INTELLECTUAL REVOLT (1855–c. 1868)

THE EFFECTS AND AFTERMATH OF THE CRIMEAN WAR

The Crimean War arose ostensibly as a result of dispute with France over privileges for Catholics at the expense of the Orthodox in the Holy Places in Jerusalem, and over Russian ambitions to establish a protectorate over the Orthodox subjects of the Ottoman Empire. At a more fundamental level it reflected the concern of Western powers about a shift in the European balance of power in favour of an overmighty, oppressive Russia. The outcome of the war – defeat on Russian territory at the hands of British and French forces operating at great distance from home, as well as Turkish forces – did not entail loss of territory, still less did it threaten Russia's status as a major European power or imperil the tsarist regime. Nevertheless the war does represent a watershed in Russian intellectual history and the history of opposition to autocracy. It punctured the sense of military invulnerability that had developed in Russia in the age of imperial expansion under Catherine and as a result of the heroic defence of the fatherland against Napoleon. It generated self-doubt and self-criticism. Most importantly it underlined the backwardness of Russia's economic and social structure and the urgency of the need for far-reaching change. Discussion of such change was facilitated by the sudden death of Nicholas after a minor illness in February 1855 and by the accession of his son, Alexander II, a man of milder temperament, to the throne. Convinced, as he famously warned the Muscovite nobility in 1856, that it was better to abolish serfdom from above than to wait until the serfs began to liberate themselves from below, Alexander initiated debate about emancipation and authorized preparation of legislation. The edict which he eventually approved on 19 February 1861 freed the serfs from their masters and provided for the allocation to them of plots of land, for which, however, they would have to pay 'redemption dues' over a protracted period. Extensive legal reform, consequential on the liberation of the majority of the population from the juridical power of the nobility, and various educational, economic and military reforms, were also implemented in the course of the 1860s. And yet public opinion was not reconciled with autocracy, not least because the emancipation failed to relieve the economic hardship of the majority of the rural population and because the government continued to resist the political reform that these changes seemed to require. Thus under Alexander II opposition to autocracy, far from abating, took more radical forms: in the late 1850s, as factions began to crystallize in the intelligentsia, a younger generation of thinkers undertook a comprehensive reappraisal of traditional values and from the early 1860s a revolutionary tide, fed by the Western socialist movement but taking a course of its own, began to swell.

In the freer atmosphere of the early years of Alexander’s reign, cultural and intellectual life again began to flourish. Given the interdependence, during the reign of Nicholas, of imaginative literature, on the one hand, and aesthetic, ethical, social and political ideas, on the other, it is not surprising that the sudden revival of thought after the Crimean War should have been accompanied by the appearance of a profusion of important works of literature. These works included Tolstoy’s Sevastopol Stories (1835–56); Provincial Sketches (1836–57), Saltykov’s satirical depiction of official mores; Pisemsky’s novel A Thousand Souls (1858) and his play A Bitter Lot (1859); Goncharov’s novel Oblomov (1859), which through its eponymous central character identified the inertia thought to be symptomatic of the pampered Russian nobleman; Ostrovsky’s play The Thunderstorm (1860); Notes from the House of the Dead (1860), Dostoevsky’s semi-fictional account of his years in prison; and Turgenev’s four major novels Rudin (1856), A Nest of Gentry (1859), On the Eve (1860) and Fathers and Children (1862) – in which he was felt to have depicted the changing physiognomy of the educated Russian nobleman in the period from about 1840 to 1860.

A further sign of the cultural and intellectual renaissance of the post-Crimean period was the reinvigoration of certain journals and the appearance of new ones. The journals began to reflect increasingly clear positions on the political spectrum. Thus Slavophils found expression in The Day (Den') and in the late 1850s and early 1860s a 'native soil conservatism' (POCHVENNICHESTVO; see pp. 48–50) akin to Slavophilism was purveyed by The Muscovite (Moskvitchanie) and then by the successive journals The Time (Vremia) and The Epoch...
(Epokha), of which Dostoevsky (by now back in St Petersburg) was \textit{de facto} editor. \textit{The Library for Reading} (\textit{Biblioteka dlja chitaniai}), under the editorship of Druzhinin (see pp. 51–2), offered a defence of art for its own sake that had liberal or even conservative political implications. \textit{The Russian Herald} (\textit{Russkii vestnik}) served as a mouthpiece for an emergent liberalism, albeit a liberalism of a peculiarly statist Russian hue. Notes of the Fatherland and in particular \textit{The Contemporary} (\textit{Sovremennik}), in the hands of Nekrasov and Panaev and under the \textit{de facto} editorship of Chernyshevsky, became the main forum for radical thought during the decade after the Crimean War. In the early 1860s \textit{The Russian Word} (\textit{Russkoe slovo}) adopted an even more extreme radical viewpoint, loosely termed 'nihilism', which towards the end of the decade after the closure of \textit{The Russian Word}, was taken up by \textit{The Deed} (\textit{Delo}) [54]. (The three broad streams of thought represented by these journals — conservative nationalism, liberalism, and radicalism respectively — are dealt with separately and in that order in the following sections of this chapter.) The sudden flowering of public opinion in Russia, reflected in the resurgence of imaginative literature and the revival and expansion of journalism, was also stimulated by Herzen, who in 1852 had moved to London and who in 1853, with the aid of Polish exiles, established a ‘free Russian press’ there. From this uncensored printing house Herzen launched a new periodical, \textit{The Pole Star} (\textit{Poliarnaiia svezda}), in 1855 and then, in 1857, together with his friend from childhood days, Ogariov, now also an émigré, the newspaper \textit{The Bell} (\textit{Kolokol}). With its exposure of abuses which could not be openly publicized inside Russia, \textit{The Bell} was read with interest in official circles as well as by the intelligentsia.

The differences between romantic conservative and Westernist thinkers that had emerged in the 1840s persisted in the 1850s, when the leading Slavophiles Khomiakov, the Aksakov brothers and Sama- rin remained active, and in the early 1860s when native-soil conservatism was formulated by Dostoevsky, Grigorev and Strakhov. At the same time a further major fissure developed in the intelligentsia within the Westernist camp itself. On one side of this fissure stood the older, more moderate men who had come to maturity in the reign of Nicholas and who hoped Russia could regenerate itself through piecemeal reform. These ‘men of the 40s’, or the ‘fathers’ in the terminology of Turgenev’s major novel, were advocates of evolution: gradual, peaceful change from above. On the other side stood the ‘men of the 60s’ as they came to be known, the ‘sons’ who had come to challenge the ‘fathers’ and whose outstanding fictional representative is Bazarov in Turgenev’s masterpiece. These younger, more radical men were impatient for thoroughgoing transformation and in the last analysis looked with equanimity on the prospect of revolutionary upheaval. The two sides are characterized by the markedly different tones and demeanour that Turgenev has captured in his novel. The formality, civility and elegant manners and dress to which the older generation attach such importance are rejected by the younger generation as the hypocritical conventions of an obsolescent class; the young cultivate instead a freedom, casualness, even carelessness, of appearance and conduct. Beyond these superficialities lies a deeper divergence of values. The more moderate fathers, at least according to Turgenev’s humane depiction of them, respect the individual human personality and cherish family relationships and friendship. The young, on the other hand, view the human individual as an organism that behaves in a predictable way according to natural laws which are discoverable by science, and they conceive of close human relationships as a product of mutual self-interest or ideological affinity. Their differences, in Turgenev’s novel, are encapsulated in their contrasting attitudes to nature: whereas for the fathers the natural world represents a universe with which they empathize and its beauty is inextricably associated with their own innermost personal joys, for the apparently pragmatic nihilist Bazarov nature is not a temple but a workshop in which he can study with a view to ascertaining immutable laws that explain human, as well as animal, organisms. To some extent the two factions within the Westernist intelligentsia represented the standpoints of different classes as well as different generations. The ‘men of the 40s’ were on the whole members of the nobility, such as Annenkov, Druzhinin and Turgenev himself (although their companion Botkin emigrated from the merchant class). Among the ‘men of the 60s’, on the other hand, we find more so-called raznochintsy, that is to say men of varied backgrounds but of lower social status than the gentry, for example representatives of the petty bourgeoisie (\textit{meshechanstvo}) and the merchant class (\textit{kupechestvo}), and members of the embryonic professional class such as doctors, who enjoyed relatively humble status in nineteenth-century Russia.

One social feature of the militant young faction of the intelligentsia which requires comment is the prominence among them of the sons of the lower clergy. Both Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov, the two leaders of the radical intelligentsia in the five or six years after the Crimean War, belonged to this group. So too did Antonovich and Eliseev, two of the most militant publicists of the 1860s, Nikolai Uspensky, a writer of short, naturalistic sketches on peasant life, and
Pomialovsky, a powerful prose writer who was beginning to examine the spiritual character of the raznochintsy as a dislocated social stratum when he succumbed to alcoholism at the age of twenty-eight. Jocularly known as popovichi, these sons of the lower clergy experienced the same poverty as the majority of the rural population but perhaps because they were literate and had access to fiction and publicism sensed their hardship more keenly than most and sought means of escape more avidly. At the same time it is possible that their ecclesiastical background gave them a strong sense of the world as a struggle between principles of good and evil, and imparted a moral or religious colouring and a millenarian zeal to their thought even when they had abandoned Christian doctrine for materialism and atheism.

CONSERVATIVE NATIONALIST THOUGHT IN THE 1850s AND 1860s

The Slavophiles of the 1840s were weakened by several deaths among their number – the two Kireevsky brothers died in 1856, and Konstantin Aksakov and Khomiakov both died in 1860. Nevertheless Slavophilism, like other strands of thought, underwent a revival in the new conditions after the Crimean War. One manifestation of that revival was Konstantin Aksakov’s memorandum to Alexander on the internal state of Russia, which was examined above (see pp. 28–9). Another was a so-called epistle to the Serbs written by Khomiakov and co-signed by other leading Slavophiles such as the Aksakov brothers, Kosheliev and Samarin. In this open letter to the people of Serbia, Khomiakov offered fraternal advice to fellow Slavs, lecturing them on the social importance of the Orthodox faith which they shared with the Russians and which alone offered clear understanding and sincere brotherhood, and eulogizing the supposed Orthodox willingness, expressed in the peasant commune, to submit unquestioningly to a collective will [Doc. 11]. Both Kosheliev and Samarin, moreover, were authors of thoughtful projects for the emancipation of the serfs.

However, nationalist thought also began to find expression in the related but distinct ‘native-soil conservatism’ that sprang up in the late 1850s and early 1860s and that, like Slavophilism, found itself ill-at-ease with the modern bureaucratic tsarist state. The native-soil conservatives (poehvoseniki) – among whom the literary critic Grigorev, the future novelist Dostoevsky, and the critic Strakhov were the most prominent – re-examined the problem of Russia’s national identity and joined the debate as to which alien institutions and values it was prudent to adopt and which native ones it was important to sustain. They pondered means of bridging the gulf that separated the educated class from the masses and they bemoaned the fate of the alienated intellectual at odds with his society, rootless and lacking inner equilibrium or moral certainty. Their fear of the encroachment of capitalism in Russia and their belief that people would become dehumanized in the modern industrial setting led them to defend a mainly agrarian communal society not dissimilar from that envisaged by some contemporary radicals (see pp. 57, 60) and the early Populist revolutionaries (see pp. 67, 69, 72). On the other hand their emphasis on the need to reconcile conflicting interests in order to bring about social harmony brought them closer to the liberals (even though they despised the liberals’ constitutionalism and could not understand their respect for the temporal law) than to the radicals who shared their distaste for capitalism. While liberals such as Kavelin (see pp. 31, 52) sought to blur social distinctions by advocating equality before the law (though not the erosion of economic differences), the native-soil conservatives looked forward to a society in which the gentry, petty bourgeoisie, and peasant, united by the Russian’s supposed innate sense of brotherhood, might co-operate with one another in the service of a large national purpose. Ironical as it might seem, this emphasis on reconciliation eventually led the native-soil conservatives into open conflict with the radical thinkers, who were not to be satisfied with half-measures. In any case the revolution envisaged by the native-soil conservatives was a moral one which would concern the inner life of the spirit rather than the external forms of social organization which radical thinkers regarded as the main sources of poverty, crime and misery [87; 88; 90].

To some extent ‘native-soil conservatism’ finds expression in the great novels – Crime and Punishment, The Idiot, The Devils, and The Brothers Karamazov – which Dostoevsky came to write once he had clarified his outlook in his journalistic contributions to this strand of thought in the early 1860s. Some of Dostoevsky’s ideas perhaps owe something to Grigorev’s ‘organic criticism’, which is grounded in a belief in the primacy of artistic creativity for mankind and in the inseparability of that creativity from distinctive national cultures and histories. For example Grigorev, as Dostoevsky was later to do, put forward a theory of Russian types, positing a humble type, which he associated with the Slavs, and a predatory type, which he associated with Russia’s early Varangian rulers. He also attributed universality to the Russian character and conceived Pushkin as the supreme manifestation of that universality. In the draft of a travelogue on his stay in
the West in 1857–58 Grigorev even prefigured the bilious view of Western peoples presented in Dostoevsky’s own record of his travels in the West in 1862, Winter Notes on Summer Impressions, with its derisive attitude to the slogan of the French Revolution, Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité, and its view of the rationalist utopia as an anthill [88; 89 iii].

It must be emphasized that although in his later journalism his conservatism and nationalism are explicit and harsh, Dostoevsky the artist transcends partisanship and even-handedly presents a multi-faceted view of reality. Nevertheless his novels clearly reflect and transmute into a timeless and universally valid presentation of profound metaphysical, ethical, social and political problems some of the major assumptions, anxieties and hopes of Russian conservative nationalist thought in general and of native-soil conservatism in particular. Dostoevsky rejects the optimistic view of the progress of Western civilization put forward by the Victorian historian Buckle. He admires the humility and true Christian piety of the simple Russian people. He notes the fragmentation of contemporary society. He is alarmed by the loss of religious faith, which is under attack from science, rationalism and scepticism, and by the growth of materialism, egoism and individualism, forces supposedly invading Russia from the West. He anticipates the moral anarchy and political tyranny to which nihilism, if unchecked, might lead, and he yearns for spiritual regeneration, moral revolution and the reconciliation of antagonistic social forces [89; 96].

RUSSIAN LIBERALISM AFTER THE CRIMEAN WAR

The years immediately following the Crimean War may be seen as the heyday of liberalism in nineteenth-century Russia, if by ‘liberalism’ we understand advocacy of freedom of expression, abolition or relaxation of censorship, and implementation of reform by the government in an atmosphere of stability and security. These years were Russia’s first age of glashnost’ (the word was used at this time, to indicate a greater openness and transparency in public affairs and a broadening of the parameters of permissible debate). Liberals, perhaps for the only time in tsarist Russia, found themselves more or less in harmony with the autocracy. After all it was the autocrat himself who had stimulated discussion of the most fundamental social reform, abolition of serfdom. Their writings, including detailed projects for the emancipation and other proposals relating to social and administrative questions, could be published legally, although much literature of this sort also circulated in manuscript form inside Russia or was published in the nine anthologies printed by Herzen in London on his free press in the years 1856–60 under the title Voices from Russia. Liberal thinkers such as Kavelin and enlightened bureaucrats and government ministers such as N. A. Miliutin, who played an important role in the editorial commissions preparing the ground for the emancipation and who in 1858 was appointed Deputy Minister of the Interior, mixed freely. Liberals were filled with admiration for Alexander, praised him fulsomely and were overcome with gratitude to the ‘tsar-liberator’ when the decree emancipating the serfs was finally published.

