

The Russian Worker in the Revolutionary Movement

(Based on personal recollections)

Dedicated to those who gave speeches at meetings of St Petersburg workers to mark the worldwide demonstration of 1 May

Dear and Respected Comrades!

It is to you who are continuing the cause of the revolutionaries of the seventies that these reminiscences belong by right — and I can say with clear conscience that they are written *completely truthfully*. Allow me to dedicate them to you and with this present evidence, albeit only weak evidence, of my sympathy with your aspirations. We Social Democrats are ready to support every revolutionary movement directed against the existing social order. All the more understandable is our sympathy with you, who boldly stand under the Social-Democratic banner, which is now the banner of the revolutionary proletariat of all countries. We do not and will not have any other task apart from providing all feasible assistance to the development of the political consciousness of the Russian working class. You have set yourself the very same task. Let us go together towards our great goal without looking back and without wavering, supported by the proud certainty that the measure of our successes will be a measure of the political development of our homeland. Back in 1877, your predecessor, the worker Peter Alekseev boldly said to his judges that when the muscular arm of the worker was raised, the yoke of despotism, surrounded by soldier's bayonets would dissolve into dust.¹ To his words, we can and should add that the yoke of despotism will dissolve into dust *only* when the muscular arm of the worker is raised.

Foreword to the Second Edition

The Populists of the seventies viewed the peasantry as the main revolutionary force in Russia, and viewed the agrarian commune as the starting point for the development of our country in the direction of socialism. The development among us of commodity production and large-scale capitalist industry appeared to them to be an extremely lamentable phenomenon, undermining the foundations of our people's economic life and thus holding back the approach of the social revolution. Thus, activity among the workers never occupied a prominent position in the Populist programme: they were interested in workers only to the extent that the latter were considered capable of supporting a peasant uprising which, in the opinion of the Populists, was to break out far from the industrial centres, in the peripheries, where the great peasant-Cossacks revolts had still not been forgotten and where popular ideals were carefully

¹ Peter Alekseevich Alexeev (1849–91) was a weaver who conducted socialist propaganda from 1873. Arrested in 1875, he was a defendant in the Trial of the 50 in February-March 1877, where he made a speech containing these words. The text of this speech was widely distributed. He was sentenced to ten years prison with hard labour. In 1884, he was released to live near an isolated settlement in Yakutia, where he was murdered by robbers in 1891.

preserved.² It would seem that, adopting this view of the workers, the Populists could not be in a hurry to establish closer ties with them. Before establishing an auxiliary organisation, it was natural to be first of all concerned with the organisation of the main forces of the future revolutionary army, i.e. the forces of the peasantry. But in fact, the Populists occupied themselves more with the workers than their programme demanded. The Populists were energetic people who did not like to sit on their hands. Many of them, finding themselves in the cities, made approaches to the workers so as not to waste time needlessly.

And though these approaches could not be systematic, and though in the majority of cases, those Populists approaching the workers took all steps to ensure the earliest possible departure from the city for the village; given that at any one time no small number of Populists lived in the cities, and given that the advanced layers of the urban workers was even then very receptive to revolutionary propaganda, 'the workers' cause' grew and expanded nonetheless, shocking the activists themselves with its unexpected successes. The first great result of the Populists' approach to the St Petersburg workers was the so-called Kazan Demonstration of 6 December 1876. And towards the end of the seventies, the Populist organisation Land and Freedom had already gained significant enough experience in the areas of propaganda, agitation and organisation among the workers.

In a leading article printed in the fourth issue of *Zemlia i Volia*, Land and Freedom's newspaper, I drew up a balance of this experience. It turned out that the 'worker question' all the more often and all the more insistently drew attention to itself, in spite of the Populist theories which had made the peasant question central. But at the same time, it was also obvious that revolutionaries were still far from acquiring all that influence over the urban working masses that they might acquire. I explained this by the fact that they conducted little agitation. I said that revolutionaries gave excessive significance to workers' circles in which they conducted propaganda (the reading of lectures about the Stone Age and the Solar System as I put it, ironically) and that they did not see that it was necessary to stir up the masses as a whole. Agitation on an economic basis, mainly during strikes, was the immediate practical task I indicated to those of our comrades who were occupied with workers.³

The members of the Land and Freedom society at that time all the more easily agreed with me that the question about the methods of our revolutionary work among the peasantry had long since been resolved in the same sense. It had entered the heads of none of our 'village people' to organise circle propaganda among the peasants. They were all firmly convinced that they could only acquire influence over the peasant masses by means of agitation based on its immediate (predominantly economic) demands. And this conviction remained among our revolutionaries right up until the time when so-called terror drew their attention elsewhere and

² This view of workers as a class capable only of playing the role of an *auxiliary detachment* in the revolutionary army passed wholesale from the Populists to People's Will (see the note printed in *Kalendar Narodnoi Voli* entitled 'The Preparatory Work of the Party', section B — urban workers). And this is understandable. Not without reason, People's Will said of themselves that *in terms of their basic outlook they too were socialists and Populists* [Plekhanov's footnote].

³ This article does appear to be included in any of the Russian-language editions of Plekhanov's collected works. This may be because he was only one of its authors, because the source material is lost, or possibly because it revealed a sharp clash of opinion between Plekhanov on the one hand, and leading worker-revolutionaries on the other. This said, the material extensively cited in the 1904 historical pamphlet *Stepan Khalturin and the Northern Russian Workers' Union* by Georgii Arkadieievich Kuklin (1880–1907) may relate to this article, even if the summary Plekhanov gives here does not bear an especially close relationship to the content of this piece of apocrypha.

until the view, first expressed by the newspaper *Narodnaia Volia*, that work among the peasantry under our political conditions meant fruitlessly bashing one's head against a brick wall gained traction among them.

From the mid-eighties, Social-Democratic ideas began to circulate among revolutionaries active in Russia. The circulation of these ideas took place very slowly, partially as a result of the social reaction which came on once the government had managed to smash the People's Will party, and partially because the old Populist theory was still strongly imprinted on the minds of Russian people sympathetic to socialism. And yet by the start of the nineties, when the first weak signs of a new social revival began to show, the number of Social Democrats was so significant that they were wondering about how they might acquire broad practical influence on the working class. The experience of the seventies pointed to agitation as the unavoidable means to this end. But the experience of the seventies was completely unknown to our young comrades, the overwhelming majority of whom were familiar only with the methods of circle propaganda.

To alleviate this affliction, in order to familiarise young Social Democrats with the practical conclusions bequeathed to us by the Populist era, and to show them how one can and should agitate, I wrote my memoirs of the Russian workers' movement of the 1870s. I thought that, having familiarised readers with what was done by their predecessors, I would shed a little light on what was still to be done by them. But I could not be satisfied with narrative alone. At the end of the seventies, when I wrote in *Zemlia i volia* about the necessity of agitation on an economic basis, I was a Populist to the end of my fingernails. At the start of the nineties, when I took up the pen in order to write my memoirs, fascination with Populism had already been replaced in me by a critical attitude towards it, because I had long since adopted the Social-Democratic point of view. As a Social Democrat, I clearly saw what I had not noticed as a Populist, namely, that agitation on an economic basis can and should be used by agitators for the political education of the working masses. The reader will see that the proposed memoir contains within it an adequate explanation of this side of the question.

I am drawing attention to all of this because certain storytellers are now raising an objection, against me in particular and against the Emancipation of Labour Group in general that we supposedly did not understand the significance of agitation and therefore could not point it out in a timely fashion to our young comrades. If Messrs Storytellers knew the history of our movement better, they would themselves without difficulty understand how absurd their compositions really are.

True, the time is still not very far from us when our view on agitation was found lacking by many of our young comrades, who persistently opposed to it the view that was laid out in detail in the well-known pamphlet, *On Agitation*. I am not going to analyse this pamphlet here. My attitude to it was expressed very recently in the article 'Once again, Socialism and Political Struggle', which was printed in the first instalment of *Zaria*. I will only note that the consistent defenders of the view laid out in the pamphlet *On Agitation* soon became, and inevitably had to become, Economists, whereas the view of the Emancipation of Labour Group is shared by all the thinking advocates of the Political tendency. The opposition which this view once met with among a certain section of our Social Democrats testified only to the fact that these Social Democrats still did not fully understand not only the immediate political task of our party, but also the whole ethos of Social-Democratic theory. And the more and the sooner they admitted

their mistakes, the more and the sooner they were reconciled with the view of the Emancipation of Labour Group.

The reproach made against us by the above-mentioned storytellers would not deserve the least attention if they had not considered themselves called upon to correct and compensate for that which was supposedly missed and supposedly spoilt by ourselves and our closest comrades. But under the very pretext of that correction and compensation, these gentlemen, very poor in ideas of their own yet very rich in the misunderstanding of others' ideas, preach such desperate nonsense about 'tactics as process' and about the relationship of economic agitation to political agitation that they in truth deserve the title of Genius ... in the field of confused concepts. And it is impossible to ignore geniuses: we do not have the right to pass over these reproaches in silence.⁴

But we will leave comrades Storytellers for the moment and cast a glance at the path followed by Russian Social Democracy since that time when the first edition of my memoirs was published. At that time, our comrades had only just started asking themselves whether they should pass over from propaganda to agitation. Today, agitation has taken on a scale they could not have imagined in their wildest dreams. Back then, our comrades had already acquired a firm and fruitful influence in workers' reading circles; now the working masses see in them their most reliable leaders and they listen attentively to their words. Back then, our comrades still only strived to occupy the dominant position in the Russian revolutionary milieu; today, this position belongs to them indisputably, absolutely and irrevocably. And all this they have achieved in spite of the diligence of the police and the Judas kisses of the 'critics'. Those whose grandmothers tell fortunes lives well! For us, Russian Social Democrats, History is the old lady who performs divinations, and they have rapidly advanced our cause.

It is well known, however, that *noblesse oblige*. Those who possess such a wise grandmother should constantly 'keep themselves in tune' and remember that great responsibilities have been placed upon them. So far, our cause has moved forward very quickly, but its advance will probably slow down severely in the future if we do not manage to solve those practical tasks which have risen up in front of us precisely thanks to our great success. The most important of these tasks is, without any doubt, organisation. The question of it now has that same decisive significance that agitation had some ten years ago. It lies at the centre of all the rest of the practical questions of our time. Without resolving it, we will not find a fully satisfactory to any of the others. And when the question of organisation is resolved, one can say that the others will be resolved of their own accord. Then we will have made a new great leap forward in the history of our party. Then even the most persistent detractors of Russian Social Democracy will be obliged to recognise that the latter is fated to gather under its banner all the living forces of revolutionary Russia. And then Social Democracy will have every right to say to every sincere revolutionary, as Y-h said to the Jewish people:

I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt have no other gods before me.

⁴ The reference here is to articles published in *Rabochee Delo* №10 by Boris Krichevskii and Alexander Martynov. See Mullin 2015 for details.

The first worker revolutionary with whom fate brought me into contact was Mitrofanov, who was once sufficiently well known among Russian revolutionaries and who later died in prison from consumption.⁵ I became acquainted with him through the Kh brothers, students at the Medical Academy, at the end of 1875. Mitrofanov was already living without legal status at that time, staying with the Kh brothers and hiding from the police.

As with all student revolutionaries of that time, I was of course a great 'lover of the people' and was preparing to go to the people, though my conception of them was (again, as with all student-revolutionaries of that time) very confused and ill defined. Loving the people, I knew them very little or rather, I did not know them at all, despite growing up in the countryside. When I first met Mitrofanov and realised that he was a worker, i.e. a representative example of the people, a mixed up feeling of pity and a kind of awkwardness stirred in my soul, exactly as if I was guilty of something before him.

I very much wanted to say something to him, but at the same time, I decidedly did not know how and with what expressions I should start to engage him in conversation. It seemed to me that our student language would be completely incomprehensible to this son of the people and that in conversation with him I should observe that absurd, dressed-up style in which many of our revolutionary brochures were written. Fortunately, Mitrofanov led me out of my difficulty. He spoke first, and I no longer remember how the conversation turned to revolutionary literature. I saw that my interlocutor had read more than flowery brochures. He was familiar with the work of Chernyshevskii, Bakunin, Lavrov and he knew how to read them critically. The journal *Vpered!* seemed to him insufficiently revolutionary. He leaned towards the Rebel trend and defended this approach with the help of those arguments that were usually cited by student Rebels.

My amazement knew no bounds. The personality of Mitrofanov decidedly did not fit into my sentimental ideas about the people. And so he interested me all the more. I began to meet with him often, voraciously asking him about his revolutionary activity among the people. Of all the layers of the people, the one closest to me according to my situation at that time was of course the St Petersburg workers, and so I bombarded my new acquaintance with questions about who they really were. Mitrofanov took a negative attitude towards them. From his words, it emerged that the real people were the peasantry, and that the urban workers were to a significant degree corrupted and filled with a bourgeois spirit, in consequence of which revolutionaries had to go to the countryside. Such assessments, which fully corresponded to received ideas about the people, could not inspire in me an inclination towards closer acquaintance with the St Petersburg workers, and over the course of several months Mitrofanov remained the only worker with whom I was personally acquainted. This said, a

⁵ Stepan Vasilievich Mitrofanov (c 1848-?) was a native of Vladimir province, a peasant who had migrated to St Petersburg in 1862. He worked at MacPherson's Shipyard at Galernaia Gavan and then at the Nobel Metalworking Plant in the Vyborg District. He was a participant in propaganda circles during the 1870s who co-operated with the police. He was first arrested in 1874 but was not put on trial and gave evidence against his colleagues that was used in the Trial of the 193 in 1877. He was cleared to live in St Petersburg legally from September 1876. As an asset of the Third Section, the secret political police, he facilitated the arrest of leading members of the Northern Russian Workers' Union in May 1879. See *Deiatelny revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia v Rossii, t II, v iii*, 939-40.

sufficiently active propaganda campaign was being conducted among workers back then, one in which I would soon play as active a role as I could.

At the very beginning of 1876 there happened to be no flat suitable for revolutionary workers' meetings. I had a fine big room on Peterburgskaia and a very kind Baltic Finn landlady, who decidedly could not understand what might be found objectionable in large gatherings of young people during the evening. There was no reason to fear any denunciations to the authorities on her part. On the contrary, in the event of something happening, she would be the first to try to warn her lodger and to extract him from difficulties. All my revolutionary acquaintances knew about the valour of my landlady. Naturally, in accordance with good revolutionary habits, these people kept their activities secret from me for the time being as I was 'uninitiated'. But as there was no reason to distrust me, they opened up as soon as it became necessary, if not to me personally, then in my room. To the question of whether a workers' meeting could be held at my place, I answered with full agreement and, despite the prejudice against urban workers derived from Mitrofanov, I awaited the date of the meeting with impatience.

This took place during some big holiday. At around eight o'clock in the evening, around five or six refined-looking 'revolutionaries' arrived, several of whom I had never seen before. Then the workers started to arrive. The meeting was opened in the same way as it was conducted, and in the way meetings probably still are conducted in Russia, i.e. without the least formality. Private conversations broaching the subject of the meeting developed, little by little, into a general conversation and everybody wishing to say something inserted their observations, not in the least considering who at this particular moment had the floor. The floor belonged to everyone together and to nobody in particular. Owing to this, the debate lost much in terms of order, but on the other hand, it gained more than a little in terms of cordiality.

The meeting being hosted by me had great significance. Right at that moment, the programme of the 'Rebel' (*buntar'*) tendency within populism was being worked out.⁶ The majority of revolutionaries from the intelligentsia thought that the main force of the Russian socialist party should be directed towards agitation based on existing popular demands, whilst only the so-called Lavrists, mostly inactive and therefore uninfluential among revolutionaries, stood for propaganda.⁷

As Rebels, the intelligentsia gathered at my place tried to guide the workers towards agitation. The workers in general poorly grasped the distinguishing features of different revolutionary programmes and the intelligentsia had to invest a lot of effort before one of them finally comprehended all the subtleties of the controversial programmatic points, as Mitrofanov had. But I only noticed this later. At the time, I could only see that the workers gave in to the arguments of the Rebels with reluctance. It should be noted that the best, the most reliable and influential people from among the St Petersburg worker-revolutionaries were gathered at my flat. Many of them had already been subject to persecution as a result of the revolutionary propaganda of 1873-4 (from which the famous trial of the 193 later emerged) and had read and

⁶ These were the followers of Mikhail Alexandrovich Bakunin (1814–76).

⁷ These were the supporters of Peter Lavrovich Lavrov (1823–1900).

learned much whilst in prison.⁸ On being released, they again fervently took up revolutionary activity, but looked at revolutionary workers circles most of all as self-education circles. When the Rebels, setting out their views before them, expressed the view that propaganda did not have any revolutionary significance, the workers protested fervently.

‘How can you not be ashamed to speak like that?’ a certain V exclaimed with passion. If I am not mistaken, he worked at the Munitions Plant on Vasilievskii Island and had only just left the house of preliminary detention, where he had been sent as a result of involvement in the Chaikovskii circle.⁹ ‘Each one of you intelligentsia have taught in five schools and bathed in seven seas whereas some workers don’t know how a school door opens! You don’t need to study any more, you know so much, but workers can’t go without it!’

‘It is not so bad to perish for a cause when you understand it’, said a rangy young worker V Ia, ‘but when you perish for something unknown, then that’s really bad. You’ll get little good from a worker who doesn’t know anything!’

‘Every worker is a revolutionary by his very position’, objected a Rebel, ‘does he really not understand that the owner grows rich at his expense?’

‘He understands it, but badly; he sees it, but not as he should’, the workers countered. ‘To someone else, it seems that it cannot be otherwise, and that God wishes the worker to suffer. You show him that it can be otherwise. Then he will become a real revolutionary.’

The controversy dragged on for a long time. In the end, both sides made concessions. It was decided to not neglect propaganda, but at the same time to not let slip suitable opportunities for agitation. I am certain, by the way, that it was then unclear to the workers precisely what sort of agitation the Rebels wanted from them. And among the Rebels themselves, this word was then being united, I think, with a somewhat vague idea.

Anyway, the arguments ended, and it was possible to consider the meeting closed. The Rebels left as did several workers, but the majority remained seated, drinking tea and talking. Someone ran downstairs for beer, a modest drinking session began, and the conversation took on a comic character. V recounted various funny stories from his prison days and V Ia, the same V Ia who said that a man can only sacrifice himself for a cause he understands, even sang a song composed, in his words, by the Kolpino workers after Karakazov’s attempt on the life of the tsar. Only the beginning of this song remains in my memory:

Thank you, Karakazov, for wanting to kill the tsar...¹⁰

⁸ This mass trial of socialist propagandists took place between October 1877 and February 1878. The Senate initially acquitted 90 of the defendants, but this decision was overturned by the tsar in 80 of these cases, making him a target for terrorists following the trial.

⁹ The Chaikovskii Circle was active in St Petersburg from 1870 and it emphasised peaceful propaganda and publishing endeavours. It was named after its leading figure, Nikolai Vasilievich Chaikovskii (1850–1926) who later participated in the Essars and the White Movement. The group played an influential role in the Movement to the People of 1874, a mass movement of socialist propagandists to the countryside.

The Munitions Works on Vasilievskii Island, which plays no small part in this pamphlet, was founded in 1869 and was renamed the Kalinin Works in 1922. It was located at 1 Uralskaia Street.

¹⁰ Dmitri Vladimirovich Karakazov (1840–1866) made an individual decision to kill the tsar despite being a member of the Ishutin Circle, a conspiratorial organisation created in Moscow by his cousin, Nikolai Andreevich Ishutin (1840–79). His shot missed and he was executed.

This merry group stayed with me long after midnight and I parted with my guests as if they were old friends.

