CHAPTER ELEVEN

Populism

TRIALS AND TERRORISTS

While the tsar's soldiers and diplomats were fighting the Turks and negotiating the treaties of San Stefano and Berlin, his judges and lawyers were prosecuting revolutionaries. In January 1877 they tried various malcontents for demonstrating outside St Petersburg's Kazan Cathedral. In February and March of the same year, in the 'trial of the fifty', they dealt with a Moscow-based 'Pan-Russian Social-Revolutionary Organization'. In May they procured the condemnation of the 'South Russian Union of Workers'. In October they set in train the three-month 'trial of the 193', the largest political trial in Russian history. In March 1878 they sought the conviction of Vera Zasulich for attempting to kill St Petersburg's Governor-General. In July 1878, in Odessa, they condemned to death the terrorist Ivan Koval'skii.

If the trials were designed to frighten the regime's opponents, they were a failure. In April 1879 Aleksandr Solov'ev attempted to shoot the tsar as he finished his walk in the Summer Garden. In February 1880 Stepan Khalturin tried to blow up the Winter Palace. On 1 March 1881 a group of conspirators led by Sofia Perovskaya enacted a complex plot to kill the tsar by throwing bombs at him as he made his way back to the Winter Palace after taking exercise at the St Petersburg riding school. The first bomb missed, but Alexander descended from his carriage to inspect the damage and was hit by the bomb that killed him.

Since this book begins and ends with the murder of a tsar, it might be said that not much had changed in Russia between 1801 and 1881. The murders, however, took different forms and had very different causes. It is a minor indication of the difference between Russia in 1801 and Russia in 1881 that whereas Paul was murdered at night in his bedchamber, Alexander was murdered in daylight in the street. More important, the murderers of 1881 thought they were acting on behalf of people other than themselves. They thought, indeed, that they were acting on behalf of the people as a whole. The subversive doctrines which gave rise to the trials of political activists and the attempts on the life of the tsar go by the generic name
of populism (narodniches'tvo), a creed whose many different manifestations all gave the people (narod) a higher priority than the political superstructure.

By the 1860s the feeling that the Russian state took little notice of the masses had been developing among educated Russians for at least two generations. The concept of 'people-ness' or 'nationality' (narodnost') had been popularized on the left of the political spectrum in the 1820s in the hope that the growth of state power might be arrested. Nicholas I's Minister of Education, S. S. Uvarov, had tried to turn 'people-ness' to the state's advantage by hitching it to 'Orthodoxy' and 'Autocracy' in 1833, but the non-conformist impulse which brought it to life refused to disappear. Whatever the obscurity of the ideas of the Slavophiles, their antipathy towards Peter the Great and their enthusiasm for the peasant commune made clear that they set greater store by the common people than by governmental institutions and bureaucrats. After Alexander Herzen experienced the failure of the 1848 revolutions in western Europe, he too came to feel that the Russian Empire's best way forward lay in building on the communal instincts of the peasantry rather than adopting the unsuccessful philosophies of western liberals. One of the effects of the debate which followed the emancipation of the serfs was to reveal that although enlightened bureaucrats thought the existing order could be put to rights, non-governmental intellectuals disagreed. In the view of the latter, redesigning the empire would merely improve the position of the privileged. Since many educated people outside the government believed that the privileged would leave the poor to their own devices, they promoted the notion that action had to be taken rapidly to prevent the rift between the highest and the lowest orders of society from widening.

**POPULISTS AND SOCIAL CHANGE**

Disagreements between educated people inside and outside the government were deep-seated, but they were hardly sufficient to explain why radicals turned to violence. Nor, apparently, were the deficiencies of the regime glaring enough to warrant the response which gave rise to the trials of 1877-8 and the murder of the tsar. At first sight, the behaviour of the dissenters of the 1870s was perverse. However flawed the legislation of the early 1860s, subjecting a tsar who had enacted the most far-reaching reforms since the time of Peter the Great to greater pressure than most of his predecessors hardly seemed to be sensible. Yet Russia contained more dissenters in the 1870s than at any earlier point in the century. Why did radical populism take hold when the government had been trying to put its house in order?  

*Of the many answers to this question, the most logical seems to be that the inadequacy of the reforms of the 1860s became increasingly apparent and that conspiracies and violence sprang from widespread disillusionment. Implicitly, this was the view of Nikolai Bunge, a senior figure at the Ministry of Finance who painted a lurid picture of the empire's economic circumstances in a paper of September 1880.* Bunge gave the impression that the emancipation of the serfs and the subsequent legislative changes had done nothing for the empire's material well-being. The immediate cause of his disquiet was the expense of fighting the Turks, but he said enough about structural problems to imply that the country's fundamental difficulties lay deeper. If a senior government official could be so critical, it is easy to imagine the opinions of educated people outside the government who had been reared in a tradition of dissent. If the reforms of the 1860s had failed to improve the country's prospects, the likelihood of public protest was considerable. Perhaps the people who figured in the trials of 1877-8 and who launched a campaign against the life of the tsar in 1879 were simply the public face of widespread social unrest.

The trouble with this argument is that the evidence for mass dissatisfaction with the policies of the regime seems not to have been as great as it ought to have been. If the people who were supposed to be getting poorer gave few signs of enthusiasm for revolt, why did dissidents feel the need to act in their name?

The empire was certainly experiencing significant social change. Towns have not played much part in this book because prior to the reign of Alexander II fewer than 8 per cent of the population lived in them, but around the middle of the century they started growing rapidly. The population of Kiev nearly doubled between 1861 and 1874, that of Moscow roughly tripled between 1846 and 1897. Types of employment changed significantly: 46,000 Muscovites were employed in 'large-scale industry' in 1853, 77,000 in 1890. City life was unhealthy. 'In the 1870s an estimated one-third of all Kievans suffered from venereal disease'. Peasants were leaving their villages for the towns or hunting for land in underpopulated parts of the empire. Official figures on the granting of internal passports suggest that internal migration 'more than tripled between the 1860s and 1880s'. Since many of those who travelled undoubtedly did so without acquiring a passport first, the true figure was certainly higher. Jeffrey Brooks points out, again on the basis of official figures, that 'Approximately 12 million people legally designated as peasants were living outside their native provinces or districts in 1897, and that 300,000 settlers migrated from European Russia to the lands beyond the Urals from 1861 to 1885'. When the South-Western Section of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society conducted a census of the population of Kiev in March 1874, one of the many things it discovered was that more than two-thirds of the inhabitants of the city had been born somewhere else.

An entire social group, women, entered the reckoning of legislators for the first time. In 1858 the government committed itself to providing them
with secondary education. In 1859 they were given permission to attend university lectures. Their involvement in the Sunday School movement of 1859–62 inclined the authorities to view them with suspicion, but legislation of January 1871 gave them the right to work in telegraph, railway, postal and business offices, and to teach and become midwives. In 1872 the Ger'e Higher Women’s Courses started at Moscow University, with the object of training women to teach in secondary schools. Amazingly, in a country where student corporate activity was considered seditious and where the educational system was based on strict centralization, the women directed the courses themselves. The ultra-conservative Minister of Education, Dmitri Tolstoi, seems either to have thought that educating women was safer than educating men because women were less likely to turn into dissidents, or that letting women study within the confines of the empire was a lesser evil than obliging them to seek education abroad. Official university-level courses for women, the first of their kind in Europe, opened in Russia in 1878. In Russia proper in 1881 some 45 per cent of the total number of students in secondary schools and some 20 per cent of the total in higher education were female, proportions exceeded only in the United States.

Despite these and other signs of social change, however, it was to be the 1880s and 1890s, if not the turn of the century, before the social and economic consequences of the emancipation of the serfs found expression in mass support for the radical transformation of the tsarist regime. It is not possible to argue, for example, that the beginnings of the emancipation of the female inhabitants of the Russian Empire played much part in the genesis of populism. Although some of the most famous populists were women — Vera Figner, Vera Zasulich, Sofia Perovskaya, Ekaterina Breshkovskaya – Dmitri Tolstoi seems to have been right, on the whole, to believe that women would reject the idea of becoming revolutionaries; even Soviet sources can only locate about a dozen heroines among the many women educated in the 1870s. It is true that city-based workers began to pose the regime significant problems. Whereas between 1861 and 1865 the authorities counted 85 strikes and worker disturbances, in the first half of the 1870s there were 175. Some of the strikes, moreover, were of large scale. In May 1870 800 textile workers struck at the Nevskii works in St Petersburg. The Governor of Moscow commented that the hands of the clock were approaching the time when the question of the antagonism between labour and capital might make itself heard. In October 1871 the head of the Moscow division of the Third Department informed his superiors that artisans were becoming keen readers of newspapers and taking up questions which in western Europe had given rise to ‘the so-called workers’ movement’. The following month, after strikes at two local factories, the Governor of Moscow told the Ministry of Internal Affairs that workers were meeting in taverns to discuss the propositions that ‘manufacturers lived by the sweat of labourers’ and that ‘consequently ... it was not a sin to remove the obstacles to the well-being of the working class, and would not

be a bad thing to ruin manufacturers by setting light to their factories and machines’. Although, at the end of 1871, the government instituted public readings of improving literature in the hope of offsetting the influence on workers of other sorts of reading matter, the 1870s witnessed not only the first involvement of workers in an overtly political demonstration (that of December 1876 outside the Kazan’ Cathedral in St Petersburg), but the foundation of both South and North Russian Workers’ Unions and some agitation by workers at political trials. Fifty-three strikes took place in 1878, sixty in 1879. In November 1878 as many as 2,000 workers withdrew their labour at a cotton mill in St Petersburg. Not only textile workers but also metal workers, railway workers, tobacco workers and seasonal port labourers all went on strike in various parts of the country at one time or another.