The values of Russian liberals in the intelligentsia in the late 1850s found their clearest expression, odd as it may seem at first sight, in a polemic about art. Liberals sought to preserve nobility, understood in a spiritual as well as a social sense, and to uphold the values of objectivity and moderation by defending an art unconstrained by topical social and political demands. (This position was similar to that adopted by Belinsky in his Hegelian phase.) The main champion of uncompromising art was Druzhinin, who became editor of The Library for Reading late in 1856, and he was supported in this enterprise by Annenkov, Botkin and the novelist Turgenev. These men glorified the heritage of the poet Pushkin and exordined modern Russian writers to establish a ‘Pushkin school’ of Russian literature. In the course of a protracted polemic with Chernyshevsky (see pp. 55–9) over the period 1855–58 apropos of the major works of Russian literature appearing in those years, Druzhinin denigrated ‘didactic’ art and reproached Belinsky for his role in promoting it and commended instead the Olympian detachment and serenity displayed, Druzhinin believed, by such poets as Homer, Shakespeare and Goethe. Whereas didacticism, Druzhinin argued, impoverished literature in various ways, dispassionate art had a lasting beneficial moral effect on society by awakening in readers an appreciation of ‘poetry’, broadly defined.

The appeal of this view of art beyond Druzhinin’s own generation was limited by its conservative implications. ‘Pushkinian’ values, as Belinsky had argued in his cycle of essays on Pushkin as far back as the middle of the 1840s, were passe and socially innocuous. The liberal position therefore put no pressure on a government traditionally reluctant to reform. Objectivity could even be interpreted as indifference to the plight of the masses. Moreover, the cult of the serene poet and the advice that he should not come down to the level of the crowd, Shakespeare’s ‘vile multitude’, smacked of an elitism that was no longer fashionable. Such conservatism even came out in Druzhinin’s distinguished work as a translator of Shakespeare: he
as Granovsky and Kavelin from a man who is in many respects ideologically close to them, Chicherin, an important thinker who stands at the conservative end of the liberal spectrum [102]. Chicherin’s credentials as a liberal opponent of autocracy in the years following the Crimean War are undeniable. He was a leading contributor to the manuscript literature which gave expression to an embryonic liberal opinion. He attacked the aristocracy and presented their continued privilege as incompatible with the needs of an ethical modern state which existed, he believed, to subordinate the demands of individuals and estates to a rational plan promoting the general welfare. He advocated abolition of serfdom and the granting of a set of individual rights, freedom of expression, conscience and the press, academic freedom, publicity of governmental activity and legal proceedings — which amounted to a minimum liberal political programme. Nor did his view of the importance of the state in Russian history or his belief in the continuing need for reform within the framework of a strong state set him apart from the liberals of the older generation. And yet the latter did not accept him as one of their own and Kavelin censured him for the spirit of his criticisms of Herzen. As engagé intellectuals the ‘men of the 40s’ did not prize Chicherin’s notion of scholarly integrity and his exclusion of moral concern and emotion from his thought and they tended to find him abrasive, arrogant, formal, distant and cold.

For all his independence and integrity, his advocacy of academic values and civil rights, Chicherin increasingly gave succour in various ways to autocracy. For example, he commended the French system of government over the English because it maintained the centralized state which Chicherin considered a prerequisite for the full development of freedom. He appealed to students of Moscow University, in which he occupied a chair from 1861 to 1868, to obey the law of the state irrespective of its perceived moral legitimacy. His relations with the court became close in the early 1860s; he took a patriotic stance on the Polish Revolt of 1863; and he deplored the lack of a concept of limits in the Russian mentality and urged Russians to develop a sense of proportion and moderation. While declaring an enthusiasm, in a treatise On Popular Representation (1866), for the electoral principle and representative government he also argued that such government could only operate successfully given certain preconditions, such as a mature political society, that were plainly lacking in Russia and he even expressed a preference for ‘honest autocracy’ over ‘bankrupt representation’. And yet such conservatism was unexceptional in the liberal camp after 1861, when opinion in the intelligentsia quickly

described Kent, in his introduction to his translation of King Lear, with fondness as the ‘faithful servant, the ideal of the true loyal subject’, and he also elected at this period to translate Coriolanus, in which the eponymous warrior and selfless patriot is finally driven by theickle and insolent tribunes of the people to desert the Roman cause [103 ch. 5].

The cautiousness and essential conservatism of Russian liberals after the Crimean War is manifested not only in their aesthetic standpoint but also in their stout defence of the interests of the nobility, their reluctance to tamper with the principle of autocratic government in Russia and their dependency on the benevolence of the autocrat. These aspects of contemporary liberalism are apparent in a ‘Memorandum on the Emancipation of the Peasants in Russia’, one of the most important projects on the subject, which was written by Kavelin in 1855, and in a supplement to it written the following year. Although he advocated complete liberation of the serfs from dependence on the lords and apportionment of land to them, Kavelin was anxious to ensure that the reform would jeopardize neither the social standing nor the economic well-being of the nobility. He insisted that the lords be compensated, in full and in advance, for the loss of their serfs as well as their land, argued in favour of continuation of large-scale private landownership by the nobility and tried to ensure that the lords’ landholdings would indeed remain substantial after the emancipation by proposing that the peasants receive only so much land as they currently cultivated. He was far from advocacy of a laissez-faire post-reform economy which might undermine the pre-eminent position of the landed nobility in favour of a bourgeoisie. As for autocracy, the Russian tsar is seen by Kavelin as a figure who towers over sectional interests, a mediator and arbitrator who impartially judges the claims of all classes, showing preference for none [100; 103 ch. 6].

The bulk of the liberals of this post-war period, as ‘men of the 40s’, nourished rather a misty idealism that is conveyed in a celebrated essay of Turgenev’s, ‘Hamlet and Don Quixote’ (1860). In this essay Turgenev draws a schematic distinction, which owes much to German sources, between what he believes are diametrically opposite types of personality: on the one hand the Hamlets, believing in nothing outside themselves, racked by doubt and scepticism and unable to apply themselves to any useful activity, and on the other hand the Quixotes, admirable idealists who live for something outside themselves and are indeed able to dedicate their lives to active service in some noble cause. It was essentially quixotism that distinguished the liberals such
polarized. Annenkov, Botkin, Druzhin and Kavelin too all chose loyalty to the autocrat in the interests of political and social stability, fearing that a triumphant socialist opposition would by accident or design bring about uncontrollable destruction. This choice entailed a loss of influence in the intelligentsia, an outcome of which, in truth, these liberals had had presentiments as far back as 1856. Their predicament is poignantly conveyed in fiction by the retirement of Pavel Kirsanov, in Turgenev's *Fathers and Children*, to the aesthete's foreign haven of Dresden. (It was in Dresden too, incidentally, that Annenkov, who like Turgenev himself spent most of the last twenty years of his life abroad, was to die in 1887.)

It should be added, finally, that the émigré Herzen occupied political space somewhere between the liberals who have been examined in this section and the militant young thinkers who will be examined in the following section. In some respects he was closer in the years after the Crimean War to the liberal camp than to any other. Admittedly, he had not endorsed the liberal opinions expressed in the anthologies *Voices from Russia*; indeed he was himself criticized in the first of those anthologies by both Kavelin and, more intemperately, Chicherin for his impatience with autocracy and with a policy of cautious reform. Nevertheless he too placed high hopes on Alexander for a while. Thus in 1856, echoing the words of Julian the Apostle to Christ, he congratulated Alexander, who had just announced his intention to abolish serfdom: 'You have conquered, Oh Galilean!'. Herzen also reproached the radicals of *The Contemporary* for their derisive attitude towards the liberals who were striving honourably to civilize their society after the reign of Nicholas. He quarrelled with Chernyshevsky, who had met him on a visit to London in 1859 and who damningly described him to Dobroliubov as 'Kavelin squared' [103 p. 190]. And yet following the emancipation, which he considered a betrayal of the peasants, Herzen again lost faith in the state. He now called on the youth to go to the people, expressed support for the Polish Revolt of 1863, and in 1865 moved to Geneva in order to be closer to the growing and increasingly militant young Russian émigré community there. Not that his support for the revolutionary wing of the intelligentsia was ever unequivocal: in 1869, the year before his death, his old fears about the cost of revolution found renewed expression in the 'Letters to an Old Comrade' which he addressed to Bakunin.

**RADICAL THOUGHT: CHERNYSHCHEVSKY**

Of the radical thinkers who effected a revolution in Russian thought after the Crimean War, the first and most important was Chernyshevsky [109; 116; 117; 118; 122]. Born in 1828 in Saratov, on the bank of the Volga at the easternmost boundary of Europe, Chernyshevsky was educated first in a local seminary and then, in the 1840s, at St Petersburg University. A product, then, of the depths of provincial Russia and of Russia's 'window on to Europe', to use Pushkin's description of St Petersburg, Chernyshevsky displays at one and the same time both the frame of mind of an ascetic, ecclesiastical caste and the erudition and approach to rational knowledge of a secular and thoroughly Westernized thinker. His thought betrays both a messianic zeal and a willingness to surrender to schematic designs of the Germanic sort that so attracted Russian thinkers from Belinsky to Lenin. He exemplifies the tendency that is marked in Russian thought to strive for what may be called an 'integral Weltanschauung' (the awkwardness of the expression testifies to the foreignness of the concept within an English intellectual framework). That is to say he tries to construct a rigid system of belief coherent in all its parts which will provide both a comprehensive explanation of all phenomena and a guide to living.

Chernyshevsky was concerned to replace what he saw as a priori notions or even cherished prejudices - about the existence of God, the duality of spirit and matter, the coexistence of good and evil in human beings, the transcendent quality of beauty - with a demonstrably valid system of belief regulated by reason. Fundamental to his outlook - and to that of the radical critics of autocracy in general at this period - is a firm conviction in the efficacy of natural science as a force for good in the world and in the applicability of the method deployed by natural science to all human problems. For not only did the natural sciences such as medicine, physics, biology, chemistry - to which Chernyshevsky was fond of making allusions which now seem banal - promise to reduce suffering through disease and to increase prosperity through technological progress. They also enabled their practitioners - who proceeded empirically, observing, measuring, conducting experiments and testing conclusions - to formulate incontestable laws which held good in all circumstances. Natural science therefore seemed capable of providing comprehensive explanations of all phenomena. Moreover, the rubicon separating the world of facts (the territory of metaphysics) from that of values (the territory of ethics and political philosophy, with which Russian thinkers were now primarily concerned) was easily, almost imperceptibly, crossed. The
natural sciences therefore came also to be regarded as an infallible key to social, economic and even psychological and moral problems.

Chernyshevsky launched his intellectual rebellion in 1855 in a dissertation for a master’s degree at St Petersburg University on the apparently abstruse subject of the ‘aesthetic relationship of art to reality’. The direct object of his attack was the work of the German aesthetician Vischer, but behind this object stood the aesthetic system of Hegel and beyond Hegel the Platonic notion that above the transient, concrete, everyday world there lies a higher world of ideal forms whose beauty may be captured by the artist. To Chernyshevsky this dualistic aesthetic system, with its juxtaposition of an imperfect here-and-now and a transcendent world that we may briefly glimpse but never securely attain, encourages a tragic view of human life and stoical resignation to one’s fate. In order to combat the political quiescence encouraged by such attitudes, Chernyshevsky redefined the beautiful as that which reminds us most vividly of life itself. Our aesthetic ideal, he contends, is that which is vital and vigorous. Moreover conceptions of beauty, he argues, are relative; what is considered vital varies depending on the class of the subject. Having reduced reality to one plane and redefined beauty accordingly, Chernyshevsky also limits the jurisdiction of the artist: his function is to reproduce reality, as the author of a handbook might, with a view to showing people what they have not seen or understood before [20 pp. 199–202].

In the years 1855–56 Chernyshevsky produced a long cycle of essays on what he termed the ‘Gogol Period of Russian Literature’ in which he implicitly laid claim to the mantle of Belinsky, or at least to the mantle of the Belinsky of the early 1840s who had championed a committed literature. Thus while the liberal Westernizers were defending the Olympian detachment of Pushkin, Chernyshevsky advocated the artistic engagement and social criticism with which Gogol and Belinsky were felt to be associated. The critic approaching literature in this way would exploit the appearance of a new work of art as an occasion for commentary on the social conditions or factors that had given rise to it. The approach is exemplified in essays by Chernyshevsky himself on Nikolai Uspensky’s sketches of peasant life, in which Chernyshevsky addresses the question as to the likeliness of peasant revolt, and on Turgenev’s short story ‘Asia’, in which the critic uses the highly poetic, nostalgic recollection by Turgenev’s narrator of an unfulfilled affair as a pretext for an expose of the fecklessness of the serf-owning Russian gentry.

However, relatively little of Chernyshevsky’s attention after 1855–56 was devoted to aesthetic or literary matters, partly no doubt because he was confident that these would be capably handled by the like-minded Dobroliubov, who began writing regularly for The Contemporary in 1857, and partly because the parameters of debate widened so quickly after the Crimean War that it became possible to venture into more overtly social, economic and political fields. It is indicative of the clarity of the socialist vision of the younger generation that by 1858 Chernyshevsky was taking up Herzen’s defence of the peasant commune as an embryonic socialist institution. While he saw the commune as a feature of the existence of all peoples at a primitive stage of their development rather than as a precious institution exclusive to the Slavs, he did believe, like Herzen, that it might serve as an antidote to the Western ill of proletarian misery. In an article entitled, with characteristic inelegance, ‘A Critique of Philosophical Prejudices against Communal Landholding’, Chernyshevsky argued that backward societies did not invariably have to repeat all the stages of development undergone by more advanced ones and that Russia might proceed directly from its current semi-feudal condition to a form of socialism based on the peasant commune without passing through a protracted phase of capitalist development [20 pp. 207–12]. In other articles of the same period – the period, it should be remembered, when the emancipation of the serfs was being considered – Chernyshevsky stressed the economic as well as the moral virtues of communal landholding, taking issue with those who saw the commune as an inefficient, unproductive agricultural unit.

The growing confidence of the young socialists is reflected in Chernyshevsky’s attacks, written in the same period as his articles in defence of the peasant commune, on his ‘liberal’ opponents in the intelligentsia who argued for gradual social change. In a number of essays on the apparently remote subject of French political history he fosters a view of Russian liberals as indecisive, unpractical, prone to high-sounding but essentially vacuous utterances and hypocritical in their defence of various rights and freedoms. ‘Liberals’, Chernyshevsky argued in an essay on ‘The Struggle of Parties in France in the Reign of Louis XVIII and Charles X’, set free speech and a constitutional structure above the material well-being of the masses. They did not understand that a legal right had value only when a person had the material wherewithal to take advantage of it. Unlike ‘democrats’, who were hostile to aristocracy and hoped to break the traditional domination of the upper classes over the lower in society, ‘liberals’ cherished a certain degree of ‘aristocratism’ and would not allow the balance of social power to be tipped in favour of the uneducated mass [Doc. 12] [20 pp. 203–6]. In a further article, on the eighteenth-
century French physiocrat Turgot, Chernyshevsky obliquely expressed a fear that the ascendency of liberalism in Russia would lead to the growth of a _laissez-faire_ economy based on the principle of self-interest and would thus result in even greater hardship than the system it replaced.

The redefinition of values on which Chernyshevsky had embarked in his dissertation on aesthetics is completed in an essay of 1860 entitled ‘The Anthropological Principle in Philosophy’, which is notable for its further application of the reductionism that had eliminated a transcendental plane in aesthetics. Following German thinkers such as Vogt (notorious for his assertion that the brain secretes thought just as the liver secretes bile), Moleschott (who had argued that mental processes should be seen purely as the product of physical stimuli), and Büchner (who explained consciousness as a physical state of the brain brought about by the movement of matter), Chernyshevsky attempts in this essay to popularize a crude materialism and determinism. He denies the existence of a spiritual aspect in man. He then asserts that thought is the product not of intuition or innate impulse but of sensation and external stimuli. The human will be belittled by redefining it as merely ‘wanting’, a phenomenon in a whole chain of cause and effect in which external factors play the main role. Character, and what we perceive as human goodness or badness, Chernyshevsky treats as moulded by environment. Consequently crimes – or ‘bad actions’, as Chernyshevsky prefers to call them – are explained after the manner of Robert Owen as the product of poverty.

