the individual.

Belinsky created for a new and vastly influential method of literary criticism. ~~the new a vastly influential~~ His achievement is implicit in the famous letter of denunciation with which he

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<sup>14</sup> J.H.Seddon, n.10, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Kochan and R. Abraham, n.1, pp. 171-172.

overwhelmed the deranged Gogol:

"And here the public is right, for it looks upon Russian writers as its only leaders, defenders and saviours against Russian autocracy, orthodoxy and nationality, and therefore, while always prepared to forgive a writer a bad book, will never forgive him a pernicious book."<sup>16</sup> Here in essence is Belinsky's ideal of the committed writer as the man capable of giving voice to the deepest and most cherished humanist ideals and values. Belinsky's ideal is probably derived from German romantic philosophy, with its view of the artist as the mouthpiece and expression of his particular epoch.<sup>17</sup> Under Belinsky's inspiration, however, this developed quite different connotations in Russia. It involved taking a middle course between the theory of art for art's sake, and moral, social, or political didacticism. Literature would be both narrower and broader in scope-narrower in the sense that its concern would be first and foremost with ideas, and broader in that it would be responsible to the whole of society. "To deny art the right of serving public interests, Belinsky wrote, means 'debasing it, not raising it, for that would mean depriving it of its most vital force, that is, the idea, and would make it an object of Sybaritic pleasure, a play thing of lazy idlers.'<sup>18</sup>

Thus the critic's task was to elucidate and assess the idea embodied in a work. Belinsky would have agreed that 'all art is propaganda'. The question was: what sort of propaganda? Did it defend the people from 'autocracy, orthodoxy and nationality,' or did it defend the official patriotism of the regime? Where did the writer, the poet or the novelist stand? This was Belinsky's criterion. In other words, he saw and judged literature in moral and not in literary or utilitarian terms. The work of art had no right to lead an autonomous

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted in L. Kochan and R. Abraham, n.1, p. 172.

<sup>17</sup> L. Kochan and R. Abraham, n.1, p. 173.

<sup>18</sup> A. Walicki, *Russian Social Thought: An Introduction to the Intellectual History of 19th Century Russia*, (Oxford, 1975), p.106.

moral existence in a world divorced from the values of human life. It was part and parcel of the world.

Belinsky believed that the artist must remain truthful to his vision, even when he functioned as a man and not as an artist. This accounts for the virulence with which writers such as Gogol and Tolstoy, renounced their own earlier writings when they found them incompatible with their later beliefs. It was a matter of supreme importance to be an artist; for it meant a decision to take an active part in the most momentous struggles of the day. Hence the peculiar strength and the tang of conflicts that often set one writer or critic against another - Belinsky against Gogol, Chernyshevsky against Herzen, Pisarev against Pushkin, Tolstoy against Turgenev. What gave these conflicts their special force was not simply personality differences or literary theories, but the underlying conviction that the stake was the very future of society itself.<sup>19</sup>

Belinsky's demands that art be coterminus with life, that the artist be committed to portray reality, in inescapability of a theme or a problem located in a certain milieu known to the writer and recognizable as such by his readers - all this did, of course, gain added strength from the censorship. By prohibiting the free public expression and discussion of public issues, it helped to ensure that fiction would become the favourable medium for debates of this type.

In literature, the 1820s and 1830s had been the age of poetry and of two great writers, Aleksandr Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov. However, the first great play of the nineteenth century was A.S. Griboedov's (1795-1829) The Misfortune of Being Wise. In this play Griboedov, in the person of the hero Chatskii, biting and passionately criticizes the spiritual poverty, backwardness, and hypocrisy of his contemporaries. Finished in 1824, the masterpiece was put on stage only in 1831 with numerous cuts because of its strong criticism of

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<sup>19</sup> L. Kochan and R. Abraham, n.1, pp. 173-174.

Russian high society.<sup>20</sup> It's an early treatment of the subject of the conflict of generations - a theme developed later by Turgenev and other Russian writers and presages the "superfluous man" embodied by Chatskii, so common in Russian literature of the forties and fifties. He also anticipates the strong element of social criticism that figures so prominently later in Russian literature. In many ways Griboedov shared the views of the Decembrists and was also under suspicion in 1826 for friendships with Decembrists.<sup>21</sup> In Belinsky's lifetime the impetus that his theories gave to literature was already showing itself. He died in 1848, but by then Pushkin and Lermontov had created, in Eugene Onegin and Pechorin, respectively, the first significant representatives of the 'superfluous man' as a criticism of the regime and of social conditions. The type enjoyed a long life and was variously embodied in the works of Turgenev and Chekov, and of course in Goncharov's *Obломov* the apotheosis of superfluity in the form of apathy.<sup>22</sup> Although differing in detail, they were men whose energy and talent could find no outlet in public service. They were cut off from the court and the regime by their contempt for its values. But they were also cut off from the mass of the people by their superior Europeanized education. Hence they lived and moved in a sort of limbo, animated purely by private concerns.

Alexander Sergeevich Pushkin (1799-1837) often hailed as the founder of modern Russian literature, excelled as a lyric poet, novelist and writer of tales and critical essays. As a young poet, he sympathized with noble causes and like Griboedov, had friends among the Decembrists. In 1825, he very likely would have participated in the Decembrist uprising had he not been previously exiled to his mother's estate in

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<sup>20</sup> N.V. Riasanovsky, n.20, p. 394.

<sup>21</sup> E.C. Thaden, n.21, p. 131.

<sup>22</sup> L. Kochan and R. Abraham, n.1, p. 174.



southern Russia.<sup>23</sup> As early as Eugene Onegin, written in 1822-31, Pushkin turned to a penetrating and remarkably realistic treatment of Russian educated society and its problems. Onegin became one of the most effective and compelling figures in modern Russian literature, while both he and the heroine of the poem, Tatiana Larina, as well as their simple story, were to appear and reappear in different variations and guises in the works of Lermontov, Turgenev, Goncharov and others.<sup>24</sup>

In his prose A Captain's Daughter, even more than his poetry Pushkin has been considered a founder of realism in Russia and thus an originator of the main current of modern Russian literature.<sup>25</sup> The long poem, The Bronze Horseman depicts a disastrous conflict between an average little man, Eugene, and the bronze statue of the great founder of St. Petersburg, who built his new capital on a virtually impassable terrain, where one of the recurrent floods killed Eugene's beloved: a conflict between an individual and the state, human desire and necessity, man and his fate. Pushkin established Russia as a full participant in the intellectual life of Europe.

Michael Lermontov (1814-1841), Pushkin's successor was scornful and disdainful towards Russian society of his time. His life was a constant protest against his environment, a protest which found expression both in public gestures, such as his stunning poem condemning Russian high society for the death of Pushkin, and in private troubles which resulted in his own death. Lermontov moved from romanticism towards realism and through his short novel A Hero of Our Times, he became one of the founders of the Russian realistic novel.<sup>26</sup> The introduction boldly calls it 'a portrait composed of the vices of all, our generation, in their full development'. The protagonist, Pechorin, a young officer whose character is gradually revealed - there is virtually no story to the book - through a series of laconic episodes. Pechorin, the man of the thirties, is shown to be something of a Machiavellian

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<sup>23</sup> E.C. Thaden, n.21, p. 131.

<sup>24</sup> N.V. Riasanovsky, n.20, p. 395.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 395.

character, become sinister in his incapacity, to use undoubted talents and condemned to waste his life in pointless soldiering. Unfathomable and unutterable despair is his end. Although Lermontov's portrait is no objective analysis and not without a certain cool irony, it yet remains a powerful study of a man of vigour gone to seed in a society that denies him the necessary scope. Here the 'superfluous man' is blended with the rebel against society, whom Dostoyevsky was later to portray in such characters as Raskolnikov.<sup>27</sup>

Pushkin and Lermontov studied society on a small scale, their viewpoint derived from the position of the isolated Westernized aristocracy. With Gogol, the canvas is immeasurably broadened to include the lives of the small landowner and nobility, as Gogol conceived them, in all their triviality and vulgarity. Pushkin and Zhukovsky, a veteran court poet, were his first mentors.<sup>28</sup> Gogol drew a plausibly realistic picture of Russian society as a moralist and grotesquely and humourously caricatured it.<sup>29</sup> The Overcoat, tenderly satirizing and pitying a humble clerk, has become famous as the progenitor of a staple theme of much nineteenth-century literature. It is characterized by an accumulation of small detail, and a tone of fellow-feeling.<sup>30</sup> Dostoyevsky's Poor Folk is a prime example of the genre. It was Dostoyevsky who said: 'We have all come out from underneath Gogol's "Overcoat"'.<sup>31</sup>

Dead Souls, the simple story of a scoundrel, Chichikov, who proceeded to visit provincial landlords and buy up their dead serfs-serfs were referred to as "souls" in Russia - to sell these serfs later as if they were alive, has been hailed, and not at all unjustly, by critics all the way from Belinsky to the latest Soviet scholars as a devastating, realistic,

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, pp. 396-397.

<sup>27</sup> L. Kochan and R. Abraham, n.1, p. 175.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 175.

<sup>29</sup> E. C. Thaden, n.21, p. 132.

<sup>30</sup> N.V. Riasanovsky, n.20, p. 397.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 397.

satirical picture of rural Russia under Nicholas I.<sup>32</sup> This macabre story is the pretext for a widespread panorama of backwoods noblemen and provincial life. As Chichikov goes about purchasing 'non-existent souls', Gogol presents a satirical but truthful picture of country life; a cadaverous world, peopled by barely one sympathetic personage. Chichikov meets grasping, corrupt officials, miserly widows, slothful, brutal landowners, stupid noblemen, gamblers, and a whole array of living monstrosities. At the end it is clear that the 'dead souls' of the title are by no means the serfs but the whole world above them.<sup>33</sup>

When the novel was published in 1842 it created a furore. Pushkin had exclaimed some years earlier on hearing Gogol read the first draft: 'God, how sad our Russia is!' Belinsky greeted it as a truthful picture of the country inspired by a profound inner life. The slavophiles could see in the novel a faith in the Russian future, however much its present might be betrayed. Gogol's comedy, the Inspector General, which is a similar satire on provincial life, could also be understood in this sense.<sup>34</sup>

Karamzin, Zhukovsky, Krylov, Griboedov, Pushkin, Lermontov and Gogol were by no means the only Russian authors in the reign of Alexander I and Nicholas I. While Pushkin himself was an outstanding member of a brilliant generation of poets, among the prose writers there were also included Serge Aksakov; the magnificent narrator of provincial gentry life, and other gifted authors. Moreover, pre-reform Russia saw much of the work of another supreme lyric poet, Theodore Tyutchev, as well as the first publications of such giants of Russian literature as Turgenev, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy.

By the end of the reign of Nicholas I, a Russian national style had asserted itself in literature and the arts. All kinds of cultural cross-currents moved across Europe and Asia in a complex manner and at the beginning of its golden age,

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 397.

<sup>33</sup> L. Kochan and R. Abraham, n.1, p. 176.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, pp. 175-176.

Russian culture was giving as good as it got, so to speak, and had arrived at a new level of maturity.<sup>35</sup>

The change of atmosphere between the thirties and forties and was most obvious in the arena of philosophical and political debate. The years after the suppression of Decembrist revolt had been years of introspection, self-absorption and gloom. Intellectuals felt impotent and alienated from Russian life. There was no public outlet for their activities.<sup>36</sup> Eighteenth century liberalism or radicalism persisted in the nineteenth century in groups as different as Alexander I's unofficial committee and the Decembrists. But on the whole, intellectual scene began to change drastically. Romanticism and German idealistic philosophies as guides for much of European thought.<sup>37</sup> In the new world of romanticism such strange problems as the true nature of nations and the character of their missions in history came to the fore.

Intellectuals sought refuge in German philosophy and, particular, in the romantic idealism of Schelling. This taught that real life, the particular, was unimportant and called on the individual to plunge himself into the universal, the ideal life of the spirit, which was all that mattered, and in which everything, self, humanity and the world, (but especially the self) was subsumed.<sup>38</sup> Schelling affected certain professors and a number of poets - like Tjutchev - and also groups of intellectuals, schools of thought, such as the Slavophile. It was largely an interest in Schelling that led to the establishment of the first philosophic "circle" and the first philosophic review in Russia. In 1823 a dozen young men and the associates formed a circle named "The Lovers of Wisdom"<sup>39</sup> to discuss and apply to Russian traditions the new philosophical theories in Germany led to Prince V. F.

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<sup>35</sup> P. Dukes, *A History of Russia*, (London, 1998), p. 142.

<sup>36</sup> J.H. Seddon, n.10, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> N.V. Riasanovsky, n.20, p. 399.

<sup>38</sup> J.H. Seddon, n.10, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> N.V. Riasanovsky, n.20, p. 44.

Odoevskii, it also had as its member D.V.Venevitinov, who wrote movingly about the need to establish a separate national identity and cultural independence for Russia. Influenced by Schelling, Friedrich Schlegel, Fichte and other German idealist and romanticist, he attributed Russia's past failure to make an important contribution to world literature due to imitation of foreign literature by her writers and failing to find inspiration in Russia's own national originality samobytnost, and in literary forms that corresponded to her own national being. The group disbanded after the Decembrist rebellion in order not to attract police attention.<sup>40</sup>

Towards the end of the decade, the vogue for Schelling gave way to adulation of Hegel. The centre of idealist philosophy in Russia was the circle formed around Nikolai Stankevich in Moscow. Stankevich himself among the leading writers and thinkers of the next decade: Belinski, Bakunin, Konstantin Aksakov, Iuri Samarin, Timofei Granovskii, Mikhail Katkov. These men were largely responsible for the diffusion and lasting influence of Hegel in Russia.<sup>41</sup> A discussion of Russia's cultural and intellectual future was resumed in the 1830's by the Stankevich and Herzen - Ogarev student circles. Both saw manifestations of the mind in nature and thought in terms of the general development of history and mankind from inanimate nature of human self-consciousness. Saint-Simon's views on the moral regeneration of society and the founding of a new form of Christianity attracted them. Herzen's and Ogarev's introduction of Young Moscow to utopian socialism was, however a significant event in Russian intellectual history, for it was through them that Bakunin's and Belinsky's curiosity was aroused about socialism as a possible key to Russia's future.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, at a later date, in the 1850's and 1860's, Herzen's journalism helped to win wide support for socialist ideas in the younger generation. Their arrest in 1834 gave rise to intense feelings of injustice in Herzen and

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<sup>40</sup> E. C. Thaden, n.21, p. 135.

<sup>41</sup> J. H. Seddon, n.10, p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> E. C. Thaden, n.21, p. 135.

Ogarev about having been arrested, imprisoned and exiled for nothing more than having had unorthodox thoughts and reading the wrong books and ~~th~~is strengthened their incipient socialism, which became a symbol of protest against the arbitrariness and heavy-handed paternalism of Nicholas I and his bureaucracy.<sup>43</sup>

The Stankevich circle had a twofold significance for the intellectual history of Russia. First, it was in this circle that Belinsky further developed the impressions about Schelling's idealistic philosophy and romantic aesthetics that he had formed through his association with Professor Nadezhdin. The discussion of the circle reinforced in his mind the notion that artistic creation being the noblest and highest expression of a given people, the artist had important ~~eth~~ical and moral responsibilities. True art for him always had to further Russia's national development which, after 1840, he identified with progress, enlightenment and humanity.<sup>44</sup>

The second respect in which the Stankevich Circle was important for Russia's intellectual history resulted from its ~~ser~~ious study of Hegel. The impetus Stankevich gave to the study of Hegel within his circle entered into the mainstream of Russian thought, particularly through the intermediary of Bakunin, Herzen and Granovski. Early in the 1840's Bakunin's and Herzen's ~~use~~ of Hegel's ideals paralleled and was influenced by that of German Left Hegelians, who insisted that Hegel's system properly should not be used to defend the status quo but rather to criticize and negate existing institutions and values, especially religion, so that society could be renovated and man liberated. Granovskii, on the other hand, interpreting Hegel more in keeping with the latter's own later views, conceived of gradual reform and enlightenment introduced within the framework of existing institutions and by the state under the influence of enlightened representatives of society's educated minority. This brand

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 136.

<sup>44</sup> See Ibid, pp. 136-137.

Hegelianism strongly influenced Russian scholarly circles in the nineteenth century. Both varieties of Hegelianism provided the background for and partly explained the appeal that Marxism had for many Russian intellectuals towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>45</sup>

After the death of Stankevich in 1840, the circle broke up into a Slavophile right, a moderate Hegelian, led the liberal westerners, while to their left stood the socialists Herzen, Belinsky and Bakunin. Bakunin and Belinsky, who in the late 1830's had undergone a period of conservative "reconciliation with reality" justification for the existence of autocracy and even serfdom, finding it difficult to reconcile serfdom and the arbitrary and pedantic autocracy of Nicholas I with their own humanitarian ideals, because by the end of 1842 socialists and sharp critics of religion and Russian social, cultural and political conditions.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, the Slavophiles, equally disenchanted with the unpleasant realities of Nicholas's Russia, increasingly looked to the Muscovite past and Orthodoxy for inspiration in molding a revitalized Russian society and culture. The Slavophile group was the first to formulate a new ideology, which in part was a delayed reaction to the publication in 1836 of Chaadaev's first Philosophical Letter.

Peter Chaadaev, an ex-officer in the Hussars and friend of the Decembrists, a dandy, a habitué of the aristocratic salons of St. Petersburg and Moscow, inflamed the conflict of what was the Russian past, the Russian tradition, in which men were to seek a guide to the present and the future. In A Philosophical Letter written in 1829, but not published in the Moscow journal Telescope until 1836,<sup>47</sup> Chaadaev argued that Russia had no past, no present and no future. It had never really belonged to either the West or the East, and it had contributed nothing to "intellectual order of things."<sup>48</sup> The 'letter' provoked an immense furore - what alarm in the

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<sup>45</sup> Walicki, n.18, p.103.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p.103.

