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Prefiguring a Future Passed:

Politics of Narodnichestvo

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Abstract

The historiography of *narodnichestvo* has since its inception had to contend with the matter of defining its subject, with approaches ranging from a narrowly semantic prescriptivism ordaining the appellation's use exclusively in reference to the 1876-79 revolutionary party, to the broadly cultural understanding of *narodnichestvo* as a popular social sentiment of affinity for the Russian peasant which found its expression not only in politics, but also arts and literature. As a result - and despite their tremendous salience and peculiarity to the broader Russian Imperial history - the historical continuity of the *narodnik* movement, and in particular the evolution (and revolution) of its politics and ideology, have been somewhat unduly sidelined in the discourse and scholarship of *narodnichestvo* as a historical phenomenon.

While the radical organizations that comprise the focus of this paper cannot account for the sheer breadth of Russian Populism, they have nevertheless most explicitly found within their daily life and functioning the crystallized articulation of the *narodnik* zeitgeist that captured the imaginations of their contemporaries. Arising as it did at a time and in the context of romantic nationalist awakening all over Europe, *narodnichestvo* was indeed a broadly popular phenomenon - but it is its vanguard, often strictly organized and always practically oriented, that truly captured the needs of popular life. More pertinently to the trajectory of its political development it took on seriously the perennial cursed question: what is to be done?

This paper attempts a longitudinal study of the history of *narodnichestvo* not as a singular group or historical phenomenon, but a continuity of organizational forms that simultaneously expressed and iteratively shaped a political ideology of its own. This historical agency I term the *narodnik* body of politics; its growth and evolution over time are captured in the memoirs and recollections of the *narodniks*, which constitute the material base of this work.

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Introduction

The definition of "*narodnichestvo*" would appear to be a solved historical problem. Richard Pipes, perhaps the single most authoritative voice on the history of modern Russia that side of the Atlantic, had already in 1964 convincingly established the most important details surrounding the term's inception — as an endonym for an organization of revolutionary agrarian socialists in 1876-78 — as well as traced its contemporary use and historiographical trajectory from the 1870s onward.[1] If Pipes' "semantic inquiry" was not comprehensive enough, Franco Venturi's 1960 magnum opus *Roots of Revolution* presented as thorough a survey of 19th century Russian revolutionary traditions – Populism chief among them – as one could expect; more recently, Christopher Ely's 2022 *Russian Populism* rounded out the roster of histories of Populism with a holistically modern approach.

History of the Russian revolutionary movement presented such an appealing subject matter, in fact, that they were already being written before their subject could properly leave the scene of history; singularly illustrative here are the German economic historian Alphons Thun's sympathetic efforts to understand the infamous regicidal terrorists of *Narodnaya Volya*, which culminated in the quiet 1883 (!) publication in Leipzig of his *Geschichte der revolutionären Bewegung in Russland.* The work admittedly garnered far more attention throughout its many republications as *Istoriia Revoliutsionnykh Dvizhenii v Rossii* – first translated and published almost simultaneously in 1903 by erstwhile *narodnik* comrades and contemporary political rivals, Socialist Revolutionary Leonid Shishko and Social Democrat Georgy Plekhanov.

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[1] Richard Pipes, "Narodnichestvo: A Semantic Inquiry." *Slavic Review* 23, no. 3 (1964): 441–58. https://doi.org/10.2307/2492683.

So contested was the still living memory of *narodnichestvo* – let alone the Socialist Revolutionaries' credible claims to descent from its venerable tradition – that even yesterday's allies could not afford to leave its record stay for posterity without personal editorial input. The discourse surrounding *narodnichestvo* would only get more fraught with acrimony in the wake of the First Russian Revolution and the brief window of (relatively) open discussion it ushered in on the pages of publications like *Byloe,* before finally becoming a matter of social and political life and death after the October Revolution, when the scattered surviving *narodniks*, at once legendary martyrs of revolutionary prehistory and reactionary enemies of Marxism, would find themselves feverishly defending the legacy of their cause before the Soviet public. Upon closer inspection it becomes clear that, in focusing on the purely semantic aspects of *narodnichestvo*'s definition, Pipes was not merely attempting to establish an objective, value-neutral framework of assessing or defining *narodnik*-ness, but in fact actively excising the political – and the ostensibly politicized – out of the appellation practically defined by its political use, be it for self-determination or deprecation.

Nowadays, the academic practice is to elide the issue of definition as much as possible; as Christopher Ely, author of the most recent survey of Russian Populism, accurately puts it, "no simple definition—no matter how nuanced and multifaceted – could capture the rich, variegated, long-lasting, self-contradictory, and endlessly disputed nature of this phenomenon."[2] After all, the polemic battles fought over it have themselves long since become the subject of historiography, while distance temporal as well as ideological has enabled modern scholars to examine seemingly each and every impression left by *narodnichestvo* on late Imperial Russia from its economy and politics to arts and culture, venturing above and beyond the prescriptive

[2] Christopher David Ely, *Russian Populism: A History* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 2.

confines of "a consistent set of principles or a coherent movement" – why bother relitigating what are essentially debates over a century passed?

What I hope to achieve in this work is less a relitigation and more a reconstitution of the historical conditions that brought *narodnichestvo* to the fore of Russian social and political life and shaped its trajectory, developing as it did from an insular and utopian section of "cabinet" intelligentsia grouped in small cliques and into an organized nationwide party-led movement capable of orchestrating acts of terror against the highest echelons of Tsarist power. Crucially, this transformation challenges popular ideas of Russian intelligentsia in relation to the broader Imperial society as being either isolated, ineffectual or even disinterested in social and political matters. More specifically, of particular interest is Ernest Gellner's model of modernizing nationalism that posits the Decembrists' supposed failure to materialize a Russian nationalism of their own in conjunction with the nascent proletariat. Rather than discard his framework altogether, recalibrating Gellner's locus of Russian modernization by a few decades allows *narodnichestvo* to be productively examined within the broader European context of nationalisms emerging as a reaction to the advent of industrial modernity.

Furthermore, by engaging with contemporary as well as memoiristic material on its own terms, a consistent through line of recurrent terms of political self-conceptualization emerges among the putative *narodniks*, who consistently saw themselves as not merely rebelling against the autocratic regime or attempting to bypass the development of capitalism in Russia, but first and foremost as presenting an alternative vision of modernity around which to mobilize popular forces. Their project of participatory, egalitarian, agrarian socialist direct democracy built around the traditional popular structure of the *mir,* though sharing its basic theoretical outline with a myriad other contemporary European anarchist, utopian socialist, federative and associative

formulations, was crucially being put into practice by the *narodniks* in the course of their day to day organization. This consequently comprised what I tentatively term the body of their politics, highlighting both the significance of the materiality of *narodnik* organization bringing together vast numbers of people involved in a wide assortment of activities, as well as the fact that the movement itself was an active embodiment of the acutely political philosophy of *narodnichestvo*.

Aversion to "politics" – that is, Western European parliamentary, partisan, statist bourgeois notions of politics so abhorred by the *narodniks'* immediate progenitor Herzen – was as widespread among the *narodniks* as it was among their aforementioned European radical contemporaries; this did not stop the *narodnik* movement, of course, from taking on a definitionally political character despite this rejection of the trappings of "politics" – or from turning towards explicitly political struggle outright with the establishment of *Narodnaya Volya,* which coincidentally marked the peak of *narodnik* influence on the Russian society. This tension between the professed values of radical anti-politics and active involvement in practically political activity is another aspect of *narodnichestvo* that is difficult to conceptualize absent a working definition around which analysis of ideological development could be anchored. Instrumental in understanding the inner workings of the *narodnik* "anti-political" body of politics is the framework of prefigurative politics – and more specifically prefigurative communism – pioneered by the American New Left social scientist Carl Boggs. In framing the *narodniks'* efforts as an attempt at creating a parallel social structure rooted in communal organization, rather than a political challenge situated within the autocratic modernizing project's hegemony, the movement's frequently overlooked organizational, ideological and theoretical innovations are reconciled with its indisputably central preoccupation with ethics and morality.

Ultimately, however, the attempted historical "reconstitution" of *narodnichestvo*, as well as the postulated concept of its body of politics, serve best to explain precisely its eventual degeneration following the collapse of *Narodnaya Volya;* the fault lines of future divergences practically become apparent in the process of tracing the many contingent choices and adaptations the *narodnik* body of politics had to undergo in order to continue functioning under the conditions of intensifying Tsarist autocracy and concomitant dilapidation of traditional Russian rural life the movement centered itself around. The *narodniks* had for their predecessors the ivory tower intelligentsia of literary salons and magazine editorial boards and the radical studentry unable to channel their energy into anything more than performative manifestations, while their rise to prominence was occasioned by unprecedented disruptions to traditional organization of Russian estate society. Examining the *Narodnik* polemics with Marxists that overcast the downfall of *Narodnaya Volya* in view of this trajectory suggests a failure on their part to conclusively internalize within their body of politics what Gramsci termed "the social element in which the becoming concrete of a collective will, partially recognized and affirmed in action, has already begun" – the prefigurative ideal of truly popular life. Having broken on-the-ground contact with the masses – continuous in some capacity ever since the first "going to the people" – the new "liberal" *narodniks* could not but revert to the impotent ivory tower "cabinet" intelligentsia state of yesteryear. The *narodnik* body of politics – once subject to constant revision and reevaluation on account of having to maintain and coordinate a wide array of practical activities – was now increasingly being ossified into a *narodnik* mythology, its main public exponents clinging to an increasingly desperate rejection of already capitalist reality.

Still, though their revolutionary efforts to prefigure another world were ultimately frustrated, the *narodniks* did effectively serve as the unwitting midwives to Russian modernity.

As a para-nationalist movement in a Gellnerian sense, they were the trailblazers at the frontier of the Russian people's discovery. And, as Lenin so evocatively quoted Herzen, they were in fact the "young helmsmen of the gathering storm" [3]– of the "movement of the masses" that shook the autocracy in 1905 before bringing its edifice down altogether in 1917. Finally, despite the post-*Narodnaya Volya narodniks'* ultimate devolution into comfortably numb reformism, the mantle of revolutionary non-Marxian socialism would eventually be taken up by the Socialist Revolutionaries among other self-proclaimed neo-*narodniks*; their basic theoretical templates proved their mobilizational power well into the era of mass politics ushered in by the February Revolution. Studies of *narodnichestvo* taking a broadly unfocused approach – that is, attempting to encompass every aspect of its historical phenomenon – inevitably miss the causal link necessary for an explanation of its trajectory.

This thesis thus attempts to join the works examining the *narodnik* movement from a more subjective viewpoint: if Ben Eklof and Tatiana Saburova's *Generation of Revolutionaries* can be said to employ a prosopographic approach in focusing on the Foucauldian "infamous" men among the *narodniks*, then my work will foreground the subjectivity of *narodnichestvo* as the embodiment of a political philosophy first and foremost. To that end, I utilize a wide array of primary sources – primarily (near-)contemporaneously written egodocuments, the material base of which was gathered over a month of fieldwork in the Russian State Library, the State Public Historical Library, and the Center of Socio-Political History in Moscow. By placing the often analytical memoiristic writing in the historicized context of a developmental trajectory of the ideas and practices of *narodnichestvo* – what I term its body of politics – the movement itself can more properly be conceptualized as a contingent product of specific historical circumstances and

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[3] Vladimir Lenin, "Pamiati Gertsena," *Sotsial-Demokrat, no.* 26, May 8 1912, https://www.marxists.org/russkij/lenin/works/in_mem_h.htm.

iterative, interstitial process of constant reflection on the lived experience of revolutionary praxis by real people possessed of historical agency.

The first chapter deals with the immediate aftermath of *Narodnaya Volya*'s downfall in 1881, and the fiercely theoretical polemics it spawned between the *narodnik* survivors and the incipient Russian Marxist intelligentsia. This chronological displacement sets the stage for a critical examination of *narodnichestvo's* political make-up in the second chapter's reconstitution of its historical development building up to and immediately following the 1861 Emancipation. Finally, chapter three deals with the contingent choices made by the already established *narodnik* movement over the course of *Zemlya i Volya*'s three years of operation from 1876 to 1879, and how they both shaped and reflected the shifting political philosophy of *narodnichestvo* in the lead-up to its turn towards terrorism.

Chapter I. *Nashi napravleniia, nashi raznoglasiia*: *Narodnichestvo* in Post-Mortem: 1881-

The "Father of Russian Marxism," Georgy Plekhanov, once one of the leading figures in the central organ of the *narodnik* movement, *Zemlya i Volya*, had in truth – unbeknownst to himself – been in one long, continuous ideological shift. Having broken with the terrorist majority of the party along the line of its practical activities – choosing to stay true to his Bakuninist (!) "rebel" ideals of propaganda work in the villages to foment and nurture unrest among the peasantry – he would be joined by a small group of like-minded individuals in forming *Chernyi Peredel* in response to *Narodnaya Volya*'s secession.[4] For all their professed differences, Plekhanov's group of *buntars* practically achieved little that could measure up to *narodovoltsy's* heroic struggle against the autocracy – and, soon taken in by their resounding successes, almost wound up joining their former confederates in late 1881, if only in co-publishing their *Vestnik* in Geneva. This potentially historic joint venture appears to have fallen through for two different reasons of equal importance: there was of course the mutual personal antipathy of Plekhanov and Lev Tikhomirov, then Vestnik's editor-in-chief (and later infamous monarchist renegade), dating back to the original split of *Zemlya i Volya*, but no less important was the former's *inability* to accept the ideology of the *narodovoltsy* as a requisite for serving as its mouthpiece; curiously Plekhanov remarked that "to call myself an editor of Narodnaya Volya's magazine, without being a narodovolets in reality, would have meant putting myself into a most ambiguous and uncomfortable position."[5]

For the thoroughly disillusioned *narodnik* Plekhanov it would have been perfectly natural to accept the vicissitudes of practical adjustments necessary for mere survival in the conditions

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[4] For a more detailed overview of the intellectual trajectory of Plekhanov and his associates in *Chernyi Peredel*, see E. Belfer, "Zemlya vs. Volya. From Narodnichestvo to Marxism," *Soviet Studies* 30, no. 3 (1978): 297–312.

[5] Leo Deutsch, "Letters of G. V. Plekhanov to P. L. Lavrov," *Dela i Dni* no. 2, 1921.

of Russian autocracy; for the fledgling Marxist Plekhanov, however, it was becoming increasingly impossible to serve both God and Mammon. It is not surprising that the final proverbial *petra scandali* that frustrated rapprochement efforts between the two groups would be the conditions posed by Tikhomirov and Maria Oshanina, the now-exiled *narodovoltsy* editors, for the publication of Plekhanov's *Sotsializm i politicheskaia bor'ba* in the *Vestnik* – with Tikhomirov's critical addendum or not at all. Plekhanov would understandably request his article back – and go on to publish it himself in *Biblioteka sovremennogo sotsializma*, the official organ of his own newly founded – and first in Russia – Marxist group *Osvobozhdenie Truda*.

In publishing *Sotsializm i politicheskaia bor'ba* Plekhanov can thus be said to have officially began his apostasy from *narodnichestvo* and acceptance of Marxism with an appropriately provocative gesture; but it is in writing it in the first place that his ideological maturation as a Marxist was finally complete. Somewhat paradoxically, this required first accepting the now defunct *Narodnaya Volya*'s posthumous victory over *Chernyi Peredel* – but only insofar as was necessary to shed the remaining trappings of his Bakuninist *buntarstvo* with its rejection of the titular political struggle. "The so-called terrorist movement had ushered in a new epoch in the development of our revolutionary party – the epoch of *conscious political struggle* against the government"[6] - but they could not conceptualize it as such, so long as *narodovoltsy* remained faithful to the fantasy of peasant-led social revolution and persisted in treating political struggle as a mere tool in the service of the former. As a Marxist, Plekhanov now recognized that the revolutionary potential of the *narod*, and consequently the viability of his erstwhile revolutionary colleagues' movement, would continue to dwindle with the future development of capitalism in Russia, ruinous as it was to the traditional rural social structures

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[6] Georgy Plekhanov, "Predislovie," *Sotsializm i politicheskaia bor'ba,* (Moscow: OGIZ, 1938), 8 (translation mine).

upon which *narodniks* hitched their hopes of revolution. Without opposing economic development as such, "we [narodniks] were thus forced to remain ambivalent witnesses to the process destroying the very foundation upon which we were to construct the building of the future"[7] And oppose economic development writ large they would – leading Plekhanov to follow through with the polemic with his seminal *Nashi raznoglasiia* in 1884.

But what was, after all, left of *narodnichestvo* by 1884, the movement that had three years prior managed to bring down the Tsar? As it turned out, despite demonstrably succeeding in mobilizing and coordinating immense personal resources for the organization of its practical activities, the *narodniks*, once forced off the scene, had seemingly left very little in the way of intellectual scaffolding upon which a cogent defense against the waves of Marxist critique could be mounted. This apparent mismatch in practical and theoretical capabilities, not coincidentally, has been the subject of great import to Antonio Gramsci, who described the identification of theory and practice as "a critical act, through which practice is demonstrated rational and necessary, and theory realistic and rational."[8] Proceeding from the given of practical activity – dictated as it was by the realities of operation in Tsarist Russia – the task of *narodnik* theory was not merely to furnish rationalizations, but also to "prove themselves assimilable into practical movements, thereby making the latter yet more practical and real."

The twentieth century Italian Marxist theorist's concern, admittedly, ran deeper still; to him, finding "the particular forms of practice, even and especially in their conditions of subalternity to or interpellation by the existing political society" was crucial not just as an end in itself – a prefigurative ideal of social organization – but also "for the formation of a political 'of

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7 Georgy Plekhanov, *Sotsializm i politicheskaia bor'ba*, 51.

8 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London, UK: ElecBook, the Electric Book Co, 1999), 688.

a completely different type'" than that presently existing under bourgeois hegemony.[9] In a way, Gramsci was rediscovering for himself – but more importantly articulating theoretically – what Herzen had wistfully observed almost a century ago in Europe: that the constitutional order – the Gramscian "political" – constituted merely a "half-liberation, a brazen attack on the past with a desire to inherit its power."[10] The perennial radical aversion to statist politics found in Gramsci its theoretical justification: "the political," posited "as a space prior to and determining of the moment of politics" – crucially meaning "not only 'official' politics, but organizing and coordinating functions throughout the social formation," i.e. also the politics of the sense *narodniks* engaged in – was revealed instead as "a philosophical 'distillate' of the bourgeois class's hegemonic project,"[11] having come into being as it did only around Herzen's time in Western Europe. Curiously, the "political" as such never properly existed in Russia at all, rendering suspect the applicability in strict terms of Gramsci's analysis to the *narodniks'* inarguably less cerebral opposition to political struggle; nevertheless, it is illuminating to consider if taken more generally as a recognition of the "integral state's" ideological hegemony – and in view of the inchoate suspicion of intelligentsia's role in ideology construction voiced by *narodniks*, prefiguring in a way Gramsci's "critique of the integral relationship between all philosophy hitherto and the (bourgeois) state form."[12]

Plekhanov in *Nashi raznoglasiiia* resolved to leave no stone unturned in establishing not just the titular disagreements he had with the remnants of *Narodnaya Volya* (primarily Lev Tikhomirov), but also in outlining the "true tasks of Socialists in Russia" – that is to say, his

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9 Peter Thomas, 'Gramsci and the political: From the state as 'metaphysical event' to hegemony as 'philosophical fact'', *Radical Philosophy* 153, Jan/Feb 2009, pp. 27–36, 31.

10 Herzen, "LVII god respubliki, edinoi i nerazdel'noi," *S togo berega,* http://gertsen.lit-info.ru/gertsen/proza/s-togo-berega/iii-lvii-god-respubliki.htm.