The impression they produced on me was tremendous. I completely forgot Mitrofanov's gloomy assessment of the St Petersburg workers. I saw and remembered only the fact that all those present most indisputably belonged to the people, and were well-developed, relatively speaking, individuals with whom I was able to speak just as simply and, consequently, just as sincerely as I was able to with my student friends. Not only that, I looked up to those who had already spent some time in prison: 'I have still done nothing to prove my devotion to the cause, and they have already managed to stand up for it', I said to myself and looked at them almost with benevolence, probably like every sincere and young revolutionary who has not yet been in trouble looks on an experienced comrade who has suffered for the cause.

I had taken away the same impression from my acquaintance with the illegally living Mitrofanov, but I had considered him an exception. Now I knew that there were many exceptions like him. The matter of approaching the people, which had earlier frightened me with its difficulty, now seemed to me simple and easy. Without delay, I decided to get as close as possible to my new acquaintances. Maintaining the now established connections with them was all the easier owing to the fact that several had given me their addresses and had invited me to visit them.

First of all, I went to a certain G who lived, as it turned out, next door to me. G was one of a kind, hardly having in his character a single one of those features which the intelligentsia loved to ascribe to the people. In him, there was not a trace of peasant spontaneity or a peasant inclination to live and think as his ancestors lived and thought. With the most ordinary capabilities, he distinguished himself with a rare thirst for knowledge and a truly amazing energy in the cause of its acquisition. Working at a plant for ten hours a day and returning home only in the evening, he sat daily at his books until one o'clock in the morning. He read slowly and, as I have noted, did not easily assimilate what he had read. Yet what he did assimilate, he knew very well. Small, weak-chested, pale and beardless, with small, fine moustaches, he had long hair and wore dark blue glasses. During the winter cold, he threw a broad plaid blanket over a short woollen coat and then finally looked like a student.

He lived like a student too, occupying a tiny room, the only table of which was strewn with books. When I was briefly introduced to him, I was struck by the variety and multitude of theoretical questions that were besieging him. What was this man not interested in, even though he had scarcely learned to read and write as a child? Political economy and chemistry, social questions and the theory of Darwin equally drew his attention, provoked in him an equal interest and, it seemed, decades were needed, given his circumstances, to satisfy his mental hunger even a little. This feature of his character both pleased and saddened me. Why it would please me is clear without explanation; it saddened me because I was then thoroughly imbued with Rebel opinions and for Rebels, a superfluous passion for books was considered a flaw, the sign of a cold, non-revolutionary temperament. By the way, G really was not a revolutionary by temperament. He probably always would have felt better in a library than in some noisy political meeting. But he did not lag behind his comrades and one could rely on him absolutely.

Accompanied by G, I visited all the rest of the workers who had attended the above-mentioned meeting in my room and then acquired through them many new acquaintances.

Seeing how the cause of the workers interested me, the Rebels took me into their circle, with the effect that 'work among the workers' became from that point on my main revolutionary obligation.

II.

It goes without saying that among the workers, as everywhere, I met people who were very different from one another in terms of character, abilities and even education. One, like G, read a lot, others were middling, reading not a lot but not little, and others preferred intelligent conversation over a glass of tea or a bottle of beer to a book. But in general, this whole milieu was distinguished by a significant mental development and a high level of its everyday requirements. I saw with amazement that these workers lived no worse than students, with many of them living much better. On average, each of them earned from 1 rouble 25 kopeks to 2 roubles a day. Naturally, on this relatively good pay it was not easy for those with families to survive. But bachelors – and they constituted the majority among the workers known to me – could spend twice as much as an impecunious student.

There were among them some real moneybags such as the mechanic S, the daily pay of whom was as much as 3 roubles. S lived on Vasilevskii Island together with V, who at the meeting at my place had so fervently stood up for propaganda in workers' circles. These two friends occupied a fine furnished room, bought books and sometimes liked to indulge themselves with a bottle of good wine. They, especially S, dressed like real dandies.

Incidentally, all the workers of this layer dressed incomparably better and, most importantly, more neatly and cleaner than we students. All of them had a good black suit for grand occasions and when attired in it resembled gentlemen much better than any student. Revolutionaries from the intelligentsia frequently and bitterly reproached workers for their 'bourgeois' inclination towards dandyism but could neither root out nor even partially weaken this supposedly harmful inclination. Habit here proved to be second nature.

In reality, the workers cared about their appearance no more than the intelligentsia did about theirs, only their concern was expressed differently. A member of the intelligentsia loved to dress 'democratically', in a red shirt or a greasy blouse, whereas the worker, who had had enough and was sick to death of dirty blouses in the workshop, loved on getting home to put on clean and as it seemed to them, 'bourgeois' clothes. With their often exaggeratedly careless dress, the intelligentsia protested against worldly flamboyance; the worker, by caring about the cleanliness of his clothes, protested against those social conditions thanks to which he too often saw himself compelled to wear dirty rags. Now probably all will agree that this second protest was more important than the first. But at that time, the matter seemed otherwise to us. Imbued with the spirit of ascetic socialism, we were ready to preach to the workers that very 'absence of needs' in which Lassalle saw one of the main obstacles to the success of the workers' movement.

The more I became familiar with the St Petersburg workers, the more I was struck by their high level of culture. Brisk and articulate, capable of standing up for themselves and taking a critical attitude to their surroundings, they were urbanites in the best sense of the word.

Many of us then held the opinion that propagandised urban workers should go to the countryside in order to act there in the spirit of some revolutionary programme. This opinion was shared by some workers too. I have already said how exclusively Mitrofanov advocated activity in the countryside. That view was the direct and unavoidable consequence of the then-nascent populism, with its suspicious attitude towards urban civilisation and idealisation of the peasant way of life.

The populist ideas dominating among the revolutionary intelligentsia naturally left their impression on workers' opinions. But they could not change their habits and so genuine urban workers, i.e. workers completely accustomed to the conditions of urban life proved in the majority of cases to be unsuitable for the countryside. Coming together with the peasantry was for even harder for them than for the revolutionary intelligentsia. An urban resident always looked down on a villager, providing the former was not a penitent nobleman and was not completely imbued with the influence of the gentry of this type. So it was with the St Petersburg workers. They called the latter 'grey' and inwardly always somewhat suspected them, whilst sympathising with their tribulations in complete sincerity. In this sense Mitrofanov, with his antipathy towards the town represented an undoubted exception to this general rule. But Mitrofanov had lived among the intelligentsia for a long time owing to his illegality and was completely imbued with all their feelings.

It should also be said that among the Petersburg workers, the 'grey' villager often cut a rather pitiful figure. The peasant S, who was originally from Smolensk province, worked as an oiler at the Munitions Works on Vasilievskii Island. The workers at this factory had their own consumer's cooperative and dining hall, which also served as a reading room in that it was supplied with all the capital's newspapers. The following incident took place right in the middle of the uprising in Herzegovina.¹¹ The new oiler went to eat in the common dining room where after dinner the newspapers were read, usually aloud. On this day, there was something about the 'glorious defenders of Herzegovina' in some paper. The villager got involved in a conversation stemming from this story and expressed the unexpected supposition that 'he was, probably, her lover'.

'Who? *Whose?*' asked the dumfounded interlocutors.

'That there defender of Herzegovina; what would make him defend her if there wasn't something going on between them?'

Those present burst out into raucous laughter. 'So in your view, Herzegovina isn't a country, but some broad?' they exclaimed. 'You really don't understand anything, you complete bumpkin!' From that time on, he was for a long time nicknamed 'the grey'. This nickname greatly surprised me when I first met him deep into the autumn of 1876, when he was already a convinced revolutionary and a most active propagandist.

'Why do you call him that?' I asked the workers.

'Well, you know, he played some joke on us in the dining room; you see he thought...'

¹¹ This was an uprising of the Serbian population of Herzegovina against their Ottoman rulers which began in the summer of 1875 and precipitated three years of revolt in the Balkans against the Ottoman Empire that is often referred to as the Great Eastern Crisis.

‘Yes, well, I was mistaken’, the oiler justified himself amiably. ‘See – what did I understand back then?’

Such occurrences gave occasion only for ridicule. But between the grey people of the countryside and the St Petersburg workers misunderstandings sometimes took place that were of a much more regrettable nature. On a charge of conducting propaganda in 37 provinces, the worker B-n, a native of Novgorod or St Petersburg province, ended up in prison. Released after almost two years, B-n went home to get his passport updated, if I am not mistaken. Upon his arrival, he was detained, and then the elders decided to flog him for tax arrears. They informed him of this decision as if it were something entirely normal and completely unavoidable.¹²

‘You’ve completely lost your mind’, B-n cried out, ‘just try to touch me and I’ll burn down this whole village, and your heads will roll too. I’ll disappear and you will regret having had anything to do with me!’

The elders flinched. They decided that their gaolbird had lost his mind and that it was better to have nothing to do with him. So B-n left his native village not having enjoyed the benefits of the birch. But he could never forget what had happened.

‘No’, he told us, ‘I am ready to conduct propaganda among the workers as before, but I will never go to the countryside for any reason. Not for anything! The peasants are sheep and they will never understand revolutionaries.’

I more than once noticed how the workers viewed corporal punishment as degrading human dignity to a high degree. Sometimes they showed me newspaper articles about the flogging of peasants with indignation and I always struggled to decide what outraged them most of all: the ferocity of those doing the whipping, or the dumb submission of those being whipped.

When the Land and Freedom organisation, which was founded in 1876, began to establish its revolutionary colonies among the people, we managed to persuade several St Petersburg workers to move to Saratov province. These were experienced people, sincerely devoted to Populist ideals and profoundly imbued with Populist opinions. But their attempts to settle in the countryside came to nothing. Having wandered through the villages with the aim of finding a suitable place to settle (with many of them being taken for Germans), they threw in the towel and finished by returning to Saratov where they established connections with local people.¹³ However much this alienation from the people on the part of the latter’s urban children surprised us, the fact was staring us in the face and we had to abandon the thought of attracting workers to the peasants’ own cause.

I ask the reader to keep in mind that I am speaking here of the so-called ‘plant’ workers, who made up a significant part of the St Petersburg working population and were clearly distinct from ‘mill’ workers, both in their relatively tolerable economic situation and in their habits. The latter worked more (12-14 hours a day) than the former but earned significantly less (20-25 roubles per month). They wore calico shirts and a broad-hemmed overcoat with a fitted

¹² Flogging with a birch was a legal punishment for peasants in Russia until 1904.

¹³ Germans were invited to settle on the Volga by Catherine the Great from 1763. They were allowed to retain their language Catholic or Protestant faiths but became Russian subjects. Saratov province was one of the main centres of settlement.

waist (*poddevka*), which the plant and works workers laughed at. They had no chance of renting a separate flat or room and lived communally. They had firmer connections with the village than the plant workers had. They knew and read a lot less than the plant group and in general were more like peasants. The plant workers viewed themselves as something in between the intelligentsia and the mill workers. As to whom they were closer to in terms of their understanding, the peasants or the plant workers, this depended on how long they had lived in the town.

The mill worker who had only just arrived from the countryside of course remained for some time a real peasant. He complained not of pressure on the part of the boss, but of heavy taxes and the lack of land. His presence in the city seemed to him to be temporary and, moreover, a very unpleasant necessity. But little by little, urban life submitted him to its influence; unconsciously he acquired the habits and views of an urbanite. Having worked in the city for a number of years, he already felt bad in the village and unwillingly returned to it, especially if he was managing to encounter 'intellectual' people, encounters which stimulated an interest in him in books.

I used to know such mill workers who, on being obliged to return home for some time, went away as if into exile and, like the plant worker B-n, returned decidedly hostile to village life. The reason was always one and the same: the village order and morals were becoming unbearable for a man, the personality of whom was starting to develop, if only a little. And the more gifted a worker was, the more he thought and studied in the city, the sooner and more decisively he broke with the village. Mill workers, who had participated in the revolutionary movement for several years could not usually survive more than several months in their home villages. Sometimes the relationships of such workers to their parents and elders took on a truly tragic character. The 'fathers' bitterly whined about the disrespectful 'sons' and the sons with a heavy heart became convinced that they had become complete strangers to their families and they were irresistibly drawn to the city, towards close, friendly circles of comrade-revolutionaries.

One hardly need explain where lay the cause of the better economic conditions of the plant workers. It consisted in the character of their work. It was easy and quick to learn to work well in a mill, at a spinning or weaving apparatus. For this a few weeks was enough. But around a year was needed to become a joiner, a turner or a metalworker. Workers who knew one of these trades were already considered master craftsmen, and it was these craftsmen that were needed in the plants.¹⁴ It is also indisputable that our noted 'fundamental principles' (*ustoi*) did not remain without influence in this case. The necessity of paying taxes that often exceeded the income of a peasant plot several fold drove a mass of commune-members from the village every year. These headed for the mills from every direction and their competition dreadfully lowered pay. In the plants, this influx was less noticeable as it was hard to end up there without special training.

Apart from that, many of the plant workers were urban residents, i.e. people enjoying a happiness rarely bestowed upon the Russian worker, namely that of being a proletarian and therefore not being subject to direct taxation on the part of the state. Naturally, hunger alone

¹⁴ It goes without saying that I am not speaking here about the brickworks, sugar refineries and similar plants, where 'grey' workers worked [Plekhanov's footnote].

was more than sufficient to put the seller of labour power in conditions that were very uncondusive to its sale. But for the mill workers tied to the land, hunger was united with oppressive taxation. The state first tied their hands, and then let them fight with need how they may.

As native urbanites, many plant workers from childhood had had much greater access to education than their counterparts in the mills. Among the plant workers known to me, I did not meet people who had simply never been to school. Some of them went to an ordinary town primary school, others to the schools of the Technical or Philanthropic Societies.¹⁵ I am entirely unfamiliar with the schools of the Philanthropic Society (I heard only from the workers that one of them had several classes), but I know the schools of the Technical Society very well. Though poorly equipped, they carry out their business well enough, teaching reading, writing and arithmetic to the young people of the plants.

For the adult workers, Saturday (evening) and Sunday (morning) readings of cosmography and other natural sciences are, or at least were organised in these schools. The readings were always well attended and you had to see the attention with which they listened to the speaker! I more than once witnessed how elderly workers came up to the teacher and warmly thanked him for his labours: 'that really was very interesting', they would say, 'many thanks to you from all of us'. At several factories, worker-propagandists have made the following observations: if somebody does not go to the readings, there is little to hope for from him; conversely, the more attentively he follows them, the greater is the certainty with which one can say that with time he will become a reliable revolutionary and we have invariably been guided by this sign in the matter of recruiting new members to our circle.

Several of the workers who were interested in books were at times not averse to taking up the pen themselves. At the Munitions Works on Vasilievskii Island, the workers ran a handwritten journal for a time, a kind of sharply satirical chronicle of life at the plant. Most of all, its target was the works management, but sometimes the workers' satirical whip reached higher. So, for example, I remember that the journal brought to the attention of its readers that a draft law was being discussed in government circles by force of which entrepreneurs who had mutilated the greatest number of workers in their mills and plants over the course of a year would receive special awards ('the awards would be commensurate to the number of fingers arms and noses torn off' this article stated). This bitter mockery aptly characterised the situation in the country, the legislation of which, carefully guarding the interests of the employers, neglected the interests of the hired in the most shameless fashion.

The working youth – adolescents and children – as far as I noticed are distinguished by a much greater independence compared to the young people of the upper classes. Life at an earlier age and with greater severity pushes them into a struggle for existence, which leaves an impression of resourcefulness and hardness on those of them who contrive to be spared a premature departure from life. I knew a thirteen-year old lad, completely orphaned who, working at Galernaia Gavan' [Gallery Harbour] at MacPherson's, lived completely alone, obviously feeling not the least need for any additional help.¹⁶ He settled accounts with the

¹⁵ These charitable institutions had been set up by the government. The Imperial Philanthropic Society was founded in 1802, the Technical Society in 1866.

¹⁶ Murdoch [also Mark] Lachlan MacPherson (1813–79) was the owner of a shipbuilding concern on the Clyde who at one point built an Imperial Yacht for Nicholas I. He moved to St Petersburg during the 1830s and in 1856

office himself and without anybody else's instructions managed his small budget. I do not know if he had a guardian: this seems somehow a little too soft for a worker, but if he did then probably did not have too much to do for his ward.

Clashes with the masters and the owners develop a remarkable unanimity among the working youth. In the summer of 1878, at the time of strike at the New Cotton-Spinning Mill, several child mill workers were arrested and held at the police station. Their comrades, also children and just as much rebels as those arrested, immediately headed as a crowd to the station, demanding their release. The result was a sort of children's demonstration. Adult workers did not play any part in it. They only observed it from afar: 'Look at what the kiddies are doing', they said approvingly, 'no worries, let them learn'.

However, in this case there was nothing for the kiddies to learn. They had already played a most active and useful role in the strike, understanding what it was about. When a large gathering of the strikers took place in the extensive courtyard of the New Cotton-Spinning Mill, the children took on the role usually played by a Cossack mounted patrol. By some sort of intuition, they found out about the approach of the enemy and immediately brought this to the attention of their elders. 'Sergeant's coming, sergeant's coming' rang out the children's shouts and informed in good time, the gathering dispersed.¹⁷ When the sergeant arrived on the scene, there was nobody to grab. The adult police force of Alexander II grew terribly angry at the juvenile police force of the workers. Many of these little strikers were then subjected to 'corrective punishment by the police'. However, I do not think that the punishment corrected them in the sense that bosses had wanted.

Many interesting things could have been noticed in the workers' milieu by such a fine observer as Gleb Uspenskii.¹⁸ But our Populist novelists usually did not pay any attention to it. For them, the people ended where peasant spontaneity disappeared and where the ancestrally bequeathed philosophy of Ivan Ermolaevich¹⁹ breaks down under the influence of the awakened thought of the worker. True, in the seventies not only Populist novelists were guilty of this sin and not only legally permitted literature in general. Illegal writers for their part also promoted the false idealisation of the peasantry and the triumph of unique theories of Russian socialism, which could never look at the worker question from the correct point of view. Imbued with populist prejudices, back then we all saw the greatest harm for Russia in the triumph of capitalism and the development of the proletariat. Thanks to this, our attitude to the workers was always ambivalent and completely inconsistent.

On the one hand, we did not ascribe any independent political role to the proletariat in our programmes, placing our hopes exclusively on a peasant rebellion. On the other hand, we considered it necessary all the same to be occupied with the workers and were not able to turn away from this matter if only because with an incomparably smaller expenditure of force proved incomparably more fruitful than our beloved settlements among the people. But, going

founded the Baltic Shipyard with his partner, Matthew Carr (1800–82). MacPherson's grandson, Arthur (1870–1919) was a pioneer of association football in Russia.

¹⁷ i.e. *uchastkovoï pristav*

¹⁸ Gleb Ivanovich Uspenskii (1843–1902) was an author and journalist for the legally permitted press who sympathised with the Populist movement.

¹⁹ Note to the second edition. It perhaps does not trouble the present-day reader to recall that Ivan Ermolaevich is the hero of one of Uspenskii's sketches. This was an extremely artistic type of 'real' Russian peasant from the good old days. He contains the answer to many cursed questions of Russian history [Plekhanov's footnote].

to the workers not so much against our will so much as against our theory, we were naturally not able to explain to them what Lassalle called 'the idea of the workers' estate'. We did not preach socialism or even liberalism to them, but precisely that Bakuninism transposed into a Russian key, which taught workers to suspect 'bourgeois' political rights and to place antediluvian peasant institutions before them in the form of a seductive ideal. Listening to us, the worker could be imbued with hatred towards the government and with a rebel spirit, and could sympathise with the grey peasant and to wish him all the best, but he could not under any circumstances understand what his own tasks consisted in, the socio-political tasks of the proletariat. Before that, he had to figure things out with his own mind, and the reader will see below that, when the workers finally did figure things out, they horrified all the right-thinking intelligentsia.²⁰

Here I need to make a reservation. What I said about the attitude of the intelligentsia to the worker question relates only to the Rebel tendency represented by Land and Freedom and individuals adopting their Populist point of view. Along with them, there were also the Lavrists. Those of this tendency were then in the minority and quickly disappeared from the scene. But we must do them justice: their propaganda was probably more sensible than ours. True, they rejected 'bourgeois' political freedom like us and they, or at any rate many of them, were ready to tremble for the fate of the society's 'fundamental principles'. In their views there was also much inconsistency, but this inconsistency contain one fortunate peculiarity: though they rejected 'politics', they showed a very sympathetic attitude to the German Social Democracy. One cannot hold a high opinion regarding the logic of a person who rejects politics and at the same time sympathises with the workers *political* party just mentioned. But with his accounts of the latter, such a person can plant the seeds of healthy concepts in other people's heads which, in favourable circumstances manage to fully assimilate the Social Democratic programme or at least approximate it to a greater or lesser extent. In this case no small credit is due to him.

