

The Russian Revolution: Historical Reflections



Department of History
Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira
Belur Math, Howrah – 711 202

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The Russian Revolution: *Historical Reflections*

Platinum Jubilee Commemorative
Volume



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Contents

Editors Note

1.	The Russian Revolution and the Colonial Question: The Lessons of History	<i>Sobhanlal Datta Gupta</i>	1
2.	The Russian Revolution and Indian Revolutionaries in Central Asia	<i>Dilorom Karomat</i>	7
3.	The Historic Lessons of the Russian Revolution	<i>Kunal Chattopadhyay</i>	24
4.	Bolshevism and Bolshevik Revolution	<i>Ananda Bhattacharyya</i>	54
5.	Revolutionary Russia: situating Mikhail Bakunin and his anarchist ideas	<i>Saptadeepa Banerjee</i>	78
6.	Russian revolution and its impact on Indian national movement	<i>Subrat Biswal</i>	118
7.	Women and the Russian revolution: an exploration in Bolshevik theory and practice	<i>Soma Marik</i>	128
8.	The Russian Revolution: Beyond Ideologies	<i>Moumita Chowdhury</i>	154
9.	From the Gulag to Auschwitz: The Impact of The Russian Revolution	<i>Biswajit Mukherjee & Subhadip Das.</i>	169

Editors Note

The Russian Revolution of 1917 decreed the demise of the old Tsarist regime and in its nature and sweep, proved to be the greatest social upheaval since the days of the French Revolution. The Bolsheviks, who seized power in October that year, proceeded to establish the world's first Communist State covering nearly one-sixth of the globe. Their Revolution, it has been argued, proved to be the most momentous event of the twentieth century inspiring communist movements and revolutions across the world, notably in China, provoking a reaction in the form of fascism, and after the end of the Second World War, having an insightful influence on the many anti colonial movements and shaping the architecture of international relations in the course of the Cold War. The Bolsheviks continued in power for over seventy years until the structure which they had so assiduously built up collapsed under its own weight in 1991. This allowed historians to see the history of the Russian Revolution (following the work of Russian scholars who were finally freed from the trammels of Soviet censorship) in its entirety for the first time.

Since then, scholarship on the historic event has advanced in research and interpretation, particularly in the sphere of social and cultural history. Now, on the cusp of the centenary of the significant events that once unfolded in Russia together with its far reaching reverberations that has and has been affecting humankind suggests that as students of history it is a good time to reflect more philosophically on the tumultuous event.

With this aim in view, the Department of History, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, BelurMath, Howrah in collaboration with the Russian Centre of Science and Culture in Kolkata, Gorky Sadan, organised a one day international seminar on the theme, ‘The Russian Revolution: Historical Reflections.’ The seminar was held on the 15th of February, 2017 and was part of the Platinum Jubilee Celebrations of the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, BelurMath Howrah.

The essays that appear in this volume were presented in the seminar. The editor is grateful to Dilrom Karomat, independent research scholar from Uzbekistan, now associated with the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies Kolkata, Prof. Sobhanlal Datta Gupta and Prof. Kunal Chattopadhyay, all resource persons in the seminar who agreed to contribute to this volume. The ideas and arguments expressed in the various essays is that of the respective authors and the editor and the publisher of this volume are in no way responsible for the same.

The first article by Sobhanlal Datta Gupta focus on the role of the Communist International (Comintern), which for the first time not only highlighted the importance of the colonial question internationally as it connected the colonial question with the problem of world revolution, but under the aegis of Lenin in 1919, the strategy and tactics of anti-colonial struggle were worked out in great detail, providing direct support to the struggling people in the colonies in the 1920s and 30s. The paper also identifies three problems which the Comintern had to confront despite the assistance given to the struggle of the colonial people by it. The final section of the

paper talks very briefly about the impact of the Russian Revolution on the colonies. The second, by Dilorom Karomat is dedicated to the Russian Revolution and its role in supporting revolutionary movement in India at the time of Third Comintern. The next essay by Kunal Chattopadhyay provides a quick survey of the historiography of the revolution over a century. In the light of his short survey which point to how the writing of history has been used to serve political goals, the paper looks at the course of the revolution with certain specific questions in mind; for example “Was there a “Democratic” alternative to the Soviets and the Bolsheviks? His answers and arguments that follow are thought provoking and should interest anyone seriously engaging with the revolution. The paper by Ananda Bhattacharyya deals with Bolshevism, Bolshevik Revolution, and its relation with the Indian Revolutionaries both in India and abroad as also its impact on the Indian subcontinent. Through a study of primary sources, he shows how the British reactions were multi- dimensional which were reflected in the contemporary papers and official documents. The essay by Saptadeepa Banerjee situates Mikhail Bakunin and his anarchist ideas in Revolutionary Russia of the nineteenth and twentieth century to examine his political philosophy in the context of the political and intellectual developments that took place in Russia during that phase. The next essay by Subrat Biswal also looks at the event and its impact but this time on Indian national movement. The paper by Soma Marik argues that Bolshevik theory and practice concerning the organization of women workers, the struggle for women’s emancipation, and the definition of equality for women underwent transformation in course of their

engagement in struggles and observes ironically that while women were not exactly pushed back to the Tsarist age, inequality and male domination was nonetheless established substantially. The next essay by Moumita Chowdhury analyses the Russian Revolution through the prism of real politik and focus on the relation between state, power and force. She argues that the establishment and maintenance of statehood has little to do with ideology, rather ideology is often moulded and re moulded to serve political and military purpose. By analyzing the role of the army and the impact of wars on the Russian state and society, the essay show that it was the combination of power and force that underlined the coming of the Bolshevik Revolution. The last essay by Biswajeet Mukherjee and Subhadip Das concerns with a series of letters exchanged between Francois Furet and Ernst Nolte over the impact of the Russian Revolution as the later emphasizes on succession (Bolshevism preceded Fascism) and gives it the role of causal nexus while the former dismiss it as too simplistic. The paper argues that the letters between Nolte and Furet raises questions that should concern each and every one of us.

As convener of the seminar, I have received invaluable help from many people. I convey my gratitude and thanks to all of them. I remain grateful to Mr.Yury Dubovuy, Vice Consul and Director, Russian Centre of Science and Culture in Kolkata, Gorky Sadan for agreeing to collaborate with us and also to grace the event as an invited speaker. I extend my appreciation to Irina Malysheva for coordinating between Gorky Sadan and the Department of History, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira and also for presenting a short paper. I

remain grateful to Dr.Dilorom Karomat, research scholar of Uzbekistan, and now associated with the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata for agreeing to deliver the keynote address of the seminar. I offer my reverence to my teacher Prof.Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty who agreed to attend and chair a session in the seminar in spite of his busy schedule and other preoccupation on that day. Finally I express my gratitude and thanks to the authorities and support staff of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, my students both present and ex students, and my colleagues in the Department of History for their plenteous support and cooperation in making this seminar successful.

Prithwiraj Biswas

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March, 2017*

The Russian Revolution and the Colonial Question: The Lessons of History

Sobhanlal Datta Gupta

I

The Russian Revolution of 1917, despite many of its pitfalls and shortcomings, will be remembered for ever by the oppressed people engaged in the struggle against colonialism. This refers to two issues. First, under the auspices of the Communist International (Comintern), which was established in Moscow on the initiative of Lenin in 1919, the strategy and tactics of anti-colonial struggle were worked out in great detail, providing direct support to the struggling people in the colonies in the 20s and 30s. Second, what impact did the Russian Revolution make on the struggle against colonialism?

As regards the first issue, it needs to be kept in mind that, prior to the formation of the Third International, the colonial question did not engage the attention of the Second International (1889-1914). The Comintern for the first time highlighted the importance of the colonial question internationally as it linked the colonial question with the problem of world revolution. This was evident already in the inaugural Congress (First) of the Communist International in 1919. The Third International, in fact, provided a new dimension to the understanding of the colonial question by focusing on organization and ideology. Organizationally, it provided a major booster to the formation of Communist Parties across the globe, while ideologically it highlighted the point that anti-colonial struggle would reach its fruition only if the struggle against colonialism is linked to the struggle for socialism. Mere nationalist rhetoric would limit anti colonialism to the establishment of bourgeois rule in the aftermath of colonialism and unless this is superseded by the establishment of socialism, anti-colonial struggle would lose

its significance. Historical evidences show that already by 1921 communist parties were established in China, Korea, Indonesia, Egypt, South Africa, Argentina and Turkey. Besides, archival research of U.S. historian Richard Pipes and Russian historian Dmitri Volkogonov now has established the point that immediately after the Russian revolution Lenin categorically issued the directive that it would be the responsibility of the Bolshevik Party to send its representatives to the countries of the East for providing military and financial assistance to the struggling people in the colonies. The records of the Comintern indicate that the colonial question was particularly highlighted in the Second (1920), Fourth (1922), Fifth (1924) and Sixth Congress (1928) , apart from the Baku Congress (1920), which was especially devoted to the understanding of the colonial question in the aftermath of the Second Congress.

However, despite the assistance given to the struggle of the colonial people by the Comintern there were at least three problems which it had to confront.

II

First, in the resolutions of Comintern it was very explicitly stated that in the interest of deepening the anti-colonial struggle, the communist parties of West would have to extend material and moral support to this cause. But, in practice, this did not happen. In the case of India, archival records of the British Communist Party now reveal that, despite repeated appeal of the CPGB leadership (which included Rajani Palme Dutt, Ben Bradley, Sapurji Saklatvala), they had to lament that the ranks of the CPGB could not be persuaded to be engaged in the struggle against colonialism, since they suffered from a feeling of “Empire consciousness” and racist supremacy. In Algeria and Morocco, the French Communist Party’s position vis-à-vis anti colonial struggle against French colonial rule was rather passive. In Portugal, the Communist Party’s position was that its main agenda was to fight against the fascist rule of Salazar and this demanded a kind of joint struggle of the Portuguese working class and people in the African colonies of Portugal.

Second, this created a problem in the Comintern in the sense that on a number of occasions Comintern congresses witnessed sharp debates among the delegates of the Western and non-Western countries. Thus, M.N. Roy, Ho Chi Minh, representatives of Korea and Turkey strongly reprimanded the West European communist parties for their rather passive stand on the question of colonialism and on this question the Russian Communist Party leadership wholly sided with the Eastern representatives. As early as 1920 Lenin in a directive concerning the nationalities and the colonial question highlighted the importance of the colonial question , reminding the West European communist parties of their special responsibilities in this regard. Trotsky in the Fourth Congress of Comintern (1922) fully endorsed the position of the Eastern delegates. Besides, what is important is to remember that for a proper analysis and understanding of the

colonial question the Comintern had taken a series of measures by setting up an Eastern Department, the Indian Commission, the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in Baku (KUTV) and a research institute. It is in these institutions that Roy, Ho Chi Minh and thousands of representatives of the Eastern countries received their political and military training. In the case of India, a number of Ghadar revolutionaries who secretly went to Russia were trained in the Comintern.

Third, the communist parties that emerged in the East under the auspices of the Communist International were by and large guided by two interrelated ideas, which they picked up from the Russian Revolution. First, genuine anti-colonial struggle precluded any alliance with the nationalist forces, since bourgeois nationalism was a spent force, as it believed in a compromise with imperialism. Second, in their understanding the Russian revolution, with its focus on armed struggle under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, was the model which had to be followed in the colonies. In the case of India the attitude of the communist party toward Gandhi and other nationalists was reflective of this position. This was not endorsed by Lenin and it is precisely this position which was shared by M.N. Roy in his debate with Lenin in the Second Congress of Comintern in 1920. In fact, although in the initial years of Comintern Lenin himself dreamt of a world revolution, the defeat of the German Revolution in 1919 and the collapse of workers' uprisings in central Europe and Italy in 1918-1919 led him to revise his stand and by 1921, when the Third Congress of Comintern was held Lenin called for a broad anti-imperialist united front, contesting the position of the communist parties in the colonies that bourgeois nationalism was a spent force. He made it clear that the communist parties would have to simultaneously join hands with nationalism in the fight against colonialism in the colonies and fight against their compromising position. In

1935, this position of Lenin was further legitimized when Georgi Dimitrov in the Seventh Congress of Comintern called for popular front/united front against the rising menace of fascism across Europe. For many communist parties this position was difficult to accept, ie. the communist parties in the French colonies of North Africa vis-à-vis Arab nationalism. Within the communist parties of India and Indonesia there were sharp differences on this question. One exception, at least to a large extent, was the Syrian Communist Party. Despite this confusion and differences within the Communist International one point stands vindicated. The communist movement in the colonies was tremendously inspired by the victory of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and that is why, rightly or wrongly, they considered the Bolshevik Party as the model to be followed.

III

Finally, as regards the impact of the Russian Revolution on the colonies, one has to look at the years 1945-1991. This was a time when anti colonial struggle was transformed into what came to be characterized as the national liberation movement. Throughout the 50s, 60s and 70s national liberation movement gained momentum in Asia, Africa and Latin America. It was Soviet economic and military assistance which tremendously contributed to the unfolding of struggle in Angola, Mozambique, Sudan and Ethiopia in Africa, Vietnam in Asia, Cuba and Nicaragua in Latin America. In Cuba and the aforesaid African countries radical regimes, professing socialism took shape. Besides, the Soviet Union's role in accelerating non-aligned movement was a major factor. What is especially significant is the fact that within the third world the impact of the Russian Revolution was two-fold. There were countries like Cuba, Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia which fully subscribed to the ideology of revolutionary socialism and considered the Soviet Union as their great ally. But there were also countries like India, Egypt and Indonesia which were ruled by nationalist leaders like Nehru, Nasser and Sukarno. But they too were deeply influenced by the Russian Revolution and looked towards the Soviet Union in times of crisis. In the bitter moments of Cold War, in times of Suez crisis, Bangladesh War, on the Kashmir question these nationalist leaders looked towards the Soviet Union as their only support against imperialism.

The Russian Revolution and Indian Revolutionaries in Central Asia

Dilorom Karomat

The approaching ... anniversary of the October Revolution brings to mind many episodes connected with it. This... takes us back to the blessing of our own national liberation struggle which was then intensifying.

Shaukat Usmani¹

The year 2017 is significant as the centennial year of the Russian Revolution. Significant as nowadays, not only historians and researchers, but most post-Soviet Republics are trying to analyse and understand what happened in the

¹ Shaukat Usmani, *Russian Revolution and India*, in *Mainstream*, July 1, 1967, p.13;

Shaukat Usmani (1901–1978) had been a very early leading activist of the Communist Party of India (CPI), formed in October 1920 in the Soviet city of Tashkent and a founding member of the Communist Party of India (CPI) when it was formed in Kanpur in 1925. He was also the only candidate to the British Parliament contesting elections, while he was residing in India—that too in a prison. He was sentenced to a total of 16 years in jail after being tried in the Kanpur (Cawnpore) Case of 1923 and later the Meerut Conspiracy Case of 1929. Usmani has published several books. He was able to publish his “Four Travellers” [Karachi, Usta Publications Corp. 1950; First English Edition (originally published in 1939 as "Char Yatri" in Hindi and "Char Musafir" in Urdu)] An account of a journey through Jagdalak, Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif, Tirmiz, Comsomol, Bukhara and Samarkand, this was a fact based novel about the trip of four Indian revolutionaries to the Turkestan republics, the central Asian part of the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Other his book was “Historic Trips of a Revolutionary - Sojourn in the Soviet Union”, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers - privately published limited edition, 1977).

Russian Empire 100 years ago; what impact (positive and negative) it left on culture and natural development of society. It is well-known, that the events of 1917 greatly affected millions of individuals and had a tremendous bearing on public consciousness. Thousands fled the Empire and most of those who stayed were later on repressed. The process, which involved several generations, resulted in the changing of mentality amongst millions of inhabitants of the former Russian Empire and later on citizens of Soviet Union. This understanding of what was lost and ultimately regained throughout Eurasia has not ended yet. Thus, most of former Soviet Republics likes to pretend that 1917 never happened. However, Russian President Vladimir Putin in one of his meetings (held in December, 2016) rightly stressed that “The Russian Revolution is our shared history and we must respect it.”²

Since 1917, much has been written on the subject, which points to two main directions - mythology and practice of Russian Revolution. Again, differences can be seen in understanding and interpreting the events. Some researchers refer to the events as “the Great Russian Revolution” or two Russian Revolutions – Democratic in February and Proletarian (Socialist) in October,³ while others are arguing

² Source: *Podpisano rasporyajenie o provedenii meropriyatij k 100-letiyu...* at [http://rushistory.org/sobytiya/...](http://rushistory.org/sobytiya/)

³ Revolutions are referred as February and October’s because Russia’s use of the Julian calendar until February 1918. There are many popular conspiracy theories how Revolutions happen. Thus, The February Revolution, which felled Nicholas II, is now said to have been sponsored by the British (through the efforts of the very active British ambassador to Russia, George Buchanan). The October Revolution, which brought the Bolsheviks to power, was allegedly financed by the Germans, who helped Lenin make his way to Russia and really needed his help to end World War I.

about abolishment of revolutionary process by the coup staged by the Bolsheviks.⁴ In February 1917, in the midst of World War I, a mass uprising in Petrograd, the capital city of Russia, led within five days to the overthrow of the Tsar Nicholas II and the 300-year-old Romanov dynasty. This momentous event proved, however, to be only the beginning of the Russian Revolution, which represented an important landmark in international relations. The February Revolution significantly altered the geopolitical map of Europe. For example, soon after those events, the process of dissolution of Austro-Hungarian Empire, etc started. During the eight months that followed, Russia was the scene of intense conflicts between political parties representing distinct and irreconcilable social interests. Lenin and Trotsky⁵ had

⁴ However, the October Revolution was not a coup conducted by a secretive and elitist band. Above all, the revolution was about the mobilization of the mass of ordinary Russians—workers, soldiers and peasants—in a struggle to change their world. That is to this day the most important legacy of the Russian revolution.

⁵ Leon Trotsky, one of the greatest historians of the revolution, and one of its most important participants. He described the significance of revolution: “The most indubitable feature of a revolution is the direct interference of the masses in historic events. In ordinary times the state, be it monarchical or democratic, elevates itself above the nation, and history is made by specialists in that line of business—kings, ministers, bureaucrats, parliamentarians, journalists. But at those crucial moments when the old order becomes no longer endurable to the masses, they break over the barriers excluding them from the political arena, sweep aside their traditional representatives, and create by their own interference the initial groundwork for a new regime. Whether this is good or bad we leave to the judgment of moralists. We ourselves will take the facts as they are given by

advanced a Marxist revolutionary program for the overthrow of capitalism that gained mass support from the Russian working class. Nikolay Bukharin characterised these situation as “the proletariat has nothing to lose but its chains; it has a world to gain.”⁶

The revolution that Lenin led in October 1917 marked one of the most radical turning points in Russia’s history. The Bolshevik Party seized the power and the Soviet Union was established. It was a revolution, which politically radicalized the working class throughout the world, inspiring the masses with the possibility of an alternative to capitalism and imperialism. Thus, the February and October Revolutions are events, which are connected with each other and considered to be two parts of the Russian Revolution of 1917 which ended with the victory of Bolsheviks.⁷ Rosa Luxemburg in her book *The Russian Revolution* (published in 1918) has stressed:

The party of Lenin was the only one which grasped the mandate and duty of a truly revolutionary party and which, by the slogan--"All power in the hands of the proletariat and peasantry"--insured the continued development of the revolution.⁸

the objective course of development. The history of a revolution is for us first of all a history of the forcible entrance of the masses into the realm of rulership over their own destiny.”

⁶ N.Bukharin, “The Russian Revolution and Its Significance” published in “The Class Struggle, May-June, 1917”

⁷ The overthrow of the Tsar Nicholay II and the 300-year-old Romanov dynasty in February 1917, in the midst of World War I, followed by a mass uprising in Petrograd, the capital city of Russia has been proved, however, to be only the beginning of the Russian Revolution.

⁸This text is republished from the *Marxists Internet Archive* at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/russian-revolution/ch01> (last accessed in February 2017)

Lenin, as a charismatic leader with unusual gifts and with a special relation with the people, had great capacity to understand national and international dynamics from the perspective of the exploited workers and peasants. The Revolution was by no means a specifically local "Russian" phenomenon. Lenin later named it as "World Bolshevism" and it has revolutionary tactics, theory and program. The essence of the Russian Revolution has become a slogan—*"Bolshevism can serve as a model of tactics for all."* As is well-known, Lenin developed Marxism through practical reflection on the Russian Revolution and thus established a perspective that came to be known as Marxism-Leninism; this influenced charismatic leaders of other countries. Among them were young urban men of India, who had a dream to reach Russia and to see "the leader of Revolution, whose heart and mind were serving the interests of all oppressed and exploited working people."⁹ A Soviet journalist and noted Indologist, Dr.L.V.Mitrokhin in his book *Lenin and Indian Freedom Fighters* has stressed with great respect the following:

I was fortunate enough to meet freedom fighters in India who had seen Lenin, heard his speeches, and even those who had talked to him. Among them there were people who had participated in the armed struggle defending the Revolution in Soviet Central Asia and the Transcaucasia republics, who like Lenin and his comrades, had taken the arduous road of revolutionary struggle for the liberation of the exploited people in their own country... I met them already at the end of their lives. Many of them had experienced years of prison and labour camps, but not one of them expressed a single word of regret for the road he had chosen; to their last breath

⁹Mitrokhin L., *Lenin and Indian Freedom Fighters*, New.Delhi, 1988, p.ix.

they remained faithful to the bright ideals that were written on the banners of the Great October Revolution.¹⁰

Lenin's call to work with the nationalists was met by enthusiasm. The Communist International or Comintern, organized in 1919 on the lines of First and Second International, was the means of promoting revolutions on an international scale (adoption of Lenin's Colonial Thesis) and gave new strength in the struggle of the colonial people and nations for independence from the Western imperialist countries. The prominent Indian revolutionary Shaukat Usmani in his memories notes:

Moscow at that time was the Mecca of Revolution and the asylum for all the revolutionaries of the world.¹¹

Again:

In 1919, there was born in Moscow, a unique organisation embracing all the revolutionary socialist elements of the world. This was the historic Communist International.¹²

The Indian National movement demanded for Independence and was profoundly affected by the Russian Revolution. It was a time when tensions in relations between the growing Indian National Movement and the British Indian government were beginning to move towards a new level in the circumstances of the First World War. Lenin corresponded and met several prominent Indian revolutionaries like Prof. Mohammad Barakatallah, Maulavi Abdur Rabb, Raja Mahendra Pratap, M.N.Roy, and was well informed about campaigns of non-cooperation. India was seen by Lenin as one of the greatest countries of Asia, which would play a leading role in the fighting against imperialist colonial systems in the East. It seems that Lenin's office in

¹⁰Mitrokhin L., *Lenin and Indian Freedom Fighters*, pp.ix-x.

¹¹Shaukat Usmani, *Reaching Moscow*, in *Mainstream*, July 22, 1967, p.20.

¹²Shaukat Usmani, *Roy Versus Berlin Group*, in *Mainstream*, July 29, 1967, p.15.

Kremlin was open for Comrades, revolutionaries of other countries and students. Representatives of the Indian people took grave risks and went to Moscow to meet Lenin. Some of them were lucky just to shake hands with him. L.Mitrokhin tried to restore names and find more information about them. In his book on Lenin he details about Barakatuallah, the memories of Raja Mahendra Pratap, and others who came “from Peshawar to Moscow on Foot.” One of the prominent Indian revolutionaries Shaukat Usmani in his letter addressed to L.Mitrokhin (sent from Cairo, dated October 6, 1966; original is preserved in Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies) reminisces:

Referring to your question about Comrade Lenin, I may say here that myself, Majid and one Sehrai were studying in Moscow from January to April 1921. During this period some excursions were organised for the incoming Communist visitors and students. I happened to be in one of these and saw Comrade Lenin in his office in Kremlin and shook hands with him. Nothing more can be added except that I heard him speaking in the same year (... July to September 1921)...¹³

However, in L.Mitrokhin’s book about Lenin (published in 1988) there is more detailed references to Shaukat Usmani, which was perhaps a result of personal conversations:

In March 1921 Shaukat Usmani and Abdul Majid, together with trade-union leaders, were given a tour of the Kremlin. “There were twenty of us,” Shaukat Usmani recalled, “Lenin came out from his office to greet us. He was very friendly and asked us about our impressions of our stay in Soviet Russia.”¹⁴

¹³ Original letter from Shaukat Usmani to L.Mitrokhin is preserved at Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata.

¹⁴Mitrokhin L., *Lenin and Indian Freedom Fighters*, p.34.

Another Indian friend of L.Mitrokhin, M.S.Mehdi, told the former about another meeting where Abdul Majid was present:

Abdul Majid, who found himself in Pakistan after the division of India in 1947...was ...also a student of Communist University in Moscow. At that meeting Lenin explained the need for starting a new economic policy in order to strengthen the unity of workers and peasants and further the cause of socialism. Abdul Majid was struck by the lucidity and strong logic of Lenin's speech.¹⁵

Thus, Lenin's personality attracted Indian freedom fighters, and his ideas greatly influenced the growing movement for Independence in India. Discussions with Barakatallah, Raja Mahendra Pratap, Abdur Rabb and M.N.Roy bore fruits. The support came from the Bolshevik government for Indian exiled revolutionaries based in Kabul. That stimulated rebellion in North West India and Punjab during 1918-1921. Much has been written on the subject, both by Indian and British scholars, but the specific character of the Bolshevik support for rebellion in North West India and the Punjab are known mostly from British records. The archival documents preserved in Russia and Uzbekistan (Tashkent) are still under investigation. The memoirs of Indian revolutionaries such as M.N. Roy, Shaukat Usmani, Muzaffar Ahmed give some information about several groups of Indians who reached Central Asia to seek Soviet help in the struggle for Independence. However, as Dr.Devendra Kaushik rightly points out:

After the liberation of Central Asia by the Great October Socialist Revolution in 1917 this region became a centre of attraction for many Indian freedom fighters who made Tashkent a nucleus of their revolutionary activities. While the work of India revolutionaries in London, Paris, Berlin,

¹⁵Mitrokhin L., Lenin and Indian Freedom Fighters, p.34.

Stockholm, New York, San Francisco and California in the West and Tokyo in the East is fairly well known, not much is known about their activities nearer home in Soviet Asia in the period immediately following the October Revolution.¹⁶

Scholars like L.V.Mitrokhin, Dr.Devendra Kaushik, Prof.Surendra Gopal had tried to fulfil these lacuna. The Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute has an important collection of Russian material on this subject that was pieced together by late Soviet Indologist, L.V. Mitrokhin, and acquired in copy for the Institute by Dr.Devender Kaushik. Moreover, there are several other preserved collections of letters:

(i) Written to L.V.Mitrokhin, when he was Press information officer of the USSR Embassy in New Delhi; (ii) written by Muzaffar Ahmed to Dr.D.Kaushik. These letters along with some pieced articles from *Mainstream* and *Link* pertain to the period 1966-1969, corresponding roughly during the 50th anniversary of The Great Russian Revolution. The correspondences mostly related to Indians in Central Asia, and particularly to Tashkent, my hometown.

Tashkent, a capital of modern Uzbekistan, is very significant for Indo-Russian relations. Since 1866, Under Russian rulers, Tashkent, the Tsarist Russian administrative centre, emerged as a major trading centre for Indians, along with traditional centres like Bukhara, Samarkand, Kokand, etc. Tashkent was to be the new base for Russian armies marching towards India. Tashkent has emerged as a major centre of emigrant Indian Freedom fighters as the Bolshevik rule, motivated partly by ideological reasons and partly by their desire to put pressure on the British Government and

¹⁶ Kaushik, Devendra, *India and Central Asia: Political Contacts from Colonial Period to Aftermath of the Socialist Revolution*, in Surendra Gopal (ed), *India and Central Asia: Cultural, Economic and Political Links*, Delhi, 2001, p.129.

supported Indian freedom fighters in all possible ways. Mahendra Pratap and Barakatullah reached Tashkent first, once in 1918 and again in 1919 before going to Petrograd and Moscow. Thus, Indians tried to cultivate Russian support and Tashkent became a new destination for them. Indians welcomed the Bolshevik initiative who spoke of 'proletarian internationals' and were committed to wipe out 'colonialism' and capitalism. Shaukat Usmani has recollected:

Indusky Kurs, the military academy for Indian revolutionaries set up at Tashkent, was a symbol of fraternal assistance that the new land of Socialism extended to the fighters for Indian freedom against British imperialism. .. It was late in November 1920 that almost all the Indians then in Tashkent agreed to join the Indian Military School. Duries were assigned. The writer first, and then Rafiq Ahmed were deputed to Andijan to co-operate with the Kashgari revolutionaries living in exile in that place.... The Indian in charge of the work here was M.P.T.Acharaya, whom the writer joined in late November. Here in Andijan there was a very brilliant Russian comrade by the name of Rashkolnikov... from whom the writer learnt much about the Russian Revolution and theory and practice of Marxism.¹⁷

The background of the Military Academy actually started at Kabul, Afghanistan. Raja Mahendra Pratap was a President of Provisional Government of India, which was established by some Indian Patriots in Kabul in 1915. It became the first grouping of Indian nationalists to have established contacts with the new Bolshevik government and the link of this important event was forged in Tashkent. After Mahendra Pratap's journey via Tashkent to St.Petersbeg, Tashkent emerged as an important base for Indian revolutionaries for the next few years. Not only Muslims, but

¹⁷Shaukat Usmani, *Training Up Indian Revolutionaries*, in MAINSTREAM, July 15, 1967, p.27.

also “many Hindu youths”(according to Shaukat Usmani) took Muslim names and came first in Afghanistan and then into the Soviet Union. A great majority of people wanted like to cross over to the Soviet Union, but “only two branches consisting of 80 people each were allowed to leave Afghanistan. After reaching Tashkent all of them were lodged in so called *Indiyskiy Dom* (Indian House), which was located between new and old city. When M.N.Roy (appointed the Head of the Eastern Section of the Communist International),¹⁸ Abdur Rabb, Abani Mukherjee, M.P.T.Acharya (periodically) were settled in Bukhara House in 1920, the Bolsheviks established the Tashkent Military School to train Indians in the use of modern weaponry. After the evacuating of the *Muhajireen* to the *Indusky Kurs*, the Indian House became virtually the property of Maulana Abdul Rabb, M.P.T.Acharya, Rabb’s secretary Amin Siddique. There was some kind of confrontation between M.N.Roy and Abdur Rabb. Acharya and AbdurRab’s group later on merged into the Berklin group led by Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, G.A.K.Ludhani, Agney Smedley and Bhupendranath Datta.

In the 1920 M.N.Roy, Abani Mukherjee, Shaukat Usmani, Rafique Ahmad and others set up Indian the émigré Communist Party in Tashkent to propagate communism among Indians. The fledgling party became a part of Communist International (Comintern) in 1921. Shaukat Usmani has revealed:

... the Communist Party to India came into being at Tashkent in which neither Acharaya nor Abdur Rab and his Secretary

¹⁸Manabendra Roy went to Moscow by the end of April 1920. M.N. Roy was sent by Lenin to Tashkent as head of Central Asiatic Bureau of Comintern as well as the Indian Military School to train an Indian army of revolutionaries.

Amin Siddique could remain. The quarrel between Roy and Acharaya's group ultimately reached to Moscow...¹⁹

Reports about confrontation between Roy and Abdur Rab were sent to Foreign Minister Chicherin and seen by Lenin. But the attitude of Russians was guided by a policy of non-interference in Indian affairs. However, all detailed reports (archival documents) are preserved in Russian State Archive for Social and Political History. Thus, "Fond 495, Opus 68 under the title "Communist Party of India" constitutes the largest collection of materials on India, containing hundreds of files. *Dela* 1-6, 9 and 11-36 refer to materials concerning Roy's activities in the formation of the CPI at Tashkent, the formation of the Tashkent Military School, the Roy-Abani Mukherji conflict, the conflict between Roy and Indian Revolutionary Association, the Comintern's role in this conflict and related matters."²⁰ In the Letters addressed to L.Mitrokhin and in memories written by Shaukat Usmani one can feel some kind of disappointment for M.N.Roy:

M.N.Roy has been very uncharitable to almost all the Indians he came across in Tashkent and later on in Moscow. And in his various contributions to the Indian press there are grotesque mis-statements. We all respected him as an elderly Indian revolutionary(although he ended this career serving the Anglo-American cause during the World War II).²¹

¹⁹ Shaukat Usmani, *Roy versus Berlin Group*, in MAINSTREAM, July 29, 1967, pp. 15-16.