But although workers felt an inchoate sense of grievance, they rarely shared or even understood the objectives of non-worker propagandists. Most of them retained their roots in the countryside and tended to adhere to the monarchist ideals of the peasantry. Their major concerns were economic rather than political — better rates of pay and the improvement of conditions in the factory. The big issue in the strike of November 1878 at the ‘New’ cotton mill in St Petersburg was not the overthrow of the autocracy but the exploitation of adolescents. The Kazan’ Square demonstration of late 1876 featured not only the flying of the red flag but also support for Serbia, an objective which was anathema to the intellectuals who played a part in proceedings because Serbian success would have redounded to the credit of the tsar. The arrests which followed the demonstration persuaded St Petersburg workers that collaborating with non-workers was detrimental to their interests, with the result that when the Northern Union of Russian Workers was founded three years later it proceeded from ‘the cardinal assumption that only workers should be permitted to enter’. Thus revolutionary populism came to a head at a time when its chances of evoking sympathy among the working population of the empire’s cities seemed to be diminishing rather than growing.

Nor did the populists of the 1870s find much support among peasants. The atmosphere in the countryside was less febrile in the 1870s than it had been at the time of the emancipation. Indeed, it was much more tranquil than it ought to have been. The fundamental economic problems of the peasantry had not been ameliorated by the change in their legal status. In some ways the peasants’ difficulties had intensified. They were still tied to the commune and still locked into the principle of dividing the land into strips rather than fields. They had to continue paying dues to landlords so long as they remained in the state of ‘temporary obligation’. Owing to the landlords’ manipulation of the statutes of 1861, peasants who had moved from temporary obligation to freedom tended to be working smaller holdings than they had worked under serfdom. They also had to find cash for their redemption payments and could no longer make use of the pastures and woods which had been available to them when they belonged to the
the tsar in April 1879 peasants expressed the view that the authorities would punish the gentry for his deed by depriving them of some of their property. On 16 June 1879 the Minister of Internal Affairs, L. S. Makov, felt obliged to quash rumours of land redistribution by publishing an official statement to the effect that it formed no part of the government’s plans.

The most interesting thing about disquiet in the countryside in the 1870s, however, was not its prevalence but the fact that peasants looked for relief to the tsar. They were no more interested in revolutionary answers to their problems than were their cousins in the towns. As they revealed in their reaction to Solov’yev’s attempt at regicide, they thought of populist revolutionaries as bosses. Jakov Stefanovich, the city-based agitator who played a key part in exacerbating the obstreperousness of the peasants of Chigirin, achieved his objective only by forging documents in the name of the tsar. As we shall see below, students who left the towns for the countryside in the summer of 1874 in the hope of finding sympathy for a radical transformation of the existing order became extremely disillusioned. Later radicals fared no better. Rozalia Bograd, a medical student who subsequently married Georgii Plekhanov (the organizer of the demonstration outside the Kazan Cathedral in December 1876), spent the summer of 1877 in the village of Shirokoe in the province of Samara. Unlike many of her peers, she succeeded in establishing good relations with the local community, but she was still obliged to conclude that while ‘the population of the village was of an inquisitive bent’, it was ‘not revolutionary’. If very few peasants listened sympathetically to agitation on the part of outsiders, even fewer went beyond rumour-mongering to the practice of sedition. Petr Mart’anov, the peasant who published an open letter to Alexander II in The Bell and subsequently died at hard labour, might be called the swallow who failed to make a summer. Only 92 of the 662 people who were prosecuted in political trials in Russia between 1871 and 1879 belonged to the peasant estate, and 45 of them appeared in the single, highly unusual affair of the peasants of Chigirin.

**POPULISTS, EDUCATION, AND THE ROLE OF IDEAS**

If, then, the activities which gave rise to the six great political trials of 1877 and 1878 and the subsequent attempts on the life of the tsar are not to be explained by pointing to massive popular dissatisfaction with the policies of the government, their origins must be sought elsewhere. The best places to look are the Russian educational system and the writings of a few influential ideologists. It was convenient, of course, for Russian students who fell under the influence of would-be opinion-formers to believe that there was a relationship between the world around them and the theories which
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few populists, however, came from the lowest rungs of society, and hardly any could say with Andrei Zheligov that by birth they were peasants.

Some of the students who became radicals undoubtedly became dependent on the material and psychological support they received in tight-knit student circles. Under Alexander II a significant proportion of Russian university students attended universities far from their homes. In the academic year 1877–8 991 of the 1,418 students at St Petersburg University had received their secondary education outside the St Petersburg educational district.6 Equivalent figures for the other universities of the empire were much smaller, but it was not until the reign of Alexander III that the government required people who sought a university education to attend their local institution. It was hardly surprising that students who were effectively migrants looked to each other for support, or that in certain circumstances a student self-help group might turn from the pursuit of comfort and entertainment to political ideas, the desire to convert others, and a belief in the need for action. What effected the transformation, however, is hard to pin down.

A major factor seems to have been reading matter. Chernyshevskii’s novel What is to be Done?, Vasiliy Bervi-Florovskii’s The Condition of the Working Class in Russia, Nikolai Mikhailovskii’s essay ‘What is Progress?’, Petr Lavrov’s Historical Letters, and Mikhail Bakunin’s Statism and Anarchy notably altered the intellectual environment.

Chernyshevskii wrote What is to be Done? in the Peter and Paul Fortress after his arrest in July 1862. Incredibly, in what was ‘perhaps the most spectacular example of bureaucratic bungling in the cultural realm during the reign of Alexander II’, the censors allowed the novel to appear in print in 1863. Subtitled ‘Tales about New People’, it centred on Vera Pavlovna Rozal’skaia, the daughter of a St Petersburg apartment block caretaker who escaped the philistinism of her parents. What endeared the novel to readers was its message that ordinary people could take charge of their lives. Chernyshevskii introduced a god-like background figure, Rakhtemov, to emphasize that his major protagonists were unexceptional. If Vera Pavlovna could throw off the ties that bound her, so could others. In an open address to his readers, the novelist put the point bluntly: ‘Come up out of your godforsaken underworld, my friends, come up. It’s not so difficult’.8

The nature of the godforsaken underworld in which most Russians dwelt was the subject of Bervi-Florovskii’s Condition of the Working Class in Russia, ‘an exhaustive survey of the nation’s misery’ which appeared in St Petersburg in 1869.9 Aleksandra Kornilova, who read the book with Sofia Perovskia, whose forebears included governors, ministers, ambassadors, and the morganatic spouse of a tsar, explaining why Russian aristocrats became radicals is about as easy as explaining why Patty Hearst joined the Symbionese Liberation Army. Very

attracted them, but the notion that such a relationship existed was less a re-
fection of Russian reality than a function of their capacity for making the
wish father to the thought.

State Secretary A. A. Polovtsov derived the impression from the trial of
an obscure peasant in 1878 that ‘an entirely goodhearted person who came
to St Petersburg with the intention of receiving an education there was
bound inevitably to become a nihilist, an enemy of the existing order.’

Strictly speaking he was wrong, for the overwhelming majority of those
who passed through the Russian educational system in the 1860s and
1870s turned into loyal servants of the state. In a sense, however, he was
right. A large proportion of the relatively small number of people who be-
came ‘enemies of the existing order’ were better educated than their con-
temporaries. Enrolment in tertiary education was not a sufficient reason
for taking up radical ideas, but it came close to being a necessary qualification.

