



LAURA ENGELSTEIN



Moscow, 1905



WORKING-CLASS ORGANIZATION
AND POLITICAL CONFLICT



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*To my parents
and to the memory of
Morris and Riva Greenfield*

Preface

My research on the social history of Moscow's 1905 revolution is based primarily on published sources, especially contemporary newspapers and official statistics compiled and published by the tsarist census bureau and by the Moscow city administration. I used these and other printed material at the following libraries: the Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, Nanterre, France; the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; the Helsinki University Library; the Hoover Institution, Stanford, California; and the New York Public Library. An early version of Chapter 11, based on these sources alone, appeared as "L'Insurrection de Moscou," in Jacques Baynac, ed., *Sur 1905* (Paris: Editions Champ Libre, 1974).

I spent the academic year 1973-74 in Moscow, under the sponsorship of the IREX Graduate Student Exchange with the Soviet Union. My experience in the archives, however, was not a happy one. I was given access to a very limited amount of material in the Central State Archive of the October Revolution (TsGAOR) in Moscow and in the Central State Historical Archive of the Soviet Union in Leningrad (TsGIAL). The documents I saw were useful in supplementing other sources, but represented only a minute sample of the riches in those archives.

In the early stages of this project I benefited immensely from the encouragement and intellectual stimulation of Lynn A. Hunt, whose work on the history of the 1789 French Revolution greatly influenced my thinking. Throughout my stay in France, Marion Bieher offered generous hospitality. I also profited from the exchange of ideas and sharing of work in progress with Diane Koenker and Gerald Surh. Leopold Haimson read an early version of the manuscript and offered helpful suggestions. Most of all, I would like to thank Reggie Zelnik for his encouragement, invaluable critical advice, and friendship. Without his persistence and support, this book would not have been written. J. C. Bell at Stanford University Press

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introduced me to the joys of revision with good-humored ruthlessness. The anonymous outside readers provided excellent criticism, which helped me improve the manuscript at various stages. Barbara Mnookin at Stanford University Press did a magnificent job of editing, and Itsie Hull helped me live through the whole process in relative sanity.

Dates are in the old style, that is, according to the Julian calendar, except when otherwise noted. In the twentieth century, the Julian was thirteen days behind the Gregorian calendar used in the West. The transliteration follows the Library of Congress system, except for well-known names. Foreign surnames and almost all firm titles, however, are left in transliteration, because many defy retranslation.

L.E.

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I

INTRODUCTION

In the 1905 revolution, widespread political dissatisfaction among the upper classes of Russian society joined with massive working-class and peasant unrest to produce, for the first time in Russian history, a nationwide movement for social and political change. The movement was not of a piece: its goals ranged from the moderate constitutional aspirations of progressive landowners, through the more democratic ambitions of liberal professionals, to the socialist program of the revolutionary intelligentsia, speaking in the name of the working class. What the educated contributed in rhetoric, ideology, and organizational skills, the peasants and workers contributed in the form of direct action: the strike and the jacquerie. As the crisis developed, the working class acquired a political education, and the privileged learned to use the instruments of collective action. The resulting combination, in conjunction with rebellious stirrings in the armed forces, frightened the tsarist regime into making the first constitutional concessions in its history.

What was the contribution of the working class to the nationwide opposition movement? It consisted first in massive work stoppages in the major cities, which virtually paralyzed the economy at crucial moments during the year. Communications, transportation, manufacturing, and vital public services ceased when white- and blue-collar workers went off the job. Without this popular movement, educated society might not have been able to convince the government that political change was desperately needed. The mobilization of the urban masses also helped move the liberal reform program in a more radical direction than it might have taken on its own. The voice of the revolutionary intelligentsia carried far greater weight in progressive circles when it appeared to speak for thousands, indeed hundreds of thousands, of agitated workers.