²⁰ Purabi Roy, Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, Hari Vasudevan (eds), *Indo-Russian Relations 1917-1947: select archives of the former Soviet Union*, an inventory, MAKAIAS, New Delhi 2012, pp.12-13.

²¹ Shaukat Usmani, *Training Up Indian Revolutionaries*, in MAINSTREAM, July 29, 1967, pp. 15-16.

The important roles played by M.N.Roy for the rebellion in the East are well-known. The Soviet Foreign office (headed by Chicherin) supported Roy and co-opted him first of all into *Malyi Bureau* (a small bureau) of five members, which were set up by the ECCI (Executive Committee of the Communist International). Also “Roy was asked to get involved with the activities of its Central Asiatic Bureau (CAB) charged with the responsibility of for forming policies for the liberation of the oppressed people of the East. Roy was informed that two prominent Russian members of (CAB) – Sokolnikov and Safarov – were already stationed in Turkestan; and that Roy should take over as the Chief of the military operations to be launched from Tashkent... Roy expected to raise a nucleus of Indian Liberation Army at Tashkent by imparting military training to Muslim Muhajirs who left India because of the British stand against the Caliphate of Turkey. This force was to be further strengthened by drawing recruits from the tribes of North West frontier regions of India. The army was then to march into India to occupy some Indian territory and set up Soviet Republic. The new Soviet Republic was to give a call to launch a revolution and also a socio-economic program to attract the Indian masses. Roy had estimated that the British power in India, after the War, would have grown weak and it would not be able to withstand attack from North West. Lenin, surprisingly, allowed Roy to pursue his plan of leading a military expedition through Afghanistan to liberate India from the colonial British rule. Perhaps, Lenin meant to combine Roy’s plan to strengthen Pan-Islamic rebellion against British with his own strategies. Lenin, however, advised Roy to wait for Stalin’s opinion. But, Roy could meet Stalin only by about the summer of 1921, by which time it had all come to an end.”²²

²² M,N,Roy: brief outline of life –events and thoughts –Part 10: Tashkent mishup, at <https://sreenivasaraos.com/2016/01/15/mn-roy-brief-outline-of->

The Indian Military School was closed in April 1921, as a *quid pro quo* for industrial assistance that Britain promised to Soviet Russia, under Anglo-Russian Trade Pact in March 1921. The task of directing revolutionary activities in Central Asia was transferred to the newly formed Eastern Commission of the ECCI in Moscow. The Indians were asked to enrol in the newly established University for the Toilers of East in Moscow. Shaukat Usmani was one of the *Muhajireens* who was tutored both at Moscow as well as at Tashkent. However, the Indians dispersed. Some went to Bukhara; some moved towards Turkey; some left for Chinese-held Eastern Turkestan. The flow of freedom fighters fleeing India and entering central Asia through Afghanistan or Chinese Turkestan stopped. Tashkent was no longer a major concentration point of Indians, traders or freedom fighters.²³

Conclusion

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was an event of great historic importance. It influenced the history of many countries and nationalities. Bolsheviks, in fact, united all regions of ex-Russian Empire, which almost had collapsed after February Revolution. The revolution opened the door for Russia to fully enter the industrial age. After the revolution, new urban-industrial regions appeared quickly in Russia and became increasingly important to the country's development. Education also took a major upswing, and illiteracy was almost entirely eradicated. The Bolshevik Party was considered and went ahead with one of the greatest, fantastic socio-political experiments in the history of mankind. This experiment took place almost seven decades and cannot be underestimated even after its failure. The Bolsheviks were the first in the history of mankind, who tried to bring into

[life-events-and-thoughts-part-10/](#)

²³ Surendra Gopal, *Dialogue and Understanding Central Asia and India: the Soviet and Post-soviet Era*, MAKAIAS, Delhi, 2005, p.76-77.

reality one of the greatest dreams of civilisations – the creation of a unique society, where all people are equal and not divided into classes, ethnicities, etc. Such society was not established, but enthusiastic attempt still remains. Moreover, two other great events of the 20th century are also related to the Russian Revolution of 1917, e.g.the defeat of Nazi Germany during World War II and the emergence of Russia as one of the superpower countries of the world and secondly, collapse of Soviet Union in 1991.

The 1917 Russian revolution was powerful in spreading socialist ideas and a land of hope for millions on the Earth. Many kinds and for many reasons Indians came to the Soviet Union after The Russian Revolution. A large number of them were political exiles, who looked for possibilities in fighting for freedom. Information about most of them is fragmentary, when only few of them are well-known (M.N.Roy, Abani Trilok Mukherjee, Prem Singh Gill, Shaukat Usmani, etc). Most of them “combined their work for freedom with propagation of history and culture of India, the traditions of her hoary past and the problems she was facing under Western domination. Their contribution towards spreading the knowledge about India in the Soviet Union is of no mean order.”²⁴ Moreover, one of them, Nissar Mohammed, was appointed as Minister of Education in just formed Republic of Tajikistan and represented it first in Tashkent and later in Samarkand. He was among the early arrivals in Central Asia, who settled down in the Soviet Union. Unfortunately the lives of most of them were tragically interrupted at the time of repressions.

The Tashkent Military School appeared to have a great attraction for Indian immigrants. According to researchers there were about eight thousand Indian settlers in

²⁴ Unnikrishnan P., *Indian Revolutionaries in Soviet Union*, part I, LINK, August 30, 1964, p.33.

Soviet Asia itself in places like Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Andijan, etc. These settlers provided a good base for anti-British work, but not all of them were directly involved, because most of them were traders. Almost all Indians, who joined the Tashkent Military School, came from India through Afghanistan or Chinese Turkestan. There they received military training along with learning Russian and English languages. According to D.Kaushik:

These activities of Indian revolutionaries at Tashkent caused acute anxiety among British circles. The “Times” of London wrote in its issue of Jan.16, 1920 that the Bolsheviks had opened a large number of propaganda schools at Tashkent from where agent’s will be sent to India, China and all Muslim countries. This type of propaganda continued even upto Feb.1921 when the political school at Tashkent and the military training school for Indians had winded up and Indian revolutionaries moved to Moscow.²⁵

Surendra Gopal argues that “with the closure of the Military School in May 1921 Tashkent ceased to be a Soviet – sponsored base for Indian freedom fighters. “²⁶Devendra Kaushik come to the conclusion that “the phase of active and direct support to the revolutionary movement in the colonies was to a certain extend a logical corollary of the imperialist foreign intervention in the Russian Revolution. As the Soviet power emerged victorious from the civil war and intervention, it began to realise increasingly that only an indigenious revolutionary mass organisation could deliver the goods and revolutionaries from abroad could only play a limited role. The emphasis now shifted from the training in use of arms to

²⁵Devendra Kaushik, *Indian Revolutionaries in Soviet Asia*, LINK, January 26, 1966, p.76.

²⁶ Surendra Gopal, *Dialogue and Understanding Central Asia and India: the Soviet and Post-soviet Era*, p.57.

political and organisational training.²⁷ However, small group of Indians remained in Tashkent and tried to maintain and develop contacts with freedom fighters in India. Thus, the story of India's struggle for Independence cannot be complete without remembering these chapters of history which related to The Russian Revolution and role of Tashkent in these events.

²⁷Devendra Kaushik, *Indian Revolutionaries in Soviet Asia*, LINK, January 26, 1966, p.76.

The Historic Lessons of the Russian Revolution

Kunal Chattopadhyay

When we consider the Russian revolution, we find quickly that political positions dominate, even when one is told that the issue is an academic study. My first task will be to provide a quick survey of the historiography of the revolution over a century because without such a survey, we cannot understand the minefield where we stand when we discuss these century old events.

In India, additionally, there is the tragedy of the colonial past where we have a distorted education system, a filter whereby English becomes a tool in the hands of a narrow group of people. Again, when the so called experts write text books in Bangla, pages or even entire chapters, are simply translations from this or that English language book. Reading about the Russian revolution naturally becomes difficult. In Bangla, till now, there exists not a single decent narrative apart from John Reed's classic *Ten Days that Shook the World*.²⁸ (Reed 2007)

John Reed, Bessy Beatty and Albert Rhys Williams were radical journalists who became friends of the revolution, and in the case of Reed, a founder of the Communist Party in the USA. Reed's work was the most significant, and got embroiled into controversy as a result. Lenin read it, and wrote a foreword. Lenin's brief remarks were: "With the greatest interest and with never slackening attention I read John Reed's book, *Ten Days that Shook the World*."

Notes:

²⁸John Reed, *Ten Days that Shook the World*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 2007 (original publication 1919).

Unreservedly do I recommend it to the workers of the world. Here is a book which I should like to see published in millions of copies and translated into all languages. It gives a truthful and most vivid exposition of the events so significant to the comprehension of what really are the Proletarian Revolution and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. These problems are widely discussed, but before one can accept or reject these ideas, he must understand the full significance of his decision. John Reed's book will undoubtedly help to clear this question, which is the fundamental problem of the international labor movement.”

But this was not to the liking of Stalin in 1924, for Reed does not treat Stalin as a significant figure, while Trotsky is shown as Lenin's co-leader. Stalin had a low opinion of Reed's book, and in the Stalin era it was not republished in the USSR.

Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries, Kadets, former tsarist generals and White guard leaders all wrote accounts.²⁹

In the 1930s, three works of major importance appeared. William Henry Chamberlin, a journalist who had spent many years in Russia, and had worked before the final clamp down on the archives, wrote a detailed study, running

²⁹For example, Alexander Kerensky, *The Catastrophe: Kerensky's own Story of the Russian Revolution*, D. Appleton and Company, New York, 1927; Anton Ivanovich Denikin, *The Russian Turmoil -- Memoirs: Military, Social, and Political*, Hutchinson & Co., London, 1922; P. Miliukov, *Political Memoirs 1905-1917*, (Ed. By A.P. Mendel, tr. By C. Goldberg), University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1967; and N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution 1917: A Personal Record* (ed., tr. and abridged by J. Carmichael), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1955.

into two volumes. Sheila Fitzpatrick calls it the “best general work on the Revolution and Civil War”.³⁰

Between 1932 and 1933 there appeared the three volumes of Leon Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution*, written in 1930 in exile, and translated ably by Max Eastman into English. Apart from one or two specific fields, such as women in the revolution, Trotsky’s work set the agenda for much subsequent research, and it was also to remain central to how the revolution could be studied, outside the USSR and outside orthodox communist Party circles.³¹ As a narrative and an explanatory text of the events of 1917, from February to October, Leon Trotsky’s *History* makes most of modern research appear not so modern, after all. There is one significant flaw/limitation, which is blindness to the fact that with 43% of the working class female in composition, much more attention was needed to their double burdens, their struggles, and how the Bolsheviks won them over.³² The second reason why the *History* is crucial is at the level of its contribution to the development of the tools of the materialist understanding of history. The theory of uneven and combined development, elaborated in the first chapter of the book, was not an after the event justification of a Bolshevik seizure of power that went against Marx’s prediction that socialist revolutions would break out in the most developed countries first. Rather, it is a theoretical generalisation of Trotsky’s

³⁰W.H. Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution 1917-1921*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1987. See the back cover for FitzPatrick’s comments.

³¹Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, Indian Edition, Aakar Books, Delhi, 2014, vol.I., with an introduction by KunalChattopadhyay and Soma Marik (pp. v-xlii) taking up his contributions.

³² I am not adding any notes to this point since Soma Marik has a paper on that issue in the present volume.

proposed revolutionary strategy since 1905, which he followed Marx in calling Permanent Revolution.

The third book was different, but would be very influential. This was the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) Short Course*. It was composed by a commission of the Central Committee of the CPSU, with very active participation of Stalin, who wrote one chapter and edited much else.³³ Key new elements introduced into the writing of the history of the Russian Revolution, at this late date (1938), were names like Stalin, Molotov and Ordjonikidze as major leaders of the revolution, that Stalin directed the uprising, and the idea that Zinoviev, Kamenev, Rykov, Bukharin, Trotsky and Pyatakov had been capitulators trying to deflect the party from the path of the socialist revolution.

Academic Russian studies emerged as part of the Cold War, and as a result was to share much with its Soviet state sponsored counterpart. Two basic concepts were applied. One was the paradigm of “totalitarianism”, originally applied against Nazi Germany. The other was what Stephen Cohen would later call the “continuity thesis”, in other words, that the early years of the revolution led inevitably to the gulags³⁴. The accounts begin by holding up Lenin’s *What Is to Be Done?* As a blueprint for party and personal dictatorship, move on to assert that October 1917 saw a minority coup d’état, and end up by arguing that it was the Bolsheviks who from the start were determined to banish all opponents and

³³Commission of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U. (B), *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) Short Course*, International Publishers, New York, 1939

³⁴ See Stephen Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History Since 1917*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1985.

turn Russia into a one party and police state.³⁵ According to the ex-Communist Bertram Wolfe, ever since 1903 Lenin was building an independent apparatus, and from then till Stalin's death in 1953, Bolshevism had only two authoritative leaders – Lenin and Stalin.³⁶ Similarly, Robert V. Daniels, despite showing diverse trends within communism, insisted that Leninism gave birth in two crucial ways to Stalinism.³⁷

From the 1960s, critical scholarship challenged both the Cold War Right and the Moscow versions. E.H. Carr and Isaac Deutscher³⁸ wrote major works. The social movements

³⁵ I am summarizing in this note decades of such rightwing work as a detailed discussion of the historiography is not my principal aim here. Former Marxists or socialists turned renegades played an important role in the development of this cold War synthesis. See for such an example, Bertram D. Wolfe, *An Ideology in Power: Reflections on the Russian Revolution*, Stein and Day, New York, 1970. See further Leonard Schapiro, *The Origins of the Communist Autocracy*, G. Bell and Sons, London, 1955; Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, Vintage Books, London and New York, 1990; Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia 1917-1991*, The Free Press, New York, 1995; Stephane Courtois, Nicholas Werth, Jean-Louis Panne, Andrej Paczkowski, Karel Bartosek, Jean-Louis Margolin, *The Black Book of Communism: Terror, Crimes, Repression*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1999; Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy: A History of the Russian Revolution*, Viking Press, New York, 1996 as major Cold War and post-Cold War.

³⁶ Bertram D. Wolfe, *An Ideology in Power: Reflections on the Russian Revolution*, pp. 187, 188.

³⁷ Robert Vincent Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution: Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1969, p. 410.

³⁸ E. H. Carr, *History of Soviet Russia*, 14 volumes, Macmillan, London, 1950-1978. Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography*, second edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford etc., 1967; and Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet: The Life of Leon Trotsky*, Verso,

of the 1960s inspired social historians in the 1970s to write history “from below”, resulting in detailed studies of workers, peasants, soldiers, particular cities, etc.³⁹This led to a re-affirmation of the Marxist claim that the taking of power by the soviets was the culmination of a massive popular revolution. Scholars like Rabinowitch⁴⁰ challenged the totalitarian thesis through a new academic study.

But the crisis and then the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the fact that it was identified, very wrongly, with the revolution (which meant the Stalinist counter revolution was ignored), meant that from the 1990s, right wing historiography has predominated. Richard Pipes wrote his major book on the revolution in 1990. Orlando Figes wrote his book in 1996, arguing that the Bolshevik intellectuals aroused mass passions not realising that the masses were more interested in vodka and vaudeville than in progressive social change. Several historians from the former USSR, like Dmitry Volkogonov, also wrote studies where they portrayed the February Revolution and the Provisional Government as the only hope for a democratic future, and saw Lenin as a cruel tyrant. From the mid 1990s, a special effort was underway to study and present negative pictures of Trotsky. As one of the biographers, Robert Service, wrote bluntly, Trotsky had not been part of the Stalin regime, so he was being seen as a democratic communist alternative, and Service saw it his

London, 2015 (a one volume version of the original three volumes titled *The Prophet Armed*, *The Prophet Unarmed*, and *The Prophet Outcast*)

³⁹ See Ronald GrigorSuny, “Toward a Social History of the October Revolution”. *American Historical Review*, Vol. 88, No.1, February 1983; Daniel H. Kaiser ed, *The Workers Revolutuon in Russia 1917*, Cambridge Unviersity Press, Cambridge, UK, 1987 for summaries.

⁴⁰ Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (original publication 1976), Haymarket, Chicago, 2009.

responsibility to tear down this reputation. Several scholars have shown the large numbers of wrong information in his book, or in the one's by Swain or Thatcher. But the dominant tendency is to argue that Bolshevism was a tight conspiracy of a handful of leaders, who used a coup d'état to get hold of power.

Academic studies that have focused on archives have gone in very different directions. The February Revolution was studied by Eduard Burdzhakov from 1956, the first critical study. In 1967 he published a full book on the February revolution.⁴¹ Hasegawa published a major study on the same subject in 1981.⁴² Both books are important for the details they bring. Instead of seeing the February revolution merely as a prelude to October, they study it in detail. And in doing so, they disclose that the February revolution was not spontaneous. Burdzhakov examined leaflets to show that the Mezhrayonka and the Vyborg District Committee of the Bolsheviks played a central role. McDermid and Hillyar, and Moira Donald and Richard Stites before them, looked specifically at the women workers, notably the women textile workers who set off the February revolution but are recognised duly.

Studies by David Mandel⁴³, Alexander Rabinowitch, Rex Wade, and others look at factory committees, the Red

⁴¹ Eduard Burdzhakov, *Russia's Second Revolution: The February 1917 Uprising in Petrograd*, tr. Donald J. Raleigh, Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1987 (Russian edition 1967).

⁴² Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *The February Revolution, Petrograd, 1917*, Publications on Russia and Eastern Europe of the School of International Studies, number 9, Seattle: Washington University Press, 1981

⁴³ Mandel, Mark-David, (1983) *The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Regime. From the February Revolution to the July Days, 1917*. London: Macmillan, Macmillan Academic and Professional

Guards, and the changes from June to October/November. Mandel showed how economic problems led to a demand for industrial democracy and the rise of the factory committees. Rabinowitch looked at the July semi insurrection, as well as the November revolution, in two volumes. Other cities, the countryside, various institutions were studied.

The collapse of the USSR also saw non right wing Russian scholarship coming out. Vadim Rogovin and Alexander Pantsov were two of the scholars who produced very serious histories. But these are seldom studied, except by specialists.

It is in the light of this short survey of how the writing of history has been used to serve political goals, we will be looking at the course of the revolution with certain specific questions in mind.

Was there a “Democratic” Alternative to the Soviets and the Bolsheviks?

Was there anything called democracy anywhere before the Russian revolution? This may sound an absurd question after over seven decades of propaganda that liberal democracy is the ultimate stage of political evolution. Yet it is far from an absurd question. What do we understand by the term democracy? And did bourgeois democracy exist?

In France after the crushing of the Commune, the French bourgeoisie was compelled to retain the vote for all men. But women did not have the vote till the constitution of

Ltd., in association with the Centre for Russian and East European Studies University of Birmingham. Mandel, Mark-David, (1984) *The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power. From July Days 1917 to July 1918*. London: Macmillan, Macmillan Academic and Professional Ltd., in association with the Centre for Russian and East European Studies University of Birmingham.

1945. In Germany, male suffrage existed for elections to the Reichstag, but there existed an upper house dominated by the Princes. And elections to the provincial assemblies, above all to Prussia, saw loaded voting. And once again women did not have the vote. In UK, all men did not have the vote till 1918, and all women not till 1928. In the USA, not only did women not have the votes, but blacks, even after being freed, were often denied voting rights, through laws and manipulative measures collectively called Jim Crow.

Beyond the right to vote, there were other issues, not new to Marxists but often forgotten, such as the existence of bureaucratic structures that mean that elected representatives do not control the state, the existence of the army as an autonomous entity, and the links between the courts and the ruling class in a number of ways.

Freedom of the press and freedom of speech are often described as essential to democracy. Working class papers faced many hurdles throughout the 19th century. Organising was always a battle. This remains true even now. Lakhs of toilers can go on strike, but the viewpoint that will be expressed is that of the rich, because their advertisements are what bring in the profits. Furthermore, defamation laws, stamp acts, and numerous other means were used, not merely in colonies, but in developed capitalist countries, to keep radical viewpoints muzzled.

All the way till the early twentieth century, liberal theory, barring a few persons, such as John Stuart Mill in some of his later writings, was hostile to democracy.

In that case why did Marxists go on talking about a bourgeois democratic revolution? First, they needed to make a distinction between the long drawn out process of transition from feudalism to capitalism, on one hand, and the much more dramatic, and compressed process whereby the modern

capitalist state was created. Secondly, since the process of creating bourgeois states was not one that had already ended, they wanted or needed to set up a distinction between the bourgeois revolutions of the past, and bourgeois attempts at getting power in their own ages in contrast to proletarian revolutions.

The contrast Marx made between the English Revolution and the French Revolution on one hand, and the German revolution of 1848 on the other, was intended to make that particular contrast.⁴⁴ However, the consequence would for a long time be very different. Not so much for Marx and Engels, possibly, as for their followers.

By the middle of the 19th century, it was the French bourgeois historiography that had established the concept of a bourgeois revolution, carried out by a bourgeois leadership, speaking on behalf of the people constituted as the nation. In their interpretation, the Third Estate represented the entire nation. Hence the bourgeois leadership of the Third Estate spoke for the nation. In their perception, there was no conflict between the leadership and its mass base. In the early writings of Augustin Thierry, the very possibility of a conflict between the bourgeois leadership and the masses was ruled out, as he identified the bourgeoisie with the nation.

This is where Marxism came in. Was the bourgeois revolution an analogue of the desired proletarian revolution? Was it necessary for the bourgeoisie to take power in a revolutionary way? Can the English and the French Revolutions be explained as class struggles at their peak?

In 1889, during the centenary of the French Revolution, Karl Kautsky wrote an essay. What was novel

⁴⁴ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, , *Collected Works (MECW)*, vol 8, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977, pp.160-163.

was a systematic Marxist presentation of the French Revolution, and one where sociological interpretation was combined with historical narrative. The ill repute of Kautsky after the Russian Revolution meant a disappearance of references to the work. But till 1923, the book appeared in four German editions running into 18000 copies printed, along with at least eight translated editions. Kautsky stressed that the revolutionary part of the bourgeoisie could not carry out the revolutionary transformation alone but had to forge an alliance with the sans-culottes. But they were caught in a historical trap. They were petty bourgeois, but wanted freedom not only from the feudal forces, but also from capitalism. As a result, a contradiction developed between the historic necessity of capitalist development and the goals of the sans-culottes and the Terror. Kautsky as a historian seems to be taking the position that there is no point in developing an understanding of the discourses, mentalities or views of the sans-culottes, given that they were condemned by history. Though, as a Marxist, he does not see them as a “rabble” or a “mob”, he does end up with teleology, the assumption of a sequence of modes of production dictating the politics of the revolution.⁴⁵

George Valentinovich Plekhanov, often called the “Father of Russian Marxism”, held that “Russia was already on the road to capitalist development, and no intelligentsia was able to swerve her from that road. Bourgeois conditions would clash in ever more acute contradiction with autocracy, and at the same time create new forces for the struggle against it. Securing political freedom is a necessary precondition for the proletariat’s further struggle for socialism. Russian workers would have to support liberal society and the

⁴⁵ See Karl Kautsky, *Die Klassengegensätze im Zeitalter der französischen Revolution*, Verlag von J.H.W Dietz Nachf., Stuttgart, 1908 (original publication 1889).

intelligentsia in their demands for a constitution, and the peasantry in its revolt against the survivals of serfdom. In its turn, if it wanted to gain a mighty ally, the revolutionary intelligentsia would have to adopt Marxist theoretical positions and devote its efforts to propaganda among the workers”.⁴⁶

Lenin took a different position. While he still accepted the idea of a bourgeois democratic revolution, he argued that it would have to be carried out in opposition to the liberal bourgeoisie. But because the working class would be in alliance with the peasantry, it would have to make it a thoroughgoing democratic revolution rather than a socialist revolution. This was where, in 1905, Trotsky differed with him. Lenin argued that Russia had two paths open to it - either an American model of growth, or a Prussian one; either peasant-petty bourgeois capitalism or landlord-monopoly capitalism. Trotsky challenged this, by pointing to uneven and combined development. Combined development, because the most advanced forms could be adopted lock, stock and barrel. But uneven, because even after such adoption, the bulk of Russia's economy remained underdeveloped, poor, semi-feudal, to which had been grafted sectors of exotic capitalism. The economic relations and social contradictions of Russia showed, Trotsky insisted forcefully, that the Russian social formation was not simply one merely lagging some years behind the West.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ See Plekhanov, George, (BR) ‘The Bourgeois Revolution: The Political Birth of Capitalism’, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/plekhanov/1895/anarch/bourgeois-revolution.htm> (accessed on 14th December 2015).

⁴⁷I have discussed their differences at length in Kunal Chattopadhyay, *Leninism and Permanent Revolution*, AntarRashtriyaPrakashan, Baroda, 1987.

The Provisional Government and Democracy:

On 8th March (23 February by the Russian calendar), International Women's Day, a rising strike wave of the past two months turned into a general strike, triggered by women textile workers. By 27th February, in war weary Russia, many military units in the capital, Petrograd, had gone over to the fighting workers, refusing to fire on them from the second day, and actually rebelling on the fifth. By 1 March the army was with the rebels and Tsar Nicholas had no option but to resign. But who would form a new government? At this point, members of the Duma, a semi-parliament elected by a complicated and restricted suffrage tilted to the wealthy, put forward a Provisional Government, consisting of well known members of the Liberal landlord-bourgeois opposition.

But how legitimate was it? And how democratic?

Till 27th February, Rodzhianko, the Lord Chamberlain and Chairman of the Duma, had refused to disobey the Tsar's law. The Prime Minister had issued an order dissolving the Duma, and it had not protested. So formally the Duma was abolished. Only a private "Committee of the Duma members" had been formed with Rodzhiano as head. The rightwing monarchist parties had stayed away, while most socialist duma members were in jail or in Siberian exile. So it was a committee, in essence, of the so called Progressive Bloc. Only when the success of the insurrection was recognised did they try to change the title to Provisional Government. For this, however, the Lord Chamberlain was unsuitable, so he was replaced by Prince L'vov, an undistinguished Duma member well known as part of a group that took part in the war efforts of Russia.

The workers and soldiers did not see the Duma or its members as their legitimate leaders. They wanted an end to the war, the senseless killings. The historian Peter Gatrell

estimates that during the war Russia lost 1.8 million soldiers. They wanted food supply and a lowering of prices. Meanwhile L'vov, and members of his Government, were people who made money due to wartime investments and were determined that the war should continue.

So why did the people accept this Provisional Government? The answer is they did not, initially. They created their own institution – Councils (the Russian word for Councils is Soviets). Elected representatives of workers from all factories, and soldiers from the regiments, came together to create the Petrograd Soviet. But the workers and soldiers were not confident of their ability to lead. So they turned to left wing intellectuals. The Mensheviks, one of the Socialist parties, were prominent among the workers. And a large part of the soldiers were peasants pushed into the army, and they trusted the Socialist revolutionary party, which had long preached an agrarian revolution and total redistribution of land. But these parties did not believe they were capable of leading the revolution, and their leaders requested the Duma Committee to form a government, as the History written even by Miliukov has to admit.

On 2 March, in answer to a question from a massive demonstration before the Tauride Palace, Miliukov, the principal leader of the liberal party, known as the Kadet Party, said, we rule because we have been chosen by the Russian revolution.⁴⁸ This was however a risky answer, since if one said the revolution had chosen, then of course the revolution had the right to throw out as well. So there was an attempt to assert that the legitimacy came from the Duma. But of course the Duma had been formally, legally dissolved, and the members had shouted Hurrah in the name of the tsar, rather

⁴⁸P Miliukov, *Political Memoirs 1905-1917*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1967, p.406.

than resisting. Moreover, elected on a narrow and distorted basis, the Duma did not represent the country.

Legal minded members of the Kadet party tried to create a third option – trying to get Grand Duke Mikhail to accept the Crown, and hand over his authority to the Provisional Government. This was bad in law, and moreover Mikhail had refused to take the crown.

Controlling the army is the first power of any government. But the vital decision came from the Soviet. Nicholas Sukhanov witnessed soldiers virtually dictating to the left Menshevik Skobelev, the Order No. 1 of the Soviet which democratized the army. The Order said that all units of the army were to send elected representatives to the Soviet. Soldiers were to obey officers only for war related issues. Outside that they had full citizen rights. Old feudal customs, like calling officers Your Excellency, were abolished. Flogging and the death penalty were halted at soldiers demands. When Generals complained to Gekhov, the minister of war, he told them that he was helpless, since the Soviet had issued this instruction. This shows that the Provisional Government was in charge only because the soviet had permitted it.

Further steps included recognising the right to strike (so far all strikes had been illegal and unionists were liable to be arrested at any time). It was declared that a Constituent Assembly would be elected, based on universal adult vote. Local elections were conducted through the year. The right to hold public meetings and express views openly were recognised. Abraham, the biographer of Kerensky, says the reform programme of the Provisional Government can be called a charter of democratic rights, but not a programme for social change.

What about the party system? There remained three Centre Right parties, because public hatred made it impossible for monarchist and proto fascist parties (including the Black Hundreds, who had carried out anti Jew pogroms) to function. These three were the Trade Industrialist Party, the Union of 18 October, and the Kadets. The Kadets drew in most rightwing politicians, and as a result shifted much to the right compared to their positions of 1905-6. The Russian bourgeoisie, and the liberal landlords, understood that the Kadets were the best party to serve their needs. Rosenberg, the outstanding historian of the Kadet party, shows that the left wing, who wanted some moderate reforms, received about one third of votes in the party Congress.⁴⁹

In November 1917, after the soviet conquest of power, the Bolsheviks organised the elections to the Constituent Assembly. Despite having over 1,00,000 members, and local branches all over Russia, and much money, the Kadets got only between 6 and 7 % votes and barely 17 elected representatives. Why did this happen? The answer is, the petty bourgeoisie, the well to do peasants, the better paid workers, who vote liberals in developed countries, did not support the Kadets.

The struggle for the Constituent Assembly revealed the reluctance of the Provisional Government. On 3 March the Provisional Government declared that universal, equal, direct and secret ballot would be the way a Constituent Assembly would be created. But Miliukov, the main Kadet leader and the real power in the Provisional Government, told the French Ambassador, Paleologue, the very next day, that he wanted to avoid early elections. At this stage this was not due to a fear

⁴⁹For full discussion on the Kadets see William G. Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution: The Constitutional Democratic Party, 1917-1921*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey, 1974

of the Bolsheviks, but of the Mensheviks and above all the Socialist Revolutionary party. Too many radicals in the Constituent Assembly would have resulted in the Assembly attacking landed interests in the countryside at least, says historian Lionel Kochan.⁵⁰ Maklakov, a founder of the Kadet Party, said that Russia had received too much freedom as a result of the revolution. A Kadet newspaper, *Svobodnyi Narod*, thought the majority of people did not understand the real meaning of freedom.⁵¹ In other words, Kadets wanted petty reforms, not an agrarian revolution, and they therefore wanted to shut down the freshly won democratic rights. So it took three weeks just to announce the names of the members of the Election Commission. The rules for putting up candidate took another two months. Then there were debates – should members of the Tsar’s family have the vote? Should the age of voting be 18, 20 or 21? These took up long periods. At last, when the Bolsheviks announced they were calling a mass demonstration in June, demanding democracy, the Provisional Government announced that elections would take place on 17 September. But this was then promptly postponed. New dates were set for 12 November. And by this time, it was the Bolshevik party that was campaigning most vocally for the elections to the Constituent Assembly. Meanwhile, in August, there was the Kornilov conspiracy, fully backed by the Kadets in the hope that democracy would be throttled.

Ending war was the next demand of the people. Eyewitness accounts show how war devastated Russia. SR leader Victor Chernov told the First All Russia Congress of Soviets that war was sucking Russia dry. even Kerensky in his memoirs says war led to the fall of the democratic

⁵⁰L Kochan, 'Kadet Policy in 1917 and the Constituent Assembly', *Slavonic & East European Review*, vol xiv (1967), pp183-192

⁵¹Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*, p90, 190

government.⁵² But then, why were they determined to pursue the war?