Daniel Brower’s investigation of radicals active in St Petersburg between
1840 and 1875 reveals that 76 per cent of the 50 who were active between
1840 and 1855, 96 per cent of the 148 who were active between 1855 and
1869, and 87 per cent of the 202 who were active between 1870 and 1875
had studied in higher educational institutions.10 It also reveals that more
radicals were active in St Petersburg in the last and shortest of Brower’s
three sub-periods than in either of the other two, which seems to imply
that the radicalizing effects of higher education were increasing. Since
the tertiary educational sector was growing in size, however, speculating on
the rate of radicalization is difficult. Not only did the number of students in
Russian universities increase by 67 per cent between 1869 and 1882,11 but
tertiary-level education was available in a growing number of technical col-
lleges. As we shall see, the Petrovskia Agricultural Academy in Moscow
became the principal recruiting ground for a famous dissident almost im-
mediately after its foundation in 1865.

Why a minority of Russian students became radicals when the majority
did not is a question which has never been answered satisfactorily.
Answers couched in terms of social origins founder on the fact that most
students still belonged to the ranks of the gentry. It is true that, by more or
less banning members of the clerical estate from entering universities in
March 1879,12 the government gave the impression that it thought radicals
sprang from the lower orders. It is also true that many gentry were too
poor to differ significantly from members of the estates beneath them, that
the proportion of non-gentry students was slowly rising, and that more
than two-thirds of the St Petersburg activists of the first half of the 1870s at-
tended tertiary educational institutions in which the composition of the stu-
dent body was less gentry-dominated than it was in the universities.
Activists of the 1870s nevertheless included Petr Kropotkin, who came
from a long line of princes, and Sofia Perovskia, whose forebears in-
cluded governors, ministers, ambassadors, and the morganatic spouse of a

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Thus radicals derived inspiration from empirical literature as well as from fiction. When they read Mikhailovskii, Lavrov and Bakunin, they entered the realm of political and sociological theory. Mikhailovskii's 'What is Progress?' (1869) taught that 'an exclusively objective evaluation cannot give a complete picture of the facts of social life.'21 Progress, in other words, was spiritual as well as material: people had the power to influence the world around them. Lavrov's Historical Letters, which appeared in the form of essays in 1868 and 1869 and as a book in 1870, went beyond Mikhailovskii by arguing that developed individuals not only had the power to make a mark on the world around them, but were under an obligation to do so. In Lavrov's opinion, leading a just life meant not only attending to 'the development of one's personality in physical, intellectual, and moral respects', but also attaining for the selfishness on which personal fulfilment depended by furthering civilization rather than merely acting as its custodian.22

Mikhail Bakunin called Lavrov's ideas 'meaningless scholarly twaddle',23 but not for the obvious reason that they made excessive demands on their adherents. He thought they would prove ineffectual. Even if people took them seriously, he believed, change would be long delayed and slow. The object of Bakunin's Statism and Anarchy, which was printed in Switzerland in 1873 but quickly penetrated the Russian countryside, was to effect change quickly. Bakunin did not believe the Russian Empire had to be put off until intellectuals had developed their personalities and accumulated disciples. People who adopted this view had got hold of the wrong end of the stick: 'in order to alter thought,' Bakunin said, 'one must first of all change life.'24 He rejected the notion that 'changing life' was a distant prospect. He thought the conditions for changing Russia were present already. Unlike most theorists of populism, he trusted the people to know their best interests. Their communal traditions, he thought, had prepared them for that 'anarchy' which was infinitely preferable to the growth of the state. Non-peasants who sought the destruction of the state needed only to move into the countryside and light the touch-paper of revolution.

The overwhelming effect of Russian ideological tracts of the 1860s and 1870s was to encourage their readers to believe that the circumstances in which ordinary people lived their lives were unbearable and could and should be altered. Many readers also formed the impression that action had to be taken quickly. The first volume of Karl Marx's Capital, which appeared in German in 1867 and in Russian translation in 1872, inveighed against the pernicious effects of capitalism in western Europe. The capitalist mode of production was gaining ground in Russia and threatened to depress the condition of the population still further. That populists feared the coming of capitalism is certain. The title of Bervi-Flerovskii's book was an obvious echo of Engels's Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844, and the records of the court which tried most of the populists who were prosecuted in the 1870s showed that many of them had a certain ac-

quaintance with the writings of Marx.25 Edward Acton has made clear that populists were not averse to industrialization per se, but rejected the kind that was taking place in the west.26 According to populists, Russian industrialization had to rest on the communal traditions of the Russian countryside. Like Marx, populists held that socialism was a laudable goal, but they sought to arrive at it by a different route. They rejected the materialist notion of unavoidable economic stages. The structure of Russian society, they believed, was unique. Whereas western societies could achieve socialism only by experiencing capitalism first, the survival in Russia of the peasant commune gave Russians the chance to generate a socialist order on the back of feudalism. As late as 1885 Lev Tikhomirov argued that the Russian variant of socialism would not be 'the product of the development only of capitalist production', but would rather be marked by 'the coming together of the surviving forms of communal Russia with the socializing life of Europe.'27 By the mid-1880s many populists were changing their views (Tikhomirov himself was to become a monarchist), but in the 1870s their commitment to the possibility of a 'Russian road to socialism' was well-nigh total. Marx (and the emancipation of the serfs) made them feel that the Russian road might shortly be closed. The need for haste was considerable.

KARAKOZOV AND NECHAEV

Because none of the ideological tracts which the educated and the semi-educated devoted in the 1860s and 1870s made clear how the objectives in which populists believed were to be attained, activists had to work out modes of operation for themselves. Violence seemed to be the keynote in the 1860s; propagandistic activities at the beginning of the 1870s; agitation in 1874; a combination of agitation and propaganda between 1875 and 1878; and violence between 1879 and 1881. The swings of the pendulum were so great that, as both Boris Koz'min and Richard Pipes have pointed out,28 subsuming all the revolutionary activity of the 1860s and 1870s under the single name 'populism' is probably a mistake. It is certainly anarchistic, for in the language of the period the term 'populist' (narodniki) referred only to a dissident who took up residence in the countryside with the object of getting to know the peasantry. Nikolai Morozov, who became a leading advocate of the use of terror, said that in the first half of the 1870s the people whom historians have dubbed populists were known simply as 'radicals' (by contrast with 'liberals', who spoke of freedom but did nothing to promote it, and ' nihilists', who were characterized by the eccentricity of their manners).29 Although virtually all Russian dissidents of the 1860s and 1870s sought to promote the people at the expense of the state, the narrative of their activities reveals extensive tactical differences.
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According to Franco Venturi, still the major non-Russian historian of the Russian dissident movements of the 1860s and 1870s, 'the first purely and typically Populist nucleus' was that which produced Dmitrii Karakozov, the man who fired on Alexander II in 1866 and was at least partly responsible for the government's abandonment of reform.\(^{30}\) Having been expelled from Kazan University for involvement in the disturbances of 1861, the mentally unstable Karakozov returned to his studies in 1865 but transferred to Moscow University in 1864. There he joined a circle of students led by his cousin, Nikolai Ishutin, who had been recruiting sympathizers for a year. Ostensibly, Ishutin's association was no more than one of the many self-help groups set up by students of non-metropolitan origin, but in reality it was much more dynamic. Even judging by the highly suspect evidence which members of the circle gave to the crown's investigators, Ishutin's co-adjuvants exemplified the entire range of contemporary dissident ideologies. Some of them believed in putting the existing machinery of state to new uses, some wanted to alter it, some to consign it to oblivion. Karakozov was in the first camp. The point of killing the tsar, he said, was to place on the throne the reform-minded Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich. Ivan Khudiakov, the circle's agent in St Petersburg, portrayed himself as a believer in constitutionalism and gradualism. The government could be pressurized, he thought, into summoning an 'Assembly of the Land' (a representative body employed by Muscovite tsars in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). Ishutin went further. The authorities ought to think long and hard, he said, about the socio-economic conditions under which the masses laboured. His own disillusionment arose from witnessing the hardships experienced by ex-serf factory workers in Kaluga in 1865. They were worse off, he thought, than they had been before the emancipation. Better working conditions would obviate the need for actions of the type undertaken by Karakozov. Ishutin envisaged a socialist order in which local communities would be the building blocks of society. Members of a community would work half the land in their own interests, half in the interests of society as a whole. Decisions affecting only a single community would be taken locally. Decisions affecting the population in general would be taken by a gathering of community representatives.