<sup>47</sup> L. Koochan and R. Abraham, n.1, pp. 167-168.

salons!', exclaimed one contemporary.<sup>49</sup> Chaadaev was officially declared insane and subjected to a sort of house arrest. He had condemned Russian history en bloc as sterile and worthless because of its separation from western influence. Russia had remained apart from the worlds' developments stagnant in its isolation;

"Confined in our schism, nothing of what was happening in Europe reached us. We stood apart from the world's great venture ... while the whole world was building anew, we created nothing: we remained crouched in our hovels of log and thatch. In a word, we had no part in the new destinies of mankind. We were Christians, but the fruits of Christianity were not for us."<sup>50</sup>

Chaadaev's remedy was a rapprochement with catholicism, the medium whereby Russia should rejoin the West. Here were a clarion call to the Westerners. Their members included Herzen, the brilliant publicist and father of Russian socialism. Herzen read the letter while in exile and welcomed it as a "merciless cry of reproach and bitterness against Russia."<sup>51</sup> Belinsky, the founder of Russian literary criticism, Turgenev, the novelist, Granovskii, the historian, and Bakunin, the future anarchist, whatever their other differences, there was a fundamental belief in the urgent necessity for closer contact with the West, where the virtues of free thought, rationalism, individual liberty, the values of science existed and could serve as the means and the model for the regeneration of Russia.

The debate in 1840s was between the 'Slavophiles' and 'Westerners'. These terms originated in friendly discussions between former members of the Stankevich circle,<sup>52</sup> but soon came to stand for two distinct and opposed schools of thought the leading representative of the Slavophiles were Aleksei Khomiakov, Ivan Kireevsky, Konstantin Aksakov and Samarin. The

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<sup>48</sup> N.V. Riasanovsky, n.20, p. 400.

<sup>49</sup> L. Kochan and R. Abraham, n.1, p. 168.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 168.

<sup>51</sup> E. C. Thaden, n.21, p. 139.

<sup>52</sup> J. H. Seddon, n.10, p. 8.



disagreement between the Slavophiles and Westerners centered on the definition of individual freedom and the interpretation of Russian history.

The Slavophiles were believers in the organic society. This was a society in which individuals achieved complete harmony with the community and did not see themselves as separate from it. Freedom was defined as spontaneous identification with the community, or sobornost.<sup>53</sup> The social solidarity of sobornost grew up on the basis of tradition, custom and faith. The orthodox religion was a very important part of this social bond. The Slavophiles elaborated a peculiarly Muscovite Orthodox view of history. Following Schelling in combining religion with romantic philosophy, they criticized what they considered the one-sided rationalism, legalism, contractualism and individualism of European civilization. The German romanticists in general influenced them to emphasize Russia's uniquely national origins and the necessity that she should follow her own path of historical and cultural development.<sup>54</sup>

The Slavophiles believed that all the elements of the organic society had existed in the peasant village of pre-Petrine Russia. They pointed to the village commune or mir as surviving proof of this. They saw the true foundations of Russian life in the commune, which they regarded as the means of avoiding in Russia the rise of a proletariat and other economic ills of Western Europe. The commune was also for them an expression of the principles of brotherly love, unity and personal freedom, which they attributed to Slavic tradition and Orthodox Christianity.<sup>55</sup>

The Slavophiles were opponents of the autocracy, the organic nature of Russian society, they believed, had been destroyed by the state. The Petrine state, being based on European and German bureaucratic principles, had nothing in common with the Russian people and way of life and disrupted

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>54</sup> See E.C. Thaden, n.21; N.V. Riasanvosky, n.20; and A. Walicki, n.18

the organic unity that had existed between tsar and people in Muscovite times. Critical of state interference in Church, the Slavophiles urged a return to true orthodox traditions to a free and autonomous Christian community of believers headed by Christ and founded on the principles of love and freedom.<sup>56</sup>

While the Slavophiles were mostly land-lords and gentlemen-scholars of broad culture many intellectual interestss, teh westerners were much more diverse than the Slavopliles, and their views did not form a single, integrated whole. Even socially the westerners consisted of different elements, ranging from Michael Bakunin who came from a gentry home, to Vissarion Belinsky whose father was an impoverished doctor and grandfather a priest and Basil Botkin who belonged to a family of merchants.<sup>57</sup> The Slavophiles and Westerners started from similar assumptions of German idealistic philosophy, and indeed engaed in constant debate with each other, but came to different conclusions. While Khomakov and his friends affirmed the uniqueness of Russia and the superiority of true Russian principles over those of the West, the other party argued that the Western historical path was the model that Russia had to follow. Russia could accomplish its mission only in the context of western civilization, not in opposition to it. Thus, the westerners took a positive view of western political development and criticized the Russian system.

While the Slavophiles preferred Schelling, the Westerners chose Hegel and tended to distrust extreme romanticization and idealization of the past. The Westerners, in contrast to the Slavophiles, approaved Peter the Great's breaking with the Muscovite past and forcing Russian society to assume the political, institutional and social forms of European civilization. Although not less patriotic than the Slavophiles, the Westerners believed in the fundamental unity of modern civilization and felt that Russia had much to learn

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<sup>55</sup> A. Walicki, n.18, p.103.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p.109.

<sup>57</sup> N.v. Riasanovsky, n.20, p. 402.

from the forms and theories of government and social organization of the more advanced western European nations.

For the Westerners, the rebellion against Hegel had taken the left-Hegelian form of the assertion of the primacy of the individual over the absolute.<sup>58</sup> The autonomy of the individual became for them the greatest existing principle. They believed that history had a goal - the emancipation of the individual from external constraints and the maximising of his conscious freedom of choice. Progress took place through the destruction of all traditional and irrational bonds and their replacement by rational legal and political norms. As Turgenev says:

"I do not want salvation but truth, and I expect it from Reason and not from Grace."<sup>59</sup>

The state played an important historical role in establishing the rule of law and thus paving the way for the emancipation of the individual.

The Slavophiles looked to traditional Russian values, as Khomiakov said:

"The form and content of historical documents, folk songs and tales awaken the stifled forces within us, they lead us out of our orphaned state and show us a past in which we can find consolation and a present which can inspire us with affection."<sup>60</sup>

The westerners, to European ones, to the principles of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and liberalism. Both sides were utopian in their way. The Slavophiles looked backwards to an idealized version of Russia's artificially constructed rational society in which individual freedom would be maximized. To the Westerners one of the most important reasons for independence' and they wanted the 'ferment of emancipation' to 'first enter the realm of individual rights'. Turgenev too preferred to be "Prometheus, Satan, the embodiment of revolt and individuality ... an atom ... but my

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<sup>58</sup> J.H. Seddon, n.10, p. 9.

<sup>59</sup> A. Walicki, n.18, p.110.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p.119.

own master."<sup>61</sup>

The differences between them, however, should not be exaggerated. The views of neither side were clear cut. They were all opposed to autocracy, almost all in favour of emancipation and some sort of democratic reforms.<sup>62</sup> While the Slavophiles wanted emancipation through the peasant commune, the Westerners as represented by Kavelin<sup>63</sup> regarded the emergence of a centralized state and rationalization of social relationships as pre-requisites for the emancipation of the individual. They all believed that Russia had some kind of mission and would be able to solve problems that the West had been unable to deal with. They all (eventually) came to see the village commune as having a particular role to play in this process. As Herzen said, 'Yes we were their opponents, but very strange ones. We had the same love, but not the same way of loving... Like Janus or the two-headed eagle they and we looked in different directions, while one heart throbbed within us.'<sup>64</sup>

There were relatively few Slavophiles and their ideas were comparatively coherent. The westerners formed a broader body with a less homogenous world view. They were united in their opposition to official Nationality and Slavophilism, were all in favour of individual freedom, seen as guaranteed by representative government, democratic liberties, and emancipation of the serfs. But, by the mid 1840s a rough distinction between liberals and radicals had appeared. The leading liberals were Granovskii, Turgenev, Kavelin and Boris Chicherin; the leading radicals Herzen and Belinsky. The two groupings differed in their attitude to art, religion, the French Revolution and the 'capitalist' society of Western Europe. The liberals were supporters of 'art for arts' sake', were in general religion whereas, the radicals believed in the art's social mission, and had under the influence of left Hegelianism and in particular, Ludwig Feuerbach, become more

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p.119.

<sup>62</sup> J. H. Seddon, n.10, p. 9.

<sup>63</sup> A. Walicki, n.18, p.123.

or less atheistic. In French revolutionary history, the liberals were admirers of the Girondins, of moderate revolutionism, reasonableness and legal norms; the radicals preferred the Jacobins and accepted the necessity, in some circumstances, of violence, bloodshed and dictatorship. The liberals were mostly uncritical of Western society; the radicals (above all Herzen) were sickened by the vulgarity, complacency and corruption of Louis - Philippe's bourgeois monarchy.<sup>65</sup> The similarities between the two groups were much stronger than the differences, which were more a question of tone. By the sixties however, the radicals and liberals separated into two hostile camps.

However, in the 1840's, it was the more radical figures among the Westerners who won the allegiance of Russia's educated youth. Herzen and above all, Belinsky were the most popular writers of the day, exerting, an enormous influence on the younger generation.

In the 1840's Belinsky was the most influential Westerner with socialist inclinations. By 1839, he broke with abstract Hegelian metaphysics and partly as a result of Herzen's influence, embraced a creed of atheism, utopian, socialism, and realism.<sup>66</sup> He taught through his own example the young Russians to look to literature as the articulation of national cultural life and to expect it to further the cause of enlightenment and progress by expressing socially useful ideas. He used his literary criticism to argue for social and political change. His views were most strikingly expressed in his Letter to Gogol, a reply to Gogol's 'betrayal' of the democratic cause, by the publication of his reactionary Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends. In an intense outpouring of feeling, Belinsky denounced Gogol as 'preacher of the whip, apostle of ignorance, champion of obscurantism and black reaction'; the orthodox church as 'the prop of the knout and the toady of

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<sup>64</sup> J.H. Seddon, n.10, p. 9.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, pp. 9-10.

<sup>66</sup> E.C. Thaden, n.21, p. 141.

despotism'; Russia as a country which 'offers the terrible spectacle of a land where men buy and sell other men without even the cant of the Americans, who say negroes are not men.'<sup>67</sup> He called for 'the awakening in the people of a feeling of human dignity', declaring 'Russians see her salvation not in mysticism, or aestheticism, or piety, but in the achievements of education and humane culture.'<sup>68</sup> Following Belinsky's powerful examples, political and social ideologies, banned from direct expression in Russia, came to be commonly expounded in literary criticism.

Herzen, the leisured son of a wealthy landowner, was in social terms a more typical representative of the intelligentsia of his generation. The illegitimacy of his birth, however, helped to foster a natural rebelliousness and carry his intellectually to a position far more radical than his contemporaries in the 1830s and 40s. His radicalism can be traced back to the oath to avenge the Decembrists which he and his friend Ogarev took at the age of sixteen.<sup>69</sup>

The early evolution of his ideas was romantic, but romantic in the more political sense of the French Saint-Simonians and Schiller, rather than Schelling.<sup>70</sup> Herzen was a more consistent and convinced socialist than Belinsky. In the 1840's after his return from exile he tried to come to terms with the Left Hegelians in Germany and such French Utopians as Fourier, Proudhon, Louis Blanc and Blanqui. Works of German, Left Hegelians, especially Feuerbach's The Essence of Christianity, confirmed Herzen in his atheism and turned his attention to the revolutionary implications of Hegel's philosophy. In his memoirs Herzen referred to Hegelian philosophy as the "algebra of revolution". Thus Hegelian philosophy, in Herzen's opinion, emancipated man and left "not one stone standing of the Christian world, of the world of outlived tradition."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 141.

<sup>68</sup> J. H. Seddon, n.10, p. 11.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>71</sup> E. C. Thaden, n.21, p. 142.

In exile at Novogorod, he learned such new key phrases from French writers as "bourgeoisie", "proletariat", "phalanstery", and "the organization of labor".<sup>72</sup> Granovskii, a liberal moderate who believed in gradual and evolutionary change was particularly disturbed by the radical political and religious implications of Herzen's interpretation of Hegel. Herzen responded to Granovskii's disapproval by exaggerating the degree of his political and religious radicalism. Not only did he defend revolutionary atheism, but he also demanded total enlightenment and the destruction of the old world. However his defence during less extreme moments, of liberty of an individual makes him seem closer to liberalism than revolutionary maximalism.<sup>73</sup> Herzen's two major philosophical articles, *Dillettantism in Science* and *Letters on the Study of Nature*, did more than anything else at this time to popularise left-Hegelian ideas in Russia. His short stories, especially *Who is to Blame?* were more conspicuous for their didacticism than their literary merit.<sup>74</sup> The main theme was the right to free love, but they included attacks on serfdom and all constraints in Russian society which hindered the free development of the individual. Herzen went to Europe in 1847, and there became caught up in the events of 1848, thus accidentally beginning his career as Russia's first political emigre in the sense of a force in Russian politics operating from outside Russia.<sup>75</sup> Disappointment in the bourgeoisie's victory over socialism in the European 1848 revolutions influenced him to extol the peasant commune as a democratic egalitarian institution that could be joined with Western individual freedom to provide the basis for the emergence of socialism in Russia. Especially tempting for Herzen was the thought that Russia, lacking a heavy legacy of tradition,

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 142.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p.142.

<sup>74</sup> J.H. Seddon, n.10, p.11.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p.12.

might lead other nations to socialism, thereby placing herself in the vanguard of humanity. He remarked, "...peasant Russia, which is moving toward classlessness, remain for me, as before, the countries of the immediate future".<sup>76</sup>

The collectivist creed of the Russian masses provided, in Herzen's opinion, for a psychological climate favourable to the founding of a future socialist society the kind of climate which he did not find in Western countries. As he put it:

"This basic, natural, inform recognition of right to the land places the Russian people on an entirely different footing from that of all the peoples of the West.... The right to the land implies a different kind of morality and different social relations - relations which are as yet undeveloped, but which cannot be replaced by alien relations stemming from a social order that denies any right to land except on the basis of purchase and inheritance. Our future institutions will inevitably be based on elements of the spontaneous socialism which is a part of our life".<sup>77</sup>

Since Herzen's ideas on the relationship of the commune to socialism greatly impressed young intellectuals during the 1850's and 1860's, he can be considered the father of Russian revolutionary populism.<sup>78</sup>

Bakunin, described as "founder of nihilism and apostle of anarchy", whose intellectual development and activities both paralleled and differed from Herzen's established himself among the leaders of the left-Hegelian movement through his article: "The Reaction in Germany" written in 1842. Although the final words of the article, "the passion for destruction is a creative passion",<sup>79</sup> suggest the revolutionary trend of Bakunin's thinking, it was only after he settled down in Paris

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<sup>76</sup> J.H. Curtiss, ed., *Essays in Russian and Soviet History*, (New York, 1963), p.35.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p.44.

<sup>78</sup> E.C. Thaden, n.21, p.143.

<sup>79</sup> N.V. Riasanovsky, n.20, p.405.



in 1844 that he came into contact with Proudhon and other European socialists that he adopted an openly revolutionary position.<sup>80</sup> Between 1844 and 1848 he elaborated a revolutionary creed that taught contempt for the European bourgeoisie and faith in the revolutionary potential of the Russian peasant. Despite his failure to organize a Czech conspiracy to overthrow Habsburg rule in the 1848 participated in the Slavic Congress in Prague and joined the men at the barricades during the abortive Prague insurrection in June 1848. Arrested as one of the military leaders of the Dresden insurrection, by the time he managed to escape from Siberia after six years of imprisonment and four years of exile, and reach Herzen's residence in London in December 1861, he had become a legendary revolutionary in Russia and Western Europe.\*1.

The ideas of Herzen and Belinsky were propagated through the medium of the journal, which, in the absence of public life, became the forum in which theoretical discussion was concentrated and ideological battles fought. The number of periodicals in Russia rose from 47 in 1826 to 130 in 1850. There were two major anti-government journals: *Otechestvennye Zapiski* edited by Andrei Kraevskii; and *Sovremennik*, Pushkin's old journal; , revived in 1847 by Nikolai Nekrasov and Ivan Panaev. A third, less successful, but often more radical journal was *finiskii vestnik* (1845-50), run by Fedor Dershan. The old-established reactionary journals - *Syn otechestva*, *Severnaia pchela* and *Biblioteka dlia Chteniia* run by the notorious triumvirate of Grech, Bulgaria and Osip Senkovaskiv, were badly hit by the new competition. New, more lively right-wing journals, *Moskvitianin* (edited by Pogodin) and *Maiak* failed to attract a wide readership. The circulation of the others rose sharply, but the actual readership was many times greater - subscriptions were high, so copies were passed from hand to hand and were available in public reading rooms and

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<sup>80</sup> E.C. Thaden, n.21, p.143.

cafes, such as Izler, Vol'f Passazh and Ivanov's, where they were often read aloud.<sup>81</sup>

The success of Belinsky, Herzen and other radicals in getting their ideas across in the journals was partly due to their slipping political and social criticism into their articles in such a way that the censors didn't notice it, but the public could read between the lines. Numerous contemporaries testify to the crucial role played by Herzen and Belinsky in the intellectual formation of a generation. Vladimir Stabov remember how, at the Law School in the early forties.

"Belinsky was definitely our real teacher. No classes, courses, essay writing, exams and so on did as much for our education and development as Belinsky on his own with his monthly articles. In this we were no different from the rest of Russia of that time. Of course, Belinsky's enormous importance wasn't just due to the literary aspects of his work: he purified everything for us, he formed our characters, he filled, with his strong man's hand, the patriarchal prejudices by which the whole of Russia had lived until then.... We were all his direct pupils".<sup>82</sup>

Belinsky's ideas had become commonplace among radical intellectuals by 1860's, and Herzen's views on socialism and the peasant commune and Bakunin's revolutionary agitation and conspiracy inspired countless populists and revolutionaries during the 1860's and 1870's.