Equally far-reaching and influential was the reductionist utilitarian ethical doctrine put forward in ‘The Anthropological Principle in Philosophy’. Whereas it was conventional to attribute altruistic as well as selfish impulses to people, Chernyshevsky holds that human actions are invariably governed by self-interest. However, since humans are rational creatures they are also amenable to persuasion that their own best interest lies in the last analysis in co-operation with their fellows. According to Chernyshevsky’s doctrine of ‘rational egoism’, humans must therefore be taught to derive their selfish pleasure from performance of actions which are of benefit to others. Judgement of actions as good or bad is to be made on the basis not of some absolute moral imperative but a relativistic criterion: an act is good or bad according to its consequences. It is good if it is useful, and the greatest good is that which is useful to the greatest number. In this hierarchy of interests – formulated, it should again be remembered, in the years in which the abolition of serfdom was being discussed – the ‘interests of a large class stand higher than the interests of a small one’. Cherny-

shevsky’s ethic has a mathematical exactitude which is pleasing to him (it represents the application of geometrical axioms such as ‘the whole is greater than the part’ to social problems) and is consistent with a socialism in which individual liberty is less important than collective welfare [Doc. 13] [20 pp. 213–22].

The outlook painstakingly – and often tediously – expounded by Chernyshevsky in his publicism between 1855 and 1862, when he was arrested for alleged complicity in the activity of revolutionary groups that were beginning to appear, eventually found fictional expression in his celebrated and highly influential novel _What is to be done?_ [7]. The novel was written in prison, smuggled out, lost, recovered and published in _The Contemporary_ in 1863. Here the socialist vision is clarified through Chernyshevsky’s portraits of the ‘new people’, his heroes Lopukhov and Kirsanov – both, it should be noted, students of medicine and therefore devotees of the natural sciences – and his heroine Vera Pavlovna. These characters live in harmony, personal and social, according to the principles of rational egoism. Escaping from the oppressive institution of the family, the basic unit of existing social organization, Vera Pavlovna establishes a model for the socialist future in the form of an efficient co-operative of seamstresses. In one of a cycle of dreams in the novel she beholds a communistic utopia inspired by the Fourierist phalanstery and housed in a building reminiscent of that monument to nineteenth-century technological progress, the Crystal Palace. Above all these new people towers the figure of Rakmetov, the ‘flower of the best people’, the ‘salt of the salt of the earth’, a proto-revolutionary who is preparing himself physically and mentally for future exploits and who – in an apparent abnegation of the determinism preached in ‘The Anthropological Principle in Philosophy’ – tempers his will by self-denial and by lying like a fakir on a bed of nails [116].

RADICAL THOUGHT: DOBROLIUBOV, PISAREV AND THE ARTS

Chernyshevsky, in his reappraisal of existing values, was closely supported by Dobroliubov, chief literary critic for _The Contemporary_ from 1857 until his death from tuberculosis in 1861 at the age of twenty-five. Dobroliubov exemplified the tendency in Russian thought to use literary criticism for social and political ends. His purpose was not, as he frankly explained, to discuss the artistic qualities of the works he reviewed but to examine the social, moral and ultimately political questions which they raised. Thus his famous article
What is oblastnovshchina?, a review of Goncharov's Oblomou, was written not so much about the novel but rather apropos of it as a discourse on the degeneration of the 'superfluous man' in the conditions of post-Nicholaevan Russia [Doc. 14] [9 pp. 174–217; 20 pp. 228–34]. Dobroliubov was primarily interested not in idiosyncratic literary characters, still less in lyrical descriptions of nature written for the sake of art alone, like those produced at this period by the poet Fet, but in the social type as depicted in realistic prose fiction. For types, as portrayed by a writer with insight, truthfully revealed processes taking place in society. Dobroliubov looked forward to the day when the 'superfluous man' would be replaced by the so-called 'positive hero', a man of more resolve who could be relied upon to take decisive action. However, within Dobroliubov's own lifetime it was slightly premature to expect the disoriented Russian raznochinitel', socially displaced and as yet diffident, to take on that role. Thus as Dobroliubov noted in his essay 'When will the Real Day come?', in which he reviewed Turgenev's novel On the Eve (and in which he characteristically blurred the boundary between art and reality), it was in the person of a Bulgarian patriot, Insarov, that Turgenev had portrayed the man of action; the principal Russian males in the novel continue to display a lack of will and energy [9 pp. 388–438]. The common people, on the other hand, offered somewhat more hope to the socialist camp: in various essays on works depicting the lower social strata Dobroliubov endorsed Herzen's view of the peasants as the authentic Russian people and described them as serious-minded, practical, endowed with a moral purity lacking in the idle nobility and fit to play the part of free citizens after the impending emancipation [9; 22; 109; 114; 121].

The rebellion initiated by Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov was taken to new extremes after the arrest of the former and the death of the latter, notably by Pisarev who though imprisoned from 1862–66 exercised a profound influence on radical thought up until his death from drowning at the age of twenty-seven in 1868. In several respects Pisarev shared Chernyshevsky's and Dobroliubov's convictions. Like them he rejected art for art's sake and demanded the application of the criterion of utility in judgements of works of art. He extolled natural science and prided himself on the rejection of all prejudices and superstitions, that is to say assumptions that could not be upheld by reason and empirical method. He preached a thoroughgoing materialism, endorsed Chernyshevsky's theory of rational egoism and wrote a favourable review, entitled 'The Thinking Proletariat', of Chernyshevsky's novel What is to be done? [23 pp. 624–75]. And yet Pisarev pressed Chernyshevsky's and Dobroliubov's ideas further than they pressed them or perhaps dared to press them. Unlike them, he wrote of the 'destruction of aesthetics' and unashamedly spoke of a good pair of boots as more useful than a play by Shakespeare. Most importantly he seems to have glimpsed, as is clear from one of two admiring essays he wrote on Turgenev's character Bazarov, the destructive potential of the individual who acknowledges only the authority of his own senses and who, liberated from external moral constraint, roams at large beyond conventional conceptions of good and evil. Depending purely on taste, such a figure, Pisarev accepted, might prove either a great benefactor of mankind or a monstrous criminal [20 pp. 240–3; 109; 114; 121].

The term 'nihilist' (nigilist), which gained currency as a result of its use in Turgenev's novel Fathers and Children and became a widespread label for all representatives of the radical youth in the 1860s, may seem something of a misnomer to us, at least when applied to Pisarev, nihilism's leading spokesman. For the radicals of the late 1850s and the 1860s, far from believing in literally nothing, placed great faith in science as a key to the world and a panacea for its problems. And yet destruction was indeed the essential first stage of their mission to remake the world: they wished first, as Turgenev's Bazarov again felicitously put it, 'to clear the ground'. 'Nihilism' therefore remains a convenient term with which to describe the outcome of the intellectual rebellion that had begun towards the end of the Crimean War with Chernyshevsky's ponderous dissertation on aesthetics and which culminated a decade later with an iconoclasm that shocked more moderate opponents of the regime, as well as the regime's supporters, and lent impetus to the revolutionary movement.

It should be added, finally, that the leaders of the intellectual revolt of the late 1850s and the 1860s not only used the arts as material for their publicism but also in turn had a profound effect on imaginative literature, painting and music. Writers, painters and musicians all heededed the demands of Chernyshevsky, Dobroliubov, Pisarev and their supporters for topical subject matter, 'denunciatory' treatment of established institutions and privileged classes, sympathetic attention to the plight of the masses and a realistic artistic manner. Thus many writers – for example Levitov, Reshetnikov, Sleptsov and Nikolai Uspensky – now offered naturalistic sketches of peasant life, descriptions of the hardship of the nascent proletariat, and portrayals of 'positive' heroes and heroines unencumbered by the values of the nobility and capable of translating convictions into action. There also appeared a school of artists, including Kramskoi, Miasojedov, Perov,
Repin, Surikov and Vereshchagin, who rejected the seemingly artificial classicism promoted by the Russian Academy, with its fondness for alien or mythological subject-matter, in favour of a more literal art depicting subjects of national and topical relevance. These painters came to be known as the peredvizhniki (or ‘Wanderers’ as they are sometimes called in English) on account of their practice of moving exhibitions of their painting from place to place with a view to taking their art beyond the galleries frequented by the wealthy urban classes and making it more widely accessible. They too looked on art as a vehicle for expressing civic ideals and dwelt on social injustice and inequality, as well as painting simple Russian landscapes and scenes from Russian history. In music a similar function was performed by a group of composers known as ‘The Five’ or the ‘mighty handful’ (moguchiaia kuchka) and comprising Balakirev, Borodin, Cui, Mussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov. Building on foundations laid by Glinka and Dargomyzhsky, and guided by the critic Stasov, an enthusiastic interpreter of the ideas of Chernyshevsky, these composers rebelled against the seeming artificiality of the Italianate opera popular in the first half of the nineteenth century, insisted on the use of music to tell a story, freely introduced folk songs and motifs into their works and – most notably in Mussorgsky’s Boris Godunov – treated the Russian peasant mass as a mighty historical force.

SEDITIOUS LITERATURE AND REVOLUTIONARY GROUPS IN THE 1860s

The radical intelligentsia had conducted itself with some caution while the abolition of serfdom was being prepared. However, once the emancipation edict was promulgated in February 1861 the radical wing of the intelligentsia was dismayed by what seemed the inadequacy of the measure and quickly became more belligerent. The new mood found expression in a spate of subversive leaflets. The authors of the first such leaflet, entitled ‘The Great Russian’, copies of which were scattered in St Petersburg and Moscow in July 1861, appealed to the educated classes to relieve the incompetent government of its power. A second issue of the leaflet, which was distributed in September 1861, contained a demand for a better solution to the peasant question, the liberation of Poland and a constitution. A third issue of the leaflet, which appeared later in the same month, predicted that popular rebellion would break out in 1863 if the demands previously made were not met. In a more militant proclamation, addressed ‘To the Young Generation’ by Mikhailov and Shelgunov and printed on Herzen’s press in London, the young were urged to explain the evils of the tsarist order to the people and the troops and the prospect of revolutionary violence was countenanced with equanimity. Copies of a further and still more bellicose proclamation, entitled ‘Young Russia’ and written in prison by a former student, Zaichnevsky, were scattered in St Petersburg and Moscow in May 1862. Zaichnevsky criticized Herzen for expressing the naive hope that socialism might be introduced by peaceful means in Russia, predicted a ‘bloody and implacable’ revolution which would demolish the ‘foundations of contemporary society’ and summoned the youth to take up their axes and ‘beat the imperial party without pity’ [Doc. 15].

The period following the emancipation was also marked by student disturbances which broke out in St Petersburg in September 1861 in protest against the plans of the new Minister of Education – Putatin, a former admiral – for a stricter regime in the institution. In the spring of 1862 tension was further heightened by a series of fires which badly damaged certain quarters of St Petersburg. The cause of the fires was not reliably established but conservatives fanned the widespread suspicion that radicals had started them. Taken together the seditious leaflets, student unrest and suspected arson caused public alarm and began to weaken enthusiasm for reform. The beginning of the end of the period of freedom that had followed the Crimean War was marked by the arrest in 1862 of numerous people suspected of political offences, including Chernyshevsky, and by the brutal suppression of the Polish Revolt in 1863.

It was in this climate that the first revolutionary circles began to appear. In 1861–62 Serno-Solovevich led a group calling itself Land and Liberty which set up a lending library of illegal literature in St Petersburg and issued a paper [129 ch. 10]. In 1865 Ishutin, a Moscow student, founded a group named The Organization, which dreamed of an insurrection and established a link with a group in St Petersburg led by Khudiakov. From the periphery of Ishutin’s organization, perhaps from a section of it melodramatically named ‘Hell’, a student Karakozov came forward in 1866 to attempt to assassinate Alexander. (The attempt was unsuccessful and Karakozov was duly hanged [129 ch. 14].) The enthusiasm of the government for reform declined. The Contemporary was closed in 1866. The mood among the young in the country’s higher educational institutions became more fevered; many began to look forward to a peasant uprising or other apocalyptic event in the near future.

In the academic year 1868–69 disorders again broke out in the higher educational institutions of St Petersburg and Moscow. The
unrest was now harnessed by Nechaev, a beguiling young artisan from the provincial textile-manufacturing town of Ivanovo. Nechaev succeeded in organizing a number of circles in St Petersburg before disappearing in March 1869 and fleeing to Geneva, where he won the confidence of the gullible Bakunin and of Ogariov, now enfeebled by infirmity and alcohol. Together with these émigrés Nechaev generated a further torrent of proclamations, written in a vengeful spirit and millenarian tone, hundreds of copies of which were posted to Russia from abroad during the spring and summer of 1869. In August that year Nechaev returned to Russia, armed with a melodramatic document signed by Bakunin and bearing the seal of a ‘European Revolutionary Alliance’, of which Nechaev was supposed to be a member, and in Moscow he again set about organizing student circles, now under the banner of a ‘Committee of the People’s Revenge’ [128].

Nechaev’s subsequent notoriety stems mainly from two sources: firstly, a document known as ‘The Catechism of a Revolutionary’, which he probably wrote in Switzerland together with Bakunin in the summer of 1869, and, secondly, a murder which he orchestrated and helped to carry out in November that year. The ‘Catechism’ is infamous for its espousal of the Machiavellian principle that the end justifies the means. In particular the ‘Catechism’ made it clear that the goal of revolution in Russia was of such overriding importance that any tactic that might promote it, including deception, extortion, blackmail, theft and even murder, would be legitimate. From the pages of the ‘Catechism’, which was read out at the trial of Nechaev’s co-conspirators, the so-called Nechaevtsy, in July 1871, there emerged a picture of the revolutionary as a ruthless, self-abnegating figure who placed no value on human life, viewed all fellow humans as instruments to be used in the execution of the revolutionary master-plan, and whose personal wants and feelings have been wholly subordinated to the exigencies of the revolutionary struggle [Doc. 16]. The ruthlessness advocated in the ‘Catechism’ Nechaev himself put into practice in the murder of the student Ivanov, who was evidently less pliable than the other members of Nechaev’s cell and whom Nechaev accused of planning to betray his organization. Ivanov was lured to a grotto in the grounds of the Agricultural Academy in Moscow and there he was pinned down by other members of the group while Nechaev beat and strangled him and finally shot him in the head. His body, weighted with bricks, was thrown through a hole which Nechaev had made in the ice on a nearby pond [128; 129 ch. 15].

Ivanov’s body was discovered a few days after his murder and arrests and confessions shortly followed. Nechaev himself again fled the country but was arrested in Switzerland and extradited to Russia in 1872, tried in January 1873 and incarcerated in the Peter and Paul Fortress in St Petersburg, where he died in 1882. The Nechaevan episode in the Russian revolutionary movement, to which the trials of the Nechaevtsy and of Nechaev himself gave widespread publicity, understandably caused alarm in official circles and agitated public opinion. For Dostoevsky – whose novel The Devils, with its moral and social chaos and its apocalyptic imagery, grows out of precisely these historical events and the intellectual revolt and rifts in the intelligentsia that had preceded them – Nechaev seemed indicative of the nation’s catastrophic loss of bearings. However, it is equally important, when considering the history of opposition to autocracy, to note that the nechaevtsy also caused revulsion within the socialist camp itself and marked the end, for the time being at least, of a cynical, manipulative and authoritarian attitude to revolutionary activity. The revolutionary activists of the 1870s were to be influenced by leaders of altogether different moral complexion and political persuasion, some of whose most influential works were appearing in precisely those years, 1868–69, in which Nechaev himself was active.
6 THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT IN THE 1870s

RADICAL LITERATURE AND THOUGHT, 1868-73

The years from about 1868-1873, like those following the Crimean War, represented another period of heightened intellectual and cultural activity in Russia. However, whereas in the earlier period revolt had taken the form mainly of rejection of old values, now a powerful, or seemingly powerful, revolutionary movement began to develop.