11 Thomas, 'Gramsci and the political,' 31.

12 Thomas, 29.

Marxist party program. Having previously hoped to gradually convert his former comrades to Marxism, Plekhanov now ruthlessly attacked each and every of their weak spots, all too familiar to him: the impossibility of their Blanquist aspirations to overthrow the government in a coup, their willful obduracy in accepting the undeniable advancements of capitalism, the endemic overestimation of the intelligentsia's role in leading the masses… Save for his review of Tikhomirov's *Pochemu ia perestal byt' revoliutsionerom* published in 1888 (a bombshell apostasy from *narodnichestvo* that shocked everyone but Plekhanov; prior to his full review of the book, *Sotsial-demokrat* published a brief retrospective laconically titled "The Inevitable Turn"), Plekhanov mostly quit the ongoing polemic with this parting shot, leaving it to the side of *narodniks* to defend themselves – but perhaps just as importantly, redefine themselves for a new era, in which appeals to party discipline, liberally employed against Plekhanov in 1882-83, no longer carried any weight on account of the party's effective disappearance.[13]

One of the people left to helm the sinking ship of *narodnichestvo* and most influential in shaping its liberalized outlook in the polemics of the 1890s was Vasilii Vorontsov, who defined *narodnichestvo* in his in 1893 *Nashi napravleniia* with the following tripartite structure: "with the interests of the people taken as the goal, and the forms, developed by its collective thought or others corresponding to its wishes as the means, and the autonomous activity of the populace as the lever of social evolution – these are the three pillars characterizing *narodnichestvo*, as it came to define itself in the Reform era of our history."[14] While never a part of the clandestine, revolutionary current of the movement, Vorontsov was nevertheless consistently involved in

[13] For an exploration of "Legal Marxism" and its exponents after Plekhanov left the polemics - Peter Struve, Mikhail Tugan-Baranovsky, and others - see Richard Kindersley, *The First Russian Revisionists : a Study of "Legal Marxism" in Russia* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1962). Its development and evolution are further explored in Arthur P. Mendel, *Dilemmas of Progress in Tsarist Russia: Legal Marxism and Legal Populism* (Harvard University Press, 1961).

[14] Vasilii Vorontsov, *Nashi napravleniia*, (St. Petersburg: 1893), 7 (translation and emphasis mine).

guiding its publicist wing, first serving as an anonymous correspondent to Petr Lavrov's *Vpered* in 1876, and later as a permanent writer for Nikolay Mikhailovsky's *Otechestvennye zapiski* from 1879 onwards – both central pillars of *narodnik* thought. More importantly, Vorontsov would then spend the 1880s engaged in a famously vicious polemic with the burgeoning Russian Legal Marxist movement over the continued relevance of *narodnichestvo* to Russia's future – and, on the other hand, the place of capitalism therein; the publication that truly put Vorontsov on the intellectual map of Russia, fittingly, was his 1882 *Sud'by kapitalizma v Rossii*.

The "second revolutionary situation" occasioned by the assassination of II on March 1, 1881, had failed to materialize into a full-on popular revolution – and, after a brief period of cautious uncertainty, the state apparatus struck back against *Narodnaya Volya* with such efficiency as to effectively decapitate the movement completely. And while its remnants struggled in vain to preserve anything of their organization, it fell upon the latter day *narodniks*, Vorontsov chief among them, to articulate their position vis-a-vis Russia's urban-industrial modernity – seeing as the autocratic regime purported to stand behind its encroachment could not be toppled after all. The legacy of *narodnichestvo* itself – let alone its continued existence as a cohesive movement – was increasingly being put into question as the public reflected on the achievements of its brief period of activity;[15] one such query prompted Vorontsov to open his treatise with a polemic digression addressing a common concern, voiced as early as 1884 by liberal publicist and academician Pypin – Nikolay Chernyshevsky's close maternal cousin – that *narodnichestvo,* despite its tremendous salience in Russia's political life, was nevertheless "something rather vague, not easily defined, arbitrary," while *narodniks* themselves in reality

[15] The "crisis of faith" in the tenets of Populism among its exponents, as well as the resulting theoretical developments leading up to Vorontsov's particular brand of Populism, are explored in great detail in Richard S. Wortman, *The Crisis of Russian Populism* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

often turned out to be "people, at every turn proclaiming that they are the special friends of the people, and nevertheless proselytizing something very close to obscurantism."[16] This was perfectly natural in Vorontsov's view, as previously "[*narodniks*] had neither the time nor desire to formulate a scientific basis for any of their various programs,"[17] engaged as they were in constant practical activities befitting of revolutionaries – but now, freed from that burden, the underlying theoretical essence behind their movement could finally be explicated.

In this regard, though relatively orthodox and theoretically unassuming at first glance in its assertion of "interests of the people" as its primary goal and "autonomous activity of the populace" as the sole valid means of achieving the former, Vorontsov's attempt at a definition of *narodnichestvo* here still subtly betrays the context of its writing (the fallout of *Narodnaya Volya*'s organizational collapse and years of Tsarist reaction following it) not only in his replacement of even the slightest hints at social revolution with the decidedly moderate championing of "social evolution," but also his sequestering of *narodnichestvo* to its specific manifestation "as it came to define itself in the Reform era," treating it already as a historical phenomenon. With over three decades separating him from the Proclamation of February 19, 1861, subtextually Vorontsov was not merely making a tacit concession of the canonical *narodnichestvo*'s passing, but also thereby staking a claim to its descent and continuation.

This decision to cling tenaciously to the moribund label of *narodnichestvo*, if not its formerly revolutionary cause, of necessity had to elicit from Vorontsov a critical analysis in justification - one that revealed itself illuminative not only in relation to the theoretical substance of *narodnichestvo,* but also Vorontsov's, and by extension the rest of the legal *Narodniks*,

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[16] Pypin, "Narodnichestvo," *Vesti Evropy* no. 2, 1884, quoted in Vasilii Vorontsov, *Nashi napravleniia*, (St. Petersburg: 1893), 2.
[17] Vorontsov, *Nashi napravleniia,* 7.

understanding thereof. In an impressively incisive, almost prescient, turn of thought, Vorontsov arrives at an essentially Gramscian formulation of the place occupied by intelligentsia and its natural product of existence, ideology. As if prefiguring Gramsci's contention that one must "distinguish between historically organic ideologies, those, that is, which are necessary to a given structure, and ideologies that are arbitrary, rationalistic, or "willed,"[18] Vorontsov stressed that the main role played by the intelligentsia's intellectual activities, and in particular its claims of scientificity, lies at the moment precisely in the fact that "with purportedly "scientific" steadfastness they align the public opinion in favor of just one class' interests, strengthening its party program by undergirding it with ostensibly scientific basis."[19] Although not as maturated or elaborately articulated yet, Vorontsov evidently grasped at the same basic premise of hegemonic ideology envisioned as the manifestation and a tool of class conflict, albeit expressed through a distinctly autochthonous, *Narodnik*, rather than Gramsci's universalizing Marxist lens.

Crucially, however, whereas Gramsci arrived at these "initiatives and activities which form the apparatus of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes"[20] as part of a broader search for a proper definition of the relationship between the "class-State and regulated society," Vorontsov explicitly sought to prove through this repudiation of externally imposed rationalistic theories an ideological, one might say, affirmation of a prior belief, while the class character or derivation thereof was almost incidental. Thus it is of little surprise that, rather than delve into the particular ways bourgeois class interests (as properly Gramscian analysis of structure would have him do) end up manifesting in the hegemonic superstructure, Vorontsov instead chose to rhetorically (re-)relitigate the discourse of *zapadnichestvo*, whose proponents –

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[18] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), 707.
[19] Vorontsov, *Nashi napravleniia,* 38.
[20] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks,* 526.

half a century ago at this point – argued for the necessity of Westernizing Russia's political and social institutions; this time, Vorontsov charged its supposed exponents among his contemporaries with a dogmatic adherence to "rationalism." Instead of any material interest guiding the intelligentsia's beliefs, it was a "faith in the tenets of abstract science as a reliable guide for social development … and conscious systematic effort of the mind as the foremost driving force of the evolution of humanity itself throughout history and the strongest pillar of its progressive development"[21] that embodied their "position, privileged and detached from the people." To bring the line of comparison with Gramsci to a close, Vorontsov once again differs here with his implicit suggestion that "the people" somehow existed outside of the bourgeois hegemony – keeping in full agreement, of course, with his insistence that the *obshchina* remained yet untouched by capitalism's advances in its preservation of the communal life.

The specific line of argumentation exhibited here by Vorontsov was, coincidentally, nothing new; as far back as the original relitigation of the *westernizer*-slavophile debates in the Great Reform era publicism of the 1860s, Fedor Dostoevsky, writing from the philosophical standpoint of his *pochvennichestvo*, an esoteric offshoot of slavophile thought, rejected any manner of "insular ideological systems" on the basis of their being divorced from "direct and immediate demands of real life" and instead merely "*consciously* derived from the past."[22] Nikolai Berdiaev, another Christian Existentialist philosopher, would later distill this perception further still by describing the Russian intelligentsia as "having an idolatrous attitude to science itself," ostensibly lacking "the sceptical criticism of Western peoples."[23] Entirely unsurprising in this light, then, is Vorontsov's conscious alignment of his *narodnichestvo* with the position

[21] Vorontsov, *Nashi napravleniia,* 40.
[22] A. L. Ospovat, "K izucheniiu pochvennichestva (Dostoevsky i Ap. Grigoryev)," in *Dostoesvky. Materialy i issledovaniia. Tom 3.* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1978): 144-150, 146 (emphasis mine).
[23] Nikolai Berdiaev, *The Origin Of Russian Communism* (London: The Centenary Press, 1937), 18.

previously occupied by the *slavophiles* in the opposition he believed existed between "the two main currents of our public thought – *westernizer* and *narodnik*."[24]

Apparently in recognition of his having overlooked the motivating power of class dynamics in ideological formation, Vorontsov further draws a distinction between those countries where the popular masses themselves actively participate as "social agents" and possessed an intelligentsia of their own, and those where "the main agent in the formation of public consciousness, that one way or another is reflected in the fate of the people, is the intelligentsia of the privileged classes."[25] In the former configuration, the course of ideological development posed no threat to the position of the people even when left entirely in the purview of the "privileged intelligentsia," as its class biases would always be counterbalanced by multitudinous pressures from below; it is the latter scenario, obviously corresponding to the realities of contemporary Russia, that Vorontsov believed required strict, programmatic self-discipline. There, his argument went, "to remain at the heights of its *station and the responsibility demanded of it*," the intelligentsia had to abide by the following: to commit themselves to studying systematically and in detail the *narod* both in its "spiritual physiognomy" and its social relations, and thereby acquire "objective" data as to the needs of popular life and the means of their satisfaction; "at the same time and more importantly it is necessary for the intelligentsia to draw closer the people," through which not only could its aforementioned needs be studied more closely, but also the "culturally developed means for the satisfaction of various needs of private and public life" could be passed on; most important of all, however, is that "its privileged intelligentsia possessed broad ideals and used these ideals – and not the formulae mediating

[24] Vorontsov, *Nashi napravleniia,* 109.
[25] Vorontsov, *Nashi napravleniia,* 55.

between them and contemporary life – to evaluate both their concrete projects and planned activities."[26]

To Vorontsov, the significance of *narodnichestvo* thus lay in the fact that it enabled the privileged intelligentsia to escape the siren call of its traditional preserve, rationalism, and its concomitant bourgeois social ideology. The core distinction of *narodnichestvo* from the rest of Russian intelligentsia's ideological spectrum, then, was found precisely in this theorized opposition drawn between the narrow formulae of self-interested Western rationalism and the popular "broad ideals" of the former. More importantly, with *Nashi napravleniia* Vorontsov would effectively steer the discourse *du jour* towards his immediate milieu's – and, not coincidentally, his intended audience's – intellectual "directions," and away from the current material realities of Russia, whose political rapprochement with France and subsequent influx of foreign capital by the end of the 1880s marked yet another drastic acceleration of its capitalist development. The possibility of a Russian economic *sonderweg* had all but disappeared, leaving *narodniks* to ponder their shrinking place within the intelligentsia and its general course – a far cry from the defiant proclamations of Vorontsov's 1882 *Sud'by kapitalizma v Rossii*, when "early signs" of capitalist encroachment could be more or less credibly – as evident from its public success – dismissed as "resembling more a play at capitalism, rather than a reflection of its real relations … despite such an imposing facade."[27]

Even that, however, was already an implicit assumption of a defensive posture by Vorontsov, as even by 1882 these inchoate omens of capitalism already evidently possessed an "imposing facade" - even to the dead-ender *narodniks*! It is crucial to emphasize that, unlike the early periods of *narodnichestvo*'s functioning as a political force, post-*Narodnaya Volya*

[26] Vorontsov, *Nashi napravleniia,* 59.
[27] Vasilii Vorontsov, *Sud'by kapitalizma v Rossii*, (St. Petersburg: 1882), 24.

reflections necessitated a reckoning with the now indisputable realities of the country's lumbering industrialization; Vorontsov himself had to admit in no uncertain terms that "this optimistic worldview, however, had not yet settled accounts with the many phenomena of life that directly contradict it: the peasantry's continued loss of land, the destruction of communal bonds, the development of individualism among the people, growth of speculation, etc." – all foreboding signs for the man positing "autonomous activity of the people" as the mechanism of social evolution. It is very clear that Vorontsov's primary goal in writing *Sud'by kapitalizma* was, in fact, not a dogmatic defence of *narodnichestvo*'s tenets as they once existed, but rather their restatement for a new era – as otherwise "the practical worldview and motives of public activity of this party would inevitably bear the marks of such an ambivalence in scientific grounding."[28]

Still, *Sud'by kapitalizma* managed to hold on to what could be called *narodnichestvo*'s weak hypothesis and thus set the tone for its polemics against the legal Marxists throughout the 1880s. In essence, where early *narodniks* would champion social revolution by the people as the sole way of circumventing the "scientific socialist" schema of developmental stages by virtue of Russia's unique position of simultaneous economic backwardness and exceptionally collectivist national character, Vorontsov's defense now focused instead on denying capitalism's progressive potential altogether. Taking as fundamental to capitalist organization of labour the principle of "achieving the greatest production at the lowest costs,"[29] Vorontsov argued that Russia's peripheral position and coming late to the global division of capitalist spoils effectively barred it from ever reaping the same benefits Britain or France did with their nigh unlimited access to colonial markets, while its capital accumulation would primarily entail a technological game of qualitative catch up with minimal quantitative growth in employment - and, therefore, of the

[28] Vorontsov, *Sud'by kapitalizma,* 3.
[29] Vorontsov, *Sud'by kapitalizma,* 124.

proletariat, leaving the Russian people with the worst of both worlds: the ever growing immiseration of capitalism with none of the consciousness that could only develop within a massive - and therefore influential – urban working class.

As an aside, it is interesting (in the interest of estimating the originality of Vorontsov's thesis, among other things) to point out that the intellectual premises of *narodnichestvo* – or, at the very least, the primordial soup of its original influences – can be said to have started precisely with this very question of "working class." That is – beyond the obvious importance of the burgeoning proletariat both providing a point of first contact with "the people" for the urban intelligentsia of the 1860s as well as serving as a tether to the village communities of which they were, almost universally, a recent transplant – it was the specific condition of the working class, albeit defined in the customary *narodnik* manner to encompass broadly the category of "the people," that attracted among many others the interest of Bervi-Flerovsky, whose 1869 treatise *Polozhenie rabochego klassa v Rossii* famously spurred Marx to study the Russian language.[30] Despite self-consciously omitting the properly wage-laborer proletariat of Russia's two capitals, Flerovsky's work presented one of the first comprehensive surveys of Russia's multifarious industries following the emancipation of 1861 (indeed much of it was written already in 1866), and, despite focusing primarily on showcasing Flerovsky's impressive command of statistical data on key socio-economic indicators such as prices, wages, mortality and birth rates, nevertheless could but express his resentment against what he saw as misguided intervention of the upper classes into the natural life of the people. Prefiguring Vorontsov's line of argument, Flerovsky already in 1869 led the charge against "prejudice, preconceived notions or foreign

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[30] Karl Marx to Ludwig Kugelmann, November 29, 1869, accessed January 7, 2025, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1869/letters/69_11_29-abs.htm.

ideologies" infesting the "educated society" which was seemingly set on introducing as much inequality into the distribution of land and debt as would be economically feasible post-Emancipation.[31]

Of course, unlike Vorontsov in the charged political atmosphere of 1882, Flerovsky – for whom *Polozhenie rabochego klassa* was moreover the first serious publication, preceding even his work with the Chaikovsky circle – was relatively free of any pressure to draw any particular conclusion. As such, he allowed himself to trace to a logical conclusion the material interests of privileged intelligentsia that he posited to explain the particular outcome taken by the Emancipation in the first place—that, "like had happened in the West, [relations between various classes] could transition into open discord"[32] absent a dramatic reevaluation of priorities within the intelligentsia, who had already once neglected their moral duty – notably reminiscent of Vorontsov's language of "responsibility of station" – in treating their obligations towards the peasants settled as soon as they were emancipated legally, leaving them dependent and indebted to their landowners. This, he had claimed, threatened to have catastrophic consequences beyond mere social cohesion, but, pointing to economic trajectories, a potential economic collapse as well; as such his argument transformed from mere moral appeal to the consciences of the landowners and into sounding the alarm in the interests of the common weal. "We can only watch in terror as 1871 approaches, when an even greater mass of land would be abandoned by the peasants. Not only they, but all of us will be left with nothing … all of us turned tributaries to the estate of landowners."[33] The consequences of capitalist development attained an urgency of

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31 Vasilii Bervi-Flerovsky, *Polozhenie rabochego klassa v Rossii*, (St. Petersburg: 1869), 491.

32 Bervi-Flerovsky, *Polozhenie rabochego klassa,* 499.

33 Bervi-Flerovsky, 499.

apocalyptic dimensions in Flerovsky's analysis, and it is not difficult to see how he would go from there to encouraging the Chaikovtsy and the Dolgushintsy to "go to the people" in whatever capacity possible; for the time being, however, it stopped short of providing any actionable plan to follow – it was after all, only a treatise into the condition of the working class.

More than a decade later, with Flerovsky's worst fears not having come to pass in the short term, Vorontsov was thus largely free to retread his observations of peasant proletarianization, mass immiseration and gradual economic decline in *Sud'by kapitalizma v Rossii*, drawing on modern statistical data; it had seemed that despite the *narodniks'* hopes, the processes of primitive accumulation of capital went on, leaving a trail of widening stratification, rural depopulation and peasant land deprivation in its wake. Most pernicious of all, Russia's predominant mode of economic production, its agriculture, stood to lose the most from capitalism's unchecked advance – but to Vorontsov, this simultaneously promised to expose the weaknesses in its foundation to steadfast believers among the *narodniks*. In a rather telling passage, Vorontsov went as far as to claim that "the mere fact that most agricultural actors are of the mercantile estate and by and large the Jews – a class living for quick and easy profit – that mere fact allows us to sing eternal praises our, however imaginary, capitalist farming."[34] All of the essentials of latter day *narodnichestvo* are on display here: a somber admission of undeniable and rapid changes in the modes of agricultural production is accompanied with an immediate, almost as though brought up as an afterthought, unsubstantiated claims of its "imaginary" status, and, in a disturbing development, a dash of unabashed antisemitism.

This latter point, while not central to either Vorontsov's argument or my study here, is nevertheless illustrative to explore, if only to demonstrate the extent of *narodnichestvo*'s

[34] Vorontsov, *Sud'by kapitalizma,* 134.

intellectual disorientation after March 1881. On one hand, it should hardly come as a surprise that its broad alignment with the interests of the Russian peasantry would result in the occasional opportunistic lapse in antisemitism (what with Mikhail Bakunin playing such a prominent role in its intellectual inception) - but for Vorontsov to have deliberately qualified his rudimentary "class analysis" in gestures at "the mercantile estate" with such an explicit and visceral endorsement of Jewish racialization indicates if not the mood, then at least the tone of *narodnik* discourse. Finally, of course, it bears repeating the context in which Vorontsov wrote these lines in 1882, when the memory of the 1881 pogroms was still fresh in the public's minds, and to which he almost certainly intended to allude. Had this been written some two decades later, in a context more receptive to such agitation, one could easily imagine this developing into a sort of "Judeo-Capitalist" libel alleging the destruction of Russia's traditional industries by a parasitic, rootless enemy from without; thankfully, Vorontsov seemed minimally interested in furthering this line of argument beyond a tacit nod to the antisemitic fad.