Ishutin claimed not to be an extremist. He denied contemplating the acquisition of funds by robbery and dissociated himself from Karakozov's attempt at regicide. His object, he said, was to form links with the peasantry and the urban working class in order to introduce them to socialism. When his preparations were in order, he planned to propose to the government that it accept his socialist principles. In the event of a refusal he would set in train a popular revolution. According to Khudiakov, revolution was scheduled for a point about five years ahead. Ishutin admitted that the circle had contemplated establishing a subsection called 'Hell' whose members were to be dedicated to violence, but his own view, he said, was that the proposal was unworkable. Karakozov had pressed for creating 'Hell' rapidly, but other members of the circle had demurred. 'You can imagine our horror,' said Ishutin, 'when we learned from Khudiakov that Karakozov was in St Petersburg'. The would-be assassin had been persuaded to return from the capital and go into hospital, but he had then started claiming that he would get better treatment in St Petersburg. The attempt on the tsar had taken place after his second departure for the north. Ishutin insisted that although his circle was guilty of a number of things, it did not espouse violence.\(^{31}\)

The 'long-haired hulk in the red shirt' was undoubtedly lying. At the point when he began his activities, the violent flyersheets of 1861 and 1862 were still in the air. Intellectually, Ishutin was the heir of Petr Zaichnevskii. The evidence of junior members of the circle made it apparent that his imagination was vivid. When recruiting a seventh-grade schoolboy in Penza in 1863 he not only spoke of the need for a revolution to introduce socialism in Russia but also asserted that a 5,000-strong party committed to this objective already existed. Later, he claimed to know of a pan-European committee for organizing bomb plots. On the spectrum of political activity which ran from discussion and propaganda on the right to violence and terror on the left, his group was well to the left of centre.

They were not nearly so far to the left, however, as Sergei Nechaev, the nineteen-year-old son of a house-painter from the textile town of Ivanovo who arrived in St Petersburg just after Karakozov fired on the tsar. Less privileged and less highly educated than most of those with whom he associated, Nechaev outdid all of them in the resolution with which he dedicated himself to toppling the existing order. 'I have lived for forty years and I have met many people,' said his associate Ivan Pryzhov, 'but I have never met anyone with Nechaev's energy, nor can I imagine that anyone like him exists.'\(^{32}\) After coming to the capital Nechaev worked as a schoolteacher and attended lectures at St Petersburg University. Disaffection among students enabled him to form a coterie which, in the winter of 1866–9, produced an elaborate 'Programme of Revolutionary Actions'. After asserting that the condition of the masses was wretched, that the tsarist regime was incapable of undertaking economic reform, and that the only way out — is political revolution', the programme laid down a timetable. By May 1869 circles of dissidents were to be set up in St Petersburg and Moscow. Between May and September they were to establish additional organizations in provincial towns and draw up a detailed description of the object and methods of their organization. In October 1869 they were to return from the provinces to the centre, finalize the party rules, and 'begin systematic revolutionary activity embracing all of Russia'. A mass uprising was to take place in the spring of 1870, when, under the statutes of emancipation of 1861, the gentry would lose the right to impose land allocations on their former serfs. At that time peasants would be in a position to express the full extent of their dissatisfaction.\(^{33}\)

Although disturbances among the students of St Petersburg in March 1869 produced a round of arrests which broke up Nechaev's circle and obliged him to flee abroad, he adhered to his plan of campaign. In Switzerland
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land he gullied Mikhail Bakunin into collaborating with him on the detailed rules of his non-existent organization. Conventionally known as the ‘Catechism of a Revolutionary’, these rules were one of the most extraordinary products of the nineteenth-century Russian revolutionary movement. From strictly organizational matters (the construction of a network of cells, members of which were to be in touch only with the cells immediately above and below them), the ‘Catechism’ proceeded to the type of person whom Nechaev and Bakunin admired and the tasks which they expected their acolytes to undertake. ‘The revolutionary’, Nechaev believed, ‘is a doomed man. He has neither his own interests, nor affairs, nor feelings, nor attachments, nor property, nor even name. Everything in him is absorbed by a single, exclusive interest, by a total concept, a total passion – revolution.’ The goal of the revolutionary was ‘merciless destruction’. Those in authority over society were to be executed or exploited. The people at large were to be provoked into undertaking a ‘massive rebellion’.35

True to the schedule he had drawn up before fleeing abroad, Nechaev returned to Russia in August 1869. This time he based himself in Moscow. Students of the Petrovskaya Agricultural Academy flocked to his banner, but one of them, Ivan Ivanov, proved less compliant than the others. Nechaev and four associates murdered him. When, on 25 November 1869, Ivanov’s weighted corpse was washed up on the bank of a lake in the Academy grounds, the police and the Third Department began rounding up everyone with whom Nechaev had ever been associated. Nechaev himself escaped to western Europe, but seventy-nine people stood trial between July and September 1871. The ‘Programme of Revolutionary Actions’ and the ‘Catechism of a Revolutionary’ became public knowledge. Nechaev had not only failed to promote the cause of revolution but had apparently dealt it a mortal blow. The exposure of his methods obliged potential revolutionaries to return to the drawing board. The premise on which he based his activities, moreover, had turned out to be ill founded, for the spring of 1870 went by without occasioning significant unrest in the countryside.

The trial of Nechaev’s associates, remarkably enough, did the revolutionary cause some good. Despite the reform of the courts in 1861, Ishutin’s circle had been tried in camera. In 1871 the authorities believed that they had such a strong case against the friends of Nechaev that they could afford to try them in public. The plan backfired; Nechaev’s associates succeeded in conveying the impression that Nechaev had misled them. The scholarly Petr Tkachev, whom we shall meet again, made a particularly favourable impression on the court. His common-law wife delivered a well-received address on the oppression of Russian women. Only four of the accused, those who had participated in the murder of Ivanov, were condemned to hard labour; forty-two were acquitted. Dostoevsky vilified Nechaev in a novel (The Devils), but most educated contemporaries – even the poet Fedor Tiutchev and the novelist Nikolai Leskov, neither of whom was a radical – accepted the view that Nechaev’s associates were more sinned against than sinning. Stung by its defeat, the government created a special department of the Senate to try future political cases. Thus Nechaev indirectly demonstrated that the tsarist authorities were less than wholly committed to the observation of legal niceties. They certainly bypassed the law in his own case, for the trial which followed his extradition from Switzerland in 1872 had the distinction of being the most improperly conducted of all the political trials held in Russia between 1871 and 1876.36

THE CHAIKOVTSY AND THE GOING TO THE PEOPLE

After Nechaev, Russian dissidents appeared to give up all thought of conspiracy, revolutionary cells, direct action and terror. The effect of Nechaevism on radicals was to give militancy a bad name. Populists dedicated themselves to self-education. ‘Lavrovism’ (the development of the individual) took precedence over ‘Bakuninism’ (revolutionary agitation). A seventeen-year-old youth from Astrakhan who arrived in St Petersburg in the autumn of 1869 witnessed a confusing debate among students on the question whether propaganda was preferable to terror. ‘I did not know’, he said, ‘what it was better to start doing: distribute books or engage in murder.’37 In keeping with most other populists at the beginning of the 1870s, he decided to distribute books. Nechaevism seemed to be a dead letter.

Circulating dissident literature lay at the heart of the activities of a group of students at the St Petersburg Medico-Surgical Academy. Known misleadingly as ‘Chaiakovtsev’ (after N. V. Chaiakovskii, an early but influential member), their leader was Mark Natanson, who ran a student library at the Medical Academy from which he dispensed books on the social questions of the day. Natanson made available the radical journalists Dobroliubov and Nekrasov, the west European historians Mignet and Motley, the Russian historians Kostomarov and Shchepov, the naturalists Sechenov and Darwin, the west European socialists Lassalle and Louis Blanc, and selections from the work of Voltaire and Marx. He formed close ties with the capital’s booksellers and publishers and procured works that were hard to get hold of (Bervi’s Condition of the Working Class in Russia and Lavrov’s Historical Letters). He made arrangements for the printing abroad of proscribed works such as the essays of Chernyshevsky and Marx’s Civil War in France (which a member of the circle translated into Russian). His fellow ‘librarian’, V. M. Aleksandrov, went to Switzerland to run the group’s printing press. In the summer of 1873 the Chaiakovtsev purchased in Vienna everything they needed for the establishment of an underground press in Russia, though developments at home prevented them from setting it up.

The Chaiakovtsev were few in number. Even counting their close associates in the women’s circle of Sof’ia Perovskaya, there seem to have been
only thirty-six of them. Because of their hostility to the dictatorial inclinations of Nechaev, they kept their dealings informal. Between 1869 and 1871 the closest they came to a statement of aims was a document entitled ‘A Programme for Circles Devoted to Self-Education and Practical Activity’, which rested on the abstractions of Lavrov’s Historical Letters. Although the authorities suppressed the circle’s reprint of Bervi’s The Condition of the Working Class in Russia, tried to prevent the Chaikovtsy from distributing Bervi’s ABC of the Social Sciences, and pursued Natanson indefatigably, it was hard to believe that they had much to fear from a coterie whose principal interest, self-improvement, affected no one but the members.