Two strands apparent in the late 1850s and early 1860s – firstly, interest in the popular masses and, secondly, interest in the development of the active new representative of the intelligentsia – again combined, following the intellectual iconoclasm of the 1860s, to prepare the ground for this movement. Mordovtsev surveyed the great peasant rebellions of Russian history (1870-71) and the ethnographer Maksimov produced popular sketches of peasant life (1871). The revolutionary hero depicted in Chernyshevsky’s What is to be done? [7] is reincarnated, in a sense, in Sokolov’s popular work Renegades (1866, republished 1872) in which the Stoics, early Christians, sectarians, utopians and socialists are all presented as beings of superior moral calibre who have chosen to live outside the imperfect societies into which they have been born. He or she reappears, often as a pilgrim to or propagandist among the people, in a further spate of works – Bazhin’s History of an Association (1869), Mordovtsev’s Signs of the Times (1869), Omulevsky’s Step by Step (1870) and Kushchevsky’s Nikolai Negorev, or a Successful Russian (1871) – published in those years when interest in the masses was reaching a new height. In place of the now defunct Contemporary the journal Notes of the Fatherland, taken over by Nekrasov, Saltykov and Mikhailovsky, began to serve as the main mouthpiece for the radical intelligentsia. A number of thinkers now came forward to weave various threads – beliefs long since articulated about the Russian peasant and the peasant commune; a keenly felt need for distinctive national identity; the thirst for positive action and self-sacrifice; distaste for capitalism – into a more or less coherent, if fanciful, revolutionary strategy which for the sake of convenience we shall label Populism.

The least known of these thinkers but arguably the one who best captured the spirit of the time was Bervi, who wrote under the pseudonym Flersovsky. Bervi was an eccentric, ascetic man of Scottish ancestry who, it seems, represented to Tolstoy a rather uncomfortable example of the ‘simplified’ intellectual that Tolstoy himself aspired to be. He spent much of his life in voluntary or enforced wanderings around Russia and on the basis of this experience and of his researches wrote an influential work entitled The Condition of the Working Class in Russia (1869) which belongs to the same loose genre of travelogue as Radishchev’s Journey from St Petersburg to Moscow. Adducing copious visual and documentary evidence from his odyssey from the frozen tundra of the north to the arid deserts of the south, from the endless Siberian taiga to Russia’s agricultural heartlands and inchoate industrial centres, Bervi set out to demonstrate, pace Engels (against whose Condition of the Working Class in England he implicitly pitches his own work), that the existence of the Russian masses is uniquely wretched. At bottom The Condition of the Working Class in Russia is an expression of moral outrage at the plight of the peasants and workers in the immediate post-reform period, but like Radishchev’s earlier work it combines indignation with fashionable rational argument. For Bervi is a precise observer of the way of life of the people (a fact which makes his book a useful historical source) and he deploys the then developing tool of statistical analysis, which imparts a scientific quality to his work. Bervi helped to fix in the consciousness of the revolutionary youth respect and an almost religious compassion for the suffering Russian masses. He also re-articulated the beliefs, expressed two decades earlier by Herzen and fundamental to Russian Populism, that the Russian people were peculiarly socialist in nature, that their commune represented an embryonic socialist institution, and that Russia was not bound to follow the same path of economic and social development as that taken by the West but might come to socialism by a different route. The popularity of Bervi’s cocktail of outrage and compassion, documentary evidence and Rousseau-esque nationalism is attested by the frequent reference to it both by the police, who uncovered many copies of it in caches of reading matter used by revolutionary groups, and by revolutionaries themselves who in their memoirs recalled its influence on them [20 pp. 233-8; 115].

Besides cultivating sympathy for the common people and repeating the views on national distinctiveness on which revolutionary strategy
in the 1870s was to rest, radical thinkers of the late 1860s were compelled also to challenge the deterministic position, or 'fatalism' as Lavrov had called it, that Chernyshevsky had adopted, at least in 'The Anthropological Principle in Philosophy'. This they needed to do in order to give the aspiring revolutionary a theoretical basis for freedom of action. This task was addressed by Mikhailovsky, in his long essay 'What is Progress?' (1869). Mikhailovsky argued that the objective point of view obligatory in the natural sciences was inappropriate in sociology in which humans were the subject of study as well as the students. Sociologists could only arrive at the truth, Mikhailovsky contended, if they put themselves in the position of the sentient beings they were examining, thinking their thoughts and suffering their sufferings. While not wishing altogether to abolish the objective method, then, Mikhailovsky did demand that the subjective method serve as a 'higher control' [123].

LAVROV

A similar function to that of Mikhailovsky's essay 'What is Progress?' was performed by the single most important work of this period, from the point of view of the emergent generation of revolutionaries, Lavrov's *Historical Letters*, which were published in serial form in 1868–69 and appeared in a separate volume in 1870 [19]. In fact the *Historical Letters* restate views put by Lavrov in less accessible works written in the late 1850s and early 1860s about the need for ideals and the obligation to put them into practice. Having sought to establish in his first two letters that history was no less important a field of enquiry than the natural sciences and that a subjective method was inevitable and legitimate in it, Lavrov made a celebrated appeal to the intelligentsia, in his fourth letter, to pursue the ideal of social justice. Playing on the ambiguity of the Russian word *dolg*, which has the sense of both 'debt' and 'duty', Lavrov argued here that the members of the intelligentsia had incurred an enormous debt to the toiling mass of mankind for the privileged conditions that had enabled them to formulate their ideals. This debt Lavrov translated into a duty incumbent on the 'critically thinking minority' to renounce their privilege by putting the socialist ideal into practice [Doc. 17] [20 pp. 261–8]. No excuses for inaction would be tolerated: neither scholarly work divorced from society's pressing needs nor any fears about the possible futility of heroic deeds by solitary individuals would relieve the critically thinking minority of this obligation. Thus the *Historical Letters* place Lavrov in the tradition of the 'repentant nobleman' who, like Radishchev eighty years before, had pleaded with his fellows to go with humility to the peasant hut in search of reconciliation and personal salvation.

Lavrov shortly attempted to give substance to his plea that ideals be translated into action by outlining a revolutionary strategy and taking practical steps to assist its implementation. In 1870 he escaped, with the assistance of a young revolutionary sympathizer named Lopatin, from internal exile in the then remote provincial town of Vologda and travelled to Switzerland, where many Russian students were congregating and where he assumed the role of one of the émigré leaders of the developing revolutionary movement. In the pages of a journal *Forward!* (Vpered!) which he edited first in Zurich and then in London in the period 1873–77, Lavrov urged the idealistic youth to go to the peasantry — for it was not from the towns but from the villages that the Russian revolution would come — and to inculcate in them the socialist consciousness of which the educated minority had become aware. In common with most revolutionaries of this period Lavrov believed that the Russian peasant possessed the energy and purity needed for this task, that the indigenous practice of communal landholding provided the ground on which socialism might be built in Russia, and that the village assembly, or *mir*, might become the basic political element of the society of the future. When this goal had been achieved the revolutionaries would retire into the background, for the peasants themselves, once converted to socialism, would, it was fondly hoped, implement the necessary changes from below. Indeed it seemed to Lavrov essential that the revolution's prospective beneficiaries, the people, carry out the reconstruction of society themselves: wherever 'consciousness' had been imposed on the masses by an alien minority a new breed of exploiters had come to power over the bodies of those who had built the barricades [Doc. 18].

It should be emphasized that such a revolution was conceived by Lavrov — as by Bakunin and the majority of Russian revolutionaries in the 1870s — as economic and social rather than political. That is to say Lavrov expected a new social order to come into being as a result of the transfer of the means of production from the privileged minority to the masses rather than as a result of a transfer of administrative power to a new government or institutions. Like early West European socialists such as Fourier and Robert Owen he was sceptical of the value of political machinations and he shared the view of anarchist compatriots such as Kropotkin and Tolstoy that political power had a corruptive influence on those who wielded it.
The task of persuading the masses to carry out economic and social revolution was urgent, since Russia's progress to a socialism based on its distinctive peasant commune could be jeopardized by the further development of capitalism. Under a limited constitutional monarchy, Lavrov surmised, the Russian bourgeoisie, which at present had no traditions or unity, would grow stronger and the masses would be correspondingly weakened. And yet the means by which the intelligentsia was advised to achieve this objective were ponderous. For Lavrov's strategy gave priority to propaganda over agitation: the revolutionary, he believed, should not attempt to stir up emotions by dwelling on local grievances or particular instances of injustice but should appeal instead to reason by comprehensively explaining the source of the country's ills. To that end the propagandist might have to draw on encyclopaedic knowledge of history, social movements, political theory and even the natural sciences and medicine. However, such protracted self-preparation for propagandistic activity, as Lavrov himself described the task in an article 'Knowledge and Revolution' which was published in Forward! in 1873, implied a gradualism that was unattractive to the movement's more impatient spirits [20 pp. 270–7]. For them the teachings of Bakunin, who although he was by now an exile like Lavrov enjoyed greater popularity in Russia in the last years of his life than ever before, proved more congenial [127; 129 cb. 17].

BAKUNIN

Bakunin, by the 1870s, had long since played a prominent role in European revolutionary politics. In 1842 he had famously concluded his first essay in revolutionary thought, written in Germany under the influence of the radical 'Young Hegelians', with the dictum that the 'passion for destruction is a creative passion' [2 p. 58]. In the following years he mixed in France with French and German socialists, including Proudhon and Marx, and with Polish émigrés whose cause of national liberation he supported. He was a participant, in 1848–49, in revolutionary events in Paris and Prague and in an insurrection in Dresden, where he was arrested and whence he was handed over to the Austrian authorities. In 1851 he was extradited to Russia and incarcerated in the Peter and Paul Fortress in St Petersburg. There he wrote a notorious Confession, which combined expressions of repentance, appeals for clemency and a mélangé characteristic of him, of Slav patriotism and Germanophobia. In 1857 he was released to live in Siberia, from which he escaped in 1861. He now travelled, via Japan and the United States, to Britain, where he was reunited with Herzen, with whom, however, relations shortly deteriorated for political and financial reasons. After a brief stay in Sweden, followed by four years in Italy, he settled in Switzerland and there he continued to attract an international circle of followers and to hatch revolutionary plots until his death in 1876.

While Lavrov affected the revolutionary youth through his appeals to its conscience, Bakunin stirred it by the intrinsic rebelliousness of his thought, by his glorification of revolt and by his personal example as a revolutionary veteran of international renown. For Bakunin, by the end of his life, had established himself as one of the major representatives of anarchism, a doctrine which rejects the state, with its apparatus of army, bureaucracy, laws, judiciary and socially binding institutions such as the Church and the family and which necessarily rests – given its assumption that people are capable of living in harmony without such external coercive apparatus – on a view of human nature as essentially good. Bakunin's anarchism – which is of a very different character to that of Tolstoy (see pp. 85–8) – took clear form during the last years of his life, following his escape from Russia and his rift with Herzen. Although his writings are for the most part as fragmentary and as adversely affected by his want of organizational ability as are the numerous networks he seems to have attempted to create, his late work Statism and Anarchy (1873) [3] does clearly reflect this hostility to the state in all its forms. He here condemns the theocratic state, the bourgeois state, the autocratic state (as exemplified by tsarist Russia, whose corrupt, authoritarian administration, headed by representatives of a Germanic dynasty, Bakunin was fond of contrasting with the simple, free-spirited Russian people), and even the prospective socialist state (as represented by the dictatorship of the proletariat envisaged by Marx and Engels). This antipathy to authoritarian socialism brought Bakunin, by the end of the 1860s, into destructive conflict with the no less wilful Marx, who contrived to have Bakunin and his libertarian followers expelled from The First International Working Men's Association, which had been founded in 1864, at the organization's congress at The Hague in 1872.

As an anarchist Bakunin could agree with Lavrov that Russian revolutionaries should seek to change society not from above, by the establishment of a revolutionary state and creation of new political institutions, but by helping the people to introduce their own forms of association from below. Like Lavrov he too urged the intelligentsia to move closer to the masses; indeed he suggested that it was the destiny of the intelligentsia now to merge with the masses and to live for
them. However, the ultimate object of going to the people, as Bakunin envisaged it, was very different from that conceived by Lavrov. For the masses, as Bakunin perceived them, were not a blank sheet of paper, some tabula rasa on which the members of the intelligentsia could inscribe their own favourite thoughts. In a pamphlet of 1862, in which he had contrasted the political order, or lack of it, associated with the Romanov tsars, the leader of peasant revolt Pugachov (see p. 5) and the authoritarian Decembrist Pestel (see pp. 16–19), Bakunin spoke of the Russian people as having untainted ideals of their own: free of the religious, political, legal and social prejudices ingrained in the West and embodied in Western law, the Russian common people would create a new civilization. The task of the intelligentsia should therefore be merely to help the people to express their will, to realize the ideals they had always had but of which they were perhaps not fully aware. This broad strategy found its definitive expression in an appendix to Statism and Anarchy, which was very widely circulated among Russian revolutionaries in the 1870s. Since the intelligentsia was unable to teach the masses anything of use, Bakunin argued here in opposition to Lavrov, there was no point in opening ‘sociological faculties in the countryside’: the peasant would not understand the propagandist and in any case the government would not allow the propagandist to operate. And yet conditions were not unpropitious for revolution. The common people did possess a tripartite socialist and anarchist ideal upon which social revolution could be based. The prime purpose of revolutionaries who went to the countryside should be to break down obstacles to full implementation of this ideal [Doc. 19] [3 pp. 198–217; 20 pp. 278–85]. The revolutionaries should conduct not propaganda but agitation with a view to fomenting a peasant revolt of the sort to which the Russian people were always prone, as demonstrated, Bakunin believed, by the uprisings of Stenka Razin and Pugachov and even by a proclivity to brigandage which Bakunin admired [110; 124; 129 ch. 17; 131 ch. 6].

Tkachov

There is one further revolutionary strategist, Tkachov, who must be examined at this point, although he had little perceivable influence on the revolutionary movement during the 1870s. For Tkachov put forward a strategy that contrasts markedly with those of Lavrov and Bakunin and seems in the light of the revolutionary events of the 1870s, when those strategies were tested, to take more account than theirs of Russian reality. Moreover, Tkachov’s thought is often held to prefigure, perhaps even to influence, the strategy later adopted by Lenin. Arrested and sentenced to internal exile for his part in the student disorders of 1868–69, Tkachov escaped abroad in 1873 and settled in Switzerland, where he set up a revolutionary journal of his own, The Tocsin (Nabat), twenty numbers of which came out between 1875 and 1881.

On one level Tkachov endorsed the Chernyshevskian determinism from which the so-called ‘subjective sociologists’ Lavrov and Mikhailovsky had taken pains to free radical thought. Tkachov followed Marx – he was one of the first Russian thinkers to make an approving reference to the German socialist – in asserting that people and their culture were shaped by environment, and in particular by economic conditions, and in denying that ideas in themselves had much effect on historical development. And yet at the same time he doubted whether history was governed by laws as rigid as those of the natural sciences, acknowledged the existence in humans of a critical faculty that enhanced their capacity to effect social change, and conceded that a small minority of people might be spurred to action by moral ideals. These deterministic and voluntarist tendencies co-exist uneasily in a review published in 1868 of a book dealing with peasant movements in sixteenth-century Germany. Economic ‘principles’ governed social orders and it was not possible to disrupt their logical development, Tkachov argued here in his deterministic vein; consequently one could not accomplish far-reaching social change by quickening or slowing the operation of that principle. It might be possible, on the other hand, entirely to alter the governing principle of a society, to replace it with a new one, to accomplish a ‘historical leap’ from one social order to another.