Influenced by Herzen and Belinsky as well as Western socialist literature, in many cases becoming convinced socialists were another group of radicals, the petrashertsy. They formed an informal group of two score or more men, who from late 1845 until their arrest in the spring of 1849 gathered on fridges at the home of Michael Petrashersky in St. Petersburg and espoused especially the teaching of French

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<sup>81</sup> See Seddon, n.10, p.12.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p.13.

Utopian socialist Fourier.<sup>83</sup> They drew together around the reading of foreign literature, in particular, banned socialist writers and discussed radical approach to philosophical, economic, political and literary questions.\* Their interest in and adoption of socialist and revolutionary ideas placed them on the extreme left-wing. Even before 1848, many of the Petrashertsy were sympathetic to the idea of revolution. Their inspiration came from two main sources from their study of the history of revolutionary movement against feudalism, in particular the first French revolution, and, to a lesser extent, the sixteenth century Peasants' War the first advocates of revolution in Russia.<sup>84</sup> However, many of the Petrashertsy were critical of the Decembists and anxious not to repeat their mistake, not to embark of a rising without the support of the mass of the population.<sup>85</sup>

The Petrashertsg spread their views beyond the confines of the circles through their literary and journalistic activity (the young Dostoevsky was one of the most prominent of the Petrashertsy) and especially through the *Pocket Dictionary of Foreign Words*, a mini encyclopaedia of socialist propaganda. After the outbreak of revolution in France in 1848, the tone of the circles became increasingly dangerous and subversive.<sup>86</sup> A perceived increase in popular interest in Russia, combined with Nicholas's reactionary response to revolution, which stripped them of illusions in a reforming Tsar, convinced them of the desirability and (quite wrongly at this time) of the possibility of a revolution in Russia. Their attention became focussed on carrying their propaganda to the lower classes - on converting peasants, serfs and soldiers to revolutionary ideas and on utilizing the potential for discontent among the non-Russian nationalities of the Empire.

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<sup>83</sup> N.V. Riasanovsky, n.20, p.405.

<sup>84</sup> J.H. Seddon, n.10, p.195.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p.147.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, pp.13-14.

Finally, after various attempts of form conspiracies, just before their arrest, a secret society was organized, its immediate task, the printing and distribution of propaganda, its ultimate aim, an uprising. In April 1849 the press was ready. The articles were ready. And then the blow came they were betrayed by Antonelli, a Third Department agent who had warmed his way into Petrashersky's circle. On the night of 23 April 1849, as the visitors left Petroshefsky's, the arrests began.<sup>87</sup> On 22 December 1849, twenty-one people were sentenced to hard labor or exile in Siberia or army service in the Caucasus, for their `criminal intentions of overthrowing the existing state order in Russia.<sup>88</sup>

The underestimation of the Petrashevtsy occurred because the importance of the affair was deliberately played down, first by the governments, later by its liberal opponents. After the arrests, the government of Nicholas I, terrified at the thought of socialist and revolutionary ideas spreading among the Russian youth, labelled the case of mere `conspiracy of ideas' the widespread nature which the town gossip at first attributed to it'. Then, the emergence of the populists in the 1860s helped helped to throw their immediate predecessors into shadow. The populists began to act directly against the government, whereas the Petrashevtsy had been arrested when they were just on the point of putting their ideas into practice. And, though former Petrashevtsy were later active in the populist movement, they tended to lie low and leave the leadership to others.<sup>89</sup>

It is with Chernyshevsky that the direct impact of the Petrashevtsy can most clearly be seen. Chernyshevsky the ideological mentor of the new plebian radical movement of the sixties, Lenin's hero, formulator of a stern utilitarian populism and a materialism almost religions in its fervour,

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, pp.226-230.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p.14.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, pp.14-15.

was introduced to socialism to Feuerbach and to ideas of revolution, by the Petrashevtsy. When in 1858, he became chief critic of *Sovremennik*, he developed many ideas first elaborated by the Petrashevtsy to form the ideology of his Russian populism. His Anthropological Principle in Philosophy sets out the anthropological materialism of Fourier and Feuerbach. His economic writings, are very similar to Miliutin's and show the direct influence of Fourier and Louis Blanc. Probably his major contribution to Russian socialism was his development of the idea of making Russia's peasant *obshchina* into the basis of the future socialist commerce or plalanstery, an idea which the Petrashevtsy introduced him to.<sup>90</sup>

The intelligentsia which came of age in 1830's was disgusted by society's materialistic values and by the newcomers to the public stage: entrepreneurs, merchants and bureaucrats. The intelligentsia withheld its sympathy from and refused to collaborate with the new professionalized bureaucratic elite, which saw its mission primarily as one of promoting economic progress. Instead it chose to define its identity in relation to "the people."<sup>91</sup> Alienated from their native class, this tiny minority of the young fervently desired symbiosis with the people, with the Russian peasantry of the past and present (and even the future, as in the case of Bajunin). Such a symbiosis could not be achieved, however, unless the intelligentsia could show what special role it had to play in the future of the peasantry.

In 1853, Herzen founded in London a "Free Russian Press", which soon stimulated in Russia a desire for more open discussion of public issues. In 1855 he began publishing the journal *Polar Star*, reviving the name of a Decembrist publication of the 1820's and displayed on its cover the heads of the five Decembrists who had been executed, reflecting the

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, pp.234-235.

<sup>91</sup> P. Dukes, n.35, p.201.

source of his inspiration;

"The stuff of our dreams was women out of ways of organizing a new league in Russia on the pattern of the Decembrists and we looked upon knowledge as merely a means".<sup>92</sup>

But Herzen's real influence dated from the founding of the *Kolokol* (Bell) in 1857. More moderate in tone than his previous publications it attracted a wide audience in Russia, including high officials and even the Emperor himself, and discussed issues untouched in the Russian language press—emancipation of serfs, corruption in the government, freedom of speech, and the abolition of corporal punishment.<sup>93</sup>

Meanwhile, inside Russia defenders of reform, denied the opportunity to express themselves publicly, made their opinions known through memoranda intended for presentation to the tsar. The liberal K.D. Kavelin in 1855 and Slavophiles Iurii Samarin, A.L. Koshelev and Prince V.A. Cherkasskii in 1856-57 presented memorandas to the emperor insisted that the peasant be granted legal equality and emancipation with land and the landowners be adequately compensated for their loss of obrok or *barshchina* revenues.<sup>94</sup>

In 1857, with governmental permission to discuss emancipation, almost all journals such as M.N. Katkov's *Ruskii Vestnik*, the Slavophiles' *Russkaia Beseda*, the crypto-socialist *Sovremennik*, and Herzen's *Kolokol* in London favoured emancipation. However, while Herzen and Chernyshevsky in the *Kolokol* and *Sovremennik* desired emancipation with land along with minimal payment, the Slavophiles continued to defend their position of the memoranda of 1856-57. While All of them warmly endorsed the commune, being in it the foundation for a future socialist society, a member of writers in Katkov's

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<sup>92</sup> Art. by Alexander Herzen, "Young Moscow", in T. Riha, ed., *Readings In Russian Civilization*, p.338.

<sup>93</sup> P. Dukes, n.35, pp.203-204.

<sup>94</sup> E.C. Thaden, n.21, p.172.

*Ruskii Vestnik* criticized such views by emphasizing the economic inefficiency of the commune and the advantages of private property and a free peasant economy.<sup>95</sup>

The support for peasant emancipation came from literary quarters as well. I.S. Turgenev in *A Sportman's Sketches* (1852), presented a realistic and sympathetic discription of the serfs he had encountered on his hunting trips; it greatly stimulated interest in peasant emancipation by revealing to upper-class readers, including the future Alexander II, the many human qualities of the Russian seft.<sup>96</sup>

In 1861, with the emancipation of the serfs, the aspirations and the disappointments grew, fostered by the tide of revolutionary journals. The seedbeds of dissidence were the universities which had been patronized by the government to fill its expanding bureaucracy.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., pp.172-173.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p.210.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE ABOLITION OF SERFDOM AND THE TURBULENT YEARS**



The emancipation of serfs, and the judicial and administrative reforms of the 1860s and 1870's although more-far-reaching than those of Nicholas I did not revolutionize Russian society. Continued state control and supervision, heavy financial obligations, and communal regulation of peasant affairs made life in the countryside seem not too different from what it had been prior to the emancipation. The gentry still occupied high posts in the army and bureaucracy and occupied a dominant position in the new institutions created by the reforms.

Yet the reforms made a difference. The granting of personal liberty to the peasants freed them from total dependence on the landowning gentry and, despite many remaining restrictions greatly encouraged social mobility. New organs of local "self-government" permitted elements from the gentry and the educated minority of the Russian population to engage in socially useful activities, especially in the promotion of elementary education, and more flexible banking and financial policies removed many restraining influences on Russian economic development and helped to provide the basis for the industrial upsurge of the 1880's and 1890s.<sup>1</sup>

The term intelligentsia came into use in the early 1860s in reference to a group of alienated and critically disposed intellectuals who believed they had the responsibility of pointing the way to Russia's future. Having much in common with the Moscow intellectual circles of the forties, they differed in that they no longer consisted so overwhelmingly of

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<sup>1</sup> E.C. Thaden, *Russia since 1801*, (New York, 1971), p.167.

a handful of gentry cut off from the other strata of the Russian population; the educated group, though still small, was considerably increased in size as numerous *raznochintsy* entered the universities and the professions. As a whole the *raznochintsy* intellectuals were of clerical origin and more impatient and extreme in their expectations than had been the members of the intellectual circles of the forties.<sup>2</sup> They were given an unprecedented opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with the world publicly by relaxation of controls in the late fifties and reforms of the sixties that allowed the educated minority greater freedom than before to discuss important social and economic questions.

The doubt, distrust, and even open hostility peasants displayed toward authority after the emancipation greatly impressed and heartened Russian radical intellectuals. Not understanding the complexities of the emancipation settlement and distrusting the officials and landowners entrusted with its interpretation and implementation, the former serfs greeted emancipation with refusals to perform obligations and even resistance to officials and soldiers. In 1861, there were 337 cases where troops had to quell peasant disturbances, the most notorious incident being at Bezdna in Kazan Guberniia. Under the influence of Anton Petrov, a peasant, the peasants of Bezdna refused to obey the authorities, and 350 peasants were killed or wounded in the subsequent bloody showdown with the troops. This sparked off immediate reaction on the part of educated society. Herzen described the revolt in *The Bell* and historian Shchapov, addressing those who had fallen, at the

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.220.

requiem mass organised by the students at Kazan University declared;

"Friends killed for the people❖ In Russia for about a hundred and fifty years there have begun to appear among the bitterly suffering dark masses of the people, among you, peasants, your own Christs - the democratic conspirators. From the middle of the last century they have been considered prophets, and the people has believed in them as atoners, emancipators. Here again has been such an atonement, and you friends are the first to fall at its summons as sacrifices to despotism expiating the freedom long expected by the whole people. You are the first to destroy our sleep, you have destroyed by your initiative our unjust doubt about our people not being capable of initiative in political movements❖ The land, which you worked, with the fruits of which you have fed us, which now you wanted to obtain as your property and which has accepted you as its martyrs into its towels - this land summons the people to revolt and freedom❖ Peace to your dust and eternal historical remembrance to your self-sacrificing deed. Long live the democratic constitution❖<sup>3</sup>.

Shchapov's speech may be looked upon as one of the first steps towards the foundation of the Populist movement which was to develop for most of the rest of the reign of Alexander II, and then to split up just before his assassination in 1881 in two principal directions, towards liberalism on the one hand, and Marxism on the other.

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<sup>3</sup> P. Dukes, *A History of Russia*, (London, 1998), p. 146.

The development of the revolutionary movement after the emancipation until the consolidation of industrial capitalism may be equated with the rise and fall of Populism. From the late 1850s until the middle of 1860s, the chief vehicle of progressive ideas was *The Bell (Kolokol)*; published in London by Alexander Herzen. At first hailing the emancipation as a great step forward and Alexander II as the tsar-liberator, *The Bell* soon became disillusioned with both, and declared that the people had yet to be granted their greatest needs, 'land and freedom'. With the curtailment of universities' activities towards the end of 1861, students were urged to take themselves to the people<sup>4</sup>.

During the 1860s and early 1870s, besides *The Bell*, other voices calling for anti-tsarist dissidence were Mikhail Bakunin, Petr Lavrov, Sergei Nechaev, Petr Tkachev and Nikolai Chernyshevskii. Like Herzen and Ogarev, these were all moving, albeit in widely different ways, from the influence of German idealistic philosophy to something more materialistic, thus to some degree acting out the roles of the young generation in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*.

Chernyshevskii, by writing in *The Contemporary*, disillusioned by the government's subordination of peasant interests to those of the gentry turned more to preparing young people's minds for a future revolution. He suggested the disapproval of the government's reforms program by attacking liberals who wished to introduce gradual reforms within the existing framework of society. Reviewing John-Stewart Mills,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.169.

he criticized laissez-faire capitalism. Furthermore, in writing on Mills and economics in general, Chernyshevskii skillfully suggested to his readers that the best organisation of society and economic production was a socialist one.<sup>5</sup>

The Narodniks (Populists) first spoke to the educated youth of Russia in the voice of Chernyshevskii, the son of a priest, a revered name in their martyrology of imprisonment in Siberia.

With Chernyshevskii was closely associated Dobroliubov, also the son of a priest.. Through his association with the former after 1856, Dobroliubov became a radical critic of existing society, and, as Soviet historians phrase it, a ❖ revolutionary democrat❖. He too, like Chernyshevskii and other intellectuals of the nineteenth century Russia refrained from criticizing the government directly but used the characteristic Aesopian language of the period and the analysis of literature to raise doubts in the minds of his readers about the justice and rationality of existing conditions and social organisation in Russia<sup>6</sup>.

The third intellectual leader around 1860 was Dmitrii.I.Pisarev. Pisarev, belonging to an impoverished petty gentry family and unlike both Chernyshevskii and Dobroliubov, was an inconsistent socialist. Being a nihilist and negator of the traditions of the older generation, her served the useful purpose of freeing the younger generation from the restraints of the alleged superstition and ignorance

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<sup>5</sup> E.C. Thaden,n.1, p.222.

of the past. For Pisarev, it was important that the younger generation should discard all social institutions and beliefs that could not pass the test of reason, because only then would it be obliged to rely on its own efforts and ingenuity and to utilize fully scientific knowledge, education, and enlightenment to build a new and better future society<sup>7</sup>.

A truly revolutionary movement only emerged in Russia during 1861 and 1862. At that time Herzen and his friend and collaborator, N.P. Ogarev, in London, and young men inside Russia who stood considerably to the left of Chernyshevskii, Dobroliubov, and Pisarev issued a number of manifestos addressed to peasants, soldiers, and students. Herzen and Ogarev, soon became advocates of open revolutionary activity in the spring of 1861 in response to measures taken by the government to repress student and peasant unrest. As early as July 1861 in *Kolokol*, Ogarev answered the question "what do the people need?" with the words "land and freedom", or "Zemlia i volia", at the same time outlining a program of reform that included more generous allotments for the peasants, retention of the *obshchina* (peasant commune), equitable taxes, compensation for former serf-owners from sources other than the peasant *obrok*, reduction of government military expenditures, and convocation of a popular assembly, or *zemskii sobor*.<sup>8</sup> When St. Petersburg University was closed a few months later, *Kolokol* urged expelled students "to go to the people", thereby providing the Russian revolutionary movement with another of its most famous slogans.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp.222-223.

<sup>7</sup> A. Walicki, *Russian Social Thought*,(oxford,1975), p.86.

<sup>8</sup> E.C. Thaden, n.1, p.224.

Meanwhile inside Russia three issues of the clandestine newspaper *Velikoruss* (*The Great Russian*) appeared between July and September 1861. *Velikoruss* addressed itself to the educated minority and advocated the convocation of a national assembly and a program of reform designed to attract support from liberal elements in the gentry. Among other manifestoes, the most radical and extreme was entitled "Young Russia" and drafted by P.G. Zaichnevskii<sup>9</sup>. An extremely incendiary document, it enjoined the younger generation to place itself at the head of the masses and lead them onward to some sort of general revolution which was to sweep aside all existing institutions, including the state, family, and church, and to bring about a revolutionary dictatorship and the creation of a new Russian society based on socialism and the peasant commune.

The legacy of Pisarev was carried on by Petr Lavrov, a professor at the Artillery Academy, in the two concepts of the 'critically thinking individual' as the creative factor of human progress, and knowledge, as the source and instrument of this creative force. In 1869-70 with the publication of his *Historical Letters*, written in exile, under the pseudonym of Mirtov, Lavrov came into his own among the revolutionary intelligentsia.<sup>10</sup> Escaping to Paris in 1870, he fell into the fever of the commune, came close to its leading figures and was even commissioned by them to go to London in May of the same year to get help for it. There he met Marx and Engels, became a member of the Paris section of the International and

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.224.

<sup>10</sup> A. Walicki, n.7, p.85.

thus entered into relations with the European workers and the socialist movement of the time. This played a not unimportant role in the formation of his own socio-political views and through him in the evolution of the ideas of the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia.

For Lavrov, for the thinking individual, a lofty 'moral idea'; had to be worked out within oneself, and then one had to strive to affect the future course of history in that spirit. But that meant that this 'ideal' had to be brought to 'the people', the thinking minority could only pay off its own debt to this majority by bringing its own 'ideal' not to the privileged summits of society, but to its deprived lower depths.<sup>11</sup> As Martov points out, 'Lavrov's whole book was a summons to the Russian democratic intelligentsia to form a party and conduct a systematic struggle against the historic order in the name of socialism'<sup>12</sup>. The youth that Pisarev "had set to work" to educate themselves was turned to, by Lavrov with the cry 'to the people!' 'And it was first this cry that was triumphantly snatched out of his book by broad circles of the intelligentsia, whose attitudes happened to ripen on the threshold of the '70s and soon fused into a tempestuous movement, known as 'going to the people'

After moving abroad, in July 1873, Lavrov began publishing the '*Vperyod (Forwards)*' collections of articles and from 1875 on a fortnightly under the same title in accord with the Petersburg group of 'Chaikovskyites'<sup>13</sup> Thus there sprang up

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.90.