For what it is worth, among the remaining *narodniks* on the field the recognition of ethical responsibility in choosing their rhetoric was somewhat greater than that displayed by Vorontsov. Future Shlisselburg prisoner Ivan Popov, for instance, recollected having to coordinate the activities of the remnants of *Narodnaya Volya* among the Petersburg studentry in 1881-82, regretfully noting that at the moment "the majority held a rather more sympathetic, rather than negative, attitude towards the pogroms, seeing in them an anti-government movement."[35] Popov, unfortunately, was in the minority even among the supposedly conscientious *narodniks* and within the party leadership, so desperate was the need for any sign or confirmation of the Russian peasant being a supposed natural revolutionary. A rogue faction

[35] Ivan Popov, *Minuvshee i perezhitoe: iz vospominanii*, (St. Petersburg: 1933), 113.

in Moscow even went as far as to print a proclamation explicitly endorsing the pogroms in *Narodnaya Volya's* name, but the attempt to circulate them in the south was thwarted by Vera Figner, who auspiciously happened to be in Odessa mere months before her eventual arrest in Kharkiv following Degaev's renegacy.[36]

Not that the official stance of the *Vestnik* was much better; the front page of its February 1882 volume rather morbidly concluded, answering the question of the official party line on the antisemitic violence, that "in the name of humanity it is difficult to provide an answer, but by itself it is clear as day … [that] we have no right whatsoever not just to hold in contempt, but even to remain indifferent towards a purely popular movement."[37] Of course, it had to be justified that the peasant was purportedly not murdering the Jew as a Jew specifically, but that he was murdering a "zhid," an exploiter, a usurer, an agent of the autocratic state – and of course *Narodnaya Volya* itself could not ignore the overwhelming and unjust social persecution the Jewish people themselves were victims of; but considered against its utility for the coming revolution, the party editorial could only shrug and conclude that "when the time of reckoning comes, the people can be merciless."[38] It was, of course, immaterial whether the outbursts of antisemitic mob violence by and large had little to do with any meaningful anti-government, much less anti-capitalist, sentiment among the people; what mattered most was that the people were finally in motion.

It could be argued that what separated the editors of the *Vestnik* from Vorontsov and his *Sud'by kapitalizma* – inasmuch as the latter can be praised for displaying relative restraint in

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[36] Lynne Ann Hartnett, *The Defiant Life of Vera Figner: Surviving the Russian Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 133.
[37] "Peredovoi listok Vestnika Narodnoi Voli #8-9," in *Literatura sotsial'no-revoliutsionnoi partii "Narodnoi voli',* (St. Petersburg: 1905), 438.
[38] "Peredovoi listok," 439.

pursuing antisemitic opportunism – was the former's need to eventually have a revolution; Vorontsov, as has been mentioned above, had already replaced it with a decidedly less spontaneous evolution as the ultimate goal of his political project. *Narodnichestvo* at this juncture had already become something of an aberration within the activist landscape; its intellectual premises, borne out of a dissatisfaction of existing structures of radical political activism of the 1860s, have been revealed as wholly inadequate with the failure of the second revolutionary situation, inaugurated with the assassination of II, to materialize into anything more tangible than (placid support for) stochastic acts of terror against an already marginalized population across the country, much less an organized popular movement. To persist in *narodnichestvo* and attempt to keep afloat the sheer intellectual dominance it had maintained throughout the 70s – as many, like Vorontsov, would continue to do throughout the 1880s – would have required (in the absence of any other sign of life from the masses) either overt flirtation with barbaric opportunism demonstrated by the *Vestnik* in its #8-9, or an effective submission to liberal "evolutionism" of Vorontsov – itself having no recourse but to persist in an increasingly untenable rejection of economic reality.

This, of course, required of Vorontsov to demand the impossible: to merely *ask*, where years of guerilla terrorism and covert propaganda had failed, from the Tsarist government what amounted to an effective unconditional surrender of its modernizing project on no other grounds than Vorontsov's lofty contention that "the progressive development of our country is possible only in the absence of any obstacles to the manifestations of popular activity, and under the strict observance by the public institutions of the principle of the working populace's benefit – a principle uneclipsed by any more or less respectable *formula.*"[39] Such an impotent, classically

[39] Vorontsov, *Sud'by kapitalizma,* 68.

intelligentsia manner of asserting the supremacy of ideological truth over material interests in deciding the question of social organization was to be the direction of liberal *narodnichestvo* for Vorontsov, and constituted the divergence with him for Plekhanov ten years prior; for him, such a toothless approach simply amounted to conceding any realistic pathway to success, finally disenchanting him with the prospects of non-Marxian socialism in Russia. The central question of *narodnichestvo*'s viability as a political project would remain unanswered to Plekhanov, as after all "Russian revolutionary intelligentsia had, since the beginning of the 1870s, failed to contribute even one serious argument in favour of the negative resolution of "whether Russia should go through all of the phases of European development," a question posed already by Herzen."[40]

That is not to say, though, that the platform of liberal *narodnichestvo* proposed no actionable steps to achieving its goals. Social evolution, too, had to be carefully guided along its path – without, however, radically challenging the status quo; the "propaganda of the deed" was to be replaced with the theory of "small deeds," a tradition contemporaneous with the first "going to the people" already in the 1870s. Expanding in reach beyond radicalized studentry on the margins of civil society, the experience and promise of cultural work in the zemstvos created the conditions for an alignment of interests between the predominantly gentry zemstvo liberals and the reformist currents within *narodnichestvo*. On the one hand, this was a seemingly natural development, seeing as the practical activity of much of even the politically involved party membership (as was the case for *zemlevolets* Ivanchin-Pisarev and the other "villagers") - let alone the disengaged fellow travelers which constituted the bulk of the mass campaign as a phenomenon - consisted of entirely above board menial administrative work rendered subversive

[40] Georgy Plekhanov, *Nashi raznoglasiia,* 174.

by its sheer scale only owing to the state's deep seated paranoia; it is that latter fact that would, for the time being, ultimately push the *narodniks* underground with police surveillance, while the zemstvo as an institution would remain effectively neutered, leaving its exponents to helplessly call for its building to be "crowned" with the establishment of an All-Russian Zemstvo Council, if not the Duma.

With the failure of the revolutionary wing in 1881, however, this once marginal position within *narodnichestvo* would rise to prominence once more, if only by technicality. By the 1880s, their insistence on "small deeds" left the remaining liberal *narodniks* well behind the trajectory of even the liberal zemstvo movement, which had by the end of the 1870s coalesced around an explicitly political set of demands focused on the aforementioned "crowning" of the *zemstvo*. Ivan Petrunkevich, who would go on to found the *Soiuz Osvobozhdeniia* and figure prominently in the development of the Kadet party, already in 1879 (though expressing a rather extreme position within the movement) published his "Ocherednye zadachi zemstva." As well as fan the flames of pan-Slavist nationalism among the *narodniks*, the Russo-Turkish War of 1878, which saw the liberation by Russian soldiers of fellow Slavs in Bulgaria from Turkish rule, had the simultaneous effect of emboldening liberals like Petrunkevich to push for zemstvo empowerment; echoing the *ressentiment* of Decembrists towards the (nominal) constitutionalism of Congress Poland under an autocratic Tsar, he wistfully remarked that Russians, having transformed in Bulgaria "yesterday's slaves into free citizens, blessed with constitutional rights and guarantees, themselves returned home as slaves still."[41] Against such impassioned speeches

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41 Ivan Petrunkevich, *Stranichka iz vospominanii*, quoted in F. A. Petrov, "Organy samoupravleniia v sisteme samoderzhavnoi Rossii: zemstvo v 1864-1879 gg.," in *Velikie reformy v Rossii* 1856-1874, (Moscow: 1982), 208.

the liberal *narodniks* effectively resigned themselves to advocating for what amounted to participation in day to day zemstvo activities.

If Georgy Plekhanov had been in one long ideological drift until his Marxist mooring, then the *narodnik* movement found itself in ideological free fall once the base of its party organization was removed from under its theoretical superstructure. The Gramscian task of identity of theory and practice miserably failed in the direct aftermath of the party's collapse, as its surviving nerve centre, clustered around Tikhomirov and Lavrov in exile, seemed more interested in polemically policing apostasy from former members through appeals to party discipline than theorizing a route correction. The stagnation of *narodnik* thought, its posthumous fixation with spontaneous movement of the people, gave rise to paroxysms of populism in the vein of the Black Hundreds – before being swept away by a neutered, placidly reformist and practically literary *narodnichestvo* left in the hands of the likes of Vasilii Vorontsov or Iakov Abramov, a *narodnichestvo* in name only. A sense of irony could not have escaped the publicist Vorontsov when he lamented the "rationalist" intelligentsia's proclivity to mindlessly reproduce bourgeois ideology in absence of direct contact with and study of the people. How, then, could the Russian *narodnik* intelligentsia ever have hoped to escape this vicious circle of seemingly invariably succumbing to its bourgeois predilections?

Chapter II. *Narodnichestvo*, Historically Re-Constituted: 1830-1871

The history of the *Narodnik* movement can be presented as one of an urban intelligentsia's decades-long struggle to protect a traditional communal rural way of life against an autocratic state and its efforts to modernize. Such a framing misses the minutiae of historical context, much specificity and nuance, but most elegantly captures the central conflict of two competing visions of modernity: the inexorable advent of an industrialized capitalist European civilization, and the resolute agrarian socialist vision of a primordialist communalism rooted in the ethnic life of the *narod*. The intellectual pedigree of *narodnik* thought comprised a veritable constellation of eclectic – and often clashing – influences, from the anachronistic romantic nationalism of the Slavophiles to the most avant-garde contemporary formulations of scientific socialism and anarchism; the *narodnik* cause may ultimately have been lost, but in their wake the *narodniks* left a legacy of revolutionary organization that would outlast their particular project; its own theoretical developments, finally, left a lasting influence on the politics of Russia long after the *narodniks* proper left the scene.

A comprehensive conceptualization, much less definition, of the *Narodnik* movement as a historical phenomenon in straightforward terms, then, presents an enormous challenge – one that had remained unsettled since the inception of its historiography already in the wake of its decline in the 1890s. The use of *narodnichestvo* to describe the intellectual activities of Vorontsov, for instance, is difficult to reconcile with the label's association with violent terrorism just years prior, and that – with militantly anti-political campaigns of political propaganda among the peasants a decade before. To grasp the trajectory of the movement in its entirety – and as a coherent movement – requires an understanding of the interstitial process of the contingent development, replacement and refinement in the manner of the ship of Theseus of its

methodological arsenal – what I term its body of politics. This process, naturally, begins before the *narodniks* proper come into the picture; before the mass campaign of going to the people could be conceptualized, the people themselves had to be discovered. Singularly illuminating here is the modernist theory of nationalism formulated by Ernest Gellner, who explained the birth of nationalism in relation to the advent of industrial modernity; although Gellner's framework proves inaccurate specifically in his treatment of the Russian case, as will be established below, the framing is nevertheless instrumental in the reconstitution of *narodnichestvo*'s historical inception to follow.

Part 1: Ernest Gellner, Russian Intelligentsia, and the Nationalism that Wasn't, 1830-1855

Tracing the trajectory of intelligentsia's geographical spread in the wake of early European modernisation in *Thought and Change* – a work that would become foundational to his influential theory of nationalism – social anthropologist Ernest Gellner makes the curious observation that, "[s]uperficially, they [the intelligentsia] always face the dilemma of choosing between "westernizing" and a *narodnik* tendency."[42] He goes on to develop this binary by contextualizing it for his audience, presumably more familiar with Western European intellectual history: having located the genesis of intelligentsia within the first cohort of Enlightenment thinkers by virtue of being "alienated from its own society by the very fact of its education,"[43] he parallels the westernizer-"*narodnik*" dualism with that of European rationalists and romantics of the late 18th century. Gellner likely meant, of course, to invoke not the *narodniks* but the *slavophiles* of the 1840s as the Russian manifestation of European romantic nationalism; but that distinction is ultimately beside the point – as the overarching conclusion he draws is that the dilemma was actually false all along: the "philosopher-kings" of this nascent intelligentsia will ultimately "all act as westernizers, and all talk like *narodniks*."[44] This – to be clear – entirely innocuous slip up helps illustrate the total conceptual nebulousness of *narodnichestvo* as a historiographical subject. As Christopher Ely rightfully points out in the introduction to his *Russian Populism*, even such ridiculous definitions thereof as to count Nicholas II among the populists are not entirely without their merit;[45] in comparison, the slavophile thought would in

[42] Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), 171 (emphasis mine).
[43] Gellner, *Thought and Change*, 169.
[44] Gellner, 171 (emphasis original).
[45] Christopher David Ely, *Russian Populism: A History* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 6.

fact be a crucial precursor of Herzen's almost messianic synthesis of western socialism and Russian communalism, laconically outlined already in an 1855 letter to Proudhon.[46]

But the usefulness of Gellner's work does not end there for the scholar of *narodnichestvo*, as his modernist framing of nationalism, adjacent theoretically to the thinking of his contemporaries Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm, explicitly engages with the historical circumstances of the *narodnik* movement's inception. Indeed, if the "*narodniks*" Gellner spoke of were in fact the slavophiles of 1840s, then the intelligentsia "philosopher kings" suggested to "act as westernizers and talked like *slavophiles*," would accordingly have been the *narodniks*. This, in turn, places them at the centre of Gellner's model of nationalist formation. Crucially for his argument, "nationalism is a phenomenon connected not so much with industrialisation or modernisation as such, but with its uneven distribution," a disruption of traditional order that produces deepened social stratification "unhallowed by custom" and therefore "not well protected by various social mechanisms."[47] Here, the intelligentsia and the "proletariat" must serve as the burgeoning national movement's "two prongs," having both, albeit in qualitatively different ways, been uprooted from their earlier positions in society; by necessity, their alliance requires also their mutual discovery of each other – that is to say, of the intelligentsia and the "proletariat" coming into contact.

It is important to note – for the purposes of establishing his framework's basic applicability to the Russian case – that by "proletariat" Gellner does not mean exclusively the urban wage-earning industrial worker as the term is used in the Marxist tradition, but something much closer to that nebulous category of "the people" *Narodniks* centered their movement around: it is "in general morally uprooted, but it need not be physically uprooted, i.e. physically

[46] M. Ol. Gershenzon, "Zapadnye Druz'ia Gertsena," *Byloe*, 1907, 79.
[47] Gellner, 166.

removed from its previous rural habitat." He furnishes this description with a historical example in the Algerian national revolution, and in particular the Aures mountains, where the "villagers least removed, in a superficial sense, from the traditional tribal order, who had remained in their old area" were, nevertheless, "disrupted by a kind of sociological action at a distance."[48] In this regard, there certainly would have been no more distance separating the Russian peasantry from the long overdue yet simultaneously disastrous "sociological action" of the 1861 Emancipation[49] - allowing for the narod to function effectively as Gellnerian proletariat at least from that point onwards.

This, unfortunately, is also where Gellner's framework diverges from the historical trajectory of *narodnichestvo*. Already in *Thought and Change* – that is, before formulating a more crystallized and focused theory of nationalism in *Nations and Nationalism* – and despite allowing for this crisis of modernity to "exist in a situation providing maximum opportunities and incentives for revolution,"[50] Gellner implicitly forecloses the potentiality of true *social* revolution through an almost teleological historical assertion of a nationalist industrial modernity as the necessary remedy. In effect, having clearly identified this sharp revolutionary situation, Gellner shifts his attention immediately to its conclusion, stating plainly that nationalism necessarily follows modernity as the latter essentially requires the former.

That this is a strictly functionalist argument has long been a charge saliently levied against Gellner,[51] and is at any rate of little relevance to our subject, seeing as the more comprehensive typology of nationalism outlined in *Nations and Nationalism* leaves the Russian

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[48] Gellner, 168.
[49] Ely, *Russian Populism,* 66.
[50] Gellner, 166.
[51] Brendan O'Leary, "On the Nature of Nationalism: An Appraisal of Ernest Gellner's Writings on Nationalism," *British Journal of Political Science* 27, no. 2 (April 1997): 191–222, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0007123497000112, 203.

case with an unsatisfying "Decembrist revolutionary"[52] designation. To Gellner, this was clearly a fringe case too irrelevant to warrant extensive elaboration, as his typology postulates that in a culturally homogenous "agro-literate" polity, where "the ruling class forms a small minority of the population, rigidly separate from the great majority of direct agricultural producers, or peasants," and is "horizontally segregated"[53] into various strata, or estates, the appearance of a politically disenfranchised intelligentsia (ostensibly) produces a "nationalism-thwarting" situation - and is consequently of minimal interest to Gellner.

And yet it would be far too premature for a study of *narodnichestvo* to accept Gellner's conclusions as final. For one, the long history of the modern Russian revolutionary movement could hardly be said to have stopped at the Decembrists; indeed, if anything, Gellner's own typology would position their conspiratorial plot of noble officers as coming well before the postulated stage of modern historical nationalism invariably spearheaded by the joint forces of intelligentsia and the proletariat. Furthermore, Gellner's framing of the intelligentsia as a "politically weak sub-group [that] is economically or educationally privileged, but being indistinguishable from the majority, is capable of swimming in the general pool without detection"[54] is more spurious still. It is convenient, for the purposes of elucidation, that the very term Gellner has been taking for granted thus far, "intelligentsia," is in fact loaded with pointedly specific historical context of origin: as in Russia, far from an alliance of convenience with the Gellnerian "uprooted proletariat" in pursuit of a shared nationalism, intelligentsia of the 1860s was defined instead by the very fact of its alienation from the masses.

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[52] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Cornell University Press, 1983), 94.
[53] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism,* 9-10.
[54] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 95.

"The disconnect of the educated classes with the people, the weakness of popular self-consciousness in the Russian society, a lack of integrity, spiritual unity with the Russain soil and the absence of organic creativity in the *so-called Russian intelligentsia*"[55] was, in so many words, *the* idée fixe of Ivan Aksakov, one of the most important Slavophile thinkers - and, not coincidentally, also one of the originators of "intelligentsia" as a specific sociological term. Somewhat more cynically, Fedor Dostoevsky, writing in 1873 from a vantage point of retrospect and through a distinct lens of his own idiosyncratic offshoot of Slavophile thought, cuttingly remarked that *narodnik* precursor Herzen and his like were "born emigres," embodying the culmination of the Russian nobility's centuries-long gradual separation from "the soil" – as Dostoevsky called himself a *pochvennik*, identifying within the soil the living forces of the people – "all of them, his ilk, were born here just like that, as emigres, despite having never left Russia in their majority."[56]

Herzen himself, reminiscing on his generation's scions, who have experienced that stifling atmosphere of "Nikolaevan time of moral soulmurder" firsthand, makes a point of mentioning his youthful enthusiasm for proselytizing socialism – "in every corner of our youthful "universe" … everywhere, always … throughout our entire life, from the university auditorium to the London typography."[57] Curiously, nowhere do "the people" figure in this insular world; it was, indeed, proselytism among his own peers and not propaganda for and within the people that Herzen and his cohort engaged in. And yet he also fully anticipated Dostoyevsky's charge of his being a dilettante, "boyar" socialism borne out of vacuous idleness,

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[55] S. V. Motin, "O poniatii "Intelligentsiia" v tvorchestve I. S. Aksakova i P. D. Boborykina.," *Izvestiia Penzenskogo Gosudarstvennogo Pedagogicheskogo Universiteta Im. V. G. Belinskogo*, no. 27 (2012): 838–44, 841 (emphasis mine).
[56] Fedor Dostoevsky, "Starye liudi," in *Dnevnik pisatelia*, 1873.
[57] Herzen, "Russkie teni," in *Byloe i Dumy,* 1868.