Tkachov agreed with Lavrov and Bakunin that in the 1870s the conditions for revolution in Russia were favourable but might quickly become less so. The Russian state, unlike its Western counterparts, did not represent the interests of any social class and had no foundations or support in the Russian social structure, he claimed in an ‘open letter’ addressed to Engels in 1871; it merely ‘hung in the air’. Thus although at a distance it gave an impression of might, the state was so weak, Tkachov believed, that it could easily be overthrown. However, capitalism was developing in the wake of the emancipation of the serfs, and as a powerful, conservative class of peasant landowners and farmers and a commercial and entrepreneurial bourgeoisie came into being so the prospect of revolution would fade. Revolutionaries could therefore not afford to wait. ‘Now or not at all
quickly, perhaps *never!* Tkachov warned impatiently, though as a slogan the warning was somehow lacking. It was time to call the revolutionary intelligentsia to action, as the title of Tkachov’s journal, invoking the bell rung to summon people in an emergency, was intended to imply.

On the other hand Tkachov was sharply distinguished from the bulk of his contemporaries in the revolutionary movement by his unflattering view of the Russian peasantry. While he did not deny that an oppressed mass was always ‘ready’ for revolution, he strongly disagreed with Bakunin’s optimistic view of the peasant’s nature. To Tkachov the peasantry was a passive, conservative force: its age-old slavery and harsh environment had deprived it of rebelliousness and energy. Thus Tkachov compared the peasants to a snail which has withdrawn defensively into its shell and described them – in a phrase that seemed to echo Hobbes’s famous view of human life in the state of nature as ‘nasty, brutish and short’ – as ‘coarse, savage and brutal’ and bound to remain so as long as they dwelt in poverty.

It followed from this view of the masses as inert and lacking in a socialist ideal of their own that one could not expect the revolution to be carried out from below by the people themselves and that revolutionaries should not squander time and resources on fruitless propaganda or agitation among the peasantry. The responsibility for initiating and executing revolutionary change lay entirely with a minority from within the intelligentsia. Tkachov therefore developed a strategy known as ‘Jacobinism’, after the faction led by Robespierre and responsible for the revolutionary dictatorship and terror in France in 1793–94, or ‘Blanquism’, after the later nineteenth-century French insurrectionist and organizer of secret revolutionary societies, Auguste Blanqui. While the revolutionary minority should not omit to foment the discontent that was ever-present among the masses, its main purpose, according to Tkachov and his small number of followers, would be to seize political power itself, and then to exercise that power in order to re-educate the masses and implement the necessary political, economic and social reforms from above [Doc. 20]. In order to carry out a *coup d’état* the revolutionary minority would have to bring to their ranks a degree of discipline and organization of which the freedom-loving majority of Russian revolutionaries in the early 1870s seemed temperamentally and ideologically incapable. Tkachov thus advocated the creation of a centralized, hierarchical organization with strict rules which would have the will, single-mindedness, resolve and discipline to act like a military force. He commended the conspiratorial organizations of Ishutin and Nechaev, unsavoury as they might seem in the 1870s, and the pragmatic Machiavellian morality associated with these organizations: his revolutionary minority, convinced of the rectitude of their cause, would not be squeamish in their choice of methods but would approve or disapprove of actions in proportion as they helped or hindered attainment of their goal [126; 129 ch. 16; 130].

THE ‘GOING TO THE PEOPLE’

At the beginning of the 1870s a further network of socialist circles sprang up in various higher educational institutions, notably in St Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev and Odessa. Collectively the members of these circles were known as the Chaikovtsy, after one of their leading members Chaikovsky, although the name is somewhat misleading, since Chaikovsky was not in the first instance the principal organizer of the network (Natanson played that role) and did not remain at its centre throughout the period during which it was active. The future anarchist Kropotkin also played an important part in this group, writing its lengthy programmatic document. The Chaikovtsy attached great importance to the collection of a broad range of printed matter – for example, the writings of socialist thinkers, both Russian and foreign; works of history and sociology; appropriate imaginative literature – that might aid the revolutionary intending to conduct propaganda among the people. Such literature would both help prospective propagandists to prepare themselves, as Lavrov advised in his article ‘Knowledge and Revolution’, and serve as material for reading and discussion with the masses. The Chaikovtsy also began, in 1871, to carry out discreet propaganda among the factory workers in St Petersburg and continued this ground-breaking activity relatively unimpeded by the police – perhaps because, being novel, it was undetected by them – until arrests began to decimate the group in 1873. The Chaikovtsy deplored the cynical Nechaevan approach to revolutionary activity. They also eschewed the hierarchical, strictly disciplined model of revolutionary organization associated with Nechaev. They favoured instead loose, informal associations of the sort which Chernyshevsky envisaged in *What is to be done?* and which many groups of young men and women had tried to establish in practice in the 1860s, associations bound together only by the mutual respect and trust of their members. They thus reflected a view of the socialist circle as not so much a clandestine political society but rather ‘a family of men and women’, as Kropotkin described it nostalgically in his memoirs, ‘closely united by their common object’ [18 ii, p. 107].
(This charmingly ingenious view of the socialist circle in the infancy of the revolutionary movement may be compared to the similarly sanguine view of science held by Chernyshhevsky and others who, carried away by the rapid advances in scientific knowledge in the first half of the nineteenth century, seemed not to glimpse the possibility that science could be put to malign as well as benign use.)

The Russian revolutionaries of the early 1870s naturally drew inspiration from the works of Bervi, Lavrov and Bakunin (see pp. 67-72). With their sense of idealism, their respect for the Russian common people, their yearning for action and their optimistic conviction that circumstances were ripe for revolution or that peasant revolt was imminent, these works were in harmony with the mood of young men and women who conceived of themselves, as the Chaikovsky did, as belonging to a knightly order and preparing to perform a social miracle. Moreover, young Russian socialists had before them a contemporary example of revolutionary action, namely the so-called ‘Paris Commune’. This republican insurrection, which broke out on 18 March 1871 (NS), in the wake of France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, and lasted until 28 May, etched itself in the minds of Russian revolutionaries as an instance of heroic proletarian resistance brutally repressed by the bourgeoisie. In these circumstances the urge on the part of a large section of the student youth to forge a close relationship with the masses became irresistible and in the spring of 1874 the scattered attempts already made to conduct propaganda among urban workers and even among the peasantry gave way to a far more ambitious adventure, a ‘going to the people’ of the sort that radical thinkers such as Herzen and Bakunin had long been advocating. Some 2,000 young men and women now abandoned the major cities and descended on factories and villages throughout European Russia. They took jobs, if they could acquire them, as teachers, clerks, doctors, midwives, carpenters, joiners, dyers, cobblers or farm labourers and used the access to the common people which such jobs afforded them to try to acquaint the people with socialist teachings, to stir up popular resentment at the shortage of land available to the peasants or at the heavy burden of taxation which they bore, or to teach them revolutionary songs, or simply to engage them in conversation [129 ch. 18].

The ‘going to the people’ had the character almost of a religious movement; indeed participants compared themselves to the first Christians, who had renounced the world in which they lived and dedicated themselves to the struggle with evil. For the ‘going to the people’ satisfied the thirst for self-sacrifice and spiritual exploit that is so pronounced in Russian thought and that perhaps reflects a search for new secular channels of self-expression now that the Orthodox Church was discredited through its association with the autocratic order. And yet this idealism, in the absence of any political experience or organizational framework, could not undermine the regime. The propagandists ranged widely, appearing, it seems, in thirty-seven provinces. However, they had no co-ordinated plan or agreed message, selected their destinations more or less at random, had no means – given the vastness of the country and its primitive system of transportation – of rapidly communicating with their fellows, and often stayed in a location too briefly to have a significant impact on the peasants living in it. In any case the idealism of the revolutionary youth seems not to have been understood or valued by its intended beneficiaries. Sometimes the revolutionaries’ criticisms of the local landowners, kulaks, officials and clergy – that is to say the most apparent representatives or supporters of the system that exploited them – were well received. And yet it is clear from their own memoirs (as well as from official documents in which the loyalty of the tsar’s subjects might have been exaggerated) that powerful forces – ignorance, prejudice, superstition, gullibility, susceptibility to rumour, self-deprecation, servility, fatalistic indifference, deep-rooted conservatism, in fact the forces of whose existence Tkachov had forewarned his generation of revolutionaries – hindered the realization of revolutionary ambitions. The peasants continued to cling to their religious faith and remained confident that the autocrat himself, the paternalistic ‘little father’ (batiushka), would aid them if only he were aware of their plight, which was concealed from him by the landowners and officials. The propagandists’ attempts to win the trust of the people by adopting the dress and demeanour of the peasants and workers, their carefully contrived unkemptness, shabby clothing and demotic coiffure in fact tended to excite suspicion or derision. Their mission proved dangerous as well as frustrating: by the autumn of 1874 some 1,600 of them had been arrested, sometimes with the peasants’ assistance or following denunciations of them by the peasants themselves. Many of those arrested, less a few who died in detention, were publicly tried at the so-called ‘trial of the 193’ held from October 1877 to January 1878 by means of which the authorities hoped to shame the revolutionaries and turn the public against them. Most of the remainder of those propagandists and agitators who had set off for the countryside with such high hopes in the spring of 1874 returned in the autumn to the cities whence they had come, and there they reflected on the reasons for the failure of the ‘going to the people’ and began to test new tactics.
LAND AND LIBERTY

Despite the abject failure of the 'going to the people' it was force of circumstance rather than conscious adaptation of revolutionary theory that dictated modifications of revolutionary practice in the second half of the 1870s. Towards the end of 1876 the nucleus of a new organization, Land and Liberty, began to emerge in St Petersburg. Land and Liberty remained faithful to fundamental Bakuninist principles. It was reaffirmed, for example, that the Russian people were socialist in character; that the revolutionary organization should give expression to the ideals of the people themselves; that capitalism might be bypassed in Russia; that the Russian revolution, unlike revolutions in the West, would emanate from the countryside; and that the model for the Russian revolution had been provided by the leaders of the great peasant rebellions. Faith in the revolutionary potential of the peasant was undiminished and the blame for the débâcle of 1874 was attributed more to the arrogant intention of the intelligentsia to inculcate their own ideal on the peasantry and to their supposed inability to speak to the peasant in a comprehensible way than to any shortcomings on the part of the peasants themselves.

Consequently revolutionaries again went to the people in the spring of 1878, although they did now attempt to settle in the countryside rather than flit from one village or region to another. They also concentrated their efforts to a greater extent on the Volga region, which they identified as the cradle of the great peasant rebellions of the past and the modern refuge of many communities of Old Believers, the schismatics who sought freedom from government persecution for their religious heterodoxy. In 1877 Bakuninist agitators led by Stefanovich and Deich did enjoy a partial success when at Chigirin in the Ukraine they set about preparing a peasant force for an armed uprising by the ruse of distributing false manifestos, purporting to emanate from the tsar, in which the peasants were urged to revolt against the landowners. Hundreds had been recruited to the cause before the conspiracy was exposed by a drunken peasant. Elsewhere the buntari, as the Bakuninist agitators were known, had no more success in stirring the Russian peasantry than the propagandists and agitators of 1874.

While continuing to adhere to old theoretical premises and to pursue a more or less familiar strategy, Land and Liberty did make important organizational innovations which took account of the absence of political freedom and the pervasiveness of surveillance in Russia and which entitle one to describe it as the first Russian revolutionary party. As a result of the efforts of two of its members, Oboleshev and in particular Mikhailov, Land and Liberty was moulded into a centralized and disciplined secret society in which the individual was subordinated to the circle and each circle was subordinated to a sovereign centre with power to order individuals to carry out assignments. It was now explicitly accepted that the end justified the means and even that any member of the organization discovered to have betrayed its secrets would be killed.

Land and Liberty was responsible for tactical as well as organizational innovations. Revolutionaries began to turn their attention to forms of activity that had not seemed to have much significance within the strategic framework of preparing the peasantry for social revolution. They resorted to various forms of agitation to advertise their grievances, broaden their support and deepen discontent. They associated themselves, for example, with the renewed student disturbances in the higher educational institutions in the winter of 1877-78. They mounted demonstrations such as a gathering outside the Kazan Cathedral on Nevsky Prospekt in St Petersburg in December 1876 to honour the memory of political prisoners who had died in exile. They established clandestine printing presses inside Russia and produced numerous proclamations, appeals, leaflets, and five numbers of a substantial revolutionary journal bearing the name of their party. Some members, particularly Plekhanov, continued in the footsteps of the Chaikovtsy, conducting propaganda in small circles in most of the industrial quarters of St Petersburg, where they found their audience more receptive than the peasantry to their message. Their growing interest in the urban workers - who were viewed as a relatively accessible extension of the peasantry rather than as a distinct proletarian class - was indicated by the amount of space devoted to the labour movement in their publications in 1878-79. They also benefited from the public sympathy generated, contrary to the hopes of the government, by the 'trial of the 193' and by the slightly earlier trial, in February and March 1877, of the members of a Pan-Russian Social-Revolutionary Organization, more informally known as the Muscovites, a combination of Russian noblewomen, Georgian socialists and Russian workers who had established a network of circles in Moscow and other towns of the industrial heartland in 1875-76. The 'trial of the 193' and the 'trial of the 50', as the trial of the Muscovites was known, were notable for the severity of the sentences - up to ten years of penal servitude for peaceful propaganda - and the selfless idealism of the defendants, whose speeches, subsequently printed on clandestine presses and widely circulated, themselves constituted a further successful form of revolutionary agitation. Besides student disturbances, demonstrations, the production of seditious literature,
propaganda in the factories, and court-room oratory, revolutionaries also developed a growing attachment in the second half of the 1870s to terrorism. This 'disorganizational activity', as the programme of Land and Liberty coyly described it, developed in rather a spontaneous way. The violence began in 1876 in Odessa with the shooting of a police agent who was left for dead, his face disfigured by sulphuric acid. In January 1878 Vera Zasulich shot and wounded General Treptov, the governor of St Petersburg (this act aroused widespread public support and Zasulich was acquitted by a jury). In the same month, in Odessa, Kovalsky set a precedent by putting up armed resistance to arrest. In February Osinsky and others attempted to kill a public prosecutor in Kiev. In May, also in Kiev, Popko killed a secret police officer. In August Khravinsky stabbed to death the head of the secret police in St Petersburg in broad daylight. In February 1879 Goldenberg fatally wounded the governor of Kharkov, who happened to be a cousin of the anarchist revolutionary Kropotkin.

The revolutionary violence was in the first instance directed at individuals such as informers and police officers who threatened the safety of the revolutionaries or at those responsible for their prosecution and punishment. It quickly gained momentum as each side, authorities and revolutionaries, carried out reprisals for the attacks against it. For revolutionaries frustrated by the impasse of the peasantry it no doubt gave the illusion of decisive action. The sudden escalation of terrorism in 1878 also suggests a response to the draconian punishments meted out by the authorities at the trials of 1877-78 and to the martial atmosphere and increased hardship, especially in the southern cities, brought about by the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78. (Even the Turkish enemy, revolutionaries liked to claim, was no more cruel and despotic than the Russian authorities, who were frequently described as, or even compared unfavourably to, bashi-bazouks.) The motives advanced for terrorism by the revolutionaries themselves were rather confused but became more grandiose as the tactic became more glamorous. At first terrorism was justified in terms of self-defence, vengeance, revolutionary justice and the honour of the party. The benefits expected to flow from it, as they were rather vaguely defined by Kravchinsky in a pamphlet entitled A Death for a Death, included an end to persecution for the expression of political convictions, an amnesty for all political prisoners and an end to official arbitrariness. More extravagant hopes came to be pinned on terrorism, though, by such individuals as Tikhomirov, who argued that it might raise the standing of the party among the masses and stir them to protest, and Morozov, who thought it might severely test the political system and who eulogized the terrorists as free people among millions of slaves. Thus by 1879 some members of Land and Liberty had come to accept the 'political' struggle, the contest with the government apparatus, that their predecessors at the beginning of the 1870s had eschewed. Inevitably they now began to contemplate assassination of the autocrat himself, as the person ultimately responsible for all ills in the Russian state, and to look on tsaricide as not only satisfying a thirst for revolutionary justice but as an spur to an economic crisis and popular discontent that might bring down the regime. The drift towards political terrorism was confirmed by a further unsuccessful attempt, made by Soloviov in April 1879, to shoot Alexander II at close range [129 cb. 20].