The regime probably sensed, however, that students would be unable to confine themselves for long to the circulation of high-brow literature. Nor did they. Even in 1869 they spent their summer holidays accumulating information on conditions in the countryside. In January 1871 they arranged a meeting in St Petersburg of sympathizers from Moscow, Kiev, Kharkov, Odessa and Kazan. At the end of 1871 two members of the circle began making contact with factory workers. However imperfectly expressed, the desire for action was never far from the surface. It gained ground when Prince Petr Kropotkin became a member in May 1872. ‘At that time,’ Kropotkin said later, ‘the circle had nothing revolutionary in it.’ In 1872 and 1873 it changed course. Kropotkin differed from the other members not only in background and age (he was thirty), but also in ideological orientation.

Three months in Switzerland immediately prior to joining the Chaikovtsy had turned him into a Bakuninist. He had difficulty persuading his new associates to give up work among the educated and replace it with agitation among the common people, but gradually he developed among the Chaikovtsy the inclinations which some of them had voiced already. In late 1873 he wrote what might be called the circle’s second manifesto (of the ‘Programme for Circles Devoted to Self-Education’ can be called the first). Entitled ‘Must we concern ourselves with investigating what constitutes a perfect future order?’, the essay answered its own question in the affirmative and went on to discuss what a ‘perfect future order’ would look like and how it was to be achieved. Kropotkin left his readers in no doubt that the future was to be socialist, that state organizations were to be eliminated, and that the present social order was to be toppled by way of popular revolution. The task of the Chaikovtsy was to bring the revolution nearer: ‘our goal must be to implement our force so as to hasten this outburst, to clarify those hopes and aspirations which exist in unclear forms among the enormous majority.’

Although Kropotkin by no means dominated the Chaikovtsy, by the end of 1873 intellectual currents within the circle had been running in his favor for almost two years. Members had been increasing their contacts with the factory workers of St Petersburg. Reginald Zelnik and Pamela Sears McKinsey explain this aspect of the group’s activity in different ways, but the question whether the Chaikovtsy thought of factory workers as displaced peasants or as proletarians is less important than the fact that their enthusiasm for making contact with non-students was growing.

In 1872 Sofia Perovskaja investigated conditions among the peasants of Samara. In 1873 Sergei Kravchinski and Dmitri Rogachev conducted propaganda in the province of Tver. The Chaikovtsy were turning from theory to practice. From seeking out the under-privileged to engaging in agitation among them was a short step. It was being given a high priority, moreover, by the ‘Dolgushintsy’, a rival group whose commitment to action encouraged the Chaikovtsy in the revision of their opinions. The Siberian Aleksandr Dolgushin had founded a circle in St Petersburg at about the same time as Natanson but had been arrested at the beginning of 1870 and executed in the trial of Nechaev’s associates in 1871. Although he and his Siberian associates had been cleared, the authorities were right to think that they were dangerous. In 1872 and 1873 they did more than their contemporaries to take the ideas of populist intellectuals to the people at large.

Early in 1873 they persuaded Vasilii Bervi, author of The Condition of the Working Class in Russia, to put the case for social equality in a pamphlet suitable for distribution among the peasantry. In another such pamphlet the leader of the group called for the abolition of the peasants’ remaining obligations to their former landlords, the redistribution of land, the replacement of long-service recruitment into the army by local military training, decent schools, the abolition of internal passports, and above all ‘that the government consist not of nobles alone but of people chosen by the masses themselves’. The Dolgushints moved to Moscow in the spring of 1873, set up an illegal printing press, began distributing their pamphlets in the countryside, and sought to promote an immediate revolution. Since Kropotkin’s arguments and the natural inclinations of certain Chaikovtsy were tending towards activism already, the enthusiasm of Dolgushin’s circle made a pacific approach to the need for social change look increasingly faint-hearted.

Official moves against Dolgushin and many of the Chaikovtsy prompted radicals who remained at liberty to throw caution to the winds. In the summer of 1874, rural fora of the kind undertaken by Perovskaja in 1872 and Kravchinski in 1873 ceased to be experimental and became general. Under the slogan ‘To the People!’, disaffected city-based intellectuals fanned out along the highways and byways of the empire. Especially from Moscow, but also from St Petersburg, Kiev and other seats of learning, between 1,000 and 2,000 students and former students took their theories into the countryside. Their activities left traces in thirty-seven provinces of the empire. Bakunin wrote in Statism and Anarchy in 1873 that ‘the chief defect which to this day paralyzes and makes impossible a universal popular insurrection in Russia is the … isolation and separateness of the local peasant worlds’. The duty of radicals, Bakunin thought, was to ‘shatter that isolation’ by introducing peasant communities to ‘the vital current of revolutionary thought, will, and deed’. By forsaking self-education for action the rural agitators of 1874 made plain their Bakuninism.

Their efforts, however, came to nothing, for the premise on which
Bakunin rested his arguments was mistaken. Peasant communities rejected the idea of attacking the authorities. The main effect of the ‘going to the people’ was to demonstrate the populists’ naivety. Examples abound of the radicals’ inability to convince peasants of the need for revolution. In the province of Iaroslavl’, a literate peasant asked N. K. Bukh what purpose would be served by introducing elective government. After all, he said, peasants elected the heads of volosti already, but however sober and sensible a candidate appeared to be at the moment he stood for election, he soon became a rogue and a drunkard. In an address to the peasants of Vasiilevka in the province of Samara, Porfiri Voinarlski dwelt on his audience’s tax burden, the inadequacy of their landholdings, and the frequency of hunger. When, however, he called on the peasants to turn to the upper orders, and when he claimed that if they did so the tsar would be compelled to abdicate and land would be transferred to those who worked it, his words fell on deaf ears. A peasant asked him who would deal with malefactors once the existing authorities had been removed. The reply ‘The community’ proved unsatisfactory, for the peasant believed that although a community could deal with a single criminal, it was incapable of dealing with ten or twenty at a time. Voinarlski lost his temper, called the peasants idiots, spat, and said that although the French had no tsar, they still managed to live and conduct their affairs. This argument, one suspects, carried little weight on the banks of the Volga, though it is true that in the province of Chernigov peasants expressed positive interest in the lives of the ordinary inhabitants of other countries. From the point of view of a city-based agitator, however, the Chernigovites drew strange conclusions from what they were told. On learning that in England the labour force was landless, they deduced that the English gentry had seized the commoners’ property, that the same would happen in the Russian Empire unless they backed the tsar in his determination to keep the gentry at bay, that although they possessed insufficient land the tsar would give them more, and that without land it was impossible to pay taxes, fill the treasury, or keep the state in being. The agitators who conducted this exchange might have concluded with some justification that whatever advantages Bakunin discerned in anarchy, peasants were natural statists. To judge by an exchange of 1873, they were certainly not radicals. An agitator was trying to paint a picture of the socialist order which he hoped his audience would help him create. A peasant interrupted with the excited thought that, after the land had been redivided, he would make the most of the additional property which fell into his hands by hiring labour. Putting social relations on an equitable footing was going to be difficult if what peasants really wanted was the replacement of one sort of exploitation with another.

It is still sometimes said that the peasantry not only failed to sympathize with urban agitators, but denounced them to the tsarist authorities. Daniel Field, however, adduces strong evidence to show that the many arrests of 1874 resulted not from denunciations on the part of peasants but from the antipathy of ‘merchants, priests, stewards, and squires’. Field acknowledges that peasants displayed an ‘adamantine unresponsiveness to populist ideas’ but points out that they were equally unsympathetic to enforcers of the law. Despite their monarchism, they steered clear of the tsar’s officials. Unsympathetic to the urban radicals who appeared in their midst, they did not turn them in.

The upshot of this argument is that those who ‘went to the people’ might have stood a better chance of persuading peasants to see their point of view if they had approached them with greater circumspection. If, instead of penetrating all parts of the country simultaneously and expecting quick results, they had infiltrated the villages gradually and put down roots, they might have seemed unimportant to the non-peasant part of the rural population and gained the time to find peasant adherents. Some populists drew this conclusion for themselves. Aleksandr Lukashevich admitted at the end of 1877 that at the time of the ‘going to the people’ he had been extremely naive. He had decided that radicals had to acquaint themselves with the people at large, but he had no idea how to set about it. Since he was a Pole from the Ukrainian part of the empire, he had never been in a Russian peasant’s hut. He had believed that the only way of bridging the gap between the peasantry and the intelligentsia was to don peasant garb and enter the peasant milieu. With benefit of hindsight he thought that his attitude had been ill conceived. He recommended a person who was thinking of ‘going to the people’ to associate first with ordinary folk in the towns — in inns, in hostels and in taverns frequented by migrant peasants. Preparation, in other words — and by implication, gradualism — would serve the radical cause better than haste.