"out of the emptiness of one's heart at home,"[58] and simply asks in response, "what exactly were the people guilty of, they who recognized the pain of the needy before themselves, and pointed to them not only that pain, but also the way to relieve it?" - especially those whose names, like the Decembrists', would fill the pages of the autocracy's proscription lists?[59]

Both the ethical core of *narodnichestvo* and its fundamental estrangement from the central subject of its politics are to be found here; Herzen's socialism, to him, was a matter of compassion first and foremost, compassion strong enough for him and his contemporaries to have "sacrificed everything that others strive for: social standing, wealth, everything that traditional life had to offer, that the society, the family, dragged them towards – because of the convictions they would not betray."[60] Herzen's cohort had realized that, to come into being as a distinct sociopolitical group, the intelligentsia first had to reckon with its privileged isolation from the great suffering masses of people – and, in so doing, sever themselves irrevocably from the statist ruling class committed to maintaining that rigid hierarchy. They were, however, yet to produce a meaningful politics by which that yawning chasm could be bridged; the non-event of the Decembrist uprising was a hallowed memory of moral inspiration, but never a practical pathway to their goals. The intelligentsia and the popular masses were irrevocably set on a collision course, their lifelong mutual estrangement constituting a generational guilt for Russia's educated youth.

[58] Dostoevsky, "Starye liudi."
[59] Herzen, "Russkie teni."
[60] Herzen, "Russkie teni."

Part 2: Stumbling towards a Popular Movement, 1855-1861

Perhaps one of Herzen's most incisive analyses comes not from any work of political theory per se, but rather his acute awareness of literature and publicism's central place in both shaping and embodying the state of Russian politics – from its origins in Petrine Russia, when "all kinds of human relations between the upper and lower classes stopped, in which process of separation and ultimate severance Russian literature was forged,"[61] to its triumphant rebirth with Ostrovsky's *The Storm*, heralding the impending doom of "Russia of the Emperor, Russia military and noble, Russia that Petr I willed us."[62] Such keen insight would have been nothing short of prescient in 1834, when the 21 year old Herzen declared that "literature and political life appear to us inseparable"[63] in the program of the journal chronicling "the biography of humankind" his (formerly student) circle intended to publish – an act that would earn him his first arrest and exile that same year, inadvertently vindicating his equation of politics and literature. Arguably, his appreciation of the literary dimension of politics is also what enabled Herzen's fusion of Westernizer and Slavophile traditions, as to him "the history of Russian thought before 1848 was embodied precisely in the struggle between these two schools of thought,"[64] an explicitly political struggle waged through no other channel than the pages of periodicals and literary saloon discussions.

Gellner's westernizer-slavophile dilemma thus can be said to accurately represent at least the inciting episode of a socially distinct and politically engaged intelligentsia; its resulting synthesis in Herzen's autochthonous agrarian socialism, however, remains to be convincingly

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[61] Herzen, "Novaia faza v russkoi literature," Lib.ru/Классика: Herzen Alexander Ivanovich, Novaia faza v russkoi literature, 1864, http://az.lib.ru/g/gercen_a_i/text_1864_01_novaya_faza.shtml.
[62] Herzen, "Novaia faza v russkoi literature."
[63] Herzen, "Programma i plan izdaniia zhurnala," Lib.ru/Классика: Herzen Alexander Ivanovich, Programma i plan izdaniia zhurnala, 1834, http://az.lib.ru/g/gercen_a_i/text_1837_programma.shtml.
[64] Herzen, "Novaia faza v russkoi literature."

reduced to Gellner's "act as westernizers" and "talk like slavophiles." A cursory examination reveals that, in the absence of any possibility of direct participation in the political process, at the time of Herzen's heralded "new phase" in Russian literature arriving in 1864, both the westernizers and the slavophiles effectively and almost exclusively acted in the same manner: talking. For his own part, Herzen, having lived in and published from Europe beginning in 1847, was equally inconsequential from a purely practical standpoint – despite his position of great moral and intellectual authority, and perhaps more importantly, freedom from the considerations of Tsarist censorship.

Admittedly, this was likely a reflection of Herzen's personal ideological vacillation (especially before the Great Reforms) between the new generation's revolutionary radicalism and an almost liberal-reformist proclivity for moderation and civility. Herzen's determined noncommittal ultimately served as the backdrop for his London-based magazine *Kolokol*'s feud with the Petersburg-based *Sovremennik*, led by early *raznochintsy* radical luminaries and fellow *narodnik* precursors like Nikolay Chernyshevsky and Nikolay Dobrolyubov, and culminating in the watershed publication in the March of 1860 of the "Letter from the Province," which urged Herzen's *Kolokol*, his "Bell," to "toll now not for supplication, but to sound the alarm! To call for Rus' ax!"[65] Even *Kolokol*'s eventual support of the 1863 January Polish uprising – coming after the disillusionment of 1861's reforms – would come more as a result of Mikhail Bakunin's pressure than Herzen's personal convictions; as Bakunin put it, "[Herzen] had brought into being a strength, an enormous strength, and that honor nobody can take from [him]. Now the question

[65] Nikolay Dobroliubov, "Pis'mo iz provintsii," Lib.ru/Классика: Dobroliubov Nikolay Alexandrovich, Pis'mo iz provintsii, 1860, http://az.lib.ru/d/dobroljubow_n_a/text_0900.shtml (Originally published anonymously and signed as "Russkii chelovek"; Dobrolyubov's authorship, however, is almost certain).

is, what will [he] do with it? Russia demands a practical guidance to a practical goal. Will "Kolokol" be the one to provide it?"[66]

Herzen was hardly alone, however, in this practical paralysis; despite a clear recognition of what Petr Lavrov would term the "pathology of the existing order"[67] and unanimous opposition to it among the ranks of publicist intelligentsia – including even the slavophiles such as Aksakov who went entirely unmolested by the state despite their oppositional character[68] - literature-as-politics continued to be the exclusive domain of practical activity for the intelligentsia throughout the 1850s and into the early 1860s. Crucially for the future trajectory of the radical tradition, this stagnation – exacerbated by the clique-driven petty politicking endemic to the world of Russian legal publicism – contributed to the sharpening of factionalism and further fragmentation of the intelligentsia. In this sense, Herzen and his *Kolokol*'s late 1850s' polemic with the *Sovremennik* decidedly set the precedent, but not the tone, for the 1860s' fraught publicist space.

Now, in the ever more polarized public discourse, even the formerly sacrosanct figure of Herzen was no longer above becoming the target of libelous mudslinging on the part, for example, of *Otechestvennye Zapiski*'s editor-in-chief Andrey Kraevsky, to which Herzen himself did not hesitate to respond in kind.[69] Still, the years 1862-1863 produced a definite high watermark for radical publicism – the unpleasantries behind closed doors notwithstanding – with the publication of Nikolay Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done* in *Sovremennik* in 1863 and a

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[66] Mikhail Bakunin to Herzen, October 3, 1862. In *Pis'ma M. A. Bakunina k A. I. Gertsenu i N. P. Ogarevu* (Geneva, 1896), 86.
[67] Petr Lavrov, *Istoricheskie pis'ma,* Lib.ru/Классика: Lavrov Petr Petrovich. Istoricheskie pis'ma, 1869 http://az.lib.ru/l/lawrow_p_l/text_1869_istoricheskie_pisma.shtml.
[68] M. Dragomanov, "Predislovie," in *Pis'ma K. Dm. Kavelina i Iv. S. Turgeneva k Al. Iv. Gertsenu* (Geneva, 1892), IX-X.
[69] Herzen, "Iz zavedeniia A. A. Kraevskogo," *Kolokol,* no. 170 (1863): 1402-1403.

subsequent surge in genuinely productive discourse[70] - but also a breaking point, as Chernyshevsky's magnum opus would tellingly have to be written across four months of imprisonment in the Petr and Paul fortress. Tsarist reaction was back in full swing in the immediate aftermath of the events of 1861 – after its brief reprieve following Nikolay I's final "seven years of gloom" ending in 1855.

And if the Emancipation Proclamation was a disappointment for the Petersburg literati spurred into a flurry of activity, then its impact on the country's oppressed majority was nothing short of catastrophic. Peasant unrest almost immediately broke out across the Russian guberniyas, most notably in Bezdna and Penza, in the spring of 1861, whose equally immediate and brutal suppression by force of arms marked a final break with the early illusions of II's reformism among most of the radically-minded intelligentsia. By September of that year, regular *Sovremennik* and *Russkoe Slovo* contributor Nikolay Shelgunov would pen, print and distribute (with the aid of Herzen's London-based *Free Russian Press*) - breaking with *public* publicism – his pamphlet "To the Young Generation," where maximalist demands of the abolition of censorship, total amnesty, redistribution of land, etc., were accompanied by equally maximalist threats of violence in the vein of having to "cull a hundred thousand landlords"[71] if it came down to it. However juvenile or premature, this was an explicit and conscious contestation of the Tsarist monopoly on violence, conducted outside of the traditional channels of publicism, that called to collective action and popular legitimation of the "people's party of the young generation of all classes" it claimed to represent; the radical was swiftly turning revolutionary. This distinction could not be illustrated clearer than by comparing it to the roughly contemporary

[70] V. L. Kirillov, "Raskol v nigilistakh - razdor v nigilistakh. K istorii russkoi revoliutsionno-demokraticheskoi zhurnalistiki 1860-kh gg..," *Vestnik Permskogo universiteta. Istoriia,* no. 3(54) (2021): 68–77,
[71] N. V. Shelgunov, "K molodomu pokoleniiu," in *Narodnicheskaia ekonomicheskaia literatura* (Moscow, 1958): 83-98.

circulation of "*Velikoruss*" with its timid suggestion to "present for the consideration of the public a means of action most corresponding to the current moods of the public opinion"[72] - one of an editorial board constitutionalist at most in the extent of its political ambition.

From this point onwards, then, it becomes possible to speak not just of intelligentsia's intellectual radicalism, but also of its revolutionary character – and, already with the dissemination in the spring of 1862 of Petr Zaichnevsky's "Young Russia," its first fault line of ideological divergence as well. Moreover, in addition to its distinction through explicitly ideological commitment to a vision of Jacobinism that would become a mainstay, albeit peripheral, of the revolutionary movement, "Young Russia" is also significant in explicating one of the key elements of virtually every notable revolutionary organization going forward that is absent from Shelgunov's "To the Young Generation." As per the deliberations of the fictive Central Revolutionary Committee's full assembly, "not one of the published journals has yet to clarify to the public a revolutionary program," and it would therefore be necessary to "initiate the publishing of a journal that would make publicly clear the principles for which it is fighting, and at the same time serve as an organ of the revolutionary party in Russia."[73] Unlike earlier and mostly legal radical publicism, here publishing was treated as merely a means of communication subordinated to the functioning of the party – a form of revolutionary publicism that would continue, effectively unchanged in orientation, through the eponymous *narodnik* outlets of *Zemlya i Volya* and *Narodnaya Volya*, and down to the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party's *Iskra* in 1900.

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[72] Proclamation "Velikoruss," signed "Ivan Ivanov," critiquing the peasant reform of 1861 , n.d., 1574 / 1 / 120, Personal material of Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev, RGIA, St. Petersburg. https://www.prlib.ru/item/357755

[73] Petr Grigor'evich Zaichnevsky, "Molodaia Rossiia," (1862), in Mikhail Lemke, *Politicheskiie protsessy v Rossii 1860-kh gg.*. (1923): 508-518, 512.

Both Shelgunov and Zaichnevsky's pamphlets, despite the latter's marked Jacobinism, ultimately converge on their nigh-identical calls to action addressed – as their titles indicate – to the younger generation. One, identifying itself with its audience, asks "who is going to implement [the outlined programme]?"[74]; the other, representing a mythical party of conspirators, rejoins with "who is on our side?"[75] The answer to both, crucially, is identical: it is, in this exact order, the narod, the military, and above all (at this junction) the young generation that comprise the hopes of the authors. Shelgunov, prefiguring the call to "go to the people," concludes by asking them to "talk more frequently with the people and the soldiers, explain to them everything that we want and how easy it is to achieve."[76] Zaichnevsky, in accordance with his political Jacobinism, addresses the youth directly to prepare to take the reins of the movement: "you shall provide the leaders of the people, you shall stand at its helm."[77]

Otherwise, the pamphlets' shared language also evinces the pervasive psychological state of the intelligentsia at the time: the need for reckless, honorable sacrifice is underscored in both by evoking the memory of the Decembrists; the exasperation with placid reformism drives Shelgunov to denounce the charades of liberalism with its "empty talk" and Zaichnevsky the "myopic" liberalism of Herzen as well as the self-inflicted ultimate impotence of the "Velikoruss"; and finally and most strikingly, the acceptance by both of the necessity of revolutionary violence – even if it were "hundreds of thousands of pomeschiks," or "three times the blood spilt by the Jacobins in the [17]90s." In other words, despite – already significant – ideological variegation, it is nevertheless still possible to locate them within a shared

[74] Shelgunov, "K molodomu pokoleniiu," 98.
[75] Zaichnevsky, "Molodaia Rossiia," 517.
[76] Shelgunov, 98.
[77] Zaichnevsky, 517.

revolutionary moment and movement; in the words of Mikhail Bakunin, "there is already a Revolution in Russia."[78]

[78] Mikhail Bakunin, *Narodnoe delo: Romanov, Pugachev ili Pestel'?* (London: 1862), 6.

Part 3: "Manifestation" "Activism" before *Narodnichestvo*, 1861-1864

This revolution, already set in motion, had as its goals two concrete things: "the narod needs land – give him his land … The narod needs liberty, total liberty of movement, activity… Then give him that liberty."[79] Narod's willful, rapid movement forward in pursuit of proverbial Land and Freedom is seen as already happening, and it is in recognition of this strength, "before this great, severe and even daunting face," that Bakunin tasks the youth with yet another variation on a familiar theme, "not as teachers, but to cleanse yourself shall you undertake the feat of *rapprochement and reconciliation with the people*."[80] Bakunin, unlike – or, rather in explicit opposition to – previous popular proclamations and especially that of "Molodaia Rossiia," proclaims first and foremost the primacy of the people. Gone are the messianic, "apostolic" affectation of the noble Decembrist's self-sacrifice, and the Jacobine assumption of paternalism – and in their place Bakunin humbly prostrates before the primal force of narod. "Going to the people," before it could become a literal call to action, would first have to be understood as a spiritual turn "towards" the people: "let each one of you, in service of the common cause, go to the people in your own way, but let everyone go directly and sincerely, without any tricks or deception, let everyone carry with you all of your mind and your heart and a pure, strong will to serve him as a gift … And you will be made then, undoubtedly, *popular people*."[81]

It would of course have been tempting to call off the search for a canonical starting point of *narodnichestvo* here, with Bakunin's proclamation. After all, there we find the first call to "go to the people," the categorical rejection of intelligentsia's self-absorbed presumption of

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[79] Bakunin, *Narodnoe delo,* 13.
[80] Bakunin, *Narodnoe delo,* 29 (emphasis original).
[81] Bakunin, *Narodnoe delo,* 48 (emphasis mine).

leadership, the familiar slogan, dating back to *Pugachevschina*, demanding the popular "zemlya i volya," as well as the recognition – admittedly present already in Herzen's thinking – of the intelligentsia's fundamentally privileged position, and consequently the debt it owed, before the people. And yet all of that exists in the service of an obviously faulty premise – that the revolution "was already there." Writing from abroad, it is unclear to what extent Bakunin's thinking here is aspirational or was indicative of a genuinely held belief – but it is reflective of a popular sentiment that continued to exist even after the initial wave of peasant unrest failed to propagate further in 1861. The Emancipation proclamation in February 1861 set a two year deadline for the "ustav gramotas" to be drafted by the landowners, in which the terms of land transfer to each freed serf, and the debt obligation they were to undertake in the process; among the revolutionary intelligentsia February of 1863 was thus seen as the point at which the farce of "golden liberty" could no longer be maintained,[82] and the dam of popular discontent would finally burst into a nationwide "peasant movement." It was in this atmosphere of revolutionary fervor and anticipation that the first *Zemlya i Volya* would be founded[83] - alongside a plethora of other, smaller radical circles.

In the meantime, however, the shock of the 1861 Emancipation Manifesto and the rush of publicist activity it spawned could not have gone unnoticed by the Tsarist administration, and its indiscriminate reaction was swift to follow. Even Herzen, whose *Kolokol* was until very recently read in the Winter Palace itself, and who was by then regularly accused in radical periodicals of having helped legitimate the Tsar's liberal self-perception in laudatory articles such as 1858's "Three Years After,"[84] was once again made persona non-grata in the eyes of the regime;

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[82] Nikolay Serno-Solov'evich, "Okonchatel'noe reshenie krest'ianskogo voprosa," (Berlin: 1861) 56.
[83] Alexander Sleptsov, *Vospominaniia*, Lib.Ru/Классика: Sleptsov Alexander Alexandrovich. Vospominaniia, 1906. http://az.lib.ru/s/slepcow_a_a/text_1906_vosp.shtml
[84] Herzen, "Cherez tri goda," *Kolokol,* no. 9 (1858): 67-68.

association in any way with Herzen's publicist activities – much less a visit to London – were, retroactively, rendered grounds for immediate arrest. The devastating May 1862 Petersburg fires were rumored to have been the work of the ascendant nihilist studentry – in no small part owing to the massive success of Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* published earlier that year[85] - further alienating large swathes of the "polite society" from even the mildest dissent; the *Sovremennik* and *Russkoe Slovo* "nihilist" periodicals, mouthpieces of the radical democratic intelligentsia, were suspended from publication for eight months. Perhaps most devastatingly, 1862 would also see the first in a long line of Russian "political processes" with the Trial of the 32, involving those accused of having associated with the "London propagandists." There, among others, the Serno-Solov'evich brothers and Nikolay would be tried and sentenced to exile (one outside of Russia, another to Siberia) - taking them out of their organizational work in *Zemlya i Volya,* which at the time amounted to a confederation of Petersburg student circles united with the goal of more effective collective organization.

Bervi-Flerovsky, a prominent theoretician of *narodnichestvo* and specifically of "going to the people," reminisced of the uncertain atmosphere 1860s: "The publicists evangelized the necessity of moving from words to action; but what sort of action could that be?" The answer, given that "the public was forcibly removed from any activity whatsoever, could only be one thing – revolutionary propaganda."[86] It was imperative to overcome the clique tendencies implicit in student circles – "кружки" - limited in their scope and capacity for action; the idealist, apostolic circle of Herzen and Ogarev of the 1830s has palpably outlived its relevance as an organizational form – and the first natural impulse was to confederate. Yevgeny Mikhaelis appears here as a prominent figure in this early movement towards student centralization,

[85] Alexander Kornilov, "Lektsiia XXV," in *Kurs istorii Rossii XIX veka*, ch. 2 (Moscow, 1918): 230-252, 234.
[86] Vasilii Bervi-Flerovsky, *Zapiski revoliutsionera-mechtatelia* (Moscow: 1929), 68.

featuring prominently in the memoirs of Bervi-Flerovsky and Longin Panteleev, a rank-and-file member of *Zemlya i Volya*, despite his apparent disappearance from revolutionary historiography afterwards.[87] A united front of studentry was to replace the formerly loose patchwork of insular circles, incapable of producing anything beyond mere "disorder" promptly quelled by targeted administrative measures – as was already happening under the custodianship of the Minister of National Education, Evfimy Putiatin. His overbearing interventionism into the affairs of the St. Petersburg University was so unpopular as to be opposed not just by the students, but the faculty as well – led by the renowned liberal jurist and professor of the law Konstantin Kavelin, whose outlook was at the time sympathetic to the demands of the students.[88] Curiously, Kavelin also appears to have played a significant role in bringing Petr Lavrov to prominence among the radical youth; a full decade before his pioneering work on the historical philosophy of *narodnichestvo*, Lavrov at the time was seen as something of a novelty, a military officer just recently entering the world of literary publicism (his first book, *Essays on the Questions of Practical Philosophy*, was published in 1860). At Kavelin's invitation, however, in 1861 he gave a series of wildly successful public lectures on philosophy in the Passage for the Petersburg Literary Fund Committee, skyrocketing his fame[89] - and ironically "in doing so probably destroyed whatever chance he might have had for a new career in the academy."[90]

Having unified as a more or less cohesive body, the studentry also broke with its insular character and academically confined sphere of interests. Most notable in this regard, perhaps, is the April 1861 *panikhida,* or public memorial service, organized by the students of Kazan

[87] That is, aside from the kraevedenie of East Kazakhstan, where he eventually settled in exile, and his role in the discovery and tutelage of Abay's literary talents; see Stanislav Chernykh, "Drug Abaia," *Ural'skii Sledopyt* no. 5 (May 1981).
[88] Longin Panteleev, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: 1958), 201.
[89] Panteleev, *Vospominaniia,* 234.
[90] Philip Pomper, *Peter Lavrov and the Russian Revolutionary Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 51.