**The People's Will, 1879–81**

By the spring of 1879 an irreconcilable tension had developed within Land and Liberty between those who wished to follow the traditional Bakuninist path, on the one hand, and the supporters of political terrorism against the government, on the other. Finally a conference was held at Voronezh (preceded by a meeting of the advocates of terrorism at the nearby town of Lipetsk). Formal division was temporarily avoided but unity was precarious and by the autumn two factions were operating independently. One faction, led by Plekhanov and embracing also Akselrod, Aptekman, Deich, Stefanovich, Zasulich and others and operating under a banner suggestive of agrarian revolution, The Black Partition, advocated continued agitation among the peasantry. The other, more numerous faction, which embraced advocates of tsaricide such as Mikhailov, Morozov, Tikhomirov, Vera Figner, Sofia Perovskaya and Zheliazkov [125], designated itself The People's Will.

The Black Partition suffered immediate setbacks. Leading members were arrested in Moscow and Kiev and its clandestine press was seized by police early in 1880, whereupon Plekhanov, Deich, Stefanovich and Zasulich fled to Switzerland. In any case the party seemed ineffec- tual, pursuing as it did a failed strategy, and even disrespectful to terrorism's early martyrs inasmuch as it repudiated a form of struggle for which they had suffered. Some of its members did soon defect to the more dynamic People's Will, accepting a need for some 'push' such as a coup d'état in present circumstances, while others, including Aptekman and Plekhanov, diluted their opposition to 'political' struggle.

The People's Will, on the other hand, immediately began vigorous activity on several fronts. Although it was its terrorist campaign that brought the party most renown in revolutionary circles and that most
disturbed the authorities, its activity was wide-ranging. Like Land and Liberty the party set up clandestine printing presses and produced its own revolutionary journal, five numbers of which, as well as numerous proclamations and leaflets, appeared during the period of its most intense activity between June 1879 and March 1881. It conducted agitation among the students in the higher educational institutions in all the major cities. It founded or brought under its control circles in the armed forces in St Petersburg and at the nearby Kronstadt naval base and workers' circles in St Petersburg and Moscow and the Ukrainian cities of Kharkov, Kiev and Odessa. It even produced two numbers of a paper written specifically for the workers. It was in general the policy of the party to concentrate forces where they seemed most effective at a given moment. Therefore in the autumn of 1880 (when crop failure, famine in some Volga provinces and the rising price of bread and growing unemployment in the towns caused some unrest) the party seemed prepared to allocate more resources to work among the masses than it had been thought useful to expend there some months before.

At the same time members of the party made repeated attempts - some of which only much later came to light outside revolutionary circles - to assassinate Alexander II. In autumn 1879 they tunneled under a railway line on the outskirts of Moscow and on 19 November succeeded in derailing two carriages of a train in which Alexander was mistakenly thought to be travelling. A revolutionary who had obtained a job as a carpenter in the Winter Palace smuggled explosives into the building and on 5 February 1880 managed to detonate a bomb there, killing eleven and wounding fifty-six others, although the tsar - who was receiving a foreign guest in the palace at the time - was uninjured. Early in 1881 the party acquired a cheese shop on a street in St Petersburg and tunneled under a road down which the tsar was expected to pass. Finally a member of the party did succeed in throwing a bomb at Alexander's carriage as it passed down the Ekaterininsky Canal in St Petersburg on Sunday 1 March 1881 and as the tsar dismounted a second revolutionary threw another bomb, killing himself and mortally wounding Alexander, who died shortly afterwards. Five of those implicated in the assassination - including two of the de facto leaders of the organization, Sofia Perovskaia and Zheliatov - were publicly hanged on 3 April.

The motives advanced for this terrorist campaign, like those previously advanced by Land and Liberty, were varied. The campaign was explicitly linked to demands for political freedom and a constitution that would guarantee it. This demand was prominent in two 'political letters' contributed by Mikhailovsky to issues of the party's journal and in the letter sent by the party's Executive Committee to Alexander III after the assassination of his father [Doc. 21]. It was also more ambitiously claimed that tsaricide might spark off a popular uprising or altogether topple the autocracy and thus clear away the obstacle that impeded revolutionaries' access to the masses. With this latter end in view the party appropriated as its slogan the admonition of the Ancient Roman statesman and orator Cato, 'Delenda est Carthago!' ('Carthage must be destroyed'); all progress depended on the destruction of the main enemy.

The People's Will had moved a long way from the essentially Lavrovist and Bakuninist positions that prevailed at the rosy dawn of the large-scale movement a decade earlier. Their organization represented a further development of the centralist, hierarchical and conspiratorial model used by Land and Liberty. They recognized the passivity of the peasantry, in present circumstances at least, and effectively withdrew their forces from the countryside. In describing the autocracy, in their journal, as a 'colossus of iron on feet of clay' and regarding its overthrow as a panacea, they seemed close to the position on the Russian state advanced by Tkachov in his open letter to Engels (see p. 73). They frankly acknowledged the importance of 'political' struggle, became locked in a contest with the state itself and proved willing to contemplate revolution from above by means of seizure of political power following an insurrection. All in all these changes were felt by members of the party themselves to reflect a shift from naïve acceptance of bookish theory to hard-learned pragmatism and flexibility. Perhaps we might add that if there were two idealized conceptions that had importance for revolutionaries in the 1870s - the ideal of a pure socialist peasantry and the ideal of an altruistic active intelligentsia - then it was the latter that had now come to prevail.

It is difficult to assess the significance of the assassination of Alexander II in the history of opposition to autocracy in Russia, because one has to try to weigh practical consequences against symbolic value. In immediate concrete terms the assassination brought no benefit to the revolutionary camp. It provoked no popular uprising or mass disturbance, nor did it wring from the government any concession such as an amnesty for political prisoners, a constitution, or the convocation of a popular assembly. On the contrary, it precipitated numerous arrests which decimated revolutionary networks, gave rise to heightened police vigilance which made even peaceful socialist activity more difficult, brought to the throne a tsar of more conservative temper than Alexander II and ushered in a period of exceptionally conserva-
tive government. At the same time the assassination undoubtedly gave autocracy an appearance of vulnerability, glamourized the revolutionaries in some quarters (and even won them some sympathy among the public in Western countries), and produced new martyrs for future generations of revolutionaries to revere and emulate. In the larger perspective it is therefore an event that has significance as a major landmark beyond which perceptions of autocracy in Russia could perhaps never be quite the same again [129 chs 21–2; 132 chs 12–15; 143 pp. 26–35].

7 OPPOSITION AFTER 1881

TOLSTOY

The failure of the assassination of Alexander II to yield any results acceptable to radical public opinion combined with the renewed official reaction to produce an atmosphere of despondency in the Russian intelligentsia in the 1880s. As in the 'dismal seven years' that followed the outbreak of revolutions in Europe in 1848, so again in this decade there was a relative dearth of major works of thought and literature, a dearth only partly explained by the recent death of major writers (Nekrasov in 1877, Dostoevsky in 1881, Turgenev in 1883) and by Tolstoy's rejection of an artistic vocation from around 1880. The collective depression and mood of resignation among the intelligentsia in these years is captured in the early work of Chekhov, whose career as writer of short stories and playwright begins in this decade. The eponymous central character of Chekhov's first play, Ivanov, first performed in 1887, a man of the generation which had gone to the people full of hope and optimism in 1874, is aimless, exhausted, crushed and ashamed of his inadequacy and ends by committing suicide. The intelligentsia's former preoccupation with social problems and its commitment to social justice were replaced by a new interest in artists who saw their art as an end in itself, such as Baudelaire and Flaubert, in resurgence of religious belief, especially in more mystical forms, or in a passive indifference to the world nourished by Buddhism. Among those who remained committed to social ideals many pursued them in less impatient and forceful ways than had been fashionable in the 1870s, accepting that the world could not be radically changed all at once and contenting themselves with a policy of 'small deeds', that is to say attempts unobtrusively and patiently to ameliorate conditions over many years if not decades or even generations. Others began to subscribe to Tolstoyism, to which we now turn.

In the late 1870s Tolstoy underwent a profound spiritual crisis which made him question the way he had hitherto lived and reject his
literary works to date as merely satisfying a vain craving for renown. Filled with self-loathing at the recollection of his participation in war, duelling and gambling and at his lying, promiscuity and drunkenness, he turned to the writings of scholars, scientists, philosophers, sages and theologians. However, none could provide him with an answer to the questions as to the meaning and purpose of life which tormented him; all his enquiries seemed only to point to the conclusion that all is vanity, that death is better than life, and that we must rid ourselves of life. Turning away from his own class, which condoned the false life he had been living, he thought he found truth in the common people, who seemed to display a simple, firm faith, defined as the force of life, and to live for others. Tolstoy describes this crisis and the suffering it engendered in his *Confession* (written in 1878–79, published in Geneva in 1884) [28]. He now set about a renewed study of the gospels and on the basis of it offered his personal interpretation of the meaning of Christianity, an interpretation which seeks to bring the kingdom of heaven down to earth, placing emphasis on the moral and social justice of Christ’s teaching, particularly the Sermon on the Mount, rather than on the revelatory dimension of the gospels and the promise of life in the hereafter. He formulates his own commandments, abjuring anger, lust and binding oaths of allegiance. He attaches cardinal importance to the passage in the gospels in which Christ counsels the man who is struck to turn the other cheek in order that his attacker may strike again. For aggressors degrade themselves, Tolstoy believes, by resorting to violence; the most effective way of eradicating the evil they do is not to counter it by similar means but to react with a humility that compels them to shrink in horror from such actions. This pacifism also finds expression in forms more threatening to the state, such as condemnation of capital punishment and repudiation of war – which Tolstoy had experienced at first hand in the Crimea and memorably described in his *Sevastopol Sketches* (1855–56) – with its bloodshed and its capacity to arouse men’s ambition.

Once he had undergone this conversion Tolstoy became first and foremost a moralist rather than an artist. The artistic credo of his later years is described in *What is Art?* (1897) [30]: he now requires of art that it ‘infect’ the subject with the artist’s purpose, particularly religious purpose, and rejects his own great novels *War and Peace* (1865–69) and *Anna Karenina* (1875–77) as bad art. After 1880 he produced relatively few works which compete with his earlier writings in terms of artistry. On the other hand he did pen many tracts, such as *What I believe* (written in 1883, banned 1884) and *The Kingdom of God is within You* (1894) [29], and his final novel, *Resurrection* (1899), in which he outlined the beliefs he now held (elements of which are already present in his earlier writings). He now preached an ethical anarchism, rejecting the coercive state [Doc. 23], the official Church, the institution of private property, the oppressive and unjust legal system and the harsh penal system.

In the most general terms Tolstoy after about 1880 urges people to abandon evil ways and live better lives. For it is only through the internal moral improvement of each individual, he believes, not through external, institutional change, that substantial social progress will come about. He hopes that all people – like the eponymous hero of ‘The Death of Ivan Ilich’ (1886), an ambitious judge, who when he realizes he is dying undergoes a religious conversion – will perceive the falsehood of the goals of rank, wealth and social status which they pursue. The antidote to the ills Tolstoy sees among the upper classes lies in a continuing search for the Rousseau-esque natural man glimpsed in his early story ‘The Cossacks’ (1863) and in a desire to emulate the simple life of the common people, who already in *Anna Karenina* have been depicted as more closely in touch with nature and with themselves than the corrupted inhabitants of the *beau monde* of Moscow and St Petersburg. In search of purity and simplicity the former sensualist now counselled sexual abstinence and vegetarianism, deplored the use of tobacco and alcohol, wore simple clothes and sought as far as possible to become independent of the labour of others, himself working in the fields and making his own boots. Disciples flocked to his estate at Iasnaya Poliana to talk with him and they set up colonies designed to implement his precepts.

Tolstoyism, with its rejection of violence as a means of combating evil, constituted a threat to the revolutionary movement, some of whose representatives complained of the tendency of Tolstoy’s teachings to hinder their attempts to recruit the youth for their own purposes in the 1880s. Tolstoy, for his part, abhorred the dogmatism of revolutionaries and their willingness to resort to force. Fictitious examples of revolutionaries, for all their commitment and resolution in the face of punishment, are not presented in a uniformly sympathetic light in *Resurrection*. And yet it would be wrong to see this hostility to the revolutionary camp as diminishing the effectiveness of Tolstoy’s personal contribution to the erosion of the authority of the autocratic government. The banning of his tract *What I believe* is indicative of the subversiveness of its content, and the extent of the danger Tolstoy was felt to pose to the official Church is reflected in his excommunication in 1901. His role in undermining the moral legitimacy of the regime under which he lived is paralleled in more
recent times by that of Gandhi, who much admired Tolstoy's teachings, and in the Soviet Union by that of Solzhenitsyn [131 cb. 8; 134; 135].

PLEKHANOV AND THE ‘EMANCIPATION OF LABOUR’ GROUP

Arguably the most ominous developments in the 1880s, from the point of view of the tsarist government, were taking place outside Russia itself. As a result of the tradition of political emigration begun by Herzen and Bakunin and continued by Lavrov, Tkachov and many others in subsequent decades, there were well-established Russian communities in such countries as Switzerland, France and Britain where the political climate was freer.

In international anarchist circles Kropotkin, a member of the Chaikovsky circles in the early 1870s (see p. 75), had become prominent as a result of years of agitation in Switzerland and France before settling in England in 1886. In opposition to Darwin, Kropotkin posited mutual aid, not competition and a struggle for survival, as a crucial factor in the natural evolutionary process, and argued for a corresponding social model. However, his major writings (The Conquest of Bread (1892) [17] and Mutual Aid (1902)) were yet to appear and in the 1880s his influence on the Russian revolutionary movement was negligible [131 cb. 7; 141; 150].

Of much greater importance, both in the short term and the long term, were Plekhanov and other former members of Land and Liberty – Akselrod, Deich, and Vera Zasulich – who in 1879, retaining faith in the Bakuninist strategy of attempting to raise a peasant revolt, had aligned themselves with The Black Partition rather than The People's Will but who shortly thereafter had emigrated to Switzerland. Assisted by a wealthy sympathizer, Ignatov, in 1883 they established the so-called ‘Emancipation of Labour’ Group, dedicated to the popularization of Marxism, to which Plekhanov had now been converted. This task entailed composition of original works making the case for acceptance of Marxism as a doctrine applicable in Russian conditions, production of Marxist works for a Russian readership, organization of transportation of this material into Russia, and maintenance of contacts with socialist groups still active inside Russia.

The two major works which mark Plekhanov’s conversion to Marxism are Socialism and Political Struggle (1883) and, most importantly, Our Differences (1885) [24 i]. Large parts of these works are devoted to polemic with the Populist camp, particularly with the epigones of The People's Will among whom a Jacobin tendency had become pronounced after the assassination of Alexander II. However, alongside the negative, polemical thread of these works ran Plekhanov’s argument that historical development everywhere followed those same economic and social laws which Marx had discovered and that Russia, while it lagged far behind Western European countries, was therefore following the same path as those countries. Nor could societies leap over certain phases of development, so Plekhanov’s argument ran, although an understanding of the laws of development might help them to shorten a phase or alleviate the pains associated with it. It followed, pace Populists of all complexions, that Russia, on its way to socialism, was bound to pass through a capitalist phase of development. Plekhanov supported his case in Our Differences by painstaking examination of the state of Russian industry. He produced copious evidence to show that the number of factory workers was increasing, that cottage industries were being transformed into larger-scale forms of production, and that capitalism was undermining the peasant commune, which Populists continued to cherish, by splitting the rural community into one stratum of peasants who were accumulating land and another, larger, stratum which found itself on the labour market. Plekhanov concluded that capitalism was inexorably gaining ground in Russia, outsting small producers, driving landless peasants off the land and creating an army of workers as it had in the West [Doc. 24] [133 chs 5–8; 143 cb. 4].