Precisely such credit is due to the Lavrists. Recalling now the lectures read in workers' circles by the Rebels, I think that the workers could derive real benefit only from the lectures on political economy by the late Fesenko.²¹ This man, who unfortunately died too soon, knew his chosen subject well and knew how to explain it in an accessible and fascinating manner. But his lectures continued only for a few months. With his departure from St Petersburg, we dropped political economy completely and priority was given to 'sketches from Russian history' which boiled down for the most part to accounts of the Razin, Bulavin and Pugchev revolts and in

²⁰ Note to the second edition. The opponents of Social Democracy now say to them: 'You were not the first to turn towards the workers. Revolutionaries start to be active among the workers before Social Democracy arose.' On the one hand this is true as, *inter alia*, my memoirs about the workers' movement of the seventies, i.e. from the time when populist opinions dominated among us revolutionaries, show. But the question is not one of whether Russian revolutionaries were active among workers prior to the emergence of Social Democracy but of how they acted, and of what role was accorded to this type of activity in their programmes. Our opponents willingly forget about this, but this is what is most important: to be active among the proletariat without attributing to them an independent role in social development means not to develop but to confuse its class consciousness.

²¹ Ivan Fedorovich Fesenko (1846–1882) was a propagandist from Poltava province who organised populist reading circles in St Petersburg and Kiev. He was an early populariser of Marx's political economy within the populist movement.

part, to the history of the peasantry (mostly according to Belaev's book *The Peasantry in Rus*).²² For an understanding of the worker question, these sketches yielded nothing.

Sometimes we talked to our listeners about the International Workingmen's Association, but as Rebels, we extolled the activity of Bakunin whilst depicting the 'centralists', i.e. the supporters of Marx and Engels as fairly vicious reactionaries. Such an elucidation of the history of the International could not promote the political development of our listeners. The good thing about the Lavrists was that they at least did not portray the workers' movement in the west in a distorted form and under the influence of their accounts, the Russian worker was able to better clarify his own tasks. If a strong Social-Democratic note could be heard in the programme formulated by the Northern Russian Workers' Union in the winter of 1878-9, then this should to a significant degree be ascribed to the influence of the Lavrists.

But in general, the intelligentsia-revolutionaries did not shine in the role of lecturers for the simple reason that they did not know much, and that which they did know, they did not always understand properly. They were useful to the workers as a daring young fellows capable of obtaining banned books, making a passport and finding a suitable flat for secret gatherings, in short, teaching all the refinements of conspiratorial activity. They stirred, awakened and urged the workers on with their mobility, self-assurance, boldness and his limitless inclination to every kind of 'refusal' (*otritsanie*). Although many workers, especially the more developed, took a sceptical attitude towards the intelligentsia, they could not get by without the irreplaceable factor of 'conspiracy'. Under the influence of Khalturin and his closest comrades, the Petersburg workers' movement became over the course of a certain period of time, a completely independent cause of the workers themselves. But even Khalturin constantly had to turn to the intelligentsia for help in different practical matters.²³

What books were read most of all among the workers? At any rate, not those revolutionary pamphlets, the fairy tales about the four brothers and about the kopeck, Mudritsa Naumovna, etc, which the revolutionaries intended specifically for the people.²⁴ They were all so poor in content that they could not satisfy even a partially literate worker. There were suitable only for newcomers who had not read anything, and even in connection with them served as a feeler for their outlook. If a worker, having read such a book, was not scared, this meant there was sense in him, it meant that loyalist feelings and 'Judaic fear' (*strakh*

²² Ivan Dmitrievch Belaev (1810–73) was a professor at Moscow University who had no connections with the revolutionary movement.

²³ Stepan Nikolaevich Khalturin (1856 [57]–82) was a leading worker revolutionary in St Petersburg who was eventually joined People's Will and was executed for his participation in terrorism. An account of his life and activity is given in sections VI and VII of the present pamphlet.

²⁴ The composition and circulation of propaganda in fairy tale form was a recognised tactic of Populism in the 1870s, and the Chaikovskii Circle made particular use of it. *The Four Brothers* (*Chetyre strannika*) was composed by Lev Alexandrovich Tikhomirov (1852–1923), the future People's Will Executive Committee member who renounced revolution in 1888. *Mudritsa Naumovna* and *The Tale of the Kopeck* (*Skazka o kopeeke*) were written by Sergei Mikhailovich Kravchinskii [also Stepniak] (1851–95). These stories were all original compositions and combined traditional tropes with references to modern socialist theory and practice. In *Mudritsa Naumova*, for example, the hero manages to visit both an enchanted forest, where he flies on the wings of a butterfly to the Third Congress of the International Workingmen's Association.

iudeistkii) were worn very lightly.²⁵ If he flinched, this meant keeping him at a distance or at least being more cautious with him.

But once you were convinced of the revolutionary mood of a worker, you had to either provide him with either more serious printed material to read, or answer the questions which had arisen in his head directly through conversation. Only *The Satiated and the Hungry*, a book published in Geneva that was anarchist both in spirit and exposition, and even perhaps *The Cunning Mechanism* were considered by the workers to be more substantial reading. They looked on all the remaining revolutionary pamphlets for the people as something too basic. 'That's for the greys', the plant workers would say about them. In general, I noticed that, reading a book published specifically for the people, a capable worker felt somewhat humiliated, placed in the position of a child reading fairy tales. He wanted to move over quickly to works intended for the more intelligent reader, and not just for the grey people. For many workers, the reading of serious and even learned books was a sort of matter of honour. I remember a certain I.E., a strapping hammerman from Archangelsk province, who with a diligence worthy of reading more suitable to him sat in the evenings at Spencer's *Principles of Biology*. 'What is it, do you think that we workers are complete fools or something?' he angrily answered me when I suggested he try something easier. Such workers eagerly read everything that was printed by the revolutionaries for the intelligentsia. *Statism and Anarchy* by Bakunin, *Vpered! Obshchina, Zemlia i volia*, Dragomanov's pamphlet *What was gained from the recent war?* which was republished in St Petersburg, etc.²⁶

But here a new misfortune appeared. In the revolutionary publications intended for the intelligentsia, much was frequently said about things which could not be of great interest to the workers. Such, for example, were special 'intelligentsia' questions about 'the duty of the educated class to the people' and of the moral obligations flowing from this, about the relationship of the revolutionaries to '[high] society' and debates about programmes, i.e. in other words, how to more easily and conveniently have an effect on the people and, incidentally, on the above-mentioned workers. As has already been said, though it goes without saying, the workers took a sufficiently indifferent attitude to programmatic debates, though they were far from indifferent about the direction of their own revolutionary activity.

'This journal isn't for us – our journal should be run in a totally different way', Khalturin often said to me, in relation to *Zemlia i volia*, which was then being published in St Petersburg. And he was of course completely right. *Zemlia i volia* like *Obshchina* and *Vpered!* could not be a workers' journal either in terms of its content or in terms of its tendency.

When asking the workers what exactly they wanted from revolutionary literature, I would receive the most diverse answers. In the majority of cases, each wanted it to resolve

²⁵ This appears to be a biblical reference to John 19: 38. Joseph of Arimathea took Christ's body for burial after crucifixion from Pilate, but hid the fact that he was a follower of the deceased 'for fear of the Jews' (or sometimes: 'fear of the Jewish authorities'). As such, Plekhanov is probably referring more to a fear of the tsarist authorities on the part of workers rather than any anti-Semitic prejudices.

²⁶ *Vpered!* was the theoretical journal edited by Lavrov, five issues of which were published in between 1873 and 1877 in Zurich and London. *Obshchina* was the émigré journal of the Rebel trend, nine issues of which appeared in 1878. Mikhail Petrovich Dragomanov (1841–95) was a contributor to *Obshchina* and one of the first advocates of Ukrainian nationhood. The pamphlet in question was published in 1878 in Geneva and speculated on the possibility of radicalisation within the army as a result of Russia's victory in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-8, which was often viewed as a war of liberation on behalf of the Balkan nations against their Ottoman overlords.

questions that were for some reasons occupying them at that given moment. But a great multitude of these questions passed through the heads of thinking workers and every worker, depending on his inclinations and the character of his mind, had his favourite questions. One was most of all interested in the question of God and asserted that revolutionary literature should direct its main forces towards the destruction of the people's religious beliefs. Predominantly historical, political or natural-scientific questions interested others. Among my acquaintances among the mill hands, there was even one who was especially occupied by the woman question.

He found that workers did not respect women and treated them as lower beings. In his words, many married workers even sent their wives away when their guests started revolutionary conversations: 'there's no need, they say, to get the women mixed up in all of this'. Accordingly, the women had no interest in public affairs, something which in turn told badly on the men, as former always tried to distract the latter from the dangerous revolutionary cause as a result of their own lack of development. My acquaintance never missed the opportunity to propagandise a woman and made every effort to establish special revolutionary circles among working women. He very energetically inspired in his comrades – that is to say, he did not hold back from strong words – an opinion on women worthy of developed people. Occupied with his idea, he naturally sought help from revolutionary literature and regretted that it was not sufficiently concerned with the woman question.

I note in passing that this ardent advocate of female liberation was one of those mill workers for whom life in the countryside had become completely unthinkable. When I first became acquainted with him, he was still a very young fellow, though he was already considered 'an old revolutionary' as he had been propagandised by the Chaikovskii circle. In 1873 or 1874 when no more than a boy, he ended up in the house of preliminary detention ('strangulation' as the 'politicals' used to say) where he conducted himself in an exemplary fashion and acquire a passion for reading. On his release, he more than one travelled to Tver province, to his home village, but he could get on with the people there. They called him a student and considered him lost. He amazed them with his habits and views and his disrespectful attitude to the village authorities. However, they consoled themselves with the proverb: 'when he marries, he will change' and he had hardly reached the age of eighteen when they found a bride for him. But right then, he became interested in the woman question and would not even entertain the thought that any upright and honest man would marry a woman he did not know. To avoid pointless confrontations, he made up his mind to stay away from his home village. The village meanwhile decided that the young man was utterly spoilt. I really do not know if our Populists would agree with the village in this case.

There were a few revolutionaries among the women-workers of Petersburg, and there were even strikes among them (at the tobacco factories) but in general, women did not really play an important role in the workers' movement of that time. Several plant workers did not marry precisely because there were no suitable women in their social circle. 'Our women are complete fools and intelligentsia women won't marry the likes of us, let them have the students', such workers said, not without bitterness. I think that in this case too it was not urban indulgences but a serious moral development which influenced them.

I have absolutely no intention of idealising contemporary urban conditions: we have practised enough false idealisation. I have seen and I know the negative sides of this life.

Arriving from the countryside in the city, the worker sometimes really does start fooling around. In the village, he lived by the covenant of his forefathers, submitting without argument to their long-established customs. In the city, these customs at once lose their meaning. For a person to not lose all moral standards, the latter have to be replaced by new customs, new views on things. Such a substitution is in reality gradually taking place, as the unavoidable and daily struggle with the boss alone imposes mutual moral obligations on the workers. But 'for the time being', so long as the worker has still not managed to be imbued with the new morals, he all the same passes through a moral turning point, which is sometimes expressed in sufficiently ugly behaviour.

Here is repeated that which is experienced by every social class and every society during its passage from a narrow, patriarchal system to another which is broader, more complex and more confusing. Rationality comes into its own and, chomping at the bit, immediately draws anti-social conclusions. The intellect in general is capable of bigger mistakes than the objective reason of custom. For this, it is cursed by all conservatives. But so long as people go forward, periodic breaks with custom will remain. And however mischievously the intellect sometimes acts during these breaks, you do not correct its mistakes by preserving the old order. They are usually corrected by the further course of life itself. The more the new order develops, the more new moral demands conditioned by it become clear to each and all, little by little acquiring the firmness of custom, which then holds back the excessive mischief of the intellect. In this way, the negative sides of development are removed by its own positive acquisitions, and the role of a thinking person in this unavoidable historical movement is defined of its own accord.

I knew one young mill worker who was a completely honest fellow, until he came across revolutionary propaganda. But the moment the socialist attacks on the exploiters were made known to him, he started to misbehave, considering it permissible to deceive and steal from people belonging to the upper classes. 'It's all the same, they stole from us', he objected to the reproaches of comrades to whom he openly displayed the loot and with whom he proposed to share it up equally. Were such a case known to the late Dostoevskii, he would not of course have failed rub it in the faces of the revolutionaries in *The Brothers Karamazov*, where he would have wheeled out this fellow alongside Smerdiakov, a victim of intelligentsia free thinking, or in *Demons* where, as is well known 'no step is without horror'.²⁷ It is interesting that the comrades themselves, hardly having ever read the works of Dostoevskii, started to call the thievish young man Demon. But they did not blame either the intelligentsia in general, nor socialist propaganda in particular for the feats of this Demon. With their influence, they tried, as it were, to make a complete moral individual of this youth and to teach him to fight against the upper classes not in the capacity of a cheat and a thief, but as a revolutionary agitator. I soon lost sight of the Demon and I do not know if his moral break was resolved in a positive way. But that a favourable outcome was quite possible is vouched for, among other things, by the disapproval that his exploits met with on the part of all the revolutionary workers around him.

²⁷ In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the morally repulsive Smerdiakov, a servant, murders his employer, the patriarch Fedor but argues that responsibility for the act lies with the freethinking middle brother Ivan, son of Fedor, whose ideas supposedly had a negative influence on him. The older brother, Dmitri, is falsely imprisoned for the crime.

At the present moment, many within the intelligentsia argue about the possibility of revolutionary propaganda among the workers.²⁸ I think that anybody who has encountered Russian workers even a little knows how attentively and how sympathetically they relate to this propaganda. People say that propaganda meets with an insurmountable barrier on the part of the police. But such people speak too often without having taken the trouble to make even one serious attempt in this direction. True, sometimes they refer to 'experience'. But experiences are not all the same. Without ability, no revolutionary activity is possible and no police can stop capable people. The Land and Freedom society during its whole existence maintained active relations with workers through several of its members. And it is remarkable that, in all that time, the workers movement proper brought us only one raid, and an insignificant one at that.

This came as a result of information given by a worker arrested in 1878, our comrade I, who was occupied with propaganda at one of the Moscow factories. The numerous arrests of workers which took place in the spring of that year in St Petersburg, arrests thanks to which the late Khazov ('Uncle') and several other comrades of ours ended up in the hands of the police, were caused by the intelligentsia itself. Specifically, Khazon, who was then living without legal status in Moscow, asked a student of the Petrovsky [Agricultural] Academy to hide some clandestine papers. The latter buried the packet he received in the Academy's garden, but apparently not well and not deeply. Some random curious dog dug it up and unfortunately, some too discerning loyalist, having acquainted himself with the contents, presented it to the authorities. This unexpected find proved to be a real treasure-trove for the police, who immediately arrested Khazov and one of his Moscow friends. As often happens in such situations, these arrests gave occasion for others. The raids spread to Petersburg, where the large and well-united workers circles of Galernaia Gavan' suffered in particular. Our losses were then very serious, but we understood that we had to blame ourselves, not the workers.

In their dealings with the workers, Land and Freedom always adhered to the following methods. Those members of the organisation to whom the conduct of activity among workers was entrusted (there was always only a few of them, at most four to five people) were obliged to set up special circles of young intelligentsia. These circles did not belong to the Land and Freedom organisation properly speaking, but acting under the leadership of its members, they

²⁸ Note to the second edition. Now they have already stopped arguing about this. Now all recognise the possibility of such propaganda (just like agitation). But when I wrote these memoirs, this question could only be considered resolved in the negative sense. As recently as 1889, V Zhuk in *Svobodnaia Rossiia*, edited by Vladimir Burtsev and Vladimir Debogorii-Mokrievich, wrote: 'Even successful propaganda among individual, developed workers is not worth that mass of victims which it demands. In the majority of cases workers, having played some role or other in the revolutionary movement, having come into conflict with the authorities in prison, lost heart and were not able to defend firmly their convictions which, it seems, had been well assimilated by them when they were free. The arrests of workers usually brought about the destruction of revolutionary organisations which were in touch with them. Of course it would be harsh and unjust to blame the workers for this (the good and just V Zhuk – G.P) as there was nowhere to get that bravery and moral strength which is given by education and development.' (*Svobodnaia Rossiia* 1, pp37). I suitably denounced this amazing opinion in the foreword to our publication of Alekseev's speech (Geneva 1889). But it will be hard for the contemporary reader to imagine what a storm this foreword provoked in the émigré Russian colonies! They were ready to anathematise me, protests were written against me. Nowadays nobody is going to anathematise me. But, of course, other, just as suitable occasions for anathemas and protests can be found. I know this very well and I am not at all embarrassed by it. Public opinion is an important matter, but we revolutionaries should be able to swim against the current. Without this ability, we are no good, without it he is a revolutionary only in name [Plekhanov's footnote].

could not but work in the spirit of its programme. It was these circles who made contact with the workers. Given that, thanks to the propaganda of 1873-4, there was a sufficiently large number of revolutionaries among the St Petersburg workers, the task of Land and Freedom and its young supporters amounted, first and foremost, to the organisation of these already-prepared forces.

The 'old', for the most part already experienced worker-revolutionaries, by joining with some reliable newcomers, constituted the core of the St Petersburg Workers Organisation with which the intelligentsia mainly interacted. We could fully rely on these people and it would have been absurd to fear that they would give us away. Nonetheless, remembering that one cannot have too much of a good thing, and that in secret revolutionary activity caution was obligatory even when it seemed absolutely superfluous, Land and Freedom gave neither their names (i.e. the names under which they were registered at the police station) nor their addresses to these experienced workers. I would add that they acted thus not only with workers: the address of a Land and Freedom member and the for the most part invented name under which he lived was usually known in the organisation by only a few members occupied alongside him in one and the same branch of revolutionary work. The rest, occupied with other revolutionary specialisms had to be satisfied with meeting them at conspiratorial flats, where general circle assemblies were held.

The central selected worker group was responsible for leading the local workers' circles which had sprung up in different parts of Petersburg. The intelligentsia did not interfere in these local groups, but organised the delivery of books and helped with the acquisition of secret flats for meetings, etc. Every local circle had to attract new members with its own efforts, who were informed that similar circles existed in St Petersburg, but where precisely was known only to the central workers' core, which had a general meeting every Sunday. Revolutionary intelligentsia would also appear at the meetings of local circles to conduct propaganda. But as there they were known by fictitious names, if some spy managed to get in, he would be able to inform those who had sent him only that a certain Fedorovich, or Anton, or 'Uncle' at a certain time and place had shaken the foundations of society. Where to find this Fedorovich, Anton or 'Uncle' remained shrouded in the gloom of ignorance. To follow any of these foundation-shakers in the street was not so easy because they resorted to special measures, in the form of double-entry courtyards, taxis suddenly hailed in a place where there was no similar vehicle to follow them and where the spy who was tailing the foundation-shaker on foot could not help but lag behind him, etc. With such precautions, we were able to successfully carry out our business even in the harshest times, when revolutionaries who did not belong to an organisation (nihilists, as they called us in their jargon) fell into the hands of the vigilant Arguses in their dozens for the slightest trifles.