Not only did workers strike and demonstrate in greater numbers than

ever before, but they also took part in the creation of representative institutions, through which they expressed their grievances and desires. The 1905 revolution witnessed an astonishing proliferation of grass-roots organizations, from factory and strike committees, labor unions, and community councils, to the St. Petersburg Soviet of Workers' Deputies, capstone of the October general strike. Many of these associations were the product of intelligentsia initiative, but party activists were themselves surprised at the enthusiasm with which the blue-collar ranks responded to their appeal. The revolutionaries were not always successful, however, or not always in the manner they had anticipated: many factory and shop workers were hostile to their approach and to their persons; others interpreted the political message in their own peculiar fashion; those who took part in worker organizations often departed from the original intentions of their intelligentsia sponsors and used the organizations in ways that suited their own needs and their own view of the world. The mobilization of the working class enabled the radical left to put pressure on its liberal allies, but it also pressured the socialist parties into altering their own expectations and strategies.

The working class was not a passive element in the revolutionary upheaval. It is clear that educated political leaders were not free to manipulate the masses in whatever direction they desired. It is difficult, however, to determine the degree to which socialist ideology corresponded to the workers' actual motives and desires. Few have left a record of their personal experiences. The memoirs that exist speak the language of ideological hindsight, the language of the victorious October Revolution. These insist that the Social Democrats rightly interpreted the workers' needs, political as well as material. Those who wish to discredit the popular movement contend that radical activists imposed their own political vision on the workers, who had no grander aspirations than the pressing desire to alleviate economic misery. But did the workers not have positive goals of their own? Were they insensitive to questions of social injustice and personal dignity? Lacking adequate literary evidence, the historian must approach this question by examining the pattern of working-class behavior in the course of the revolution. The changing structure of collective action, both from the sociological and from the organizational point of view, is the documentary legacy of 1905 that may allow us to understand the nature of the popular contribution to revolutionary politics.

Focus on this kind of evidence may not provide access to the "psychological dimension" of the revolutionary experience. But it does more than describe the external impact of popular actions, the role they played in the larger social equation. Patterns of behavior reveal attitudes, points of

view, levels of political understanding. These express themselves in such particulars as the readiness to cooperate, the consistency of response, the emergence of rank-and-file leadership, and the nature of the goals adopted by the collectivity. These criteria provide a vocabulary that may enable us to avoid speculation about "consciousness"—that is, articulated self-awareness—without ignoring that crucial ingredient of revolutionary politics, the popular state of mind.

The working-class contribution to the revolution took two forms, as we have noted: massive strikes and demonstrations, and participation in grass-roots organizations. But the popular movement did not arise in isolation, as part of a closeted dialogue between revolutionary activists and their exclusive labor constituency. Much historical study has focused on the way outside groups provoked and channeled lower-class unrest. But the generation of political militancy was a many-sided process, involving interaction among different social strata. Workers not only responded to example and exhortation, but themselves provided inspiration. This, too, must be credited to their account. On the one hand, factory and shop workers struck on the suggestion of professional revolutionaries, rebellious students, and dissatisfied administrative and clerical employees. On the other hand, blue-collar strikes that began as modest bread-and-butter conflicts grew in proportion and political significance as they attracted outside support and sometimes prompted other groups to take similar collective action. Labor unrest achieved political results in 1905 because it was part of the general mobilization of urban society.

Soviet scholarship tends to reduce the question of outside influences on the working class to the question of party influence, specifically of Bolshevik party influence. Likewise, it views the development of worker organizations as the result of Bolshevik party leadership, or, in the case of developments that clashed with Bolshevik expectations or of tactics that failed, as the result of Socialist Revolutionary or Menshevik interference.¹ More than one historian has held a match to these straw men, and we shall do little to stir the ashes. Intelligentsia activism (let alone Bolshevik leadership) was but one of many forces shaping the worker's experience and his perception of that experience. Government and management policy and the educational activities of establishment liberals also contributed to worker self-awareness, promoted a sense of class solidarity, and prompted workers to fight their economic battles by collective means. The worker's response to such influences—his willingness to take action and his ability to take part in organization building or to assume leadership himself—depended on a variety of circumstances. Social background, education,

familiarity with city life, social contacts (not merely political contacts) outside the factory milieu, position within the plant hierarchy, wage level, family and community involvement—all these facets helped form a worker's political identity. The revolutionary events themselves changed the way people saw their own position in society and opened up new possibilities of political action. This was true throughout the social hierarchy.