They were determined to get Constantinople, the gains promised in the Balkan region, part of Persia, the Palk and the Dardanalles straits, and Rodichev, speaking at the Kadet Congress, said that this was not Russian imperialism but the basis of Russia's freedom. Miliukov made it clear that he was opposed to a democratic peace without victors and losers. The army officers also resisted any talk of a peace.⁵³

Finally, the peasant demand for land was resisted tooth and nail. . "Out of the 624 counties constituting old Russia, 482, or 77 per cent, were involved in the movement." The peasants were not initially fighting the Mensheviks and certainly not the Socialist Revolutionaries. But Tseretelli as the Minister of the Interior showed himself as protecting the landlords and using the army. State violence led to a fall in peasant resistance to landlords in July and August. But in September and October they rose sharply again. Landlords' manors were raided, and on many occasions set on fire. Between February and October, there were 4,954 conflicts with landlords and only 324 with the peasant bourgeoisie.⁵⁴ So if a democratic revolution has any meaning, it was opposed by the Provisional Government, and not only the liberals, but also, from April, by the Mensheviks and SRs, who entered the government as coalition partners and fought

⁵²M Philips Price, 'In the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets', in M Jones (ed), *Storming the Heavens: Voices of October*, Zwan, London, 1987, p28; A Kerensky, 'The Provisional government 1917', *Slavonic Review* 1930, p2.

⁵³ See for an overall assessment, R A Wade, *The Russian Search For Peace, February-October 1917*, Stanford, 1969, pp143-147.

⁵⁴ L. Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, vol 3, Delhi, Aakar, 2014,

the very workers, peasants and soldiers who had raised them up to power.

The Reality of Popular and Proletarian Democracy in 1917:

Right from the beginning, it was the masses that pushed for revolution, and the masses also pushed for the creation and development of organisations that truly represented them. These included soviets, factory committees, trade unions, soldiers' organisations, peasant committees. The crucial organisations were the soviets, but they were not the only ones. And if the Bolsheviks led them, that was politically, and because the Bolsheviks were willing to move *with* the masses.

Soviet is a Russian word, the equivalent of council. Workers sent representatives from factories to constitute soviets. Similarly soldiers also had their own bodies. The first great action taken by the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, was the issuing of the famous Order No.1. Between 23 and 27 February, a strike had turned into a general strike. Soldiers had refused to attack the workers and had gone over to them. On 28th February, the Provisional Committee of the Duma Members tried to assume governmental authority and issued an order calling on the soldiers to return to their barracks and obey their officers. On 1st March, the Tsar abdicated. Prince L'vov, who had been part of the liberal opposition (which was in favour of conducting the war better, not ending it) now headed the renamed Provisional Government. But the soldiers were clear, that they now wanted democratic rights. Sukhanov, the Menshevik-Internationalist who witnessed many of the events of the revolution and wrote at length about them, remembered soldiers virtually dictating the text of the Order No.1 of the soviet. It asserted that: in all military units from the level of company, and on naval ships, soldiers committees were to be

elected; that soldiers were also to elect representatives to the Soviet; that in political matters soldiers were to follow the Soviet and their own committees, following military discipline only in military matters; that weapons were to be controlled by the committees and not by officers; that information and on duty soldiers would obey military discipline but in all other matters would enjoy full political rights; and that the orders of the government's military commission were to be obeyed except if they ran counter to the orders of the orders and decrees of the Soviet⁵⁵. At one stroke, it changed the political situation in two ways. At the top, it challenged the undemocratic Provisional Committee (and thereafter the equally undemocratic Provisional Government) by pitting the authority of the Soviet against their authority. At bottom, it created a democratic structure for the army. Soldiers were asked to form their own committees, and except when fighting the war, to follow their own political belief, that is, not go and shoot common people because the officers had so decreed.

It is also important to understand the structure and function of soviets. Workers and soldiers elected representatives, and could replace them whenever they were dissatisfied. Moreover, the way the soviets started functioning at the local level, meant that even before October, in growing parts of the country, soviets were taking over from the organs of local government like city Dumas and rural zemstvos. And they were also subordinating the bureaucracy to their control. Local soviets developed in cities under the city soviets. This happened in Moscow, Yaroslav, Kazan, Nikolaev, Rostov-on-Don and elsewhere.⁵⁶ Under military protection from the city

⁵⁵See the text in

<https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/government/1917/03/01.htm>

⁵⁶Soma Marik, *Reinterrogating the Classical Marxist Discourses of Revolutionary Democracy*, New Delhi, Aakar, 2008, p327

soviet, they dealt with local problems. Factory councils, trade unions, various kinds of committees to deal with specific problems, local militias all sprang up.⁵⁷

Food supply began to be taken over by coordination between the soviets of big cities and rural organisations. On March 5, Petrograd workers discovered 180 trucks of grain consigned to private individuals. The Food commission of the Petrograd Soviet appropriated these and sent them to the soldiers of the Northern Front, having learnt that they had only one day's food left.⁵⁸

The Executive Committee of the Krasnoyarsk Soviet sent a telegram along the Siberian Railway line forbidding delivery of food for speculative purposes. And an All Russia Food Congress was called in May 1917 with 333 delegates. The Moscow soviet took the initiative in this.⁵⁹

Rural soviets appeared a little later. But by late July 1917, 52 gubernia out of 78 had gubernia soviets of peasants' Deputies. Lower down, 371 out of 813 uyezds in Russia had uyezd level peasant soviets.⁶⁰

The claim is often made, that even if this was true in 1917, the "Bolshevik seizure of power" meant the transformation of the soviets into organs of bureaucratic-totalitarian one-party rule. It is therefore necessary to take a look at the continuity of soviets beyond October. All the way to 1921, the local soviets showed that the communists, as the RSDRP (B) had renamed itself, were not in a majority. In

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ *Podovolstvenny Vestnik* July 30, 1917 (this was a bulletin of the Central Food Committee of Petrograd).

⁵⁹ A. Andreyev, *The Soviets of Workers and Soldiers' Deputies on the Eve of the October Revolution*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1971, p. 75

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.96.

volost executive committees, non-party members predominated. In district executive committees, communists had a slight majority. Moreover, even the presence of party members could not at that stage always mean a tight discipline. In February 1917 the Bolsheviks numbered about 24,000. By July they had grown to about ten times that size, and to approximately 4,00,000 by October. So these were not all supposedly hardened Leninists portrayed as blind followers of the words of the leadership. [Of course, we will see below that the image of the party itself is totally untrue.] In 1919, the only year for which detailed data is available, only 12.5 per cent of the district and city executive committees could be considered Old Bolsheviks.⁶¹ The proportion of Old Bolsheviks in the uezd Congress Executive Committees in fact declined from 12.2 per cent in 1919 to 7.6 per cent in 1921.⁶² Equally significant is the age composition. In 1919, in a sample of 2662, taken from 30 per cent of all local Soviet Executive Committee members in the District Congress and City Executive Committees, and 40 per cent of those in the Provincial Congress and City Executive Committees, under 25 years accounted for 13.7%, 25-29 year old persons 30.3%, and 30-39 year old people 44.2%. This clearly represented the elimination of the older bureaucratic layers and the coming forward of workers and peasants. This supposition is further borne out when we see that the educational qualifications had come down with 20.6% having no more than a high school education and only 4.5% having

⁶¹M. Vladimirsky, *Sovetyispolkomy i s'ezdySovetov: Materialy k izucheniiusrtoeniya I devatelrostiorganovmestriougopravleniya*, vol.1, Moscow, 1920, p.7

⁶²Robert Abrams, 'Political Recruitment and Local Government: The Local Soviets of the RSFSR: 1918-1921', *Soviet Studies*, vol. 19, no.4, April 1968, p.576.

university education, among the District Executive Committees.⁶³

Alexander Rabinowitch studied one city district Soviet of Petrograd and detailed how this institution almost entirely displaced the sub-district dumas and municipal boards. This First City District Soviet had its own peoples' court network, replacing the old judiciary, an investigation commission, a social welfare section, a legal section, a housing section, a culture and education section and its own press. In May-June 1918, it held a conference, where the 201 voting delegates included 134 Bolsheviks, 13 Left Socialist Revolutionaries, 30 Mensheviks and Menshevik Internationalists, and 24 Socialist Revolutionaries. As Rabinowitch puts it, it was an attempt at "an honest effort to restore meaningful links with the masses despite the stirrings of civil war".⁶⁴

And the soviets were only one of the institutions, as already pointed out. It is essential to look into the detailed workings of at least one other institution, especially after the researches of David Mandel.⁶⁵ This is the factory committee movement and its struggle for workers' control. Marx did not see socialism/communism as merely the taking away of the means of production from the capitalists and their statization. Since capitalism involves the alienation of the workers, he saw its replacement as something involving an associated production. Moreover, as the state was supposed to wither

⁶³See *ibid.*, p 577 note 25 for a comparison with 1920-21. The bulk of the data comes from M. Vladimirsky, *Sovetyispolkomy i s'ezdySovetov: Materialy k izucheniiusrtoeniya I devatelrostiorganovmestriougopravleniya*, vol.1, pp.4-6.

⁶⁴Cited in Soma Marik, *Reinterrogating the ...* pp. 400-401

⁶⁵ Mark David Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power*; David Mandel, *Factory Committees and Workers' Control in Petrograd in 1917*, IIRE, Montreuil, France, 1993.

away, statization/nationalization could only be a very initial step. 1917-18 showed that this was not simply Marx's imagination.

Party, Class and Democracy:

The next point I want to emphasize is that working class democracy cannot be established, without internal democracy in the revolutionary party or parties of the working class. This is something that both right wing scholarship and journalistic propaganda, and much of left wing politics, ignores. The common view within the left is that democratic centralism simply means that once the party decides a line through a Party Congress, all that is left is its execution, and it is for the leadership (Central Committee, Political Bureau, etc) to lead and for the others to follow. The right presents a more vicious version, but one that is essentially similar in suggesting that from *What Is to Be Done?* via 1917 till the ban on factions in 1921, Lenin had a one track mind, and simply wanted to take power for and by a small coterie. The researches of Paul Le Blanc⁶⁶, Lars Lih⁶⁷ and Soma Marik (already cited) seriously challenge such views. I want to stress Lih's book *Lenin Rediscovered*. There are problems in the way Lih portrays Lenin here, and in his biography of Lenin. But to me these are relatively minor issues. What Lih does in *Lenin Rediscovered* is, after over a century of *What Is to Be Done?* being written, for the first time in a purely academic sphere, discuss the book in its context and shows that all the

⁶⁶ Paul Le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party*, Humanity Books, New York, 193.

⁶⁷Lars T. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: What Is to Be Done? in Context*, Brill, Leyden, 2006. See my review of Lih in Kunal Chattopadhyay, 'Lenin and Democracy: Recovering Truth from Mythology', *Economic and Political Review*, Vol 44, Issue 08, 21 Feb. 2009.

great pundits on the right never used a minimum of scholarly technique or standards when reading or discussing Lenin.

Lih blows up the entire Cold War and post-Cold War myth that something called Bolshevik autocracy stemmed from this text. But Marxists had been making this point for years. Only, they were being ignored, even when they were in the academia. I can mention Paul LeBlanc as one example. In *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party*, he shows that the emergence of the Bolsheviks has to be seen as a process, where class forces and diverse activists interact.

Second, Lenin also believed that forming factions as periodic groupings was perfectly normal, as was even negotiations between factions. Responding to a charge of factionalism brought by the Socialist Revolutionaries, he said that a mass party had to inform the masses “as to which leaders and which organisations of the party are pursuing this or that line”.⁶⁸

Lenin stood on the extreme left of the party at this point. Not only did he advocate a clean break with the centrists, (that is, left Mensheviks/ Menshevik Internationalists like Martov who had opposed the war but from a perspective excluding turning the war into revolution), but he also insisted that there should be no halt at a supposed bourgeois democratic stage of revolution. This was the essence of his April theses.

The April Theses were published in *Pravda* with the Editorial note that they were his personal theses.⁶⁹ The next

⁶⁸V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, 4th English Edition, Moscow, Progress Publishers, Vol.13, p. 159

⁶⁹*Pravda*, 7 April, 1917.

day, Kamenev editorially dissociated the party's mouthpiece from Lenin.⁷⁰

Lenin responded by taking his campaign to the entire party. This action showed that he did not see himself as being bound by any kind of Central Committee discipline. A month of inner party discussions carried out while the revolution was unfolding, led to the Seventh all Russian Conference of 24-29 April. The crucial resolution, 'On the Current Moment', won with Lenin getting 71 votes, Kamenev, his leading opponent. And co-reporter, getting 39 in opposition, and 8 delegates abstaining.⁷¹

In June, a debate took place over whether to organize a public demonstration demanding that the Congress of Soviets should end the Provisional Government. The decision was taken by the nine members Central Committee, but a meeting of the CC, along with the Petrograd Committee, the Military organization, representatives from the trade union and factory committee party cells. This meeting decided, by 58 votes to 37, and with 52 abstentions, to declare that a demonstration would take place. But the All Russian Congress of Soviets declared that the demonstration would be used by counter revolutionaries and called for a ban. Faced with this situation, an emergency meeting attended by five Central Committee members decided with three voting for and two abstaining (Lenin and Sverdlov), to call off the demonstration. The party ranks responded by angry resolutions against the Central Committee. Lenin, in a speech before the Petersburg Committee, on 11 June, said that "Your right, the right to protest against the actions of the Central

⁷⁰*Pravda*, 8 April, 1917. Kamenev and Stalin were both editors at this point.

⁷¹*Sed'maia (Aprel'skaia) Vserossiskaia Konferentsiia RSDRP (Bolshevikov)*, Moscow, 1958, pp. 50, 106.

Committee, is a legitimate one, and your decision must be a free one.”⁷²

The failure of Kornilov’s coup disarmed the bourgeoisie. Lenin immediately again proposed that the soviets, headed by the Mensheviks and SRs, should take power, saying that in that case the Bolsheviks would peacefully campaign for their programme within the soviets. But the moderate socialists rejected this.

Following these developments, Bolshevik resolutions won and representations increased in the Soviets. At the Second Congress of the Soviets of Workers and Soldiers Deputies of the Urals, (17-21 August), representing over five hundred thousand workers and soldiers, the Bolsheviks had 77 deputies against 23 of the Mensheviks. On the night of 31 August- 1 September, the Petrograd Soviet adopted a Bolshevik sponsored resolution on power by 279 votes to 115 which led to the old Menshevik-SR dominated executive committee resigning. On 9 September voting took place on whether the Soviet was indeed changing its line. The Bolsheviks won this time by 519 votes to 414, with 67 abstentions.⁷³

Throughout September and early October, Bolsheviks went on gaining forces in the Soviets stressing the need for working class power. And within the Socialist Revolutionary party, a left wing gained strength. By the time of the insurrection this left would split and form a separate party. The SR base was strong among the peasants. But it was the Left SR party that championed the traditional SR politics.

⁷² S. Marik, *Reinterrogating...* 334-335.

⁷³ See *ibid*, and A. Andreyev, *The Soviets of Workers and Soldiers’ Deputies on the Eve of the October Revolution*.

While this went on, inner party debates among the Bolsheviks also persisted. Lenin began calling for insurrection when the Bolsheviks gained hegemony in the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets. But he faced resistance in the Central Committee. In its meeting of 15 September, it was decided, with 6 votes for and 4 against, and 6 abstentions, to burn Lenin's letters (all but one copy).⁷⁴ On 23 September, 15 members of the CC voted by 8 to 7 for a policy of entering a relatively spurious body named the democratic Conference with a line of confronting the moderates, while a minority was for boycotting the Democratic Conference. Finally, on 5 October, Lenin and Trotsky got their way in the CC, with the decision to withdraw from a body named Council of the Republic. But Kamenev expressed his dissent. Members of committees lower down, learning of Lenin's proposals, started putting pressure on the CC for an insurrection.

Kamenev, supported by Zinoviev, felt that an insurrection was tactically unwise, and it was better to go on strengthening the party's forces. The two of them wrote this openly in Gorky's paper on 18th October. An angry Lenin demanded their expulsion. But others differed. Stalin felt that the differences were not irreconcilable. And this was also the point, that when the insurrection actually began, Kamenev took part in its actual conduct.⁷⁵

⁷⁴*The Bolsheviks and the October Revolution, Minutes of the Central Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (Bolsheviks), August 1917—February 1918*, London 1974, tr. Anne Bone, with additional notes by T. Cliff, p. 58

⁷⁵ See Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution, vol3* for the narrative.

In conclusion:

It is necessary to go beyond October, to look at the tragic Civil War that destroyed the working class, the counter revolutionary pressure that resulted in attempts to defend the revolution by increasingly authoritarian means, not because it was part of a previous Bolshevik goal, but because they seemed to see no option⁷⁶. But it is also therefore necessary to learn how progress can give way. The creation of the Cheka as an institution, far more than the Red Terror, can be seen as one turning point⁷⁷. Though the Cheka would be disbanded,

⁷⁶ For the Civil War, see W. Bruce Lincoln, *Red Victory: A History of the Russian Civil War*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1989.

⁷⁷ See for an account of the Cheka, George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police - The All Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-revolution and Sabotage, December 1917-February 1922*, Oxford University Press, Oxford etc, 1986. I cite the book with important caveats however. It is the one known book with a detailed study of the Cheka, its institutional history, and its role in combating counterrevolution, speculation sabotage and misconduct in office. However, Leggett's single-minded goal of exposing Lenin as the evil mastermind leads to some poor scholarship. His characterization of Lenin as "the self-appointed Marxist Messiah," the soviet government as "Lenin's state", or the Civil War in Russia as a "bitter class war of Lenin's making" display more bile than scholarship. To attribute the bitterness of the Civil War to Lenin, who allegedly manipulated the lives of millions, treats workers and peasants as mindless herds, and systematically ignores the reality that the Civil War was started by the counter revolutionaries. Feverishly trying to portray that mass "limitless terror" was the cornerstone of Bolshevism, springing ready made from Lenin's head; Leggett flatly ignores the degree of popular support for the soviet state organs, and the degree of popular participation in them. He also accepts without qualification the biased accounts of Steinberg or Melgunov, and relies frequently on

its memory would remain, and would be revived brutally by Stalin in the 1930s. The ban on opposition parties was indefensible after the end of the Civil War. The processes by which a bureaucracy arose, how it consolidated power, and how in the 1930s it unleashed savage terror on the workers and peasants need to be all examined. A number of studies have indeed sought to do so. What cannot be accepted is the insistence on equating the democratic space created by the Revolution with something that was clearly a counter revolution. After all, Stalin had to murder the majority of the Old Bolsheviks in order to establish his power securely.

third-hand quotations in his attempts to condemn Lenin and Dzerzhinsky out of their own mouths. There is virtually no sense of a desperate struggle against foreign invaders, internal counterrevolutionaries, disease, or hunger.

Bolshevism and Bolshevik Revolution

Ananda Bhattacharyya

The present paper deals with Bolshevism, Bolshevik Revolution, its relation with the Indian Revolutionaries both in home and abroad and its impact on the Indian sub-continent. The British reactions were multi-dimensional to the above and these are reflected in the contemporary papers and official documents; it is the basis of those on which this present essay is based.

Bolshevism

The Chief Correspondent of the *Daily Mail* at Helsingfors telegraphed the following message:

“The Indian Centralisation Committee, which is now working at Petrograd under the Bolsheviks, is composed of the same members as the Berlin Indian Committee. It is stated by the Petrograd journal, *Krassanja Gazeta*, in the special number devoted to British India and to formation of Indian Centralisation Committee at Petrograd, that a large number of Indian Bolshevik propagandists have already been sent to India and that the power of Universal Bolshevism will soon be made known to the British Empire. We may remember that the Indian Committee who worked in Europe and America for our enemies during the war have always been

prone to overstate their activities particularly in the matter of sending arms and emissaries to India “⁷⁸.

An Indian in the employ of the Bolsheviks

Several British and French subjects who had returned from Moscow stated the fact “that there is an Indian lawyer there named ‘Servadi’ who was on intimate terms with Lenin and is running the India department of the Bolsheviks ministry of propaganda. This obviously refers to Hasan Shahid Suharawardy, a member of a well-known Calcutta family, who obtained permission from the British Government to go to Russia from England in 1916. It is said that he has several Indian assistants working under him at Moscow”⁷⁹. There was also another reference to an Indian who escaped from Moscow and landed in England on 11th April and who had made a statement. He was teaching languages in Moscow when the Soviet revolution broke out. He was offered, and was able to refuse a post in a gymnasium and continued to maintain himself by giving private lessons.

Bolshevik Propaganda

It was declared by the Criminal Intelligence Department that “steps (had) to be taken against the import of

⁷⁸ Weekly Report, Criminal Intelligence Department, dated 15th February 1919.

⁷⁹ Weekly Report, Criminal Intelligence Department, dated 31st March 1919.

Russian jewels intended to be sold to India (1920)".⁸⁰ There was one Russian jeweller named Pereivsky alias Joseph Perry, resident at 7, Lindsay Street, Calcutta, who was suspected to be a Bolshevik agent. It was affirmed by the Criminal Intelligence Department that "there are no definite indications that he is dealing in the stolen Russian Crown jewels; it is possible that being a Russian and possibly a Bolshevik he is doing so." Thus it was decided that "if the collector of customs arrange to have any jewellery which is imported from foreign countries carefully scrutinised, let it (be) know (n) to the government if there is anything suspicious in the nature of the consignments". On the basis of which P. C. Bamford, Superintendent of Police, intelligence Branch, Calcutta wrote that 'An expert gave them a general valuation, whilst the cleverest of them all made a special analysis of the imports of jewels into Russia'. Even the jewel department at Petrograd noted that it 'was being transferred to the strong rooms of the Kremlin at Moscow – a tidy bundle of strong-books and safes representing the up-to- date collection of the "Northern Community"'. There is a detailed reporting in the *Pioneer* dated 22nd October 1920 under the caption *The Bolshevik Jewel Crown Store: Lenin's Diamonds* that 'diamonds are but one episode in an important and full organised branch of Bolshevik policy, which took its stunt from the decision to enter upon foreign propaganda '. It was in April 1918, writes a Russian contributor to the *Observer* that Trotsky impressed the view upon his colleagues "that unless the revolution

⁸⁰ The original file number was deleted by the Intelligence Branch when the present researcher had taken notes during the early eighties of twentieth century.

spreads to other countries we shall in the long run be crushed". From Moscow agents were sent to the markets in neutral countries and Germany, and the disposal of the jewels began in a pre-arranged and careful manner. It was concluded in this way that "it is difficult to estimate the value of the jewels in Bolshevik hands, but there is no doubt that it reaches a very high figure". There were also some agents of Afghan Bolsheviks who had to return in their own country. They were distributing propagandist literature through Afghanistan and Independent territory.

Bolshevik menace

There was a Bolshevik menace prevalent in India as it may be clearly retrieved from the notes compiled in the office of Director, Criminal Intelligence.⁸¹ This report aims to discuss the meaning of the very term "Bolshevism", its origin, growth and aims. The report was prepared by a military officer on 15th February 1919 on the basis of the contemporary Russian and Indian newspapers, review articles and on the basis of the reports of Criminal Intelligence Bureau. It may be said that the 'Bolshevism as a political term first came into use in 1903 at the conference of the Russian Social- democratic party in London. The conference split on a question of methods rather than of aims.'⁸² The majority supported Lenin in advocating the spread of the gospel of socialism by all and any means and were, therefore, called

⁸¹ This report was not published in Police abstract. It was a reprint of paragraphs taken from the Weekly Report of the Director, Criminal Intelligence.

⁸² Intelligence Branch file " Bolshevik Menace to India "

Bolsheviks. His opponents, led by Plekhanov, who leant rather towards compromise with the more advanced types of Liberalism and to constitutional methods of agitation, were similarly nicknamed the Mensheviks, or Minorities. It was not until 1912, however, that this split widened into a definite branch, and that separate parties were formed, largely, it is believed, through the agency of the secret police, acting through agents in the party.

The Bolshevik and Menshevik had come to represent the ideas with which the two parties were identified. A Bolshevik was more extreme than a Menshevik and was opposed to the Minimalist, of the Social revolutionary Party. Its leaders were forced to live abroad and to carry on their activities underground. Bolshevism was hardly known in Russia until 1916, except to the secret police or students of socialism. Their numbers were insignificant and when they returned to Russia with the crowd of their revolutionaries of all creeds and opinions, they found themselves looked upon as noisy extremists, whose views were too fanatics for practical politics. The rise of the party to supreme power was due to its attitude towards the war. The Bolsheviks, however, had from the first demanded peace at any price. Lenin himself had, at the International Socialist Conference of 1915 in Switzerland, expressed the view, which was that of the great mass of the Russian proletariat, that condemnation for the war must be laid, not on any one nation, but on the capitalist systems of all alike. The special correspondent was of opinion that 'I have had 20 years residence in Russia, witnessed the Revolution of 1917, and have since then kept constantly in touch with the developments testifying to the growth of Bolshevism in

general and the German intrigues behind the sense directed towards the cultivation of this poisonous growth of Russia and Allied countries'. The Bolsheviks can be described as violent extremists or 'whole hoggers', while the Mensheviks are the 'go slowers'. One English Correspondent in his Weekly Report, dated 17th April 1919 noted the facts as regard the perils of Bolshevism. It was clearly mentioned that large numbers were exiled, among whom Bolsheviks predominated, and so many Bolsheviks had for many years never lived in Russia at all, their chief centre being Switzerland. Bolshevik leaders were very largely Jews – not real Russians at all- but Russian Jews who for many years had been nursing their grievances, real as well as fancied, against the old governing classes in Russia. That the Jews were bitterly and cruelly oppressed in Russia, there is no doubt, but it is only fair to say that it was not entirely undeserved. The majority of Bolshevik leaders were not Russians but Russian Jews who had been living far from Russia for years, who had been all the time nursing their grievances and vowing 'Revenge' on Russia, while turning their brains to the study of the extremist forms of socialist experiments and just waiting for the opportunity. The Jews who were the ringleaders cared no more for Russia than any other country, but unfortunately Russia was undoubtedly the best field for their efforts. They knew they were in the minority, they knew their party was mainly supported and led by Jews but they also knew this: they had a programme destructive though it was, they were well organised and they had no scruples in making rash promises to the poor peasant masses which would give their temporary support and they were sure to be believed for long enough for them to carry through their ruthless destruction of

whatever civilisation existed, which would enable them to rebuild Russia on a purely imaginary basis. The Bolsheviks from Switzerland, from America and from other places of exile arrive in Russia, well organised, well financed with their poisonous programme carefully worked out and approved by the German General Staff. The first step was to see that the Bolsheviks had agents in Great Britain. There are plenty of Russian Jewish exiles in England and the Bolshevik Government found no difficulty in selecting a Jew, by name Litvinoff. This man was clever and unscrupulous. He selected his friends for filling other posts in the Russian Bolshevik Representation in England. He lost no time in organising his intrigues. The British Government, who at first followed the policy of toleration of Russian Bolsheviks, considering that it was the business of Russia to choose her own government, gave Litvinoff many facilities due to his position of Representative of the Bolshevik Russian Government. His diplomatic bags were made the medium for the importation of Bolshevik pamphlets, and for large sums of money for the furtherance of his schemes. Ultimately Litvinoff and his satellites (among whom may be mentioned the so-called Glasgow Consul John Reid, (interned) were sent back to Russia in exchange for our own representative who had been cruelly treated and imprisoned by the Bolsheviks. But before this step was taken Litvinoff and the other Russian Bolshevik Jews had shown their seeds with good effect. It is simply that they have only heard one side of the question which has sedulously been presented by Russian Bolshevik Jews to British Pacifists and Extreme Socialists, who almost unchecked, passed on these doctrines to the working-man as the glorious results of the Russian Revolution.

It is evident from the weekly report dated 15th September, 1919, that the position in Soviet Russia was obscure, but two currents of thought had been recognized. Lenin was said to perceive that Bolshevism had succeeded in destroying the ancient system, but had failed to build anything in its place. It also appears that “there is a certain amount of sporadic revolutionary activity. There is talk of reviving Soviets and plans to this end are said to have been made for Scotland. Secret attempts to enrol volunteers for the “Red Army” are reported from Glasgow. *The Daily Herald*, financed largely from India, has been working up feeling over the so-called Hapsburg restoration in Hungary.”⁸³ In America Bolshevism found a home, but the reaction had set in. The Russian Government was reported to have furnished two million roubles for communist agitation in Canada.

Measures against Bolshevism

One Special officer was appointed by the Government of India to deal with diffusion measures against Bolshevism prior to the action taken by the Government of Bengal. The Government of India were of opinion that the time has arrived when the Bolshevik menace should be made known confidentially to the important Princes of India in order that their co-operation might be enlisted in any measures ‘that it may become necessary to take later on’.⁸⁴ Ronaldshay on

⁸³ Weekly Report dated 15th September 1919, Criminal Intelligence Department.

⁸⁴ Letter from the Government of India, Home Department Nos, D. O. No. 91 A/ C dated 12th January 1920 and 359, dated the 6th February 1920.

behalf of the Government of India ordered Mr H. L. Stephenson, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal to keep in mind, in the press and in public speeches 'regarding the spread of Bolshevism and in particular its menace to India, and I think it right that you should share the knowledge that my Government possess as to the probable methods to bring this country within their clutches'.⁸⁵ The root idea of Bolshevism was the destruction of all private property, and the subversion of all government and religion. These ideas could only take practical shape when the existing structure of society had been reduced to chaos, and the first step in Bolshevik propaganda to foment existing discontent and take advantage of any popular excitement which might lead to disorder. The Government of India was of firm conviction that the Bolsheviks had opened a large number of schools at Tashkend for the purposes of propaganda, where a speciality was made of oriental languages and Indians and other Orientals were being trained as agents. As soon as these agents were proficient they would be sent to India and their natural route would be over the North-West Frontier. It was also apprehended that there was an organisation at work in Holland to despatch these agents on eastward – bound ships. The Government of India had taken steps to watch for the arrival of these agents and to improve their own organisation for obtaining information of the working of the Bolshevik propaganda, both outside India and in the Provinces. It was desirable to provide two officers in plain clothes, one European, and one Indian, to board all passenger boats and visit all ships entering the port. These officers would assist

⁸⁵ Letter dated 7th February 1920

police passport officers in examining new arrivals, a duty which was carried out necessarily on board incoming boats between Panchpara and the docks or jetties. These officers will also co-operate with the customs officials who would deal with objectionable literature and would work directly under the Deputy Commissioner of Police.⁸⁶ A copy of the letter was also sent to the Commissioner of Police for information and for communication to Mr. Bartley and to the Deputy Inspector- General, Intelligence Branch.⁸⁷ Mr. Bartley and Mr. Corbett also pointed out that the Bolshevik propaganda necessitated a considerable number of enquiries and 'the watching of a certain number of suspects. Mr Bartley is therefore acting mainly as a post office , and they considered it desirable that the work should be transferred to Mr Dixon of the Intelligence Branch, who would be in a better position to get the information furnished and to have the measures taken without delay'.⁸⁸ It was also decided on behalf of the Government of India to gather information regarding the adoption of defensive measures against Bolshevik propaganda and to state 'for the information of His Excellency the Governor in Council that the Government of India do not consider that it is any longer necessary to retain an officer on special duty on the staff of the Director, Central

⁸⁶ R, Clarke, Commissioner of Police, Calcutta to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 26th February 1920 (No. 1586/ G. 777-19)

⁸⁷ File No 27 / 1920

⁸⁸ Letter from the Commissioner of Police , Calcutta, dated 26th February 1920 (1568G. 777-19)

Intelligence.⁸⁹ The work of watching Bolshevik activities outside India was carried on by the Special Bureau of Information under Colonel W. F. T. O' Conner. In furtherance of the scheme to deal with the danger of the ingress of Bolshevik emissaries and literature into India, this government had sanctioned two Inspectors of the third grade for the Calcutta Police for one year, with effect from the 16th March 1920.⁹⁰

Indian Revolutionaries and Russia

The following report was sent out from the wireless stations of the Bolshevik Government in the beginning of December:

“On November 25, the Indian Delegation handed a memorandum to Sverdloff, president of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets in the name of the peoples of India. This memorandum gives an exposition of the long martyrdom of India under the yoke of England, which keeps a population of 325,000,000 of the inhabitants in slavery. The Russian Revolution produced an enormous psychological impression on the Indian people. In the United States of America and in France, Indian delegates were imprisoned. They were driven out from Japan, Switzerland and Denmark under the pressure of the English diplomats. The memorandum further says that the liberty of the world will be in danger as long as the

⁸⁹ Letter from the Secretary to the Government of India , Home Department to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal No. 474 C dated Delhi , the 28th December 1920.