Already towards the end of 1876, when Land and Freedom was still only starting the construction of revolutionary settlements among the people, propaganda among the workers had taken on a sufficiently broad scale both in St Petersburg (Galernaia Gavan', Vasilievskii Island, the Peterburgskaia, Vyborg, Obvodnyi Canal, Nevsky and Narva Gate districts) and its surrounding areas (Kolpino, the Alexandrovskii Works, Krondstadt, etc.).²⁹ But I have already

²⁹ The Alexandrovskii Works is today known as PAO Proletarskii Zavod and owing to the city's expansion, is located within St Petersburg. It is a machine-building plant and in the 1870s served the railway network, using imported American technology.

said that the Rebels were not satisfied with propaganda and wanted to agitate at all costs. Our mood in the end captured the attention of the workers. At that time, everybody recalled the demonstration marking the funeral of student Chernyshev, killed in prison after having been arrested in connection with the trial of the 193, in the spring of 1876.³⁰ It produced a very strong impression on the whole intelligentsia and for the whole summer of that year, we were delirious with demonstrations. But the workers did not take part in the Chernyshev demonstration, as it took place on a working day and the organisers somehow forgot about them: Chernyshev was buried by the intelligentsia. And so the workers wanted to have their own demonstration and moreover, one which by its sharply revolutionary character would completely eclipse the intelligentsia demonstration. They convinced us that, by preparing well and choosing a holiday, it could bring together up to two thousand workers. We doubted this, but the Rebel streak spoke in each one of us, and we gave in. This is how the famous demonstration on Kazan Square of 6 (18) December took place.

Now everybody has forgotten about the demonstration on Kazan Square. Even Mr Dragomanov himself, who at one time loved to reproach revolutionaries for it, recalls it less and less. But in its day, it aroused a lot of talk and controversy. Some condemned it, others exalted it, though very often both sides had a very mistaken understanding of it. For the intelligentsia, the goal of the demonstration remained unclear, probably because in its preparation, the intelligentsia played a part only in the person of a few Land and Freedom members active in the working-class regions of St Petersburg. These people made use of all means that depended on them in order to attract as many workers as possible to it, but as far as I know, they thought little of the intelligentsia. They will come, they said, without being called and if they do not come then this is no great misfortune, perhaps this will even be better, as a purely worker demonstration will be the outcome.

Nonetheless, on the morning of 6 December a large number of students gathered by Kazan Cathedral. It seems to me that this happened mainly because throughout the month of November, rumours had been circulating around St Petersburg about some kind of demonstration due to take place near St Isaac's Cathedral, and the public had already been prepared. Who had thought up this demonstration and what character they had intended to give it, we in Land and Freedom simply did not know, though we of course would have been at St Isaac's if something really had taken place. But this demonstration was not fated to take place: it was always being postponed somehow from one holiday to the next so that the impatient nihilists finally started to get angry. They started to speak about the demonstration at St Isaac's with nothing more than irony. Not wanting the public to confuse us with these dawdlers, we deliberately chose another place – the Kazan Cathedral – for our demonstration. All the same, when rumours reached the public about our plans, many decided that the forthcoming Kazan demonstration was the one which should have taken place at St Isaac's. Having thirsted for excitement for a long time, the revolutionary youth came from everywhere to the Kazan Cathedral and in spite of our initial calculations, proved to be in the majority.

³⁰ Pavel Feoktsovich Chernyshev (1854–76) studied at the Medical-Surgical Academy and was involved in the organisation of a student fraternity. He was arrested in his native Samara province for conducting propaganda in August 1874. He contracted tuberculosis in prison, awaiting trial, and was released shortly before his death in March 1876. His funeral procession to the Volkovo cemetery took on the character of a demonstration.

Not many workers came: 200-250. And that was completely understandable. If for the workers belonging to revolutionary circles, the demonstration had sense as an attempt at agitation, then for comrades untouched by propaganda, it could really only be of interest as a new, hitherto unwitnessed spectacle. They had no palpable reason for active participation and so they did not go to it. Already several days prior to the demonstration, we could see how impossible were the rosy hopes of the revolutionary workers' circles who had conceived it. We could already see how funny the too-cautious organisers of the St Isaac's demonstration had become in the eyes of the public, and did not wish to resemble them. On the evening of 4 December, a meeting at which, apart from Land and Freedom, the most influential workers from different corners of St Petersburg were present, almost unanimously decided that the demonstration should take place if at least several hundred people came. At this same meeting, the idea of a red flag, which no one had thought of before, was proposed and approved.

We considered the inscription sown onto this banner, 'Land and Freedom', to be the best expression of the people's ideals and demands. But to the people itself, or at least the capital's people, it proved incomprehensible. 'How can it be that they wanted land and freedom?' they subsequently reasoned in several factories. 'They're right about the land – they really do need to give land to the peasants. But as for freedom – this has already been granted. What is this all about?' It turned out that in our slogan 'Land and Freedom' we were late by at least fifteen years. However, in certain places among the peasantry other responses were heard. A comrade living in Malorossia told me that he once overheard a conversation between peasants about the Kazan Square demonstration.³¹ 'What they wanted was good', an old man remarked, 'everybody wants this, we all need land and freedom'. This same old man in no way wanted to believe that the revolutionaries could be persecuted for such just demands. 'Nothing happened to them', he asserted, 'the tsar simply summonsed them said "Wait, lads, you will have land and freedom, only don't shout about it in the streets"'. The whole of Russia talked about the Kazan demonstration in one way or another.

But how did the demonstration proceed? I have said that the meeting of 4 December resolved not to postpone it if at least several hundred people gathered. All of the following day was dedicated to running around the workers' districts. On the morning of 6 December, all the Rebel workers' circles (the Lavrists were of course opposed to the demonstration) arrived at the designated place. The harbour workers were particularly well represented: a whole workshop of 40-45 men arrived in full force from one of the plants at the harbour. But there were simply no workers unconnected to these circles. We saw that we lacked forces and resolved to wait. The workers dispersed into nearby taverns, leaving only a small group to follow the course of events by the cathedral porch. Meanwhile, the students were approaching in large groups. The not very numerous crowd inside the church had already been struck by this strange influx of unusual worshippers towards the end of mass. The churchwarden glanced in their direction with some kind of alarm and amazement. The mass finished and the strange worshippers did not disperse. Then the churchwarden entered into negotiations with them. 'What can I do for you, gentlemen?' he asked, deliberately approaching the group of Rebels.

'We want a requiem', the answered.

³¹ i.e. Ukraine.

‘We cannot have a requiem today: it’s a Tsar’s Day.’³²

The rebels were amazed. Actually, no church service had formed any part of the plan for the demonstration, but given that the revolutionary crowd was still arriving and the rebels needed to play for time, they thought up the idea of a requiem merely as a plausible pretext for their further presence in the church. When the warden explained that the requiem could not be sung, they were thrown into confusion for a short time.

‘I’ll go and order a prayer service’, the late Sentianin whispered to me.³³

‘Go and pay the priests for our billet’ I answered, giving him a three-rouble note.

Sentianin left. But I to this day do not know what he decided with the priests.

The bored nihilists started to go out on to the porch and the worker-Rebels who had been sitting in the nearby taverns approached them. The crowd took on a sufficiently imposing size. We decided to act.³⁴

³² Tsar’s Days were public holidays in the church calendar to mark important days in the biographies of the royal family, including birthdays and name days of the tsar, the tsaritsa and the heir to the throne, and the tsar’s coronation. 6 December was the tsar’s name day (Alexander).

³³ Alexander Evgrafovich Sentianin (1856–79) studied at the Mining Institute, where he joined a socialist self-education circle. In 1877, he began to conduct propaganda in Rostov-on-Don, taking a job in a factory work, though he was of a gentry background. He was an advocate of ‘defensive terror’, i.e. direct violent resistance to police actions against the revolutionary movement as opposed to the assassination of prominent officials deemed ultimately responsible for these actions. Thus, he participated in the killing of a spy and in the liberation of a political prisoner in Rostov. He was arrested in Kharkov in 1878, putting up armed resistance to the police and died the following year of consumption in the Peter-Paul Fortress. Regarding Sentianin’s interactions with the clergy, some sources suggest that he actually requested a prayer service for Nikolai Chernyshevskii and other political prisoners.

³⁴ Note to the second edition. Whoever wrote the obituary of Zaichnevskii (*Materialy dlia istorii russkogo revoliutsionnogo dvizhenii. S prilozheniem: S rodiny i na rodinu* No 6-7, p505) says, among other things, the following: ‘What especially repulsed him (Zaichnevskii) about Land and Freedom was the Kazan Square demonstration, where he saw above all an inadequacy of organisation and a lack of seriousness on the part of the organisers. He managed to secretly arrive in St Petersburg and in one student flat he castigated the speaker (giving the impression that he did not know that the speaker was in the same room) for having dared to give a speech, when it had been decided by the organisers to give it only when three thousands workers were gathered on the square. The speaker had to listen in silence while Zaichnevskii denounced him.’

The person who wrote these lines either forgot or did not consider it necessary to say how Zaichnevskii knew under these conditions that it had been decided to give a speech: he was not among the organisers of the demonstration and was not at the meetings. Indeed, the decision the author of the obituary mentions was not only not taken by the organisers of the Kazan Square demonstration: nobody even proposed it. At the meeting on 4 December, it was decided, on the contrary, to act if at least several hundred people were gathered on Kazan Square. And it would have been impossible to act otherwise under these conditions without demoralising the revolutionaries. Not knowing how the Kazan Square demonstration was prepared and organised, Zaichnevskii was not able to castigate the speaker for his supposed failure to respect the decisions of the organisers. Indeed, he castigated not the speaker but, first and foremost, all the revolutionary-Populists in general for their expectation of active support on the part of the people. He also spoke against demonstrations but only for the reasons which the author of the obituary well explains. ‘Every kind of demonstration and terror was rejected by him unconditionally as a direct disruption of organisation’ (ibid, 504). And why did the speaker ‘have to listen in silence’ to Zaichnevskii’s argument? Was it really because he was tortured by conscience owing to his violation of revolutionary discipline? As I have already said, there was no such violation. In reality, the speaker was not at all silent but it is very possible that for a time ‘he listened silently’ to an opinion which up until that time had not been heard from a revolutionary about the inevitable inertness of the people. He was profoundly struck by some of the contemptuous notes of this opinion [Plekahnov’s footnote]. Peter Grigorievich Zaichnevskii (1842–96) was best known as the author of the Young Russia proclamation of 1862. This document was strongly influenced by Jacobin thinking and it thus went against the anarchist assumptions predominant in Russian Populism by calling for a

The authorities had probably caught wind of rumours regarding our preparations. However there were not many police and gendarmes on Kazan Square. They looked at us and waited for something to happen. When the first words of a revolutionary speech rang out, they tried to squeeze through the crowd to the speaker, but the latter pushed back. All participants in the demonstration became terribly excited. The workers closed in a tight circle around the speaker: 'Guys, hold tight, don't give up, don't let the police in', Mitrofanov ordered, as police whistles sounded in the square. When the speech was over, they unfurled the red banner and shouts of 'Long live the social revolution! Long live Land and Freedom!' rang out. Mitrofanov quickly pulled the hat from the speaker's head, and having replaced it with some peaked cap, wrapped his head in a hood.³⁵ 'Now, let's all go together, or they will arrest us', some voice cried out and we as a crowd moved in the direction of Nevskii Prospect.

But we had only taken a few steps when the police, reinforced with constables and overseers who had come running at the sound of whistles, started to seize those in the rear ranks. Now the general excitement reached its peak. 'Stop: they're taking some of ours', someone ordered, and the crowd rushed to take back the arrested. The police were crushed and ran behind the cathedral into Kazanskaia street. If, having repulsed this first hostile attack, the revolutionaries had shown more self-possession, they would probably have been able to retreat without losses and in full order. Land and Freedom understood this, and as soon as the arrested were taken back, they shouted for their followers to once again close ranks. But to whom of those who have ever taken part in similar clashes is it unknown how difficult it is to bring within suitable limits passions that have already started to show themselves?

Our followers continued to pursue the fleeing police. A terrible disorder broke out and our ranks completely fell apart; meanwhile, the police acquired strong, new reinforcements. Whole detachments of constables, in the company of a multitude of yard keepers were rapidly approaching Kazan Square along the same Kazanskaya Street towards which the fleeing police had headed. Carried away with the pursuit, the revolutionaries clashed with this detachment head on. A fierce brawl broke out. The forces of the police grew with every minute. The revolutionaries were surrounded on all sides. An orderly retreat on their part was made impossible. It was a good thing that they were able to retreat in more or less significant groups. Such groups for the most part successfully fought off their attackers, though not without significant bodily damage. But those who acted in isolation were immediately seized and, after brutal beatings, dragged to the police station.

I have no desire to sing the praises of fisticuff on anyone's part. But in view of the brutality displayed by the police, I note with some satisfaction that the latter also got it pretty bad. The revolutionaries, some of whom were armed with knuckledusters defended themselves desperately. On their side, the student NN distinguished himself in particular. Tall and strong, he amazed the enemy like a powerful Ajax son of Telaton, and wherever his sturdy figure appeared, the defenders of order had a terrible time. However much the police tried to seize him, he happily beat off all attacks and returned home the same free man he was when he came to the square. The defenders of order who suffered at his hands only knew that some tall, strong, brown-haired fellow was pummelling them, but they simply could not remember his

democratic republic. Zaichnevskii spent most of his life in various forms of internal exile, hence his clandestine visit to St Petersburg. The speaker at the Kazan Square demonstration appears to have been Plekhanov himself.

³⁵ It is worth repeating that Mitrofanov appears to have been co-operating with the police at this stage.

face. When later, at the end of the clash on the square, they ran into Bogoliubov on Morskoi Street, they imagined him to be their victorious enemy. They arrested him beat him brutally at the station and then, as is well known, condemned him to hard labour. But Bogoliubov played no role in the demonstration whatsoever.³⁶

When, after the speech was delivered, the red flag was unfurled, it was seized by the young peasant Potapov and, raised up on the workers' hands he held it high above the heads of those present for some time. The police noted his description, but for a long time they were not able to arrest him. The bold and decisive group who defended him were retreating along Nevskii. They reached the corner of Sadovaia. The pursuit constantly weakened and, apparently, finally stopped. Then Potapov got on a horse-drawn tram, considering himself already safe. But spies were following him. So long as he was not alone, they kept a respectful distance, but once his companions had disappeared, the spies descended on the tram and, stopping it, arrested Potapov. They found the flag on him, which in itself constituted irrefutable evidence. Nonetheless, the court only sentenced Potapov to confinement in a monastery 'for repentance'.³⁷

The relative lenience of this strange sentence is apparently to be explained by the Potapov's youth. But it is well known that in Russian political trials judges do not hesitate to condemn very young defendants to hard labour and later even to death in military courts. In this case, the intent was otherwise. The government found it necessary to spare the workers. Around 10-12 of them ended up in the dock and all of them received sufficiently light sentences: several, like Potapov were sentenced to repentance in a monastery, others to exile and settlement in Siberia.

The greater part of the intelligentsia-defendants received penal servitude and with very long terms, the likes of which had been unheard of up until that point. The judges could not fail to see that the guilt of almost all the defendants in this latter category was at least doubtful. But notes were found on two of the arrested workers which, as the prosecutor noted, 'clearly pointed to collusion'. These notes really did point to collusion, but it was no less clear that none of the intelligentsia revolutionaries on trial participated in this collusion. The Third Section knew very well that the main preparers of the demonstration had not been arrested. But the court was not embarrassed by this, revenging themselves on the arrested intelligentsia for the

³⁶ Alexander Stepanovich Bogoliubov (1854–after 1887), a propagandist since 1874, was sentenced to 15 years hard labour for his supposed part in the demonstration. In the summer of 1877, whilst in the House of Preliminary Detention on Shpalernaya Street, he refused to remove his hat in the presence of the St Petersburg Chief of Police, Fedor Fedorovich Trepov (1812–89) and was illegally beaten as a punishment. This provoked a prison riot and led to Trepov being targeted by terrorists. Vera Zasulich attempted to assassinate Trepov in January [February] 1878, but only injured him, and was acquitted in a jury trial.

³⁷ Iakov Semeovich Potapov (1859–1919) was originally from Tver province, but found work in Thornton's Woollen Mill in St Petersburg at the age of 12. Contrary to what Plekhanov states here, his punishment was ultimately severe, owing to his repeated clashes with the religious authorities. Having spent an initial period at a monastery in Vologda province, he was transferred to the Solovetskii Monastery in the White Sea, traditionally a centre of religious dissent. (This was later the Solovki prison camp in Soviet times). Here it appears that he was kept in solitary confinement. Following further acts of insubordination, he was exiled to Kobyay, a remote point in Yakutia. He was only allowed to reside in the city of Yakutsk from 1896, where he spent the rest of his life, despite being granted permission to return to European Russia the following year, providing he stayed out of Moscow and St Petersburg.

actions of those in hiding. It is well known that the government always establishes in these cases a type of collective responsibility between revolutionaries.

But for the government, the thought was too unacceptable that among the workers there could be such incorrigible rebels as among the intelligentsia. It tried to convince itself and others that only under the bad influence of the latter did the workers cease to be the loyal subjects of the monarch, and it very unwillingly brought them to court, preferring to deal with them using administrative methods. This was very wise. So long as only representatives of the intelligentsia appeared in the role of political criminals, it was possible to convince the peasants that these criminals were lords angry at the tsar for the abolition of serfdom. With regard to criminals from among the workers, such assurances lacked all sense and the image of a rebel had to take on a completely new form, one very unpleasant for the government, in the popular imagination. The government very well understood how disadvantageous a turn the revolutionary movement would take (from the government's own perspective), if this movement, not limiting itself to the intelligentsia, started to attract just a few layers of the people.

The Kazan Square demonstration was the first attempt to apply our notions of agitation practically. These notions were at the time still too abstract and for this reason alone their practical application could not be successful. The Kazan Square demonstration clearly showed that we would always remain alone if in our revolutionary activity we were guided only by our abstract passion for agitation and not by the existing mood and existing pressing needs of that milieu we intended to agitate.

We did not forget this lesson, but more than a year passed before the occasion for taking up agitation amongst the St Petersburg working population presented itself. It was a very sad occasion. At the Munitions Works on Vasilievskii Island, an explosion of powder took place. Several workers were terribly mutilated and four were killed on the spot. The next day two more died from severe injuries. Thus, the workers of this factory were going to accompany six of their comrades to the Smolensk cemetery. The explosion had taken place because of the unforgivable culpability of the factory management. The affected workshop was located on the second floor and was linked to the outside world by just one staircase. Right by the entry to the workshop, by the staircase lay in a special storeroom a significant enough store of pressed gunpowder, from which shells were made.

When this powder was ground at the bench, it gave off a fine dust which covered the benches, floor and walls of the workshop. One spark was enough for the gunpowder dust to flare up and, carrying the flame to the powder storeroom situated by the staircase, cut off any route to salvation for the workers. The workers were all the more conscious of the danger threatening them as sparks were often produced during work through friction. Sometimes even the gunpowder dust covering the workbenches flared up. But given that for the time being these flare ups were insignificant, management relied on the grace of god. Statements by the workers were ignored. It is understandable that, when the explosion took place, the workers in this plant were very angry. The revolutionary circle operating there immediately saw that it had to act. One of its members wrote an appeal in which the accident which had taken place in the factory was connected to the general position of the working class. This appeal, which was printed in our secret print shop, produced a good impression and it was read with sympathy even by those workers who nobody had noted to be sympathetic to the revolutionaries. But

this was not enough. The revolutionary circle at the Munitions Works wanted to give the coming funerals the character of a demonstration.