In Moscow, formal labor organizations were most successful when they corresponded to the structures of everyday life: the neighborhood, the plant, or the individual trade. The clever organizer, interested in attracting real grass-roots support, recognized these limitations and made the most of them. In St. Petersburg the citywide soviet exercised considerable political authority, and workers from heavy industry played a dominant role in animating and in leading the strike movements. But in Moscow, centralized committees and unions never got off the ground; the workers were not ready for them. Local, small-scale organizations had much greater vitality. The situation there, in fact, tends to demolish two chestnuts of Soviet historiography: the importance of the industrial "proletariat" as the keystone of the mass movement, and the emergence of a serious political split between representatives of the working class and those of the professional and "bourgeois" classes.

The Moscow working class, as we shall see, was in fact a congeries of disparate social groups. Small-shop craft production still flourished alongside large-scale, mechanized industrial plants. Light industry, in particular clothing, textiles, and food products, dominated the city's economy. The apparel trade was almost exclusively artisanal. The food and textile industries, by contrast, relied in the main on a supply of unskilled labor capable of relatively simple manual or mechanized operations.² A high proportion of workers in both sectors worked in large plants and lived in factory barracks; a large proportion were women, on the average less literate than men.

Such unqualified workers constituted the majority of factory laborers in Moscow. They were "proletarians" by virtue of the circumstances and quality of their work experience; they did not correspond, however, to the Marxist type of urbanized industrial laborer with a developed sense of class identification. In Soviet parlance, these were the "backward" element: unhappy and volatile, but culturally and politically unsophisticated. Their actions in 1905 were not uniform, however. Indeed, most textile workers were slow to respond to the political crisis and were unprepared to form their own organizations. Workers in tobacco and tea factories, on the other hand, were notable for the coherence and deliberateness of their strike actions. They were also highly responsive to political

leadership, proving only how dangerous it is to deduce politics directly from sociology.

The printing and metal industries to a much greater extent combined elements of artisanal and factory labor: like the garment trade, they employed vast numbers of skilled workers in small shops, though a significant number worked in larger enterprises. Metal and print factories, however, were organized on a different basis than food and textile plants, and they demanded a different kind of laborer. The paragon of the self-aware proletarian was in fact the skilled metalworker. Literate, well-trained, well-paid, and citified, the metalworker responded eagerly to socialist propaganda, urged his fellows to confront management, led them onto the streets, and got himself elected to shop and union committees. In the big metal works, such skilled workers formed a majority; textile mills and other factories employed them in smaller numbers in repair and maintenance shops. Some, with long seniority and good wages, were committed to stability. But others, by age or temperament more restless, were often in the front ranks of factory protests.

But probably only a minority of skilled metalworkers in Moscow were skilled factory workers. Moscow's metal industry was composed largely of small and medium shops, many of which engaged in finely crafted metalwork, a form of artisanal, not industrial, production. And yet there was a close affinity between the industrial "avant-garde" (the *peredovye rabochie* of Soviet literature) and the skilled craftsmen. They were similar in social background, in nature and degree of training, and even in the character of their work environment. The machine shop inside a large plant had much in common with the small, independent shop in terms of authority structure and of the work process itself. The skilled, literate blue-collar worker, whether in large- or small-scale production, retained the independence and pride of the artisanal craftsman.