The question as to whether capitalism was developing in Russia and as to its probable future there, while at first sight possibly arcane, in fact had immense practical significance for Russian revolutionaries in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century. For if Russia was indeed following the same capitalist path down which the West had long since been proceeding, then the Populist notion of national distinctiveness was mistaken and the Marxist schema was indeed applicable to Russia. In that event revolutionaries were right to concentrate their attention on the potentially revolutionary proletariat rather than the peasantry (conceived by Marx and Engels as a benighted, idiotic class). At the same time it would have to be accepted that socialist revolution was not an immediate prospect in Russia and that Russian revolutionaries, while cultivating a socialist consciousness among the workers, would need simultaneously to cooperate with the bourgeoisie in fighting the common enemy, autocracy, with a view to winning political freedoms.

It should be borne in mind when assessing the importance of the ‘Emancipation of Labour’ Group that Russian thinkers before 1883 were by no means unacquainted with Marx’s ideas or dismissive of
them. The first Russian translation of *The Communist Manifesto*, done by Bakunin, had appeared in 1869 and the translation of Marx's *magnum opus*, the first volume of *Capital* (1867), had been completed and published in 1872 (over a decade before its first translation into English). It was not disputed by Russian socialists that Marx had provided a penetrating analysis of the economic system underlying the detested bourgeois order in Western Europe. However, what was not accepted before 1883 was that the laws of historical development that Marx outlined might be applicable to Russia, a relatively backward rural country for which socialists ever since the Petrashevsky and Herzen had predicted a distinctive historical path that would bypass capitalism. The country was relatively undeveloped industrially, its bourgeoisie was incoherent as a class and politically weak and its small working class could hardly be described as a proletariat, since in most places workers' links with the villages in which they originated were not broken. Even Marx and Engels themselves—who incidentally admired the terrorist struggle of The People's Will against the autocracy—seemed to strengthen the Populist case when in 1882 they wrote a preface to a new, second Russian edition of *The Communist Manifesto* in which they counthecened the possibility, to put it no more strongly, that Russia might indeed be exempted from the laws applicable in the West and might build a form of socialism based on the indigenous peasant commune [Doc. 22].

The arguments that could be made for and against acceptance of Marxism as a doctrine applicable to Russia in the 1880s, as they presented themselves to Plekhanov's contemporaries, must have seemed quite evenly balanced. It was to the credit of Marxism, in an age when the efforts of seemingly heroic individuals to topple autocracy had failed, that it placed emphasis on the contest of whole classes as the moving force in the historical process and correspondingly reduced the responsibility on individual agents for the direction which that process took. Moreover, the promise that Marxism seemed to offer that the capitalist order would eventually be undermined by its own contradictions and that socialism would more or less inevitably triumph was reassuring to an intelligentsia now depressed by evidence of its impotence. Finally, it was apparent—particularly in St. Petersburg, in Moscow and surrounding towns such as Ivanovo, and in Ukrainian cities such as Kiev, Kharkov and Ekaterinoslav—that industry in Russia was indeed developing in the 1880s and that a working class, whose representatives revolutionaries had long since found more receptive to their propaganda than the peasantry, was therefore growing. On the other hand it counted against Marxism that revolution in the Marxist schema was a long-term prospect, not an immediate one, a goal that would be attained only after a more or less protracted stage of capitalist development during which the misery of the masses would be prolonged and would assume new forms. The more compassionate spirits in the socialist camp found it hard to turn their backs on the suffering of the present generation in the hope of a better life in a distant future. They also found it distasteful to collaborate in the short term with the detested bourgeoisie, as the Marxist schema dictated. Furthermore, abandonment of the path that had been followed for so long seemed to many to imply a betrayal of the movement's martyrs. In any case the beliefs on which Populism rested—that the Russian peasant was innately socialist, that socialism could be built on the peasant commune, and that Russia could bypass capitalism —had deep roots and a long history in Russian thought. For all these reasons Marxism may have been attractive in intellectual terms but from a moral and emotional point of view—and it was this viewpoint, perhaps, that tended to carry most weight with the intelligentsia in nineteenth-century Russia—Populism remained compelling to most revolutionaries active inside Russia in the 1880s.

It was perhaps indicative of the fact that the climate was still unpropitious for the reception of Marxist ideas in Russia in the middle of the 1880s that the émigré group chose for themselves a name which avoided reference to Social Democracy and that in the first draft of their programme they conceded the need for political terrorism, as if in acknowledgement of the continuing popularity of The People's Will. In any case the group soon suffered a severe organizational setback: in 1884 German police arrested and extradited Deich, the member on whom the group most depended for maintenance of contact with revolutionaries in Russia. And yet if the immediate impact of the group in Russia was small, its importance in the longer term was very great. For Plekhanov had made a crucial contribution to the controversy over capitalism in Russia and had rehearsed the arguments in favour of acceptance of Marxism there, and the group as a whole had established the beginnings of a Russian Marxist literature. Foundations had been laid on which socialists inside Russia were able to build in the 1890s, by which time there was a greater readiness in the intelligentsia to look critically at the weaknesses and failures of Populism [133; 143 ch. 4].
REVOLUTIONARY GROUPS IN THE 1880s

The resilience of the old Populist beliefs after the assassination of Alexander II is indicated by the continued appearance of works by imaginative writers such as Zlatovratsky and by publicists such as Kablits (who wrote under the pseudonym Luzov) which praised the robust peasant or uncritically extolled the collective principles supposedly embodied in the village community. Equally important, the view that Russia was following a separate path of development, or could continue to follow a separate path, was also reasserted, with apparent academic authority, by respected economists. Vorontsov, in an influential book entitled *The Fate of Capitalism in Russia* (1882), doubted whether capitalism was likely to flourish in Russia where he detected a complex pattern of modes of production of which capitalism was only one. Capitalism was an alien growth in Russia, Vorontsov argued, and conditions did not favour its further development: the market was weak, the country was immense and communications were poor, and the entrepreneur’s overheads were relatively high owing to the need to provide workers with adequate heating, food and clothing during the severe winter. Luhakov, also writing in 1882, argued on the basis of an examination of different types of agricultural production that only a small proportion of land in Russia was utilized according to a capitalist system and agreed with Vorontsov that prerequisites for capitalism’s growth, such as the availability of plentiful capital and a proletariat, were lacking. A third economist, Danielson, did accept that Russia’s economy was being transformed into a capitalist one but contended that this development could and should be halted [143 pp. 79–81; 149].

The majority of revolutionary groups – and such groups did continue to spring up and proliferate, in spite of the repressive climate and official vigilance – also continued to repeat many of the shibboleths of Russian socialists over the preceding decades, although their socialism was often eclectic and confused. For the sake of convenience we may identify three types of group active in the 1880s: firstly, remnants of The People’s Will or groups that tried to revive that party or to uphold its tradition; secondly, groups of vaguely Populist character for which theoretical alignment was less important than commitment to patient, ‘preparatory’ activity that was not expected to yield rapid results; and thirdly, groups that leaned in the direction of one form or another of Social Democracy. These types of group will be examined in order. However, it must be emphasized that this classification is somewhat artificial, for both the political complexion of most of the socialist groups active in the 1880s and the boundaries between the different types of group were unclear.

Repeated short-lived attempts were made after the assassination of Alexander II to reorganize The People’s Will. However, these attempts generally betrayed the weakness of the party and indicated that in practice it was no longer mainly preoccupied with, or capable of, a terrorist campaign against autocracy. Some members of the party, for example, in desperation seized upon the anti-Semitic pogroms which broke out in 1881, with official connivance, as encouraging manifestations of a mass revolutionary movement. At the end of that year and the beginning of 1882 the Jacobin tendency in the party, represented by Tikhomirov and Oshanina, came to the fore and leaders of the party advocated a coup d’état (although in practice they had no means of carrying it out). The party also found itself forced to beat a retreat from St Petersburg and Moscow, where its declared strategy of political struggle with the government really dictated that it should have its headquarters. Consequently the party often found itself marginalized in distant provincial cities far from the capitals such as Kharkov (where Vera Figner, the last major figure of the party in its heyday to remain at large, was arrested early in 1883) or even isolated backwaters such as Ekaterinoslav, Novocherkassk, Taganrog and Tula, where mainly Jewish revolutionaries (Orzhikh, Bogoraz and others) attempted to restore the party in 1885–86. In such peripheral bases The People’s Will found itself pursuing objectives which from the point of view of the authorities seemed relatively innocuous by comparison with political terrorism. In particular the party began to pay increasing attention after 1 March 1881 to propaganda among factory workers in St Petersburg, Kharkov, Kiev, Odessa and even more remote towns such as Ekaterinoslav and Rostov-on-Don.

The desire to give propaganda among the factory workers the theoretical status that its current prominence in practice seemed to merit, as well as resentment on the part of activists inside Russia at the claims to authority made by Tikhomirov and Oshanina, who were now in Parisian emigration, gave rise in 1884 to a dispute between so-called ‘young’ and ‘old’ factions of The People’s Will. The ‘young’ faction was represented chiefly by Jakubovich and the ‘old’ faction chiefly by Lopatin, the émigrés’ emissary. The priority attached to propaganda among the workers by the ‘young’ faction was reflected in their wish to broaden the party’s base and to relax the centralist organizational principle in order that greater freedom be given to local groups. The ‘young’ faction also expressed a preference for ‘economic’ terrorism – that is to say, attacks on, for instance, harsh factory owners – as against the attempts at tsaricide with which the party had hitherto been associated. In the event, though, further arrests –
made possible by the carelessness of Lopatin – decimated the party towards the end of 1884.

Finally, at the end of 1886, out of the numerous circles that had been formed among the students of St Petersburg, a group emerged which designated itself the 'terrorist faction of the People's Will Party' and which produced bombs with the intention of assassinating Alexander III. Members of the group were arrested on 1 March 1887, the sixth anniversary of the assassination of Alexander II, as they began to patrol Nevsky Prospekt for a third time in the hope of finding their quarry, and on 8 May five of the conspirators – Andreishkin, Gener- alov, Osipanov, Shevryov and Aleksandr Ulianov – were hanged. The programme which Ulianov drew up for this 'terrorist faction' confirmed the interest of supporters of The People's Will in the working class, viewing it as the natural bearer of socialist ideas, speaking of workers as the nucleus of the party and envisaging propaganda and organization in the factories as the revolutionaries' principal task. And yet at the same time the terrorist plot of 1886–87 showed again that the banner of The People's Will remained the rallying-point for the movement's most active spirits [142 ch. 2, 4, 6; 143 ch. 2].

While The People's Will was in its death throes, numerous groups began to devote themselves to patient, careful preparatory work in 'self-education' circles with a view to long-term activity among the workers and peasants and within the intelligentsia itself. One such group was the Muscovite 'Society of Translators and Publishers' which in 1883–84 set about translating and reproducing writings by foreign socialists, including Louis Blanc, Lassalle, Marx and Engels. Other groups sprang up and persisted throughout the 1880s in the main provincial cities with higher educational institutions. In Kazan, a tightly-organized network of circles was developed by the students Fokin, Bekariukov and others, in which members made a careful study of socialist works according to a systematic reading programme, using texts from clandestine libraries and so meticulously observing the rules of secrecy on which Fokin and Bekariukov insisted that the network probably remained intact for almost a decade. Similar networks were established by Fokin in the higher educational institutions of Kiev, to which he moved in 1884, and by Bekariukov when in 1886, on completion of his medical studies, he returned to Kharkov, where fruitful contact was established with local workers' circles. Even the members of such groups themselves found the groups' position on the political spectrum hard to plot. Often they embraced theoretical supporters of various factions, ranging from The People's Will and 'militarists' (who believed in the need to build a strong organization in the armed forces) to early sympathizers with Social Democracy and latter-day members of The Black Partition. (A group of the latter, based in Kazan, produced a symposium entitled The Social Question (1888) which was indicative of the general confusion at this period: one contributor acknowledged the progress of capitalism and its impact on the peasant commune but clung to the dream of peasant revolution.) However, such differences had little significance given that the immediate task, it was generally agreed, was to gather forces and create a strong organizational base prior to any future attempt to go to the peasants or workers [142 chs 5, 8; 143 ch. 3].

At the same time there appeared a number of groups which looked beyond Populism to Western European examples for socialists to emulate. The first such group was the 'Party of Russian Social Democrats', more widely known as the Blagoevtsy after one of the group's leaders, Blagoev, a Bulgarian student at the University of St Petersburg (who subsequently became prominent in the socialist movement in his own country). The group existed from late 1883 to the beginning of 1887, although by the early months of 1886 it had already been severely weakened by arrests. The Blagoevtsy devoted themselves above all to propaganda among the workers in various regions of St Petersburg and to activities designed to support this activity such as the acquisition and operation of printing presses, production of a newspaper, and maintenance of a clandestine library of suitable prohibited literature. They established contact with the émigrés of the 'Emancipation of Labour' Group and in 1886 received a shipment of literature from them. However, despite their obvious affinities with the émigrés the Blagoevtsy were not unequivocal supporters of Marxism. Rather their programme – especially their declaration of faith in a democratically elected body expressing the wishes of the majority – reflected the influence of Marx's rival within the German Social-Democratic movement, Lassalle. Nor was their thinking free of Populist assumptions. They continued, for example, to view the peasantry in Russia as an important revolutionary force and to see the workers as a bridge to the peasantry; they did not altogether repudiate terrorism; they had links and affinities with the 'young' faction of The People's Will; and works by such authors as Cherny- shevsky, Lavrov, Mikhailovsky and Bervi-Flerovsky appeared on their programme of reading for propaganda among the workers [142 ch. 3; 143 ch. 4].

A further organization that seems to have leaned in the direction of Social Democracy was a group led by Tochisssky which came to be known as the Association of St Petersburg Artisans and which oper-
ated independently of the Blagoev group among the St Petersburg workers in the period 1885–88. Tochissky maintained a sharp distinction between his group of educated propagandists, on the one hand, and the workers' circles which his Association assisted, on the other. (The workers' circles were partly the product of a labour movement that was beginning to acquire a momentum of its own.) Tochissky — who in the manner of the propagandists of the 1870s tried to lead a simple, ascetic life, dressing like a worker and living in poverty — viewed the intelligentsia as a potentially corruptible force which would only be a temporary ally of the workers, albeit an ally that was necessary to the workers so long as the workers were not fully aware of their own interests. The aim of the Association — and perhaps in this respect Tochissky was influenced by the example of British trade unionism — may have been gradual improvement of the economic conditions of the workers. Its practical activity, however, seems to have been largely pedagogical, a factor that accounts for the relatively light sentences meted out to its members when they were apprehended by the authorities [142 ch. 3; 143 ch. 4].

There also developed in St Petersburg, in the period 1889–92, a larger network of circles led by Russian student leaders, notably Brusnnev and Krasin (a future Soviet ambassador in London), and a number of Polish students. These circles too conducted propaganda among the factory workers of the capital and participated in various forms of agitation such as promotion of strikes, production of a workers' paper, and arrangement of May Day meetings in 1891 and 1892. Here too the emphasis seems to have been on careful preparation for a long-term campaign that might yield solid results in the distant future. It is debatable, though, to what extent the workers were primarily interested in the whole in formation of economic associations or political organizations rather than in educational and personal self-improvement and even to what extent they welcomed their association with these representatives of the intelligentsia [143 pp. 155–60; 145]. Even in provincial cities groups with Marxist leanings were now appearing. The earliest such grouping was that led by Fedoseev who briefly enjoyed influence in student circles in Kazan in 1888–89. Fedoseev had embarked on a plan to acquire and have translated and reproduced several texts from the Marxist canon when he was arrested. It was probably at this time that the future Lenin, younger brother of Aleksandr Ulianov and himself expelled from Kazan University for his part in student demonstrations there late in 1887, first became acquainted with Marx's Capital, although until his departure from Kazan in the spring of 1889 he was almost certainly more sympathetic to the tradition of The People's Will, for which Aleksandr had laid down his life, than to the alien stream of socialist thought [142 chs 7–8; 143 pp. 99–107, 145–55].