University and Theological Academy, for the victims of the brutal suppression by general Apraksin of the Bezdna peasant unrest of 1861 mentioned above. Aside from the uncharacteristically prominent participation there of genuinely apolitically motivated students of the Theological Academy,[91] this episode is otherwise fairly representative of most other contemporary student activism: wherein a public space would be transformed, in relation to some recent event of political significance, into a platform for popular agitation (but not propaganda), usually bolstered by an arraigned gathering of a crowd, and sometimes accompanied by a group of speakers; police presence, however, frequently cut any ambitious program short.

This demonstration, or "манифеSтация," approach, was prodigiously employed by Poles in anticipation of the 1863 January uprising, and in fact one of the earlier instances of a Russian student demonstration came in the form of a solidarity *panikhida* in memory of the five Polish demonstrants killed in the suppression of the February 13, 1861 Warsaw manifestation. The response of the student body here is indicative of its newfound strength and unity: having caught wind of an investigation being carried out into the *panikhida*'s planning, with the intent of singling out Polish students, the student assembly - "Sходка" - resolved to gather signatures from the Russian students confirming their presence at the memorial service; as a result, though not without some help from the faculty, even the student responsible for the collection of signatories was eventually relieved of disciplinary charges.[92] Prior to the mass campaign of "going to the people" of 1873, and the even later turn towards full blown terrorism, manifestations can be said to have been the primary form of non-literary political activism for the Russian intelligentsia,

[91] R. V. Tupikin, "Uchastie studentov Kazanskoi dukhovnoi akademii v panikhide po krest'ianam s. Bezdna," *Vestnik PSTGU*, no. 82 (2018): 23-36, 30.
[92] Panteleev,174.

owing to its ease of planning even under a rudimentary organization and immediate public resonance.

Fittingly illustrative of its mainstay status in the radical tradition is the fact that the very first act of the *Narodnik* second iteration of *Zemlya i Volya* in 1876 was just such a manifestation – the Kazanskaya demonstration (so called for the Kazan Square in St. Petersburg it took place on) - only then it would serve to provide a conscious retreat from laborious and costly village propaganda, and a return to agitation in the capital explicitly aiming to reach the urban worker.[93] The students of 1861, needless to say, were not concerned with who they were reaching out towards; simply doing something, at this juncture, was enough. And at any rate the range of practically feasible options, developed over a decade of revolutionary activity, was not there yet. Panteleev, for instance, recalls that when the studentry's representative, Pokrovsky, was approached by two people from the *Sovremennik* testing the waters of the students' actual combat readiness, and asked whether they could gather 300 people "ready for anything," he replied in the positive without a second thought, instinctively "assuming that they were speaking about *some kind of manifestatsiya or other*"[94] - such was the extent of his practical imagination; and Pokrovsky was among the students standing "for the most radical ends"!

Naturally, the *Sovremennik* correspondents' actual suggestion was to "set out for Tsarskoe Selo, assault the palace and take the heir to the throne" as a hostage to demand from the Tsar a constitution; fortunately Pokrovsky's response, after briefly considering the possibility, was to refuse. The phantasmagorical juxtaposition between these refined *gens de lettres* casually proposing to send three hundred young men on a headlong assault against the autocracy's beating heart – an act of war too daring for even the militants of *Narodnaya Volya* at their strongest to

[93] Vera Figner, *Zapechatlennyi trud. Tom 1* (Moscow: 1964), 144.
[94] Panteleev, 533 (emphasis mine).

have even considered – accurately captures, I think, the disjointed, unmoored chaos of the radical intelligentsia's discursive field at the time. As such, this episode does not necessarily represent some underlying divide between the studentry and the publicists either in theory or in practice; the aforementioned author of "Molodaia Rossiia," Zaichnevsky, might well have agreed in Pokrovsky's place, and he led a student circle of his own – rather, this moment should be understood as a sort of *narodnik* primordial crucible, where, through trial and error and gradual evolution, multitudes of possibilities eventually converged into the historical trajectory of *Narodism*. Finally, this episode is also important in that it showcases a mechanism of interaction – between the studentry and the wider radical world – that would eventually give rise to the first iteration of *Zemlya i Volya* – a coming together of the fresh productive forces of a unified studentry under an organizational structure provided by "adult" literary publicists – a necessary prenup before the nascent intelligentsia could face the popular masses.

Special epistemological diligence, however, must be maintained here, as the history of this first *Zemlya i Volya* is remarkably obscure – even by the already low standards of early Russian revolutionary groups. Beyond the memoirs of Panteleev, who occupied a relatively low position in the organization and therefore was not privy to most of its operational details, we have, in the way of first hand testimony, only the unfinished and fragmentary memoirs of Sleptsov to go by – and, as bibliographer and rare expert on the subject Solomon Risser points out, their writing after 40 years of willful oblivion was motivated in large part by "distortion of facts in the memoirs of Panteleev"[95] published in 1904. The source of this distortion, Risser notes, were Panteleev's own "antagonistic attitudes" towards Sleptsov that prevented him from conducting the "contemporaries' peer review" customary to late imperial memoir writing. What

[95] S. Risser, "Vospominaniia A. A. Sleptsova," in A. Sleptsov, *Vospominaniia* (Saratov: 1962).

this means is that the only two documentary recollections pertaining to that monumental period of *Zemlya i Volya*'s brief existence are irrevocably marred by "Sleptsov and Panteleev's 43-years late polemic" and their "collision of egos."[96] Thankfully, Panteleev's perspective, however valuable as a "characteristic" image of the era's studentry, does not cross over into Sleptsov's narrative of *Zemlya i Volya*'s inception, and both can therefore be presumed safe from epistemological contamination; in Risser's estimation, it is primarily Panteleev's skewed characterization of Sleptsov (euphemistically nicknamed "the pince-nez gentleman" whenever he does appear in the narration) and overly ambitious positioning of their Petersburg student circle as the operational "centre" of *Zemlya i Volya* that are obviously suspect – whereas Sleptsov, at any rate, did not even get to writing the section of his memoirs pertaining to Panteleev and his characterization.

In Sleptsov's fragmentary account – despite missing, among other things, the all-important chapter detailing his meeting of brothers Serno-Solov'evich – a rough pathway towards *Zemlya i Volya* can nevertheless be identified: Sleptsov, "feeling a thirst for altruistic activity,"[97] eventually meets Nikolay Serno-Solov'evich, and becomes part of his circle. The idea of forming an underground revolutionary group appears when they come into contact with the head of the newly unified Petersburg studentry Mikhaelis and an unnamed university professor, through whom recruitment from among the students could be arranged. Finally, a visit to Herzen in London left Sleptsov with an ambivalent impression: "there were no decisive disagreements between the two of us; he inspired distrust in himself with his inordinate self-conceit, but his attitude towards the shaken Russia, his opinions and ideas I hadn't yet gotten the chance to think

[96] Risser, "Vospominaniia A. A. Sleptsova."
[97] Sleptsov, *Vospominaniia,* 3.

through."[98] Through a discussion with Chernyshevsky – on another Serno-Solov'evich circle member Obruchev's introduction – these uncertain feelings give way to a shared resolve to "undertake the organization of a secret society."[99] Finally, Herzen himself commits *Kolokol* to a path of no return with the publication in July 1861 of the anonymous "What does the narod need?", penned by Nikolay Ogarev in collaboration with Serno-Solov'evich, Sleptsov and Obruchev. The pamphlet, characteristically titled after a rhetorical "cursed question," provides the answer in its first line – "the answer is very simple: the narod needs Land and Liberty."[100]

[98] Sleptsov, 4.
[99] Sleptsov, 4.
[100] Nikolay Ogarev, "Chto nuzhno narodu?", *Kolokol* no. 102 (1861)

Part 4: Revolutionary Dead End, 1864-1871

Zemlya i Volya's first iteration ultimately would not achieve much. The tsarist reaction so far looming in the background of this discussion, had in fact already taken its organizational head, Serno-Solov'evich, out of the picture; Chernyshevsky was arrested in spring of 1862; finally, Sleptsov steps away from the revolutionary scene halfway, in 1863, and with him gone Panteleev's cell of five people, no longer in contact with what remained of the operational centre, was left to its own devices.[101] Even during its "normal" operation, at least from Panteleev's perspective – as Sleptsov's account stops with the publication of "What does the people need?" - *Zemlya i Volya* does not appear to have broken with the status quo of post-1861 student activism. Most illustrative here is Panteleev's recollection, after Sleptsov's exit, that "as soon as we got to talking business, nothing other than the issuing of proclamations was even thought possible," and while there were "talks of the necessity of direct propaganda among the people, it was only thought possible at some point in the future, indeterminate future.."[102] The reaction decapitated and paralyzed the burgeoning movement in its infancy.

With the dissolution of *Zemlya i Volya* in 1864, the last act of this tentative era of activism would arguably signal its future trajectory with the demise of the Ishutin circle. One of the last remnants of *Zemlya i Volya*'s student confederation still in operation, under Ishutin's ambitious leadership his circle of (former) students managed to pull together the dissipated Moscow studentry, organized – in the spirit of Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?* – a number of manufacturing cooperatives, and even considered going out to the people; "the acquaintances were multiplying, new relations were being created, the revolutionary atmosphere was

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[101] Risser, "L. F. Panteleev," in Longin Panteleev, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: 1958), 18.
[102] Panteleev, 316.

thickening and its questions were posited more decisively and sharply"[103] - a reignition of 1861's spark under qualitatively new conditions of white terror. And yet it is these bitter experiences of the past that ultimately doomed Ishutin's project, when Dmitry Karakozov first suggested the group assassinate the Tsar as a show of the revolutionaries' strength before meeting the people – "we should first show the people the defeatability of Tsarist power, and only then turn to evangelizing against its Tsarist order."[104] It was, of course, nearly unanimously rejected; the four years separating them from 1861's dreams of an impending popular revolution have sufficiently demonstrated that, despite everything, "in the eyes of the people the Tsar is their Liberator and their closest benefactor." Still, Karakozov remained unconvinced; his single-minded focus on the assassination of II was, unmistakably, a product of revolutionary despair at the reactionary surge. That his attempt was independent of the circle did not save Ishutin from arrest – and, with him, of the majority of his organization; the group, as it turned out, had a provocateur among its ranks.[105]

In the meantime, the failure to capitalize on the revolutionary moment had also poisoned the well of literary publicism. The erosion of authority figures such as Herzen held among the reading intelligentsia left the discursive field with no clear "Pole Star" to moderate the polemics, while the ongoing white terror and intensification of censorship deflated the remaining authors' willingness to express what has become legally inexpressible. Even the vanguard organs of the radical democrats, *Russkoe Slovo* and *Sovremennik*, following their return to publication after their eight month suspension in the wake of the 1862 fires, had to moderate their message. "Personal conflict was the consequence of "intellectual panic," anxieties, of the "tiresome state

[103] Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia, *Iz moikh vospominanii* (St. Petersburg: 1906), 8.
[104] Breshko-Breshkovskaia, *Iz moikh vospominanii,* 10.
[105] Breshko-Breshkovskaia, 12.

of the soul" - and so Shelgunov, the author of "To the Young Generation" and former correspondent for *Russkoe Slovo*, ostracized from publication anywhere at this time, lamented that "in the place of discussions of the common cause came the talk of personal good, and instead of calming the anxious mind on the rock of common ideas, the frustrated and dissatisfied personal ego sought activity in private polemics."[106]

The so-called "schism among the nihilists" of the 1860s that drew so much polemic gloating from Fedor Dostoevsky and his *pochvennik* outlet *Epokha*, was thus less of a genuine schism and more of an almost psychological response: "a dead end, the crushing of hopes, disorientation and disillusionment, that the generation of the 60s felt at that time gave rise to personal conflicts in the public press."[107] Once radical and fresh, literary publicism simply could not stay the course and weather autocratic reaction – and, like the studentry who found an outlet in fruitless and mercilessly punished manifestations, the pages of *Sovremennik* and *Russkoe Slovo*, previously marching in the vanguard of Russia's intelligentsia, were now filled with interpersonal mudslinging, not infrequently joined in on by onlookers from outside the radical tradition, as with Fedor Dostoevsky's 1864 "Mister Shchedrin, or the Schism among the Nihilists." The image of the 1860's radical, dragged down from the lofty heights of Dobrolyubov or Chernyshevsky's intellectual apogee in 1862, was now such that even a fledgling writer like Dostoevsky could get away with satirizing them in 1865's *"*The Crocodile*"*: "Every great idea and tradition of our newspapers and magazines are obviously manufactured by people laying idly

[106] V. L. Kirillov, "Raskol v nigilistakh - razdor v nigilistakh. K istorii russkoi revoliutsionno-demokraticheskoi zhurnalistiki 1860-kh gg..," *Vestnik Permskogo universiteta* no. 3(54) (Perm: 2021): 68-77, 70.
[107] Kirillov, "Raskol v nigilistakh - razdor v nigilistakh," 74.

on their side; that is why they are called "cabinet" ideas, but so what if they're called that! I will invent now an entire social system wholesale – and you won't believe me how easy that is!"[108]

The revolutionary moment of 1861, then, had thoroughly exhausted itself against the brick wall of tsarist reaction; the movement had hit a practical, theoretical and intellectual dead end, seemingly failing to achieve much of anything – both in terms of material gains in concrete Tsarist concessions, or the development of organizational capabilities of the revolutionary movement. Evocative of this atmosphere of stagnation towards the late 1860s is Nikolay Sveshnikov's description, a memoirist vagrant and bookseller, of one "den" of radical studentry, the Smorgon commune, also known as the Academy: "I lit a candle wanting to read; but, approaching the table, was greeted with such a mass of filth, that, even unaccustomed to comfort and tidiness, I was overcome with disgust … Lots of speeches on liberty, equality and fraternity were held there; but speeches remained speeches, while the majority much preferred the buffet stocked with plenty of vodka, beer and snacks."[109] Still, his recollections of student debauchery would hardly be notable had it not been for the mythological infamy garnered by the Smorgon Academy in the revolutionary rumour mill – and by extension revolutionary historiography, as had often happened with relatively obscure episodes of revolutionary history (like the first *Zemlya i Volya*). The Academy, it was said, was in fact a secret society first founded by the Saratovite core of Ishutin's circle upon their release from Petersburg preliminary detention around 1867, and would not only "produce" from its bellows the infamous "nihilist" Sergey Nechaev, but also many of his acolytes that terrorized Petersburg both civil and radical.

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[108] F. M. Dostoevsky, "The Crocodile," in *Dostoevsky F. M. Sobranie sochinenii v 15 tomakh.* T. 4. (Leningrad: 1989): 551—584, 572.

[109] Nikolay Sveshnikov, *Vospominaniia propashchego cheloveka,* http://az.lib.ru/s/sweshnikow_n_i/text_1896_vospominania_propashego_cheloveka.shtml.

The reality, in all likelihood, was far more prosaic; Viktor Kirillov's 2016 critical examination of the Smorgon commune's mythos, published under the telling title *Revolutionary Terrorism that Was Not,* effectively leaves only the Saratovite Ishutintsy founding members as part of the Smorgon history, while whatever connections to the Nechaev case they had are revealed as insignificant and, moreover, entirely coincidental. More important here – keeping in the spirit of Tatiana Saburova and Ben Eklof's focus on the "infamous" men of history, in a Foucauldian sense, - is rather the fact of the grimy, hungry Smorgon's representativity of the Petersburg radical studentry of the time. Kirillov rightfully concludes his book of myth-busting by saying that "though the history of a mysterious secret society, never discovered by the state and practically unremembered by contemporaries could have been more interesting were the Smorgontsy themselves mysterious conspirators and terrorists, the portrait of regular, "background" revolutionaries is important for understanding the ways and means of forming a revolutionary society, and motives of revolutionary choice by lesser known men."[110]

And it is against that background of unassuming, rank-and-file studentry that the figure of Sergey Nechaev stood out as all the more shocking. "Revolutionary" life in the capital – whether as a publicist or a student – had by the end of the 1860s become a rut of its own, only sporadically shaken up by one happening or another. Nechaev's own brand of fanatical, almost millenarian revolutionary zealotry, outlined in his *Catechism of a Revolutionary* (written with Mikhail Bakunin's support, if not cooperation), during a brief period of self-imposed exile, served to either impress, disgust or even terrify the otherwise inert Russian student. The revolutionary of Nechaev was not the slovenly party-goer of Smorgon', but a "doomed man"

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[110] Viktor Kirillov, *Revoliutsionnyi terrorizm, kotorogo ne bylo: Tainoe obshchestvo «Smorgonskaia akademiia» v russkom revoliutsionnom dvizhenii 1860-kh gg., AIRO* (Moscow: 2016), 194-95.

sworn to "hate everyone and everything in [the world] with an equal hatred." Ideologically, of course, Nechaev's *Narodnaya Rasprava* – the Geneva-based organ of his eponymous revolutionary party – still echoed the calls for a "*narodnaya*, *muzhitskaya*" revolution; in organizational terms, however, he was an extreme accelerationist. "The revolutionary thought of the educated classes in Russia, up until now, was extremely slow in developing," he argued, going even as far as to claim that "the entire radicalism of the educated estates, every striving for social reconstruction was an external, fashionable outgrowth, limited to a loud phrase and the washing of its hands of any practical activity (*дела*)."[111]

If anything, what is remarkable is the sheer significance afforded to the Ishutintsy and Karakozov in particular. "Their [Karakozov, Ishutin et al.] beginning was only the prologue for the now ready to begin Russian national tragedy," "[t]he beginning of our holy cause was started on the morning of the 4th of April 1866 by Dmitry Vladimirovich Karakozov!" "The cause of Karakozov should be seen as a prologue … let us hasten to usher in the drama itself!" "The initiative was opened by the Ishutintsy. So too shall we join them, while the trail is still hot..."[112] The 19 year-old Nechaev was obviously conscripted into the radical fold by Karakozov's heroic feat; but, perhaps more importantly, he also represented the hastening of the coming revolution and its "moral transformations … in quiet isolation away from the loudmouthed phrasemongers" in the last decade, and consequently a renewed urgency to act.[113] Nechaev himself had little patience for "theory," characteristically arguing that "in the Cossack circle, organized by Vasilii Ous in Astrakhan, upon the appearance there of Stepan Timofeevich Razin" - leader of the 17th century Cossack anti-Tsarist uprising - "the ideal of social equality was immeasurably closer to

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[111] *Narodnaya Rasprava* no. 1, (Geneva: 1869), 4.
[112] *Narodnaya Rasprava* no. 1, (Geneva: 1869), 5, 12, 14, 16.
[113] *Narodnaya Rasprava* no. 1, (Geneva: 1869), 5.

realization than in the phalansteries of Fourier, the institutes of Cabet, Louis Blanc or other scientist socialists, closer than in the associations of Chernyshevsky."[114]

In Nechaev's own organization, *Narodnaya Rasprava*, this ideal of equality was never meant to be found; as Nechaev's biographer Felix Lur'e somewhat judgmentally remarked, "the example of Nechaev's practical activity demonstrated to the future generations the existence of an other, non-traditional morality, corporate revolutionary morale entirely new and drenched in human blood, alone capable of ensuring the success of social change."[115] Insofar as Nechaev's revolutionary concerned himself exclusively with the destruction of the state, the realm of morals and morality was rendered entirely irrelevant next to the considerations of cold utilitarian calculus. Human capital was to be moved and exchanged, weighed against its utility to the revolutionary cause – and so the first calibration of Nechaev's own values came with the very first instance of a human refusing to be mere capital: the insubordination of *Narodnaya Rasprava'*s member Ivanov during the so-called Polunin affair.