The distinction between factory and nonfactory production was not the critical determinant of working-class behavior. High skill level and a sense of trade identity generally separated militant from passive workers in 1905. In the industrial setting, the labor elite supplied initiative and leadership. But traditional small-shop trades also proved extremely active, both in the strike movement and in trade-union organizing. Thus engravers, ribbonmakers, gold- and silversmiths, tailors, carpenters, and others far surpassed the unqualified factory masses in degree and sophistication of political involvement. Protest on the part of metalworkers in private industry and in railroad shops and of printers had a much wider impact on the mass movement as a whole than did strikes among food and textile workers, who collectively outnumbered them.

Another group that made a vital contribution to the labor movement in 1905 was the white-collar employees in the nonmanufacturing sector. They identified with the working-class cause, provided organizational guidance, and joined their blue-collar fellows in the meeting hall and on the street. Without them, no coherent movement would have emerged among either railroad workers or municipal employees, two groups indispensable to the success of the revolution in Moscow.

Thus the Moscow labor movement of 1905 was not, strictly speaking, a "proletarian" affair. It was a working-class movement in the most generous sense of the term, and it depended for its success on the support and participation of non-working-class groups. The leadership of the movement was equally heterogeneous. In St. Petersburg, the October general strike, highpoint of the revolution, was led by the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, dominated by representatives of metal and machine factories. In Moscow, it was led by a mixed committee of liberal professionals, white-collar employees, and representatives of industrial and craft trades. By the time a soviet came into being in Moscow, the mass movement was already on the decline, and the organization never commanded the authority of the St. Petersburg model. Independent working-class leadership in Moscow was not strong enough to threaten the oppositionist coalition, which indeed showed remarkable durability. A violent counter-revolutionary movement created a powerful bond between liberals and radicals. This bond survived the October Manifesto, despite a growing liberal nervousness with revolutionary tactics and an increasing tendency toward strident rhetoric on the part of intelligentsia radicals. "Bourgeois" Moscow did not abandon the working class, even when the workers took part in that most chilling of popular exercises, the armed insurrection.

Widespread sympathy for the workers' cause was not merely a function of negative circumstance: a common enemy and the relative weakness of labor leadership. Educated circles remained faithful for reasons of their own. True, many of the industrialists considered themselves progressive, but they resented the growing power of labor organization and resisted making economic concessions in the face of collective pressure; and many liberals were wary of association with political extremism. The socialist movement was surprisingly popular, however, among white-collar and professional groups, who often adopted Social Democratic or Socialist Revolutionary jargon to express their own political goals. Pharmacy clerks, for example, railed against their "economic exploitation" by their "class enemy," the pharmacy owners, and proclaimed their solidarity with the proletarian class struggle. Marxist class terminology may have accorded ill with social reality in imperial Russia, but it eloquently expressed the sense of social and political injustice bitterly felt by almost all members of

Russian society. This may account for its tremendous symbolic appeal outside the committed radical minority, especially in the heat of the revolutionary crisis.³

If the time was ripe for proletarian revolution, this meant that historical developments had already fatally weakened the old regime. Logically, defenders of the status quo were eager to prove that social change was far less advanced than partisans of revolution liked to believe. Throughout the nineteenth century the tsarist government had attempted to prevent the emergence of a proletariat, and down to the revolution itself its spokesmen insisted that Russia did not have one. "In Russia," wrote Count S. Iu. Witte in 1895, "there is fortunately no working class in the Western sense, and therefore there is no labor question." Likewise, the equally high-ranking K. P. Pobedonostsev in 1897: "Conditions are different here than in the West: we still uphold patriarchal relations between factory owners and workers, who have not lost their ties with the land."⁴ As late as 1907, Factory Inspector I. I. Ianzhul denied that the Russian working class had become a proletariat; unlike Europe, which had had the misfortune to develop a permanent urban labor force, Russia had only a mass of displaced, migrant peasants—the hyphenated worker still rooted in the countryside, whose sense of identity and world view continued to be defined by the traditional, hierarchical categories of premodern society.⁵