POLITICAL MOVEMENTS IN THE 1890s

The political conditions in which Russian revolutionaries operated after 1894, when Alexander III died and was replaced by his son Nicholas II, remained essentially the same as in the previous reign. Nicholas promptly scotched hopes of political reform by reaffirming the principle of autocracy upheld by his father and his mentor Pobeđonostsev and by rebuking zemstvo leaders who had been 'carried away by senseless dreams about participation by representatives of the zemstvo in the affairs of internal government' [45 p. 549]. And yet the demand for political reform was about to become irresistible. For one thing, in an autocratic state where the will of an individual is supreme, the accession of a new ruler generally heightens the expectation of change. In any case Nicholas, a mild man happiest in the bosom of his family, seemed a less intimidating ruler than his predecessors. Most importantly, under the supervision of the energetic Count Witte, who was Minister of Finance from 1892 to 1903, and with the support of Nicholas himself, Russia's economy underwent rapid modernization in the 1890s. This process — achieved through the attraction of foreign loans and investment, establishment of financial stability, maintenance of protective tariffs, further expansion of the railway network, development of mining in the Ukraine, and growth of grain exports through the Black Sea ports — threw the obsolescence of Russia's political structure into even sharper relief.

In these conditions movements began to develop that were to lead to the proliferation of political organizations and the intensification of political activity in the last years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century and eventually to the Revolution of 1905. The principal movements that can be distinguished may be classified as liberal, Populist, and Social-Democratic, although it should be emphasized that the distinctions between them, both ideological and organizational, are not always clear-cut. All these movements represent continuations of the pre-existing streams of opposition to autocracy, or rather the re-emergence and quickening of those streams after a period in which their flow had been sluggish and partly hidden from view.

The liberal movement of the end of the century grew partly out of the efforts long since made by members of the rural intelligentsia to
bring about social improvements at local level within the legal framework provided by the zemstva, the councils set up from 1864 in one of the reforms that followed the emancipation of the serfs. In the 1880s such activity accorded well with the policy of ‘small deeds’, with which many members of the intelligentsia, bereft of great expectations, were then content. (This modest policy has an echo in the plays of Chekhov, with their characters resigned to the present stagnation but hopeful that their descendants might one day live more satisfying lives.) At the level of the so-called ‘third element’, that is to say hired professional employees of the zemstva, the rural intelligentsia established firm contact with the peasantry in the closing decades of the century through their positions as doctors, nurses, teachers, veterinary surgeons, lawyers and agronomists [144 p. 7]. At a higher level, among the appointed officials of the zemstva, there was a desire to share such local experience of social activity. This desire gave rise to an aspiration, which might elsewhere have seemed unexceptionable, for the creation of consultative bodies. Although Shipov [72 ch. 6], a Moscow zemstvo leader who most prominently expressed this aspiration, was allowed to organize such a meeting of zemstvo provincial board chairmen at Nizhnii Novgorod in 1896, he was not permitted to repeat the exercise in St Petersburg the following year. A bolder strand of liberalism gave rise at the beginning of the twentieth century to the establishment of a paper, Liberation (Osvoboždenie) in Stuttgart under the editorship of Struve and the foundation of an illegal opposition party, the Union of Liberation, chaired by Petrunkevich and dedicated to the abolition of autocracy and establishment of constitutional government [45 pp. 553–7; 101].

As for Populism, it was reinvigorated in the 1890s by dismay at the severe famine which afflicted the central black-earth provinces in 1891 and which was followed by an outbreak of cholera and peasant unrest. This rural crisis revived the desire on the part of the urban intelligentsia to go to the aid of the peasant mass, precipitated a return to the people, for humanitarian purposes, and thus led to renewal of that contact with the peasantry which the revolutionaries of the 1870s had tried to establish. The crisis also vividly highlighted for revolutionaries the question – which was bound to be answered as much on emotional as on purely rational grounds – as to whether the intelligentsia should concentrate on the alleviation of present hardship or dedicate itself to struggle for eventual political change which would supposedly remove the causes of such hardship in the longer term.

The mouthpiece for ‘legal Populists’ in the 1890s was the journal Russian Wealth (Russkoe bogatstvo) and its main spokesman the indefatigable Mikhailovsky, who in 1894 produced an emotional critique of Marxism. Attempts to revive a Populist movement were made by activists of an earlier period who were now returning from exile such as Natanson, who created a short-lived organization called The People’s Right in 1894, and Breshko-Breshkovskaya, one of the propagandists of 1874. More important were various groups such as the Union of Socialist Revolutionaries, founded in Saratov in 1896 (also known as the ‘Northern Union’), which moved its headquarters to Moscow in 1897, and the Southern Party of Socialist Revolutionaries founded in Voronezh in 1897. The Northern Union followed in the tradition of The People’s Will, advocating terrorism with the aim of political liberation and neglecting activity among the peasantry, while the Southern Party put forward a strategy more reminiscent of the Black Parliament, that is to say agitation among the masses, mainly the urban workers but not excluding the peasantry. Independently of these groups Chernov made attempts in Tambov Province in the period 1895–99 to take revolutionary ideas to the peasantry, placing emphasis, as an earlier generation of Populists had done, on the moral dimension of socialism and even hoping to exploit sectarian antipathy to the authorities [144 ch. 2]. A further group, founded in Minsk in 1898 by Breshko-Breshkovskaya and a young Jewish chemist Gershuni, also advocated political terrorism. The foundation of an Agrarian-Socialist League in Paris in 1900 represented an attempt to amalgamate the scattered Populist groups. In the course of 1901–2 these groups merged into the broad Party of Socialist Revolutionaries (the SRs) which was led at this stage by Breshko-Breshkovskaya, Chernov, Gershuni and Natanson among others. The continuing popularity of terrorism was attested by a spate of assassinations, some of them carried out by the so-called Combat Detachment of the SRs, in the early twentieth century.

While Populism struggled to reassert itself, the popularity of Marxism increased rapidly among the intelligentsia in the early 1890s, both in St Petersburg and in provincial backwaters which had recently been Populist strongholds. In 1893 Lenin, having qualified as a lawyer in Samara, where he lived from 1889–1893, joined one of the Marxist circles in St Petersburg and in 1895 went abroad and visited Plekhanov, who had recently strengthened the Russian case for Marxism with a powerful exposition of historical materialism in his work On the Question of the Monistic View of History (1894). On his return to St Petersburg Lenin collaborated with Martov (pseudonym of Tse- derbaum), a Jewish revolutionary from Vilna (modern Vilnius, capital of Lithuania), to amalgamate the Marxist groups in the capital as a
Union of Struggle for the Liberation of the Working Class, which was however destroyed by arrests in 1893–96. (Both Lenin and Martov were exiled for three years to Siberia, where Lenin produced his own statement of the case for the application of Marxism in Russia, a long study of the penetration of the rural economy by capitalism entitled *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899).) Surviving groups of Marxist intellectuals and workers met secretly at Minsk in 1898 and founded the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP), but it too was soon incapacitated by arrests.

Within the Marxist camp, however, fissures soon developed that mirrored those in the Populist camp a generation earlier. These fissures concerned such thorny questions as the degree to which socialist activity should take place within the existing legal framework, the relationship between political and economic struggle, and the relationship between the intelligentsia and the masses (now the urban workers rather than the peasantry). Mindful of the successes of Social Democrats in gaining political influence in the freer countries of the West, some Marxists – Berdiaev, Bulgakov, Struve, Tugan-Baranovsky – concentrated their attention on the short-term objective which Marxists shared with the bourgeoisie, namely the winning of political freedoms and the undermining of autocracy [138; 139]. Not surprisingly, some of the 'legal Marxists', as these Marxists came to be known, were later to lean towards the liberal camp and made important contributions to the volume entitled *Landmarks* (1909) which criticized the tendency of the Russian intelligentsia to take up polarized ideological standpoints. A different position was taken by Kremer, another Jewish revolutionary from Vilna, who in his pamphlet *On Agitation* (1894) argued that the intelligentsia should learn from the masses and represent their grievances. According to yet another point of view, adopted by some intellectuals such as Prokopovich and his wife Kuskova, socialists should strive primarily to win for the workers economic gains and material improvements of the sort that seemed possible to achieve in some Western countries. Yet other socialists of the period, led by Takhtrianov and represented in the newspaper *Workers’ Thought* (Rabočaia mysl’, 1897), continued abroad as *The Workers’ Cause* (Rabochee delo), were concerned to build a mass labour movement rather than one dominated by Marxists in the intelligentsia. These various heresies, actual or somewhat exaggerated for polemical purposes, are vehemently opposed by Lenin in his work *What is to be done?* (1902) [21]. Taking his title from Chernyshevsky’s novel, which he greatly admired, Lenin argues in *What is to be done?* that the working class, if left to its own
PART THREE: ASSESSMENT

In the late eighteenth century, Russia’s nascent educated public, which at that time consisted largely of the Westernized nobility, still conducted debate about matters of cultural, social and political concern without seriously questioning the legitimacy of autocracy as a form of government for the country. However, quite early in the nineteenth century, and partly as a result of Russia’s involvement in the Napoleonic Wars, this harmony between civil society and the autocratic state began to break down. As Russia moved closer to the West in cultural terms and played a more prominent part in European political affairs, so her form of government came to seem more akin to an oriental despotism than to politics of the sort with which educated Russians were becoming increasingly familiar through their travels and long stays in Western Europe. Relations between state and educated public were aggravated by the general resistance of autocracy to reform, by a perception that even when reforms were introduced – as after the Crimean War – they did not go far enough, and in particular by the refusal of autocracy to contemplate political reform consistent with the social and economic changes taking place in Russia in the second half of the century. At the same time the eighteenth-century sense that the nobleman had a duty to serve the state – a sense that persisted even after the formal abolition of the obligation to serve in the army, navy or civilian administration in 1762 – was translated into new conceptions of duty, towards such abstractions as art, the Absolute Idea of Hegelian philosophy, and – most subversively – the people.

In the course of the nineteenth century even social groups that had once been generally loyal to autocracy became alienated from it: the parish clergy ceased to see the tsar as the defender of the faith and, at opposite ends of the social spectrum, both nobles and peasants lost faith in the myth of the tsar’s benevolence. However, it was principally through the group that came to be known as the intelligentsia that opposition to autocracy was articulated. Or, to put it another way, it was as an ‘intelligentsia’ that an independent civil society came to conceive of itself. The social composition of the intelligentsia changed considerably during that golden age, from about 1820 to 1880, when Russia’s classical literature and thought were being created and when society and state were becoming alienated from one another. Rebellion that in the immediate post-Napoleonic period found expression among the high nobility – the social group from which the Decembrists mainly emanated – was by the middle of the century led by men of various social strata, the raznochintsy. The chief loci of opposition moved from the aristocratic drawing room and the officers’ mess to the editorial board of the ‘thick’ journal, the student circle, and the clandestine revolutionary cell. As opposition was democratized and radicalized in these ways women came to play a larger and more prominent part in it. Although in the first half of the century they did frequent and in some cases preside over the salons in which cultural life was conducted, during the second half they became a more powerful presence in the socialist commune or revolutionary circle and suffered punishment together with men for the pilgrimages to the people and the acts of terrorism.

The Russian nineteenth-century intelligentsia, in all the phases of its development, professed an admirable independence, integrity and idealism. Its members placed great faith in the power of ideas and, in the second half of the century, in natural science, which they valued both as an instrument for the improvement of material civilization and for its apparently incontestable method of solving problems of all descriptions. And yet the systems of ideas which the intelligentsia constructed often had a character no less authoritarian than the political and social system against which the intelligentsia was pitted. Moreover, the lack of representative political institutions, the absence of a vigorous free political life and the consequent exclusion of the intelligentsia from government helped to give free rein to a mode of thinking that was impractical, even irresponsible, as well as idealistic. For there was little real prospect that members of the intelligentsia would themselves have to put the utopian theories which they pressed upon their readers into practice in the imperfect, unpredictable world of human affairs, social relations and historical events.

Divisions within the intelligentsia itself were numerous, and opinions differed greatly as to the course that opposition to autocracy should take. Indeed some thinkers, of conservative persuasion, continued throughout the nineteenth century to defend autocracy as the most appropriate form of government for Russian territory or the
Russian people. (Even thinkers in this tradition – to which the Slavophiles and native-soil conservatives such as Dostoevsky belonged – had reservations, though, about the nineteenth-century state, whose Westernizing bureaucratic apparatus undermined the consensual paternalistic form of autocratic rule that supposedly characterized pre-Petrine Muscovy.) However, as the loyalty of the educated public towards the autocratic state began to dissipate after the Napoleonic Wars, a larger section of the educated class – though still, it should always be remembered, a very small proportion of the population of the country as a whole – tried to define Russia’s future not as a re-creation of a distant past but as part of an international social transformation prepared by ideas furnished by the more advanced Western European civilization. The paramount question for members of this camp of the intelligentsia, once the case of conservative nationalists had been answered, was whether to attempt to reform and civilize Russian society within the existing political structure or to seek more radical change, possibly by revolutionary means. Westernizers of the more moderate type, such as the liberal Westernizers of the 1840s and 50s (for example, Granovsky and Kavelin), Chicherin in the reign of Alexander II, and the later liberals working within the zemstva, did not directly challenge the autocratic state. Indeed they were more or less convinced that only the survival of a strong autocracy would guarantee preservation of order during a period of reform. On the other hand Westernizers of the more radical type – Belinsky and Herzen in the 1840s, Chernyshevsky, Dobroliubov and Pisarev in the 1850s and 60s – envisaged the establishment of a new social – and moral – order incompatible with the survival of autocratic government. The intellectual rebellion which they set in motion in the 1840s and which culminated in the nihilism of the 1860s precipitated a tide of revolutionary action that abated in the 1880s, only to re-emerge with increasing force, but moving now in various directions, at the end of the century.

Within the revolutionary movement too, divisions quickly became apparent. For one thing, revolutionaries had to decide whether to attempt to replace autocracy by some alternative form of government, perhaps equally authoritarian, as recommended by Tkachov and eventually Lenin, or to abolish government with coercive power altogether, as anarchists such as Bakunin, Kropotkin and Tolstoy advocated. For another, the question of national identity continued to give difficulty. Whereas the first wave of Russian revolutionaries, in the 1870s, identified the supposedly indigenous institution of the peasant commune as a basis for socialism and envisaged progress towards the socialist goal by a separate path from that being taken by Western nations, Russian Marxists, beginning with Plekhanov in the 1880s, viewed Russia as essentially a member, albeit a backward one, of the European family of nations and welcomed signs of the development of a proletariat there.

When due account has been taken of the divisions within the intelligentsia that have been examined in this book, it should all the same be noted that there are qualities and emphases in the thinking of that intelligentsia which tend to cut across the divisions and which lend Russian thought a distinctive character. The Western student might expect Russian thinkers, living under a capricious autocracy, to give high priority to establishment of the rule of law and to protection of the individual from the whim of the autocrat and his favourites. On the whole, however, the mission of these thinkers is a grander, more messianic one, the construction of a social and moral utopia, the realization even of the kingdom of heaven on earth. Their thought has a pronounced utilitarian quality: they come to be dissatisfied with the pursuit of art or philosophy or any branch of culture or knowledge for its own sake and are driven to seek truths that can be readily applied. They display a fierce moral engagement, even religiosity. They tend to subordinate the interest of the individual to that of the larger unit – family, peasant commune, Church, people, nation – which the individual inhabits. Finally, they express a perennial anxiety about national identity and thus provide a model for debate of a sort that recurs throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in developing nations in which Westernization and modernization have imperilled native values and institutions.