⁹⁰ Ibid

imperialists' and Capitalists' power of England exists, which power is founded upon the slavery of a fifth part of the population of the globe. The memorandum ends with an expression of confidence that the days of England are numbered, that the Indians will rise and drive out the foreign domination, and that free Russia will stretch out a fraternal hand to them".⁹¹

Indian Revolutionaries and Bolsheviks in Europe

Weekly Report informs that the leader of the first Indian Mission to Russia have been received with much ceremony by Trotsky. V. Chattpadhyay and Har Dayal were both in Stockholm. Abdul Jabbar and Abdul Sattar with three other Indians were in Moscow working under Bolshevik control. The Bolshevik Moscow had recently addressed a communication to their emissary in Turkistan reporting that these two Indian Muslims as mentioned above had visited Lenin. They presented a long address asking for assistance in freeing India from English servitude and in spreading in India information about Bolshevism. An Indian Russian Committee was endeavouring to work in Afghanistan and other Muslim parts in Russia. Barkatullah was still in Afghanistan. Rikki Kesh alias Ziauddin succeeded in returning from Persia to Berlin after the arrest of Kershap .It was apprehended that he had been sent to Russia. He was awarded the Iron Cross by the Germans for his faithful services. It was also reported that Dr. Hafiz and Umrao Singh Majithia were in Moscow. It was also learnt from Bhupendra Nath Dutta that the Chief of the

⁹¹ Weekly Report dated 11th January 1919, Criminal Intelligence Department.

Moscow Committee had arrived in Switzerland.⁹² All the members of this Committee were reported to have become Bolsheviks and they all, on the suggestion of the Soviet Government, desired to turn their National Committee to Communism. Das Gupta was himself affected in this way. He said that the name of the Moscow chief had not been mentioned to him, but he had grounds for the belief that he was Umrao Singh Majithia. According to a wireless telegram from Moscow, Barkatullah had an interview with Lenin on 8th May. It was considered by some well-informed Indians in London that Har Dayal's sudden detestation of Germany and 'fancy' for England was a blind. The Indian Pan- Islamist and revolutionary Barkatullah had produced a pamphlet in which he promised to reconcile the divergent principles of Islam and Bolshevism. He had produced two editions, one for Shias and the other for Sunnis. It is learnt from his past record before he became a politician that he was in effect a Bolshevik in the days when Bolshevism was unknown. His pamphlet on the Aryan Conquest of the Dravidians was an ample proof of this. It was said that he might dislike the late German Government and the Kaiser and his entourage on account of the way he himself was treated by the German Foreign Office, but he had no reason to hate the German people. There were many who thought that German penetration into India had in no sense been abandoned and 'Har Dayal is not a fool'. He was on the contrary very intelligent. He was able to exercise power and influence between Hindus and Muhammadan students; and as an Indian nationalist he did not owe allegiance to

⁹² Weekly Report dated 12th May 1919, Criminal Intelligence Department.

anyone- he would use Russia, or Germany, or England to gain his object.

A report received in London on 25th April 1919 stated that many agitators had been prepared for service in the East. A large number of them were trying to reach Tashkent and Persia. It was reported that a branch of the 'league of Eastern Freedom' was already working in Tashkent. Natives were being trained as agitators. The 'League of Eastern Freedom' had as its object the spread of Bolshevism among the people of Asia. Special agitation courses had been arranged in Moscow in the Mussulman Workman's Hall. Lectures were delivered on various subjects. At the beginning of April 1919 two Indians named Professor Ahmed Kharis and Mohaed Hadi, who claimed to represent the 325 millions of India, read a paper at a session of the All Russian Central Executive Committee. This paper was copied as an example of what Bolshevism would swallow as the case for, and the views of those Indians who accepted Bolshevism were entitled *Leaders of the Russian Revolution, Comrades and Friends*. The main focus of that doctrine was to propagate the inspiration which they had inherited from the Russian Revolution, a new hopes and aspirations. The doctrine concluded by saying that universal freedom would remain in danger as Imperialistic and Capitalistic England would remain powerful and her power would rest on her Indian possessions, and on the advantages she gained from the enslaved population and industry of India. It was hoped that all communities of India would join in the task of driving out the foreigners from our territories and unfettered Russia would hold out to us a hand in freeing India and the world.

The Indian National Committee also organised a secret meeting of 'responsible Nationalists' in which the present situation and future programme were discussed. The German Foreign Office had ordered that all future dealings between the Committee and Germany must be kept secret. This meeting decided that only executive member of the Committee and heads of departments should be informed of dealings with the German Government. The Committee resolved, at the request of Chattpadhyaya in Stockholm and Barkatullah in Moscow, to send a man to Stockholm to help Chattpadhyaya and another to Moscow to strengthen the Committee there, and also to send trustworthy members to Afghanistan. It was decided to consult the various branches, especially which at Stockholm, about requesting the Moscow Committee to forge English and Indian notes to be used to further Nationalist aim. Information was also received that a large consignment of arms were shipped to Northern India from Russia. In fact the Bolshevik authorities had a special organisation for the encouragement of revolutionary movements in the Orient, and that they were engaged in turning out propagandist literature in Indian and other Eastern languages. It added that there was little doubt that many of the Indian revolutionaries and anarchists who formerly comprised the Indian Committees under the German Foreign Office had taken service at Moscow.

The Soviets had organised at Stockholm a special bureau for propaganda abroad. This bureau centralised all the Bolshevist movements abroad, the various organisation plans which they possessed, and served as a liaison agency for all those people attached to it. The greater part of the money sent

from Russia for propaganda uses was concentrated at Stockholm, in the service of the said bureau. At its head was placed one of the Bolshevist leaders, known under two different names, Ganetzky and Furstenberg. A hue printing work was actually installed at the Kremlin. In these printing works called 'centrale', revolutionary pamphlets were published in all known tongues of Europe and Asia. This literature was spread over the world. There is a list of Indians in India and outside who were either known to have joined the Bolsheviks or as suspected of holding pro- Bolshevik views. Special mention may be made as Tarak Nath Das, Basanta K. Ray, Maharaj Narayan Kaul, Obeidulla, Madhab Rao Yakub Hussein, Abdul Rashid, Alif Khan and others. Among revolutionaries from Bengal mention has to be made of M. N. Roy who was not only active in Bengal, but also in San Francisco, from where he absconded to Mexico, and was believed to be devoting himself to Bolshevik propaganda and agitating amongst the workmen at Tampico. Similarly Bhupendra Nath Dutta accompanied a mission to Moscow in 1919 where he had to remain while the other members went on to Turkestan to help the Bolsheviks.

Internment of Russian Seamen

- In the middle of March 1918 the British Admiralty authorised the Government of India to requisition five Russian steamers on behalf of the Ministry of Shipping, viz. *Edward Bary*, then on her voyage from Calcutta to Bombay via Marmagoa, Ural, in Calcutta, Baikal at Basra, Eugenia at Rangoon and *Ivan Asbeleff*. The vessel *S. S. Edward Bary* had left

Calcutta before the orders for requisitioning was received. It is learnt from the proceedings of the political department, Bombay Castle ⁹³ that there were internment of Russian seamen in the sailors 'Home, Calcutta Barracks at Dumdum and the consent of the Government of Bengal to take over the officers and crew of the *S. S. Edward Bary* and *S. S. Baikal*. *S. S. Edward Bary* arrived in Bombay on the 25th March 1918 and that the European crew accommodating Captain, Chief Engineer, Russian Lettish, 2nd Officer, 3rd Officer, Russian Finn and other officers and sailors were removed and interned in the Sasson Dock in Bombay pending their transfer to Calcutta. On 4th April 1918 it was informed to the Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal, which 14 Officers and 17 men of the Russian ships *Edward Bary* and *Baikal* arrived in Calcutta from Bombay and were received in the sailor's Home on the 30th March 1918.⁹⁴ It was presumed that these men would be interned in the Dum Dum Barracks. There is a detailed list of Russian seamen who were kept at Dum Dum, whereas, the Russian Officers and Seamen of *S. S. Edward Bari* came into the Home at noon on 30th March 1918. There was a bioscope entertainment every Wednesday at Dum Dum for the soldiers there at 8-10 p.m.⁹⁵ The Russian Officers and Sailors

⁹³ Proceedings of the Political Department, dated 27th March 1918, Maharashtra State Archives, Bombay.

⁹⁴ Letter from the Government of Bombay No. 2820 W. dated 27th March 1918.

⁹⁵ Letter from the Commissioner of Police dated 29th April 1918.

desired to proceed and it was observed that 12 of the total desired to sign on in Calcutta. It was, therefore, decided that they should be sent away with the other men i. e., F. Klinchuk, interned at Dum Dum but absconded elsewhere. Besides, the Ships *S. S. Edward Bary* and *S. S. Baikal* had a large number of Russian Officers, Chief Engineer, 2nd Officer, Donkey men, Boatswain, carpenter, Firemen, sailor and Greaser. The Ships *Edward Bary* and *Ivan Azballiff* were discharged by their Captains owing to their Bolshevik tendencies and were forced to land at Calcutta. They were accused under the Ingress into India Ordinance and 40 sailors out of 63 were made over by Mr Beatson Bell, Chief Secretary to the Marine Secretary. The remainder, except a few who were in Hospital, were expected to be sent to the home. A proposal was also taken for the possession of the *Ural*, a Vessel. *S. S. Ural* was the only Russian vessel in Calcutta, was requisitioned by the Captain Superintendent, Royal Indian Marine Dockyard, Calcutta, and the officers and crew were landed and detained under the Foreigners Ordinance 1914, read with the Ingress into India Ordinance, 1914. Major Malet said 'the General would only receive them into the Fort, if they could be kept as military prisoners under a guard and liable to be shot if they attempted to escape'. The Russian Vice- Consul, posted at Delhi said that 'he was very glad to hear that the men had been interned in the Home' as he 'considers they should not be allowed to be at large. He has no objection to the *Ural* being taken over by the British

authorities'. R. Clarke, Commissioner of police, Calcutta, informed to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal that Captain Seemel late of the Russian ship *Ural* was permitted to live in hotel as the accommodation for officers in the Sailor's Home was over-crowded.⁹⁶ Commissioner of Police also informed that Captain Seemel of the *Ural* desired to proceed to America⁹⁷. There were some Officers in *Ural* who wished to go to America and Japan also. But there were some difficulties as it was reflected in the letter of the Offg. Commissioner of Police which runs as follows " Apart from the very specific orders which the American Consul- General has received from his Government forbidding the entry of Russians into the United States without special permit; the immigration laws of the United States of America do not permit of these Russian Sailors being dumped into the country without any prospect of immediate employment and for those reasons the American Consul- General expressed his inability to make any recommendation to his Government with regard to the 18 Russian Sailors at Dum Dum and the 6 Russian Sailors in Burma who desire to proceed to America

⁹⁶ Political Department Proceedings, File No. 142 dated 20th April 1918, West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta.

⁹⁷ Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal , dated 11th May 1918, Political Department Proceedings No. 810-18

“⁹⁸ Another Russian Seamen named Michael Gremoff and I. Primak, an officer, were interned and kept in the Howrah General Hospital⁹⁹ .Among them few Russian Seamen were granted permits to Saigon. E. Seemel, the Captain of the Ural was strongly averse to being repatriated to Russia. He would only go thee under compulsion. He had a desire to go to America, where he thought, he would be able to obtain a ship. Alternatively he was willing to go to Japan where he had some funds in the Nagasaki bank and thus he would be able to look after himself. F. Crowley, 3rd Engineer of the American ship Costs Rics, by nationality, Lett left Russia as a boy and had never been back since. He had served nearly always in British ships but did not want to go to Russia. There were another two Russian Seamen namely, John Wirtaneu and Emeljan fepa or Fena were also confined at Dum Dum, while, Kusmanko was sent to Howrah General Hospital for treatment.¹⁰⁰ There were some Norwegian citizens, though, not interned but allowed to leave the Sailors’ Home. They were shipped on the *S. S. Rina* which left Calcutta on the 28th April 1918. Mr. Frank Biloba, alias Francisco Biloba, a Russian national, aged 26, staying at Spain,

⁹⁸ Letter from the Offg. Commissioner of Police to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Political Department Proceedings dated 15th May 1918.

⁹⁹ Letter from the Commissioner of Police to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 4th April 1918, Political Department Proceedings, File No. 142 /1918.

¹⁰⁰ Letter No. W. 810-18/423 dated 4th April 1918.

arrested for his participation in Industrial World's workers' disturbances at Broken Hill, was sent to Gibraltar via Bombay by the S. S. Malta on 27th September 1919.¹⁰¹ The wages of Biloba and Burtovitch was sent to the Superintendent, Alipore Central Jail under section 3 of the Foreigners' Ordinance, 1914¹⁰².The Commissioner of Police suggested that the Governor of Gibraltar should be informed by telegram that Mr Biloba should be handed over to the Spanish authorities. ¹⁰³ John Burtovitch sent a letter to the Secretary to the Political Department, Government of Bengal at the time of his arrest where in it was alleged "at the time of arrest I was never told why I was arrested and am still in dark as to the reasons for my detention and as to the date of my release. I can assure that I never committed any offence either aboard the ship or in this country which could have merited this detention."¹⁰⁴ Ultimately, Biloba and Burtovitch were released and given the discharged certificates and deported by S. S.

¹⁰¹ Letter from the Commissioner of Police to the Chief secretary to the Government of Bengal , Political department dated 12th September 1919 & Telegram of the Political Department, Government of Bengal, dated 29th September 1919.

¹⁰² Letter from the Commissioner of police to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Political Department dated 11th August 1919; Letter to the superintendent, Alipore Central jail dated 19th September 1919.

¹⁰³ Letter from the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, No. 1262, dated the 12th September 1919.

¹⁰⁴ Letter from John Burtovich to the Secretary, Political Department, Government of Bengal dated 22nd July 1919.

Boveric¹⁰⁵. Burtovitch was detained at Singapore and placed on board the *S. S. Hop Sang*¹⁰⁶ which would pass through Penang and Singapore. Though Burtovitch was considered to be an undesirable person but he confessed that in order to get a job he might be allowed to remain there.¹⁰⁷ Even the Government of Burma was asked to send to Calcutta the names of the officers and men of Russian steam for shipment on board the *S. S. Teesta* which was expected to leave Calcutta on 31st May 1918. Arrangement for their accommodation in hotel was taken by the authorities concerned. Master of Russian vessel, Baikal had convinced the authorities at Basra that he had an impression in his mind that he would be shot if he was sent back to Russia.

- **Repatriation**
- The eighteen Russian Sailors ‘who elected to proceed to America is being treated in the same category as those who elected to return to Vladivostok’ in order to get an employment¹⁰⁸. The following action had been taken in connection with the repatriation of the

¹⁰⁵ Letter from Superintendent, Andrew Weir & Co to Marine Superintendent Office dated 7th august 1919.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from the Commissioner of Police to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal dated 16th September 1919 , Political Department Proceedings.

¹⁰⁷ Letter from the Inspector- General of Police, Straits Settlements, Singapore to the Commissioner of Police , dated 3rd September, Special Branch No. 565/19/5.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from F. A. Cowley , Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Commissioner of Police dated 5th May 1918, Marine Department (War Branch) West Bengal State Archives.

Russian Officers and Sailors. The Consul General for America stated that they were prohibited from granting permission subject to the approval of the American Government. "Consul General stipulated that if the Government of Bengal would support the applications of those Russian officers who desired to go to the United States by declaring that their going to the United States would not be inimical to allied interests and that the position in which the officers found themselves was due to no fault of their own." The government of Bengal were prepared to make the declaration in support of the applications of those Russian subjects in cases 'where there is reason to believe that a return to their own country would be attended with danger to themselves'. Of the 7 men who were ordered to be kept in the Sailor's Home until they could be signed on to a British or American ship in Calcutta, Crowley was permitted to leave and Klemchuk had not yet been traced. Of the remaining 5, Warna alone elected to remain in Calcutta and the Port officer had been asked to have him signed on to a British or American ship and ultimately Warna had been accommodated in the Sailors' Home at Government expense. The other 4 Captains and Officers who desired to go to America were shipped on the *S. S. SAINTHIA* for Hong Kong and they were allowed to proceed thence to America subject to their approval. The remaining 200 non-commissioned Russian officers were shipped on the *S. S. SAINTHIA* and given permits to Japan en-route to Vladivostok, but carried no arms. As regard the

repatriation of Russian officers and crews of requisitioned vessels Ural, Baikal and Edward Bary six officers seventeen crew granted permits for America pending visa of Consul General for America Hong Kong stop.

Revolutionary Russia: Situating Mikhail Bakunin and his Anarchist Ideas

Saptadeepa Banerjee

The passion for destruction is a creative passion too!

Mikhail Bakunin (*Reaction in Germany: From The Notebooks of a Gentleman*, 1842)

Introduction

The year 1917 is significant not only in the history of Russia but also in the realm of global politics as 1917 witnessed the establishment of the first Socialist government in the history of the world that eventually brought about a fundamental transformation in the nature of world politics in the post-World War I period. The Revolution of 1917 destroyed the edifice of the Tsarist regime seeking to create a new socio-political order that would eventually pave the way for the creation of a classless and stateless society. It is true that in order to create a new socio-political order there is a need to destroy the one that already exists but what if that new ‘order’ exercises authoritarianism in a form and context completely different from the previous one? Russian Anarchist thinker Mikhail Bakunin,¹⁰⁹ an inveterate champion

¹⁰⁹ Russian Anarchist Mikhail Bakunin was born in 1814 in the Bakunin family estate of *Premukhina* in the province of Tver in Russia. He is considered to have been the propounder of Collectivist Anarchism that gave a call for the destruction of established authoritarian institutions like the state, church and the bourgeois capitalist order, that according to him were essentially despotic in nature, at the onset of the social revolution to be conducted by the toiling masses (the industrial proletariat, the peasantry and the

of the ideals of individual and collective liberty and equality had hoped that Russia would one day free itself from the shackles of authoritarian rule and embody the principles of liberty and equality, basic rights that the human race is meant to be entitled to.¹¹⁰ This complete annihilation of the existing despotic regime/state structure would be the work of his ‘true people’, that is, the impoverished sections of the society – the working class, the peasantry and the *lumpenproletariat*¹¹¹ - led by the intellectual proletariat.¹¹²

In order to situate Bakunin and his Anarchism in the revolutionary tradition of Russia one needs to take into

lumpenproletariat). The revolution would lead to the creation of a free federation of units/communes constituted by the autonomous federated producers’ associations or groups of industrial workers and agricultural communities organised from the bottom-up in accordance with the principles of Collectivism and Federalism. The confiscated wealth of these institutions would be collectively owned by producers’ groups within the communes.

¹¹⁰ Bakunin’s revolutionary and Anarchist ideas were first encapsulated in his article *Reaction in Germany: From The Notebooks of a Gentleman* (1842). He was influenced by the revolutionary interpretation of the conservative Hegelian dictum, ‘That which is rational is real, and that which is real is rational’ in Berlin, Germany. It served as the basis of his ‘algebra of revolution’.

¹¹¹ These groups were the revolutionary forces that constituted the social base of Bakunin’s ‘social revolution’.

¹¹² Bakunin clearly defined the role that the ‘intellectual proletariat’ would play in the conduct of the ‘social revolution’ in his only major work in the Russian language, *Statism and Anarchy* written in the year 1873.

See Michael Shatz (trans. and ed.), *Michael Bakunin: Statism and Anarchy* (Cambridge University Press, 1990)

consideration the major shifts that took place in the historiography on Bakunin and his Anarchist thought over time. Historians writing in the 1930s¹¹³ were overwhelmingly preoccupied with the task of assessing Bakunin as an individual by highlighting the contradictions in his character and the extent to which such contradictions facilitate an understanding of this Russian rebel. Such engagement focused attention on the projection of Bakunin's image as an eccentric revolutionary rather than his Anarchist thought. Historiography in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s however, filled in the lacuna to a great extent. In the 1950s Bakunin's Anarchist ideas were primarily studied against the backdrop of Cold War politics.¹¹⁴ It was also a time when collections of Bakunin's writings were published in an attempt to project Bakunin as a 'libertarian Socialist' and Marx's 'great

¹¹³ Some important works of this period are: *The Romantic Exiles* by E.H. Carr (London: Serif, 2007, originally published in 1933), *A History of Russia* by the official historian of the Soviet Union E. Yaroslavsky (London: Lawrence and Wishart and Printed in the U.S.A.: Union of Labour Throughout, 1935), *Michael Bakunin* by E.H. Carr (New York: Vintage Books, 1937), *Apostles of Revolution* by Max Nomad (Boston: Little Brown, 1939)

¹¹⁴ An important collection of Bakunin's writings published in the 1950s that intended to bring to the fore the Collectivist and 'libertarian Socialist' ideas of Bakunin in the context of the Cold War is *Mikhail Bakunin: Marxism, Freedom and the State*, trans. and ed. by K.J. Kenafick. Through this collection of documents Bakunin was projected as a champion of 'libertarian Socialism' as opposed to the 'authoritarian Socialism' of Karl Marx.

Isaiah Berlin's study of Bakunin and his ideas is however a serious exception to the general historiographical trend in this period. Berlin refused to accord the status of an 'original thinker' to Bakunin. See Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers* (Penguin Books, 2008)

historical enemy' in the context of Socialist developments in this period.¹¹⁵ However, ideological connections between Bakunin's Anarchism and Leninism were also traced in the process of treating Bakunin as a predecessor of Bolshevism.¹¹⁶

An eminent historian of 'Populist and Socialist Movements' in Russia, Franco Venturi made a significant intervention in the study of Bakunin and his political thought in the context of the revolutionary movements that took off in Russia in the late nineteenth century.¹¹⁷ A study of Bakunin as a forerunner of Populism¹¹⁸ marked a sharp break with the earlier historiographical tradition on Bakunin. For Venturi, the Populist Movement of Russia was 'a page in the history of the European Socialist Movement'.¹¹⁹ Researching on this theme at the Lenin Library in Moscow between 1947 and 1950, Venturi tried to study the characters of the revolutionary movements and the development of their ideas in the broader political context in which they operated. This in turn

¹¹⁵ Another useful collection of Bakunin's writings published in this period is *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin: Scientific Anarchism* edited by G.P. Maximov (Glencoe III: The Freedom Press, 1953)

¹¹⁶ Eugene Pyziur, *The Doctrine of Anarchism of Michael A. Bakunin* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1955)

¹¹⁷ Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution* (New York: Universal Library Edition, Grosset & Dunlap, 1966)

¹¹⁸ Another historian who examined the ideological affinities between Russian Populism and Bakunin's Anarchism is Andrzej Walicki. See Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought: From The Enlightenment to Marxism* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1979), pp. 118-121, 268-28.

¹¹⁹ See Franco Venturi, "Russian Populism" in *Studies in Free Russia* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), p. 220. See also Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, op.cit., pp. 36-62, 429-445.

necessitated an examination of their relationship with the 'political powers'.¹²⁰ In conducting his research, Venturi observed a bizarre 'silence' in the Soviet Union with regard to the study of the revolutionary movements in Russia in this period and the revolutionaries who led those movements. According to Venturi, this strange relationship was a ramification of Stalinist rule in Russia as in that period 'socialism was being constructed' and in the process a sharp distinction between 'revolutionary democrats' like Herzen, Chernychevskii, Belinskii and Dobrolyubov and 'bad' revolutionaries like Bakunin, Lavrov, Mikhailovskii and other members of the *Narodnaya Volya* or the *People's Will* was made.¹²¹ Stalin feared that the dissemination of Bakuninist ideas that are supposed to have influenced members of the *Narodnaya Volya* would threaten the stability of the Soviet regime. In the words of Venturi, 'In this vast historical novel, the characters of the 1860s were heroes, those of the 1870s the anti-heroes'.¹²² This Stalinist policy of not viewing the revolutionary movement as a 'whole' was in sharp contrast to that of the Leninist government that often moulded the image

¹²⁰ See Michael Confino, "Franco Venturi's Russia" in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 11, 1 (Winter, 2010), p. 105.

¹²¹ Venturi, "Russian Populism", op. cit., p. 218.

The revolutionary organisation *Zemlya I Volya* (*Land and Freedom*) split into the *Narodnaya Volya* (*People's Will*) that advocated terrorism, political struggle against the autocracy and decided to attack the Tzar directly and the *Cherny Peredel* (*Black Repartition*) that continued the work among peasants in the countryside. The assassination of Tzar Alexander II was the work of the *Narodnaya Volya*.

¹²² See Venturi, "Russian Populism", op. cit., p. 218.

of a radical revolutionary like Bakunin that catered to their political needs.

The 1960s and 1970s constituted an important period that witnessed a shift from the preoccupation of assessing Bakunin as a person to considering him as a political thinker.¹²³ In the 1970s, translated and edited volumes of Bakunin's works were published that directed scholarly attention towards the Anarchist thought of Bakunin and his ideological conflict with Marx over the nature of Socialism against the backdrop of the developments that were taking place in a world split into two camps in the Cold War period. The constructive elements in his Anarchist/Collectivist and Federalist thought were highlighted by focusing on the ideological affinities between Bakunin's Anarchism and the two distinct currents of Anarchism – Anarcho-Communism and Anarcho-Syndicalism.¹²⁴ Bakuninism as a distinct phenomenon in the Anarchist movements of the United States of America, Italy, Spain and Japan was also studied in order to underscore Bakuninist influence on the revolutionary working class movements in these countries primarily in the

¹²³ An important collection of Bakunin's writings on Anarchism published in 1971 is *Bakunin on Anarchy* by Sam Dolgoff. Attention was drawn to Bakunin's anticipation of the creation of a 'Technocracy' or 'modern commissarocracy' or a 'scientific-political ruling class' when he critiqued the Marxist dictum of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.

See also Arthur Lehning (ed.), *Michael Bakunin: Selected Writings* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), Anthony Masters, *Bakunin: The Father of Anarchism* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1974)

¹²⁴ See Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967)

See also Paul Avrich, "The Legacy of Bakunin" in *Russian Review*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Apr., 1970)

late nineteenth century.¹²⁵ In the 2000s, attention was drawn to the ideological parallels between Anarchism and Bolshevism to underscore the inherent contradictions within the Bolshevik ideology. In this regard it is important to note the varied perceptions about Bakunin generated in Bolshevik Russia as Bakunin for the Bolsheviks was in the post-revolutionary period merely a Romantic rebel whose political thought was scrapped off its Anarchist elements, primarily anti-Statism, to suit the needs of Soviet Russia.¹²⁶ In the context of the Russian experience of 1917, the Marx-Bakunin polemical conflict assumed immense importance as Bakuninist interpretation of Marxist ideology that called for the establishment of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ provided an explanation for the developments that took place in the new regime of the proletariat.

As this paper seeks to locate Bakunin and his ideas in the context of revolutionary movements in Russia that reached a climax with the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks (who adhered to the Marxist ideology) in 1917 and the establishment of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ it is useful to take a look at the ideological debate that took off between

¹²⁵ See Paul Avrich, “Bakunin and the United States”

(<https://libcom.org/files/BAKUNIN%20AND%20THE%20UNITE%20STATES.pdf>)

See also T. Ravindranathan, “Bakunin in Naples: An Assessment” in the *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Jun., 1981), Philip Billingsley, “Bakunin in Yokohama: The Dawning of the Pacific Era” in *The International History Review*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Sep., 1998)

¹²⁶ See James Frank Goodwin, “Russian Anarchism and the Bolshevization of Bakunin in the Early Soviet Period” in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 8, 3 (Summer, 2007)

Marx and Bakunin within the First International pertaining to revolutionary methods and objectives.

Looking through the eyes of Bakunin: Bakunin's critique of Marxist ideas and the context of the ideological conflict with Marx in the First International Workingmen's Association

The First International Workingmen's Association served as the forum where ideas pertaining to the tactics of the international working class movement were being conceived of and developed in the nineteenth century.¹²⁷ Bakunin became engaged with the First International and working class issues in July, 1868¹²⁸ where he got involved in an ideological conflict with Marx with regard to the method, strategy and social base of the revolution.¹²⁹ The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 that brought to the fore certain crucial tenets of Marxism with regard to the conduct of a 'proletarian revolution' necessitates a closer examination of the ideological conflict that ensued between Marx and Bakunin in the context of the international working class movement that was being conducted through the First International from 1864 onwards.

¹²⁷ The First International Workingmen's Association was founded on 28th September, 1864. It was an international forum where workingmen from across the world assembled in order to discuss and find solutions to working class problems that resulted from the Industrial Revolution.

¹²⁸ Prior to this, Bakunin had participated in the League of Peace and Freedom that had been constituted in 1867 to discuss peace in a period of political turmoil.

¹²⁹ Bakunin met Karl Marx in Paris, France in 1847. Karl Marx according to Bakunin, propounded the 'authoritarian' brand of Socialism. Bakunin's association with Marx is considered important in the context of the development of his Anarchist doctrine.

Bakunin was opposed to the centralising tendencies of Marx manifest in his advocacy of the creation of a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in the process of establishment of Socialism.¹³⁰ The ideological conflict primarily centred on the concept of 'state' that both Bakunin and Marx understood and defined differently. For Bakunin, the institution of the 'state' needed to be demolished at the beginning of the 'social revolution' for it symbolised tyranny, oppression and functioned as a tool for the exploitation of the masses. Critiquing the emphasis that Bakunin laid on the abolition of the 'state', Marx and Frederick Engels stated that the abolition of state was in itself an 'authoritarian act'. This state that perpetuated tyranny and oppression of its people was according to them essentially abstract in nature. Drawing a clear line of distinction between a proletarian 'social' and 'political' revolution, Bakunin underscored that it was crucial for the working class to achieve their 'economic emancipation' from the autocracy and the bourgeois capitalist order. Bakunin bore a deep hatred for 'state communism' or State Socialism or a 'Free People's State'. For Bakunin, 'modern communism' was a clear manifestation of the 'authoritarian communism'¹³¹ of Marx or State Socialism that involved employment of labour by the State.¹³²

The other fundamental aspect of a Marxist 'proletarian revolution' that Bakunin objected to was the 'conquest of power' by the proletariat, that is, by the industrial

¹³⁰The ideological conflict between Marx and Bakunin brings to the fore the differences between the 'libertarian' and 'authoritarian' brands of Socialism.

¹³¹ Bakunin considered Marxist ideology to be an 'authoritarian' variant of Communism.

¹³² Mikhail Bakunin, "Letters to a Frenchman on the Present Crisis" in Dolgoff, op. cit., p. 217.

working class in the post-revolutionary period. Bakunin emphasised that the objective of a ‘proletarian revolution’ was not to be the gain of some political rights from the ruling authorities but to ensure the ‘economic emancipation’ of the working classes that was to be achieved through common economic demands. ‘Economic emancipation’ and not the need to formulate a common political programme should be the driving force of the ‘social revolution’. Responding to this criticism leveled against him, Marx stated that ‘economic emancipation’ of the working class without its ‘political emancipation’ would be meaningless. The working class would have to wield political control in the transitory phase of the revolution, constitute itself into a ‘political party’ and establish the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’.¹³³ Bakunin emphatically stated that the consequences of the ‘conquest of power’ by the proletariat would be grave as the proletariat would in the process be transformed into a ‘new aristocracy that of the urban and industrial workers’.¹³⁴ This new ruling class would eventually exercise centralised dictatorial control over the peasantry; a social class that Bakunin felt Marx had not paid much attention to. ‘Class, power and State’, according to Bakunin were the instruments used for ‘the political subjugation of and economic exploitation of the masses’.¹³⁵ Thus Bakunin stated that Marx’s advocacy of the ‘conquest of power’ by the proletariat laid the foundations for

¹³³ See Marx, Engels, Lenin, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism* (New York: International Publishers, 1972)

¹³⁴ Mikhail Bakunin, “A Letter to the Editorial Board of *La Liberte*” (1872) in Arthur Lehning (ed.), op.cit.,pp. 253-254.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 254.

the creation of a ‘Peoples’ State’ or *Volkstaat*¹³⁶ that would lead to the ‘rule of the new society by social savants’.¹³⁷

Having discussed the ideological conflict between Bakunin and Marx within the First International briefly, attention needs to be directed to the reception of Bakunin and his Anarchist ideas in Russia to situate him in the context of revolutionary movements that gained momentum in Russia from the 1860s onwards. Some of the issues of the Marx-Bakunin polemical conflict that resurfaced in the revolutionary discourse of Russia in the early decades of the twentieth century will be dealt with in a subsequent section.

Situating Bakunin in Revolutionary Russia: Bakunin’s message to the Russian revolutionaries and dissemination of his Anarchist ideas in Russia in the 1860s and 1870s

Significant developments in the social, political and economic life of Imperial Russia took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. These developments were largely the ramifications of Tzar Alexander II’s attempt to initiate the ‘Great Reforms’¹³⁸ in the 1860s in order to deal with the military and economic crisis coupled with a loss of confidence

¹³⁶ *Volkstaat* or People’s State is a government formed by the working class by the principle of universal suffrage.