<sup>12</sup> T. Dan, *The Origins of Bolshevism*, ed., And translated by Joel Carmichael, (London, 1964), p.65.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.66.



for the first time an 'émigré' press that was directly tied to organizations active in Russia. This bond was possible because of the numerous émigré colonies that sprang up in various cities of Europe (chiefly in Switzerland), made up of people who had escaped from the persecutions descended on the intelligentsia from the beginning of the '60s on, and of the youth, chiefly young women, who were seeking abroad the university knowledge. All these served as intermediate links that ensured the provision of the émigré press with material, an exchange of opinions, and intellectual communication.<sup>14</sup>

In Paris, Lavrov's work came under the very powerful influence of the European working class movement, with which he had come into very close contact, and of Marxism, which at the time ideologically dominated the International, which he joined. His Populist outlook began reflecting alien Marxist elements, and this inconsistency was merely the expression of the new factors that were bringing into the intellectual development of broad strata of the Russian intelligentsia the influence of the Western European working class movement and proletarian socialism<sup>15</sup>.

Lavrov's journalistic work as an 'émigré' played the role of a channel through which the ideas of Western European Socialism poured into the Russian revolutionary movement. But, after his *Historical Letters*, Lavrov's authentic historical activity lay in his providing the theoretical foundations for the practical activity that revolutionary Populism passed over

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<sup>14</sup> A. Walicki, n.7, p.91.

<sup>15</sup> A. Walicki, n.7, p.102.

to during the '70s. It was primarily this work that the *Vperyod* anthologies and the periodical were devoted to<sup>16</sup>.

Reversing the idea of the European working-class socialism, Lavrov soon assimilated its three basic 'Marxist' propositions : Socialism arises on the socio-economic terrain prepared by Capitalism; the working-class is the demiurge of the socialist revolution, the working-class of all countries is bound together by ties of international solidarity. The commune, remained as before, the original social form capable of passing over directly into a higher, Socialist form. In the second *Vperyod* volume, he said, "Our social revolution must not come out of the cities, but out of the villages"<sup>17</sup>.

Lavrov's historical antagonist in the Populist movement was Bakunin, and the division between them was expressed all the more distinctly in the 1870s, when the movement passed over to practical revolutionary activity. It was in Italy that Bakunin's views on world anarchism assumed their definitive form and his revolutionary activity turned towards the laboring masses, and assumed a definite international tinge giving him a preponderant influence on the ideology of the Russian revolutionary movement of the 1870s.

While still living in Italy, he had drawn up plans and programmes for a 'World Association of International Brothers'. After moving to Switzerland he organised an 'International Alliance of Socialist Democracy' with an anarchist programme, and in the spirit of this programme, got

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<sup>16</sup> T. Dan, n.12, p. 68.

out the first number of the *Narodnoye Delo* (*The People's Cause*), which had been founded in Geneva in 1868 by N.I. Zhukovsky. He declared this Alliance dissolved when this proved necessary for him to enter the International (1863) through its Geneva section, but in fact he preserved his own special organisation as a secret society within the International, and began the systematic struggle against the general council headed by Marx and Engels that in 1872 led to the exclusion of him and the French anarchist Guillaume, but at the same time to the decline and defacto liquidation of the International itself.<sup>18</sup>

Anarchist influence was expressed more than once in the pre-revolutionary years in the two branches of the Russian Socialist movement the Populist (maximalist) and the Marxist (i.e. the Makhayev group). In these years and in the years of the 1905 and 1917 revolutions, purely anarchist organizations played a noteworthy part (especially in the peasant partisan movement during the civil war in Southern Russia). But in general, anarchism as a finished system was never more than a peripheral phenomenon; it never played a major role in the evolution of Russian democratic and socialist thought.<sup>19</sup>

Petr Tkachev, the son of a small landowner, had many brushes with imprisonment by the time he was eighteen years old. From 1865 on, he was a colleague of Pisarev on the *Russkoye Slovo*; when that was shut down, on the *Delo* (*The Cause*) that replaced it at the end of 1867. In 1871, sentenced

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

<sup>18</sup> See Ibid, pp.73-76.

<sup>19</sup> A. Walicki, n.7, p.105.

in the 'Nechayev affair', he escaped abroad and without stopping his collaboration on the *Delo* began his own literary work as an 'émigré' under various pseudonyms, until the 1880s. In April 1874, he printed a programmatic pamphlet, 'Tasks of Revolutionary Propaganda in Russia'; from the end of 1875 to the end of 1876 he published in Geneva, in conjunction with a group of Polish émigré sympathizers (K. Tursky, K. Yanitsky and others), the periodical *Nabat*, subtitled 'Organ of the Russian Revolutionaries'.

Maintaining the same views in principle on the peasant commune as Lavrov and Bakunin, Tkachev also agreed with them in acknowledging the increasingly disintegrating effect that contemporary Russian capitalism was beginning to exercise on it. However, he concluded that with the beginning of the disintegration of the commune and the emergence on the one hand of an extremely powerful conservative class of peasants, landowners, and on the other of a pecuniary, commercial and industrial bourgeoisie', the revolution in Russia had become an urgent necessity. 'We can not wait', either until the propaganda of the Lavrovites organised the masses of the people for a conscious struggle for the Socialist 'ideal', or until there arose out of the uninterrupted chain of Bakuninite 'insurrections' that chaos that would give rise to 'freedom, equality, and justice'<sup>20</sup> This revolution had to be made 'by' the intelligentsia on behalf of the masses and not by means of the people.

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<sup>20</sup> T. Dan, n.12, p.87.

As the 1860s drew to a close, a decade of the theoretical elaboration of ideology gave way in the 1870s to a decade of the application of this ideology to the practical work of the revolution. However, there was no sharp boundary dividing the two. There was an uninterrupted reciprocal interaction between theory and practice. However, by the 1870s onwards, revolutionary activity stopped being the property of little groups with few people, few in number, fragmented, introverted and isolated from each other, revolving around one or another eminent individual, and the revolutionary movement became a 'mass' movement in the relative sense that it took hold of the basic 'mass' of the social spectrum of the Russian intelligentsia, made by history the bearer of the democratic idea in Russia. Vera Figner rightly remarks that the 'Chaikovskiyite group founded at the end of the 1860s was 'the last group that bore the name of an individual'<sup>21</sup>.

Pisarev, Lavrov, Bakunin, Tkachev - these four names symbolize the four basic ideas that entered the spiritual arsenal of Russian Populism: the individualistic idea of personal self-perfection; the rationalistic idea of Socialist enlightenment; the emotional-mystical idea of plebian insurrection; the Jacobin idea of settling the political problem by the forces of the thinking intellectual minority for the people, but not by the people.

Though the organization Land and Freedom, founded in 1862 by disciples of Chernyshevskii in the hope that the dissatisfied peasant would bring about a peasant revolution,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.91.

failed, the Ishutin group which began with a purely propagandist elaboration of Chernyshevskii's communist ideas, in the mid 1860s, gradually became a microcosm of trends which were to emerge later in a more elaborate and precise form in the works of Populist theoreticians and embodied in their revolutionary practices<sup>22</sup> towards the beginning of 1866, within the secret organ of the group; the 'Organization', an even narrower conspiratorial group emerged, named 'Hell'. The basic idea behind Hell was not to wait passively for the advent of the 'social revolution' but to try actively to 'unleash' it by some kind of 'grandiose, terrifying facts', capable of 'shaking up the slumbering people'<sup>23</sup>. A failed assassination attempt on Alexander II, led to the arrest, punishment and end of the group.

Another Moscow group, among the students of the Agricultural Academy in 1869, was the Nechayev group, founded by Serge Gennadyevich Nechayev. In 1868-69, Nechayev, together with Tkachev, took part in the student movement, but at the beginning left for Switzerland where he became close to Bakunin by passing himself off as an agent of a non-existent organisation, the People's Tribunal (Narodnaya Rasprava). Soon he began publishing a periodical under the name in which Bakunin's *Revolutionary Catechism* and the proclamation, *Beginning of the Revolution* which sanctioned 'individual terror' were published<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> A.F. Adams .ed., *Imperial Russia after 1861: Peaceful Modernisation or Revolution?*, (Boston, 1965), p.43.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.47.

<sup>24</sup> P. Dukes, n.3, p. 173.

In 1869 November, a student of the Nechayev group, Ivanov was killed by the other members on suspicions of harbouring contacts with the police and this led to the subsequent arrest and end of the group. Nechayev escaped to Switzerland to bring out a second issue of the *Narodnaya Rasprava*, and in 1870 after his rupture with Bakunin moved to London where he began publishing a leaflet called the *Obshchina* (the commune). He died in 1882 in Paul Fortress ten years after he was handed over to the Russian government as a criminal.

The most determined adversary of the Nechayevites who propagated immediate peasant insurrection, were the Lavrovite group of the 'Chaikovskyites, which emerged in the autumn of 1869 in Petersburg. Believing that while sustaining the 'insurrectionist' spirit in the people by means of partial protests, they must wait for a more opportune time for the insurrection, it was made up chiefly of students at the Academy of Medicine and named after one of its most eminent members, Nicholas Vasilyevich Chaikovsky.<sup>25</sup> The real historical significance of this group is that it gave rise to the most massive revolutionary organisation of the 1870s: Land and Freedom (*Zemlya i Volya*) but this organisation was preceded by the legendary epic of 'going to the people'.

The 'going to the people' wave of the intelligentsia is marked by two distinct phases -1874-75 and 1876-78. Beginning with the Dolgushinites in 1873, hundreds of young people came to the capital and prepared themselves to work on the land chiefly in the semi-intelligentsia roles of teachers, nurses,

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<sup>25</sup> R Pipes, ed., *The Russian Intelligentsia*, p.154.

village clerks, etc, helping the people with their own knowledge and thus winning its confidence. Some, influenced by Bakunin, resorted to heavy physical labour to connect with the people. Students left universities, higher institutions of learning and special schools. Graduating physicians refused to take their final examinations. Young men and women furtively left their parents' homes, equipped themselves with false passports, dressed in peasant costumes, turned themselves into 'one of the people' and went to the countryside to a life completely unknown to them<sup>26</sup>. However, the movement lacked a central organisation, but 'revolutionary dens' were organised with the help of sympathizers.

In the spring of 1874, this army of intelligentsia moved into about thirty provinces, the main stream moving into areas of old peasant uprisings (the rebellions of Stenka Razin and Emelyan Pugachov, the Ukraine, etc.) ,where the terrain was considered readiest for propaganda. Though this preference for 'insurrectionist' regions reflected a Bakuninite tendency, the eminent role in the preparation of the movement was played by Lavrovites, especially the Chaikovskyites.<sup>27</sup> While the Lavrovites sought to bring 'knowledge' to the people, the Bakuninites' principal object was to seek out and foment peasant discontent to the greatest degree possible. That the Bakuninites did not cut much ice with the peasants is recorded by Aptekman;

'I noticed that any sharp sallies against the Tsar or against religion made an extremely disagreeable impression on the

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<sup>26</sup> E.C. Thaden, n.1,pp.250-253.



peasants; they were just as deeply perplexed by energetic appeals for a rebellion or uprising<sup>28</sup>. Finally the Bakuninites too followed a peaceful 'academic' propaganda of Socialist ideas by way of conversations and distribution of pamphlets. Vera Figner, a Lavrovite and later famous in the People's Freedom movement, points to the similar orientation of the Lavrovites;

'Seeing that in the West political liberty had not made the people any happier we shifted exclusively to the terrain of economic relations. We considered it impossible to summon the Russian people to a struggle for rights that would not give them bread; together with this, while intending to replace existing economic conditions, we were hoping by undermining the idea of Tsarism among the people, to secure the democratization of the political order'<sup>29</sup>.

The movement, however, met with savage repressions. The arrests which began in late summer, concluded in the 'trial of the 193', with acquittals for some but gaol and exile for the majority. The lessons drawn from this 'fiasco' are summed up in a letter to Vera Zasulich in the following two to three years by Serge Mikhailovich Krachinsky, 'scientific socialism', the socialism of the west, bounces off the Russian masses like a pea off a wall. Everyone felt the need to adapt ourselves to local conditions<sup>30</sup>. The experience of the first wave was useful in the more powerful second wave of 'going to the people' that was to be organized by land and freedom.

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<sup>27</sup> L. Kochan and R. Abraham, *The Making of Modern Russia*, (The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1983), p.182.

<sup>28</sup> T. Dan, n.12, p.99.

Land and Freedom was founded in 1876-77 by M.A. Natanson and A.D. Mikhailov after a long-drawnout debate. In Mikhailov's words, 'the Russian socialists have left collectivism, a harmonious scientific theory, and by way of bitter disappointments, sacrifices and painful sufferings have come to Populism'.<sup>31</sup> Though the basic leaders of Land and Freedom were Lavrovites and Chaikovskiyites, Tkachev's ideas had a strong and obvious influence during the critical years of the shifting of land and freedom over to the political terrorism of the People's Freedom. Land and freedom was a landmark in revolutionary history as the first strictly centralized, combat, conspiratorial revolutionary organisation in Russia, as Lenin notes in his *What is to be Done?*.

Rejecting the 'harmonious theory' of collectivism in favour of an empirical 'Populism', the programme of Land and Freedom that was worked out in 1876-77 categorically stated : "We shall narrow down our own demands to whatever is materially feasible in the immediate future, that is, down to the people's demands and desires, whatever they may be at any given moment"<sup>32</sup>

The first programme of the Land and Freedom sought to achieve the three points; of transfer of all land to the rural workers and its equal distribution; the breaking up of the Russian empire into portions in accordance with local wishes; and the transfer of all public functions into the hands of the commune; through agitation and disorganisation of the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.99.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.101.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.102.

state was soon abandoned<sup>33</sup>. The public excitement created by the Russo-Turkish war of 1877 and the accompanying economic crisis, the workers' strikes, and the revival of a liberal, especially Zemstvo opposition' all fuelled the combative tendencies of the intelligentsia and led to a radical revision of the programme. The 'Great Council' consisting of all eminent members who were present in Petersburg resulted in the 'second programme'. The new programme declared anarchy and collectivism as its ultimate political and economic ideal and populism as an historically laid down Russian road to 'Western Collectivism, not antithetical to it.' Populism is justified on the grounds of its leading to the creating of a massive foundation for the future successful course of the social cause in Russia<sup>34</sup>.

The new programme sought to unite within its framework all the revolutionary currents and become the focus of the liberal opposition which had begun to surface by compounding mutually contradictory ideas of Lavrov, Bakunin and Tkachev. In Vera Figner's assessment, in contrast to former programmes, the new one extended the sphere of activity of its partisans throughout all strata of society<sup>35</sup>. Its activity encompassed work among the peasants, the industrial workers in higher schools of learning and even collaboration with the 'rebels' in order to exploit them to further the cause.

The attempt to synchronize theory with practical necessity made the second programme 'one of the most eclectic

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<sup>32</sup> F. Venturi, *The Roots of Revolution* (London, 1961), P. 585.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 106.

<sup>34</sup> T. Dan, n.12, pp. 105-106.

and contradictory documents of the Russian revolutionary movement'. The contradiction in theory is evident in the Populists' claim of not isolating 'the economic and political ideal laid down by history' while simultaneously demanding a violent overturn as the only means of satisfying the aspirations of the people in the face of 'ulcers of bourgeois civilization' threatening the destruction of the commune<sup>36</sup>. This eclecticism creeps into the practical tasks ❧ the 'organizational' and 'disorganizational' too. The first of the 'organizational tasks', the creation of a tightly knit and smoothly working organization of trained revolutionaries from the intelligentsia and workers is tied up with the contradictory element of this organizations' need to form ties with the liberals or the possessing classes. The 'disorganizing' activities, including work among the troops, the involvement of government functionaries, at the same time allowing systematic extermination of the most dangerous or eminent members of the government was interpreted as supporting individual acts of terror<sup>37</sup>. The contradictions built in the 'disorganisation' task played a decisive role in the subsequent fate and were the immediate cause of its dissolution.

The programme shifted in the countryside from the 'preaching of the principles of socialism' of the early 70s to 'protests based on the vital interest of the countryside' at the end of the 1870s. Popov even mentions the difference between the opinions of acquitted members of the trial of 193

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 106.

<sup>36</sup> F. Venturi, n.32, p. 591.

<sup>37</sup> T. Dan, n.12, pp. 107-108.

and the members of the new organisation ; 'The Land and Freedom people and the acquitted revolutionaries of the first call-up . . . spoke different languages. Zhelyabov and Tikhomirov, for instance, were horrified by the practical programme of Land and Freedom'.<sup>38</sup> The second call-up's temper and practice became more and more Bakuninite and insurrectionary.

Though different in mood and plans from the first phase, the second phase too met with the same fate. The reason can be traced in part to the development of capitalist relations in the city as well as the countryside , the latter leading to the rapid dissolution of the communal system and temperament. The resultant heterogeneity and antagonisms led to a very slow response by the peasant commune to appeals for collective protest. Consequently the attention of the Populist revolutionaries too shifted from the rural to the urban setting, believing that the capitalist city and not the pre-capitalist village was becoming the determining factor of her further socio-political evolution<sup>39</sup>. Imperceptibly the goal and character of its revolutionary activity also changed. The frequent conflicts between the entrepreneur and the factory workers, saw the Populist revolutionaries increasingly being drawn into the 'factory question'. Successful recruitment of especially aware individuals from among the laboring masses into the organisation necessitated the formation of two branches of the special 'Workers Union'; a northern (December 1878) and a southern (1879). Plekhanov,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 109.