This circle was not under the exclusive influence of the Rebels. Communicating with the Rebels, they maintained permanent friendly relations with the Lavrists too. But the negative attitude of the Lavrists to all kinds of 'rebel attempts' was well-known to them, and they feared that the latter would not approve of their demonstration. It was very unpleasant for the workers to upset their Lavrist friends, but to pass over the opportunity for a demonstration was even more unpleasant. As a result, they resorted to cunning. Having invited the Rebels to attend the funeral, they earnestly requested that they said nothing to the Lavrists. 'God be with them entirely', they said, 'the Lavrists are good people, but they will go and argue, claiming that what we are doing is useless, and we can't listen to them, all the workers are really fired up'. The Rebels of course had no wish to give them away to the Lavrists.

On the day of the funeral, at around nine in the morning, a well-armed group of Rebels (including the late Valerian Osinskii) came up to the building at the Munitions Works, where a large crowd of workers had already assembled.³⁸ Members of the workers' circle at the factory immediately joined the Rebels, and they were also armed with something 'as a precaution'. The late Khalturin, who was then working at another plant, also came to the funeral. A caucus began: what was the mood of the workers and what could the revolutionaries make of it? The Rebels decided that to give a revolutionary speech was out of place. The crowd of workers in their Sunday best seemed to them too 'bourgeois'. And this impression was so strong that it was felt not only to those intelligentsia who, studying with the plant workers, seemed to know their habits, but even, strange as it may seem, to members of the local workers' circle. The spirits of the latter also fell.

The coffins showed up; those present removed their hats for a moment and then the funeral procession began. There was a bitter frost that day, which further cooled our revolutionary impulses. 'No, gentlemen, revolution must be made in the summer – in this cold you won't stir up anybody', we joked, rubbing our pale noses and ears.

On to the cemetery. In one of the corners far from its entrance, six fresh graves had been hacked out of the frozen earth, next to which lay six modest wooden crosses. The police, who had been accompanying the procession in sufficiently large numbers, and who were being reinforced by a new detachment of constables at the entrance to the cemetery, stood around the graves. The priest said a final prayer and the coffins were lowered into the ground. While they were being buried, the crowd remained completely calm and we were completely convinced that we could do nothing. But when everything was finished and the time had come to disperse, some kind of movement stirred within it. A thickset, redheaded worker squeezed his way to one of the endmost graves.

³⁸ Valerian Andreevich Osinskii (1852–79) was a leading figure in the so-called Executive Committee of the Social Revolutionary Party, or Southern Executive Committee, which was responsible for the assassination of two senior officials on Kiev during the first half of 1878. This organisation is generally regarded as a faction within Land and Freedom. He was arrested in January 1879 and executed in May.

‘Gentlemen’, he exclaimed in a voice trembling from emotion, ‘we are burying today six victims killed not by the Turks but by the firm’s trustees [*popechitelnoe nachalstvo*].³⁹ Our manag...

They cut him off.

Police whistles rang out and a district overseer put a hand on his shoulder with the words ‘you’re under arrest’. But he had hardly managed to utter this when something completely unexpected happened. Angry cries rang out from all sides and the crowd, that same crowd that had produced such a hopeless impression on us owing to its supposedly bourgeois neatness, rushed as one man at the dumbfounded police. In a trice, the arrested man was carried off somewhere far away by a surging wave of workers and the overseer who had tried to take him apologised to the assembled public in a weak voice.

‘I really can’t do otherwise, gentlemen,’ I am answerable for disorders to my superiors.

‘You don’t say! It’s time to give you a hiding so you don’t stick your nose where it shouldn’t be from now on!’ he was answered from the crowd.

‘Kick his head in!’ shouted the most embittered people in the crowd.

The police’s position became critical. Here, in the remote Smolesnk cemetery, they were completely powerless before a thousand enraged workers. But it was precisely this powerlessness, obvious to everybody, that saved them.

‘Brothers, why beat them?’ said somebody. ‘There’s lots of us and not many of them, it would be shameful to get into a tangle with them. Let them go home, they won’t dare touch any of us.’

This half-diplomatic, half-generous speech somewhat calmed the workers. The shouts died down and the crowd stopped threatening to beat up the police, but on the other hand, the workers did not want to let them go in peace either, as they feared the police would follow and then arrest the speaker. The crowd divided into two parts, one surrounding the police, the other closing ranks around the speaker and triumphantly leading him to the gate. He clearly did not expect such an honour and looked with embarrassment at his comrades, who were noisily expressing their sympathy with him. All those surrounding loudly cursed the directors and the police. I was especially struck by a small, thin old lady who passionately repeated to nobody in particular, as if talking to herself, that you need to stand up for your man. And the crowd was undoubtedly ready to stand up for him but she, as a result of her inexperience, might have been outwitted by spies. The Rebels saw fit to give her some sound advice.

At the main gates of the cemetery, several cab drivers were waiting for passengers. The revolutionaries sat the worker who had tried to speak in the sleigh of one of them, and they forbade all the rest from leaving. For greater certainty, they took the horses by the bridles. In this way, not a single spy could follow the speaker, who had rapidly departed in the company of two reliable people. When the other part of the crowd, who were leading the police under escort, arrived at the gate, he was already gone from view. However, they continued to hold the police hostage, making various now mostly teasing remarks about them. But they almost

³⁹ This was at the time of the Russo-Turkish War [Plekhanov’s footnote].

ruined things with excessive zeal. Once beyond the gate, one overseer, the one who had cut off the speaker, drew a whistle out of his pocket and quickly raised it to his lips in order to call for help. The crowd again became agitated. They tore the whistle from him and gave him a few formidable shoves. He could only swear! 'This is a riot', he cried in helpless rage, 'you will all answer for this, you won't get away with this.'

'And you had better be quiet if you want your sides to stay whole', the workers lectured him.

'There is nothing for me to be quiet about. I am doing my duty and you are rioters', he raged and suddenly, turning to group of Rebels, he remarked that he had seen them on Kazan Square.

'It's nice to catch up with old acquaintances', the Rebels politely answered. 'We hope it won't be the last time.'

The workers laughed. The overseer shrugged his shoulders and fell silent, with an expression of utter discontent on his face.

'Well, it's time to let them go, let them head home and warm up', the crowd decided and began to separate into groups of twenty to thirty, who were animatedly discussing what had happened. Only the most irreconcilable continued to scold and even push the backs of the overseers distributed among the taxi-drivers sledges. Finally, even the irreconcilable left and the Smolensk cemetery took on its usual empty appearance.

The collective resistance given to the police by the workers of the Munitions Works produced a splendid impression both on the St Petersburg workers' circles and on the Rebel intelligentsia. It showed that even workers untouched by propaganda were fully capable of decisive and united action, and that at a suitable moment, they did not fear a union with the Kazan Square rebels, i.e., with revolutionaries. We needed only not miss such moments in order to secure the sympathy of the worker masses.⁴⁰ And when a strike broke out at the New Cotton-Spinning Mill in March of that same year, we were certain that we could make common cause with these masses.⁴¹

The first strike at the New Cotton-Spinning Mill was provoked in March 1878 by a significant reduction in piece rate pay and a long list of new rules, the goal of which was the very same cheapening of labour power, a matter dear to the entrepreneur's heart. There was a small revolutionary circle of 10-12 people at this factory who had only recently been recruited, lacked experience and had not been tested in action. The guiding spirit of the circle was the non-commissioned officer Gobbst, who was later, in July 1879, hung in Kiev, but at the time he was being diligently sought by the police for his propaganda work among the forces of the Odessa military district.⁴² Gobbst was not only completely reliable; he was positively rare in his devotion to the cause. On his own, he was worth another circle. However,

⁴⁰ It is at this point that the Meadowcroft translation ends.

⁴¹ The New Cotton Mill was set up in 1846 by three Englishmen: one John Jubb, a merchant of the First Guild, B. Busk and D. Lodler. Despite its name, it was one of the first textile factories to be built in the city. Its main building has been restored and housed the creative space Tkachi from 2010-20 (60-2 Obvodnyi Canal).

⁴² Aron Gobet [also Gobst or Gobbst] was executed in Kiev under the name of Anisim Federov in July 1879. He had been involved with Osinskii's Southern Executive Committee. He was of Jewish origin and a native of Vilno, and served as a non-commissioned officer in the 60th Zamostsii Infantry Regiment, which was based in Odessa.

he had not managed to familiarise himself well with the factory milieu and nor did he work at the factory, living next door to it as a shoemaker-owner of the only conspiratorial flat in the area. So he did not have direct influence over the workers. To all this we need add that, as luck would have it, all the 'grey' people who had recently arrived in the capital and who had entirely preserved their rural prejudices worked at the New Cotton-Spinning Mill – the largest of the factories of the Obvodnyi Canal, employing more than two thousand workers. One can imagine therefore those obstacles which revolutionaries would meet in trying to make contact with the strikers.

When the Land ad Freedom members notified by Gobbst came to his conspiratorial flat, matters stood as follows. The workers were fully convinced that the 'higher ups' [nachalstvo] would immediately stand up for them once they understood the sense of the new rules. There was no possibility of disillusioning them regarding this. We had to concede to their naïve certainty, by letting them learn from experience how great the concern of Russian 'higher ups' was for the needs of the working class.

The nearest representative of the authorities to the strikers was the local police sergeant. And it was to him that they turned first of all with their complaint. The constable proved to be a great diplomat. In order to play for time, he politely received the petitioners and promised to negotiate with the factory manager. The simple-minded workers celebrated their victory in advance. But a day or two passed and the machines stood idle, and the small shops started to refuse the strikers credit, while the manager still had not revealed the least inclination towards concessions. What could this mean? Did the constable really not negotiate with them? Petitioners were again sent to the station but this time they were not received as previously. The sergeant found that the workers were obliged to submit to the new rules and 'rioters' were threatened with severe punishment. The strikers discerned from this that he had got into bed with management and decided to 'go further', i.e. to the governor. It goes without saying that he did nothing more for them than the sergeant. Then there was talk of petitioning the heir.⁴³

All of this took about a week, and during this week, the revolutionaries had managed to forge a good bond with the workers. From the very start of the strike, the workers had noticed that every time they gathered as a large crowd, some unknown people appeared among them, who were not at all dressed like factory workers and who perhaps even bore a general resemblance to students, but unfailingly siding with them. These people gave them no little practical advice. They said there was no point going to the sergeant or to the governor. The workers did not listen to them, but things ended up as they had predicted. Financial support was given to strikers with families, on whom the stoppage of work, naturally accompanied by the stoppage of pay, told particularly badly. True, this was actually given out by certain factory workers, but how could they get money? It was not hard to guess: these secret people were giving them money. The strikers' trust in the revolutionaries grew with every passing day.

How much the working masses valued their unexpected supporters is shown by the following example. One of the liveliest members of the local revolutionary workers' circle was a

⁴³ Note to the second edition: The reader will remember that this was still during the reign of Alexander II [Plekhanov's footnote]. This means that the workers petitioned Alexander Alexandrovich Romanov (1845–94), the tsar Alexander III (from 1881).

factory hand whom we shall name Ivan. A splendid fellow, very bright, active and energetic, Ivan loved to show off. This fault, which, by the way, he more than made up for in through his merits, sometimes placed him in sufficiently comic situations. Once, to our great surprise and chagrin, he took it into his head to read the strikers a lecture on surplus value. His audience was not at all up to this: they were preparing to speak about how to behave in view of the unexpected change on the part of the sergeant. The speaker himself, as it turned out, poorly understood his subject and, worse, grew very embarrassed during this first, so to speak, trial lecture. Nothing but nonsense came of his popularising efforts and he was deeply abashed by his failure. We thought that from then on, he would calm down for quite some time, if not for good. However, this was not the case. As soon as the next day Ivan had forgotten about this sad event and he was again finding himself drawn towards an indulgence in some pose or other.

Once, in the middle of the strike he came to Gobbst's flat at around eight in the morning and triumphantly communicated to one of the rebels who was there: 'Peter Petrovich, we need to have a review'

'What sort of review?'

'Never mind. Come into the street. Have a look at people and show yourself. The people are bored!'

The rebel here named Peter Petrovich to some degree resembled Ivan in terms of his character, and he was, incidentally, a great friend of his. He quickly figured out what Ivan wanted and without objection went out with him into the street. A few minutes later, the rest of the rebels followed, two or three people, who were very interested in the new deed of the irrepressible and incorrigible Ivan. Reaching the Obvodnyi Canal, they were presented with the following picture.

Hundreds of strikers covered the bank of the canal, forming a solid wall along it. In front of this wall, slowly and ceremoniously marched Peter Petrovich and behind him at a certain distance moved Ivan, slightly turning to the side his respectfully-bowed head to give the impression that one ear was closer to the leadership and would not miss a word of any instructions that could be followed. Every this remarkable pair went, workers removed their caps, bowed in greeting and made various approving remarks. 'There they are, our eagles, they're on the move!' lovingly exclaimed an older worker just a few steps away from me. Those around him remained silent, but it was clear that the appearance of the 'eagles' brought them great satisfaction.

Ivan's comic invention was suggested to him by a true understanding of the mood of the masses. The people really were bored, missing the revolutionaries. They felt more cheerful and bolder in their presence.

I note, however, that the great majority of the strikers' understanding of the 'eagles' was very vague. The strikers viewed the latter as their friends. They also saw that they did not get on with the police. But that was all. As to what relationship the revolutionaries had with the higher authorities, with the tsar in particular – very many strikers probably asked themselves about this. The majority must have ascribed to us their own view of the tsar as a true defender of the people's interests, a view which they brought with them from the village. The most naïve perhaps went as far as considering us secret agents of the tsar. I know that at the beginning of

the strike at least some of the workers firmly believed in the existence of such agents. 'Quiet, brothers', some spinner probably already wizened by experience once shouted to a crowd gathered by the factory building, 'there are government spies hanging around here'. 'What spies?' said another, turning to his neighbour. 'Those people, my brother have been sent secretly by the tsar to find out if the people aren't being oppressed. They walk for a while, listen and tell him. There is nothing to fear in the spies. There is no point: the spies are witnessing the truth.'

This flattering opinion about the spies was soon reduced to dust by reality. Not a week went by before all the strikers well knew to whom and about what the spies reported. The young factory workers started to organise serious raids on them. Usually, these took place in the evening. A detachment of hunters went to one of the local taverns, which the spies would retreat to during the strike to get warm and listen in on the conversation of a clientele made up of those same strikers. 'Are there any spies?' asks the leader of the group to somebody he knows. 'There're a couple of them that have been hanging around here for a while, watching, listening in'. The leader needs only this. He whispers to his assistants and settles down to pour tea near to the spies. No sooner do the spies leave the tavern than they run out after them. 'Hey – spies! Stop them, stop them!' he cries at the top of his lungs and the spies take to their heels but at the first corner, they run into an ambush. They are seized and carried to the canal. There they are politely placed on the ground and, as on an inclined plane, released to roll down the steep bank. Having been rolled in the snow and smashed against the ice, the spies jump up and fly at full pelt to the police station. 'Uliu-liu-liu! Uliu-liu-liu!' the workers shout good-humouredly after them, and then quickly disperse to their homes to avoid police retribution.⁴⁴

Accounts of the unpleasantness experienced by the spies very much entertained all the strikers. Properly speaking, the revolutionaries were to them the same unknown people as the spies. Sometimes, for some reason or other, in place of the 'eagles', long known to the mass of the workers, some completely new people would arrive on the scene. But it was remarkable that the strikers were never mistaken and not once did a single revolutionary have to experience for himself the treatment intended for a spy. The workers could tell a revolutionary from a police detective with some special sense. It is possible, however, that those of them who earlier saw in spies the secret agents of a benevolent tsar, later took the revolutionaries for such agents. It is also possible that they attributed the distribution of money to families deprived of credit as tsarist charity. At any rate, closer ties with the revolutionaries did not prevent the majority of strikers from hoping for help on the part of the throne.

It was from none other than the 'eagles' that they expected a petition to be written ('a nice little document'). To make such a request of the revolutionaries was almost like asking Satan to lead a prayer service to a saint. The members of Land and Freedom winced in advance at the thought of such a responsibility, all the more because the Lavrists, unhappy with the method of action chosen by them, had long since accused them of betraying revolutionary principles. But there was nothing that could be done. Faith in the tsar must be destroyed, not with words but with experience. And so, one morning a draft of the required petition was brought to Gobbst's flat. Approved by the local workers' circle, it was presented for review at a workers' meeting, which took place in the yard of the New Cotton-spinning mill.

⁴⁴ A hunting cry used to encourage hounds in the pursuit of a wolf.

Child workers ('the kiddies'), who had always played an active role in the strike, spread out around the adjacent streets and lanes so that, with the approach of the police, they could warn those who were gathered. Somebody, (the very same Ivan, it seems) climbed up onto a big heap of coal and thunderously read out the petition. It produced general delight.

'It is not unknown to Your Imperial Majesty', it said, 'how bad were the plots given to us, how much we suffer from the lack of land!'

'True, true', roared the crowd, 'only titles to land, but no benefit from it!'

'It is also not unknown to Your Imperial Majesty that we pay heavy taxes for these bad plots', continued the reader.

'That's also right; that's also true', the listeners concurred. 'They never give you a break with taxes!'

'The cruelty with which these heavy taxes are exacted from us is, finally, not unknown to Your Imperial Highness,' rang out from the coal-heap tribune. 'Need has chased us to the city for pay and here at every step we are harassed by the factory-owners and the police'.

Next followed an analysis of the new rules which had provoked the strike and by way of conclusion it was said that, not finding protection in any quarter, the workers await it from the heir to the throne, and that if he did not pay attention to their request, then it would be clear that the only thing left was for them to rely only on themselves.

This conclusion was also found to be very reasonable. 'If we get nothing even from the heir to the throne then we will after all have to put things right ourselves', the listeners decided. Thus, the petition was prepared. But how to give it to the heir? Nobody wanted to send an envoy to the Anchikov Palace as such a journey could end in a very unpleasant fashion. It was decided to go as a crowd.

The police had long since guessed that the revolutionaries were supporting the strikers. The spies bent over backwards trying to track down the instigators. But it was hard to catch Land and Freedom members, and their spying efforts would have come to nothing, if it had not been for one unfortunate occurrence.

During the winter of 1877–8, the intelligentsia was in an extremely agitated state. The Trial of the 193, this long duel between the government and the revolutionaries, stirred up all opposition elements over the course of several months.⁴⁵ The students were particularly worked up. In the University, the Medical-Surgical Academy and the Technology Institute, big

⁴⁵ The Trial of the 193 took place from 18(30) October 1877 to 23 January (4 February) 1878 before the Senate, the highest court in the Russian Empire. The defendants were socialist propagandists, many of whom had already been held on remand for several years since the summer of 1874, when a large number of activists had attempted propaganda in the countryside. During the pre-trial period, 43 suspects had died in prison, an additional 12 had committed suicide and 38 were judged to have gone insane. Three more defendants died during the trial itself. A total of around 4,000 had been arrested and questioned during the preparation of the trial, and many of these had already been sent into administrative exile before the trial began. The prosecution made the case that all the defendants belonged to a common organisation aiming at the overthrow of the government, but these charges were mostly rejected by the Senate, as many of the propagandists had acted purely on their own initiative. A majority of the defendants were thus acquitted, though 28 were sentenced to penal servitude and 36 were exiled. Immediately following these verdicts, the tsar ordered the administrative exile of 80 of those acquitted. This action led to him being targeted by socialist terrorists in the years which followed.

meetings took place at which Land and Freedom speakers who were living illegally and were unintimidated by the possible presence of spies, gave the most inflammatory speeches. The recently set up underground print shop of Land and Freedom was working vigorously. Apart from extensive coverage of the 'great trial', it also issued lots of appeals and, among other things, a draft address to the Minister of Justice Pahlen from the students which had included a rare protest against the gendarmes' inquisition (we named this draft the Russian 'petition of rights' as a joke).⁴⁶ All such publications were widely distributed throughout Russia, but it was understood that they were to be found most of all in St Petersburg, where anyone wishing to could easily get them. The shot of Zasulich and the armed resistance to the gendarmes of Kovalskii and his comrades in Odessa (30 January 1878) poured yet more oil on the flames.⁴⁷ The thirst for action and struggle stirred in the most peaceful people and there was no revolutionary undertaking for which many willing volunteers could not immediately be found.