THE RISE AND FALL OF LAND AND LIBERTY

The reaction of Lukashevich to the set-back of 1874 indicated a tendency on the part of certain populists to turn from Bakuninism to Lavrovism. Having implied the need for preparation in his Historical Letters of the late 1860s, Lavrov made his views clearer after slipping out of Russia in early 1870. In the programme of his journal Forward! and in the essay Knowledge and Revolution, both of which appeared in Zurich in 1873, he emphasized that ‘the reconstruction of Russian society must be carried out ... not for the benefit of the people, but also by the people’. In view of the unpreparedness of the majority and its low level of literacy, revolutionaries could not expect ‘the reconstruction of Russian society’ to take place in the near future. They should not imagine, therefore, ‘that they have merely to join the ranks of the people’. Rather, they should prepare themselves for heightening the masses’ political consciousness ‘when the
time comes; ‘only thorough knowledge provides this preparation.’ In these explicit statements of his political creed, Lavrov was attempting to combat Bakunin's Statism and Anarchy. In theory, Bakunin shared the view that revolutions had to be made by the people who were to benefit from them, but since he had convinced himself that the Russian peasantry were ripe for revolution already, he denied the need for time-consuming self-education on the part of revolutionaries. After the populists' failure to provoke a mass upheaval in 1874, Lavrov looked right and Bakunin wrong. The experience of defeat encouraged part of the populist movement to abandon direct action for preparation and gradualism. Thus Rozalia Bograd spent the summer of 1877 in the province of Samara not to circulate calls for a rising, but to educate herself and the peasants. She already admired her future husband Plekhanov, but as an avowed Lavrovist fought shy of his Bakuninism. Deborah Hardy devotes a chapter of her book on the populists of the second half of the 1870s to showing that Bograd was not the only radical who believed that the correct response to the disappointments of 1874 was to continue ‘going to the people’, but not to expect immediate results.49

After 1874, however, most populists needed to feel that they were getting somewhere. Indeed, the humiliation of the arrests and the government's preparations for a massive trial (the trial of the 193) embittered radicals who remained at liberty and heightened their desire for action. Lavrov's plan of campaign was too slow-moving. Even Bakunin's philosophy began to seem moderate. Certain radicals felt that, if they had overestimated the revolutionary potential of the common people, the day was coming when they would have to make revolution on their own. They would have been appalled to think that they were returning to the views of Karakozov and Nечаев, but in contemplating the idea of acting without the support of the masses they were opening the door to violence. Had they but known it, the one-time Nечаевist Petr Tkachev was elaborating a philosophy to suit them. Tkachev had been arrested in 1869 and condemned at the trial of Nечаев's associates in 1871, but in late 1873 he fled to Switzerland. In emigration he enunciated ideas which differed sharply from those of Bakunin and Lavrov. Like Nечаev, but unlike all the populists of the early 1870s, Tkachev denied that the masses had to decide their own fate. On the contrary, he held that change could be effected only by a small group of conspirators. If radicals hoped to transform the Russian Empire, they had to abandon their belief in the revolutionary potential of the peasantry, accept the importance of organization, and conquer the state machine. The revolution was to be made in the name of the people, but not to be the product of a popular revolt.

In view of the terrorist conspiracies which marked the final stage of populism, it is tempting to argue that the failure of the ‘going to the people’ turned radicals into supporters of Tkachev. While it can be demonstrated, however, that populists read Chernyshevskii, Bervi, Mikhailovskii, Lavrov and Bakunin, it is not easy to demonstrate that many of them read

Tkachev. Only one complete set of The Tocsin, the journal Tkachev published in Switzerland, is to be found in a Soviet library.0 The distribution of The Tocsin and its influence in Russia were insignificant.0 Evgeniia Rudnikova has demonstrated a connection between Tkachevist circles abroad and a circle led by Petr Zaichnevskii in Orel between 1873 and 1877,0 but by the mid-1870s Zaichnevskii was on the periphery of Russian revolutionary politics. S. S. Volk makes the best case for the influence of Tkachev on the terrorist phase of the populist movement,53 but the main reason Tkachev seems important today derives from the fact that Lenin spoke highly of him more than a quarter of a century after he had elaborated his theories.54

Despite the populists' ignorance of Tkachev's activities, however, they edged towards similar views 'under the pressures of circumstance'.55 They made plain in 1875 that they did not intend to take the defeat of the 'going to the people' lying down. The 'Pan-Russian Social-Revolutionary Organization', which functioned briefly in Moscow, and the 'South Russian Union of Workers', which functioned briefly in Odessa, showed that one of the ways in which they responded to lack of success in the countryside was to redress themselves to workers in the towns.56 In the southern part of the empire, they began to consider a mode of activity among the peasantry which depended neither on the basic assumption of 1874 (that peasants were natural revolutionaries) nor on the Lavrovist assumption that only by long residence in the villages could populists reveal to peasants where their true interests lay. This new mode of activity, the invention of Iakov Stefanovich, turned on the exploitation of the peasants' monarchism. In Statism and Anarchy Bakunin had called the peasants' 'faith in the tsar' one of the 'three dark features' that 'cloud the Russian people's ideal, distorting its character and very much impeding and retarding its realization'.57 Stefanovich found a way of turning the monarchism of the peasants to the advantage of revolutionaries. His activities in the Chigirin district of the province of Kiev between 1875 and 1877 showed that certain populists had abandoned the notion of the peasants' enthusiasm for rebellion and replaced it with a readiness to engage in organization and provocation.

Stefanovich said that he first learned of the complex developments among the peasants of Chigirin from reports in the émigré Russian press.08 Indirectly, he may have been aware of Ekaterina Breshko-Breskovskai'a activities in the Chigirin district at the time of the 'going to the people'. A Chigirin peasant told Breshkovskai'a in 1874 that at the beginning of the 1870s the members of a village community had protested unanimously about the activities of local land surveyors. Nineteen of the complainants had been flogged and six despatched to Siberia. The peasant concluded that nothing could be achieved by a single rural community. 'It is necessary', he said, 'to write a charter and distribute it throughout the country, to bring about a mass uprising. ... It will then be possible to deal with both the government and the army'.09 Devising a false royal charter and distributing it among the peasants was precisely what Stefanovich did. He first
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appeared in Chigirin at the end of 1875. His ‘primary task’, he said later, ‘was injecting a revolutionary element into [the peasants] dumb protest’. He intended ‘to try and create a revolutionary organization’. The ultimate goal of this secret peasant society was to be an insurrection. In February 1876 he set off for St Petersburg with a petition from the Chigirin peasants, returning at the end of the year with a fabricated ‘Imperial Secret Charter’ which called on the peasants to ‘rise as one man ... and take possession of all the land’. The upshot, in 1877, was probably the largest set of peasant disorders to take place anywhere in the empire in the reign of Alexander II. Many arrests ensued and forty-five peasants stood trial in Kiev in June 1879, but Stefanovich had shown what could be done by conspiratorial methods. In a heated exchange of 1878 with the ultra-Lavrovist Ukrainian émigré Mykhailo Drahomanov, he insisted that what the Ukraine needed was not the gradual raising of its inhabitants’ consciousness but ‘as many socialist revolutionaries as possible’.

The implication of Stefanovich’s activity was that populists would improve their chances of transforming social relations if they abandoned the idea of relying on the masses’ capacity for spontaneous action and turned their minds to organization. Largely because of distaste for the strong-arm tactics of Nechaev, the radicals who belonged to the circles of the early 1870s and ‘went to the people’ in 1874 objected to organization on principle. After 1874, however, they thought again. When they set up a body called ‘Land and Liberty’ in 1876, they accepted the need for a much higher degree of coordination than had been evident in their earlier activities. The new body (which should not be confused with the organization of the same name which led a shadowy existence for a few years at the beginning of the 1860s) soon began taking steps whose effect was to change the course of Russian political life. Superficially, it lowered the populists’ sights. ‘We limit our demands’, said the organizers, ‘to those which can be realistically met in the near future, i.e. to the people’s demands and desires as they stand at the moment’. Ostensibly, the founders of Land and Liberty claimed to be continuing in the traditions of their predecessors—not to be leading the peasants, but following them. It was Land and Liberty that developed the practice of settling in villages rather than merely visiting them for short-lived bouts of agitation. The organizers of Land and Liberty claimed not to be interested in changing the political structure of the empire. They conceived political freedoms as by-products of their activity, ‘coke in the extraction of lighting-gas, smoke when you heat a stove’. On the other hand, they ruled nothing out. They were not explicitly hostile to purely political activity or even to terrorism. They did not consider state institutions inherently meretricious. Although the state was to disappear after the revolution, it was not to do so immediately. Peasants would not acquire complete control over their lives, for communes would have to give up some of their functions to a central government. Peasants lacked the sophistication to take charge of all their affairs. Land and Liberty thought of itself as the heir of the populists who had ‘gone to the people’, but in reality it began a shift in the direction of activities which earlier populists would have considered at odds with the social foundations of Russian society. Instead of plumbing the depths of society, the populists of the second half of the 1870s placed greater emphasis on scaling the heights.