<sup>39</sup> F. Venturi, n.32, p. 598.

in accordance with the Populist belief had predicted then that 'the question of the city worker . . . will be moved forward automatically. . . . to an appropriate place, in spite of the *a priori* theoretical decisions of the revolutionary leaders'<sup>40</sup>.

Lacking a mass-base, 'Land and Freedom' had given up hopes of actually calling in the aid of the people, but did the attempt to exploit all potential for popular discontent<sup>41</sup>. Thus one of its first acts in 1876 was to stage a mass - demonstration in front of the Kazan Cathedral in St. Petersburg, where George Plekhanov, a student of the St. Petersburg Mining Academy, delivered a rousing speech and unfurled a red flag bearing the words : "Land and Freedom" . This demonstration indirectly gave powerful encouragement to terrorism. Arrested in the fracas before the Cathedral, a seasoned young revolutionary, Alexis Bogolyubov's flogging for an act of discourtesy towards General Trepov, provoked a prison riot.. The brutal suppression of this riot, and the consequent public indignation was reflected in the act of retribution by a young woman Vera Zasulich ,later one of the co-founders of the Marxist Social Democracy in Russia, who shot Trepov, seriously wounding him<sup>42</sup>.

Vera Zasulich's act gave fillip to terrorist acts in Russia. Political terror had made a decisive entry into Russian life. The exonerative sentence given to Vera Zasulich by a liberal judge and her subsequent escape to Switzerland in the chaos at the end of the trial, completely discredited the

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<sup>40</sup> S.H. Baron, *Plekhanov, the Father of Russian Marxism* (London, 1963), p.72.

<sup>41</sup> T.Dan, n.12, p. 113.

<sup>42</sup> L.Kochan and R.Abraham, n.27, p. 217.

liberals in the eyes of the Tsar. Henceforth, all trials of those resisting the authorities were to be conducted by the military courts. As repression grew stronger, so did the terrorist attempts become bolder. While Stepnaik struck down General Mezentsov, a hero of the Crimea and chief of the Third Section, in broad daylight in St. Petersburg, in Kharkov, Goldenberg killed Prince Kropotkin, cousin to the anarchist and Governor-General of the city.

By 1878-9, the thrust of Land and Freedom had shifted from rural activity to the cornerstone of the state. The execution of Solovyov after a failed assassination attempt on the Tsar in 1879, hastened the dissolution of Land and Freedom because of the compromise the organisation had reached in allowing single members to assist in the assassination individually while refusing to assist in the affair<sup>43</sup>. While this entire affair pushed many 'farmers' into the ranks of terrorists it also provided the occasion for the rise of a 'special secret little group' within the organisation. Within this group also emerged a 'secondary' circle with a terrorist programme with a political character and the motto 'Liberty or Death'. Simultaneously, along with the official organ of Land and Freedom, which had been coming out under the editorship of N.A. Morozov, Plekhanov and L.A. Tikhomirov, there appeared under the editorship of Morozov alone, the official 'Leaflet of Land and Freedom' which preached political terror openly. The signature of 'Executive

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<sup>43</sup> T.Dan, n.12, p. 116.

Committee' too made its appearance which later became the official designation of the core of the 'People's Freedom'<sup>44</sup>.

The congress of Land and Freedom in Voronyozh on 24 June 1879 set its goal the organization of the overthrow of the autocratic order and the establishment of political liberties, by means of an armed struggle against the government. The acceptance of this 'Tkachevite' programme signalized an open and decisive rupture with the traditional 'apoliticism' of Populism<sup>45</sup>. Along with the liquidation of Land and Freedom, the Voronyozh congress signalized its breaking up into two groups - Total Reapportionment (of the Land) and the People's Freedom.

Plekhanov along with P.B. Akselrod, V.I. Zasluch, and L.G. Deich founded the organization Total Reapportionment. In a periodical of the same name, it proclaimed that 'political overturns never and nowhere could secure the people's economic and political liberty'<sup>46</sup>. With the departure abroad of Deich, Zasluch and Plekhanov, it began to break up and many followers went over to People's Freedom.

The programme of People's Freedom, the sole heir to Land and Freedom, according to a draft by Tikhomirov began with the words; 'In our basic convictions we are Socialists and Populists' , 'political liberty was not an end for us but a means' and that 'we were not pursuing the abstract ultimate objectives of socialist doctrine but those demands and needs

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 116.

<sup>45</sup> F. Venturi, n.32, p. 603.

<sup>46</sup> T. Dan, n.12, p. 118.



in the popular mind that in their essence included the socialist principles of liberty'<sup>47</sup>. Most significantly, the programme put forth the political slogan which till the 1917 revolution was to remain the general political slogan of all parties and fractions; the convocation of a 'Constituent Assembly' freely elected by a universal vote'. The fundamental political method of the party, "terror, was justified for 'undermining of the fascination of governmental power, . . . the elevation . . . of the revolutionary spirit and its faith in the success of the cause and finally, the formation of forces fit for and accustomed to battle'. However, the people are given a secondary role in the task of achieving a political overturn, and administration and troops a primary one. The central idea of the party was expressed in a concluding paragraph, "In view of the oppression of the people, and since by means of special repressions the government will be able to restrain the general revolutionary movement for a very long time, the party must assume the preparation of the overturn itself, and not wait for a time when the people will be able to get along without it."<sup>48</sup>

The members of People's Freedom were supposed to and did carry on agitation and propaganda among the people, the troops and students, and in affluent society. But this activity among the 'people' increasingly got limited to activity among only the urban workers, officers in the troops, and among students, mere recruitment of individuals fit for an active part in terrorist enterprises. But terror, according to Vera Figner ,

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 119.

<sup>48</sup> F. Venturi, n.32, p. 608.

was only a means of self-defence and was never in itself ,the aim of the party.

Further, she says "terror", `` was considered a powerful medium of agitation . . . Regicide entered this category as a detail. . . . Organizational and propagandistic activity always went hand in hand with the work of destruction<sup>49</sup>. However, as time went by, activity in the countryside became a mere rhetoric and assassinations came to represent the thrust of the party. The People's Freedom was even more dedicated to regicide than had been Land and Freedom in its final years. Extreme centralization of the party, the self-authorize status of the Executive Committee and the latter's monastic nature became the hallmarks of the party. The individual was made completely subservient to the party<sup>50</sup>.

After two failed attempts, a mine bomb along the rail-bed of the Moscow-Kursk railway, and the explosion in the Imperial dining room, Alexander II was finally assassinated by a student, Rysakov, on 1 March, 1881. Six people involved in the affair were condemned to death including , S.L. Perovskaya, N.I. Kibalchich, T.M. Mikhailov, G.M. Gelfman, N.I. Rysakov, and A.I. Zhelyabov. The sentence of hard labour imposed on majority of the 'Trial of the Twenty' shattered the old and experienced Executive Committee. Vera Figner paints the picture of wilderness when there were neither enough minds nor enough hands, neither dominant originators nor skilful executors<sup>51</sup>. But the party went on existing

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<sup>49</sup> T. Dan, n.12, p. 121.

<sup>50</sup> F. Venturi, n.32, P. 510.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 513.

formally, as can be seen in the propaganda work through 'Flying Leaflets' done by People's Freedom groups in the late 1890s<sup>52</sup>. P. Lavrov, and L. Tikhomirov published abroad the People's Freedom, *Vestnik (Courier)* from 1883 to 1886. In one of the terrorist attacks by individual People's Freedom groups on the Tsar in March 1887, five students were arrested and sentenced to death while two were imprisoned. But these were mere sparks, the People's Freedom was over-organizationally as well as ideologically. The regicide did not lead to a people's revolution and passed by in the countryside without a trace. The Populist-Socialist illusions dissipated, the remnants of the Executive Committee put forth only two demands to the Tsar as pre-requisites for the cessation of revolutionary activities; a general political amnesty and the convocation of people's representatives<sup>53</sup>.

The objective meaning of the legendary revolutionary activity of the People's Freedom thus boiled down to a struggle for a moderately liberal constitution<sup>54</sup>. However, the People's Freedom movement occupies a significant position in Russian revolutionary history because with it the apoliticism of Russian Populism and the Russian intelligentsia ended. 'Politics' became the central goal, the overthrow of the autocracy its general slogan. 'Down with the autocracy!' - the popular outcry of the Russian revolutionary movement was the legacy of the People's Freedom.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> T. Dan, n.12, p. 124.

<sup>53</sup> D. Footman, "Killing of An Emperor", in T. Riha, ed., *Readings in Russian Civilization*, (Chicago, 1964), p. 372.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 372.

<sup>55</sup> E.C. Thaden, n.1, p.250.

The "trial of the 50" and the "trial of the 193" only provided the revolutionaries with a forum to popularize their views. Both opportunities were used to pose as martyrs and demonstrate to the people their sincerity and willingness to sacrifice themselves for people's welfare. Heavy casualties during the Russo-Turkish War and the difficulties and apparent mismanagement of the Russian army in the Balkans, made Russian public more critical of the government and sympathetic to the revolutionaries. This was reflected in the spurt in revolutionary circles in the 1880s and a more intense search for an ideology suited to Russian conditions which was to emerge from the Populist ideas and predominantly from Marxism.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

# **THE NARODOVOL'TSY, THE POPULISTS AND THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS**

The 1880s saw the emergence of a new debate in Russia centering around capitalism. Despite the growth of industry and factory towns in the 1880s, Russia was still an agricultural economy with 90 per cent of the population living on land and 85 per cent engaged in peasant agriculture<sup>1</sup>. The central questions to the Russian Populists and Marxist intellectuals were; how had the peasants adapted to rapid industrialisation and whether capitalism was permeating the countryside? The famine of 1891-92 sparked an intense debate on the consequence of continued industrialisation on peasant agriculture. For both the narodovol'tsy and the social democrats of the 1880s, the Russian peasants were simply too oppressed, too poor and too ignorant to contribute to revolutionary change. The development of class relations in the countryside was hindered by communal redistribution and the vagaries of peasant farming, which increased the chasm between the rich and the poor. The state policies (the most powerful capitalist force in Russia) by supporting the commune; which it saw as a guarantee of social stability and a reliable source of revenue, ensured that the peasantry was condemned to the evils of capitalism without any benefits. Thus the Jewish pogroms of 1881-82 and other peasant revolts, were interpreted by the narodovol'tsy as being mere senseless violence and not class wars which could contribute to increasing the consciousness of the peasantry<sup>2</sup>. The narodovol'tsy thus took a middle position, neither idealizing the peasants, as was the Populist tendency, nor discounting them, as did many social-democrats. They believed instead that if the contemporary political system could be changed from an oppressor of the peasants, to one that freed them and gave them all the land, then peasant renewal could be assured

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<sup>1</sup> E.C. Thaden, *Russia Since 1801*, (New York, 1971), p. 301.

<sup>2</sup> N.M. Naimark, *Terrorists and Social Democrats*, (Massachusetts, 1983), p. 26.

through the communal self-government<sup>3</sup>.

Industrialisation also created new social-groups which demanded change, enforced these demands through action, and thus became central to the radicals' strategy for revolution. One of these groups; the technical intelligentsia, were due to the nature of their education and professions, usually modernizers and westernizers, sensitive to Russia's need for political and economic reform. Often drawn to revolutionary circles, they were politically progressive, parliamentary and liberal but unwilling to support revolutionary action, even in the name of a constitution. The program of "small deeds" developed by A. Abramov in his journal *Nedel'ia* (*The Week*) calling on the intelligentsia to teach among the people, to carry out "modest humanitarian tasks in the service of the people<sup>4</sup>", found more favor with this class.

Another segment of the intellectual elite of the 1880s; the cultural intelligentsia, was generally wealthy and of noble birth, though alienated from both the conservative government and the underground radicals. With drawing to their studies, they included the "Legal Populists" Mikhailovsky, Zlatovratskii, Engel'hardt, Vorontsov, and Danielson (Nikolai-on), and later the "Legal Marxists"; Struve, Bulgakov and Berdiaev. Both groups were radical intelligentsia and not political activists.

As a whole, the revolutionary intelligentsia of the 1880s belonged to the lower strata of the social structure. It included students or former students who had withdrawn from schools or been expelled for minor infractions, many being children of poor, commoners, of non-Russian national origins. Thoroughly isolated from the mainstream Russian social

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

structure, all harbored a collective psychology of being victims of the social structure<sup>5</sup>. Jews and Poles from western provinces and educated women formed a significant component of this group.

The revolutionary movement of the 1880s also saw participation of a great number of workers and artisans, 16 per cent of the total arrested. Between 1890-1894, this increased to 28 per cent and by 1901-1903 to 47 per cent<sup>6</sup>.

Low pay, long-working hours, dismal working conditions in factories, lack of proper housing facilities, indebtedness, the depression of the early 1880s and the consequent massive industrial along with rapid population growth contributed to the workers' attitude towards revolutionary propaganda. Economic rather than political causes led to a number of workers' strikes in the 1880s<sup>7</sup>, the largest disturbance being the Morozov Textile workers strike in Vladimir province in 1885. Georgy Plekhanov, also saw the Morzov strike as a turning point in the history of Russian labor, marking the beginning "of a new phase in the workers' movement". Vera Zasulich noted the importance of this movement in bringing about a change in the attitude of the autocracy towards the workers; "The government stopped trying them publicly and began to deal with them silently, as with enemies<sup>8</sup>".

The interaction between the Russian workers' movement with revolutionary currents, inspired social-democratic ideas among radicals and inspired the search for worker-oriented theories of revolution. The workers, interested in improving their economic and cultural circumstances, joined the workers'

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<sup>4</sup> R. Wortman, *The Crisis of Russian Populism*, (Cambridge, 1967), p. 78.

<sup>5</sup> N.M. Naimark, n.2, pp. 28-29.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> F. Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, (London, 1961), 508.

<sup>8</sup> Naimark, n.2, p. 38.



circles for acquiring literacy and knowledge and, the radicals - social democrats and narodovol'tsy there-often converted them to their causes. Besides this, government anti-revolutionary policies and activities also influenced the emergence of Russian social democracy in the 1880s<sup>9</sup>.

Norman M. Naimark in "Terrorists and Social Democrats" points to one of the reasons for the relatively greater success of social-democrats than of the narodovol'tsy, among the workers as being a more tolerant attitude of the police towards the former<sup>10</sup>. Believing the narodovol'tsy and social-democratic workers to be pawns of the intelligentsia and victims of their unbearable circumstances, the police treated those involved in the labor movement in the 1880s with leniency.

The failure of the March 1 assassination to spark off a mass upheaval forced the narodovol'tsy to rethink their program. The breakdown of the Executive committee's organisational hierarchy abetted the growth of the Workers' Section so the blurring of ideological distinctions in the revolutionary movement as a whole during the post-March period led to a fusion of earlier Black Repartition-organised workers with the Workers' Section<sup>11</sup>. Radical Russia largely ignored the Plekhanov-dominated group of Black-Repartition after the assassination. Other émigré leaders of the aforesaid group, Vera Zasulich and Lev Deich, pressured Plekhanov to join the Executive Committee due to its temporary halt to terrorist activities. However, a few Black-Repartition workers' circles remained aloof from Narodnaia Volia and came to be known as narodniki (Populists) and in 1884-85 helped build the social-democratic movement.

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<sup>9</sup> F. Venturi, n. 7, P. 520.

<sup>10</sup> Naimark, n.2, pp. 184-185.

However, the interaction between the propagandists and the workers was neither one in which the latter were completely molded and shaped to do the intelligentsia's bidding nor one where the workers were completely immune to the intelligentsia leadership. The relationship fell within the broad spectrum ranging from cooperative to antagonistic<sup>12</sup>.

The Workers' Section continued to increase in number and geographical base between 1881 and 1884. The main thrust of the propagandists being primary education and basic propaganda amongst urban workers. The workers as well as the propagandists kept moving in and out of contact with the Narodnaia Volia or the circles respectively. But, Naimark, believes that this very fluidity allowed the Workers' Section movement to survive despite police vigilance. They helped to keep alive and strengthen the nascent Russian socialist labor movement in extremely difficult political circumstances<sup>13</sup>.

The need for new revolutionary thinking in the face of an Executive Committee which seemed aloof and adamant on its fundamental precepts of centralized organisation, political terrorism, and the seizure of power led to the creation of the Union of Youth of Narodnaia Volia in 1883 under the leadership of Petr Filippovich Iakubovich, a poet and philosopher. This new organisation, had its roots in the Student League, an organisation formed a year earlier. Iakubovich wanted to transform the latter from an organisation for advancing student demands into one with a socialist content which could address the revolutionary needs of society at large.

The Union of Youth's program created a confrontation between it and Narodnaia Volia. By the spring of 1884,

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<sup>11</sup> T. Dan, *The origins of Bolshevism*, (London, 1964), p. 174.

<sup>12</sup> Naimark, n.2, pp. 184-85.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 49-50.

numerous radical intelligentsia supported the program of the Young Narodnaia Volia and, student circles in St. Petersburg also printed two underground newspapers, Free Word (Svobodnoe slovo), and Students (Studenchestvo), which, besides criticizing Narodnaia Volia's absolute politicism also talked of the need to re-emphasize revolutionary propoganda among the people<sup>14</sup>.

By late 1884, with a significant number of its members, including Iakubovich arrested, the Union of Youth was a dead organisation. While many of its members went over to the side of the Executive Committee, the worker's groups continued to assert their independence from the Executive Committee and formulated their own program "which denied the necessity of political terror".