¹³⁷ See Mikhail Bakunin, “The International and Karl Marx” in Dolgoff, op. cit., p. 292.

¹³⁸ The Great Reforms of Tzar Alexander II included the abolition of serfdom (1861), the reform of the local government (1864), reform of the judiciary (1864), the municipal reforms (1870), reform of the military (1874)

See N.A. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia* (Oxford University Press, 2000) for details.

in the Tzar that the debacle in the Crimean War had led to.¹³⁹ The insufficient reforms of the Tzar, however, led a group of disaffected educated youth imbued with liberal ideas to question as to why Russia had not transformed into a more liberal state.¹⁴⁰ This educated youth became increasingly critical of the despotic state structure of Russia and the failure of the Reforms stimulated their urge to topple the existing system. Radicalism was the most important factor that the Russian state had to reckon with in the 1860s and 70s. The Nihilist and Populist movements of the 1860s and 70s that drew substantial ideological sustenance from Bakunin's Anarchist ideas were a radical response to the Tzar's insufficient reforms. The Russian intelligentsia that gave a call for the complete destruction of the Tsarist regime and emphasised the need to achieve individual freedom was considerably influenced by Bakunin's Anarchism that stressed on the need to abolish the state in order to win liberty for the

¹³⁹ The debacle exposed the military and economic backwardness of Imperial Russia. Serfdom had become a serious impediment to the economic development of Russia in the nineteenth century as the state and the land-owning class could not favourably respond to the economic changes that the growth of a market economy in the first half of the nineteenth century had resulted in. The miserable condition of the serfs as a result of excessive exploitation was depicted even in the works of eminent Russian writers like Alexander Pushkin and Ivan Turgenev (*Sportsman's Sketches*)

¹⁴⁰ This educated youth was left dissatisfied with the "limits" of the Great Reforms.

For a detailed account of the emergence of the middle class in Russia see Edith W. Clowes, Samuel D. Kassow and James L. West (eds.), *Between Tzar And People: Educated Society And The Quest For Public Identity In Late Imperial Russia* (Princeton University Press, 1991), chapters 1-3.

oppressed people. Bakunin's revolutionary doctrine also found resonance in the revolutionary language of the Populist or the 'go to the people' (*Narodnik*) movement of the 1870s that directed attention towards the peasant commune or the *Mir* as the breeding ground for Socialism in Russia.¹⁴¹ Bakunin's implicit faith in the instinctive revolutionary potential of the peasantry was in sharp contrast to that of Marx's in the politically conscious industrial proletariat.

Bakunin's pre-occupation with the international working class movement in Europe did not turn his attention away from Russian problems and the general revolutionary situation that prevailed in Russia in the 1860s and 1870s. Bakunin critiqued the Emancipation Edict issued by Tsar Alexander II in 1861 stating that in reality it had not liberated the peasantry from the control of the landed gentry.¹⁴² Bakunin drew attention of the First International to the repressive policies of the Tsar, in particular to the 'unforeseen closing of universities, academies, and other State schools, the arrest of a large number of students in St. Petersburg and Moscow, in Kazan and other Russian provinces' and even critiqued Tsarist policies in Poland.¹⁴³

Bakunin's ideas steadily infiltrated into Russia largely through the efforts of the Russian émigré students who gathered around Bakunin in Switzerland. The repressive policies of Tsar Alexander II in the 1860s compelled many Russian students to flee from Russia and many of them settled

¹⁴¹ For "fundamental and inter-related assumptions" of the Populists see Derek Offord, *The Russian Revolutionary Movement in the 1880s* (Cambridge University Press, 1986)

¹⁴² See Mikhail Bakunin, "On Russia" in Robert Cutler (trans. and ed.), *The Basic Bakunin: Writings 1869-1871* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1992), p. 157.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

down in Zurich where they formed a students' colony. Bakunin relentlessly sought to exercise his influence over the Russian revolutionaries by coming in close contact with the Russian émigrés in Switzerland.¹⁴⁴ According to Franco Venturi, 'It was through these students that his ideas reached Russia where they then played a large part in bringing about the atmosphere which led to the movement 'to go to the people' and the second *Zemlya I Volya*'.¹⁴⁵ Venturi stated that Bakunin was able to ignite only 'a revolutionary spirit'¹⁴⁶ among the Russian revolutionaries. His ideas, however, did not contribute effectively to the founding of any revolutionary organisation in Russia.¹⁴⁷

The revolutionary situation in Russia in the 1860s and 1870s instilled hope in Bakunin that a significant transformation in the socio-economic and political condition

¹⁴⁴ Some of the Russian émigrés who were heavily influenced by Bakunin's ideas were A. Trusov, N. Zhukovsky, N. Utin, N. Elpidin, A. Serno-Solovevich. They joined the International Brotherhood of Bakunin in 1868 that had come into being in Italy in 1866. Some of his other Russian associates who arrived in Switzerland between 1869 and 1872 were students of the University of Moscow V. Golsteyn, A. Elsnits (expelled in 1869), M.P. Sazhin and Z.K. Ralli (associates of Sergei Nechaev), Feofan Nikaronovich Lermontov who participated in the 'go to the people movement' in Russia, Sergey Filippovich Kovalik and Vladimir Karpovich Debagory-Mokrievich. These new Russian émigrés were members of Bakunin's organisation *Russian Brotherhood* that was established in March, 1872.

¹⁴⁵ Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, op. cit., p. 429.

The second *Zemlya I Volya* (*Land and Freedom*) was formed in 1876 in St. Petersburg.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 430.

in Russia could be brought about. His journalistic contribution to the *Narodnoye Delo*¹⁴⁸ (The People's Cause) facilitated the dissemination of some of his core ideas that he put forward between 1868 and 1870 such as 'atheism, the repudiation of any State power, the fight against the bourgeoisie, campaign against 'the authoritarian communism of Marx and the entire German school' and a fight 'against collectivism introduced from above through any revolutionary committee, any central and official authority'.¹⁴⁹ Bakunin underscored that every nation had its distinct course of socio-political and economic development and thus social revolution in different nations would be conducted in different ways though the objectives of the revolution would be the same. 'Particular situations and particular historical precedents'¹⁵⁰ were important factors that determined the nature of social revolution in different countries. Russia in this regard would chart out its own way to establish Socialism even though its revolutionary objectives were not different from that of the proletarian movement of the west. Bakunin believed that the people of Russia could be incited into rebellion as revolutionary instincts were inherent in them.

Bakunin's message to the positivist and materialist Nihilists of the 1860s was to plunge into revolutionary action rather than just being pre-occupied with the pursuit of scientific study. Bakunin stressed that the revolutionaries should not alienate themselves from the masses as the problems specific to Russia could be understood by a closer

¹⁴⁸*Narodnoye Delo* was a periodical that was started by Bakunin and his associates in Zurich in 1868. Bakunin had contributed only to the first issue of the periodical and later it was controlled and run by N. Utin.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 434.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

association with them. He formulated a revolutionary programme for Russia that aimed at transferring land to the tillers of soil, complete annihilation of the institution of state, formation of a 'future political organisation made up exclusively of a free federation of free workmen's *artels*, agricultural, industrial and craftsmen'.¹⁵¹ In his book *Statism and Anarchy* (1873) Bakunin emphatically stated that the conditions required for the organisation of a social revolution were present in Russia.¹⁵² The grinding poverty and enslavement of the Russians and the large number of impoverished people in Russia were two such 'necessary preconditions for social revolution'.¹⁵³ People in Russia believed that land belonged to the one who cultivated it, land is collectively owned by the *mir* or the peasant commune and that the *mir* was representative of 'quasi-absolute autonomy and self-government of the commune'.¹⁵⁴ However, the conservatism of the people that resulted from their belief in 'patriarchalism' and their 'faith in the Tzar' and 'the swallowing up of the individual by *mir*' were serious impediments to the growth of the revolutionary fervour of the peasantry. Bakunin glorified banditry in Russia and repeatedly referred to the legacies of Stenka Razin (1630-1671) and Pugachev (1742-1775) in leading peasant uprisings in Russia. Bakunin vociferously stated that the religious faith of the people in Russia could be uprooted only through a social revolution and not through scientific propaganda. In this regard he assigned a crucial role to the 'intellectual

¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 433.

See also Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, op. cit., p. 201.

¹⁵²Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, op. cit., pp. 198-217.

See also Michael Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy* in Dolgoff, op. cit., pp. 323-350.

¹⁵³Shatz, op. cit., p. 203.

¹⁵⁴Shatz, op. cit., pp. 205-206.

proletariat' who according to him should 'go to the people' in order to bridge the gulf between the educated radical youth and the peasantry.

In the 1870s revolutionary groups were heavily influenced by Bakunin's ideas. Bakunin's ideas left a deep impact on the students in St. Petersburg who grouped into the *Chaykovstsy* circle. Not only did the *Chaykovstsy* circle take part in the 'go to the people' movement but it also conducted 'propaganda' work among the industrial workers of St. Petersburg.¹⁵⁵ The followers of Bakuninism in Russia called the *buntari* resorted to violence at the end of the 1870s. Derek Offord has pointed out that the second *Zemlya I Volya* adopted some of the ideas of Bakunin that determined the course of its revolutionary action. The organisation heavily relied on the inherent socialist character of the people of Russia and based its activities on the 'ideals of the people'.¹⁵⁶ The 'Pan-Russian Social-Revolutionary Organisation' or the 'Muscovites' drew ideological sustenance from Bakunin and according to Venturi, 'was the first to try and bring the ideas of his international anarchism to the workers of Moscow'.¹⁵⁷

The Russian Populists proposed an alternate way to Socialism by emphasising that it was possible to transform Russia into a Socialist country even without the penetration of capitalism into its economy. It was thus in sharp contrast to the Marxist way to social revolution that necessitated the transformation of the feudal economy into a capitalist economy witnessing the emergence of the capitalist and the proletarian classes and the eventual class struggle between the two. The failure of the Populist movement of the 1870s and the subsequent split in the second *Land and Freedom*

¹⁵⁵ See Offord, op. cit., pp. 16-17.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁵⁷ See Venturi, op. cit., p. 438.

organisation into the *Black Repartition* formed by Georgi Plekhanov and the *People's Will*, the latter advocating terrorism, made a certain section of the radical intelligentsia look for an alternative to organise a social revolution directed against the autocracy. This split within the ranks of the Russian Populists was representative of the differences of opinion among the intelligentsia. While one section of the radical intelligentsia thought it appropriate to continue 'peaceful propaganda and cultural work' among the peasants in the countryside, the other section thought it expedient for the revolutionary intelligentsia to lead the masses in the movement and assume dictatorial control over them. The inability of the Populists to incite the peasantry into revolutionary action frustrated their attempts at creating a revolutionary situation in the countryside and compelled a certain section to resort to terrorist activities.¹⁵⁸ The terrorist activities of the revolutionaries who belonged to the *People's Will* eventually resulted in the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881.

Social-Democracy in Russia

The 1880s and 1890s constituted a period that witnessed the growth of Social-Democracy ultimately culminating in the foundation of the Second International in 1889. The international working class movement was organised and directed by the Social-Democrats who sought to achieve the emancipation of the working class through an evolutionary process that involved political struggle with the state and wresting control from it. It was also a time when the working class movement across the world was being organised along the tactics of Social-Democratic parties. Social-Democratic ideas also penetrated into Russia in the

¹⁵⁸ See Richard Wortman, *The Crisis of Russian Populism* (Cambridge University Press, 1967)

1880s when Populism was still the dominant ideology.¹⁵⁹ The favourable reception of Social-Democratic ideas in Russia was essentially an outcome of the failure of the Populist movement to achieve its revolutionary objective in the 1870s and 1880s. *The Liberation of Labour* was the first major Social-Democratic group of Russia formed in Geneva by Russian émigrés like Georgi Plekhanov, Paul Axelrod and Vera Zasulich that drew attention to Marxism as a plausible alternative to the Populist ideology in Russia.¹⁶⁰ Derek Offord has noted that, ‘The first revolutionaries seriously to examine the possibility of applying Western Social Democratic theory to Russian conditions were émigré Populists, whose dwindling hope that revolution might be carried out from below was undoubtedly revived by the emphasis placed in that theory on the revolutionary potential of the urban masses’.¹⁶¹ The 1890s constituted a period that witnessed the relentless attempts made by the Social-Democrats to mobilise the Russian proletariat through propaganda and agitation.¹⁶² While Marxist ideas had made their way into late Imperial Russia, Russian Populism as an intellectual current at the

¹⁵⁹ For a history of Social Democracy in Russia see J.H.L. Keep, *The Rise Of Social Democracy In Russia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) and Derek Offord, op. cit.

¹⁶⁰ In 1888 *The Liberation of Labour* group was merged with the *League of Russian Social Democrats*. The printing organs of the *League of Russian Social Democrats* group were *Rabotnik* (‘The Worker’) and *Rabocheye Delo* (‘The Workers’ Cause’) edited by B.N. Krichevsky and P.F. Telov. Plekhanov later withdrew from the league to form ‘The Revolutionary Organisation “Social Democrat”’ in 1900.

¹⁶¹ Offord, op. cit., p. 117.

¹⁶² The Social Democratic Party came into being in Russia in 1898.

beginning of the twentieth century was provided a coherent ideological basis by V.M. Chernov¹⁶³ who blended the ideals of Populism with that of Marxism.

Engagement of Russian Marxists with Bakunin's Anarchism: Relevance of Marx-Bakunin ideological conflict in the Russian context

Polemical conflict between Marx and Bakunin resurfaced in the writings of Georgi Plekhanov, the Father of Russian Marxism, in 1895 when social-democratic ideas had already made their way into Russia.¹⁶⁴ Plekhanov had participated in the Populist Movement of the 1870s and was forced to emigrate to Geneva where he founded *The Emancipation of Labour Group* in 1883 with some of his other associates. What needs to be noted here is that Bakunin and his Collectivist Anarchist ideas continued to occupy an important place in Marxist discourse at this juncture when attempts were being made to clearly underscore the distinctions between Anarchism and Marxism.¹⁶⁵ It thus necessitated a re-examination of the Marx-Bakunin ideological conflict with a focus once again on the concept of

¹⁶³ V.M. Chernov was the editor of the newspaper *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya* ('Revolutionary Russia'). While he had an implicit faith in the revolutionary potential of the peasantry, he incorporated the Marxist concept of class struggle in the ideology of Populism to define the position of the peasantry and the industrial working class in Russia vis-à-vis the bourgeois capitalist class.

¹⁶⁴ See Georgi Plekhanov, "Anarchism and Socialism" (1895) (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/plekhanov/1895/anarch/>)

¹⁶⁵ Plekhanov identified Bakunin as the 'inventor of Collectivist Anarchism'.

‘state’ and the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ in revolutionary discourse.

The architect of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Vladimir Lenin, also had to reckon with Anarchism as a potent ideological force in the second half of the nineteenth century when he authored his “Anarchism and Socialism”.¹⁶⁶ Lenin made a trenchant critique of Proudhon’s and Bakunin’s federalist ideas and snubbed them as ‘petty bourgeois views of Anarchism’ that called for the creation of federated communes catering to the interests of the petty bourgeoisie instead of the industrial proletariat. Lenin insisted that even if the economy was decentralised and organised into a federation of communes, it was important for the proletariat to first seize control of the economy from the state after its destruction. In this regard, Lenin emphasised that the proletariat would play a leading role in the transfer of the ownership of wealth or property and the means of production from the state to the federated communes as underlined in both Anarchism and Bolshevism. With regard to the question of the ‘state’, Lenin emerged as a vociferous champion of the ‘proletarian state’ in the transitional phase of the proletarian revolution. The issues of abstention of the proletariat from politics and conquest of power resurfaced once again in the debates between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks in the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party that centred on the ‘question of the participation of the Social-Democrats in a Provisional Revolutionary Government’.¹⁶⁷ With regard to

¹⁶⁶ See V.I. Lenin, “Anarchism and Socialism” (Written in 1901; First published in 1936 in the magazine *Proletarskaya Revolutsia*, No. 7; V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, pp. 327-28) in Marx, Engels, Lenin, op. cit.

¹⁶⁷See V.I. Lenin, “From On The Provisional Revolutionary Government”, Article Two “Only From Below Or From Above As

the need to establish the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, which he called a state, in the transitional state of the proletarian revolution that would eventually create a classless and stateless society,¹⁶⁸ Lenin wrote:

And yet it would be extremely stupid and absurdly utopian to assume that the transition from capitalism to socialism is possible without coercion and without dictatorship. Marx’s theory very definitely opposed this petty-bourgeois democratic and anarchist absurdity long ago. And Russia in 1917-18 confirms the correctness of Marx’s theory in this respect so strikingly, palpably and imposingly that only those who have obstinately decided to turn their back on the truth can be under any misapprehension concerning this.¹⁶⁹ (emphases are mine)

This was written in post-1917 when the Bolsheviks had already come to power and had established the Soviet

Well As From Below?” (Published on June 3 and 9, (May 21 and 27), 1905 in *Proletary*, Nos. 2 and 3, V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 8, pp. 474-81) in Marx, Engels, Lenin op. cit.

¹⁶⁸ See V.I. Lenin, “From A Review The Youth International” (Published in *Sbornik Sotsial-Demokrata* No. 2, December 1916, Signed N. Lenin, V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, pp. 165-166) in Marx, Engels, Lenin, op. cit., p. 260.

See also Lenin, “Letters From Afar” (Written on March 11 (24) 1917, First published in the magazine *The Communist International* Nos. 3-4, 1924, V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, pp. 324-326) in Marx, Engels, Lenin, op. cit., p. 261.

¹⁶⁹See V.I. Lenin, “The Immediate Tasks Of The Soviet Government” (Written between April 13 and 26, 1918, Published on April 28, 1918 in *Pravda* No. 83 and in Supplement to *Izvestia VTSiK* No. 85, Signed N. Lenin, V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 27, pp. 263-266) in Marx, Engels, Lenin, op. cit., p. 289.

government – a practical application of the Marxist dictum – ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’. Lenin stated:

*We do not at all differ with the anarchists on the question of the abolition of the state as the aim. We maintain that, to achieve this aim, we must temporarily make use of the instruments, resources and methods of state power against the exploiters, just as the **temporary dictatorship of the oppressed class** is necessary for the abolition of classes.*¹⁷⁰
(emphasis is mine)

Lenin’s declaration is indicative of the resurface of the main issues of Marx-Bakunin conflict within the First International. Lenin provided a justification for the establishment of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ and in the process underscored the essential differences between the theoretical underpinnings of Anarchism and Marxism. This declaration was probably a reinforcement of the Marxist revolutionary idea that this proletarian dictatorship was a necessary pre-condition for the eventual withering away of the state. Theoretical justification for the establishment of Bolshevik rule in Russia was coupled with attempts made to Bolshevise Bakunin on the one hand and to project his image in a negative manner on the other in order to tarnish his legacy in revolutionary Russia. A study of the reception of Bakunin in Bolshevik Russia will be done through a close examination of James Frank Goodwin’s work and his arguments pertaining

¹⁷⁰See V.I. Lenin, “From The State And Revolution: The Marxist Theory Of The State And The Tasks Of Proletariat In The Revolution” (Written in August-September, 1917; Section 3 of Chapter II earlier than December 1918; Published as a book in Petrograd by Zhizn i Znaniye Publishers; V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, pp. 422-488 passim) in Marx, Engels, Lenin, op. cit., p. 273.

to the subject with special reference to Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *Devils*.

A Bolshevised Bakunin

A new dimension to the study of Bakunin and the reception of his ideas in Bolshevik Russia was added by James Frank Goodwin who drew attention to the reception of Bakunin and his ideas during the Bolshevik Revolution and later.¹⁷¹ He clearly brought out the crafty manner in which Bakunin's legacy was utilised by the Bolsheviks during the revolution of 1917 and in the post - 1917 period, at first to successfully bring about the revolution and then to consolidate their rule. The Bolsheviks during the course of the revolution depicted Bakunin as a Romantic revolutionary who sought to destroy the existing state apparatus that symbolised tyranny and create a new socio-political order, hence Bakunin for the Bolsheviks became a 'forerunner of the Russian Revolution'. This enabled the Bolsheviks to justify the revolution of 1917 by romanticising it. However Bakunin's Anarchism that called for the destruction of every form of dictatorship was incompatible with the totalitarian spirit of the Bolshevik state that established a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.

James Goodwin traced the ways in which the Bolshevik state repression arrested the Anarchist movement immediately following the revolution that challenged the authoritarianism of the Soviet state but eventually failed to gag the 'Voice of Labour' (*Golos Truda*), the medium of Anarchist propaganda. He highlighted the steps taken by the Soviet authorities to cast Bakunin into the Bolshevik mould to suit the purpose of the newly formed Soviet state especially in the context of the literature produced by the Bolsheviks on the occasion of the fifty year jubilee of Bakunin in which he was projected as a revolutionary who advocated dictatorship and

¹⁷¹ Goodwin, op. cit., pp. 533-60.

not an Anarchist who advocated anti-Statism. The Anarchists on the other hand were persistent in their projection of Bakunin as the ‘perfect incarnation’ of the ‘anarchist world view’.¹⁷²

Bakunin as Dostoevsky’s Devil?

James Goodwin undertook a study of the ‘Debate Over Bakunin and Dostoevsky’ that was generated in ‘early Soviet Russia.’¹⁷³ This debate centred on the argument put forward by Leonid Grossman, a specialist in literature, that Dostoevsky’s fictional character Nikolai Stavrogin in his novel *Devils* or *Demons* was essentially a ‘caricature’ of Mikhail Bakunin. Grossman emphasised that Dostoevsky voiced his views against ‘revolution’ in Russia through the novel. Goodwin sought to contextualise Fyodor Dostoevsky’s novel in order to gain a better understanding of the origins of the debate and the nature of the controversies that the debate gave rise to. He argued that the Bolshevik Revolution followed by the Civil War that engulfed the country played an important role in the manner in which Grossman’s arguments were received and perceived in the Soviet Union. A discussion of the plot of the novel would be useful in understanding the context of the debate.

Dostoevsky’s *Devils* authored between 1871 and 1872 transports the reader to an immensely radical phase in the history of revolutionary movements in Russia in the 1860s.¹⁷⁴ Nihilism was a radical revolutionary movement of the 1860s

¹⁷²Ibid., p. 551.

¹⁷³ Diss., James Goodwin, ‘The Debate over Bakunin and Dostoevsky in early Soviet Russia’(University of Southern California, 2001) (Pro Quest Dissertations and Theses; PQDT)

¹⁷⁴ See Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Devils* (Wordsworth Classics, 2005)

led by revolutionaries who believed in 'Realism' or 'Critical Realism' unlike the intellectuals of the early nineteenth century who believed in Idealism and tried to escape from the reality of Russia. The radical youth of the 1860s judged everything by the yardstick of utility. 'Nihilism' or 'Critical Realism' stood for the negation of the existing socio-political order and a critical evaluation of the values and beliefs that had so long been an integral part of the lives of Russians. 'Nihilism' rested on the belief that a fundamental change in the socio-political structure of Russia had to be brought about through a revolution. Revolutionary action and not philosophical discussions would pave the way for effecting change in Russia. Nihilism called for the complete annihilation of the institution of state that symbolised tyranny and the establishment of individual freedom.

Dostoevsky's *Devils* is a story that involves a critique of the Nihilists, the radical Russian revolutionaries of the 1860s who undermined the existing value system and sought to replace it with a radically different set of ideas that justified the demolition of the state. Dostoevsky projected the Nihilists as Devils who were unbelievers in lofty ideals and resorted to indiscriminate violence in order to achieve their immediate revolutionary goals. Dostoevsky's Devils did not hesitate to engage in immoral activities as the 'end' and not the 'means' of achieving the 'end' was of primary importance to them. They were conspirators whose personal ambitions and motives rather than their urge to achieve any revolutionary objective directed their activities. This inability of his Devils to forge a coherent constructive programme of revolutionary action often made them go astray. A.D.P. Briggs in his introduction to Dostoevsky's *Devils* wrote:

The first aim of Devils was to launch an attack on a new political attitude which was gathering popularity with the younger generation, so radical in its tendencies that there was talk of revolution and anarchy.....Even as he contemplated the current

*political scene a real-life scenario was enacted that contained all the elements he needed to attack the young radicals.*¹⁷⁵

In the novel, the leader of the Nihilists, Pyotr Stepanovich Verhovensky along with his associates hatched a conspiracy to murder a fellow member of their secret society who had decided to distance himself from it. Fearing that he would divulge some of the secrets of the revolutionary society to the governing authorities, the Nihilists led by Pyotr Stepanovich decided to kill him. It is said that the character of Pyotr Stepanovich was modeled on Sergei Nechaev, a Russian revolutionary who was also associated with Bakunin. Famous in history as a notorious revolutionary, Nechaev's association with Bakunin has often led historians to distort the image of the latter as a revolutionary who propagated indiscriminate violence against institutions and individuals.¹⁷⁶ It has been argued that Dostoevsky brought to the fore this immoral alliance between Bakunin and Nechaev through the friendship that was struck between Pyotr Stepanovich and Nikolai Stavrogin. Nikolai Stavrogin was Dostoevsky's Devil, a Nihilist by faith who was associated with Pyotr Stepanovich but was not directly involved in the criminal activities of the latter. Briggs noted that Stavrogin appears to the reader as a:

...young nobleman who certainly deserves the title of 'great sinner'. Totally amoral and unspiritual, he has been wading listlessly through a life of debauchery, brawling and crime in Moscow and abroad, deriving no pleasure from anything.....Complex, contradictory, clear - thinking yet partly insane, he is square peg in

¹⁷⁵ See A.D.P. Briggs, "Introduction" in Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Devils*, trans. by Constance Garnett (Wordsworth Classics, 2005), p. xiv.

¹⁷⁶ This argument has been put forward with regard to Bakunin's alleged co-authorship of the *Catechism of a Revolutionary* with Nechaev.

*a world that has only round holes. He seems to dwell beyond good and evil, stands aside from the actions of others, and he is unaffected by the turmoil wrought by Verhovensky.*¹⁷⁷

This is how Dostoevsky presented Stavrogin to the reader. Stavrogin had the tendency to engage in relationships that he could not remain faithful to and in this regard it needs to be mentioned that despite his secret marriage with the ‘cripple’ Marya Lebyadkin he confessed his love to his acquaintance Lizaveta Nikolaevna. Stavrogin’s tendency to get involved in frequent scuffles with those who dared to oppose or challenge him or in other situations where his eccentricities resulted in brawls was indicative of his abnormal behaviour. The reader gets a sense of Stavrogin’s violent nature from the observation of the narrator:

*I must remind the reader again that Nikolay Vsyevolodovitch’s was one of those natures that know nothing of fear. At a duel he could face the pistol of his opponent with indifference, and could take aim and kill with brutal coolness. If anyone had slapped him in the face, I should have expected him not to challenge his assailant to a duel, but to murder him on the spot. He was just one of those characters, and would have killed the man, knowing very well what he was doing, and without losing his self-control. I fancy, indeed, that he never was liable to those fits of blind rage which deprive a man of all power of reflection. Even when overcome with intense anger, as he sometimes was, he was always able to retain complete self-control, and therefore to realise that he would certainly be sent to penal servitude for murdering a man not in a duel; nevertheless, he’d have killed anyone who insulted him, and without the faintest hesitation.*¹⁷⁸

Dostoevsky’s *Devils* as a novel that critiqued the Nihilist movement of the 1860s assumed immense importance in the literary and political discussions in Russia in the post-

¹⁷⁷ Dostoevsky, *Devils*, op. cit., p. xv.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

Bolshevik revolution period. In post-Bolshevik Russia a renewed interest in the novel was generated as a result of the statement made by Leonid Grossman that Nikolai Stavrogin was a ‘prototype’ of Bakunin. Grossman claimed that Dostoevsky had successfully projected the real image of Bakunin through the immoral character of Stavrogin. Grossman’s assertion that Stavrogin was a typical literary representation of Bakunin triggered off a debate in early Soviet Russia in the literary circles between Grossman and Marxist literary critic Viacheslav Polonskii. The arguments and counter-arguments of Grossman and Polonskii were encapsulated in a book that was published by the ‘Leningrad branch of the State Publishing House’ in 1926 under the title ‘The Debate Over Dostoevsky and Bakunin’. James Goodwin in his study examined in detail this debate between Grossman and Polonskii. He wrote:

The polemical vitality of Demons found perhaps its boldest expression in a literary and historical controversy of the early post-revolutionary years. On 25 February 1923, a group of Soviet scholars in Moscow heard an unexpectedly provocative lecture by one of Russia’s rising young philologists and specialists on Dostoevsky. Speaking before the Society for the Appreciation of Russian Letters at the Historical Museum, Leonid Grossman (1888-1965) declared that Dostoevsky’s Demons, traditionally considered a depiction of “Nechaevism” also served as the “first monograph” on the father of Russian anarchism, Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876). Through his fictional Nikolai Stavrogin, Dostoevsky managed to “lift the mask from the face of Bakunin,” to reveal Bakunin’s true “spiritual nature,” and to resolve the “great mystery” of Bakunin’s personality. By demonstrating similarities between Stavrogin and his historical prototype, as well as Dostoevsky’s own interest in Bakunin, Grossman went on to define Dostoevsky’s novel as “one of the most outstanding interpretations” of Bakunin in world literature. The implication of Grossman’s revelation would have been obvious to any politically conscious listener: according to Grossman’s reading, Dostoevsky managed not simply to condemn

*the “nihilist” spirit of a minor conspiracy, but also to demonize one of the pioneering advocates of international social revolution.*¹⁷⁹

This statement made by Grossman invited not only a Marxist critique of Grossman’s contention but also an Anarchist defence of Bakunin. The projection of Bakunin’s image as a Devil in post-Bolshevik Russia by Grossman served an important political purpose for both the Bolsheviks and the Anarchists. The Marxist critique was leveled by Viacheslav Polonskii, who refused to accept Stavrogin as a ‘prototype’ of Bakunin and vociferously stated that ‘Stavrogin remained “completely independent” from Bakunin’.¹⁸⁰ Association of Bakunin with Dostoevsky’s fictional character Stavrogin invited trouble for the Bolsheviks as a resurface of Bakunin’s anti-statist or Anarchist ideas put to question the validity of the Bolshevik state in post-1917 Russia. Thus, for the Bolsheviks it was necessary to craftily fit in Bakunin’s legacy as a ‘romantic revolutionary’ instead of an Anarchist in the revolutionary tradition of Russia.¹⁸¹ Aleksei Borovoi, the spokesperson of the Anarchist position in the debate, on the other hand argued that instead of projecting Bakunin as an ‘apostle of pan-destruction’, Dostoevsky in fact provided the room to ‘articulate an alternative, constructive conception of the human need to rebel’.¹⁸²

Goodwin underscored that in projecting Stavrogin as a ‘prototype’ of Bakunin, that is the attempt made by

¹⁷⁹ See James Goodwin, “Introduction” in *Confronting Dostoevsky’s Demons: Anarchism and the Specter of Bakunin in Twentieth Century Russia* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2010), p. 2. (http://www.peterlang.com/download/extract/54230/extract_310883.pdf)

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Goodwin, *Confronting Dostoevsky’s Demons*, p. 129.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 3.