Industrialization might prove necessary—indeed unavoidable—but its social consequences were not therefore inevitable. The purpose of tsarist social policy in the nineteenth century was to keep the peasant-worker marginal to urban society. He remained a peasant by legal estate; his movements were controlled by the village, and he had no right to take part in public life within the city.⁶ To ensure further that the displaced peasants maintained their traditional subservience to authority, even in the novel urban context, the government embarked on a policy of factory legislation designed to protect the workers from destitution and to keep them from becoming a chronically dissatisfied mass. The regime thus cast itself as a benevolent force acting on the workers' behalf and expected them to respond with gratitude and continuing political loyalty. Ingratitude, in the form of strikes and collective disobedience, was in any case a criminal offense. If the state interfered in the workings of the labor market, it did so not in the interests of social justice, but in those of social harmony. To quote Count D. A. Tolstoi, Minister of Internal Affairs in the 1880's: "Factory hiring not only represents a civil contract, like any other private contract, but directly affects the interests of social order and peace."⁷ Factory legislation was, above all, a police measure.

This policy, however, had the paradoxical effect of reinforcing the sense

of class identity that the government had all along been at pains to undermine. Each worker now had a wage booklet, and each knew he had certain specific rights, among them the right to legal redress of grievances. The law recognized the worker-management relationship as a formal, contractual arrangement to which both sides were legally beholden. It thus acknowledged the transformation of traditional, paternalistic customs into the kind of impersonal, businesslike relations characteristic of modern society, the society of rational contracts so deplored by nineteenth-century conservatives.⁸

With the establishment of uniform procedures and the singling out of factory workers as a distinct category, the workers themselves gained a new self-perception. There is evidence, for example, that skilled workers, who liked to see themselves as a breed apart, were forced to acknowledge what they had in common with other laborers. Under the law, they were all *rabochie*.⁹ Although workers in the majority were still by origin peasants, it was clear that the authorities now recognized them as something else. Insofar as the regulations and procedures established by the new legislation did not adequately protect the workers' interests, they contributed not only to a sense of group identity, but also to a common sense of social injustice.¹⁰ When the Russian worker first encountered Marxist propaganda, it was not the first time he had heard he was something other than a peasant and something more than a turner, fitter, or machine operative. The idea that he was a member of a special class was already explicit in official labor policy.

If the regime feared the political consequences of industrialization—heightened social tensions and increased lower-class unrest—it also recognized that the modern state could not rest on a traditional economy. Nineteenth-century Populists, by contrast, wished to transform the country's political system without altering its basic economic structure. In common with conservatives, Populists saw the preindustrial way of life as a positive feature of Russian society. In general, they condemned modernization as a source of increased economic and spiritual misery for the laboring classes: urban poverty was no improvement on rural poverty, and had the added disadvantage of lacking the communal satisfactions and communal values that the peasant derived from village life.¹¹ But the Populists also condemned autocracy as unjust, and wished to destroy the social and political hierarchies intrinsic to the old regime. They of course welcomed signs of popular insubordination as harbingers of social revolution. They did not view change in the mode of production as a precondition for political change.

Marxism, on the contrary, considered socialist revolution a consequence of the industrial revolution. Marxists therefore celebrated the ad-

vent of capitalist society and the emergence of a class of urbanized, propertyless laborers engaged in industrial mass production.¹² A proletariat in the Marxist sense constituted only a small part of the Russian working class in the 1890's. But by then Marxism had won the favor of the radical intelligentsia, eager to believe that the logic of historical development ensured the success of their revolutionary project. Even the beginnings of a proletariat represented a definitive and irreversible break with the old order. Nicholas might wish to hold back the tide, but he himself had weakened the dike by encouraging a policy of rapid industrialization.