When rumours of a strike spread, the students immediately collected a significant sum of money for the benefit of the strikers.⁴⁸ But a radical section of the students was not satisfied with financial contributions. They wanted to get closer to the strikers. A small detachment of students from various institutions was formed with the aim of making their way down to the Obvodnyi Canal. To get there was not difficult of course, but none of these wayfarers had contacts among the local workers.

They went into a bar, probably thinking that they could meet strikers there. From the bar it was but a stone's throw to the New Cotton-spinning Mill, and truth be told, workers often visited it. Because of this, spies were permanently ensconced there during the strike, and they were of course right at that moment on the lookout for unusual visitors. For their part, the unusual visitors understood whom they were dealing with but did not want to retreat. The streets adjacent to the mill had already acquired at that time that special appearance which our workers' districts usually take on whenever even the least hint of a disturbance is detected. Spies scurry, anxious district overseers run and whole groups of constables stand at the intersection. Sometimes Cossacks show themselves and passers-by who are not participating in the disturbance look around fearfully: just about now something dreadful is about to happen.

Such a picture always produces agitation even in the most seasoned, experienced revolutionary. All the stronger must the effect be on young students. It was clear that, entering the bar, they were already handling themselves badly, and when they noticed the spies, they simply lost all caution.

⁴⁶ Konstantin Ivanovich Pahlen (1833–1912). The words 'petitions of rights' appear in English in the original text.

⁴⁷ For the background to Zasulich's assassination attempt, see note 33. See note 66 for details regarding Kovalskii.

⁴⁸ By the way, not only students gave money. The whole of liberal society was very sympathetic to the strike. It was said that even Mr Surovin parted with three roubles for their support [Plekhanov's footnote]. The Surovin in question is probably Alexei Sergeevich Surovin (1834–1912), publisher, playwright, journalist and critic. During the sixties, his columns for *St Petersburgskii Vedomosti* gave him a reputation as a liberal but later on, after his acquisition of *Novoe Vremia* in 1876, he became associated with the most reactionary section of Russian public opinion.

‘Did you hear, gentlemen, that they killed the spy Nikonov in Rostov-on-Don?’⁴⁹ They planted seven bullets in him!’ said one of them, deliberately raising his voice so that they were heard by those who absolutely should not have heard them.

‘Not seven, but eleven’, the spy corrected him, putting on his hat and going out into the street.

The head of the secret police was immediately informed about the capture of the instigators, and he sent some senior detective to the aid of the common street-corner nark. Meanwhile, the police got a taste for arrests and started to seize all passers-by who somehow seemed to them suspicious. A townsman from Pskov who had arrived in St Petersburg just a few hours previously and who had headed to the Obvodnyi Canal on some private business was taken in for absolutely nothing. At almost the same time, two Land and Freedom members were seized in the street. They had only just left Gobbst’s conspiratorial flat and were making their way home. Several workers who were considered ringleaders and indeed belonged to the local revolutionary circle were also arrested. Long in preparation, the inevitable police storm finally burst with all the force typical of it.

Having persuaded the management to make a few insignificant concessions, the forces of suppression printed a new edition of the new rules and distributed it among the strikers, declaring that every worker refusing to submit to them would be sent back to their village.⁵⁰ Fortunately, everybody rejected them and to send everybody packing would have been difficult, even for the all-powerful Russian police, and this would not have benefitted the factory.

The strikers were very sympathetic to the arrested revolutionaries.⁵¹ ‘It is a pity we did not see them get taken’, said several, ‘we would have set them free there and then’. As regards arrests among their own, they hardened rather than scared the workers. At any rate, two days after the events described, there was again discussion about submitting the temporarily forgotten petition to the heir, and it was indeed solemnly taken away to the Anchikov Palace. There it was accepted, for delivery to its addressee, by the then governor Kozlov.⁵² The workers

⁴⁹ This was then recent news [Plekhanov’s footnote]. The victim was a worker, Akim Gavrilovich Nikonov, (1853–78) who had given information to the police. For this, he was killed Alexander Abramovich Khotinskii (1850–1883) on 2 (13) February. Khotinskii was a member of Land and Freedom who later turned against terrorism, siding with Black Distribution in the split of 1879.

⁵⁰ One of the arrested Land and Freedom members was the writer of these lines. At the station to which the arrested were brought a batch of ‘new rules’ lay on the table, printed on almost exactly the same paper as that on which we printed our appeals. Regarding these rules, I pointed out the following to the overseer: ‘They start by talking about two tiny concessions and then there is a series of clauses announcing a reduction in pay. It should have been done the other way around, starting with the announcement of the cut in pay, and then delighting the workers with the concessions. In that way, they could chase away the bitter with the taste of something sweet.’ ‘What do you propose to do?’ objected the overseer with a look of profound but miserable resignation to fate. ‘It will always be bitter for the worker and you cannot change this.’ [Plekhanov’s footnote].

⁵¹ My arrest lasted for all of one day. As an illegal, I had a decent passport and bore the name of some hereditary noble citizen that was unblemished in the eyes of the police. They let me go, on condition that I did not leave Petersburg. I fulfilled this obligation honestly and did not leave the capital for a long time following this incident [Plekhanov’s footnote].

⁵² Alexander Alexandrovich Koslov (1837–1924). In fact, Koslov was not the governor (*gradonachalnik*) of St Petersburg, but an assistant to the governor, Fedor Fedorovich Trepov (1812–89), who survived the assassination attempt on the part of Vera Zasulich. Plekhanov may have assumed he had taken over the role as a direct consequence of his superior’s injuries, but this does not appear to be the case.

were convinced later on that when Kozlov took the petition from them, the heir was standing by the window and saw all of what had happened. This was probably the fruit of their fantasy but it nonetheless proved apposite. After that, nobody could convince the strikers that their petition had been hidden from the heir by hostile courtiers.

Taking away the document into the palace, the governor again came out to the petitioners and announced that the heir was now asking them to disperse and that an answer would be given to their request in a few days. The workers immediately carried out this order with complete calm.

The police quietened down, not knowing how the heir would react to the petition, and for a time it was as if the strike were a completely legal phenomenon. They began to talk about it in the press, condemning the actions of the factory administration. The strikers became the heroes of the hour. Lawyers offered their services *pro bono* and people tried to come and have a look at them, as if at fashionable curiosities. Some 'nihilist', having accidentally met a couple of these interesting people, dragged them to his flat, where dozens of other nihilists took a fancy to them, and they too unfailingly wished to bring them home and show them to their friends. Our workers roved from one nihilist flat to another, everywhere provoking the most lively interest and looking with amazement upon a world that was completely unknown to them.

By the way, these were bold lads who knew how to prove themselves and were not in the least embarrassed by unfamiliar surroundings. I remember as if it were yesterday their visit to one liberal lawyer, to whom the nihilists had dragged them so as to confer with him about the strike. He received them solemnly and even with a certain diffidence, as a provincial would meet with a foreign dignitary and they, already utterly spoiled by the senseless attention of the intelligentsia, and having managed to grow proud of their status as strikers, showed a condescending attitude towards him as they sank into his soft armchairs. Land and Freedom understood the absurd consequences which this type of coming together of the workers and the intelligentsia could lead to. They tried to put a stop to it and took every opportunity to mock it as idle amusement.

One of them convinced the nihilists that the following announcement would be printed in Land and Freedom's secret print shop: 'At Flat _ in Block _ on _ Street (here some address was named which had been the most famous for its frequent reception of the workers) from 2 until 6 in the afternoon, workers belonging to the interesting breed of 'striker' are being displayed. Viewings will cost an ordinary nihilist 20 kopeks, those having been released on bail, 10 kopeks, whilst lady-nihilists can view without charge.'⁵³ But ridicule was just as useless as admonitions.

In the eyes of many among the intelligentsia, the workers' journeys around nihilist flats had their positive side. These visits obviously gave an opportunity to influence the strikers to even those revolutionary circles who, not having any permanent connections with the Obvodnyi Canal, had grown upset at the predominant and ever-growing influence there of Land and Freedom. Many revolutionaries who did not sympathise with the Rebels were convinced that, under our influence, the strike would end in bloodletting. It was useless for us to say that

⁵³ Those on bail were revolutionaries charged with propaganda in 37 provinces who were released shortly before the Trial of the 193. A great number of them could be found at this time in St Petersburg [Plekhanov's footnote].

we had no such thing in mind; they did not believe us and were glad to take every opportunity to counter us with more pacifistic influence.

There was no great misfortune in this, if the resistance to us was conducted in a manner that was to some degree reasonable. But what could come from such conversations with workers as the following, for example? The 'peaceful propagandist' corners a few strikers in some nihilist flat full of intelligentsia and initiates the inevitable conversation about the strike.

'You naturally want the strike to retain an entirely peaceful character?' he asks them in an assertive tone.

'Of course', answers the interviewees. 'What do we really need? We need them to cancel the new rules and we don't need anything else.'

'You don't wish to create any disturbances?'

'But why on earth would we start disturbances? What's the point?'

'Well, that's splendid, you need to act exactly like that', the questioner concludes and says later that he himself spoke to the workers and was convinced that they do not sympathise with the Rebels.

Sometimes it happened that the peaceful propagandist had only just left the workers when some young supporters of 'outbreaks' (*vspyshki*) would catch him and set about an interrogation.

'So, how are things at the factory?'

'How are things? We're standing up for ourselves, just like the manager is and so, here we are, just kicking our heels.'

'They don't make concessions'

'No, they're holding on strong for now, 'Old Nick' take them [*shut voz'mi*]!'

'But you're going to stand up for yourselves? You need to teach those scoundrels such a lesson that they would ban their children from oppressing the workers!'

'Yes, obviously, we won't give in. We'll take the factory to bits and break the machinery. Then he can count his profits!'

The supporter of 'outbreaks' went away totally convinced that the strikers' were Rebels through and through. At first, the workers did not understand at all what these cultured interlocutors actually wanted from them, and with a complete lack of hypocrisy echoed people with the most mutually-contradictory opinions, given that on the one hand every striker did not in the least want disturbances, but on the other was not adverse to dreaming about a good lesson taught to the manager. But then they began to realise what it was all about, and to understand what kind of discord existed among the intelligentsia-revolutionaries, and they ended up completely perplexed. 'Oh lordy!' one worker who had just returned 'from the city' exclaimed in my presence when I was at Gobbst's. 'Every one of those circles decides our business differently. Go and figure that out!'

‘And if you were to hang around in town some more, you would hear much worse’, Gobbst grumbled angrily at him. As an experienced man who firmly held to a tendency once he had adopted it, he was not in the least embarrassed by revolutionary disagreements. But his young comrade himself, I remember, quickly became convinced that he had absolutely no need to ‘hang around town’.

As only members of Land and Freedom had serious connections with the locality, it goes without saying that their influence on the strikers remained unshakeable. The worker masses as before viewed them as ‘eagles’ and trustingly listened to their advice. More than that, circumstances developed in such a way that the Land and Freedom activists could speak with them completely openly.

The heir did not keep his promise, having not given any answer to the strikers’ request. Some of the more gullible among them continued to hope and wait, whereas others – and these grew more numerous with every passing day – decided that the heir ‘no less the governor’ was hand in glove with the management. Those same people who previously were the most energetically in favour of submitting a petition were now frequently saying that ‘going to him was merely a waste of shoe leather’.

The prejudices brought from the villages quickly gave way to a sober view of things. Previously, the strikers had viewed the sovereign as the most faithful defender of popular interests; now they started to see him as an accomplice of the capitalists. This new view was immediately expressed in some fable about the heir having an affair with the wife of the manager and, apart from that, a stake in the factory’s capital. Hardly any of the strikers seriously believed this tale, but all willingly repeated it. It remained for the revolutionaries to emphasise the conclusions the workers had arrived at on the basis of their own experience.

Meanwhile, without answering the workers, the heir apparently let the governor know that he wanted to maintain neutrality and that the police could act with their usual diligence. Once again, the strikers passed through difficult times. Police persecution was renewed and it grew with every passing day. It went as far as the district overseers breaking into the workers’ shared flats and, with the help of the constables, forcibly dragging the workers to the factory. The most stubborn were taken away to the police station and from there to the transit prison. Strong Cossack and gendarme detachments roved around the streets, and their presence must have suppressed any thought of resistance on the part of the strikers. Finally, one more edition of the new rules was issued, which promised the workers new concessions. Driven to desperation, they gave in and after a two-week silence, the New Cotton Mill once again started working at full steam.

The strike was put down not by the economic power of capital, but by police violence. Collections among the intelligentsia and workers at different industrial enterprises could have supported the strikers for at least a month. Business was not going well enough for the New Cotton Mill joint stock company that they could bear such a protracted abstinence from the exploitation of others’ labour. The police rescued them. The strikers clearly saw this and we were presented with a splendid opportunity to clarify to them the great significance of political freedom. They would have remembered our words well, as every generalisation grasped by them at the time of such movements remains extremely firmly entrenched in their heads. But

we ourselves still suspected bourgeois freedom at that time and would have considered ourselves traitors had we thought to praise it in front of the workers.

This is what constituted the weakest side of our agitation at that time. Arousing the workers against 'the authorities' and 'the state', it did not communicate to them a definite political view and therefore did not give a conscious character to their inevitable struggle against the current police state. It is remarkable that this same Land and Freedom considered it possible to speak in a totally different way with so-called 'society'. It placed before the latter, at least temporarily, definite positive political demands (see, for example, the *Zemlia i volia* feuilletons). Contrasting socialism to politics, Land and Freedom considered the struggle for political freedom to be a matter for the bourgeoisie; they continued to call the workers themselves to 'pure' economic revolution.

All this notwithstanding, the strike at the New Cotton-Spinning Mill, despite its unsuccessful outcome and our political mistakes, brought great benefit to the cause of the workers' movement in St Petersburg. All St Petersburg workers attentively followed its course, and many very 'grey people' probably came to those same conclusions regarding tsarist authority as were drawn by the weavers and spinners on the Obvodnyi Canal. For its part, this authority, to give it justice, did not miss an opportunity to side with the capitalists.

At the end of November 1878, a strike took space at Koenig's Spinning Factory, situated beyond the Narva Gate.⁵⁴ There the workers also thought of petitioning the heir and on the morning of 2 December, their representatives (30 people) set off for the Anchikov Palace. The most august Son was not only unable to help the strikers; he also refused their petition. It was clear that the workers at the New Cotton-Spinning Factory were telling the truth when they said that petitions to the heir were a waste of shoe-leather without any use whatsoever.

However, the spinners at Koenig's did not really need such a lesson. For them, the experiences of their comrades from the Obvodnyi Canal were not in vain. On the contrary, it seems that many of them knew where they should look for true friends even prior to their representatives' journey to the Anchikov Palace. Even though no revolutionary propaganda had been conducted at this factory, the strikers from the very first day of the strike decided to get in touch with the 'students' and sent several people to the Obvodnyi Canal to learn where to find these people who helped the workers. The trip to the heir was undertaken with the knowledge of the revolutionaries and in any case, it was undertaken rather half-heartedly, merely with a view to finally convincing all the waverers and doubters, in the event that such people existed among the strikers. Apart from that, it needs to be born in mind that, according to Russian law a strike is a crime and that, because of this, the petition being given by the workers to the authorities has the common significance of a counter-claim against the inevitable complaint of the factory owner.

In the suppression of the strike at Koenig's, the 'boys in blue' played a more violent role than ever before.⁵⁵ They dragged the workers directly to the Third Section where a

⁵⁴ Leopold Koenig (1821–1903) was primarily known as a sugar refiner who owned a refinery on Lifland Street, to the North of the Ekaterinhof Park in St Petersburg. In 1873 he opened a cotton mill on the same street. Today (2023) it is known as the *Sovietskaia Zvezda* (Soviet Star) factory.

⁵⁵ i.e. the gendarmes. The Separate Corps of Gendarmes (founded 1826) was the uniformed political police of the Russian Empire, closely connected to the Third Section of His Imperial Majesty's Own Chancellery, who were the secret police. In 1880, the latter was reorganised as the Okhrana.

'clarification' with the owner took place. Before this secret tribunal, Mr Koenig asserted that his workers were living in clover and that the strike was taking place as a result of external influences. He even promised to find the instigators and to give the police their names. In thanks for this, the Third Section politicians were ready to bless the most illegal actions of the future informer. In all this, they were naturally most of all interested in the question of the instigators. The workers only heard about instigators when the police decided to examine their complaint against the owner. 'You listen to wicked people,' some blue general screamed at the workers. He had shown up at the factory on the first day of the strike. 'I have here a hundred spies who follow everything you do and if the owner finds that they are not enough, I'll send just as many again!⁵⁶ As soon as I find out that rebels are visiting you, I'll send you all to Archangelsk!' The workers assured him that they did not know any rebels and meanwhile continued their acquaintance with the revolutionaries and became all the more imbued with respect towards those previously unknown people, whom the generals of all colours and owners of every guild feared so much.

It is a matter of interest that the strike at the Koenig factory was started by child workers. The fact is that in spinning factories, there is a lot of waste consisting of broken threads. This gathers around the machines in heaps of so-called 'fly'. A special group of female workers had dealt with this dust at the Koenig factory. But shortly before the period now being described, the director dismissed these workers and entrusted the dust problem to the so-called 'little piecers'. They rebelled, telling the foreman that they would not work until they were relieved of this new burden. Koenig wanted to bring an end to the matter with the expulsion of every insubordinate little piecer. Then the middle piecers and the adults joined the strike.⁵⁷

Despite all the police scaremongering, the strikers held out splendidly. They did not give in even when Koenig resorted to extreme measures, i.e. the dismissal of every last one of them. The St Petersburg revolutionary workers' circles made efforts to get employment for them at other factories.

1878 was marked by several modest victories for the St Petersburg workers. At the end of August, at Becker's piano factory (on Nabarezhnaya Bolshoi Nevki), the so-called case makers (i.e. joiners) making the wooden cases of for pianos demanded an increase in their piece rate.⁵⁸ Mr Becker answered that they could increase their pay if they stopped 'Mondaying', i.e. if they came to work on time on Mondays. The case makers went on strike and after three days, the owner conceded.

⁵⁶ Note that there were not more than two hundred workers and Koenig's [Plekhanov's footnote].

⁵⁷ Every spinner ['minder' - RM] worked on two mules and had two 'boys' under his supervision, the so-called 'side piecer' (17-19 years old) and 'little piecer' (12-14 years old) [Plekhanov's footnote]. The piecers' main role was the repairing of broken yarn, an activity mostly carried out while the mule was in motion. Those responsible for removing the fly from the mules were generally called scavengers, and this role was again mostly given to children. It appears that, in the case of Koenig's factory, this role had been combined with that of the piecers. Accounts of how arduous this work was vary, as much depended on the quality of the cotton being spun.

⁵⁸ Jakob Becker (1811-79) was a well-known German piano manufacturer who worked in St Petersburg from 1841.

The clash with the 'hands' at Michri and Shapshal's tobacco factories ended just as badly for the owners.⁵⁹ These clashes are interesting for the fact that only women worked in these factories.