Vera Zasulich, elated by the challenge of the youth to the Narodnaia Volia, in an undated letter to Engels after the appearance of Plekhanov's *Our Differences* in Russia in 1885, attacked the reassertion of narodovol'tsy centralism and predicted the imminent fall of the Executive Committee<sup>15</sup>. Zasulich's assessment seems to be correct to the extent that the defiance of the Youth and the Worker's Section to the program of political terrorism, and a centralized, hierarchical, and conspiratorial organisation was expressed in their faith in the Russian labor and the belief that the tactics and the organisation of the revolutionary movement must involve successful agitation among urban workers. However, unlike Zasulich's prediction, neither did the Narodnaia Volia disappear as an idea or an organisational entity, nor did Marxism immediately occupy a stronghold over

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pp. 59-61.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

the Russian intelligentsia.

The confusion and tactical uncertainty following the assassination of Alexander II, constant arrests and internal strife, all combined to disenchant the radicals with the Paris leadership's theoretical and practical directives and seek alternative strategies to revolution<sup>16</sup>. Plekhanov was responsible for depriving revolutionary populism of its monolithic hold on radical Russia, by walking out of the 1879 Land and Liberty meeting and then four years later, attacking the narodovol'tsy's Jacobin and terrorist orientation by employing the ideas of European Marxism. The timing of the attack coincided with the emergence of a group of St. Petersburg students, the Party of Social Democrats, who applied the tenets of Lassalle and Marx to the Russian political situation<sup>17</sup>. Even the small groups of Russian workers, already exposed to populist and narodovol'tsy propaganda, got acquainted with Marxist literature and were drawn towards social-democratic ideas. However, the social-democrats, like other Russian radicals of the 1880s, kept shifting between the Western socialist works and the narodovol'tsy and populists, trying to amalgamate the two to suit Russian conditions.

The translation of the Communist Manifesto and Das Capital in Russian in 1869 and 1872 respectively and the lectures and articles of economist N.I. Ziber in 1870s, had by early 1880s made Marx a common feature of the Russian revolutionary socialist libraries. In his 8 March 1881 response to Vera Zasulich's letter, Marx had pinned his hopes for Russian regeneration on the commune but only if the

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<sup>16</sup> A.F. Adams, *Imperial Russia after 1861*, p. 141.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

autocracy were overthrown and replaced by a government that could guarantee the commune 'normal conditions of unfettered development'. Marx while denouncing Plekhanov, saw the narodovol'tsy as being capable of bringing about a revolution. However, undeterred by Marx's position, Plekhanov kept plodding on to translate *Communist Manifesto* in Russian, which he admitted, constituted 'an epoch in my life'<sup>18</sup>.

In late 1883, Plekhanov, Deich, Zasulich, Iakov Stefanovich, and Nikolai Ignatov formed their own group, Emancipation of Labour, after efforts to unify radical emigration had broken down over the editorship of the *Vestnik* of the People's Freedom which Lavrov and Tikhomirov began publishing in late 1883. The broad aims of the new group were two; the creation of 'workers' literature for the spread of social-democratic ideas in Russia and; the organisation of Russian working-class into a special party<sup>19</sup>.

Besides, the émigré press, the legal Russian press also distributed the works of Marx. N.S. Rusanov, a writer for the journals *Russkoe bogatstvo* (*Russian Wealth*) and *Delo* (*the Cause*)<sup>20</sup>, and N.V. Shelgunov, the editor of *Delo* simplified the complexities of economics inherent in Marx's works thereby making it comprehensible for the intelligentsia and workers. The narodovol'tsy propagandists took Plekhanov's Russian translation of the *Communist Manifesto* to Moscow and St. Petersburg workers' circles in handwritten and hectographed copies. Another source which contributed to the spread of Marxist literature and social -democratic ideas in Russia was the Polish Marxist party, Proletariat (1882-

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<sup>18</sup> S.H. Baron, *Plekhanov*, (London, 1963), p. 75.

<sup>19</sup> T. Dan, n.11, p. 164.

<sup>20</sup> Naimark, n.2, p. 71.

1886)<sup>21</sup>. Thus, even before Plekhanov's attacks on the narodovol'tsy and the establishment of the Party of Social Democrats as a radical organisation, Marxist and social democratic texts had become an integral part of the Russian revolutionary milieu. First, the Populists in the 1870s and then the Narodnaia Volia and the Proletariat in the 1880s planted the new ideological seeds in the Russian revolutionary movement.

The social-democrats among the narodovol'tsy, were younger, poorer, students, more isolated from the mainstream St. Petersburg student life than their predecessors. They often belonged to the *zemliachestvo* circles; groups of young people from the same home regions of the empire who joined together in order to share their material and intellectual resources. These circles set up dozens of self-help apartments and common kitchens; the *kommunaly*, which served as centers for discussions of radical ideas. In one such circle; the Vasilii Kharitonov's *kommunaly*, a poor Bulgarian student Dimitr Blagoev, received his political education. Blagoev's letters reveal that mass arrests, retreat from liberalism and the political terror and repression had led the students away from *narodnichestvo* (Populism) and *Nardovol'chestvo* to look for new solutions. He himself, disillusioned with the aforementioned ideologies, turned to Marx and Lassalle<sup>22</sup>. By 1884 Blagoev, Kharitonov and many university students with anti-terrorist and populist leanings too, had developed, what they termed a consistent social-democratic world-view, and in early 1885, proclaimed themselves the Party of Russian Social-Democrats.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 72.

<sup>22</sup> R. Wortman, n.4, p. 104.

<sup>23</sup> Naimark, n.2, p. 74.

Norman M. Naimark has divided the activities of these social democrats into three general periods<sup>24</sup>: The first between late 1883 (the coming together of students) and February 1885 (the expulsion of Blagoev from Russia due to his links with the Paris executive committee) when the group was primarily concerned with the publication of the first number of Rabochii (The Worker), a newspaper for and about the workers. In this phase, the early social democrats carried their propaganda to workers' circles already organised by Black Repartition or the Workers' Section. The second phase lasted from February 1885 till the first of a series of arrests in winter of 1885-86 and was dominated by Kharitonov and Latyshev. The Morozov strike of 1885, the publication of number 2 of Rabochii, and the appearance of Plekhanov's *Our Differences*, all contributed to the strengthening of the social-democrats. The third period from early 1886 until the mass arrests and destruction of the Terrorist Fraction in March 1887, saw the dispersal of the social - democratic forces.

The social democrats saw the main difference between themselves and the narodovol'tsy in the context of propaganda, among workers as being that while the former attended "to the organisation and the spreading of local groups", the latter emphasized on political terror<sup>25</sup>. During the mid-1880s there were several attempts to unite the various groups carrying out worker propaganda. But formal alliances were unnecessary, as the ideological distinctions between these groups were very blurred. While Latyshev and Blagoslavov remained close to former Black Repartitionists, Blagoev and Kharitonov were on intimate terms with the remaining populists. By the mid 1880s

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, pp. 74-75.

<sup>25</sup> T. Dan, n.11, p. 190.

the revolutionary groups - the Workers' Section, Young Narodnaia Volia, the social democrats, and the narodovol'tsy - though disagreeing about the details of present and future political action, shared an infatuation with Marxism and an awareness of the revolutionary significance of the industrial proletariat.

Plekhanov's Emancipation of Labour group and his book *Our Differences*, played a decisive role in the evolution of Russian Marxism. The group was the first Russian Marxist organisation, controlling the ideological formations of all Russian Marxist groups until V.I. Lenin arrived on the scene in 1892-93. Samuel Baron states that the Emancipation of Labour was not only prominent in the social democratic movement between 1883 and 1893, it was the movement<sup>26</sup>. Plekhanov's *Our Differences*, records Nikolav Andreev, the librarian of the social democrats, raised the spirits of Russian social-democrats and gradually induced the narodovol'tsy to join the social democratic movement<sup>27</sup>.

The social democrats and the Emancipation of Labour group shared a mutually beneficial relationship. While the émigrés provided propaganda material to the social-democrats to bolster their library, to recruit new members, and to pressure Narodnaia Volia to adopt a more social democratic programme, the social democrats brought an end to the émigré's political isolation, a long series of rebuffs at the hands of Marx and the entire Western socialist community and provided a crucial source of funds<sup>28</sup>.

The social-democrats unlike the populists who saw

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<sup>26</sup> S.H. Baron, n.18, p. 117.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Naimark, n.2, p. 79.



capitalism as an evil to be eliminated at all costs, characterized it as an economic stage which would lead inevitably to socialism and for which class-consciousness of the workers was essential. The workers would have to join forces with the peasantry for attaining this<sup>29</sup>. The Emancipation of Labour group occupied the middle position between the narodovol'tsy's plans of militant seizure of power and the social~~x~~democrats' emphasis on the gradual development of worker consciousness. The group suggested an important role of the intelligentsia and not the peasants in the political struggle unlike the social-democrats who believed that preparation for the revolution was the exclusive task of a union of conscious workers and conscious peasants. Plekhanov, as opposed to the gradualism of the social-democrats, emphasized the use of agitation to speed workers along the path of revolution. The social-democrats on the other hand, differed with Plekhanov's view that a social-democratic party could seize state power in the name of revolution. While the social-democrats like Blagoev insisted that an actual socialist party could only be formed in the future, when Russia had reached a higher stage of capitalist development The Emancipation of Labour group, urged the immediate formation of such a party to push the development of capitalism and to be ready to assume the powers of the state when the proper moment arrived, when capitalism and the proletariat had reached their mature stage of development<sup>30</sup>.

Although the social-democrats did not seize the revolutionary movement from the hands of the narodovol'tsy, they did succeed in popularizing the thought of Marx and Lassalle as the basis for a new and potentially viable

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<sup>28</sup> T. Dan, n.11, p. 199.

<sup>29</sup> Adams, n.16, p.125.

<sup>30</sup> T. Dan, n.11; A.F. Adams, n.16; S.H. Baron, n.18; and Naimark, n.2.

political strategy. Many workers' groups they contacted, served as important elements of the growing socialist labor movement at the beginning of the 1890s.

At least three distinct variants of the social-democratic world view emerged during this initial phase of its popularity among Russian radicals<sup>31</sup>. The first was the variation of Marxist thought popularized by Plekhanov and Emancipation of Labour, which emphasized the role of the party in the revolution, thereby providing a prototype for a radical organisation that did not yet exist in Russia. Plekhanov wanted the workers' movement to be strengthened so that the latter would ally with social-democratic party in the coming revolutionary situation. The second variant of Russian social-democracy sought to bring the peasantry into the revolution, Tolerating terrorism, their program emphasized the development of a broadly based revolutionary consciousness was closer to that of 'émigré' Lavrov (who had begun to call himself a Marxist by the mid-1880s) than to Plekhanov's. The most complete break with narodovol'tsy tradition was made by Tochiskii's strain of social democracy, the third variant, which, distrusting the intelligentsia and discarding terrorism, placed its faith only in the workers' movement and anticipated the Economism of late nineteenth century Russia. However, the differences between the three were more clearly visible in the realm of theory than practice. The adopting of the term social-democrats instead of social revolutionaries, reflected a new self-image that was to dictate the specifications of a Russian workers' party ; tied to similar parties in the West, modeled on them, and devoted to the goals of attaining for workers their legitimate place in government and society.

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<sup>31</sup> Naimark, n.2, pp. 88-89.

During 1880s, the autocratic counter-reform was directed most against the Russian University system. The stranglehold of the Minister of Education and the curators over the university, elimination of lower class students from student bodies, raising of student fees, putting a limit on the number of Jewish students, and ban on student organized meetings were a few steps envisaged by the 1884 charter to curb radicalism. However, the charter accomplished few of its original goals. The St. Petersburg Student Corporation which began in 1883, attracting students with a radical bend of mind, sought peaceful goals, but accepted conspiratorial ideas through its newspaper *Students (Studenchestvo)* renamed *Free Word (Svobodno Slovo)* in 1884. Disenchanted with Narodnaia Volia's programme, or lack of it, and absence of a coherent political outlook, the radical students turned to Marx for a comprehensive theoretical basis for revolutionary activity. *Students* published wide ranging articles explaining Marx's ideas, reprinted Engels's *Scientific Socialism*, the program and a proclamation of the Polish Marxist proletariat, and a long review of Plekhanov's *Socialism and the Political struggle*. It attacked Narodnaia Volia for being exclusively concerned with political terror and suggested that agrarian and factory terror might be more consistent with the needs of the people<sup>32</sup>.

With increasing police attention being focused on self education circles in the late 1870s and early 1880s, the students turned to less suspect zemliachestvo circles. By the end of 1881, there were sixty five zemliachestvo circles in the major university cities of the empire; sixteen in Moscow

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 133-137.

and fifteen in St. Petersburg<sup>33</sup>. The government's dismissal of the historian V.I. Semevskii in December 1885 for delivering a series of lectures on the development of Russian serfdom prompted the political debut of one of the most potentially dangerous radical groups in Russia; the circle of the Don and Kuban.

The signature campaign protesting against the government's action yielded besides numerous signatures, a spirit of cooperation among various St. Petersburg University circles resulting in a Union of Zemliachestvos, in March-April 1886 under the future Terrorist Fraction leader Shevyrev. Functioning under the cover of the Scientific Library society it soon expanded in number and was joined by Aleksandr Ul'ianov, Govorukhin, Lukashevich, Nikonov, Popov and S. Khlebnikov. Its discussions too shifted from purely academic to social questions<sup>34</sup>. The police repression of students commemorating the death of the radical literary critic Nikolai Dobroliubov and the Ministry of Education's suppression of the zemliachestvo movement in December 1886 and January 1887, gave impetus to more serious political activities.

The terrorist fraction which emerged while believing in the narodovol'tsy formulation of the socialist future, also simultaneously integrated the social-democratic analysis of the historical process-economic advancement inevitably leads to society's adoption of a socialist structure of organisation. Till the late 1880s all narodovol'tsy groups and the Fraction believed that the inevitability of a transition from capitalism to socialism though did not rule out the possibility of skipping the capitalist phase altogether, but

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<sup>33</sup> J.L.H. Keep, *The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia*, (Oxford, 1963), p. 72.

<sup>34</sup> J.N. Westwood, *Endurance and Endeavour, 1812-1971*, (Oxford, 1973).

the direct transition necessarily required the strengthening of the working class and its class consciousness, which would enable social change. The economic transformation of Russia was to be promoted by the political struggle<sup>35</sup>.

The attempt by the Terrorist Fraction to unite these two radical world views under a single program reflected the general trend of the 1880s; a search for the right combination of the Russian revolutionary tradition, represented by Narodnaia Volia, and the 'scientific' revolutionary theory of social democracy. Believing terrorism to be means of forcing the government into political reform and according to Ulianov, also a means of raising ✕ the revolutionary spirit of the people<sup>36</sup>✕, the Fraction made an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Alexander III. The subsequent execution, exile or expulsion of students destroyed the Fraction, but left an undeniable mark on Ul'ianov's brother, Lenin, who too would attempt to form a broad political movement under the banner of liberation, to create an ideology and organisation that would unite radical Russia.

During the winter of 1889-90 attempts were made to unite the student circles of technologists with the worker's circles around the capital. However in early 1890, the workers through their own initiative formed their own Central Workers' Circle and tied it to the circle of students and operated in tandem in, what can certainly be called Russia's first social democratic organisation, the Workers' Union.<sup>37</sup> It participated for the first time in the labor movement as a whole when strikes broke out at the Thornton cloth factory and at the New Admiralty factory in December and January, 1890-91. Despite the destruction of the St. Petersburg Workers' Union at the

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<sup>35</sup> Naimark, n.2, pp. 134-144.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 146.

hands of the police in 1892, by the summers of 1892-1893, the Central Workers' Circle was reconstituted under Shelgunov and Norinskii and their new intelligentsia associates led by Aliushkevich.

Outside the activities of the Central Workers' Circle and the Workers' Union, after the famine of 1891-92, the inroads that Marxism had made into the Russian intelligentsia gave the circles a distinctive Marxist orientation. With the return of one of its members, Aleksander Potresov, from abroad, in the fall of 1892, with a package of Emancipation of Labour materials, the small circles at St. Petersburg University (consisting of Iulii Tsederbaum (Martov) S.A. Goffman, and Ivan Stavskii), renamed itself the Petersburg Emancipation of Labour group and helped shape a new generation of revolutionary social democrats<sup>38</sup>.

A renewal of political life within Russian educated society helped stimulate the revolutionary movement at the end of the 1880s and beginning of the 1890s. The zemstvo liberals resented the government's attacks on the very modest freedom of action allowed to the zemstvos in their 1864 statute and also became dissatisfied with 'small deeds' mentality of the 1880s. The counter reforms in local government, promoted by Minister of Internal Affairs, Tolstoi from 1884-85, designed to tie the villages and zemstvos directly to the central bureaucracy through the appointment of land captains (*Zemskii nachal'nik*) and other measures, hurt the task of famine-relief in 1891, angering the zemstvo specialists and liberal gentry, who began talking of the need for a constitution and engaged by the turn of the century into serious confrontation with the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 146.

<sup>38</sup> T. Dan, *The Origins of Bolshevism*, p. 239.

autocracy<sup>39</sup>.

The famine of 1891-92 was interpreted as a sign of a deep-seated crisis in the economic and social policies of Alexander III's government and the latter was condemned, by the cultural intelligentsia, the acknowledged leaders of *obshchestvo*. Like the Crimean War and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, the famine too set off a period of Russian self-criticism and debate over Russia's past and future. Mikhailovsky, Vorontsov, and Danielson entered the fray in 1892 as new members of the editorial board of the journal *Russian Wealth (Russkoe bogatstvo)*, attacking capitalism for causing the famine and the Marxists for passivity. The Marxist counter attack led by Peter Struve, interpreted the famine as an indication of class differentiation in rural Russia, and a pointer to the emergence of full-blown capitalism. Between, 1892 to 1894, Plekhanov and Lenin too entered the debate on the fate of capitalism in Russia, and the role of the individual in history. As the gap between autocracy and educated society widened, that between *obshchestvo* and the revolutionary movement, significantly narrowed.