In October 1869, the famous physician Grigory Zakharin teaching at the Moscow University was temporarily replaced by the "strict and demanding" professor Alexey Polunin, whose lectures the students collectively decided to boycott; 18 people were expelled from the university, and the lectures continued as normal. Nechaev saw this as a recruiting opportunity as well as a stage for *Narodnaya Rasprava* to finally spread its wings – to both ends, he proposed plastering the walls of the students' kitchen and library with a proclamation he wrote for the occasion, "From the United to the Divided," which Ivanov argued would only serve "to attract the gendarmes, who will demand their closure, while the perpetrators will be expelled or even

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[114] *Narodnaya Rasprava* no. 1, (Geneva: 1869), 9.
[115] Felix Lur'e, *Nechaev: Sozidatel' razrusheniia* (Molodaia gvardiia, 2001), 168.

arrested."[116] Nechaev, whose authority in the *Rasprava* hinged on conveying the decisions of the mysterious Committee with which he was alone in secret contact, could not tolerate Ivanov's dissent once he suggested the Committee could be fictitious – and, against the trepidation and horror of other members, resolved to get rid of Ivanov for good, steeling the bonds of the group in the process. It is almost remarkable how quickly Nechaev's mind moved from idea to action: the Polunin affair discussion took place on the 19th of November, the decision of Ivanov's removal was announced on the 20th, and the murder itself carried out on the 21st; of course, it is notable also that despite the conspirators' attempt to cover up the murder – going as far as to drown Ivanov's corpse – it was discovered already on the 25th, publicized on the 27th, and Nechaev himself identified as the culprit on the 25th of December.[117] *Narodnaya Rasprava* went from being practically irrelevant for the first three months of its existence to Nechaev becoming a household name in a little over a month.

Nechayev's inhuman mode of radicalism, definitionally nihilist in its negation of life and preoccupied solely with the destructive aspects of revolutionary work, then, appears to have been rooted in fairly well articulated frustrations with the state of Russian radicalism itself. To be sure, personal ego no doubt played a role in Nechaev's deceptive tactics in self-presentation (and, consequently, his interactions with fellow revolutionaries), as well as his framing of the revolution as finally imminent – and therefore his to inaugurate; but the challenge his provocative gesture presented to the world of radical Russia was both undeniable and unignorable. The revolutionary movement of the 1860s, marshaled by the systemic shock of the Emancipation and its opening of the narod as an epistemic category to the world of intelligentsia, had thus far produced much ado about "going to the people" without ever succeeding in doing so

[116] Lur'e, *Nechaev*, 162.
[117] Lur'e, 167.

on a meaningful scale. Going back to Gellner's typology, this was the deciding moment in whether the advent of industrial modernity in Russia was going to be a "nationalism-inducing" or "nationalism-thwarting" situation – that is to say, once again, if the intelligentsia could bridge that epistemic gap and join hands with the Gellnerian proletariat – the uprooted masses – in founding the Russian nation. Nechaev's audacious challenge presented a vision of *narodnik*-nationalism's failure; if the "nation-building" scenario of modernization could not be a joint venture, then it is only natural that it fell to the blighted minds of the educated classes to effect "terrible, total, universal, and merciless destruction" of modern civilization so that the future world could be built "through the movement and life of the people."[118]

[118] Sergey Nechaev, "The Revolutionary Catechism," 1869, https://www.marxists.org/subject/anarchism/nechayev/catechism.htm.

Chapter III. Prefigurative Present, Socialist Future: 1871-1879.

Part 1: Chaikovtsy Go to the People, 1871-1876.

By the turn of the 1870s, the lively world of Russian social life was utterly unrecognizable from its state a decade prior, when it was still shaking off the Nikolaevan lull in anticipation of the Emancipation – and yet the pervading mood was decisively that of a calm before the storm of changes greater still to come. Two consecutive bolts from the blue still hung heavy in the air: the attempted assassination by Dmitry Karakozov of Tsar II – the first of many to come – and the veritable *cause célèbre* of the Nechaev Affair, whose drama was furthermore yet to play out in full, as the highly publicized trial – yet again the first of many to come – would not be held until 1871. The customary hubs of "radical" activity – the familiar domains of communal living, student organizing and even publicism – had lost much of their former social cachet since the early 1860s, the days of the Serno-Solov'evich brothers' *Zemlia I Volya* and the apogee of "revolutionary democrat" *raznochintsy* literary output. On that note, with Dobrolyubov's untimely death of tuberculosis at age 25 back in 1861, Pisarev's drowning in 1868 – less than two years after his release from a four year prison sentence in 1866 – and Chernyshevsky still wasting away in Zabaikalye exile since 1864, it can be said that the radical generation of the sixties was sorely lacking in authority figures of Herzen's stature. Against this backdrop of intellectual decay and practical inaction – enforced though it was by the Tsarist state's ever watchful eye – could the destructive nihilism of *Nechaevshchina* have been accepted as the natural way forward for what was to become the *narodnik* movement?

From a historiographic point of view it would indeed have been most appealing to present *narodnichestvo's* organizational trajectory as one of steadily rising militancy, punctuated in its

transitional stages by spikes of violent outbursts – such as Karakozov and Nechaev serving to usher in the *narodnichestvo* proper of the 1870s, or Vera Zasulich and zemlevolets Solovyev's respective attempted assassinations in some ways prefiguring the formation of *Narodnaya Volya* towards the 1880s. Such a framing would all but trivialize the explanation of why their ultimate turn towards terrorism and, consequently, explicitly political struggle, was so easy to make for so many erstwhile *narodniks* – despite their contempt for politics and the sheer stress placed on the revolutionary's morality and ethics – and why it was so effective in mobilizing and utilizing increasingly precious cadre and other resources. And yet the Russian public – radical no less than the "civil" – was unequivocal in pronouncing unqualified disgust at the Nechaevite Machiavellianism. If anything, it came to constitute the negative pole, around the principled opposition to which the social forces that will go on to form the core of *narodnichestvo* would gather; Eklof and Saburova highlight the diametric opposition between the established and intertwined revolutionary tropes of youthfulness, progress, and moral purity, and the terrible precedent established by the Nechaev affair as a key catalyst in the explosion of political activity in its wake.[119]

The formative events of *narodnichestvo*, including the mass campaign of "going to the people" of 1873-74 that finally brought to fruition the perennial *narodnik* call to action found heretofore only in the most radical of Emancipation era proclamations, took place under different auspices entirely. Even in the atmosphere of unchecked "white terror" provoked by Karakozov's 1866 assassination attempt, the unprecedented, thoroughly nihilist spirit embodied by Nechaev's tactics was met with near-universal rejection and even contempt by his radical peers – including

[119] Ben Eklof and Tatiana Saburova, *A Generation of Revolutionaries, (*Bloomington, IN*:* Indiana University Press, 2017), 48.

his former collaborators (to an indeterminate extent) and effective patrons abroad in Nikolay Ogarev and Mikhail Bakunin, who would go on to publicly denounce the system outlined in the *Catechism* as "highly destructive not to the state but to the cause of liberty."[120] That is, of course, to say nothing of the broader polite society, whose deep-seated anxieties about the budding nihilist-terrorist-revolutionary movement's danger to the uneasy social order were singularly captured in Fedor Dostoevsky's 1872 *Demons* – itself intended as scathing critique not even of the titular nihilists, but of the permission structure, created by the broader oppositionist sphere, that allowed their ideas to proliferate. Finally, the impersonal, deeply anti-moral approach of Nechaev found no purchase even among the radical studentry, desperate as it was for any new way of channeling its energies into productive work – if not alienating broad swathes of it from revolutionary activities altogether.

Instead, for the time being the development of the *narodnik* "body of politics" - that is, the array of organizational and practical modes of activity at its employ – took the course of populist prefigurativism, *avant la lettre*. Closing in on ten years of II's "reform era," the ideas and ideals of broad social reorganization along popul(ar)ist lines and rooted in the traditional life of the people – discovered at long last by the educated society with their emancipation – were yet to find application in any meaningful social initiative or means of effecting actual social change – much less be embodied in a cohesive and coherent movement. Part of the issue stemmed from the radicals' (well-founded) distrust of political struggle; the harsh lessons of the 1848 European Revolutions had been thoroughly internalized by the generations of revolutionaries following in Herzen and Ogarev's footsteps. At the same time, the scale of change – economic, social, as well

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[120] Mikhail Bakunin, "Bakunin to Nechayev on the role of secret revolutionary societies," https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/1870/rebuke.html.

as ultimately political – to be effected was nothing short of biblical; the task standing before the intrepid populists-to-be, in Gramscian terms, was precisely to bring out "the particular forms of practice" out of their current "condition of subalternity to … the existing political society" with which the "material constitution" of the latter – of the Tsarist Petrine state – could be "ruptured from within,"[121] making way for a proletarian – Gellner's rather than Gramsci's – social and political hegemony.

Revolutionary upheaval of such scale was obviously far beyond anything any existing radical organization could muster the resources to accomplish – and, with close to ten years already separating the revolutionaries from the "first revolutionary situation" of 1861-63, hopes of a spontaneous peasant revolt, much less of popular revolution, could finally be properly laid to rest as fanciful pipe dreams rather than serious political aspirations. Rather than struggle directly *against* the existing structures of Tsarism with the goal of their immediate destruction, the future *narodniks* would attempt to prefigure forms of social organization in the process of their practical activity by working their way from the ground up, endeavoring to construct "an organic relationship between leftist theory and forms of organization that already exist[ed] in the wide variety of practices and social relations that compose[d] … the 'subaltern social groups.'"[122] In "going to the people," in so many words, the *narodnik* movement would be poised to finally achieve the Gramscian ideal of identity between theory and practice – requiring of them merely to "[embody] within the ongoing political practice of [their] movement those forms of social

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[121] Thomas, "Gramsci and the political," 32.
[122] Thomas, 34.

relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that [were] the ultimate goal,"[123] to employ Carl Boggs' definition of prefigurative politics directly.

The project of *narodnichestvo*, growing out of the confines of mere intelligentsia subculture, was to attain a prefigurative dimension; *narodniks*, echoing Bakunin's 1861 call, were to themselves become "popular people," refashioning their ways of life and social organization after the popular model to be universalized – just as soon as the abyssal gap separating them from the people could be bridged. Rather than the technocratic imposition from above of a utopian vision in the Fourierist manner of the Petrashevtsy, or Nechaev's equally utopian fantasy of leaving the task of all "future organization" altogether to the "movement and life of the people," the *narodniks'* practical aim became to enmesh themselves truly into popular life as it actually, currently was, into the functioning of the village, its economic life and day to day pre-political deliberations. In the process, they sought to transform existing institutions of communal organization and social relations – primarily the *mir* (rural commune) and everything it entailed – into forms that could stand on their own against the vagaries of industrial modernity, exercised through resistance to statist and capitalist encroachment, up to and including (albeit in characteristically intelligentsia flights of fancy) the possibility of agitation for popular revolution. The *narodniks'* body of prefigurative politics – at once theoretically postulated and practically embodied ideal of popular life – thus came to replace the head-on confrontation between the forces of Tsarism and the revolutionaries, envisioned by the *narodniks'* predecessors.

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[123] Carl Boggs, "Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers' Control," *Radical America* 11 (November), 100; cf. Boggs Jr., Carl. Revolutionary Process, Political Strategy, and the Dilemma of Power. Theory & Society 4, No. 3 (Fall), 3. https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/carl-boggs-marxism-prefigurative-communism-and-the-problem-of-workers-control.

At the same time, this theoretical ideal of prefigurative *narodism* had to be constantly negotiated against the harsh conditions of any independent political initiative in the Russian Empire. Most notably, overcome by the Tsarist police state's continued successes in frustrating their efforts at penetrating into the village life, *narodniks* were ultimately faced with the practical infeasibility of the prefigurative project's long-term maintenance; accordingly, they would resolve to make it feasible first – via terrorist struggle for political freedom. Even before that, however, before any centralized organizational effort could even take place in the affectively stochastic – though by no means disorganized – mass campaign of 1874, any effort at reaching out to the people was not just treated with suspicion, but was seen as tantamount to revolutionary incitement in the eyes of the state. And as *narodnik* efforts grew more focused and deliberate, the official response disproportionately erred on the side of paranoia, with prolonged periods of martial law, emergency legislation and militarized law enforcement severely limiting the extent to which the *narodniks* could maintain their preferred prefigurative course.

Further complicating the issue was the fact that the popular masses were themselves far from universally receptive to this intrusion in the heretofore isolated and parochial popular life; occasionally this manifested in becoming willing informants for the Tsarist authorities – but more often and perhaps more damagingly for *narodnik* morale, the people simply revealed themselves to be largely uninterested in courting *narodnik* advances. In a way, the unreceptive peasants can be seen as mirroring the Russian socialists' disinterest in "politics"; both frequently found the other preferring to indulge in grand visions of sweeping changes achieved in one heroic struggle – proverbial "land and liberty" for one, popular socialism for the other – to the long work of gradually constructing the organizational means that could eventually effect said

changes. Of course, the peasantry could in a sense be excused, as a class, for holding such attitudes, having occupied a marginalized, definitionally subaltern position for centuries of Russian political life; bringing the peasant out of their subalternity, and projecting it into a new hegemonic political "of a new kind" thus fell upon the *narodniks* – and indeed comprised their historical mission. Here, too, Carl Boggs' formulation of prefigurative politics is singularly helpful in conceptualizing the gap between the *narodniks'* abnegation of existing bourgeois modes of politics, and their simultaneous engagement in active political struggle. "The abolition of politics as a special and separate sphere of activity — and, conversely, the universal politicization of society"[124] through the ensconcement of direct, associative and participatory democracy – the everyday communal decision making of the *mir* projected onto the canvas of the entirety of Russia – would thus become the challenge of prefigurative *narodnichestvo* and the only means of realizing its Gramscian political project.

Before they could get to the people, however, the prospective *narodniks* had to get out of the cities – bringing with them a very specific cultural attitude crystallizing in the aftermath of the Nechaev affair. The paradoxically intrepid and insipid daily life of the Petersburgian studentry, going on its second decade of a consistent and consistently impotent cycle of organization, demonstrative manifestations followed by expulsions (or arrests) and dissolution, was to be dramatically shaken from its stupor – first by the extreme zealotry of the agitation/impressment Nechaev conducted among their circles, and then by the revelation of his circle's murder of their own member Ivanov. Ideologically, even at his most extreme, Nechaev had more or less been occupying a position on the margins, but squarely within, the Overton

[124] Boggs, "Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers' Control," https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/carl-boggs-marxism-prefigurative-communism-and-the-problem-of-workers-control.

window of radical student discourse at the time; his conspiratorial brand of revolutionary catechism was hardly distinguishable from the established "Jacobine" tendencies coalescing around people like Zaichnevsky, the author of the 1862 proclamation "Young Russia," or Maria Olovennikova (Oshanina), then a member of Zaichnevsky's circle and future member of *Narodnaya Volya*'s Executive Committee. Instead, it is the inhumane, essentially amoral – in the literal sense – constitution of Nechaev's beliefs, deeply antithetical to the closely held and daily practiced ideal of camaraderie and mutual trust among the radical studentry, that made him a pariah overnight. As Osip Aptekman, prominent *Zemlya i Volya* and later *Chernyi Peredel* member, put it, "its ["Nechaevshchina"] impostor means, jesuitism and machiavellianism were generally abhorrent to me, but their application to comrades in arms I believed to be an outright crime."[125]

An understanding of the importance assigned to interpersonal bonds forged within student circles is arguably imperative to making sense of the supreme role of morality, ethics and trust-based organization in future *narodnik* organizational endeavors, comprising not just their form but deeper substance – as prefiguring the world of tomorrow necessarily meant not merely the economic organization of society, but also its spiritual character. Of course, fundamentally Petersburgian students remained young adults with insecurities and personal interests which not infrequently conflicted with one another; the mutual animosity we noted between the first *Zemlya i Volya*'s Longin Panteleev and Sleptsov might well have been just as real between some members of its second, *narodnik* iteration (that is to say, before its split; the post-1879 rivalries – in particular of Georgy Plekhanov against Nikolay Morozov and Lev Tikhomirov – are well

[125] Osip Aptekman, *Obshchestvo «Zemlya i Volya» 70-kh gg. po lichnym Vospominaniiam,* (Petrograd: Kolos, 1924), 60.

attested); indeed the very notion of student circles implies, rather than a unified body of studentry bound by a spirit of camaraderie, a patchwork of insular cliques brought together merely by shared circumstances – as indicated, for instance, by the above note on the existence on the margins of *narodnichestvo* of Jacobine factions with its own cliques and communes. What was, however, different – for the radical students – was their exposure to other people of kindred spirits not in the narrow ideological sense of belonging to some faction or other, but the more fundamental wonderment at the realization that they were not alone. Aptekman, reminiscing on the very first "organization" he got to be a part of – a rudimentary circle of "*prikazchiks*," a group of thoroughly un-radical students attempting to reach out to the titular petty commercial clerks – noted the significance of the simple fact that "[f]or the first time a socially useful initiative, however tiny and humble, appeared before me in a concretely tangible form… What had been a merely abstract thought before was now, in the wake of the youth movement, transformed into a living, concretely tangible understanding."[126]

For many, this revelation – of the genuine possibility of a morally and intellectually "higher" kind of life – was still more dramatic against the backdrop of rigidly hierarchical, patriarchal Tsarist society. Women especially often found in radical student circles a refuge of basic human decency after a lifetime of abuse or quiet suffering: Sofya Perovskaya, fleeing from her parental home and virulently retrograde father at age 17; Larisa Chemodanova (Sinegub), progressive daughter of a village priest who escaped her predicament through a fictitious – though eventually loving – marriage; or Viktorova-Walter, who remarked on her first experience of (mixed) communal living that "[u]ntil then, I never even thought possible such a pure, fraternal attitude as had immediately enveloped me, and thought that it absolutely had to be a

[126] Aptekman, *Obshchestvo «Zemlya i Volya»,* 57.

facade for what is popularly called courtship."[127] To further drive home the estrangement of Nechaev from the rest of his contemporaries, consider in view of these testimonies his own views on women, ranging from, at best, "the most valuable or our treasures," and at worst "frivolous, thoughtless, and vapid" objects to be used,[128] with hardly a thought spared to their subjectivity – much less the specific issues posed by the woman's question (*zhensky vopros*).[129]

Of course, the mores of the average radical student circle also stood in stark contrast to the politically disengaged studentry, inspiring a measure of respect simply by virtue of not succumbing to the vices of unsupervised living in the big city. Nikolay Sergeev, a founding (though short-lived, owing to administrative exile) member of *Zemlya i Volya*, believed that it was in the student dormitory that "[his] faith in people was forged, there [he] met people crystal pure, unreservedly devoted to their ideals… This was my first experience of communal living that was to be realized in "future society" as regards interpersonal relations."[130] Indeed, the mere act of living – oftentimes mixed genders (as was the case for Viktorova-Walter as well), sharing expenses, setting up mutual aid as well as bail funds, communal libraries and kitchens (Sergeev recounts humorously how "[a]s though in a scene from the Gospel, with "five loaves" we would feed not the multitudes, but definitely ten or so people at least.") - was itself many *narodniks'* first foray into prefigurative politics; the political object of a radical student circle's

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[127] S. A. Viktorova-Walter, «Moskovskaia radikal'naia molodezh' 70-80kh gg.», in V. N. Ginev, *Iz istorii "Zemli i Voli" i "Narodnoi voli". Spory o taktike,* (Moscow-St. Petersburg: Al'ians-Arkheo, 2012), 102-199, 123.