On 24 September, a notice appeared in the workshops of the Michri factory declaring the cigarette [*papyros*]-makers currently receiving 65 kopeks for 1000 first-grade cigarettes would from then on receive 55 kopeks and that for 1000 second-grade cigarettes, 45 kopeks would be paid instead of the previous 55. This reduction of pay was motivated by poor sales of the product.⁶⁰ The 'mistresses', as the workers called themselves, tore down this notice and went to the factory office for an explanation. There they told the clerk that they would not agree to work for lower pay and asked him to take back their sticks and rolling machines with which the cigarettes are made. He cursed them in unprintable language. His crudeness utterly incensed the mistresses: sticks, rolling machines and even benches flew through the window. Taking fright, the clerk sent for the owner. Mr Michri did not allow himself to wait long. He immediately came to the factory and with his ingratiating speech and, above all, the promise of concessions, he calmed the crowd, which consisted of around a hundred women. The attempt to lower the already modest pay ended in complete failure.

Two days later, the same story repeated itself at the factory belonging to the Shapshal brothers. There the clerk put up the following notice:

To the Mistresses of the Shapshal Tobacco Factory

I hereby announce that, owing to goods being held up [*ostanovka tovara*], I am taking off 10 kopeks from every 1000 cigarettes.

Shapshal

The mistresses – there were two-hundred of them at this enterprise – tore down this notice and in its place put up a new one:

To the Owner of the Shapshal Tobacco Factory

We, the mistresses of your factory declare that we do not agree to a reduction because we cannot dress ourselves properly on our current pay.

The Mistresses of Your Factory

The clerk gathered the mistresses together and demanded that identified the person who had written this announcement. They answered that this was irrelevant as the announcement had been written in the name of everybody and they began to leave. The clerk hurried to send for

⁵⁹ In 1873, Iufuda Moiseevich Shapshal (1836-1902) moved to St Petersburg from Kiev and opened a tobacco factory with two brothers in what is today 4th Soviet street, in St Petersburg city centre. The Michri firm had been producing tobacco products in St Petersburg since 1861 and had various premises in the city centre. The founders of both these enterprises appear to have been Karaite Jews from the Crimea.

⁶⁰ *Paprosy*, - cigarettes made with a hollow paper mouthpiece where the filter would be found on modern cigarettes.

the owner. After fruitless attempts to convince the mistresses to work for less pay, Mr Shapshal was obliged to concede just like Mr Michri.

The following year, 1879, strike fever gripped several factories at the same time. It showed itself first of all at the New Cotton-Spinning Mill, which is already known to the reader. Having submitted to police violence, the workers of the New Cotton-Spinning Mill said to us that they had submitted only temporarily and that they would strike again at the first available opportunity. Truth be told, we did not believe them, seeing in their words nothing more than a wish to console themselves and us after a proven failure.

But we were mistaken. As early as November 1878, the police were given a lot of trouble with the restless Spinning Mill. On the 8 November (Michaelmas), the workers there did not show up at the factory, justifying this with the claim that it was, so they said, a holy day on which it was a sin to work. But at other factories work continued in the normal fashion and the manager of the Spinning Mill decided to make up for the lost time through an extension of the working day from 13 hours, as it was up to that time (from 5 in the morning to 8 at night with two hours for lunch) to 13¼ and to continue work under these conditions until these short periods of time added up to a complete day.

For two days work continued until 8.15 pm, exciting strong discontent among the workers. On the third day, it entered somebody's head to turn off the main gas tap at 8pm. As soon as this thought was put into action, the workers poured out of the factory in a dense throng, breaking several windows and vandalising nine warps. The true friends of the fatherland's industry, the police could not get there in time to restore order, though the following morning a whole hoard of these guardians showed up at the factory and over the course of the next few days work continued in their beneficent presence, though not until 8.15m but only until 8.

An inquiry was started: who turned off the gas? Who could have put out the lights? About seven workers were dragged to the police station. The sergeant raged and shouted that he 'would send them to Archangelsk gubernia'. However, this did not help. One woman who was working not very far from the tap said under interrogation that some worker whose face had been covered with an apron turned off the tap. Who that worker was remained unknown: the case had to be left to 'the will and judgement of God'. From this point on, the police began to keep a sharp eye on the workers.

On 15 January of the following year, the workers of the New Cotton-Spinning Mill came to the factory early in the morning like usual. Several hours passed in the usual fashion, but before lunch, the head foreman appeared in the weaving department and put up a notice inviting 44 weavers to come and get their final pay. To the question of why they were being disfavoured in this way, the foreman answered that these 44 were being thrown out for their 'rebelliousness' and that from now on, anybody unreliable would be driven out. He also announced that in general, the factory management was thinking of replacing male weavers with women and children owing to the constant uprisings.

His speech was cut off with an outburst of indignation. The notice was torn to shreds and the speaker himself had to withdraw. The weavers poured out into the street and dispersed to their homes to eat. After lunch, they gathered before the gates of the factory in a dense crowd through which none of those still wavering about joining the strike could pass. The

director hurried to inform the police of a new 'riot'. Spies began to bustle around the factory and the district overseers showed up in full uniform, with revolvers on their hips. They were accompanied by dozens of constables. But the police for the moment did not reveal any great decisiveness, probably because they still had not received appropriate instructions from above.

Towards evening of the same day, the weavers decided to demand, apart from a cancellation of the order to drive out the rebels, the following:

- 1) The raising of pay by 5 kopeks for each piece of cloth
- 2) The reduction of the working day by 2½ hours
- 3) The cancellation of certain fines
- 4) The removal of several hated foremen and overseers.
- 5) The presence of representatives of the workers during the handing over of cloth and, finally,
- 6) Payment for the whole time of the strike, as if work had not stopped.

These demands were immediately written down and, if I am not mistaken, printed on the secret press of Land and Freedom.

Rumours about a strike at the New Cotton-Spinning Mill quickly spread among the factory workers and on the next day, forty representatives from the weavers at Shaw's Mill ('Shavy', as the workers pronounced it) beyond the Narva Gate, appeared on the Obvodnyi Canal. The 'Shavinskie' also decided to strike and suggested to the 'Novokanaltsi' that they work out common demands.⁶¹ True, there could not be a complete identity of demands between the strikers at these two factories as the system practiced by Mr Shaw significantly differed from the one existing at the New Cotton-Spinning Mill.

At Shavy, work went on around the clock, the workers being divided into two shifts, one working sixteen hours, the other eight during a 24-hour period, the roles being reversed the following day. The industrious owner did not stop work even on the night before public holidays: it stopped only at 6.00am on the morning of the holiday itself. Mr Shaw took care of the workers' provisions as well: he had a small store from which they were *obliged* to buy provisions. The reader can easily imagine how beneficial this was for the attentive capitalist. Sometimes, on receiving their pay, the workers found out that all their pay had been withheld to pay off his account at the company store.

With the approval of the Novocanaltsi, the workers at Shaw's presented the following demands to the owner:

1. 5 kopeks to be added to each woven piece
2. That days on which workers are absent from work [*progulnie dni*] are not to be counted if the owner himself is responsible for the absence.
3. Warps to be given out in a good condition and material to be given out in the presence of our chosen representatives
4. Goods not to be rejected for nothing; our representatives to monitor this too.

⁶¹ The workers often referred to the Obvodnyi Canal as Novyi [New - RM] Canal [Plekhanov's footnote].

5. No fines for broken tools or for absence from the factory owing to illness or need, etc.
6. Payment for food not in the factory office like now, when receiving pay, but at the store with the pay as cash in hand.
7. Payment for the hospital not at 1¼ kopeks per the rouble, as now but at 10 kopeks a month.
8. Workers not to pay for boiling water at the factory.⁶²
9. In the morning, 8.30 to 9.00 to be given for breakfast.
10. Work to stop on the day before a holiday at 9 o'clock in the evening.
11. Gas lamps to be situated in the best position for work: we will show the places for them; currently there is no light at all in some places.
12. The assistant foremen Nikifor Arsentiev and Nefed Efimov, Nikolai Volkov and the yarn-winder Kirill Simonov to be banished from the factory: they give us no peace and we do not wish to work with them.
13. Money not to be deducted for time lost during the strike because it is not our fault that we do not work, it is owing to the stubbornness of the owners.
14. None of us to be taken to the police for not working; release those who have already been taken away.⁶³

The presentation of the last (fourteenth) demand to the owner might seem nonsensical from the formal point of view. But in reality, it bore great practical meaning as the arrest of workers took place at the insistence of the owner, and often as a result of his personal instructions. The strikers found it useful to warn Mr Shaw that, even if the remaining demands were met, they would not start to work so long as the arrests did not cease and the arrested were not liberated.

At a meeting of representatives from both factories, measures were considered *inter alia* for the support of the poorest among the strikers. There were naturally more of those at Shaw's, who were threatened with an immediate cessation of supplies from the company store. It was decided that the first collections should be placed at their disposal. It was proposed that collections be carried out at all mills and plants. An appeal to all St Petersburg workers in this sense was printed (seemingly on the underground press). Hope for support on their part was not in vain: collections were made almost everywhere and the excitement among the workers was sometimes so great that it threatened to turn into, and in places did turn into, strikes.

The strikers' appeal was scattered about Maltsev's factory (in the Vyborg district).⁶⁴ The police arrested a worker suspected of doing this; his comrades were outraged. Talk went around of copying the Novokanal'tsy but the owner restored order with an ingratiating speech and the promise of various benefits in the future. Mr Cheshire (his factory was also in the Vyborg district) did not manage to get by on promises alone: he was obliged to add three kopeks to each piece of cloth.⁶⁵ The workers on the

⁶² For tea [Plekhanov's footnote].

⁶³ Details about these and several previous strikes are taken from *Zemlia i Volia* №№ 3 and 4, where I described them on the basis of information gathered first hand at the time.

⁶⁴ This factory is perhaps better known as the Old Sampsoniev Factory, a spinning and weaving enterprise located near the Sampsoniev Cathedral. Dating back to 1836, it is possibly the oldest textile in St Petersburg. It was founded by Ivan Sergeevich Maltsov (1807–80) and several other Russian shareholders.

⁶⁵ Joseph Cheshire (1825–90), originally from Manchester, opened his factory in 1869, having already lived and traded in St Petersburg for around 20 years, and having become a merchant of the second guild.

Okhta were roused. The example was so contagious. Meanwhile the police and the spies were doing their work.

Arrests had already taken place on the night of the 16-17. Six workers at Shaw's, twenty from the New Cotton-Spinning Mill, one metalworker in the Ligovka district, etc. were arrested. The arrests only increased the workers' anger. Up until the 17th, only weavers had taken part in the strike at the New Cotton-Spinning Mill. At that point, the spinners joined them and the factory came to a complete standstill. Now nobody thought of submitting any kind of petition. The Novokanal'tsi only laughed when we reminded them about the previous year's procession to the heir: 'some fools we were!' they said.

A certain colonel appeared at Shaw's in the role of peacemaker. The workers gave him a written statement of their demands and categorically stated that they would not settle for less.

'Do you agree to these demands?' the colonel asked the owner, who of course answered in the negative.

'And what the hell do you so-and-sos want?' growled the peacemaker at the workers, 'But I'll...' etc., etc. The verbiage, typical in these cases, of 'leniency and admonition', i.e. abuse in the most unprintable language poured forth. 'Right now I have 25,000 soldiers under my command', bawled the brave warrior, 'just try to rebel!'

'That's a terribly large number of soldiers you've prepared for us, your honour', the workers noted mockingly, 'we are all of three-hundred people here, including the women and the kids. As for the men, there aren't more than a hundred.'

The colonel understood that he had blundered and bit his tongue, ordering the arrest of one of the wags, but the crowd surrounded this victim of the colonel's embarrassment and repulsed the police's attacks. With this, the not-at-all warlike peacemaker departed.

Not wishing to approach the authorities with any kind of petition, the strikers now presented them with very insistent demands. For example, the workers of the New Cotton-Spinning Mill resolved to demand the liberation of their comrades arrested on the night of the 16-17th January. On the 28th, at around ten in the morning, a crowd of around 200 gathered not far from the factory building. Here, the following declaration was read out and approved:

We, the workers of the New Cotton-Spinning Mill hereby declare that we will not go to work until all our demands presented to the owner are honoured. As regards the police, we reject any intervention on their part aimed at reconciling us with the owner until our comrades, about whom we know nothing bad, are released. If they are accused of anything, let it be judged by the magistrate and we will testify to their innocence. As things currently stand, they have been arrested and are being held without trial or investigation, and this goes against our current laws.

Whilst this declaration was being read out, a district overseer approached, inviting the workers to go to the station for a discussion with the sergeant, but the workers instead chose to negotiate with the governor. The route to the governor's house lay across Zagorodnyi Prospect. On the latter is, or was, a 'House of the Townsmen's Guild' with a passageway through the yard. The workers had hardly passed through this yard when they were attacked by gendarmes with Sergeant Bocharskii at their head, that same sergeant who had only just invited the strikers to come to him for discussions. In all likelihood, the police, having already found out the day before about the intentions of the workers to seek the liberation of those under arrest, had prepared this resistance in advance and the invitation communicated by the overseer was simply a trap. Seeing that he could not succeed in luring the workers to the station, Mr Bocharskii set off in pursuit of them, like Pharaoh pursuing the fleeing children of Israel.

A big fight broke out. The gendarmes charged into the workers with horses, the workers defended themselves as best they could. It turned out that some of them had flails, and the Ivan already known to the reader, again playing a passionate role in the strike, even drew a dagger and wounded the horse of a gendarme who was bearing down on him. But the forces were too uneven and the attack was too unexpected. The gendarmes won. Fortunately, the above-mentioned yard allowed for a sufficiently secure, if disorderly retreat.

After that battle, the police increased their energy tenfold. Arrests began and did not cease. Several so-called instigators were sent back to their villages, others to the northern provinces. They beat and even robbed workers.⁶⁶ The police directly banned shopkeepers from giving strikers produce on credit. Strike-infected areas were literally inundated with 'gendarme power'. After several days of firm resistance, the workers gave way, having received a few insignificant concessions.

This new failure changed the mood of the former strikers really only in the sense of still greater bitterness against all the bosses and still greater sympathy towards the revolutionaries. The workers as a whole became all the more used to viewing the revolutionaries as their only friends and allies, and the secret 'agricultural' [*zemledelcheskii*] printing press as an instrument of publicity, entirely at their service. That view gained strength even in those corners of St Petersburg which revolutionary propaganda had not reached.

Once I was given, in my capacity as a member of the *Zemlia i volia*, an envelope with the inscription 'To the Editor'. I found inside it two quartos of grey paper. 'Dear Mr Editor', it was written on one of them, 'please print our appeal and if it is necessary, please correct it.' On the other was written: 'The Voice of the Working People, Working and Suffering for the Scoundrel Maxwell.'⁶⁷

In the appeal, it was said that the workers at the Maxwell factory, driven to extremes by the boss's oppression, felt that they were compelled to resort to a strike and, communicating this to the rest of the St Petersburg workers, were requesting their support. I cannot of course recall the text of the appeal from memory. I remember only one phrase from the middle of it, 'we work, we strive and he isn't happy with us, the pig'; and the concluding words, 'We will firmly stand up each for all and all for one.' However, I well remember the general impression produced by the appeal on me and on my colleagues in the editorial board. We were positively delighted. So much fresh feeling, so much simplicity and directness, so much touching ineptitude and, together with this, so much irresistible conviction was in this far-from literate proclamation that we considered it impermissible to make any significant changes to it and merely corrected the grammar. Almost the very next day, the appeal was printed out and given to its author.

This is what I learned about the discontent at Maxwell's.

Low pay, an unreasonably long working day, fines and fault finding by the foremen and overseers – all of this has its place at Mr Maxwell's factory the same as in others. But this resourceful entrepreneur has, apart from this, brought in yet one more speciality in method of exploiting labour power used by him. Next to his factory (outside the Neva Gate), he has built a big apartment block in which to place his workers. In other words, to the profitable trade of factory-owner he has decided to unite the also not unprofitable trade of landlord. To do him justice, his block was built very well and

⁶⁶ One of the strikers was passing not far from the New Cotton-Spinning Mill, playing his accordion. The gendarmes fell on him and took away the accordion. The worker went to complain about this 'daylight robbery' at the police station. They cursed him out and did not return the accordion.

⁶⁷ This spinning and weaving enterprise was located at 86 Prospekt Obukhovskoi Oboroni and the buildings referred to are still standing today. In 1844, a British subject, one Edgerton Hubbard, also a merchant of the first guild in St Petersburg founded the Petrovskaiia Manufactory. This was merged with the neighbouring Spasskaia Mill when a joint stock company was formed in 1860. The brothers D and I Maxwell managed these mills on behalf of the shareholders and gave the enterprise its popular name.

living in it would have been very comfortable, incomparably more comfortable than in those dirty blocks without air and light where his workers had previously huddled. The misfortune lay only in the rents decided by Mr Maxwell were very high, relatively speaking, at any rate, and they were really not affordable to factory workers. And that is why the latter did not want to set up home in his *phalansterie*.⁶⁸

For his part, the enlightened capitalist so firmly made up his mind to do good to his 'hands' that he did not hesitate to use very strong measures. He threatened to immediately drive out of the factory all those conservatives refusing to live in his block. From this came the workers' exasperation and they decided by means of a strike to put an end to Mr Maxwell's health-promoting perseverance. In the complete absence of any outside instigation and without any influence of 'rebels' touched by revolutionary propaganda (there were no such people at the factory) they worked out a plan of action and to carry it out, considering it necessary to appeal for help to the working population of St Petersburg and to revolutionary Land and Freedom society.

It goes without saying that they wrote the appeal themselves, but it must be added that the idea behind it was given to them by the example of the Shavinskii and Novokanal'ski workers who, as I have already mentioned, came out with an appeal 'to all workers in all St Petersburg mills and plants' at the time of their strike. This appeal probably made its way to Maxwell's factory. It is also very probable that the Maxwell workers had not refused to support the Novokanal'ski with their meagre pay and were now convinced that they would not be denied this same support. The final words of 'The Voice of the Working People, Working and Suffering for the Scoundrel Maxwell' were taken in their entirety from an appeal printed in connection with the second strike on the Obvodnyi Canal. These words: 'We will firmly stand each for all and all for one' evidently caught the mood of the St Petersburg workers at that time as subsequently they were unchangingly repeated by them whenever they were in struggle with the police or the entrepreneurs.

Overall, the workers' movement grew at that time with unheard-of speed. It is curious to see how this phenomenon was reflected in the revolutionary literature of the time.

The leading article of *Zemlia i Volia* №4, published on 20 February 1879, was entirely dedicated to the question of the role of urban workers 'in a fighting popular-revolutionary organisation'. 'Unrest among the factory population', the article states, 'constantly strengthening and now constituting the burning question of the hour, compels us to touch on that role which should belong to our urban workers in this organisation earlier than we had thought necessary. The question of the urban workers is one of those which one can say has been put forward independently by life itself, at an appropriate point, in spite of the *a priori* theoretical decisions of revolutionary activists.' This admission, which by chance escaped from a Populist is highly characteristic. The worker question was indeed put forward by life itself in spite of Populist dogma. It is hardly surprising that answering it with the aid of this dogma proved completely impossible. The populist intelligentsia could, like the author of this article only recommend 'agitation', 'agitation', 'agitation' and 'agitation' to worker-socialists whilst reproaching them because, supposedly forgetting about this agitation, they listened to 'readings about the stone age or the heavenly bodies'.⁶⁹ By the beginning of 1879, the workers' movement had outgrown Populist doctrine by a whole head. In view of this, it is not surprising that the most developed section of the St

⁶⁸ The new accommodation in question appears to be the house at 3 Tkachei Street, very close to the factory. Despite Plekhanov's description here, this building would acquire a notorious reputation as 'Maxwell's Barracks', with workers living in extremely overcrowded conditions. It was the site of a gun battle between strikers and police during a strike in 1898.