The first sign of Land and Liberty’s enthusiasm for direct action was the resolution its members displayed in springing Kropotkin from gaol, an event which should have involved a red balloon and actually did involve a violist and a specially purchased racing trotter. The organization’s main undertaking in 1876, however, was the demonstration outside St Petersburg’s Kazan Cathedral in December. Populists had been in contact with the workers of St Petersburg since at least 1871, but this was the first time they tried to bring them out on to the streets. They were uncertain whether the undertaking was legitimate. Lavrovists among them still believed that the common people ought to decide for themselves whether they wanted to demonstrate; Plekhanov felt that it was time to take advantage of urban unemployment and attempt to persuade workers to join forces with non-worker radicals. Since the demonstration was poorly supported and gave rise to some thirty arrests, it was a failure; but in that it taught populists that the lower orders were out of sympathy with them it confirmed the notion that if radicals were to further their objectives they would have to do so without relying on popular support.

The political trials of 1877 made radicals feel that the promotion of their objectives would have to take place quickly. Whatever the government’s difficulties in the war with Turkey, it seemed to be winning its battles at home. It is true that, from the government’s point of view, the trials were less than satisfactory. The uncompromising speech of the factory worker Petr Alekseev at the trial of the Pan-Russian Social-Revolutionary Organization (the ‘trial of the fifty’) became ‘a permanent fixture on the revolutionary scene during the last forty years of the tsarist regime’. Ninety of those who appeared in the dock at the ‘trial of the 193’ were acquitted and only twenty-eight were sentenced to hard labour. But although the Ministry of Justice and the Third Department complained about the Senate’s leniency, revolutionaries could hardly congratulate themselves on a swinging victory. Even the defendants who gained their liberty had served years in prison before coming to trial. Meanwhile, an incident in the St Petersburg preliminary detention centre tipped populists over the brink. In July 1877 the Governor-General of St Petersburg ordered the fogging of one of the Kazan Square demonstrators for failing to show deference towards him. Since it was illegal to subject political prisoners to corporal punishment, radicals were outraged. At a time when populist philosophy was in flux, when radicals were beginning to employ provocative tactics in both town and country, when even Bakuninism had come to seem pacific, and when the government was running an apparently endless series of prosecutions, the fogging of Bogoliubov turned out to be the straw that broke the camel’s back. From setting up discussion circles, teaching factory workers to read, seeking mass support in the villages, and attempting to or-
organize demonstrations in St Petersburg, populists moved on – or back – to terrorism. Assassinations required planning, but not the sort of lifelong preparation envisaged by Lavrov. They could be undertaken without the support of the masses. They turned out to be an imperfect tool for the realization of radical goals, but they were the perfect outlet for the populists’ mounting frustration.

Paradoxically, neither of the two celebrated terrorists of 1878, Vera Zasulich and Sergei Kravchinskii, thought of terrorism as a major revolutionary tactic. The former eventually became a Marxist and the latter one of the most constitutionally oriented of all Russian émigrés. Yet in January 1878 Zasulich tried to kill the Governor-General of St Petersburg and in August 1878 Kravchinskii assassinated the head of the Third Department. Zasulich claimed she was repaying Governor-General Trepov for ordering Bogoliubov to be flogged, but her real reason for attacking him seems to have been personal. Her lover, Lev Deich, had been an associate of Stefanoiv at Chigirin and was languishing in a Kiev gaol. Radicals in Petrograd felt they had to put off arranging his release until Trepov had been punished. To expedite matters, Zasulich attacked Trepov herself. Kravchinskii went to great lengths to downplay his attack on General Mezentsev. Immediately after the murder he published A Death for a Death, a pamphlet which argued that his goal was the achievement of a socialist society. Political structures, he said – and therefore, political actions – were a matter of indifference to him. Russians were by nature inclined to hold back from political struggle and especially from ‘all bloody measures’. Mezentsev’s murder had been undertaken simply to give radicals some respite from official pressure. ‘The government itself has put the dagger and the revolver in our hands’. Kravchinskii made three demands: complete freedom of speech; a complete end to arbitrary activity on the part of the administration; and a full amnesty for political prisoners. He demanded no more because he did not believe that the government could grant him more. His economic demands could be met only by the bourgeoisie. He did not ask the government to grant a constitution. The question whether you share power with the bourgeoisie is not our concern. Whether you grant or do not grant a constitution is a matter of complete indifference to us. Do not violate our human rights – that is all we want of you.’ In late October 1878, in the first number of the illegal journal Land and Liberty, Kravchinskii made yet plainer that terror was peripheral to the achievement of radical goals. It might bring about the downfall of the government, he said, but it ‘has nothing to do with the struggle against the foundations of the existing order’. If the government fell before society had been transformed, ‘then, lacking any roots in the people, we shall be unable to take advantage of our victory. It will be a Pyrrhic victory... At the cost of a bloody struggle and inevitable heavy sacrifices, we shall gain nothing for our cause.’ To judge by Zasulich’s confusion of the political with the personal and Kravchinskii’s attempts to assign terrorism a back seat, populists turned to violence with a degree of hesitation. Kravchinskii, however, said one thing in public and another in private. In a letter to Zasulich of July 1878 he doubted whether the peasantry could be persuaded of the need for social transformation. ‘Several years’ wearisome experience’, he wrote, ‘is bound to convince any sober individual that “scientific socialism”, the socialism of the West, bounces off the Russian masses like a pea off a wall’. If a popular revolution lay far in the future, the temptation to procure change by the use of terror became considerable. Many populists succumbed to it more readily than Kravchinskii. It was ironic that the major terrorist achievements of 1878 were accomplished by doubters, but not remarkable that they happened at all. In the southern part of the empire, in Kiev, Kharkov and Odessa, terrorist actions became regular occurrences after Zasulich set the ball rolling in St Petersburg. Nikolai Morozov and Aleksandr Mikhailov disliked having to publish Kravchinskii’s depreciation of terror in the first issue of Land and Liberty. In the winter of 1878–9 populists who supported the use of terror gained the upper hand over those who did not. When Kravchinskii fled abroad to escape the police, his place in the upper echelons of the revolutionary movement was taken by the increasingly militant Lev Tikhomirov. The arrest of Dmitrii Klementy early in 1879 further depleted the ranks of the gradualists. Plekhanov remained true to non-violence, but found himself marginalized. In March 1879 Morozov began publishing the fire-breathing Land and Liberty Leaflet (Listok Zemli i Voli). The following month Aleksandr Solov’ev tried to kill the tsar. In June 1879 proponents of terror from the southern and northern parts of the empire met at Lipetsk near Voronezh to agree their future strategy. A few days later, at Voronezh itself, populists who believed in terror met those who did not at a general session of Land and Liberty. Superficially, the two wings of the movement patched up their differences, but Plekhanov’s early withdrawal from the meeting made plain that advocates of violence were defeating their rivals. In St Petersburg, Plekhanov tried to regain the ground he had lost. The presence in the capital of Deich, Stefanoivich and Zasulich, none of whom believed in the primacy of terror, encouraged him to think that he stood a chance of overcoming the effects of the Voronezh meeting. Sof’ia Perovskaya assured him that although she sought the murder of the tsar, she intended subsequently to return to agitation in the countryside. Others, however, proved less amenable. The rift between terrorists and pacificists deepened. By October 1879 Land and Liberty had fallen apart. Two new organizations, The People’s Will and Black Repartition, took its place. By emigrating in 1880, the ‘Plekhanovites’ in Black Repartition implicitly accepted that leadership of the populist movement belonged henceforward to the terrorists of The People’s Will.
The People's Will differed from its immediate predecessors not only in its commitment to terrorist tactics, but also in structure. Apart from the fact that it centred on a coterie rather than an individual, it bore a certain resemblance to Nechaev’s organization of 1869. Although by 1881 it had acquired several thousand sympathizers and some five hundred full members, the twenty or so people who sat on its executive committee determined policy without reference to the rank-and-file. Superficially, the organization seemed to be true to its forerunners in respect of ideology. In a programmatic statement of 1 January 1880 the executive committee proclaimed that they were ‘socialists and populists’ whose immediate task was ‘to bring about a political upheaval that would transfer power to the people’. After the tsarist regime had been overthrown, a constituent assembly was to be summoned to discover the people’s wishes. The People’s Will would stand for election on the basis of broad local government. Freedom of expression, the independence of communes, transferring land to the peasantry, making over factories to the workers, and replacing the standing army with a territorially based militia. These goals reappeared in the programme which The People’s Will designed for urban workers in November 1880 and found their most strident expression in the letter which the executive committee dispatched to Alexander III nine days after killing his father.