[128] Nechaev, *Catechism of a Revolutionary*, https://www.marxists.org/subject/anarchism/nechayev/catechism.htm.

[129] A more detailed exploration of the "woman question" and how it informed the gender dynamics among the Populist revolutionaries can be found in Ben Eklof and Tatiana Saburova, "The Male Gaze and Female Profile: Marriage, Family, Populism," in *A Generation of Revolutionaries, (*Bloomington, IN*:* Indiana University Press, 2017), 73-111.

[130] N. I. Sergeev, «Iz zhizni liudei semidesiatykh godov», in V. N. Ginev, *Iz istorii "Zemli i Voli" i "Narodnoi voli". Spory o taktike,* (Moscow-St. Petersburg: Al'ians-Arkheo, 2012), 37-102, 48.

self-organizing was at least semi-consciously realized by this actuation of "the future society" in its most basic daily functioning.

It is against this context of the ambiently radical students' interpellation into active socialists via tightly knit communal life that Nechaev's abrogation of basic human solidarity in the service of single-minded destruction can be contextualized and its cold reception understood – despite its relative ideological familiarity. Nevertheless, Nechaev's innovation was recognized as a response to an existing, supra-ideological challenge – the aforementioned imperative need to change. However effective at creating a resilient and healthy progressive counterculture through its mutualist communalism, this configuration of student organizing – even past their confederation in the first iteration of *Zemlya i Volya* – failed to materialize in anything more tangible than manifestations appealing to the evidently lacking conscience of Tsarism, as well as a correspondingly steady stream of detentions, arrest and exile.

In this respect, the Chaikovsky circle - named after one of its leading members Nikolay Chaikovsky - had occupied a central place among Petersburgian circles even before Nechaev's "provocation" - but they had truly become a precursor to *narodnichestvo* only and precisely in reaction to it. Aptekman, focusing on popular moods among the studentry in 1871-72, observed that "Chaikovtsy were the first to reconcile discipline within the circle with free self-determination of its members and achieve willing subordination to the common interests without external coercion or authority, as the foundation of their organization lay in the principle of moral solidarity, unconditional trust in each other."[131] In other words, they managed to build a disciplined organization capable of real work – such as their "cause of the book," involving the organization of a network of book distributors consisting of 38 provinces across European

[131] Aptekman, 70.

Russia[132] - on a basis diametrically opposed to that of Nechaev and rooted in the life-affirming, prefigurative practices of the day.

Still, theirs was not yet a properly populist prefigurativism; while the principle of prefiguration was already there, rudimentarily articulated *qua* student organizing, the forms it took were not yet truly popular – a development that could only be achieved upon "going to the people." The question of intent is appropriate to raise here in establishing whether the campaign was conceived specifically as a way of bringing radical prefigurative practices closer in line with the life of the people; after all, the sheer breadth and diversity of the actors involved would suggest a similarly varied array of goals set and achieved, not all prefigurative – or even strictly populist. Ultimately, however, such a "strong" formulation does not preclude a "weak" prefigurative hypothesis – namely, that the modes of organizing going into the mass campaign would of necessity be transformed through the *narodniks's* experiences both at the hands of the state and among the people yet could still retain their basic prefiguravist character. Similarly, the dividing line between the "mass phenomenon" and the "organized movement" aspects of the 1874 campaign governs the relative relevance of prefiguravist tradition therein.

Indeed, the mass exodus from the cities and into the villages all across Russia on the scale of 1874 is practically impossible to convene, in the entirety of "the mass campaign," under the umbrella of any single discernible intent or motivation; Aptekman, for instance, argues that "[t]he mass movement was preceded by a movement of an organized minority of the youth"[133] in the context of the campaign being dis/organized overall. Under such a framing the mass phenomenon of 1874 becomes an intended outcome of organized activity, but not itself part of

[132] Ben Eklof and Tatiana Saburova, *A Generation of Revolutionaries, (*Bloomington, IN*:* Indiana University Press, 2017), 63.
[133] Aptekman, 134.

the *narodnik* movement – and as such more so intended to have been transformative for Russia as a whole, echoing Bakunin's 1862 appeal to awaken spiritually "towards" the people. Turning to contemporary theoretical developments in anticipation of the mass campaign, the question of the *narodniks'* conscious intent in pursuing prefigurative politics is even clearer: Petr Lavrov, foremost theoretician of *Narodnichestvo* alongside Mikhail Bakunin, in 1873 characteristically called to "turn the *mir* assembly into the basic political element of the Russian social order and subsume within collective property the private."[134] In fact, elsewhere Aptekman himself provides a motivation – standard at the time – that is perfectly consistent with a prefigurative framing of the movement and still more straightforward: "in order to initiate multitudinous and multifaceted relations within the people with the goal of broad yet deep revolutionary propaganda, agitation and organization."[135]

It should be noted that the *narodnik* "going to the people" thus conceived was fundamentally distinct from other contemporary, and indeed historical, still ongoing efforts either to "know" the people in some way or to ameliorate (the conditions of) their traditional lifestyle. For the first, there obviously is the aspect of purely ethnographic interest, beginning already with the slavophile intellectual tradition of historical "folk custom/economy" studies as exemplified by Belyaev, a professor at the Imperial Moscow University; but it arguably applies just as much even to disestablishment "dilettante" pursuits identifying themselves with the interests of the people yet nonetheless distinctly treating them as objects, be it of study or of love. Such was the lifetime's work of Pryzhov, a member of Nechaev's *Narodnaya Rasprava* and a career enthusiast anthropologist whose output, unsuited for the publicist "vanity fair," found itself stuck "between

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[134] Petr Lavrov, *Vpered,* 1873. T 1., 11

[135] Osip Aptekman, «Bibliografiia,» *Sovremennaia Zhizn'* no. 11 (1906), 227-238, 235.

the two flames: of radicalism and of the government."[136] Likewise, the people remained an object – a beneficiary – for the liberal zemstvo activists or the litany of philanthropic societies seeking to alleviate their economic hardship. In either case, there is a clear line separating the aspirational self-identification of *narodniks* with the people – their economic interests and their ways of life, and the subject-object relationship carried over along estate lines.

This distinction grows beyond mere semantics once the constantly evolving relationship of the *narodnik* body of politics to the people began to shift from long term rapprochement – surreptitious, sporadic and uneven though it was – to an eventual effective breakup with the extinction of *Zemlya i Volya* settlements. Clandestine operation in the villages on a semi-permanent basis – as was necessary for the purposes of long term propaganda prioritized by the party – required immense organizational resources even on a regional level; tying the disparate sections of the party together necessitated not only a functioning and authoritative centre with serious bureaucratic capacity, but also a coterie of experienced and dedicated agents not only versed in conspiratorial technique, propagandistic literature and a craft or two, but also capable and willing of abandoning long-held positions at the first hint of danger, as the interdependence of settler networks meant the failure of one link meant the effective isolation of the rest.

Still, the outcome of the 1874 campaign – whether intended for propaganda on a massive scale or the opening of a truly popular frontier of prefigurative politics, was, for better or worse, that the previously intractable divide between the people and the rest was finally bridged. In stark contrast to countless earlier ethnographic surveys, solitary excursions by one-off propagandists, or even occasional déclassé retirement into the villages, the movement of 1874 marked for the

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[136] Ivan Gavrilovich Pryzhov, *Ocherki, stat'i, pis'ma* (Academia, 1934), 19.

first time a truly *narodnik* effort to become one with the great masses of Russian peasantry – fulfilling, more than a decade late, the Gellnerian scenario of the intelligentsia and the proletariat's contact. Recalling our earlier criticism of Gellner's understanding of the Russian nationalism-thwarting/inducing situation, then, it finally becomes possible to answer one of the questions posed by his typology: were the *narodniks* truly so "indistinguishable from the majority" and "capable of swimming in the general pool without detection"?[137] And, as to the Gramscian subalternity that was to be elevated to hegemonic status, were the vaunted Russian people as productive a substrate for the *narodniks'* project as they had hoped?

[137] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 95.

Part 2: *Zemlya i Volya, 1876-1879.*

The "Northern Revolutionary-Narodnik Group," formed in Saint Petersburg in November 1876 by former Chaikovtsy under Mark Natanson, effectively served as a rallying banner for the returning defeated crusaders of "going to the people." The mass campaign of 1873-74 with its dizzying kaleidoscope of experiences – disillusionment, satisfaction, despration – still vividly fresh, once scattered thousands of radical students across the Russian countryside; and it was those who survived the Tsarist crackdown would gradually trickle back to the capitals to coalesce around the *narodniks'* organization, which would in 1878 rename itself *Zemlya i Volya*, after the eponymous organization of 1860s.

From the very beginning, it was envisioned as a reflection on the spontaneous, free-form and often sobering "first encounter" of the intelligentsia with the Russian people; its program accordingly states two main goals standing before the "Russian social-revolutionary party: 1) to assist in organizing the elements of discontent among the people and to merge with existing popular organizations of revolutionary character, fomenting said discontent through agitation, and 2) to weaken, loosen, i.e. disorganize the power of the government, without which we believe impossible the success of any planned uprising, however massive or well thought out."[138] Both goals were ultimately derived from the *narodniks'* experience: respectively, the emphasis on autochthonous popular forms and rejection of Western theories on one hand, and the brutality of the White Terror rendering impossible – even suicidal – any more passive approach on the other. And yet it is precisely the fundamental tension between the two, rather than interplay, that

[138] "Programma «Zemli i Voli». Mai 1878 g. Okonchatelnaia redaktsiia," https://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Etext/zemvol.htm.

defined the trajectory of *Zemlya i Volya*'s short history, culminating in its 1879 split into *Narodnaya Volya* and *Chernyi Peredel*.

As Nikolay Vitashevsky, member of an Odessa typography notable for being the first to provide armed resistance to its arrest, had put it, the impetus to militarize came from the very communalistic "prefigurative" spark that characterized the student circles earlier that decade: "[t]ightly knit camaraderie accustomed us to the possibility of having to, at any minute, meet standing shoulder to shoulder with revolver shots and dagger strikes the enemy – the police and the gendarmes. This had developed a need among the circle members to constantly be together, to live a barracks life."[139] Of course, a complete rejection of propaganda in favor of what was effectively a political struggle for the rights of expression and assembly – in other words, the same bourgeois disease against which Herzen's bitter trauma of 1848 had so effectively inoculated the *narodnik* movement – remained anathema. As Aptekman tactfully put it, "such facts could not, of course, cause disappointment in the significance of "propaganda," and if the new program of "Zemlya i Volya" relegated it to a secondary role, it was only because the revolutionaries came to prefer other methods seemingly more suitable for the task of organizing the peasantry."[140]

In fact, Vitashevsky's experience could even be posited to reflect a specifically Southern, rather than broadly *narodnik* zeitgeist – as Lev Tikhomirov put it, "already in 1878 there was in the south an element that came to see in terror not just a means of revenge, but actual struggle … daredevils such as Ivichev could not comprehend why we cannot simply terrorize the

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[139] Nikolay Vitashevsky, «Pervoe vooruzhennoe soprotivlenie - pervyi voennyi sud» (Rostov-na-Donu: *Donskaia rech',* 1907*).*

[140] Aptekman, 21.

government into conceding the socialists their freedom of activity."[141] Their northern colleagues' charges of "constitutionalism" and "recognizing the necessity of political struggle" in apparent betrayal of popular principles, would for the time being be sidestepped with claims of merely seeking state "non-interference" (*popushchenie*) by Southern leaders like Valerian Ossinsky. In the meantime, his Kyivan *Zemlya i Volya* cell would go on to orchestrate two high-profile assassinations in 1878 – an unsuccessful attempt on the life of Deputy Prosecutor Kotlyarevsky on February 23rd; and Gendarmerie adjutant Gustav Heyking on May 24th, which resulted in the death not only of its target, but also a peasant bystander attempting to seize the absconding *zemlevolets* Grigory Popko. It has to be said, of course, that both acts of terror came in the wake of Vera Zasulich's "dam-bursting" attempted assassination of St. Petersburg's Lord Mayor Trepov on January 24th that same year, while the operational logic of "disorganizing" Tsarist forces was already in place at *Zemlya i Volya*'s inception in 1876 (and put to use sporadically ever since).

More important, however, was the immediate reason for Ossinsky's campaign of terror: the discovery of the "Southern Rebels'" Chigirin plot in June of 1877, whose impact would percolate throughout *narodnik* history from then on. The circle of "Southern Rebels" (*бунтари*), which counted among its members former *chaikovtsy* Mikhail Frolenko and Viktor Kostyrin, as well as future associates of (then also "rebellious") Plekhanov in *Chernyi Peredel* and *Osvobozhdenie Truda* Yakov Stefanovich, Leo Deutsch and the aforementioned Vera Zasulich, was formed in Odessa around the turn of 1874-75 in critical reflection on the experience of "going to the people" a year prior. In stark rejection of Lavrist "*vperedovstvo*," its leader Vladimir Debagorii-Mokrievich, "fiercest follower" and personal acquaintance "of the Apostle

[141] Lev Tikhomirov, *Andrei Ivanovich Zheliabov, (*Carouge-Genève: M. Elpidine, 1899), 24.

of Destruction [Bakunin], reached veritable Pillars of Hercules in his dismissal of theoretical cultivation: having never read anything serious himself, he was almost incensed at and at any rate mocked those engaged in what he considered this harmful waste of time."[142] Instead of words the Odessite rebels sought action, not mere propaganda but the legendary Russian *bunt,* (in)famously immortalized as "senseless and merciless" by Pushkin.

Debagorii-Mokrievich himself recalled that by 1875, neither Bakunin nor the Bakuninists any longer held illusions of the Russian people's exceptionally rebellious character, having had the chance to see it for themselves in the years prior; instead came the idea of the *bunt* as a revolutionary school. "Just as the strengths and abilities of an organism are developed through practice, so too the entirety of the people, we argued, could be prepared for the revolution only by exercising its revolutionary impulses and skills. "Whosoever loves the people shall lead it under gunfire," said some famous revolutionary, and we held by that view." The Russian *bunt* was no longer senseless – yet could not but be merciless:

> We spoke at length about the preservation in our borderlands of revolutionary traditions, that on the Volga people still sing of Pugachev and Stenka Razin, and on the Dnepr of the haydamaks [18th century Cossack anti-Polish insurgents]. And that was true enough: the songs were indeed sung; only we paid insufficient attention to their melodies. Wailing and melancholy melodies of these songs would induce tears in the listener much sooner than ignite revolutionary passion.[143]

Debagorii-Mokrievich's remorseful reflection – twenty years past – on the mood in the days leading up to the Chigirin affair sufficiently demonstrates, I think, the extent of infamy it accrued among the revolutionaries since. At the time, however – much like Nechaev's *Catechisis* – it may have seemed like just the shot in the arm *narodnichestvo* needed to progress past 1874.

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[142] Leo Deutsch, *Za polveka* (Berlin: Izdatel'stvo «Grani», 1923), 242.
[143] Vladimir Debagorii-Mokrievich, *Vospominaniia* (St. Petersburg: Svobodnyi Trud, 1906), 127.

The Chigirin *uezd* – some 250 kilometers away from Kyiv – was since the early 1870s the stage of simmering peasant unrest centered around the demands for redistribution of land according to household size; the *dusheviki* – from "по душе", "per capita" – were sporadically arrested and brought to Kyiv, which is where Yakov Stefanovich first encountered them in 1875 and introduced the idea of intervening into the struggle to the «Rebels.» The local leader, Khoma Pryadko, one of the peasant *khodoks,* sent from the villages to petition the Tsar, claimed that he was, in secret, entirely on the *dusheviks'* side — and though Pryadko was already arrested by the time Stefanovich discovered their struggle, his ideas proliferated throughout the *uezd'*s peasantry. Characteristically, their practical effect essentially amounted to civil disobedience — the *dusheviks'* refusal to sign agreements on the existing division of land, in which they were remarkably opposed by those advantaged by the current situation, the *aktoviki* — the incipient rural bourgeoisie. What was, after all, to be done if the Tsar himself already signed off on redistributing the land? "Everything will be well so long as God helps you reach the Tsar"[144] - those were the words of comfort from a Chigirin village elder to the Rebels' reconaissance team, who posed as prospective *khodoks* from another region; in the meantime, military "pacification" dispatched by the Tsar to the region had thoroughly devastated the remaining *dushevik* holdouts – consider that even the Rebels' contact with them was only made possible by their forced relocation to Kyiv in the first place.

Debagorii-Mokrievich ultimately walked away from the reconnaissance meeting feeling despondent at the peasants' passivity, leaving Stefanovich (joined by Leo Deutsch and a few others) to lead the charge on how these seeds of unrest could be made to blossom into a proper bunt. In fact the Rebels' circle would be forced to dissolve itself only a year later, anticipating

[144] Debagorii-Mokrievich, *Vospominaniia,* 210.

the authorities' impending crackdown in the fallout of a failed assassination attempt by Deutsch of Nikolay Gorinovich (member of another Kyivan *narodnik* circle), suspected of acting as *agent provocateur* after his unexplained release from arrest in 1875 and suspicious behavior since, which included seeking out Stefanovich and Debagorii-Mokrievich for unclear reasons.[145] After a chance encounter with Gorinovich in Elisavetograd (Kropyvnytskyi today), where the circle activities were based at the time, Deutsch invited him to a railroad depot in Odessa specifically to avoid police attention – and believed himself to have killed Gorinovich when he poured sulfuric acid on his face for the same reason, to avoid identification – a fact later used as gruesome living testimony of the revolutionaries' "extreme brutality" at the 1877 "Trial of 193." At any rate, Gorinovich's survival – and subsequent arrests of several civilians involved with the circle's logistics – meant that it could no longer go on functioning; and while most of its members would scatter to the winds before eventually finding their way to the Southern Executive Committee (of *Zemlya i Volya*) in 1878, Stefanovich and Deutsch continued their independent work in Chigirin.

As they saw it, the task before them was to leverage existing moods such as they were – misguided or delusional – to escalate the struggle; the most direct way of achieving this, naturally, was to appeal to the *dusheviks'* stubborn trust in the Tsar. To that end, Stefanovich drafted and distributed by November of 1876 a forged Manifesto in the Tsar's name, "ordering all of the peasants to join in secret societies ("Secret Fellowships") with the goal of rising up against the nobles."[146] These fellowships – *druzhyny* – numbered hundreds of peasants already by spring of 1877; such explosive success, however, would also be the project's downfall, as the

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[145] Debagorii-Mokrievich, *Vospominaniia,* 268.
[146] Debagorii-Mokrievich, 321.

conspiracy was prematurely discovered before any uprising could begin in earnest, and Stefanovich himself arrested by September (before successfully escaping to Switzerland in May of next year). Stefanovich would later return to Russia on the eve of *Zemlya i Volya*'s split into *Narodnaya Volya* and *Chernyi Peredel* – but in the meantime, his daring had already inspired one Valerian Osinsky, head of the aforementioned Southern Executive Committee: "what astounding boldness of thought," he'd exclaim of Stefanovich's Chigirin conspiracy… Like most young revolutionary *narodniks*, the *muzhik* appeared before him as a mysterious sphinx which he knew not how to approach. Yet here he saw people not only managing that approach, but also succeeding enormously."[147]

The boldness he so admired in Stefanovich took on a different form in Osinsky's application; although *Zemlya i Volya* was never involved, strictly speaking, in the Chigirin affair, Stefanovich's arrest threatened to endanger many of the former "Rebels" now operating under his purview – and so it was judged necessary to extend the scope of "disorganizational activity" already sanctioned and practiced towards spies like Gorinovich. It is a small irony that one of the "Southern Rebels'" few practical successes in its short lifespan – the organization of an escape for one of its arrested members, Semen Lur'e – was only made possible by the incredibly lax regime in which he was being held, courtesy of Baron Heyking – the first victim of Osinsky's campaign of terror; its perpetrator, Grigory Popko, would successfully avoid capture only to be arrested in the aftermath of the mass demonstrations against the court-martial of Vitashevsky's aforementioned Odessa typography, whose leader Ivan Kowalsky's execution (Vitashevsky "only" got 4 years of hard labor) prompted the Petersburgian *zemlevolets* Sergey Kravchinsky to assassinate the Gendarme Corps' chief Nikolay Mezentsov with a stiletto in August 1878.