Even if the actual proletariat was only in an embryonic stage of development, the idea of the proletariat had an independent political reality. Marx's concept of the proletariat as the carrier of an egalitarian, democratic ideal, as the missionary of social transformation, had entered European political discourse before even the European working class had fully assumed its modern guise. Marx's political vision helped change the way the working class in transition thought about itself and also the way it was perceived by other classes. Social development in Russia lagged behind Europe, but ideas traveled faster than changes in the mode of production. To some extent, the injustice felt by the working class was the injustice experienced by every member of Russian society, only writ large: exclusion from public life and from political participation, inadequacy of legal redress for social and political wrongs, limitations on cultural freedom, subjection to the arbitrary and often cruel application of state power. The fate of the working class was the fate of society itself, as Marx had warned. Its hope was society's hope. It is possible that the proletariat achieved such symbolic popularity in Russian educated circles not only because it was the most impoverished and disadvantaged of urban classes, but also because it represented the Future pounding at the bulwark of a rigid, outmoded regime.

In the Marxist tradition, Soviet historians like to explain the activism of Russian workers in 1905 as part of a process of social change already set in motion. (To the extent that capitalist development was under way, to that extent had the working class begun to act like a proletariat) entering the political arena to challenge the class structure of the old regime and the economic domination of the bourgeoisie.¹³ Conservative Western historians, by contrast, attribute working-class unrest to the opposite cause: to Russia's social and economic underdevelopment.¹⁴ In fact, they argue, mature capitalism produces a tranquil labor force, integrated into society at large, sharing in the general material well-being made possible by a modern economy. Only the early stages of industrialization, the tumultuous period of the industrial revolution, produce the kind of social unrest that occurred in early-twentieth-century Russia. The recent migrant to

the city, the uprooted peasant, confused by social change and marginal to the urban environment, is the worker who rebels and the worker to whom the radical slogans of Marxism are most attractive.¹⁵

In fact, as we have noted, the Moscow working class was neither predominantly proletarian, in the Marxist sense, nor massively disoriented by the recent move to the big city. It contained a substantial number of urbanized, skilled workers, both inside and outside the factory. It was this group, along with white-collar and service workers, that provided the cutting edge of the political mass movement in 1905. Workers new to the city and to the factory often went on strike, but the skilled took the initiative and supplied the leadership. Weak ties to city life and a low standard of living did not promote, but rather retarded, collective action and, especially, political organization. This pattern appears to have characterized nineteenth-century working-class movements in Europe as well.

Despite the advanced development of large-scale mechanized production in Russia, the Moscow working class of 1905 did indeed still resemble the European working class in the early stages of industrialization, both in its structure and in its political behavior. By midcentury, Europe had already embarked on economic modernization, but traditional forms of production and traditional social groups were still strong. By then, however, it was also clear that Europe had a "labor question": the working class was changing, and the results presented a danger to social stability. In the crisis of 1848, the workers acted with a degree of cohesion and political aggressiveness they had never before shown. They acted in the name of the modern class they were in the process of becoming; but the leaders of the movement were, by and large, members of the established, traditional strata. E. J. Hobsbawm writes that the labor movement of 1830-48 involved a broad common front of urban workers, which derived its unity from "the programme and ideology of the proletariat, even though the industrial and factory working class as yet barely existed, and was on the whole politically very much less mature than other sections of the labouring poor."¹⁶ The worker who responded positively to socialist propaganda in this period was the wage-earning craftsman, in both shop and factory—the skilled "labor aristocrat," not the impoverished manual laborer.¹⁷ The European working class of midcentury was thus distinguished by its mixed social complexion and by the radicalism of its most stable and most socially privileged sector.

Such radicalism was not merely a rearguard action on the part of "declining artisans" anxious to defend privileges threatened by social progress.¹⁸ Recent work challenging this interpretation argues that artisans did not, in fact, dissociate themselves from factory workers; rather, industrial and craft workers both identified themselves as part of a broader class