Grossman to establish the “primordial link” ‘between protagonist and prototype’,¹⁸³ he sought to ‘exploit the unfavourable side of Bakunin’s legacy as a means of rehabilitating Dostoevsky’s allegedly counterrevolutionary novel’¹⁸⁴ in Russia. Thus, there was an attempt made to reassert the importance of Dostoevsky’s novel in the wake of revolutionary developments in Russia which was considered to be ‘counterrevolutionary’ in nature. In the process, Grossman’s interpretation of Dostoevsky’s *Demons* led to a scathing attack on the doctrine of Anarchism and its adherents in Russia who drew considerable ideological sustenance from Bakunin.¹⁸⁵ The vilification of Bakunin and condemnation of Anarchism as a doctrine enabled Grossman to possibly provide a justification for Dostoevsky’s critique of Nihilist and Anarchist tendencies in late Imperial Russia and the Russian Revolution itself that eventually established a Bolshevik state – a strategy that continued to be employed in the post-Stalinist years to serve the same purpose. The attack on Anarchism and its destructive tendencies through an analysis of Dostoevsky’s treatment of his revolutionaries in the novel enabled Grossman to situate Bakunin and his Anarchism ‘which was arguably the most threatening anathema within Russia’s revolutionary heritage’,¹⁸⁶ in the context of the Russian revolutionary experience of 1917. A careful treatment of the anti-statist Bakunin and his Anarchist ideas by the Bolsheviks however, became crucial at a time when the Bolshevik government of Lenin was looking for ways to ideologically defend the ‘dictatorship of the

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ The Anarchist movement in Russia emerged in the first two decades of the twentieth century during the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

proletariat'. Grossman's argument egged the Bolsheviks on to project Bakunin's image and ideas in a manner that would not contradict the revolutionary achievements of the Bolsheviks in 1917. The 'Debate Over Dostoevsky and Bakunin' qualified as a classic instance of the manner in which literary representation of the character of Stavrogin was craftily used by the advocates of Bolshevism to either denigrate Bakunin whose Anarchist legacy posed a potent ideological challenge to the dictatorial rule of the Bolsheviks in Russia in the post-1917 period or to cast him in the mould of Bolshevism through an 'unusual Marxist strategy built on a more careful and a more qualified rehabilitation of Bakunin'.¹⁸⁷ Goodwin observed that:

*Thus while disagreement over Stavrogin's origins may have motivated some contributions, as a purely literary issue the quest for Stavrogin's prototype hardly explains the lengthy dispute over Grossman's idea. Rather, Grossman's otherwise innocuous investigation of Stavrogin's prototype proved contentious because he transcended formalist literary scholarship and entered the most hazardous territory of Russian revolutionary history, where Bakunin played a particularly problematic role. The infamous "apostle of destruction" and chief political nemesis of Karl Marx, Bakunin left his political descendants in Russia with a controversial legacy that both attracted and repelled them. As Russia's most legendary apologist for a ruthless struggle against the state, Bakunin earned a permanent place in the pantheon of Russia's revolutionary pioneers; as the principal inspiration of violent anarchist tendencies in the revolution, however, Bakunin's legacy logically stood in uncompromising opposition to the ever-increasing power and centralisation of the Communist Party dictatorship. Bakunin was no ordinary historical prototype, but arguably Russia's most powerful modern icon of antistatism and spontaneous popular revolt.*¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., pp. 3-4.

Conclusion

An enigmatic figure in the political and intellectual history of Russia, Bakunin has ceaselessly stimulated a lot of interest in thinkers and historians who have engaged with the history and political culture of nineteenth and twentieth century Russia/the Soviet Union. Such an interest in Bakunin has often stemmed from the multifarious intellectual connections that have been traced and developed between Bakunin and ideological currents and revolutionary movements of nineteenth and twentieth century Russia. The ideas of Bakunin that eventually crystallized into his Anarchist doctrine not only provided ideological sustenance to the revolutionary movements of the second half of nineteenth century but also assumed immense importance in the course of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the period following it.

The polemical conflict between Bakunin and Marx within the First International Workingmen's Association assumed greater significance in the context of the Bolshevik Revolution that eventually established a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in Russia. During the course of the Revolution an uneasy alliance developed between the Anarchists (primarily followers of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin) and the Bolsheviks that was not meant to last long due to the ideological incompatibility of Marxism-Leninism and Anarchism.¹⁸⁹ A study of Bakunin's critique of some of the tenets of the Marxist doctrine leads one to conclude that somehow in the late 1860s and early 1870s, Bakunin had anticipated what the world was to witness in the early decades

¹⁸⁹ The role of the Anarchists in the Russian Revolution of 1917 and their alliance with the Bolsheviks have not been dealt with in this paper.

of the twentieth century during the course of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and later. International labour movement in the first half of the twentieth century was primarily dominated by the Moscow led Third International of the Communist International (*Comintern*). It was against this backdrop that the International Workingmen's Association (IWA) was established in 1922-23 by Syndicalists and Anarcho-Syndicalists from across the world who came up with an alternate idea opposed to Bolshevism for the conduct of the international working class movement.

In the process of consolidating their revolutionary gains, the Bolsheviks projected the image of Bakunin in a manner that suited their political and ideological needs as on one hand they could not ignore the legacy of Bakunin in the revolutionary tradition of Russia and on the other they found it imperative to provide a justification for their ideological standpoint with regard to the creation of a Bolshevik regime in Russia. Such an image projection became crucial for the Bolsheviks at a time when the Anarchist movement in Russia that threatened their consolidation of power was being suppressed. In asserting that Dostoevsky's Devil Nikolai Stavrogin was not essentially a 'prototype' of Bakunin, the Bolsheviks managed to carefully mould the image of the revolutionary as a romantic rebel who contributed immensely to the development of revolutionary ideologies in Russia and his 'problematic' revolutionary legacy as per requirements of the new regime.

Cold War politics of the twentieth century brought to the fore certain crucial questions pertaining to the nature of Socialism in the Soviet Union which was in turn related to the broader concept of liberty or freedom. The process of building 'Socialism in one country' involved the gagging of many other voices that questioned the process itself. In the post-revolutionary period thus, the Marx-Bakunin ideological

debate resurfaced when fundamental questions with regard to the nature of the Bolshevik revolution were raised. The nature of Bolshevik rule in the Soviet Union necessitated a re-examination of this debate and a re-assertion of the need to ensure individual and collective freedom of human beings. Bakunin's vociferous assertion that any form of dictatorship even if temporary in nature would defeat the purpose of the social revolution acquired greater significance in the course of twentieth century developments. Bakunin's 'libertarian Socialism' served an alternative to Soviet Socialism that restricted human freedom as the victims of oppressive rule could find answers to many of their questions in Bakunin's Anarchism. Thus, Bakunin and his Anarchist ideas need to be situated not merely in the context of revolutionary developments in Russia but also in global politics of the twentieth century that was conditioned to a large extent by political developments in the Soviet Union.

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Russian Revolution and Its Impact on Indian National Movement

Subrat Biswal

Capitalism and industrialization rapidly advanced in Russia after the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 and the defeat of Russia in the Crimea war (1856-59). The needs of sustaining itself as a strong continental power prompted Russia to undertake industrialization on a large scale. This was accomplished by the state playing a major role in economic activities, and with the advancement of capitalism there arose the need for raw materials and markets. In the third quarter of the 19th century, Russian imperialism had already colonised Central Asia and was competing with other imperialist powers for concessions in the Balkans and the Far East. Russia, by the end of the century was an imperialist power with semi-feudal system of agriculture and an authoritarian state system. There was no popular government, no elected organ with real powers to make laws, and a total lack of civil rights and political freedom. The liberal groups were weak and compromised too frequently with the rulers. Marxism was becoming popular and was entrusted with the historic task of combining both the anti-feudal and anti-capitalist struggles.

The Marxists, or Social Democrats as they were known then, were divided into various groups and the ideological heterogeneity was too strong to overcome. The Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP), established in 1898, was split into two major groups: the Bolsheviks (Majority) and the Mensheviks (Minority) (Anhrif: 1917). Though both the groups wanted a socialist revolution in Russia to be preceded by a democratic anti-feudal revolution, the former (Bolsheviks) wanted the working class to lead this democratic phase of the revolution.

The Mensheviks, instead, wanted the bourgeoisie, i.e., the capitalists to lead it. The Bolsheviks under Lenin's leadership finally emerged as leaders of the revolution in October, 1917, with a successful strategy of workers-peasants alliance to head state power after the revolution. The Mensheviks who supported the bourgeois government and participated in it after the overthrow of the Tsar in February 1917, had lost the support of the workers and peasants by October. On 7th November (25 October according to the Old Russian Calendar) the Bolsheviks were triumphant after three days of armed uprising which led to the surrender of the provisional government set up in February 1917.

It was the First World War which finally sealed the fate of the Tsarist autocracy. The war exacerbated the crisis that had gripped the Russian state. Russian society was an ensemble of contradictions when the war began - contradictions between feudal and peasants, between peasants and capitalist farmers (known also as kulaks), between kulaks and the landless labour, between factory owners and workers, between the big bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie, and so on (Carr: 1981). Once the war came, all these contradictions sharpened. The enormous cost of the war was too heavy for Russia, which still was relatively backward as compared to other imperialist powers. The state could not sustain such an expensive war and the burden was borne by the working people and the peasants. Workers and even soldiers were up in arms against the State. A socialist revolution materialized for the first time in history and there was no better country than Russia which was the weakest link in the imperialist chain for the revolution to succeed.

The October Revolution heralded a new era by creating a state of the workers and poor peasants whose interest was opposed to economic' exploitation wars, aggressions, colonization and racial discrimination (Pattnaik:

1992). The revolution brought into existence a socialist state that could work as a bulwark against war and imperialism. It also began a process of creation of an alternative world socialist system based on equality and free of exploitation, renounced any form of aggression, colonization and racial prejudice, as opposed to world capitalist system that is based on colonization, economic exploitation, racialism, etc.

Bolsheviks and a new system of International relations

The October Revolution spread a new message of hope and liberation for the toiling peoples all over the world and the peoples of the colonies. It was a message of liberation from all forms of exploitation - national, social, economic and political. This was reflected in a series of declarations, legal pronouncements and diplomatic initiatives of the new Bolshevik government.

The Declaration of Rights of the Working and Exploited People adopted in the third All Russian Congress of Soviets in January 1918, reaffirmed an inflexible determination to deliver mankind from wars and to achieve at all costs a democratic peace among nations, without annexation or indemnities, on the principle of self-determination of nations. The declaration proclaimed Soviet State's ".....complete break with the barbarous policy of bourgeois civilization, which has built the prosperity of the exploiters belonging to a few chosen nations on the enslavement of hundreds of millions of working people in Asia in the colonies in general, and in the small countries" (Pathybridge: 1972).

The new Soviet state took a determined stand against the prevailing system of international relations in which war and colonization were organic components. Instead, the idea of a just and democratic peace and the establishment of a system of international relations based on general democratic

principles was advocated for renunciation of secret diplomacy was a necessary corollary of Soviet international diplomacy.

Bolshevik Renunciation of Special Privileges in the Neighbouring Countries

The idea of national sovereignty and equality ran through the theory and practice of Soviet foreign policy, which aimed at reshaping international relations on democratic principles. The emergence of the first socialist state inspired formally independent small states, colonies and semi-colonies to struggle for and defend their sovereignty against oppression and encroachment by imperialist powers. In the process of evolving a new system of international relations, the Soviets attached special significance to relations with the Eastern Countries based on the principles of equality, mutual respect and friendship. The Soviet state was willing to give them friendly assistance in their struggle against 'imperialism. Despite its difficult economic situation, the new socialist state rendered not only political and moral but also great material support to countries such as Turkey, Afghanistan, Iran and others. In June 1919, the Soviet government abolished all special privileges for Russian nationals in Iran, renounced all concessions and control over Iran's state revenue, and handed over to Iran without demanding any compensation, the banks, the railways, highways and port facilities on Iran's Caspian coast and other property which had belonged to Tsarist Russia. A treaty of friendship with Iran was signed in February, 1921 (the first equal treaty between Iran and a European power), guaranteeing Iran's independence and security of her borders with the Soviet state. Similarly, a treaty of friendship and alliance was signed with Turkey, which received I receives economic, financial and military aid from the Soviet state. A Soviet Afghan treaty was signed in spring 1921 by which

interest-free loans were given to the latter and Soviet specialists were assigned to work there.

Bolsheviks and anti-colonial struggles

It was the first Russian Revolution, in 1905, that fired up the imagination of Indian revolutionaries. Mohandas Gandhi regarded it as “the greatest event of the present century” and “a great lesson to us”. India was also switching to this “Russian remedy against tyranny,” Gandhi said. The revolution made a big impact also on the minds of Indian revolutionaries who, unlike the ‘Moderates’ and the ‘Extremists’ of the Congress party, intended to get absolute independence by adopting revolutionary methods as practised by Russians. The Bengalee newspaper declared in a May 25, 1906 editorial: “The revolution that has been affected in Russia after years of bloodshed...may serve as a lesson to other governments and other peoples” (Patil: 1988).

The Yugantar issued a threat: “In every country there are plenty of secret places where arms can be manufactured.” It advocated the plundering of post offices, banks and government treasuries for financing revolutionary activities. The newspaper also observed that “not much physical strength was required to shoot Europeans” (Kielson: 2006). The Indian Sociologist said in its December 1907 issue: “Any agitation in India must be carried out secretly and the only methods which can bring the English to their senses are the Russian methods vigorously and incessantly applied until the English relax their tyranny and are driven out of the country.” These incendiary articles had an immediate impact, and within a year bombs were exploding and bullets flying across India. On April 30, 1908, Prafulla Chaki and Khudiram Bose threw a bomb on a carriage in Muzzafarpur in order to kill Douglas Kingsford, the chief presidency magistrate, but by mistake killed two women travelling in it.

Praising the bomb throwers, the newspaper *Kal* wrote: “The people are prepared to do anything for the sake of Swaraj (self-rule) and they no longer sing the glories of British rule. They have no dread of British power. It is simply a question of sheer brute force. Bomb-throwing in India is different from bomb-throwing in Russia. Many of the Russians side with their government against these bomb-throwers, but it is doubtful whether much sympathy will be found in India. If even in such circumstances Russia got the Duma, then India is bound to get Swarajya (Manela: 2007)”. Chaki committed suicide when caught and Bose, just 18 years old, was hanged. BalGangadharTilak who was known as Gandhi’s political guru defended the revolutionaries and demanded immediate self-rule. He was arrested and a British kangaroo court sentenced him to six years in a Burma jail. Days after Tilak’s trial, Russian leader Vladimir Lenin published an article titled ‘Inflammable Material in World Politics’ (Kenedy: 1982). He wrote that the British, angered by the mounting revolutionary struggle in India, are “demonstrating what brutes” the European politician can turn into when the masses rise against the colonial system (Imam: 1972).

“There is no end to the acts of violence and plunder which goes under the name of the British system of government in India,” Lenin pointed out. “Nowhere in the world – with the exception, of course of Russia – will you find such abject mass poverty, such chronic starvation among the people (Lenin: 1917). The most liberal and radical personalities of free Britain...become regular Genghis Khans when appointed to govern India, and are capable of sanctioning every means of “pacifying” the population in their charge, even to the extent of flogging political protestors!” Blasting the “infamous sentence pronounced by the British jackals on the Indian democrat Tilak”, Lenin predicted that with the Indians having got a taste of political mass struggle, the “British regime in India is doomed”.

“By their colonial plunder of Asian countries, the Europeans have succeeded in so steeling one of them, Japan, that she has gained great military victories, which have ensured her independent national development. There can be no doubt that the age-old plunder of India by the British, and the contemporary struggle of all these ‘advanced’ Europeans against Persian and Indian democracy, will steel millions, tens of millions of proletarians in Asia to wage...a struggle against their oppressors which will be just as victorious as that of the Japanese.”

Lenin and Gandhi

Lenin and Gandhi were at opposite ends of the revolutionary spectrum. They differed not only in their national and individual goals but also in the means they advocated to achieve such goals. Irving Louis Horowitz writes in *The Idea of War and Peace: The Experience of Western Civilization* that despite their differences, the very fact they were both leaders of masses of mankind in great nations place them in a kinship. India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, has indicated the character of this relationship of Lenin to Gandhi: “Almost at the same time as the October Revolution led by the great Lenin, we in India began a new phase in our struggle for freedom (Gandhi: 1946). Our people for many years were engaged in this struggle with courage and patience. And although under the leadership of Gandhi we followed another path, we were influenced by the example of Lenin.”

When Gandhi said that “nations have progressed both by evolution and revolution”, and that “history is more a record of wonderful revolution than of so-called ordered progress” he demonstrated a community of mind with Lenin that went beyond the simple coincidence of political careers,” writes Horowitz. Then there is also the Gandhian definition of socialism that Lenin frequently emphasised – the view that

socialism is more than a transformation in economic relations, but a transformation in human psychology as well. Horowitz notes that both Gandhi and Lenin were distinguished by a fierce devotion to principle, while at the same time revealing large reserves of flexibility in the political application of these principles. “Thus, the pacifist Gandhi could even agree to the utility of national armies, small in size to be sure, in times of national crisis; while Lenin could see the utility of middle-class parliamentarianism in the development of class forces. Even in personal characteristics they had much in common. Each of them eschewed personal comforts, practicing instead an asceticism geared to the achievement of their ends.”

Trotting a different path

Leon Trotsky, Russian revolutionary and the founder of the Red Army, however, felt Gandhi was a fake freedom fighter. In *An Open Letter to the Workers of India*, written in 1939, just before World War II broke out, he wrote: “The Indian bourgeoisie is incapable of leading a revolutionary struggle. They are closely bound up with, and dependent upon, British imperialism....The leader and prophet of this bourgeoisie is Gandhi (Dutt: 1935). A fake leader and a false prophet! Gandhi and his compeers have developed a theory that India's position will constantly improve, that her liberties will continually be enlarged, and that India will gradually become a dominion on the road of peaceful reforms. Later on, India may achieve even full independence. This entire perspective is false to the core” (Bose: 1995).

According to Trotsky, never before in history have slave owners voluntarily freed their slaves. If the Indian leaders were hopeful that for their cooperation during the war the British would free India, they were grossly mistaken. With uncanny foresight, Trotsky predicted: “First of all, exploitation of the colonies will become greatly intensified. The metropolitan centres will not only pump from the

colonies foodstuffs and raw materials, but they will also mobilise vast numbers of colonial slaves who are to die on the battlefields for their masters (Bayly: 1993).

Trotsky believed India's exploitation would be redoubled and tripled in order to rebuild war-torn Britain. "Gandhi is already preparing the ground for such a policy," he wrote. "Double chains of slavery will be the inevitable consequence of the war if the masses of India follow the politics of Gandhi..." All of Trotsky's predictions would have come true if the rebel Indian National Army hadn't driven a stake of fear through British hearts (Charterjee: 1994). The 1946 revolt of 20,000 Indian Navy ratings and the very real possibility of the Indian Army and Indian Air Force joining the revolt finally hastened the end of the most genocidal empire on the face of the earth.

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Women and the Russian Revolution: An Exploration in Bolshevik Theory and Practice

Soma Marik

Classical Marxism and Women's Liberation

Gender was not a conceptual category used often by Social Democrats in late 19th or early 20th century. So it is possible, and necessary, to point to flaws in Marxist thinking of that period. But it is also necessary today, to go beyond the academic condescension and the liberal to right-wing attacks, and look at the concrete achievements of the left wing of Marxism, with special reference to the Bolsheviks, in connection with women's liberation.

Unlike many of its rivals in the socialist movement, Marxism started with the proposition that the emancipation of the working class is a task of the working class itself.¹⁹⁰ At the same time, Marx's conception of the proletariat as a universal class meant that the emancipation of the proletariat would have to involve a total social upheaval, and the opening up of the potential for the emancipation of all the oppressed and exploited peoples.

The principle of working class self-emancipation meant that Marxists rejected the two major routes to socialism/communism offered so far – enlightened preaching

¹⁹⁰ This was a fundamental principle, repeatedly stated by Marx and Engels, and also by their immediate political heirs. For a full discussion see S. Marik (2008). *Reinterrogating the Classical Marxist Discourses of Revolutionary Democracy*. Delhi: Aakar, Ch.2; and H. Draper, 'The Principle of Self-Emancipation in Marx and Engels'. In R. Miliband & J. Saville (eds.), (1971), *Socialist Register*, London: 81-109.

to the entire society, hoping to convert people, and a conspiratorial organisation hoping to make a minority revolution. While this is obviously a slight simplification, it is close enough to reality. Even in the organisation that Marx and Engels joined, the League of the Just¹⁹¹, both trends had existed.¹⁹² Rather, they wanted to build a party of revolutionary workers. But the working class in capitalist society is fragmented, often set against itself. From this Lenin emphasized the need to unify and concentrate the consciousness of the advanced workers, and merge it with the advances in theoretical knowledge. The massive study of Lars Lih¹⁹³ and the debates over it have suggested that it was a widely accepted position within the Marxists even before Lenin, that the socialist message and the organised movement of the workers had to be united. In *What Is To Be Done?*, this has been one of the core aims of Lenin.

However, we need to recognise that Lih goes to another extreme in course of his debunking of the myth that *What Is To Be Done?* represented the essence of Leninism, and was absolutely novel. Operating within a specific Russian context, with total lack of democratic rights, even minimum

¹⁹¹ An early socialist group founded in Paris by the German émigrés in 1836.

¹⁹² See the minutes of the dispute between Wilhelm Weitling and Kriege (in favour of instant insurrection) on one hand, and Karl Schapper (pure propagandism) and his comrades on the other, in H. Forder, M. Hundt, J. Kandel and S. Lewiowa (eds), (1970). *Der Bunde der Kommunisten: Dokumente und Materialien, 1836-49*, Bd.1. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, for an articulation of both positions.

¹⁹³ Lars T. Lih, (2008). *Lenin Rediscovered: What Is To Be Done? In Context*. Chicago: Haymarket. See further *Historical Materialism*, vol. 18, 2010, for a small part of the huge debate ignited by Lih's book.

civil liberties, Lenin stressed the need for “professional revolutionaries”, -- workers who would be full time party workers, in a way that German Social Democracy had not done. Similarly, in later years, he would stress that the underground party, which could maintain a continuity and an adherence to basic principles in a way that legal structures in Tsarist Russia could not, had to be in control of the legal institutions. These were important tactical issues, not core principles. But an element of core principle was mixed up with Lenin’s idea of centralisation and his defence of the professional revolutionary. Lenin argued that the diverse experiences of the class struggle had to be centralised into the revolutionary party. Moreover, for him workers, not just middle class intellectuals, could understand socialism through their experiences of exploitation and struggle. But sustained class consciousness of the advanced workers could be actualised in form of vanguard party if they were relieved of their daily factory load. Hence the professional revolutionary could often be a worker who had been moved from the factory to full time political work.

Since the class was fragmented, a fact Lenin recognised from an early stage, it made sense to organise the more politically conscious elements separately. But this tended to exclude women, who were perceived very often as backward elements. The problem lay in not recognising, at least in the early years, that women did not come into the socialist movement, or indeed in organised trade union movements, not just due to backwardness, but due to the double burden they faced.¹⁹⁴ The Party Programme, drafted

¹⁹⁴ This has been examined at length in S. Marik, ‘Gendering the Revolutionary Party: The Bolshevik Practice and Challenges before the Marxists in the 21st Century’. In B. Chatterjee and K.

mainly by Plekhanov and Lenin, and adopted by the Second Congress in 1903, did not even include the demand for equal pay for equal work.¹⁹⁵

However, if we skip ahead to 1917, on the eve of the revolution the Bolsheviks had a membership of around 24,000, of whom 2500 were women. A detailed study by Barbara Evans Clements shows that among the members, while 62.1% of the men came from worker or peasant background, only 36.8% of the women were workers or peasants.¹⁹⁶ There are reasons for this gap. An average Russian working class woman was likely to be married by the time she was eighteen and a mother shortly thereafter. Seldom were there men willing to take up the duties of family income, childcare etc. Without party education to enhance the value of work done by women or to organize them separately, the formal equality of comrades in the party could not erase the real inequality of the private sphere. Women party workers were often from a background where other family members could look after the children (for example Kollontai), or where they could take the decision to not have children (for example Krupskaya), things that working class women could not often ensure. Moreover, the Russian social prohibition against women taking part in the male domain of politics operated with greater strictness on women from working class and peasant families, by contrast with women from more affluent levels. That there were still over 36% women

Chattopadhyay (Eds.) (2004). *Perspectives on Socialism*. Kolkata: Progressive Publishers, pp. 13-50.

¹⁹⁵ B. Pearce, tr. and annotated, (1978). *1903, Second Ordinary Congress of the RSDLP*. London: New Park Publication, pp.3-9.

¹⁹⁶ B. Evans Clements, (1997). *Bolshevik Women*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.32.

members from worker and peasant background is a matter of considerable progress.

Why did they come? First, within asphyxiating conditions of Tsarist Russia, the Social Democratic party, whatever its shortcomings, provided far greater equality for women. Second, Marxism did not see women's equality as mere legal equality. It insisted that women's liberation and social revolution were integrally connected, and this pulled many women to the revolutionary party.

Women's work in the party structure showed both the scope for their mobility and limitations. As the party grew in size from the time of the 1905 revolution, city committees, and in big cities district committees, were set up. Secretaries of such committees were usually party full timers, with two or three secretaries with different duties being appointed. The propaganda work (writing leaflets, ensuring the publication of pamphlets and journals) were duties of secretaries who were usually male. Women who became secretaries were technical secretaries, working to ensure the smooth running of the organisation, sending reports to the Central Committee, etc. We can cite the case of Elena Stasova, for years the Technical Secretary of Petersburg. Her correspondence with Lenin show organisational news being exchanged. Political disputes or reports are found in his correspondence with male secretaries like Radin etc.

This structure goes all the way to the top. Krupskaya was the de facto organisational secretary of *Iskra*, and then of the Bolshevik faction. But with the sole partial exception of Alexandra Kollontai, political decision making tended to be concentrated in the hands of men.

Programme and Theoretical Reflections:

The Russian Social Democrats, as Lars Lih has shown, were greatly influenced by the Germans. But on the

question of women, a gap remained for a long time. The Germans were aware that women faced additional burdens and had drawn up a separate programme for women back in 1896. They had also been tremendously successful in organising women workers through autonomous structures.¹⁹⁷ The Russians, even in the 1903 programme, did not talk about equal pay for women with men. But the 1903 programme did demand halting appointment of women in sectors where it was harmful for their health, the opening of crèches in factories where women worked, paid maternity leave, etc.¹⁹⁸ These suggest a greater emphasis on demands where women are seen as weak and in need of protection. It is also important to say that maternity and crèche issues are also important issues connected with women's right to work. However the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (RSDWP) were serious in implementing this programme which partially reflected class-gender focus. Strikes in 1905-07 regularly showed the demands regarding women coming up.

The first ever pamphlet on women workers by a Russian Social Democrat was the 1901 pamphlet *Zhenshchina Rabotnitsa* (The Woman Worker), identified by Moira Donald as being the work of Nadezhda Krupskaya.¹⁹⁹ It saw women workers as backward, but called for party work within them. The really serious effort came in 1909, when Kollontai

¹⁹⁷ See on this Soma Marik. 'German Socialism and Women's Liberation'. In A. Chanda, M. Sarkar and K. Chattopadhyay (Eds.), (2003). *Women in History*. Kolkata: Progressive Publishers, pp. 169-223.

¹⁹⁸ B. Pearce, tr. and annotated, 1903. P.7.

¹⁹⁹ M. Donald. 'Bolshevik Activity Amongst the Working Women of Petrograd in 1917'. *International Review of Social History*, (1982) vol. 27: 129-160.

published her book, *The Social Basis of the Woman Question*. Written in response to an all Russia conference called by liberal feminists, she was critical of them, but was willing to engage them in debate. The Petersburg Party Committee opposed her proposal to organise women workers and go into the feminist conference. She succeeded in gaining Central Committee endorsement. This book came out after the Conference, and had interesting points to make. It emphasized the oppressive character of the family, and questioned the prevalent RSDWP view that simply getting women into productive work would transform their conditions. At the same time, her analysis stressed that the contemporary state was the protector of “legitimate” marriages and the family, so as long as the state remained intact, real liberation for women was impossible.²⁰⁰

Real women’s liberation, she argued, could come in a society where the responsibilities of mothers, and the duties of childcare, would be society’s collective responsibility. So her definition of socialism itself envisaged looking at society and politics through gender lens.

With liberal feminists Kollontai had two clear differences. First, the liberal feminists were demanding votes for women along the same property qualification lines that men had. She saw proletarian women as marching with proletarian men against the tsarist state and the bourgeoisie. Second, certain liberal feminists rejected demands for protectionism (crèches, maternity leave etc) as opposing the demand for equality (rather like opposing reservation for dalits in the name of equality). She held that to make unequals equal, such special measures were essential, since women

²⁰⁰ B. Evans Clements, (1979). *Bolshevik Feminist: The Life of Aleksandra Kollontai*. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, pp. 57-59.

were burdened by these duties, not naturally, but due to the social structure.

Organising women:

As noted, it was from the revolution of 1905 that relatively larger groups of women were coming into the party. This was what led to the first orientation towards them. Feminists were trying to create women only trade unions, something that compelled Marxists to turn more seriously to working class women. When a few women workers were elected as representatives to the Shidlovsky Commission, appointed by the Tsarist government to inquire into the tragedy of Bloody Sunday, the government refused to seat them. This led to protests by women workers. In Ivanovo-Voznesensk around 11,000 women workers took part in a major strike.

Kollontai, who in 1905 was a left-wing Menshevik, played an important role in this period. Participating in the inaugural meeting of the Women's Union, she was appalled at socialist women giving support to the liberal feminists.²⁰¹ She criticised any idea of feminism transcending class boundaries, and was attacked in response by the liberal feminists. Attending a meeting of socialist women in Germany, she was however convinced that within the working class, a special effort among women was necessary²⁰². But now she found herself being accused by party comrades of having a harmful tendency towards feminism.²⁰³ Even among women, Vera Slutskaya, a Bolshevik, opposed Kollontai. But in 1911-12, as

²⁰¹ Ibid, pp. 44-45.

²⁰² Ibid. pp. 45-46.

²⁰³ S. Marik, 'Women in the Russian Revolution'. In I. Ness and others (Eds.), (2009). *International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest*, vol. VII, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, Malden, pp. 3550-3555.

the struggles among workers picked up again, the Bolsheviks moved to organise women. The lead was taken by women Bolsheviks themselves. When *Pravda* was launched, it occasionally carried items specifically on women. In 1914 Krupskaya, Inessa Armand, Anna Elizarova, Konkordiya Samoilo, and others launched a journal for women workers, named *Rabotnitsa*.²⁰⁴ It has in the past been a case of assuming that Lenin must have been the person who took the initiatives. Tony Cliff, for example, makes that suggestion.²⁰⁵ In reality, Lenin wrote just one letter to Armand asking her to work for the paper, and one to his sister, Anna Elizarova, where he told her that Krupskaya would be writing to her about a proposed women's paper.²⁰⁶ The letters of Krupskaya and Armand indicate that they were the ones who thought seriously about the paper, while the funds came partly from Armand's well to do friends, and partly from money collected

²⁰⁴ That it was not Lenin, but the Bolshevik women, who played the decisive role, has been argued in S. Marik, 'Bolshevikbad O Narimukti 1903-1917: Proyoger Aloke Tattver Punarvichar'[Bolshevism and Women's Emancipation 1903-1917. Re-evaluation of Theory in the Light of Practice]. In G. Chattopadhyay (Ed.), (1999). *Itihas Anusandhan-13*. Kolkata: Firma K.L.M. Pvt. Ltd, pp.761-774, especially pp. 765-766.

²⁰⁵ T. Cliff, (1987). *Class Struggle and Women's Liberation*. London: Bookmarks, p.101.

²⁰⁶ V.I. Lenin, (1958-65). *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, 55 vols. Moscow: Institut Marksizma-Leninizma pri TSK KPSS. vol. 48, p 143. A. Elizarova, 'Zhurnal "Rabotnitsa" 1914 g'. In M.S. Olminskii (ed), (1923). *Iz epokhi 'Zvezdy' i 'Pravdy', 1911-1914*, 3 vols. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, vol 3, p. 63.

by the part of the team inside Russia, namely P.F. Kudelli, Samoilova, Menshinskaia, and Elizarova.²⁰⁷

There was a clear difference in perception. Armand was a feminist, as her biographer Elwood shows.²⁰⁸ Krupskaya or Samoilova were not. But they united to collect funds for the journal, with the Bolshevik Central Committee only giving it their formal approval. Krupskaya's article in the first issue looked at how "backward" women were to be mobilised. Armand's article, by contrast, highlighted that the struggle for socialism would be strengthened if women's struggles for rights were supported. *Rabotnitsa* combined articles written by the editors, notably Nadezhda Krupskaya and Inessa Armand, which discussed the situation of women workers, including their "double burden" (of housework and childcare on top of paid employment), and their place in the struggle of their class, along with short reports. It is possible to overstress the differences among the editors, so let us also note that generally the paper (it had seven issues in 1914) tended to gloss over abuse that women workers might have faced from male workers, though they recognized that men's attitudes towards women needed to change.

In late 1914, some women did come close to the Bolsheviks. Two authors of a major study have noted that the Bolsheviks responded positively, to help them improve their

²⁰⁷ See R.C. Elwood, (1992). *Inessa Armand: Revolutionary and Feminist*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 118 for a reference to a letter from Krupskaya to Samoilova. At one place Krupskaya uses the plural "we", and it was taken to mean she and Lenin. But a copy of the letter in the Okhrana archives was signed by Krupskaya and Armand. So the "we" more likely referred to the two women.