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[147] Debagorii-Mokrievich, 322.

This brief sketch of the enormous causal chain linking back in some way to the Chigirin affair could be expanded even further; but what it serves to illustrate, besides the obvious escalation of violence, is the increasingly interconnected character of the *narodnik* movement – increasingly unified behind the *Zemlya i Volya* banner – but also the rapid escalation and acceleration of events careening out of the party's direct control and into the local leaders' hands. Even something like Gorinovich's assassination alone could surely have furnished Fedor Dostoevsky with fuel for several *Demons'* worth of nihilist scaremongering in 1871 — but by 1876 (to say nothing of 1878) it would merely serve as backdrop to the dissolution of just one of *Zemlya i Volya*'s many regional precursors.

It is telling that Aptekman, reminiscing on the gloom of his *Chernyi Peredel* years – "feeling as though revolutionary *narodnichestvo* as an ideology was breathing its last, while its revolutionary practice already outlived its illusions, dreams of youthful fantasy, overwrought constructions"[148] - refused at the same time to entertain even the suggestion that the two fractions could possibly have kept working together. A fellow *chernoperedelets* Mikhail Popov had claimed in 1906 that it was the sudden arrival of Stefanovich back from Switzerland in 1879, with its renewed "hope for revolutionary-creative work in the village," that fanned the fading flames of division between the "*narodniks*" and the "terrorists" directly leading up to the fatal Voronezh Congress, which saw the two fractions part ways. "Passionate ideological struggle, struggle between two diametrically opposed tendencies, struggle that, I stress, should inevitably have led to the schism – that struggle in Mikhail Popov's account becomes something so pitifully insignificant as to be overtaken by Stefanovich's arrival as the schism's deciding factor…" To Aptekman, standing at the end of *narodnichestvo's* long historical arc, its weight bent towards the

[148] Osip Aptekman, *Chernyi Peredel* (Moscow, 1923), 102.

absolute primacy of ideology – an ideology that stipulated praxis first and foremost; "we, the villagers ("narodniks"), sought to create the revolutionary party within the people, based on that great truth that the liberation of the multi-million mass of peasantry had to be the act of the mass itself …"[149]

The exceptional place allotted to the Chigirin affair in *narodnik* historiography is, then, somewhat misleading; while it is true that Stefanovich and company's deception of the peasants attracted criticism, otherwise it was arguably the single most textbook case of *narodniks'* new approach to "going to the people" after the lessons of the mass campaign. If 1873-74 largely saw temporary, flying student detachments reach out with minimal premeditation to the broadest possible swathes of the people, mixed reception at their hands and Tsarist reaction both ensured that all future efforts at reaching out to the people would have to take place under a new paradigm. Emphasizing the failure of abstract, high-minded pablums of atheism and scientific socialism to find any purchase among the peasants, the program of *Zemlya i Volya* - while proclaiming as their "ultimate political and economical ideal – anarchy and collectivism," - acknowledged that the party "can only be strong and influential when it is supported by the demands of the people, and does not violate the historically developed economic and political ideal of the people."[150] Furthermore, pointing to the ongoing violation of that ideal by the state and the "mass of great and small popular movements, religious-revolutionary sects and even brigand bands that represent in themselves the active protest of the Russian people against existing order," *narodnik* efforts would hone in on these hotbeds of discontent, aiming to settle

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[149] Osip Aptekman, «Iz-za chego my razdelilis'?», *Sovremennaia Zhizn'*, no. 9-10 (1906), 132-142, 142.
[150] "Programma «Zemli i Voli»," https://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Etext/zemvol.htm.

nearby for the purposes of further agitation on a semi-permanent basis, in contrast to the "flying" approach seen earlier.

Chigirin, in fact, is all the more archetypical of *Zemlya i Volya narodnichestvo* for the fact that the Chigirin uezd was actually rural and still largely communal, however uprooted by the four years of punitive Tsarist expeditions. It is telling that the Kazanskaya Demonstration, held on the 6th of December 1876, and meant to inaugurate the formation of *Zemlya i Volya*, turned for popular expressions popular discontent away from the village – and towards the industrial heart of Saint Petersburg. As Vera Figner recalled, it "called for the greatest possible number of factory workers"[151] - while Georgy Plekhanov, key speaker at the event, considered it an initiative of the conscious workers themselves, eager to eclipse the earlier demonstration in honor of student Chernyshev held in spring of that year on a weekday – and therefore involving no worker participation.[152] Indeed the very first point of contact with "the people" for many would-be *narodniks* – crucially prefiguring as well as inspiring their "going to the people" – would have been the urban workers, oftentimes themselves only recently urpooted, as in Chigirin, from their rural communities[153]; in a certain sense, before it could aspire to be populist, the *narodnik* movement already bore a distinctly urban proletarian imprint.

Even the "villagers" among the *zemlevoltsy* – who yet found themselves still in the majority – could scarcely have found a more suitable ground for more ideologically pure *narodnik* activity than Chigirin. The "religious revolutionary sects" – the Old Believers, the

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151 Vera Figner, *Zapechatlennyi trud*, http://az.lib.ru/f/figner_w_n/text_0080.shtml.

152 Georgy Plekhanov, «Russkii rabochii v revoliutsionnom dvizhenii,» http://az.lib.ru/p/plehanow_g_w/text_1902_russky_rabochy.shtml.

153 Pamela Sears McKinsey, "From City Workers to Peasantry: The Beginning of the Russian Movement 'To the People,'" *Slavic Review* 38, no. 4 (1979): 629–49. https://doi.org/10.2307/2496567; Reginald Zelnik, "Populists and Workers. The First Encounter between Populist Students and Industrial Workers in St. Petersburg, 1871-74." *Soviet Studies* 24, no. 2 (1972): 251–69.

Molokans, the Shtundists – did attract the attention of many, including Aptekman, who believed "sectarianism revealed the village of the 1870s as rebellious, searching, discontent and oppositional"[154]; but they also presented an even greater challenge in terms of actually penetrating the already considerable cultural barrier. Ivanchin-Pisarev, old Chaikovets and perhaps most consistently embedded "villager" of *Zemlya i Volya*, repeatedly stressed the basic disconnect he experienced, working earnestly as a *volost* scribe in his interactions with the (regular Orthodox) people, who would not trust a state official who would not drink or accept bribes.[155] "Noble" (*barskie*) habits had to be thoroughly excised if the *narodniks* were to ever be taken seriously as Bakunin's "popular people"; there are countless anecdotes of impossibly basic gaffes that, while humorous individually, cast serious doubt as to whether Gellner was right in believing the Russian people to be largely indistinguishable from their intelligentsia. Viktorova-Walter, who briefly stayed at the house of a peasant affiliate of the party in 1876 – and had no need to conceal her identity – was nevertheless struck by the amount of effort required not to slip into such "noble" habits as "wasting water on washing dishes"[156] or "wearing glasses when you're nearsighted."[157]

Needless to say, the "Chinese rituals" of the Old Believers were on a whole other level of arcane impermeability even to the most dedicated *narodniks*; "it took a lot of character and patience to adapt oneself to their antediluvian mores and not get bored of following the Raskolniks' rites."[158] Aleksandr Mikhailov – one of the few *zemlevoltsy* to weather the harsh

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154 Aptekman, *Zemlya i Volya,* 28.
155 Alexander Ivanchin-Pisarev, *Khozhdenie v narod* (Molodaia gvardiia: 1929), 51, 66, 77, 118.
156 Viktorova-Walter, *Moskovskaia radikal'naia molodezh' 70-80kh gg., 151.*
157 Viktorova-Walter, 113.
158 Georgy Plekhanov, «Vospominaniia об A. D. Mikhailove,» in Alexander Mikhailov, *Vospominaniia* (Geneva: Kuklin, 1903), 30.

school of *raskol'nichestvo* (and nearly coming out a christened *raskolnik* himself) – was possessed of just such a character; and, as the trajectory of *narodnichestvo* had shown so far, its continued organizational activity required increasingly more people like Mikhailov – people that could furnish the *narodnik* body of politics with party discipline. The centralist party form *Zemlya i Volya* took on after its founding in 1876 required for the first time this new facet of revolutionary identity, previously only really salient in Nechaev's infamous organizational experiment; as the party grew to coordinate more and more people, spread deep undercover across the many *volosts*, contact between whom had to be maintained in the conditions of utmost secrecy, "radicalism" could no longer remain a light commitment as it might have been a few years prior. The massive police reprisals added to the severity of the truly revolutionary work the *narodniks* suddenly found themselves occupied with; the maintenance of party discipline, then, became the question not just of organizational efficiency, but more simply life and death.

Nicknamed "the Custodian" for his strict adherence to conspiratorial practice and equally rigorous policing of its observation and general discipline among his comrades, Aleksandr Mikhailov was at once both a perfectly typical yet also exemplary *narodnik* of the 70s' cohort. Born in 1855 into a land surveyor's family in the small town of Putyvl, the idyllic memories of his rural childhood – a sentiment so ubiquitous within Populist autobiographical writing as to practically constitute a generic convention of its own – suggested little of the eventful and tumultuous revolutionary's life Mikhailov was to lead. "From the very first years of my youth, a happy star shone over my head"[159] is how he evocatively opened his "autobiographical notes" - written privately as an experienced 24 year-old party functionary around a year before his arrest in 1880, and published, posthumously, from the Narodnaya Volya archives long after his passing

[159] Alexander Mikhailov, *Vospominaniia* (Geneva: Kuklin, 1903), 3.

in solitary confinement of the Petr and Paul Fortress' Alekseev ravelin in 1884. Like so many others, his fast-track revolutionary career got its start in the gymnasium, where he supplemented the meager provincial education with independent study in preparation for the university, itself ultimately envisioned as a stepping stone towards the goal of service to the people. Already in his very first year of study, however, Mikhailov would be expelled and exiled from Saint Petersburg for his participation in the student movement, initiated, likewise in keeping with the *narodnik zeitgeist*, almost immediately upon enrollment.

When he returned to the capital a little over a year later – having acquainted himself, in violation of his provincial house arrest, with the radical circles of Kiev in the interim – Mikhailov now stood at the centre of contemporary revolutionary activity, including the formation of *Zemlya i Volya* in 1876, whose peripeteia of fate would entwine with his own from then on. In the memoirs of his peers, Mikhailov invariably appears not just as an irreplaceable asset of the party, but also a paragon of *narodnik* virtue; the one person he had ever felt a passing romantic interest in, Olga Natanson, was by the time of their meeting already married to Mark Natanson, whose friendship he valued just as dearly, and so the two remained fast friends of a chivalric fashion – otherwise, "it was said of him that he loves people only once they enter into the "main circle" [of *Zemlya i Volya*] and only so long as they remain in it… Beyond a doubt, revolutionary work permeated every thought and feeling of Mikhailov to such an extent that he could not love a person in any way other than as part of the "work" and for the "work.""[160] Such single minded devotion to the cause was obviously not unprecedented in the long tradition of revolutionary martyrs throwing lives of wealth and privilege away to join the *narodnik* struggle –

[160] Plekhanov, «Vospominaniia об A. D. Mikhailove,» 40.

but what set Mikhailov apart – and indeed the qualitatively new circumstances that produced him – was the dedication to the practical aspects of the cause rather than its abstract idea.

Mikhailov's *nom de guerre*, "the Custodian" – *dvornik* – was meant to capture his nagging habits as much as his personal subservience to the will of the party; as he liked to say, "[if the organization were to me to wash the dishes, I would put myself to that task with the same fervor as I would the most engrossing intellectual labour … and if I was to compose poetry, I would not refuse that either, even knowing full well that the poems would turn out terrible."[161] His organizational talents were entirely dedicated to the overarching task of ensuring the same degree of dedication – not merely spiritual, but practical – to the cause as he had; and as the practical activities of the party came to require increasingly more elaborate sophistication in conspiratorial technique, such dedication required also the cultivation of an entirely new science of clandestine operational security. Mikhailov knew Petersburg like the back of his hand, which allowed him not only to escape capture, but to rescue others when the need arose; he developed a set of signs to be deployed at conspiratorial apartments to avoid compromising members of the party by visiting places staked out by the gendarmes; he mastered make-up and prosthetic technique to conceal his identity in public; and all of that – fully cognizant of the titanic efforts it took him to cultivate within himself a truly modern revolutionary – Mikhailov demanded of the people he held close to him.

It is ironic, then, that Mikhailov's untimely demise came as a result of a blunder too basic for even the laxest of *narodniks* to make – if only out of a sense of self-preservation – and at a time when the razor-sharp tensions of an already terrorist struggle against the autocracy made operational security all the more fundamental. In the wake of a wave of arrests made against

[161] Plekhanov, «Vospominaniia об A. D. Mikhailove,» 35.

several members of *Narodnaya Volya* in November 1880, Mikhailov had attempted to order a set of their photocards by posing as their relative; the employees of the shop, recognizing the names of the terrorists, informed the police such that when he came by the studio to pick up his order the next day, it was already being observed by the gendarmes. Constantly on the lookout for the smallest signs of trouble, Mikhailov quickly picked up on the agitated state of the shop clerk, who tried desperately to get him to stay; he immediately turned to leave without waiting for the photos and promptly warned his comrades of the studio's compromised status. Several days later, however, Mikhailov swung by the studio again – after warning everyone else, and promising himself not to – and noticed himself being followed upon leaving. Despite his expert knowledge of the city, the police was only too prepared for his capture, and on the 28th of November Aleksandr Mikhailov was finally arrested in the most baffling circumstances; "turns out there is enough stupidity in every wise man"[162] was the only conclusion both the gendarmes and *narodovoltsy* could make.

Mikhailov's epic failure is made perhaps less surprising – or at the very least more sympathetic in its sentimentality – by the context of the will he left to his comrades from the solitary confinement of the Alexeev raveline. For much of it, it reads less like a testament and more of the same nagging *narodovoltsy* were likely used to from their daily lives together – here Mikhailov is once again imploring them to "settle on a uniform manner of testifying before the court," to "establish contact with each others' relatives in case of arrest and confinement," and finally, conscious of his custodianship now being absent in their lives, to "control one another in every practical activity, in every petty detail, in the very way of life … so that control enters your

[162] Alexander Mikhailov, *Vospominaniia*, 22.

consciousness and principles, so that it ceased to be hurtful, and your personal egos give way to the demands of the will."

But then, it is as if a dam bursts in Mikhailov: "Finally I kiss you all, dear brothers, dear sisters, I kiss each and every one of you and hold you tight to my chest, filled with the same desire and passion animating yours. Forgive me and do not think ill of me. If I ever did any of you a displeasure, believe me that it was not out of personal motivation, but only a very peculiar understanding of the common good and a particular persistence of my character."

"And so, farewell, my dears! Yours forever and truly, Aleksandr Mikhailov."

Conclusion

That the long – and by no means complete – history of the development of the *narodnik* body of politics concludes here with the simple human drama of Mikhailov functions, I hope, as more than a cute narrative trick on my part. The fundamental significance of a qualitatively new morality – cutting a stark contrast against the parochial world of Tsarist officialdom – has been a consistent through line in *narodnik* and proto-*narodnik* organization, from the messianic days of Herzen and Ogarev and through the radical student circles of the 1860s; and even as the revolutionary party organ of *narodnichestvo* turned to bloody terrorist struggle against the autocracy, it never stopped informing every aspect of the *narodniks'* activities. On a more theoretical level, this ethical optimism would also serve as the sole reminder of the movement's prefigurative past; as the revolutionaries were forced out of their long-sought union with the people by the state, it was these bonds of love and solidarity that doomed Mikhailov that bound the *narodniks* together in spite of grave danger and personal differences.

And that is why *narodnichestvo* as a cohesive movement could withstand a fundamental shift in practical approach – from propaganda of the word to propaganda of the deed – and the comorbid complications of theory as these students of Herzen suddenly found themselves involved in an explicitly political struggle with decidedly bourgeois political goals of securing for themselves the freedom to assemble and to speak (however popular the assembly and the speech). *Narodnichestvo* was, in Antonio Gramsci's terms, a true philosophy of praxis that sought a true identity of its theoretical and practical substance; and so long as its body of politics maintained a continuous internal logic of organization throughout its transformation in the manner of the Ship of Theseus, no matter how radical – it could both retain its *narodnik*

character and keep the *narodniks* themselves, who had to navigate these turbulent developments without the benefit of historical hindsight, within a shared consciousness of a cohesive movement.

It is by no coincidence that the nadir of *narodnik* practical activity marks also the deterioration of its theoretical content: a philosophy of praxis, unmoored from the demands of facilitating the functioning of an organization, could be made to justify anyone and anything. The guttural Jesuit Machiavellianism of Nechaev, coming as it did in direct response to the placid inaction of nominally radical Russia at the turn of the 1870s, can therefore be productively examined alongside the "adventurist" *buntarstvo* driving the Chigirin affair – or even *narodnichestvo*'s stumbling "liberal" turn by the *Russkoe Bogatstvo* cohort – the Vorontsovs, the Melgunovs and the Abramovichs – of the 1890s. All three, having nothing functionally common between each other (and indeed representing polar opposites within the spectrum of conceivably *narodnik* history), were nevertheless products of crisis within that philosophy of praxis, when at the lowest point of a kind of organization or activity its form, and with it the theory meant to articulate it, an apparently radical break was needed to spur the dispirited productive forces of the revolutionaries into action once more.

And while Antonio Gramsci's quest for a way out of the overdetermining "political" of bourgeois hegemony could never have been articulated with quite the sophistication necessary by the *narodniks* themselves, it is nevertheless instructive that their aversion to politics, inherited from Herzen's disappointments of 1848, ultimately stemmed from that same desire to supplant bourgeois hegemony and to overcome the great working masses' subalternity. "The people" were thus a means to an end as much as they were an end in themselves to *narodniks* and Gramsci

both; the project of *narodnichestvo* was more radically transformative of the basic underlying structure of society than to subsist merely in the idealization, veneration and service of the people – the people themselves were to become a way of transforming the world. Popular forms of organization, ways of life and cultural norms were to become the building blocks of tomorrow – and, in the case of the *narodniks*, their prefigurative assembly began within the confines of their day to day practical activity; in communal living, circle organization, centralized deliberative democracy and even barracks discipline *narodniks* and their predecessors simultaneously groped at the contours of their heralded future.

Returning scholarly attention to the matter of defining – or confining – *narodnichestvo* to any particular boundary is perhaps an overly hasty conclusion to draw from this – by no means comprehensive – examination of *narodnichestvo's* history precisely within one such boundary: that of a highly contingent yet continuously functioning body of politics, employed though it was by a great variety of actors, and who furthermore were constantly engaged in the renegotiation of its most fundamental ideas and practices. And yet it is that very shifting nature of *narodnichestvo* that captures best its historical significance – not as any particular ideology or revolutionary party, but as a living and breathing organism possessed of a historical agency of its own, with its own filiation of overdetermining historical circumstances and a trajectory of development. Unlike nationalism – in whose place it arguably came to modernizing Russia – *narodnichestvo* can more productively be conceptualized not as an intellectual or historical category, but a specific and subjectively constrained phenomenon. In doing so, and in focusing on its specific trajectory and the internal logic thereof – by historically reconstituting the process of its development – this work had hopefully served to demonstrate not just the contingent nature of

what came to be known as *narodnichestvo*, but rather how its many disparate moving parts came to operate within the distinctly uniform historical framework of its body of politics.

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