Ideologically speaking, the last generation of populists seemed to be in tune with everything for which their predecessors had striven in the course of the 1870s. Closer analysis, however, tells a different story. The published programmes of The People’s Will masked the fact that the movement set greater store by taking over the state machine than by abolishing it. Populists who ‘went to the people’ in 1874 had been attracted by the second of the two great abstractions which Bakunin discussed in Statism and Anarchy. The People’s Will had a taste for the first. Members of the executive committee were implacably opposed to the existing government, but not to governments in general. They spoke of ‘transferring power to the people’, but failed to make plain how the transfer was to be effected. If, in order to organize elections to a constituent assembly, they proposed to hold power themselves, they had abandoned the conviction of earlier populists that all power tends to corrupt. They came close to implying that people could be forced to be free.

They may not have realized the direction in which their policies were tending. One scholar argues that their version of socialism meant ‘not the death of statism ... but its dawn’. This is too harsh a criticism if it is taken to mean that The People’s Will knew what it was doing. In a letter of 1882 to their critics in the Russian revolutionary emigration, members of the executive committee who had survived the governmental onslaught which followed the assassination of the tsar claimed that ‘overturning the state was their “to be or not to be”.’ In the light of this assertion, accusing them of statism seems unfair. They appear not to have drawn a distinction, however, between overturning the state and overturning the government. Their prime concern was the acquisition of force. Is terror necessary? Are newspapers necessary? Is a change of programme necessary? Is activity among young people, workers, soldiers, the peasantry, in the zemstva, in the intelligentsia and so on necessary? To all these and similar questions we reply: how much force will this or that tactic deliver? In the view of revolutionaries who criticized The People’s Will, the executive committee’s obsession with force was statist. Force was what state machineries used to keep the masses in their place. Putting force before activity at the grassroots was putting the cart before the horse. Once accumulated, force was hard to give up. Revolutionaries with force at their disposal could turn into dictators.

Whether the principal figures in The People’s Will would indeed have named into dictators is a question which was never put to the test, for the murder of the tsar and failed to shake the government’s resolve exposed most of the conspirators to capture. On 3 April 1881 Sof’ia Perovskaya, Andrei Zheljabov, Timofei Mikhailov, Nikolai Rysakov and Nikolai Kibal’chich went to the gallows. The authorities’ determination to keep power in their hands had been growing rapidly since April 1879, when, three days after Solov’ev’s attempt to kill him, Alexander II had introduced temporary governors-general. The regime intensified its efforts to batten down the hatches after Khalturin bombed the Winter Palace in February 1880. One of these temporary Governors-General, Mikhail Loris-Melikov, was put in charge of a Supreme Administrative Commission for the Maintenance of State Order and Public Tranquillity. In an appeal to the inhabitants of St Petersburg he promised ‘not to recoil from the most severe measures to punish those who are guilty of the criminal acts that are disgracing our society.’ After the dissolution of the Supreme Administrative Commission in August 1880 Loris-Melikov became Minister of Internal Affairs and head of a new Police Department which embarked on infiltrating the revolutionary movement with double agents. The ideology of The People’s Will lived on to compete with Marxism, but the organization collapsed in the mid-1880s.

Admittedly, Loris-Melikov combined the iron fist with the velvet glove. Even Russians to whom terrorism was anathema appreciated that concessions on the part of the authorities might allay discontent. When the war with Turkey was going badly in 1877, Valuev told a senior bureaucrat that after these military failures the government will undoubtedly want to do something for the people.” Boris Chicherin responded to the terrorism of Zasulich and Kravchinskii in 1878 by recommending that the gentry be given a role in the making of government policy. In the autumn of 1879 Dmitrii Miliutin advocated surrendering half the seats on the State Council to representatives elected by the zemstva. In a sarcastic open letter to the head of the Supreme Administrative Commission the Ukrainian émigré
CONCLUSION

In 1974 Richard Pipes claimed that the decade which followed the murder of Alexander II witnessed the creation in Russia of a bureaucratic-police regime which... has been in power there ever since. It is not necessary to accept this imperceptive judgement to believe that the terrorist wing of the populist movement dramatically reduced Russia's chances of evolving peacefully. The tsarist regime was hardly dynamic at the point of Alexander II's death, but neither was it torpid. Although Loris-Melikov was very far from proposing the transference of power to the people, and although he planned reform under pressure from radicals, many members of the bureaucracy held that the government would have to involve sections of the community in the making of legislation if the empire was to go on competing with its rivals. After 1881 the concept of involvement became indelibly associated with the concept of regicide. If, in the first half of the 1870s, populists had all become Lavrovists instead of Bakuninists, or if, in 1879, they had all joined Black Repartition instead of The People's Will, a compromise might eventually have been effected between the government and its opponents. Terrorism made compromise impossible.

2. The quotations in this paragraph come from Michael F. Hamur, 'Continuity and Change in Late Imperial Kiev', in Hamur, ed., The City in Late Imperial Russia (Bloomington, Ind., 1986), p. 90 (venereal disease); Daniel R. Brower, The Russian City between Tradition and Modernity, 1850-1900 (Berkeley, Calif., 1990), p. 87 (internal passports); and Jeffrey Brooks, When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917 (Princeton, NJ, 1985), pp. 11 and 16 (peasant migration). Figures on population growth, the number of industrial workers in Moscow, and the proportion of Kievans who were born outside the city are from Hamur, 'Continuity and Change', p. 83; Robert Gohstein, The Shaping of Moscow by Nineteenth-Century Trade', in Hamur, ed., The City in Russian History (Lexington, 1976), p. 160; and Kiewski telegraf, 30 March 1875.
3. The information in this paragraph is taken from Cynthia H. Whitaker, The Women's Movement During the Reign of Alexander II: A Case Study in Russian Liberalism, on-demand supplement to JMH 48, no. 2 (June 1976); quotation from p. 9.
6. On the lack of significant peasant disturbances around 19 February 1870 see Peter A. Zaitsevoykovsky, The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia, ed. and tr. Susan V. Wobst (Gulf Breeze, 1978), p. 193; for the figures in this paragraph see Itzenberg, Dekhzenie (above, n. 4), pp. 60-1, and Peter A. Zaitsevoykovsky, The Russian Autocracy in Crisis, 1879-1882, ed. and tr. Gary M. Hamburg (Gulf Breeze, 1979), p. 32; on Anton Petrov see the opening of Chapter Nine.
7. V. A. Fedorov, 'Ideia chernogo pereda' v krestianskom dvizhenii v Rossii na rubezhe 70 - 80-kh godov XIX v.', Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta, Seriia 8: Istoriia, 1982 no. 6, p. 35.
8. A. N. Engelgardt, Iz derevni: 12 pisem 1872-1887 (Moscow, 1887), p. 554.


15. Ibid., p. 33.


24. Ibid., p. 207.


29. N. A. Morozov, Povesti moei zhizni (2 vols, Moscow, 1962), i. 72–3.


31. For the evidence which Isutin and others gave to the Murav'ev Commission in the wake of Karakozov’s assassination attempt see Aleksei Shilov, ed., Poiskhishche Karakozova 4 aprelia 1866-go, KA 17 (1926), 91–137.

32. The description is that of a hostile contemporary, as quoted in M. V. Nekhchinskii Vasili Iosifovich Khleborskii. Istoriia zhizni i teoretschii (Moscow, 1974), p. 127.


34. For a translation of Nechaev’s ‘Programme of Revolutionary Actions’ see Philip Pomper, Sergei Nechaev (New Brunswick, NJ, 1979), pp. 56–9.


36. Troitskii, Tatarskie sudy (above, n. 11), p. 145. For the remarkable story of Nechaev’s imprisonment in the Peter and Paul Fortress in St Petersburg, where he suborned his guards and established contact with a later generation of revolutionaries, see P. Shchegelev, Alekseevskii ravelin: Kniga o padenii i velichii cheteshkei (Moscow, 1898) (repr. of 1929 edn.), pp. 171–38. Still in prison, Nechaev died of scurvy in 1882.


38. Itenberg, Dotzhenie (above, n. 4), p. 143.


42. For the pamphlets by Bervi and Dolgushin see V. G. Bazanov and O. B. Alekseeva, eds, Agitatsionnaiia literatura russkikh revolucionnykh narodniki (Potsdam: proizvedeniia 1874–1875) (Leningrad, 1970), pp. 74–95 (quotations from p. 85).

43. B. S. Itenberg, ‘Nachalo massovogo “khodzenia v narod”’, Iz 69 (1961), 144.


45. The examples in this paragraph come from Itenberg, Dotzhenie (above, n. 4), pp. 305, 314–15, 329, 342.


48. Extracts from the programme of Forward (third version) and from ‘Knowledge and Revolution’ are to be found in Leatherbarrow and Offord, A Documentary History of Russian Thought (above, n. 21), pp. 269–77 (quotations from pp. 269, 271).


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and B. Kistakowskii (2 vols, Paris, 1905–6), ii. 228 (from the reprint of Stefan-
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