²⁰⁸ See R.C. Elwood.

educational and organisational skills, though some of the Bolsheviks appear to have remained sceptical about women's ability to organize and to shake off their traditional subservience.²⁰⁹

All the way to 1917 the Bolsheviks were divided on this. The only article by a male Bolshevik in 1917 came from N. Glebov, who claimed that unlike bourgeois women, proletarian women had no demands distinct from the men. But Slutskaya and Kollontai, in 1917 both in the Bolshevik Party, were to fight for a separate structure within the party for women. While the demand for an autonomous organisation was rejected, mobilising women was recognized as an important task. *Rabotnitsa* was revived.

If we turn to grassroots work, we find complexities developing. In 1905, during the first revolution, demands for minimum wages came up. But the tendency was for demanding a lower minimum wage for women than for men. Even in 1917, when trade unions managed to get the minimum wage, in Petrograd it was 5 *Rubles* for men and 4 for women. Only two strikes in Moscow saw the demand of equal pay for women and men being raised.²¹⁰

The February Revolution, Women and the Bolsheviks:

Though by 1917 43% of the labour force consisted of women, lack of gender awareness by men, who headed most unions, meant that organised struggles seldom kept in mind

²⁰⁹ J. McDermid and A. Hillyar, (1999). *Midwives of the Revolution: Female Bolsheviks and Women Workers in 1917*. London: UCL Press, pp. 134-5.

²¹⁰ For an analysis of strikes and women's participation in them, see S.A. Smith, 'Class and Gender: Women's Strikes in St. Petersburg, 1895-1917 and in Shanghai, 1895-1927'. *Social History*, (1994) vol. 19, No. 2, May: 141-168.

the special conditions of women. Poverty, lack of education, deskilling due to double burden, meant that “backwardness” did exist among women, but not as a natural process. Rather, it was imposed by social hierarchies. Interestingly, we find that when agitations tended to be spontaneous, women raised the issue of sexual assault/harassment regularly, as in strikes led by women in 1912 and 1913 in Moscow. But it would only be in and after 1917 that the Bolsheviks would take this up seriously.

Most general accounts of the revolution of 1917 mention women twice – the start of the February Revolution, and the Women’s Battalion that promised to defend the Provisional Government during the October insurrection. But women were much more active than this highly biased (and regularly repeated) account implies. Feminist influenced historiography has done much to recover the role of the women.²¹¹ If we move away from a century of narratives that focus only on the male workers, considerable changes occur in our portrayal of the revolution. As we have already remarked, women constituted about 43% of the workforce in the industries. Once we get away from the notion of the Revolution as a minority coup, once we look at how the masses of workers were reacting, it becomes as important, then, to look at the women as at the men. It was because there

²¹¹ A whole set of texts can be mentioned in this context. A pioneering work is R. Stites, (1978). *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism and Bolshevism 1860-1930*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press. See also A. Bobroff, (1974). ‘The Bolsheviks and Working Women 1905-1920’. *Soviet Studies*, vol. 26, No. 4, October: 540-567, as well as M. Donald. ‘Bolshevik Activity Amongst the Working Women of Petrograd in 1917’, and J. McDermid and A. Hillyar, *Midwives of the Revolution*.

was a growth of a female labour force that not only the Bolsheviks, but also the Mensheviks, had attempted to reach out to them in 1914 through papers meant exclusively for them²¹². As the war continued, working class unrest grew, and from the second half of 1915, strikes were increasing. The strikes saw large scale involvement of female industrial workers protesting not only over pay and deteriorating conditions of work, but also over the lack of respect shown to them by foremen and employers.

The International Women's Day strikes of 1917 which toppled tsarism were preceded by a strike among textile workers, mainly women, when a Petrograd mill-owner tried to increase the shift from 12 hours to 13 hours. Some of the women had reacted in the traditionally docile manner and been prepared to go along with the management, but the majority refused and forced the latter to withdraw the directive.²¹³ But, as memoirs of male Bolshevik leaders show, they were not pushing the women beyond a limited degree of militancy. In fact, it was a few female party members who persuaded the hesitant male leadership to make an effort in the working-class district of Vyborg by holding a meeting on the linked themes of war and inflation. These women, who co-operated with women from the Inter-District Committee, were part of a circle that had been established by the Bolsheviks in Petrograd, in recognition of the growing importance of women workers to the wartime labour movement. Kayurov, the influential metal worker leader of Vyborg, appealed to the women not to go on strike the next day. When he discovered that they had ignored his appeal, he was upset. But the leaflets

²¹² J. McDermid and A. Hillyar, *Midwives of the Revolution*, p. 141. The Menshevik journal was named *Golos Rabotnitsy*.

²¹³ J. McDermid and A. Hillyar, *Midwives of the Revolution*, pp. 146-7.

calling for a general strike also appeared in the names of the Vyborg District Bolsheviks, and the Inter District Committee. This suggests that a class and gender combination has to be taken into account here, and further, that the later attempts to portray February as purely “spontaneous” is linked to the belief that if it was an action by women it had to be spontaneous. But women Bolsheviks played a different role. Nina Agadzhanova and Mariia Vydrina, organized mass meetings of workers and soldiers’ wives, workplace strikes and mass demonstrations, searches for weapons to arm the crowds, as well as securing the release of political prisoners, and setting up first-aid units.²¹⁴ One crucial leadership figure was Anastasia Deviatkina, who had been a member of the Bolsheviks since 1904, and who organized and led a demonstration on 23 February.²¹⁵ Calling the women’s action traditional and backward simply is unacceptable, as they were not women in bread queues, sans culottes women, but working class women of textile factories who collectively downed tools, walked out on strike, moved to other factories to persuade fellow workers to go on strike. Textile workers were, proportionately, the most mobilised during the five days of the February Revolution, as one early Soviet source suggested.²¹⁶

However, when the delegates to the Soviet were elected, women were numerically far fewer. Skilled men dominated the elections for the Petrograd Soviet and then the factory committees that started coming up a little later, even

²¹⁴G.Katkov, (1967).*Russia 1917: The February Revolution*. London: Longman, p. 249.

²¹⁵J. McDermid and A. Hillyar, *Midwives of the Revolution*, p. 152.

²¹⁶V.Perazich, (1927).*Tekstili Leningrada v 1917g*. Leningrad, pp. 1-6, cited in J. McDermid and A. Hillyar, *Midwives of the Revolution*, p. 153.

in industries in which women were a clear majority of the work force. There were two main reasons for this: women's continuing responsibility for household responsibilities, especially with shortages persisting, and a lack of confidence on the women, including women's own lack of self-confidence, as to how far women could carry on sustained "conscious" politics.

During 1917, the untiring work of the women Bolsheviks would lead to tens of thousands of women workers joining the party, coming into the trade union movement, and bringing a gender sensitivity into the struggle for socialism. Immediately after the formation of the first Provisional Government under Prince Lvov, the Menshevik-Socialist Revolutionary alliance, which then dominated within the working class, brokered a class truce. Bolshevik women would work in two areas to break through this. Although both the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet leadership recognized that inflation and food shortages were issues of crucial significance, they did nothing about them. As long as the war was on, these problems could not be resolved, but the bourgeois Provisional Government would not end the war, and the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries would not go further than the Provisional Government. But women started raising their voices soon. Soldiers' wives (*soldatki*), started protesting at the lack of any improvement. On 11 April, a huge demonstration of these women went to the Tauride Palace, where sat the Soviet, showing they trusted the Soviet rather than the Provisional Government. But the Menshevik leader Dan, on behalf of the Soviet, scolded them for demanding money when the treasury was empty. Dan also refused to allow Alexandra Kollontai, a member of the Soviet, to speak to the women. Kollontai spoke to them nonetheless, albeit unofficially, and urged them to elect their own delegates to the Soviet. From this point on, Bolshevik women were playing a major role among the *soldatki*. The first strike to

break through the “civil peace” was a strike by close to 40,000 women laundry workers, demanding the Eight Hour Day and a minimum wage. They were unionised and led by Bolshevik women like Goncharova, Novi-Kondratyeva and Sakharova. After a month the strike won a partial victory. By then, the first Provisional Government had collapsed, largely over its war aims (which were expansionist), and some leading Mensheviks and SRs from the Soviet had entered a coalition government with former Duma members determined to continue with the war effort. To this government, the laundresses’ action was an irritant that endangered their plans for the country. Organising the laundresses was difficult, since they were scattered throughout the city, rather than working in large or even medium sized factories. The Bolshevik press reported the strike regularly, and clearly saw it as a model of militancy. All this indicated a de facto shift in the attitude of the Bolsheviks to women workers. Women would be engaged in struggles in other sectors too. They were particularly concerned with wage rises, improved working conditions (particularly sanitary), maternity benefits, and the abolition of child labour. They were also sharply angered at the sexual harassment they faced in the workplace, and demanded an end to body searches.²¹⁷

Organising Women after February 1917:

When Lenin returned from exile, one of his early supporters inside the Bolshevik party was Kollontai. It is to be noted that Lenin was initially in a minority in the leadership levels of the party, both regarding strategy of revolution and even regarding the question of unity with the Mensheviks, for when he returned the Bolsheviks were in fact in the middle of discussions with the Mensheviks over the possibility of unity.

²¹⁷ O. Figes, (1996). *A People’s Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1890–1924*. London: Jonathan Cape, p. 368.

Kollontai was also one of the first to propose the setting up of women's bureaus.

One reason why the Bolsheviks agreed to some form of separate work among women was very practical. Their rivals in the Socialist movement, the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries, were initially recruiting rapidly, while the Bolsheviks, with their insistence on a minimum degree of political education before a worker could be recruited, were lagging behind. So separate work among women was deemed necessary for Bolshevik party development. But there was still considerable resistance to special work, particularly separate organisational structure. Leading Bolshevik women such as Krupskaja, Kollontai, Samoilova, Stal' and Slutskaja, insisted that such theoretical purity was holding back the class struggle on two counts: first, in not recognizing that women were a force to be reckoned with by building on their militancy, and second, that however militant, women workers were backward, in terms of political consciousness and organizational experience, compared to men. Of these women, Kollontai was certainly the most outstanding. But she was not as isolated and unique as some of her early biographies tended to suggest²¹⁸. More recent work has stressed that a large group of women were working together. Vera Slutskaja had made similar suggestions even before Kollontai returned to Russia. But it is undeniable that there was a Bolshevik fear of feminism/separatism (the two being seen as identical). So rather than an organisation like a bureau, what the party agreed to was the revival of *Rabotnitsa*, and work among the women through the journal.

²¹⁸For example B. Farnsworth, (1980). *Aleksandra Kollontai: Socialism, Feminism and the Bolshevik Revolution*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press; and Cathy Porter. (1980). *Alexandra Kollontai: A Biography*, London:Virago.

A militant tram worker (woman) named Rodionova, gave three days' wages to kick-start the paper. This was at a meeting where 800 *rubles* were collected. From this point, the editors started roping her in to the work of the paper, getting her to run errands for the paper, and eventually to write for the paper. Through this process she eventually became a party member.

Samoilova conducted classes among women. Krupskaja a little after her return to Russia turned to work in the educational and youth sectors in a working-class district of Petrograd (Vyborg). Her biographer, McNeal, suggests this was because she felt Lenin's line of calling for a socialist revolution was doubtful.²¹⁹ This is based on a conception of the Bolshevik strategy that transforms it into a plot for a coup. In fact, political education was essential, if the revolution was indeed to be the self-emancipation of the working class.

Rabotnitsa, regardless of the individual opinions of the members, played a vital role in gendering class consciousness. On one hand, they challenged the stereotypes about women. On the other hand, the kind of articles, reports, that came out, also showed that male and female workers did not have identical demands and did not face exploitation in identical ways. Bolsheviks also recognized that patriarchal attitudes were not only dividing the class, but also being used by male workers to position themselves against the women in the name of family needs, while in fact there were many women headed families as well. So as the year wore on, gender became an issue that had to be taken up across the class, and not just with women workers. The Bolsheviks fought to get representation for women in the factory committees, which of course meant persuading men to vote

²¹⁹ R. H. McNeal, (1973). *Bride of the Revolution: Krupskaja and Lenin*. London: Victor Gollancz, p.73.

for them. From June, there were calls from male workers' representatives to deal with job losses and layoffs by protecting men's jobs at the expense of women's, supposedly because women's wages were supplementary while men were the principal breadwinners. The Bolsheviks and the metal workers' union jointly fought this, but stressing class unity rather than talking of gender equality.²²⁰

Women workers were aware of the problems they faced. Tsvetskova, a woman in the tannery industry, wrote in a trade union journal that if the building of socialism did not take into account women's voices, it would be a society negative towards women. Another woman, A Ilyina, writing in *Tkach*, the journal of the textile workers' union, wrote that after work, male workers could go to meetings or go for a stroll, while women had to undertake household drudgery. She indicated the latter with the Russian word *Barshchina*, which meant the labour of a serf.²²¹

After the July Days, (a semi-insurrection begun against the advice of the Bolsheviks, to which they still adhered because they felt abandoning the workers and soldiers was a big mistake, and which ended in a confused retreat and rout) the Bolshevik Party was under attack. Lenin was accused slanderously of having taken German gold. He had to go into hiding. Trotsky, and a number of others, were arrested. *Pravda* had to be shut down. The party for a time depended on *Rabotnitsa*.

Following the July Days, there came the military rout, and then the attempt by General Kornilov to carry out a coup.

²²⁰ J. McDermid and A. Hillyar, *Midwives of the Revolution*, p. 168.

²²¹ See S.A. Smith, 'Class and Gender', p. 155 for the first, and S. A. Smith, *Red Petrograd*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, p. 73.

These resulted in increasing popular discontent with the Provisional Government, in which the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries were now fully integrated, and which was headed by Kerensky, and no longer Prince Lvov. As a result, support to the Bolsheviks increased, including among women workers. Women worked with men to repel the general's forces, building barricades and organizing medical aid, in the form of Red Sisters.²²²

The opposite was the position of liberal feminists, who supported the war, and one wing of whom saw women joining the army and fighting for the war as the key issue of equality. But this served to increase the gulf between these bourgeois or intelligentsia women and the mass of worker, lower petty bourgeois or peasant women who wanted an end to the war. Of the 3,000 troops who were based in the Winter Palace in Petrograd to protect ministers of the Provisional Government, approximately 200 were from the women's battalion, with the rest made up of two companies of Cossacks and some officer cadets. By then, the government had become so isolated that there was little confidence in its survival.

In November 1917, Kollontai, Samoilova and others organised a meeting of women workers to discuss the elections to the Constituent Assembly, in which there were over 500 elected delegates, elected by over 80,000 women in 70 preparatory meetings. Thus, as the October insurrection was setting up a new order, there was also the recognition that a separate structure for women was not separatism but a dire necessity.²²³

²²² J. McDermid and A. Hillyar, *Midwives of the Revolution*, p. 179.

²²³ *Pravda*, No. 182, 5 November 1917; and *Pravda*, No. 200, 26 November 1917.

Beyond 1917:

In 1918, Kollontai, Armand, Samoilova and others organised an All Russia Congress of Women Workers and Peasants.²²⁴ In this they had the support of with the support of Yakov Sverdlov, who was effectively the chief organising figure of the party at that time, as well as Lenin and Trotsky. Out of this there emerged a permanent body, the *Zhenskii Otdel*, or the Women's Department of the Central Committee of the Party. Through the 1920s, it would be active, with Armand, Kollontai, Klavdia Nikolaieva, and Alexandra Artiukhina among those leading it.

The first years of the revolution also saw crucial steps being taken. The Peoples' Commissar for Social Welfare was Kollontai, and in that capacity, she took many gendered measures. The principle of equal pay for equal work was taken up and major headway was made in actually implementing it. The old feudal laws and semi-feudal and patriarchal customs began to be dismantled. In two brief decrees, published in December 1917, the Bolsheviks accomplished far more than anything attempted in all the preceding years: They substituted civil for religious marriage and established divorce at the request of either spouse. In October 1918, just a year after the revolution, the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet (VTsIK), ratified a complete Code on Marriage, the Family, and Guardianship. The Code captured in law a revolutionary vision of social relations based on women's equality and the "withering away" of the family. Women had entered the workforce, but they were still responsible for child rearing, cooking, cleaning, sewing, mending — the mindless drudgery of housework essential to the family. Women's household responsibilities

²²⁴ See S. Marik, *Reinterrogating the Classical Marxist Discourses of Revolutionary Democracy*, pp. 414-416.

prevented them from entering the public worlds of work, politics, and creative endeavour on an equal footing with men. Domestic violence came under legal purview. At the same time, to overcome the de facto oppressed condition of women, special measures were taken, which in contemporary language could be called affirmative action. The concept of illegitimacy was abolished, and the natural father was made responsible for all children. Existing laws that made it necessary for women to get the permission of their husbands to carry on trade, to work outside the home, etc were scrapped. Abortions were legalized, overcoming the assumption of some communists that any birth control was reactionary Malthusianism.²²⁵

Unlike modern feminists, who argue for a redivision of household tasks within the family, increasing men's share of domestic responsibilities, Bolshevik theorists sought to transfer housework to the public sphere. Kollontai argued that under socialism all household tasks would be eliminated and consumption would cease to be individual and internal to the family. The private kitchen would be replaced by the public dining hall. Sewing, cleaning, and washing, like mining, metallurgy, and machine production, would become branches of the people's economy.²²⁶ Trotsky declared that as soon as "washing [was] done by a public laundry, catering by a public restaurant, sewing by a public workshop," "the bond between husband and wife would be freed from everything external

²²⁵ For a detailed discussion of the Code see W.Z. Goldman, (1993). *Women, the State, and Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

²²⁶ A. Kollontai, (1921). 'Tezisy o Kommunisticheskoi Morali v Oblasti Brachnykh Otnoshenii,' *Kommunistka*, 12-13: 29.

and accidental." New relationships, "compulsory for no one," would develop based on mutual feelings.²²⁷

Sex workers were no longer arrested or tormented by the police. The position taken was, that the abolition of the sex trade was possible not by punishing the women but by changing the social environments. Marginal sexualities were also recognised. The 1922 list of crimes and penalties excluded same sex relations from the list of crimes. Led by Health Commissar Shemashko, an Old Bolshevik, a team of Soviet doctors and psychologists went in 1923 to Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sex research. Hirschfeld recorded that Shemashko expressed happiness that in the new Russia same sex love was not punished.

In building up the Red Army, Trotsky, the Commissar for War, did not impose conscription on women, but he allowed them to join, and get arms training. Some 50,000 to 70,000 women joined the army, which included several thousand cross dressing women who fought in the front lines.

But there were social forces opposed to these trends, as well as forces within the party. At least two influential leaders, Gregory Zinoviev and Josef Stalin, were not well disposed to the *Zhenotdel*. In the early period, with direct support from Lenin, Clara Zetkin, the German Marxist most responsible for building up a mass women's socialist movement in Germany, attempted a similar process in the Communist International. An International Women's Secretariat was created, with its own publication.²²⁸ At the

²²⁷ Leon Trotsky, (1923). 'From the Old Family to the New,' *Pravda*, July 13, reprinted in his *Women and the Family*. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970, p 26.

²²⁸ See J. Riddell, 'The Communist Women's International (1921-26)', <http://links.org.au/node/2358> (accessed on 30.01.2017)

Fourth Congress of the International, the last where Lenin was present, Zetkin delivered the opening speech in the session on work among women. She made it clear that separate organisations were must to work among women. She highlighted the Soviet Russian experience, but also criticised communist parties of a number of countries for refusing to acknowledge the need for autonomous work. Discussions took place on how to bring women into party leaderships, how to fight for the equality of women workers in the bourgeois countries, as well as a report by Sofia Smidovich on women in Soviet Russia.

Campaigns in other countries highlighted the Soviet experience, including issues like legalisation of abortion, ease of divorce, right to work, equal pay, as preconditions without which women could not be freed from domestic violence.

But from 1924, both inside Russia and internationally, things began to change. Kollontai had gone into opposition in 1921. In the mid-20s, her views on women's sexuality and freedom in that realm resulted in her being severely attacked by more conservatives in the party. The *Zhenotdel's* powers shrank. The Family Code of the mid 1920s saw discussions, and pressure from peasants against full equality for women. By the end of the decade, Stalin's so-called revolution from above meant the creation of a bureaucratic command system in which many of the older hierarchical structures reappeared. These included the gradual reduction of gender equality, making abortion increasingly difficult, punishing sex workers, and proclaiming motherhood a glorious state. Early on, Clara Zetkin had recognized the trend. One of her attempts to fight against this retrograde tendency was to publish her reminiscences of Lenin, which included a long section on her discussions with him on women's liberation, in course of which he defended the setting up of autonomous organisations for women, and also made the remarkable statement that

Unfortunately it is still true to say of many of our comrades, 'scratch a Communist and find a Philistine.' Of course, you must scratch the sensitive spot, their mentality as regards woman. Could there be a more damning proof of this than the calm acquiescence of men who see how women got more and more deskilled in the petty, monotonous household work, their strength and time dissipated and wasted, their minds growing narrow and stale, their hearts beating slowly, their will weakened?²²⁹

While it is possible to show important weaknesses in the same discussion with Lenin, including his rather dogmatic position on sexuality and other issues, what is important is, Lenin clearly saw a need for sustained organisation of women, and tackling sexism within the party. While lip service would be paid to Lenin, this policy would end in the 1930s. As industrialisation at a breakneck pace proceeded, women in large numbers were pulled into industry. Children in large numbers were left to fend for themselves. Juvenile crime was treated in a harsh way. Jurists and criminologists now targeted family disintegration as the primary source of juvenile crime. Claiming that crime was no longer motivated by poverty or social conditions, officials sought to make parents responsible for their children's behaviour by establishing repressive measures to enforce responsibility. The Commissariat of Enlightenment was criticised for its softness. Soon after, in 1936, there came a new Family code with a pro-family emphasis. Abortion was restricted unless a woman's health was threatened. The new law also granted an increase in the insurance stipend for birth, and doubled the monthly payment

²²⁹<https://www.marxists.org/archive/zetkin/1924/reminiscences-of-lenin.htm#h07> (accessed on 30.01.2017)

to employed mothers of infants from 5 to 10 *rubles* a month.²³⁰ As Goldman puts it, “Krasikov, deputy chairman of the Supreme Court, scaled the pinnacle of hypocrisy with his suggestion that poverty and cramped housing could no longer justify abortion because the maternity stipends and day-care centres allotted by the new law could rightfully be viewed as salary increases and an extension of housing space.”²³¹ By 1944, the reversal in family law was complete: the Family Edict of that year repudiated the remaining traces of the legislation of the 1920s by withdrawing recognition of de facto marriage, banning paternity suits, reintroducing the category of illegitimacy, and transferring divorce back to the courts. While women were not pushed back to the Tsarist age, substantial inequality and male domination were established.

²³⁰ W.Z. Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution*, p. 331.

²³¹ *Ibid*, p. 333.

The Russian Revolution: Beyond Ideologies

Moumita Chowdhury

Introduction

In the last century, scholars have interpreted the Russian Revolution in numerous ways.²³² This paper will hopefully add another dimension to this field of research. It will analyse the Russian Revolution through the prism of *realpolitik* and focus on the relation between state, power and force. The paper seeks to argue that the establishment and maintenance of statehood has little to do with ideology. Rather, ideology is often moulded and re-moulded to serve political and military purpose. In the game of political supremacy, desire for *power* acts as the prime motivator and *force*, in the form of the army acts the primary tool. In fact the character of the state and its ideological underpinnings are often shaped by power and force. For e.g. Imperial Russia created an autocratic garrison state, to unabashedly use its army for political supremacy. Similarly, the Bolshevik Party transformed the definition of socialism to justify its use of force to gain power. Through the analyses of the role of army and the impact of wars on the Russian state and society, this paper will show that it was the combination of power and force that underlined the coming of the Bolshevik Revolution. With respect to the army, the paper will analyse the fiscal burden that the Imperial army created on Russian economy. Additionally, it will also assess the army's role as the coercive

²³² For a survey of the major historiographical trends on the Russian Revolution see, E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, 3 vols. (London: MacMillan, 1950), Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution, 1899-1919*, (New York: Harvill, 1990), Orlando Figgs, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924*, (New York: Pimlico, 1997), Christopher Hill, *Lenin and the Russian Revolution*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1947)

mechanism of the Imperial government and the effect this had on the creation of anti-imperial feeling among the Russian population. The essay will also consider the significance of four wars fought by the Russian state: The Crimean War (1853-1856), The Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), The First World War (1914-1918) and The Russian Civil War (1917-1922). The first three wars will be examined to ascertain the politico-economic damage they did to the Russian state and the Civil War will be studied to understand the relation of power and force within the Bolshevik state and if the new regime differed from the old in this respect. The paper will look at the Russian Revolution from a politico-military perspective and take the form of history from top. Due to the language constraints of the author, primary sources could not be consulted in writing the paper. It will be primarily based on secondary sources.

Imperial Russia: Autocracy, War and Coercion

The aggressive and occasionally reckless character of the Russian state coupled with its desire for political supremacy, ultimately resulted in the Bolshevik Revolution. No one would have considered Russia to be a major political force in the sixteenth century. Although, a vast country possessing immense natural resources, Russia was a poor state. Its vast territory made it difficult to establish a consolidated state. Her climate adversely affected the development of commercialized agriculture: short growing seasons did not provide the peasantry any incentive to practice intensive cultivation.²³³ Then, how did Russia create an empire and become a political power? The answer lies in the character of state that the Muscovy created. The Muscovy understood the crucial relation between state, power and

²³³ Marshall Poe and Eric Lohr, "Introduction: The Role of War in Russian History" in Eric Lohr and Marshall Poe (ed.), *The Military and Society in Russia, 1450-1917*, (Lieden: Brill Publication, 2002), p 2.

force. They knew that one of the primary factors in the creation an empire is force and empire's raison d'être is power.²³⁴ So, it sought to establish a garrison state ruled by an autocracy. Russian autocracy comprised of the Tsar, his army, the nobility and provincial elites. Together, they alone held the right to legitimate coercion within the realm. This allowed them to introduce reforms that would put the garrison state in place: the Russian state created an imperial buffer zone by occupying non Muscovy town like Kazan, Astrakhan, Smolensk, Polotsk, Kiev and Crimean coastal cities; it sought to modernize its army by importing arms from Europe and establishing its own arms industry; and took several measures to finance its army. Large sections of the cultivable land and the peasants attached to them were nationalized and given to military servitors as payment—thus creating serfdom. By the end of the sixteenth century the Muscovite grand princes have subdued their competitors in the north-east and the western steppe region.²³⁵ Thus, the Muscovy created a strong state that served the politico-military aspirations of the rulers. With its Eurasian empire secured, it was now time for Russia to turn westward. Under the Romanov Dynasty (1613-1917) Russia gradually established itself as contender in the contemporary West European politics. Peter the Great (1689—1725) transformed Russia from an 'eastern polity' into 'Imperial Russia'. He further developed the garrison state to turn into an effective war machine. All his reforms were driven by military goals and directed towards increasing the state's military strength. He formally legalized conscription to establish a centralized army. He also introduced financial

²³⁴ Dominic Lieven, "Russia as Empire and Periphery", in Dominic Lieven ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia, Volume 2: Imperial Russia, 1689-1917*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p 14.

²³⁵ Poe and Lohr, "Introduction: The Role of War in Russian History" in Eric Lohr and Marshall Poe (ed.), *The Military and Society in Russia, 1450-1917*, pp 4-6.

reforms that would allow for better extraction of revenue from the population²³⁶. The poll tax, introduced in 1718, was levied on all male members of the taxpaying population.²³⁷ Peter the Great also introduced state-led industrialization, particularly ship-building and transportation, both of which were important in increasing the military strength of the state. Moreover, he introduced reforms which tied the nobility closely to the state. Under Peter the Great, Imperial Russia sought to exploit both the nobility and peasantry to augment the power of the state, namely the army. In fact, the military came to serve as an instrument of internal coercion and external aggression. This trend continued under his successors, for e.g. Nicholas I, fearful of domestic and external upheavals maintained an army amounting to almost one million men. Furthermore, it was the army which saved the Tsarist state during the Revolution of 1905.²³⁸

While the Muscovite princes and the Imperial Tsars were concerned with creating a strong state that could maintain internal peace and build an empire; they failed to notice the effect it had on its subjects. From eighteenth century onwards Russia was involved in constant warfare on the northern, western and southern frontiers and military expenditure came to dominate Russia's finances. During this time, the army and navy accounted for more than half of Russia's state expenditure. In fact, by 1914 Russia's military outlay exceeded that of Britain. But, the Russian state had no concrete apparatus in place to effectively support such spending. There was no regular system of taxation: while the

²³⁶ Brian D. Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army, Civil-Military Relation, 1689-2000*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp 38-39.

²³⁷ Janet Hartley, "Russia as a Fiscal State, 1689-1825" in Christopher Storrs ed., *The Fiscal Military State in Eighteenth Century Europe, Essays in honour of P.G.M. Dickson*, (2009, reprint, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), p 130.

²³⁸ Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army, Civil-Military Relation, 1689-2000*, p 40-61.

main revenue was derived from taxing ploughed land; as many as 280 different taxes were levied in Russia in 1600. These included taxes on buildings, goods, livestock and postal service. Even then the military expenditure of Peter's Northern Wars could not be met. New forms of revenue extraction, such as the poll tax were introduced. The state's income was supplemented by the sale of monopolies on alcohol and salt, excise and customs duties. Even these could not meet the needs of the Russian army. The state therefore took loans from national and foreign banks. To overcome such financial crises caused by military exigencies, the Russian state frequently issued paper money and debased the currency.²³⁹ Russia failed to bring about an economic overhaul and establish a military-fiscal state which would match its politico-military aspirations. Instead, it made piecemeal efforts to make the existing system work its favour. This created an economic system that was stunted and imbalanced and provided a fertile breeding ground for popular discontent.

The burden of Russia's pursuit of power fell squarely on the shoulders of the peasants and urban dwellers. For e.g. the poll tax, introduced at a time when the country was experiencing severe food shortages, levied further hardship on the population. Apart from economic hardships, there were other ways in which the Russian people furthered the Russian state's desire for power and political recognition. The system of conscription introduced by Peter demanded that every year one man from every twenty household would serve in the army. For the state, this greatly increased the recruiting pool

²³⁹ Peter Waldron, "State Finance" in Lieven ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia, Volume 2: Imperial Russia, 1689-1917*, p 470; Hartley, "Russia as a Fiscal State, 1689-1825" in Storrs ed., *The Fiscal Military State in Eighteenth Century Europe, Essays in honour of P.G.M. Dickson*, pp 130-135.

and ensured regular supply of troops. But for those who were conscripted, the army came to signify death. The recruits were torn away from their social foundations and thrust into a world of brutal discipline, corporal punishment, irregular pay, shortage of pay and possibly death. The Russian autocracy had created a society which was hierarchically organized, with rulers at the helm of power. This allowed the rulers to sustain institutions like serfdom and peasant bondage, which could be taxed, drafted and held accountable.²⁴⁰ A similar fate was meted out to the newly emerging working class. State sponsored industrialization had created new avenues of employment, but in the absence of labour laws, the working class lived in conditions of poverty and squalor. The state on the other hand was heavily invested in keeping the workforce in line and actively participated in suppressing any unrest.²⁴¹ This led development of discontent and unrest among the workers. Effective exploitation of its social components allowed Russia to field larger and well equipped armies, but it deterred the growth of democratic political and social institutions. The Russian society remained therefore trapped in a feudal miasma. Whenever the people revolted against such blatant abuse of power, the state employed the military to bring order. In fact, till the middle of the nineteenth century, the domestic role of the army had been confined to suppression of revolts and strikes. From 1890 to 1894, the army was called 83 times per year to subdue popular unrest and from 1900 to 1904; it was summoned 312 times per year for the same purpose.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ William C. Fuller, Jr, "The Imperial Army" in Lieven ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia, Volume 2: Imperial Russia, 1689-1917*, pp 531-536.

²⁴¹ Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army, Civil-Military Relation, 1689-2000*, p 51.

²⁴² Taylor, *Politics and the Russian Army, Civil-Military Relation, 1689-2000*, pp 60-61.