The Populists, blaming capitalism for the famine of 1891-92, hoped to avoid the heavy sacrifices that forced industrialisation on the peasantry and to preserve the commune as the embodiment of the principle of cooperation and the basis for a future socialist society<sup>40</sup>. This they hoped to do by influencing the government to alter its policy of rapid and forced industrialisation. Mikhailovsky, especially, rejected rigid Marxist determinism, insisting that the individual and human freedom could never be underestimated in the study of history and society. He asserted that the mutual antagonism

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<sup>39</sup> E.C. Thaden, n.1, pp. 309.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p. 341.

between social individualities and man's freedom and wholeness made a society developing organically according to the laws of natural evolution i.e., a capitalist society, man's chief enemy and man must join other individuals in the struggle to adapt society to their aims<sup>41</sup>.

The Legal Populists like Vorontsov wanted capitalist industrialisation to be initiated by the state, which would safeguard the interests of the small producers. Vorontsov like Herzen and Chernyshevsky saw Russian backwardness as a privilege in that Russia could skip the capitalist phase of development by making use of all the forms created in the West but at the same time, competition with the highly industrialized rival countries would help extinguish the weak sparks of capitalism in Russia<sup>42</sup>. Danielson too pointed to the lack of foreign markets and the catastrophic situation in agriculture as indicative of capitalism being contrary to the true interests of the Russian state<sup>43</sup>.

The Marxists, enabled by the government's perception of them as being less dangerous, published learned treatises on philosophy and economics between 1894 and 1899. Conducting their debate against Populism with the blessings of the government, they came to be known as, Legal Marxists<sup>44</sup>. The Legal Marxism carried on Plekhanov's attack on the Populists for their reliance on terrorism, subjective philosophy of history, and utopian faith in the peasant commune. P.V. Struve's *Critical Notes on the Problem of the Economic Development of Russia*, saw socialism not as a 'negation' but as the inevitable outcome of capitalism and criticized the Populist assumption that Russia could skip the stages of

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<sup>41</sup> A. Walicki, *Russian Social Thought*, (Oxford, 1961), p. 263.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 275.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 279.



economic development which Western Europe had passed through. Historical necessity obliged Russia to recognise her backwardness and enter into the path of capitalism<sup>45</sup>. Plekhanov joined this debate in 1895 through his *On the Question of the Development of the Monastic View of History* in which he attacked Mikhailovsky's 'subjective' view of history and extolled Hegelian philosophy and dialectical materialism as the keys to understanding the forces that determine economic and social development, and *The Role of the Individual in History* in which he asserted that an individual could play a meaningful role only by understanding the determinant socio-economic forces of the time<sup>46</sup>.

Lenin in 1894 contributed to the debate through his illegal work *What the "Friends of the People" Are and How they Fight the Social Democrats* in which, he accused the populists of being petty-bourgeois ideologists and defenders of the kulak peasantry. In 1899, he published the *Development of capitalism in Russia*, written in prison and exile following his arrest in 1895 in which he argued on the basis of statistical material that capitalism in Russia was an already accomplished fact<sup>47</sup>.

Witte's industrialisation policy strengthened capitalism in Russia, giving credence to the Marxist analysis of the nature of Russian economic development. The lack of major peasant disturbances after the famine disappointed many radical intellectuals in the peasantry's revolutionary potential and shifting all hopes on the workers<sup>48</sup>. Various

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<sup>44</sup> J.N. Westwood, n.34, p. 163.

<sup>45</sup> A. Walicki, n.41, p. 291.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, pp. 292-293.

<sup>47</sup> L. Schapiro, *The Government and Politics in the Soviet Union*, p. 17.

<sup>48</sup> E.C. Thaden, n.1, p. 343.

strikes since the 1860s and the workers' circles only attracted the general interest to the working class. A new Social Democratic circle was organized in 1892-93 by S.I. Radchenko in St. Petersburg, limited only to intellectuals, in membership, but aiming at spreading Social Democratic and Marxist views among the workers' circles. The workers however, aided by the April 1894 arrests of the narodovol'tsy, had begun swinging to the side of the Marxists.

In 1894, upon his return from Vilna to St. Petersburg, Martov was influenced by the Jewish labor movement and the pamphlet of A. Kremer, entitled On Agitation, which suggested that the Social Democrats should encourage the workers to press their economic grievances against the government and against the employers. It assumed that government support to the employers under such conditions would frustrate the workers and lead to political and revolutionary action<sup>49</sup>.

Lenin first met Martov in October 1895 after his return from a trip to western Europe, where he had met and discussed with Plekhanov, Paul Akselrod and Vera Zasulich, the desirability of a more formal organisation of the social democratic movement in Russia. Influenced by Martov and his followers' views, Lenin and other members of the Radchenko Circle fused both the groups into a single entity, the Group of Social Democrats. The group began from the fall of 1895 to move from propaganda to agitation among the workers. Their attempts at drafting proclamations and circulating among the workers to ascertain the nature of latter's sentiments, during the disturbances at the Thornton Textile factory in November 1895, led to the arrests of majority of them.

The beginning of 1896 saw the foundation of the Union of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, by four

survivors of the erstwhile Social Democratic Group. The Union in accord with the 'Vilna programme' sought to impress on the workers that their emancipation could only be brought about by themselves, through concerted struggles and also tried to explain to them the connection between the everyday needs of the workers and the general political conditions of Russia<sup>50</sup>. The founding of the Union coincided with the St. Petersburg textile strikes of 1896-97, which were remarkable for their mass character and the initiative of the workers, almost independent of the intelligentsia. The experience of the more advanced workers in the metallurgical and machine building industries and the many years of Narodovoltsy influence was reflected in the striking workers, very effective organization and discipline. These characteristics, besides winning for them, concessions to their demands, (the government reduced the working day to 11½ hours) also reiterated the Social Democrats' faith in the proletariat being the principal instrument of revolution in Russia<sup>51</sup>. Throughout the strike, the Union, which from its inception had been linked to the Emancipation of Labour group, tried on the one hand to maintain contact through it with foreign workers' organisations, and on the other, to attract the attention of Russian workers to the international working class movement<sup>52</sup>.

The Petersburg strike marked a decisive occasion for the subsequent political and revolutionary history of Russia, as the Russian working-class began turning Social-Democratic and the Social-Democracy started transforming into a massive political force. Organisations of the Petersburg Union type, sprang up in a constantly growing number of cities and

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<sup>49</sup> T. Dan, n.11, p. 296.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 200.

<sup>51</sup> J.N. Westwood, n.34, p. 167.

<sup>52</sup> T. Dan, n.11, p. 200.

industrial centers. The growth of underground Marxism as a political movement in Russia towards the close of the century due to the influence of the St. Petersburg strikes led to the Social Democratic organisations of the Jewish pale uniting in 1897 into the *General Jewish Workers Union in Lithuania, Poland and Russia*, known as the *Bund*<sup>53</sup>. The Bund played a most active role in the organisation and activities of the illegal Congress convened on 1-3 March 1898 in Minsk, at which the ancestor of the future 'Mensheviks' and 'Bolsheviks'; the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party (R.S.D.W.P.) , was founded.

The Congress was attended by the members of the Bund, a group which published the illegal *Rabochaya Gazeta* in Kiev in 1897, and delegates of only five local organisations; the Petersburg, Moscow, Yekaterinoslav, and Kiev 'Combat Unions' and the 'Workers' Committee' from Kiev. The manifesto drawn up by Struve acknowledged the 1848 revolutions of Europe as the precursor to the workers' movement, and the governmental concessions due to the Petersburg strike as indicators of the growing strength of the working-class<sup>54</sup>. Besides asserting that the proletariat could win political freedom by itself only, the manifesto sought as its aims, the fight for participation in the management of state, freedom of speech and press, freedom of assembly and finally emancipation against private property i.e., Socialism. It further emphasized that, ❖ As a Socialist movement the R.S.D.W.P. will carry on the cause and the traditions of the whole preceding revolutionary movement in Russia, setting as the most immediate task of the Party its total conquest of political liberty❖, `` the social-democracy is advancing towards as goal, already set forth clearly by the glorious figures of the

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<sup>53</sup> L.Schapiro, n.47, p. 20.

old People's Freedom Party<sup>55</sup>.

In keeping with the avowed aims of the congress, the focus now shifted from the intellectuals and small conspiratorial groups to attempt enlisting wider support among workers and spreading Marxist ideas in simpler form to a wider extent. As a result, the risk of discovery and governmental repression led to an increased need for conspiratorial action which dominated much of the theory of Social Democracy among many of its leaders thereafter. Secondly, in order to attract a wider mass following, the leaders sought to concentrate on practical objectives such as better wages and working conditions, obtainable through strikes. They believed that the struggle for 'economic' objectives would inevitably lead to the demand for 'political' objectives<sup>56</sup>.

However, Plekhanov and his fellow ideologues in Switzerland gave primacy to political objectives. But, the practical problem of applying Marxism to Russian conditions plagued them. The 'feudal' aristocracy which had to be replaced by the bourgeois rule, by a bourgeois or democratic revolution, before it could be replaced by the 'proletarian' revolution, did not in Russia, face any challenge from a still largely peasant country. Akselrod's solution to the problem was that the working-class, as the most consciously advanced class in Russia, was to exercise 'hegemony' over the middle-class parties when the latter engaged in the democratic revolution, thereby ensuring resoluteness in achieving their aim<sup>57</sup>. However, there were no middle-class parties in Russia in 1899, but later experience upon their emergence, showed the

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<sup>54</sup> T. Dan, n.11, pp. 207-208.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 208.

<sup>56</sup> L. Schapiro, n.47, p. 20.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, pp. 20-21.

meaninglessness of the concept of 'hegemony'.

Plekhanov's conflict with the leaders of the movement inside Russia exacerbated with the emergence of 'revisionism' or 'reformism' which began with the publication in 1899 of an article by a German Social Democrat, Eduard Bernstein entitled *Evolutionary Socialism*. Bernstein, denying the inevitability of intensification of the class struggle and of world revolution, suggested that democratization and rising living standards in European society made it necessary for Social Democrats to concentrate not on revolution but on social and economic reforms desired by the workers. The real purpose of socialism thus could be achieved when the socialist party worked jointly with the radical bourgeoisie for reform. A dictatorship of the proletariat thus implied merely a dictatorship of a minority of revolutionary leaders.<sup>58</sup>

The defence of Bernstein by Legal Marxists such as Struve, S.M.Bulgakov and N.A.Berdiaev, was labelled by Plekhanov as 'Economism'. But, the leaders of the Russian social democratic movement, continued to support 'economic' action by the workers mainly as a natural step to 'political' action. Plekhanov, Lenin, Martov and Potresov, all attacked Bernstein's views and along with it the leadership of the movement inside Russia for its 'economism', meaning by this the denial of the need for political action and reliance solely on pressure for economic reform. This attack was the beginning of the process by which the Swiss exiles asserted their leadership over the movement in Russia.<sup>59</sup>

Lenin, during his exile had worked out the idea of a newspaper printed outside Russia which would safeguard the Russian Social-Democratic movement from the ideological

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<sup>58</sup> E.C.Thaden,n.1,p.347.

contamination of 'economism' and also serve as an organizational for unifying the Russian underground committees. *Iskra* (*The Spark*) which appeared in Leipzig on 24 December 1900 to serve this purpose, had on its editorial board Plekhanov, Akselrod, V. Zasulich, Potresov, Martov and Lenin, all united against 'economism'. *Iskra*, secretly smuggled into Russia also sought to organize a network of underground agents whose task was to win over the underground committees to allegiance to *Iskra*.<sup>60</sup> By the spring of 1903, the overwhelming majority of the committees had been won over by one means or another.

The theoretical foundation of the periodical was orthodox Marxism. The name (*The Spark*) came from the epigraph 'From the spark shall be kindled a flame' from a verse with which the Decembrists of 1825, sentenced to hard labour, answered Pushkin's message to them, and was supposed to confirm the right of ~~our Party~~ to be the direct heir and consummator of that revolutionary cause that had been launched by the uprising of the aristocratic democrats more than three-quarters of a century before, continued by the 'plebeians' of the '40s and 50's, by the Populists of the 60's and 70's, by the peoples freedom of the 80's, and that was now passing into the powerful hands of the working-class in the form of its party- the Social-Democracy.<sup>61</sup>

Along with the object of 'politicalizing' the Social-Democratic movement, *Iskra* also set itself the task of reorganizing it. It sought to form a powerful political party by developing 'firm intellectual unification, eliminating the disharmony and confusion' prevailing among the Russian Social-

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<sup>59</sup> L. Schapiro, n.47, p.22.

<sup>60</sup> M.E.L.I., V.I. Lenin, (Moscow, 1945), pp.45-52.

<sup>61</sup> T. Dan, n.11, pp.229-230.

Democrats. The organization to be developed would be `specially devoted to the relations between all centers of the movement, to the securing of complete and timely information about the movement, and to the efficient supplying of the periodical press in all corners of Russia.<sup>62</sup>In July 1903, the second Congress which met in Brussels (later transferred to London) ,was composed overwhelmingly of supporters of *Iskra* and would have led to the emergence of a united party if the apparent unity of *Iskra* movement had been real. The deep divisions, hidden behind the façade of a united front against the `economists' came to the fore, resulting in the split into two factions; the `majoritarians' or Bolsheviks, led by Lenin and the `minoritarians' or the Mensheviks'.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p.233.



## **CHAPTER SIX**

# **THE CONTRIBUTION OF LENIN TO THE EMERGENCE OF COMMUNIST MOVEMENT**

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the figure who began emerging as the most outstanding revolutionary and would finally play the most crucial role in the 1917 revolution and fulfillment of the dream which began from the Decembrists onwards was Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Lenin). Born in 1870, in Simbirsk, in the Volga, Lenin was by the age of sixteen exposed to Marx's capital. The execution of his elder brother Alexander Ulyanov for the assassination attempt on Alexander III in 1887, was a crucial factor determining his revolutionary future. Arrested, and expelled from the Kazan University for playing a most active part in the University disorders of 1887 against tsarist exigencies, Lenin was deported to the village of Kokushkino at the age of seventeen.

Back in Kazan in 1888, despite being under constant police supervision, Lenin made the acquaintance of members of different revolutionary circles in which the works of Marx and Plekhanov's polemics against the Narodniks, were read and heatedly discussed. In the autumn of 1888, upon a serious reading of Marx's capital and greatly influenced, Lenin joined one of the Marxist circles of N.E. Fedoseyev. Moving to Samara in 1889, a convinced Marxist, he joined the Sklyarenko's circle, where he read papers on Marxism and criticisms of Narodniks. Among these were; a paper criticizing Narodnik V.V. Vorontsov's, *The Destiny of Capitalism in Russia*, a

paper on the works of Narodniks Mikhailovsky and Yuzhakov; a paper on the book *An Outline of Our Post-Reform Social Economy* by N.F. Danielson, and also a paper on Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy*<sup>1</sup>.

When Lenin arrived in St. Petersburg in 1893, capitalism had created not only a working class but also Marxist circles loosely organized with the mass-working-class movement. The task begun by the Emancipation of Labour Group to establish contact with and indoctrinate Marxist ideology in the working class was carried forth by Lenin. In order to merge socialism with the working class movement, Lenin realized that the Marxist circles had to be amalgamated, an organisation formed which would be bound by common objects and methods of struggle, adopt a Marxist program, and be the political leader of the working class.

Establishing contacts with the revolutionary circle which was a remnant of the social democratic organisation led by Brusnev, Lenin rejuvenated this group of Marxists who had contacts only with individual advanced workers, among whom it conducted abstract propaganda divorced from the political life of the country. In his celebrated paper on "The So-called question of Markets", Lenin concluded that "we have before us a living organic process, the process of development of commodity production and growth of capitalism. "He proved that

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<sup>1</sup> M.E.L.I., *V.I. Lenin*, (Moscow, 1945), p.10.

capitalism had already become "the main background of the economic life of Russia".<sup>2</sup>

Lenin became the acknowledged leader of the St. Petersburg social-democrats, due to his "extraordinarily profound knowledge of Marx, his ability to apply Marxism to the economic and political situation of Russia at that time, his ardent and unshakeable belief in the victory of the workers' cause, and his outstanding talent as an organiser"<sup>3</sup>. However, Narodnism still barred the road to the formation of a Social Democratic Party.

In 1894, Lenin came out with his book *What the "Friends of the People" Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats?* against the Narodniks and especially against Mikhailovsky's campaign against Marxism in the *Russkoye Bogatstvo*. He predicted the degeneration of the Narodniks and labelled the Liberal Narodniks as the champions of the kulaks i.e. the rural bourgeoisie, and their program reactionary and anti-revolutionary. However, the significance of his work was that it was the manifesto of the nascent revolutionary Marxist party in Russia<sup>4</sup>. Expounding the principles of the Marxist world outlook and asserting that the working class was the sole representative of all the exploited working people of Russia, he advocated a revolutionary alliance between the workers and peasants as the principle means of

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<sup>2</sup> Lenin, *Collected Works*, (Fourth Russ. Ed.) Vol. I, pp.93,94,107..

<sup>3</sup> *History of the C.P.S.U. (B)*, Eng. Ed., p.16.

<sup>4</sup> M.E.L.I., n.1, p.20.

overwhelming tsarism, the landlords and the bourgeoisie. For this, the formation of a single, socialist workers' party was imperative. He prophesized that when the workers had mastered the ideas of scientific socialism, and durable organisations had arisen among the workers which would transform their "present economic war into a conscious class struggle, the Russian workers will rise at the head of the democratic elements, overthrow absolutism and lead all the Russian proletariat (side by side with the proletariat of all countries) along the straight road of the open political struggle to the victorious communist revolution.<sup>5</sup>

Denouncing the "Legal Marxists" as bourgeois democrats, who, upon renouncing Narodism had passed from Narodnik, petty-bourgeois (or peasant) socialism, not to proletarian socialism, but to bourgeois Liberalism, Lenin still believed that a temporary bloc with them was possible, in order to fight against the Narodniks<sup>6</sup>. This bloc revealed Lenin's subsequent position too, viz. insistence that the proletariat should maintain complete ideological, political and organizational independence. In the volume of essays, *Materials for a Characterization of Our Economic Development*, containing articles by Struve, Lenin, Plekhanov and others, Lenin's essay while criticizing Narodism also pointed to the democratic elements in the Narodnik program which expressed the

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<sup>5</sup> Lenin, *Selected Works*, (Eng. Ed.), Vol.I, pp.454-55.