Therefore, for the common people in Imperial Russia, the state and the army were tools of exploitation and repression. The state extracted the life blood of the population to fulfil its quest for internal power and external glory, but gave little in return. Repeated military failures in the nineteenth century proved that the Russian state was ill-equipped to handle the role it had assumed. And as the state gradually lost its only source of legitimacy: that of being a military power, popular discontent came closer and closer to a revolution. The state realized, albeit too late, that it needs to introduce reforms and make compromises, if it was to hold onto power. But each such concession cleared the path for its demise and the coming of the Bolshevik Revolution. The first among such wars was The Crimean War (1853-1856). Defeat in this war had far reaching consequences for Russia. It made the Russian autocracy come to terms with its military redundancy as compared to other European powers. Alexander II realized that the Russian military apparatus was outdated—its weapons were archaic, its recruiting mechanism was outmoded, its communication system was underdeveloped and the Russian society and economy was in disarray. It was obvious that reforms had to be made, if Russia was to hold on to her prestige. For Alexander II, restoring the greatness of the Russian state was the major concern. To do so, the military structure needed to re-organize. The peasants and urban dwellers could no longer be expected to bear the burden of the army. A more broad based mechanism of recruitment had to be established. Alexander II realized that the strength of the army lies not only in numbers, but also on the moral and intellectual quality of the troops. And these qualities could only develop if the defence of the state became a general affair of the people.²⁴³ But changing the military structure will

²⁴³ Josh Sanborn, “Military Reform, Moral Reform and End of the Old Regime” in Eric Lohr and Marshall Poe (ed.), *The Military and Society in Russia, 1450-1917*, p 507

not help in country like Russia, where the social system was truncated and top heavy. Thus the “Great Reforms” sought to create a civil society by emancipating the serfs, abolishing corporal punishment, banishing the military service law and reforming education. The autocracy hoped that this will help in the development of national and civic consciousness and instil a feeling of dignity among the people.²⁴⁴ Although motivated by military concerns, the Great Reforms freed the peasantry from centuries of feudal bondage and created a new class among the existing landowning gentry.²⁴⁵ It introduced concepts of rights of the people, duty of the state and ownership among the greater population of Russia, making them more politically aware. Thus, the Crimean War had serious consequences for Russian state, which had contend with the growing expectations of the population. At the same time, the common people, through migration and deeper contact with the urban dwellers became aware of concepts like accountability of the state and rights of citizens. Later, this population will form the rank and file of the Bolshevik Revolution.

The Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) further demonstrated the extent to which the fate of the Russian state at home, was tied to its policies of war abroad. In the nineteenth century, victory in the battlefield had reinforced the legitimacy of the Russian autocracy and its political conservatism at home. As Japan began to pile defeat after defeat on the Russian state, the wider population burst into rebellion. Across the empire, people were turning against the state and by the autumn of 1905, the very existence of the

²⁴⁴ Larisa Zakharova, “The Reign of Alexander II: A Watershed?” in Lieven ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia, Volume 2: Imperial Russia, 1689-1917*, p 603.

²⁴⁵ Nicholas Spulbur, *Russia's Economic Transitions, From Late Tsarism to the New Millennium.*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp 13-14

tsarist regime was at stake. According to the common people, defeat in the war took away the autocracy's legitimacy to rule. They felt that the adventurist war policies of the government had rendered it impotent. The Russian state realized that it would have shed its autocratic nature, if it was to survive. The Tsar Nicholas II, had two options: he could either appoint a dictator who would ruthlessly suppress the rebellion or he could give the people civil rights, freedom of speech, press, assembly and association. While the former course would have saved the autocracy, it would have been a temporary solution and motivate further upsurge. Thus, he opted for the latter option and issued a manifesto which would give the people greater civil liberties, an expanded franchise for the elections to a Duma and the promise that all new laws will have to be ratified by the Duma before they can be implemented. Along with this, an agrarian reform was introduced in 1906 which gave the peasants the right to sell their land and join the urban labour force.²⁴⁶ The limited success of the Revolution of 1905 gave the population, the confidence to demand a complete demise of autocracy in Russia later on. But the honour of sounding the death knell for Imperial Russia belonged to the First World War. Imperial Russia entered the First World War unprepared. Its industries were not developed enough to produce adequate war materiel. Russia's domestic market was too small to support large scale government loans. Therefore, it had to depend on foreign loans to support its industries. Declaration of war brought a sudden end to this, because its chief benefactor Germany was now its enemy. But the exigencies of war demanded that Russia continued to expand its military industrialization, which had severe social repercussions. The rapid increase in

²⁴⁶ Jonathan Frankel, "The War and the Fate of Tsarist Russia", in Rotem Kowner ed., *The Impact of the Russo-Japanese War*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), pp 55-69.

the urban defence industry resulted in an influx of peasants to the cities. The urban institutions and infrastructures collapsed and caused massive hardship. Growing inflation added to the suffering of the common people. The inflation was primarily caused by a growing shortage of grain in the urban market. Furthermore, shortage of skilled labour put the Russian state at the mercy of the politically active working class. However, the final nail in the coffin happened to be, Russia's inability to serve its chief supporter: the army. The attrition rate of Russian soldiers and officers in the First World War was very high. To continue fighting, Russia kept on sending barely trained troops to the front.²⁴⁷ Russia's inadequacy in preparing for the war made it vulnerable to rising tide of discontent. The disgruntled army joined hands with the impoverished peasants and brought down the Russian autocracy.

Bolshevik Russia: Ideology, Army and Coercion

The February Revolution of 1917 saw the fall of the Romanov dynasty and the beginning of people's rule in Russia. The newly formed Provincial Government began the arduous task of reorganizing war effort, feeding the populace, introducing civic freedom and placating the demands of the workers and peasants. But their authority was undermined by the existence of a parallel locus of power—the *Soviets*. The Soviets (councils) had emerged during the Revolution of 1905 to organize the workers' strikes and were revived during the February Revolution of 1917. Most of the prominent socialist leaders associated themselves with soviets and held more influence over the Russian populace than the Provincial Government. The common people insisted that the socialist leaders should assume power and establish a true people's government. But among the socialists there was much debate

²⁴⁷ Eric Lohr, "War and Revolution" in Lieven ed., *The Cambridge History of Russia, Volume 2: Imperial Russia, 1689-1917*, pp 659-663.

regarding such assumption of power. The Mensheviks firmly believed that Russia was not ready for a socialist revolution. According to them Russia needed to experience the rise of capitalism before it could embark on a socialist path. Instead, they supported the war effort, called for order and discipline and identified themselves with the policies of the Provincial Government. But the Bolsheviks, particularly their leader, thought otherwise. Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, better known as Lenin believed that Russia in February 1917 was passing through the first stage of socialist revolution, where the power had been given to the bourgeoisie. In the next stage, the proletariat and the poor peasants shall assume power. According to the Bolsheviks, the world in general and Russia in particular was ripe for a socialist revolution. They denounced the First World War as a predatory imperialist war inseparably connected to capitalism. They believed that monopoly capitalism had reached its evolutionary limit by the end of the nineteenth century. During 1880s and 1890s, the leading manufacturing states found it increasingly difficult to reproduce capital and absorb finished products. To remedy this, they began to export goods and capital on a massive scale. Powerful armies and navies were employed to curb the resistance of the host economies, against this influx of cheap goods and superabundant capital. The imperialist state was therefore a tool for capitalist expansion. The states participating in the First World War were trying to perpetuate the development of capitalism. Therefore, any institution that supported the war was also inherently capitalist. Such organisations promoted totalitarianism and subsumed the society. The only way out of this, was to destroy the totalitarian state and in turn destroy capitalism. According to Lenin, the Provincial Government by supporting the war had failed the Russian society—the dead kept piling up, the economy was ruined and inflation and unemployed have spiralled out of control. The only way out, according to Lenin

was to devolve power unto the society, namely the proletariat and the peasants. All the land was to be nationalised, a national bank was to be established, all officials were to be elected and their appointments revocable. A state modelled on the Paris Commune was to be established--there should not be any standing army and police force or separate bodies of politicians, bureaucrats, judges, jailers, etc.²⁴⁸

The influence of the Bolshevik Revolution on the Russian society was radical. The socialist programme did not just destroy the legitimacy of the state and all its powerholder, it made impossible the establishment of any form of social order and the production and circulation of goods. The peasants expelled the landlords and seized the land. But the absence of consumer goods in the market took away the peasants' incentive to invest in commercial agriculture. The lack of a thriving manufacturing and trading establishment meant that the peasants had no place to spend the surplus earned through commercial agriculture. They therefore went back to subsistence farming. The industrial workers too followed their own agenda—they rejected everything that symbolised bourgeoisie control and Imperial industrialization, particularly the intelligentsia and authority figures. The October Revolution had not only destroyed old patterns of legitimation and authority, but also dissolved all linkages between technical intelligentsia, managerial cadres and workers. With the Bolshevik Revolution, the worker lost the compulsion of capitalist wage relation, but did not acquire any alternative moral or material incentive to ensure discipline in the work process. This resulted in a massive decline of

²⁴⁸ Neil Harding, “The Russian Revolution: An Ideology in Power” in Terence Ball and Richard Bellamy ed. *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Political Thought*, (2003, reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) in pp 239-251.

industrial production.²⁴⁹ The Bolshevik leadership realized that it needed to take control and establish its authority, if socialism was to survive.

Its existence was also endangered by the presence of multiple threats, both internal and external. Within Russia, there was a sharp resistance to the Bolshevik take over among the officers and army cadets. The Cossacks also refused to recognize the new regime: in the Orenburg area and the Manchurian frontier Cossacks went into rebellion. Moreover, taking advantage of the preoccupations of the new government, neighbouring regions like Ukraine proclaimed their independence. The situation was further exacerbated by the participation of European powers like Germany, who sought to use this opportunity to further their reach into East Europe. Facing threats from multiple sides, the Bolshevik government had to take a concrete step. This came in the form of the Red Army. Following the socialist principle the Red Army tried recruit volunteers. But when the call was answered poorly, the Bolshevik state created an army through compulsory universal mobilization. This did not sit well with the peasantry, who repeatedly refused to leave their farms and join the army. Initially, it imposed universal mobilization upon certain age groups, but over time mobilization became extensive and intensive. Creating a vast army brought with it the problems of supply and transport. A central authority for supply was established in 1918.²⁵⁰ Central authority was also established in the economic and political sphere to aid the

²⁴⁹ Harding, "The Russian Revolution: An Ideology in Power" in Terence Ball and Richard Bellamy ed. *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Political Thought*, pp 256-257

²⁵⁰ David Footman, *Civil War in Russia*, (New York: Fredrick A. Praeger Inc., 1962), pp 15-28, 135-157; Orlando Figes, "The Red Army and Mass Mobilization during the Russian Civil War, 1918-1920". *Past and Present*, No. 139, November, 1990, pp 168-211.

army. This concerted effort bore fruit and the Bolshevik state survived the civil war. It also took lessons from it. The formative years of Bolshevik rule proved that the Commune was not a viable option for state control. In fact a return to the foundational principles of the revolution would take away the power of the Bolsheviks. The poor response of the workers to the call of the Red Army convinced Lenin, that the working class have been dislodged from its class roots. The only alternative, according to him was to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat, which would retrench the values of efficient production and equitable distribution among the workers. The dictatorship was a centralized form of popular government, which set out to transform property relations. By 1920, Lenin insisted that socialism had less to do with autonomy, self-activity and freedom, and more to do with maximization of production. This could only be achieved by establishing maximum discipline, accountability and authoritarian control within the working process. Even the ruling class i.e. the workers would not be exempted from state control and coercion. The only mechanism capable of doing this was the army, which would have absolute jurisdiction over the population. Thus, the Bolshevik state that emerged after the Civil War (1918-1920) was distinctly different from the one what was promised in 1917. It was an authoritative organization which was bound by no morality or law and ruthlessly pursued the class interest of the proletariat.²⁵¹

In certain ways, Bolshevik Russia reintroduced the garrison state, albeit under a red flag. It closed its borders and detained its wider population within them. It re-conquered the surrounding territory and brought back the “buffer zone” of

²⁵¹ Harding, “The Russian Revolution : An Ideology in Power” in Terence Ball and Richard Bellamy ed. *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Political Thought*, pp 257-260.

the Muscovy. The state undertook a massive program of industrialization and extensively invested in heavy industry. Most importantly, the Bolsheviks imposed a refurbished form of serfdom to man the whole enterprise: it was claimed that socialism obligated every citizen to work for the betterment of the state. In fact, it was the garrison state that helped the Bolsheviks in saving socialism from external threats---namely, Nazi Germany and the United States.²⁵²

Conclusion

When seen from the perspective of power and force, Imperial Russia and Bolshevik Russia seem quite similar. Both of them were centralized authoritarian states that sought to protect interests of a particular class. Both of them aligned themselves with sections of the society that best served their purpose. The Muscovites and Romanovs patronized the nobles and social elites, because they were most likely to support its aspirations of an empire and political prestige. Similarly, the Bolsheviks patronized the workers because it felt that the peasantry was politically motivated enough. Both of them put the survival and prosperity of the state above all else and did not hesitate in using coercion and control to further their cause. With regards to ideology, the Bolshevik state gradually became what it used to condemn. It went from being an egalitarian regime to a totalitarian state, to secure its power over Russia. Over time it created a garrison state, much like the Muscovy, to secure and maintain political supremacy. This goes to show that in the matters of state, *realpolitik* holds more importance than ideology.

²⁵² Poe and Lohr, "Introduction: The Role of War in Russian History" in Eric Lohr and Marshall Poe (ed.), *The Military and Society in Russia, 1450-1917*, pp 11-13.

From The Gulag to Auschwitz: The Impact of The Russian Revolution

Biswajit Mukherjee

&

Subhadip Das

The paper proposes to begin with an old Polish joke about a little girl:

Who is told to write an essay in school entitled ' Why I love the Soviet Union' .Uncertain of the answer, she asks her mother: ' Mummy, why do I love the Soviet Union? 'What are you talking about, ' cries her mother, ' the Soviets are criminals, nobody loves them, and everybody hates them! 'She asks her father.' What sort of rubbish are you talking now,' he says growing angry, ' they are oppressors whose troops are occupying our country, the whole world loathes them! 'Distressed, the girl asks several other adults the same question, but receives the same reply from all of them. In the end she writes: ' I love the Soviet Union because nobody else does ' . (Kolakowski , 25)

Between 1890 and 1914 it was not England, France or Germany, the first countries to undergo capitalist development that saw rising possibilities of violent social upheaval, but Russia. Her economic backwardness was reflected in the political sphere by the weakness of her middle class, incapable of neutralizing the activities of the lower classes who wanted a total transformation of society.

In 1902 Lenin, appreciating the revolutionary movement was bankrupt, decided to set up his future party on army lines, with a highly centralized staff-and, for revolution to succeed, workers must be used as troops. They might be educated, lucid, politically free; just the same they were to go on obeying the men who did their thinking for them. The success of *what is to be done?* shows an outlook and a style; leaders of other political groups, particularly social democrats, were indignant, but in Russia, as elsewhere, they too manipulated militants and electors just as staffs manipulated troops or churches their faithful; and they did not even have the excuse of wanting to carry out a total proletarian revolution. Even before they (Russia and Italy) created communism and fascism, these two countries left their mark on the early twentieth century, the Russians by signing the peace of Brest-Litovsk, the Italians by crying 'farewell to arms' at Caporetto. (Ferro, 6-8)

It might be said that:

One must be certain that Russian Bolshevism, German Nazism, Italian Fascism were all bastard offshoots of the socialist tradition ; yet in bastard children,too, a similarity to the parents is presented, and can be clearly perceived. There were those for whom revolutionary will and political opportunity to seize power all that counted, and they produced two totalitarian versions of socialism: fascism and bolshevism. (Kolakowski, 52-53)

Furet and Nolte in their letters argue the fact that whether the Nazis acquired power in order to counter the threat of Bolshevism. They argue the fact whether the extremism of Bolshevism provokes Nazism. As Furet puts it that Nolte's contention is in the fact that

On the practical level, Lenin's extermination of the bourgeoisie in the name of the abstract idea of a classless society creates a social panic in the part of Europe most vulnerable to the communist threat and prepares the way for the triumph of Hitler and the Nazi counter terror.(Furet-Nolte , 4)

Furet claims Nolte believes that "the Bolshevik suppression of the bourgeois as a class paved the way for the Holocaust, and that the gulag precedes Auschwitz." In a letter dated February 20, 1996 Nolte writes to Furet 'I also would have gone no further than an exclusive interest in National Socialism and its German roots if I had not discovered by chance that the socialist thought of the young Mussolini was influenced by Nietzsche as by Marx .' Marc Ferro believes that:

In summer 1918 the bosses began to appreciate that Germany was being led to disaster. Discreetly, the bankers and industrialists demanded that the Kaiser should abdicate, thus abandoning the crown before the army, Reichstag or majority socialists did. They also made up to the unions, and there was an agreement to limit catastrophe, on 9 October 1918 , between Legien and Stinnes . They eared revolution more than defeat, and the formation of the soviets of the Russian type. (Ferro, 194)

He further points out that Lenin from

September 1914 demanded a transformation of imperialist war into civil war .The absolute evil was Tsarism, and military victory now could only consolidate it ; therefore revolutionaries must work for their own country's defeat , a tactic valid , by Lenin's reckoning , not only for Russia . (Ferro, 181)

This did not come to pass. The stage however was set.

Francois Furet cleverly writes that

In the aftermath of the Second World War, when, through the defeat of Hitler, History seemed to give a certificate of democracy to Stalin, as if antifascism, a purely negative definition, sufficed for freedom .By this, the antifascist obsession added a disastrous effect to its necessary role; it made the analysis of communist regimes difficult, if not impossible. (Furet-Nolte , 16-17)

Francois Furet further points out in his book *The passing of an illusion: The idea of communism in the twentieth century* that:

Italian Fascism, more directly than any other dictatorial regime of those years, was born of the war. So was Bolshevism, but Lenin acquired power because he had opposed war, not by harnessing it. National Socialism shared the same origin, although Hitler, orphan of the defeat, had already been beaten once by the Weimer Republic prior to his own victory. (Furet , 168)

We must not forget that Marx and Lenin owing to different circumstances saw things in a different light

For Marx socialism was above all the result of a country's economic maturity; he saw the proletarian revolution and socialization of the means of production as a kind of inevitable explosion resulting from what one might call the chemistry of economic life. For Lenin socialism was a problem of political power, which can and should be seized if the opportunity presents itself: wherever political conditions for seizing power arise, they should be fully exploited. (Kolakowski , 10)

It might be said that:

Traditional tyrannies are less destructive insofar as their aim is limited to suppressing political opposition and eradicating from cultural life such elements as could pose a threat to their authority. As a rule such tyrannies limit their goals: they want to remain undivided and indestructible, but not necessarily to extend their control over all spheres of life . They can thus tolerate cultural expression if it is politically different. Communism , on the other hand , from the beginning conceived of itself as an all embracing power ; it seeks not only to eliminate threats to its existence but also to regulate all spheres of collective life , including ideology , literature , art , science , the family , even styles of dress . Such an ideal state of total control is of course

extremely difficult to achieve; nevertheless, we can recall a time when the drive to achieve it was very strong, and ideological norms were established for everything: from the only correct view of the theory of relativity through the only correct kinds of music to the width of trousers that uniquely satisfied the requirements of socialist life .(Kolakowski , 26-27)

In a letter to Nolte dated June 24, 1996 Furet writes:

The point communism and fascism have in common is the fundamental political deficit of modern democracy. The different types of totalitarian regimes that are established in their name share the will to put an end to this deficit by restoring the main role to political decisions and by integrating the masses into one party through the constant assertion of their ideological orthodoxy. The fact that the two ideologies proclaim themselves to be in a situation of radical conflict does not prevent them from reinforcing each other by this very hostility, the communist nourishes his faith with antifascism, and the fascist with anticommunism. And both fight the same enemy, bourgeois democracy. The communist sees it as the breeding of fascism, while the fascist sees as the antechamber of Bolshevism, but they both fight to destroy it. The parallel history of Bolshevism and fascism, which I believe, as you do, is necessary to the understanding of twentieth century Europe, should not

obscure the specificity of their passion and crimes, which are what identifies each one. If not, how could the intentions of the actors be explained? Hitler did not need the Soviet precedent of the liquidation of the Kulaks in order to contemplate, plan, and recommend the liquidation of the Jews. The way between the avowed intention and its execution was paved by war and conquest, without necessary recourse to the hypothesis of an imitation of the anti-Kulak terror of the early 1930s. (Furet-Nolte, 33)

Raymond Aron points out that:

The opposition of the totalitarian regimes to the communists is of a different order. Originally they invoke the Communist threat to win over the masses by claiming to be saving the country from the Communist chaos. It is well known that Mussolini's great success came six months after the failure of the working class movements; everyone knows, too, that in pre-Hitler Germany there were fewer than 5 million Communist voters out of a total electorate of 35 million. So it does not look as if necessary conditions for a communist revolution were present in either Italy or Germany. But opposition to a Communist regime has been an effective propaganda weapon both at home and abroad.

More important still, I think the totalitarian regimes' opposition to communism is quite genuine, in that it is a rival. The more the

National Socialist regime gives rise to a kind of domestic revolution, than more dangerous communism is likely to seem. It looks like an alternative solution to the same problem, another possible outcome of same process. (Aron , 169)

Furet in a letter dated April 3, 1996 tells Nolte that no one can understand one of the two camps without understanding the other, so interdependent are they in representations, passions and global historical reality. He further says that Mussolinian Fascism and Nazism as a reaction to Bolshevism:

Has some validity in the sense that the fear of communism fed fascist parties, but to me only partially because it has the disadvantage of masking what was endogenous and particular to the fascist regimes while overemphasizing what they both fought against .The cultural elements from which they fashioned a doctrine existed before the First World War and therefore the October revolution. Mussolini did not wait until 1917 to invent the union of the revolutionary and national idea. The German extreme right, and even the entire right did not need communism to hate democracy I concede that Hitler privileged the hatred of Bolshevism, but as a final product of the democratic bourgeois world. In fact, certain of his close accomplices, such as Goebbels, made no mystery of hating Paris and London more than Moscow. Therefore, I think that the thesis of fascism as a reactive movement against communism only explains part of the

phenomenon; it fails to explain the difference between Italian and German fascism. Above all, it does not allow us to understand origins and traits that the two fascisms share with the detested regime. I

will add, however, that in assigning both a chronological and a causal meaning to the precedence of Bolshevism to fascism, you expose yourself to the accusation of wanting to exonerate Nazism in a certain sense . The claim that the gulag preceded Auschwitz is neither false nor insignificant , but it is not a cause effect link. But Hitler and the Nazis didn't need this (anti Bolshevism) to give substance to their hatred of the Jews, which is older than the October Revolution. In fact, before them, Mussolini, whom they so admired, had led anticommunist fascism to victory with anti Semitism. Here I find the disagreement that separates us regarding the origins of Nazism, which are older and more specifically German than a simple hostility to Bolshevism will allow. (Furet-Nolte,20-21)

Nolte replies to Furet's letter on May 9, 1996 :

You are absolutely right to think that National Socialism could not be deduced exclusively from a reaction to the Bolshevik movement, that on the contrary there existed , even before the war , a brutal German Nationalism, and that explicit intentions of the extermination of the Jews were even expressed in the programme of one party. A

glance into your area of specialization, the French Revolution and its prehistory, will perhaps help clarify the remark. Well before 1789, tendencies opposed to the Enlightenment existed in Germany too, and the criticism levelled at their partisans was very similar to those later aimed at the Jacobins. Nevertheless, these tendencies took on another character when the king was condemned to death and executed; things became really serious. From my perspective, in almost the same manner, things became really serious for Hitler when he was confronted with the reality of what he called 'bloody Russian dictatorship' and the 'destruction of national intelligentsia.' (Furet-Nolte, 27)

Marc Ferro points out:

Up to the Russian Revolution the rightness or otherwise of the war and its aims had been a matter for governments. There was opposition, particularly in Germany, but it aimed mainly at the way the war was fought or the aims of the government, and in any case the questioning had little effect since the ruling classes kept the population well in hand through propaganda, control of the press, and censorship. True opposition was still tiny. With the fall of Tsarism, all this changed. In Petrograd power fell to a government that could exist only in so far as it satisfied public opinion. Opinion was naturally divided, but now all problems of the country's future could be

discussed without hindrance. Lenin, arriving in Petrograd, said Russia was the freest country ever to exist.

Of all problems the greatest was the war. Opinion and the Soviet approved the formula, 'peace without annexations and contributions', and expected their government to adopt it; and thenceforth the war and its aims were contested, not just by powerless oppositions, but by one of the warring states, by a government talking the language of authority. The Petrograd Soviet, speaking for revolutionary Russia, launched a peace appeal on 27 March 1917 to the peoples at war, and this opened the question of peace. As yet no one knew whether it would be the revolutionary peace demanded by internationalists, or the victorious peace sought by governments, or the compromise peace sought by some conciliatory spirits.

After February the Russian bourgeoisie had by instinct assumed some of the airs of a ruling class. The bourgeoisie, supported by most of the intellectuals, university men and the like, who had been terrorized by February, wanted to achieve its own goals, which for the most part were opposite to those of the proletariat. The war must be pursued to a victorious peace, and the workers' own democratic principles could be used to justify leaving serious reform to a future constituent

assembly, since an assembly could hardly be convoked in wartime; this meant leaving reforms until peace returned. The middle classes were anxious to take over and regenerate the Russian economy to maintain the war effort. They at once clashed with workers demanding the eight-hour day, as they did also over wages and factory committees. The bourgeoisie was full of illusions as to its own strength, and did not understand what the Revolution meant or where the real power lay. Only the officers were more short-sighted. The government thus had to control conflicting claims. It wanted to restore the army, and this would be possible by continuation of the war; the government was heartened by the support it received from petty-bourgeois, railway men, artisans and some peasants. It feared more than it needed the counter-revolutionary threat, and believed it was acting wisely in opposing extreme claims. The ruling class and the High Command were dissatisfied, and did not much help the new government; thereby they pushed the lower classes into fury, and were themselves swept away. Only a small minority of Bolsheviki and Anarchists had foreseen this. They received, early in April, the support of Lenin, returning from

exile; his April Theses demanded peace, unrelenting opposition to the provisional government, transfer of power to the soviets. After April the 'Lenin Party' stood as the only organized enemy of the February

regime. This regime, however, failed to satisfy the workers; by dint of constantly repeating that the war would prevent any change or reform, it merely gave peasants, workers and soldiers a wild desire to stop the war. But Milyukov, far from trying for general peace, acted as if Russia had overthrown her Tsar merely in order to prosecute the war more efficiently, and thought that the government would be able to link the country more solidly to the western democracies and thus consolidate the social order threatened in February. Hostilities should go on: the enemy – and indeed the Revolution – would be exhausted. Constantinople would be given as a dowry to the New Russia, and in the meantime the revolutionaries could be divided and the army set against the workers by a constant brandishing of the German danger. On 18 April he sent the Powers a long-awaited Note, stressing quite unexpectedly the strength that the Revolution had lent to the defense of the principles for which Russia and her Allies were fighting. He emphasized the government's loyalty to undertakings already made. There was no word of the hopes of 'Russian democracy' for 'a peace without annexations or contributions'; on the contrary, he talked entirely of 'guarantees' and 'sanctions' that the Allies might require in order to make peace last. This Note infuriated democrats. It provoked the Bolsheviks into organizing a riot against

the government, and the Soviet leaders into allowing the riot to go on. The Menshevik leaders managed to control things and agreed to enter the government to secure victory for the Soviet's policy. Milyukov left it, predicting its impotence, a view also taken by the Bolsheviks. They, to prevent any resumption of hostilities, opened a fraternization campaign – simple little gestures, along the front, that were a kind of stuttering revolution. Russians took the initiative, but Germans, with a strong interest, encouraged them. The Soviet at once condemned this, and the Bolshevik leader, Frunze, who had gone to the front to organize fraternization, recanted. Here was clear proof that the Soviet remained the unchallenged guide of the Revolution. A few weeks later Kerenski's tour of the front displayed this again. Speaking for the new government and the Soviet, he revived the army's patriotic spirit, which Milyukov's maneuverings had nearly extinguished. To restore its offensive capacity, Kerenski saluted it, in his person, in the name of the Revolution. He would explain the war to the soldiers, and would, if necessary, take on any of the thousands of hecklers. Under the sceptical eyes of officers and Bolshevik soldiers he would thrust into an arena, into the gaze of the thousands of soldier-'aficionados' who had gathered to see his exploits. He gained the nickname, 'Convincer-in-chief'. The sight was indeed remarkable, and some of the incidents

deserve to make up an anthology. First, in the capital before his departure, Kerenski displayed, to a congress of delegates of the front, outstanding oratorical skill: Comrades – for ten years you suffered in silence. You knew what it was to obey the orders of a hated system. You would fire on the people when the government told you to. What are you doing now? Have you lost your courage? Is Free Russia to become a nation of revolting slaves? [Agitation throughout the assembly] Comrades; I won't hide the truth, I can't hide. If only I'd died two months back, I'd have died with a happy dream, a dream that a new life had begun, for eternity, in this country. People would respect each other, would not need whips and canes. (Ferro, 210-13)

One might say that communism in the proper sense was born in beginning of the twentieth century in Russia.

Until the first world war its influence within the socialist movement was nugatory outside Russia ;the fact that it was a completely new ideology and political phenomenon , not merely a tactical or doctrinal faction within a movement , went unheeded for a long time , and gradually began to become apparent only after 1910.The movement made no secret of embryonic despotism ;its totalitarian potential was present at birth . If it managed, in time, to harness the revolutionary wave in Russia and establish itself on the crest, this was admittedly, owing to an exceptional series of historical

accidents, but not only to these. There was no communist involvement in the February Revolution nor the overthrow of the Czar, and absolutely nothing communist in the slogan of the October Revolution: 'peace' and 'land for the peasants'. The dominant ideology of the masses in the revolutionary process was not communism but anarchy, expressed in the slogan: all power to the soviets (councils). The Bolsheviks took over this slogan, then dropped it (when most of the soviets were Menshevik), and then adopted it again in order to exploit the anarchist utopia to smash still existing government structures and impose their own rule on a demoralized and disorganized society. Lenin openly admitted that the Bolsheviks won because they adopted the Socialist Revolutionaries agrarian programme. (Kolakowski, 30-31)

Thus we might say that the Bolshevik Revolution had perhaps nothing to do with prophecies of Marx because the driving force behind the Revolution was not the struggle between working class and capital but was rather carried out under the slogan: 'Peace' and 'Land for peasants.'

Coming back to Furet - Nolte letters; in a letter dated September 5, 1996 Nolte writes that:

Recently while scanning a series of citations from my old readings, I came upon a sentence of Merleau-Ponty from a text published in 1947. Concerning fascism, he says that it is 'mimicry of Bolshevism' except in what is truly essential: the history

of the proletariat. This 'theory of the proletariat' is obviously exactly what is called the 'utopian' part of Bolshevism everywhere today. Therefore, today Merleau-Ponty should write that fascism is an imitation of Bolshevism, an imitation lacking this utopian part, and he could certainly add that this utopian element could be qualified as humanist, in contrast to the antihumanist motives of fascism and, above all, of Nazism. (Furet-Nolte, 47)

After the summer of 1918, a careful myth was organized by defeated Germany:

The Germans had not been defeated when their government asked for armistice. They had been 'stabbed in the back'. Socialists were made out to be responsible for this, having stirred up trouble in the rear so as to take power in a weakened, defeated Germany. (Ferro, 227)

The correspondence between Furet and Nolte comes to a grinding halt as Furet dies suddenly on July 11, 1997. In his last correspondence with Nolte dated January 5, 1997, Furet states that:

For me the novelty of Fascism in History consists in its emancipation of the European Right from the impasse that is inseparable from the counter revolutionary idea. In effect, in the nineteenth century the counter revolutionary idea never ceased being trapped in the contradiction of having to use revolutionary means to win without being able to assign itself any goal other than the

restoration of a past from which, however the revolutionary evil arose. There is nothing like this in fascism. It is in itself the revolution. I think that by insisting on underscoring the reactive character of fascism, you underestimate its novelty. (Furet-Nolte, 47)

To conclude in the words of Furet :

Bolshevism, the first to arrive on the public scene, may indeed have radicalized sspolitical passions, but the fear it provoked from the Right and beyond does not adequately explain a phenomenon like the birth of Italian fasci in March 1919. After all, the elites and the middle classes of Europe had lived in terror of socialism well before World War I and had bloodily repressed anything resembling a worker's insurrection, such as the Paris commune in 1871. Born of the war, both Bolshevism and Fascism drew their basic education from war. They transferred to politics the lessons of the trenches: familiarity with violence, the simplicity of extreme passions, the submission of the individual to collectivity, and finally the bitterness of futile or betrayed sacrifices. It was in the countries defeated on the battlefields or frustrated by the peace negotiations that these sentiments found their quintessential breeding ground. (Furet, 162-63)

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