<sup>6</sup> M.E.L.I. n.1, p.22.

interests of the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie during the bourgeois democratic revolution. This served as a theoretical basis of the Bolsheviki's tactics towards the democratic social strata and parties during the first Russian Revolution.<sup>7</sup>

During this period, Lenin also carried on intense organisational activity in building up the party. He established contacts with advanced workers in St. Petersburg and strove to train them as organisers of the future party. In the autumn of 1894, he began to conduct propaganda in workers' circle in Nevskaya Zastava district, where a number of large number of factories and works were situated. He also began to conduct workers' circles on the Petersburg side, and later he conducted a circle among the dock workers on Vassilevsky Ostrov. He gave a new turn to the work of the study circles by linking up the propaganda of Marxism with the study of the conditions prevailing in Russia. His own experience of propaganda work in the circles convinced him even more of the necessity to pass from this type of activity to extensive political agitation on current questions with a view to protecting the immediate interests of the working class<sup>8</sup>. This method was first applied during the unrest at the Semyannikov Works at the end of 1894. In February 1895, upon the breakout of unrest among the workers at the New Port, under Lenin's guidance, the issuing of a

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p.23.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.25.

leaflet by the St. Petersburg social-democrats entitled 'What the Dock Workers Should try to Attain', greatly increased the latter's influence and prestige among the workers.

Thus under Lenin's guidance, the historic turn was made from the propaganda of Marxism at small circles of advanced workers to political agitation among the broad masses of the workers. The St. Petersburg works movement ushered in a new period in the history of the working class of Russia.

By the beginning of 1895, Lenin had already taken up the fight against the nascent "Economism", at a conference in St. Petersburg, of representatives of the social-democratic groups in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev and Vilna, at which the questions of initiating agitation work on a large scale and of establishing close contact with the Emancipation of Labour Group were discussed. On April 25, 1895 Lenin left for Switzerland and met Plekhanov and other members. They reached an understanding for conducting joint activity, and discussed a number of questions of principle, concerning policy and organisation. The disagreements between Lenin and Plekhanov revolved around Plekhanov's position on the peasantry's role being insignificant in the revolution and his regarding the liberal bourgeoisie as the driving force of the impending bourgeois - democratic revolution in Russia.

Returning to Russia in 1895 September, he visited Vilna where he made arrangements for smuggling Marxist literature into Russia. After great efforts, he amalgamated all the Marxist workers' circles of St. Petersburg into the 'League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class' thereby paving the way for the formation of the revolutionary Marxist party<sup>9</sup>. The activities of the League were based on the principles of centralism and strict discipline. Headed by a central group, the direct control of all activities was exercised by five members, headed by Lenin also the editor of the League's publications. The organisation was split up into districts, headed by an organiser; chosen from the most advanced and class-conscious workers, and served to maintain connection between the district group and the factories. There were also organizers in the factories who kept the groups informed about what went on in the factories and distributed literature. In the larger factories, workers' circles were formed, serving as Social-Democratic cells at which, besides Marxism, current political questions were also discussed. Guided by Lenin, the League was the first body in Russia to unite socialism with the working-class movement, to combine the workers' struggle for their economic demands with the political struggle against tsarism, as can be

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<sup>9</sup> A. Walicki, *Russian Social Thought*, (Oxford, 1975), p. 299.



evidenced in its role in the Thornton Mills strike in 1895, and the 1896 St. Petersburg textile strike<sup>10</sup>.

To extend the League's influence, Lenin decided to publish a newspaper, which would formulate the immediate objects, and ultimate aims of the struggle of the working class. The first issue of the newspaper titled *Rabocheye Delo* (*The Workers' Cause*) was to carry three articles by Lenin but on December 1895, the police swooped down on Lenin and the League.

During his fourteen months in prison he wrote a pamphlet, Strikes and a Draft of and Commentary on the Program of the Social-Democratic party. In this first draft of the party program, Lenin formulated the aims and objectives of the proletarian class struggle; overthrow of the autocracy, the winning of political liberties, the capture of power by the proletariat and the organisation of socialist production. Sentenced to exile in 1897, he established connections with the Emancipation of Labour Group abroad and the centres of revolutionary life in Russia, receiving and writing articles from and for the illegal press. During the three years of his exile, he wrote over thirty works.

At the end of 1897, he wrote his celebrated pamphlet The Tasks of the Russian Social Democracy, summing up the activities of the St. Petersburg League of Struggle and formulating the theoretical grounds for the political

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<sup>10</sup> M.E.L.I.,n.1, pp.29-31.

program and tactics of Russian revolutionary social-democracy. In this work, he first formulated the dictum that "without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement". This pamphlet served as the tactical platform for all the social democrats then operating in Russia. He appealed to all the workers' circles and Social Democratic groups of Russia to unite in a single Social-Democratic Party.<sup>11</sup>

In 1899, in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, Lenin, attacking the Narodniks reveals the unsoundness of their theoretical views on the question of the market and then gives a concise outline of the Marxist theory of production. Taking up peasant husbandry he proves that capitalism is developing in the peasant communities. ❖ That this development irrevocably determined that there could be no other course of development than the capitalist course, and no other grouping of classes than the capitalist grouping. This was the point of the controversy with the Narodniks. This had to be proved. It was proved❖, writes Lenin<sup>12</sup>. He further explains that the leading role of the proletariat had become fully revealed and the peasantry had a dual status and dual role, i.e. the oscillation of the peasantry between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and the revolutionary roots that were deeply implanted among the peasantry in the mass.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.38.

<sup>12</sup> Lenin, *Collected Works*, (Russ. Ed.), Vol. XIV, p.213.

This scientific analysis served as the basis of the Bolshevnik's tactics in the revolution of 1905-07.

Coming out strongly against the 'revisionist' tendencies inspired by Bernstein in 1899, Lenin accused the "Legal Marxists" of a bourgeois slant and urged it to be necessary to break the alliance between the revolutionary and the 'Legal' Marxists. "We shall have to declare real and relentless war upon the critics of Marx<sup>13</sup>, he wrote. However, the amateurish methods and ideological confusion after the formation of the RSDLP in Minsk in 1898, created favourable conditions for the growth of "Economism" in the working-class movement. In protest against the "Credo" (Confession of faith, or program), Lenin, drafted "The Protest of Russian Social-Democrats" which was adopted for discussion by the conference of social-democratic exiles in the Minusinsk Okrug. In it Lenin denounced the "Economists" for their desertion of Marxism, for denying that the working-class must have its own independent political party, and for attempting to convert the working-class into a political appendage of the bourgeoisie.<sup>14</sup> The "Protest" called upon the social-democrats to organize the Party. Distributed amongst all Marxist organisations in Russia and among Marxist exiles, it "played an outstanding part in the

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<sup>13</sup> Lenin, *Collected Works*, (Fourth Russ. Ed.), Vol. III, p.10.

<sup>14</sup> Lenin, *Selected Works*, (Eng. Ed.), Vol.I, p.521.

development of Marxist ideas and of the Marxist party in Russia<sup>15</sup>.

However, Lenin was of the view that Marxism must be adapted to the Russian reality; and was not fixed and invariable. He said "we are convinced that it laid only the cornerstone of the science which socialists must carry further in all directions if they want to keep pace with life. We think that the Russian socialists particularly should develop the theory of Marx independently<sup>16</sup>, for "we shall not find ready-made patterns anywhere."<sup>17</sup> In an article in the central organ of the Party, *Rabochaya Gazeta*, he saw the immediate task to be "to arrange for the publication of a party organ which shall appear regularly and be closely connected with all the local groups"<sup>18</sup>.

One of his last literary productions during the exile was the "Draft of a Programme for Our Party" (1899) in which he asserted that the main tendency of capitalism was to split each nation into a bourgeoisie and a proletariat. Proposing that the proletarian class struggle should be more clearly described, its objects explained, and the international character of the working - class movement indicated, he emphasized that the Party's programme should particularly emphasize the political significance of the proletarian class struggle

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<sup>15</sup> *History of the C.P.S.U.* (B). Eng. ed., p.23.

<sup>16</sup> Lenin, *Collected Works*, (Russ. Ed.,) Vol.II, p.492.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p.497.

and its immediate object, viz., the winning of political freedom. He believed it necessary to characterize the class nature of Russian absolutism and to show that its forcible overthrow was essential in the interest of social development as a whole<sup>18</sup>. He also formulated the principles of the agrarian programme of the Russian Marxists and propounded the principle that the proletarian party must support the peasantry, which was striving to overthrow the autocracy and to abolish all the remnants of serfdom.

In 1900, with his exile coming to an end, Lenin, along with members of the Emancipation of Labour Group began the publication of *Iskra*. By this time, the tsarist government considered him as its most dangerous enemy. Colonel Zubatov, an officer of the gendarmes, stated in a confidential report in 1900, that "at the present time there is nobody bigger than Ulyanov in the revolutionary movement"<sup>20</sup>

On July 16, 1900 Lenin went abroad, beginning a five year period of exile. However, he was the first to prophesize the special position of the Russian proletariat in the international arena. In an article for *Iskra* he wrote:

“History has now confronted us with an immediate task which is more revolutionary than all the immediate

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.498.

<sup>19</sup> M.E.L.I., n.1, p.45.

tasks that confront the proletariat of any other country. The fulfillment of this task, the destruction of the most powerful bulwark not only of European but also (it may now be said) of Asiatic reaction would place the Russian proletariat in the vanguard of the international revolutionary proletariat.<sup>21</sup>

*Iskra* prepared the ground for the impending revolution in Russia. Its supporters carried its slogans among the masses of the workers and organized and directed their struggle. Lenin's *Iskra*, the banner in the fight for the revolutionary theory of Marxism, imbued the advanced proletarians with the spirit of devotion to revolutionary principles and cultivated the traditions of implacable hostility to the slightest distortion of Marxism.

The contribution of Lenin, to the Russian revolutionary movement thus was not only in the ideological, but also the practical field. Besides integrating the dream of socialism with the workers' reality, Lenin also further adapted Marxism to suit Russian conditions. The harmonious integration of various ideologies, the formation of a vanguard party, the propaganda work through the press and building organisations to link the intellectual leadership of the workers to the workers themselves, were all contributions of Lenin, which propelled the Russian revolutionary

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<sup>20</sup> Lenin, *Selected works*, (Eng. Ed.), Vol. II, p.50.

movement towards the realization of the Decembrist dream,  
in the 1917 revolution.

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<sup>21</sup> Lenin, *Selected Works*, (Eng. Ed.), Vol.II, p.50

# **CHAPTER SEVEN**

## **CONCLUSION**



## CONCLUSION

Beginning from the time of Peter the Great, the cultural reforms that were introduced and continued by the cultural and educational policy of Catherine the Great, opened the doors to the winds of the Western liberal ideas which would lead one day to the undermining of the very nature of political rule in Russia. Faced with the irreconcilable difference between the Russian reality of oppressive rule, curbs on freedom of thought and expression, the inhuman conditions of existence of the vast majority of the population (by virtue of their serfs or peasants) ,and, the liberal ideas of the French revolution, the freedom enjoyed by the people of Western Europe by virtue of their political institutions, the Russian army officers (mostly nobility) back home from the Napoleonic Wars, sought the answers in the overthrow of Nicholas's rule by the Decembrist movement of the 1820's and 1830's .

The beginning of the idea of contemporary democracy appeared with the beginning of the capitalist penetration of the old feudal society during the reign of Nicholas I. Though influenced by German Philosophy and the French utopians, the Russian democratic thought from its very inception sharply criticised capitalism. Russian democratic thought included a political protest against the principles of capitalist economy. And the critique of capitalism gradually paved the path towards embracing the socialist ideas.

The crushing of the Decembrist rising which had involved a vague talk of constitutional government, the prospects of liberating the serfs and the means of educating public opinion and the subsequent control over the civil society through censorship and officialdom only aided the rise of revolutionary spirit and ideas. In the new world of romanticism such problems as the true nature of nations and the character of their missions in history came to the fore. In 1836, Peter Chaadaev argued that Russia had no past, no present, and no future. Subsequent intellectuals based their belief on Russia's unique position and future on this.

However, the need of an expanding bureaucracy, necessitated educational reform which in turn gave rise to an intelligentsia; critically thinking individuals. The criticism of the regime was done largely through the use of Aesopian language in literature. Inspired by Belinsky, Russian literature developed its

characteristic identification with the life of society. From Griboedov to Pushkin ,Lermontov, in the 1820's and 30's and Gogol and Turgenev all presented the `superfluous man', the mirror image of the Western educated man of Russia alienated from the society at large. The characteristic Russian literature based on Russian reality and simultaneously guiding it emerged during this period and continued to influence later writers like Tolstoy.

The Stankevich circle of the late 1830's introduced Hegel to Russia through such intermediaries as Bakunin, Herzen, and Granovich and also gave to Russia the debate between the Slavophiles and Westerners. The debate saw a rift in the Russian intelligentsia which continued till the end of the century , amongst those who saw the future of Russia in the peasant commune and those who vouched for Western parliamentary and legal institutions. However , both opposed autocracy and were in favour of emancipation . The socialism of Belinsky and Herzen inspired a whole generation in the 1840's and 50's through the medium of the journal .The first advocates of revolution in Russia , inspired by the first French Revolution, the sixteenth century Peasant's War in Germany and the example of the Decembrists were the Petrashevtsy. Inspired by the French Revolution of 1848 , their dreams of propaganda amongst the people and a revolution dashed upon their arrests , they nevertheless continued the revolutionary momentum through a member Chernyshevsky, the inspirer of Populism , through his idea of peasant commune as the basis of future socialism.

The defeat of Russia in the Crimean War, and the failure of the 1861 emancipation reforms to deliver the goods it had promised ,all increased the self-questioning amongst a whole new generation of the Russian educated youth inspired by the intellectuals such as Herzen, Bakunin and Chernyshevsky . The `go to the people' movement's failure , however , was a classic pointer to the alienated Western educated youth , unaware of the peasant's immovable faith in the benevolence of the Tsar . Populism in a narrow sense with its stress on the peasant commune , but failed by the people turned its activities towards a smaller , educated group leading to the creation of the secret society of Land and Freedom..

The new trend of Bakuninism and Jacobinism with its stress on terrorism led to a split in the land and Freedom society in 1879 into two groups ; `Cherny Peredel' which headed by

Plekhanov emphasised gradualism, and 'Narodnaya Volia' which mounted an all out terroristic offensive against the government. Terrorism against the government officials was the overriding feature of the second phase of the 'go to the people' movement. However, with the assassination of Nicholas I, the Narodnaya Volia was brutally crushed. The debacle of Populism gave impetus to the Marxist revolutionary movement.

The 1880's were years of small groups mostly student circles, *zemliachestvos*, trying to find a way to reconcile the programme of the narodovol'tsy with that of the social-democrats inspired by Marx. These were years of emergence of underground groups and circles amongst the working class of Russia (a class created by the state policies, as capitalism made inroads into Russia), led by Marxist intellectuals or educated workers. These were also the years when émigré groups outside Russia especially the Emancipation of Labour Group of Switzerland were increasingly beginning to influence opinions, ideas and ideologies in Russia. The 1891 famine in Russia, and the introduction of the land captains thereby robbing the zemstvos of their financial powers just when they most needed it and Witte's economic policies all drew the issue of Russia's adopting the capitalist path into the revolutionary debate. The continuity in the path followed in the development of social-democracy is clear in the revival of the Slavophile-Westerner debate albeit in a new form. While the Populists such as Mikhailovsky blaming the famine on the capitalist policies of the government, and attacking the passivity of the Marxists, placed their faith on a socialist society based on the peasant commune, the 'Legal Marxists' such as Struve advocated the inevitability of Russia passing through the advanced stage of industrial capitalism to reach socialism and were supported by Plekhanov in this view. Lenin, arguing that capitalism in Russia was an already established fact based his theory and revolution on this premise.

The Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party formed in Minsk in 1898, was a step forward towards integrating the Russian Marxist revolutionaries under a single party. Under Martov's influence, Lenin's attempts to expand support base among the workers was made through shifting from mere propaganda work to concentrating on practical objectives via which he hoped to make the workers conscious of their political subjugation. The attack on the 'economists' by the emigres and the publication of *Iskra* as an organizational center for Russian underground committees and harmonizing Russian revolutionary positions into a single party,

marked the beginning of the Swiss exiles' leadership over the revolutionary movement in Russia.

In the 1890s and especially by 1901, with the publication of *Iskra*, Lenin's ideas and activities had become the source of inspiration for the future revolutionary movement. Beginning from his assertion of capitalism being an established fact in Russia, defence of the workers' organisation, workers' leaders, harmonising of ideologies into a single, centralised party, expansion of Marxist ideas amongst workers to the largest possible extent through the publication of workers' magazines (*Rabochaya Gazeta*), the adapting of Marxism to suit Russian conditions, and his defence of the peasantry as an ally of the workers in the revolution, to the publication and carrying on of revolutionary propaganda through *Iskra*, Lenin began leading the Russian revolutionary movement, *Iskra*, turning out to be ~~the~~ The Spark~~s~~ which would ignite the Decembrist dream. The dream which lived on from the Decembrists, the literary and intellectual figures of Russia, the Slavophiles and Westerners, the Petrashevtsy, the Populists and the Social-Democrats to the Communists was fulfilled in the 1917 Revolution.

# **CHAPTER EIGHT**

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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