⁶⁹ Note to the second edition: It should be acknowledged that I was the author of this article [Plekhanov's footnote].

Petersburg workers, joining the Northern-Russian Workers' Union, which was set up at around this time, significantly differed in their political views and ambitions from the Populists of the Rebel tendency.

IV.

The Northern-Russian Workers' Union naturally arose from that core of the St Petersburg Workers' Organisation which, as I said above, was made up of 'old', experienced worker-revolutionaries. The formal foundation of the Union took place, as far as I can recall, at the end of 1879. Already from the first weeks of its existence, it counted no fewer than 200 members and at least as many workers who sympathised, but who had not yet been initiated into the secrets of the organisation.

The majority of its members were plant workers. In every significant workers' district of St Petersburg, there were special circles constituting the local branches of the Union. Every branch had its own fund and conspiratorial flat. To manage its affairs, a small committee was elected. Members of a local committee were at the same time members of the Central Circle, which gathered regularly to discuss the common affairs of the Union. The Central Circle had a special fund and also the Union's library. The central fund, as with local funds was topped up with membership fees. At around the time of the second strike at the New Cotton Spinning Mill, it contained 150-200 roubles. This 'free and ready cash', as a Russian finance minister would put it, was all spent on the support of strikers, but members of the Union paid their dues properly and therefore the account never remained empty.

As regards the library, the Union was especially proud of it, valuing it highly. And indeed, it was the most valuable of its assets. It was made up partly from books bought by workers, but a larger number were donated by the intelligentsia. These books were collected over the course of a whole year and were collected so diligently that hardly a single citizen of the intelligent republic of Petropol avoided an unexpected book tax.⁷⁰ The intelligentsia gave the workers a lot of rubbish, but they did not only give rubbish. In accordance with the proverb 'many a mickle makes a muckle', the Union built up a great stock of books on different subjects.

The number of books was so great that it was impossible to store them all in one workers' flat. As a result, the library was divided into several parts and distributed around several workers' flats. Every district had its own librarian, who had a complete list of all the books belonging to the Union. If any of the members of a local branch chose from this list a work which was not in the library of a given flat, then the librarian would announce the request at the next meeting of the Central Circle and the book would be obtained from another library. Thanks to this arrangement, the police could not so easily discover the existence of the library and 'bust' its owners. Workers who did not belong to the Union also made use of the books via members they knew, but they of course did not know about the existence of the library.

Practice quickly revealed the main flaw of the new organisation. The Union as a whole could only act based on a decision by the Central Circle, which met once or twice a week. Busy with work and living in different parts of the city – and sometimes beyond the city limits – members of the Central Circle could not meet more often. But during the interval of time between two meetings, events could occur demanding immediate action on the part of the Union. The rules of the organisation did not indicate what should be done in such cases. When the second strike started at the New Cotton-Spinning Mill, two days remained until the next regular meeting of the Central Circle. Khalturin, immediately learning about the strike, found himself in a very difficult situation: could the strike be put down by the police before the next meeting? And yet to run around to all the members of the Central Circle and call

⁷⁰ Petropol was an old nickname for St Petersburg.

everybody to an emergency meeting (it is well known that for obvious reasons Russian revolutionaries resorted to using the postal service very unwillingly) would itself take not less than two days. A delay was in either case unavoidable, and Khalturin had to limit his personal interactions with the strikers for the first time. Giving the organisation greater agility was possible only through the selection of a special executive committee consisting of a small number of individuals with the right to act according to its own initiative in cases of importance without waiting for the next meeting. It seems that the members of the Union also drew this conclusion later on.

The emergence of the Union could not fail to bring us joy, even given our then Populist point of view. But its programme caused us no small amount of grief. In it, oh, horror! it was directly stated that the workers considered political freedom to be a necessary condition for the further success of their movement. We, suspicious of 'bourgeois' freedom and considering it a dangerous trap, found ourselves like a fish out of water. In a special article surveying the new programme, the editorial board of *Zemlia i Volia* came out tactfully, though decisively, against the workers' heresy it rejected. In the article, those arguments that are usually put forward by populists and Bakuninists against 'politics' were rehearsed. But such arguments had already ceased to appear convincing to members of the Union. In response to the article, they sent a long letter to the editorial board in which they said that they absolutely could not see how the workers' movement could operate in the absence of political freedom and how the acquisition of political rights could fail to be beneficial for the workers.⁷¹

It was hard for Populists to hear such 'bourgeois' reasoning from the workers (and what workers! – the members of the Union represented the cream of the St Petersburg revolutionary workers). But the utterly alien suspicion of the Union towards the peasantry struck them even more profoundly. The fact of the matter was that, defending their demand of political freedom, the authors of the letter said among other things that they, the workers, were not Sysoiki.⁷² This expression was interpreted by the intelligentsia as arrogant contempt for the peasantry. But was this interpretation correct? Of course not. The words 'we are not Sysoiki' were witness only the fact that the Russian workers at that time already stood infinitely higher than those 'common people' to whom all socialist opponents of political freedom referred. For a long time, socialists from the intelligentsia had been asserting that both in Russia and abroad, the 'common people' did not need freedom of the press because they did not read books and newspapers and consequently were not interested in censorship regulations. Their interests touched only on economic systems; they were indifferent to political forms, etc. This is how Chernyshevskii sometimes reasoned and we reasoned in the same way when we warned workers away from an interest in politics. But it was very hard for the developed worker to agree with us.

How can it be so? The common people do not need freedom of the press because they do not read and they do not need political rights because they are not interested in the struggle of political parties! What on earth is positive in a common person distinguished by such negative qualities? He is nothing but Sysoika the savage! And so long as the common people are made up of such savages, socialism will remain an unrealised dream. The common people should read and as such should fight for freedom of the press. They should be interested in the political affairs of their country and as such should fight for political rights. They should have their organisations and meetings, and as such should fight for the freedom to organise and meet. And not only should. In

⁷¹ Unfortunately, I do not have in my possession *Zemlia i Volia* № 5, in which this letter was printed or the end of № 4 containing the article by the editorial board. Therefore I am indicating only the general sense of the polemic which arose, which I remember very well [Plekhanov's footnote].

⁷² Note to the second edition. Sysoika, the hero of *Podlipovians*, the famous novel by Reshetnikov was, as is well known, an absolutely uncivilised man so long as he remained in his village [Plekhanov's footnote]. This novel, first published in 1864 in the journal *Sovremennik*, was characterised by its author, Fedor Mikhailovich Reshetnikov, (1841–71), as an ethnographic sketch. It deals with the fate of peasants from a village in Perm province, who leave their homes to work as barge-haulers.

part, they already read books, already feel the need for organisations and meetings, and already have the ambition to enter the political arena. They have already outgrown Sysoika-the-savage. We workers are already not as educated well-wishers imagine the people to be. Our own movement serves as evidence of this. But all this is only the beginning. If we want to go forward, we absolutely must knock down the police roadblocks standing in our path.

This is the sense of the Union's letter of reply, in particular the words 'We are not Sysoikis'. Perhaps the authors of the letter did not properly clarify things from all angles at this point. Perhaps they did not mention Sysoikis so as to characterise with one apt word that ideal 'people' the Rebel tendency were ready to juxtapose to the St Petersburg proletariat, who were supposedly infected with a bourgeois spirit. Yet the characterisation was made nonetheless, if only unintentionally. The Northern Russian Workers' Union knew that it was not made up of Sysoikis. And precisely this consciousness testified to its political maturity.

Be that as it may, the future historian of the revolutionary movement in Russia will be obliged to note the fact that in the seventies, the demand for political freedom appeared in a workers' programme before it appeared in a programme of the revolutionary intelligentsia.⁷³ This demand brought the Northern Russian Workers' Union close to the Western-European workers' parties and gave it a Social-Democratic coloration. I say 'coloration' as it would have been impossible for the Union to adopt a fully Social-Democratic programme. There was a large dose of Populism in the latter. It was hard to avoid this lingering illness in Russia and as a result the authors of the programme, whilst diverging from us on the fundamental question of political freedom, were not averse it seems to sugaring the pill, gladdening us with a whole heap of Populist demands.

Printed as a separate leaflet, the programme of the Union was not reprinted in a single revolutionary publication, unfortunately. It is possible to find it now only in the archives of the Third Section of old.⁷⁴ Speaking about it from memory, I of course cannot discuss any of its details.

News about the foundation of the Union was met with joy on the part of workers wherever it went. The Warsaw workers greeted the St Petersburg organisation with an address in which they said that the proletariat should be above national enmity and should pursue goals common to the whole of humanity. The Union answered them in the same spirit, expressing hope of a speedy victory over common enemies, and declaring that it did not separate its cause from the cause of the workers of the whole world. This was just about the first example of friendly relations between Russian and Polish workers.

The Union did not think to limit the field of its activity to St Petersburg. Its very name (the *Northern Russian* Union) was adopted only temporarily, pending workers from provincial cities joining it. A united and well-constructed All-Russian Workers' Organisation was the ideal of the Union's leaders.

V.

⁷³ Note to the second edition. Saying this, I have in mind the most active and most influential part of the revolutionary intelligentsia of that time: the Populists. Apart from the Populists, there were at that time the half-liberals, who spoke about political freedom. They published *Nachalo*, but did not have influence [Plekhanov's footnote].

⁷⁴ The Third Section of His Imperial Majesty's Own Chancellery was the secret political police of the Russian Empire created in 1826 following the Decembrist Revolt. It was dissolved in 1880 and replaced with the Department for Protecting Public Security and Order (generally referred to as the Okhrana), subordinate to the Police Department of the Ministry for Internal Affairs.

What did the provincial workers amount to back then? How much had the revolutionary movement touched them? The reader knows that propaganda among the workers was considered to be a side issue by the Populist intelligentsia and that the latter's programme did not designate an independent role to the working class. The main forces of intellectual revolutionaries were directed towards the mass of the peasantry. From this came a certain type of phenomena that at first sight appears strange.

As an industrial centre, Moscow scarcely lagged behind St Petersburg. But there was a significant workers' movement in St Petersburg, whereas it was weaker in Moscow than in Kiev or in Odessa. The workers cause always owed its successes to accidental reasons. The centre of Northern-Russian revolutionary organisations was St Petersburg. There, one could always find many available revolutionary forces. And this in itself was enough to start propaganda among the workers. Revolutionary forces from Moscow headed to St Petersburg or even to the big cities of the South. The workers cause could only be initiated in Moscow if it were given independent significance. But this condition was lacking, and so the workers cause in Moscow was weak.

Mill and plant industry was very little developed in Saratov; there the workers were for the most part petty artisans. Yet some Land and Freedom member or other was constantly living there from 1877-9, being occupied exclusively with propaganda among the workers. Vladimir province was dotted with factories and its population entirely consisted of factory workers in places, but it never entered the head of any Land and Freedom member to settle in Vladimir province.

Why? It was obvious! The Volga region was considered a place where the peasantry had still retained its revolutionary tradition. Thus it was chosen as the main arena for Rebel activity. In Samara, Saratov and Astrakhan provinces 'colonies among the people' were established and Saratov was the headquarters for those in Land and Freedom who were active among the 'people'. Thus, they considered it useful and necessary to secure support for themselves from its working population: when the Volga peasantry rises, the Saratov artisans will come in handy. But in the Vladimir industrial district, capitalism had triumphed, and in these unhappy localities there has been no significant peasant movement for a very long time and popular traditions had died, popular ideals had become distorted. Therefore, there was no reason for Land and Freedom to go there.

The spectre proved to be stronger than reality. The dead seized the living, as the French would say.⁷⁵ The shadows of Razin and Pugachev, which constantly flickered in the imagination of the Rebels had more influence on the distribution of revolutionary forces than the real course of Russian economic development. To what degree the rebels were mistaken in their assessment of the living forces of the people can be seen from the following noteworthy fact.

In 1878, Land and Freedom talked much of establishing themselves in Yaroslavl province. You would perhaps think that the local population of workers had somehow attracted them. Not at all, they forgot to even think about the local workers. In this case, there was another, in truth more subtle motive. Land and Freedom knew from Kelsiev's *The Russian Government's Documents on the Old Believers* that some Runaway sect (*beguny*) was flourishing in Yaroslavl province.⁷⁶ One Rebel has even

⁷⁵ i.e. *Le mort saisit le vif*. This phrase refers to the legal doctrine that the property of a dead person is automatically inherited by some other party and that there can be no point at which property is 'unowned' (owing to, say, lack of clarity as to the identity of the heir or the heir's unwillingness to take responsibility for the property). Marx uses this phrase in his preface to the first edition of *Capital*, Volume One when referring to survival of elements from earlier modes of production within the modern bourgeois mode (i.e. capitalism). The idea is that this often unwanted 'patrimony' from the past cannot be arbitrarily discarded [Marx and Engels 1979-2005, Vol. 35, p9].

⁷⁶ Vasilii Ivanovich Kel'siev (1835-72) was a member of the first Land and Freedom organisation (1861-4) and at one point, a close collaborator with Herzen in London. However, in 1867 he surrendered to the Russian authorities and renounced his Populist views, receiving a royal pardon and from this point on contributing to conservative publications.

'heard' that the Runaways can be found even today in one settlement in Yaroslavl province.⁷⁷ So they organised an expedition to catch them. But a Runaway is called a Runaway precisely because he is forever on the run. Catching him is not as easy as settling among the peasantry who live peacefully under the yoke of their ideals. Seeing that there was no way of approaching the Yaroslavl Runaways, the Rebels gave up on Yaroslavl province. Their programme did not allow them to be interested in it just because there were some workers there.

In those provincial towns where the intelligentsia had found it necessary to stir up the labouring population for some reason or other, workers' circles maintained a constant presence from the start of the seventies. Sometimes the police broke them up and sometimes, being only feebly supported by an intelligentsia occupied with other things, they acted very feebly. However, the basis for a revolutionary workers' organisation was in general prepared sufficiently well in the provinces.

In Odessa, the working masses sympathised with the revolutionaries so much that at the time of the trial of Kovalskii (July 1878), they took an active part in the demonstration before the court building.⁷⁸ As regards Kharkov, we have this curious witness statement from the local governor. In his 'most loyal' report for 1877, he writes:

One can say that, despite the numerous attempts being made on the part of malefactors, social doctrines have fortunately still not in the least reached the rural population, who have remained true to the principles of religion, morality and order. One cannot say this of the lowest class of the urban population which, being undermined by social doctrines, has in many ways lost its earlier sense of the inviolability of religious beliefs and of patriarchal family relations. The class of mill workers, which is very numerous in Kharkov, requires increased surveillance and does not represent a firm guarantee against new doctrines.⁷⁹ Among them, revolutionary propaganda meets with constant sympathy and, in the case of any kind of movement, in the sense of a

The Runaways were a minor denomination among the Priestless Old Believers who persisted in the view that the post-schism Russian state represented the anti-Christ and made every effort to avoid co-operation with the authorities, living deep in the forest. This included a refusal to pay taxes, serve in the military or to marry. Property was communal and they rejected the concept of social estates, but not hired labour. A period of peripatetic 'wandering' was expected of members, during which they surrendered possessions completely. This often took place towards the end of a member's life and the increased the visibility of the group out of proportion to its true numbers. The group had been present in Yaroslavl province since its emergence in the 1770s and was significant enough to be the target of government persecution from the 1850s.

⁷⁷ It was presumably considered surprising that such a radical sect could live openly whilst openly defying the law in several respects.

⁷⁸ See the article 'Odessa during the trial of Kovalevskii', *Zemlia i volia* №2. 'Of the five days the juridical examination lasted, three fell on holidays, when the people do not work', the author of this article writes. 'This circumstance to a significant degree encouraged the public to gather outside the court building.' How this mostly working-class gathering conducted itself, the reader can see from this same article. I will cite only one episode from it. When troops pushed the crowd away from the court, part of it went to Primorskii Boulevard. 'On the boulevard, the aristocracy was acting the Sybarite at tables loaded with drinks and delicacies. 'Bastards!' shouted one worker to those who were indulging themselves, 'you stuff yourselves when they are sentencing people to death! The executioners put to death one of the best sons of Russia and you are enjoying the beautiful view! Burn in hell!' This was said in the full light of day in the presence of armed soldiers and Cossack lances [Plekhanov's footnote]. Ivan Martynovich Koval'skii (1850–78) was a journalist and socialist propagandist who was arrested for his participation in the Movement to the People in 1874. In 1876, whilst still on bail he formed a circle in Odessa which was raided in January 1878. During the raid, members put up armed resistance to the police, injuring several of the arresting party. In July, he was sentenced to death by a military court for this action as it had taken place during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-8 and Odessa was under martial law. The sentence was handed down despite the fact that nobody had died as a result of the incident, and the fact that the war was over by the time the trial began. Kovalskii was shot the following month and his fate played a role in turning Russian socialism towards terrorist tactics, as activists sought revenge against representatives of the authorities.

⁷⁹ This is not true. There were very few mill workers in Kharkov overall back then, but that is not the main point [Plekhanov's footnote].

passage from theory to action, the class of Kharkov workers, in their great majority, will not offer a rebuff to the troublemakers. Conversations among the factory population overheard by police agents about the burdensome nature of taxes and the lack of information about what this money taken from the people is spent on, the lack of control over government and similar opinions, which were still unheard-of among the common people a few years ago, deserve special attention in this regard. Of course, the freedom of opinion of the periodical press could in part be inspiring these thoughts, but it is beyond doubt that those mainly responsible for this mood of the factory population are the distributors of revolutionary propaganda, who are working with increased vigour among the millworkers of Kharkov. Overall, the political state of the province, which is calm when it comes to the mass of the rural population, the landed gentry and the owners of real estate in general, is highly alarming when it comes to the lowest classes of the urban population, the student youth and that social scum who do not have anything to lose, and who are so numerous in big cities.⁸⁰

In the report of the Ekaterinoslav governor for 1879, such sharp remarks were probably also included with regard to the 'lowest class of the population' of Rostov-on-Don. It is well known that the Rostov police had many difficulties with the workers in that year.

Matters were as follows. I do not remember exactly on which day of Easter the police seized a drunken worker in the market and dragged him off to the police station, without sparing him the usual physical mistreatment. 'Save me, lads!' the worker cried out to the people bustling about the market square, 'they'll cripple me at the station'. The people stirred: a sufficiently large group followed the police as they led away the arrestee, begging them to release him. The police answered with foul language and, leading the arrested man into the station, set about beating the living daylight out of him. On hearing his desperate screams, this group started to throw stones at the windows of the building and to break down its gates. The group quickly grew into a crowd.

Somebody shouted for them to smash up the whole station. Doing this was not so easy: its strong gates were locked and at the windows of the lower floor stood constables with unsheathed swords and revolvers. A proper attack was launched. Several burly youths dragged a huge log from somewhere; the crowd understood their idea and dozens of hands seized the log. Singing the *Dubinushka* they started to use it as a battering ram and after a few minutes the gates were broken down.⁸¹ People poured into the station. The police, who had managed at the same time to land a few pot shots on the attackers, momentarily hid.

In the shortest possible time, the police station was smashed up. Finishing with it, the crowd fell on other police stations and then laid waste to the flat of the chief of police and those of several local overseers.⁸² Nobody thought to resist. The chief of police, frozen with fear hid in Nakhichevan' and the military authorities of Rostov were not even certain that they would manage to defend the bank and the

⁸⁰ See 'Extract from the most-loyal report of the Kharkov Governor for 1878' in *Zemlia i Volia* № 2: Talk 'about the lack of control over the government, etc., which was overheard by police agents, shows that the Kharkov workers have also started to become conscious of the significance of political rights and political freedom. It would seem that our liberals needed to find support in such quarters. But they, or at any rate, many of them, speak about nothing with such great willingness as about the immaturity and unfitness of the Russian working class for the struggle for political freedom. What amazingly insightful and profound people! [Plekhanov's footnote]. Note to the second edition. Thus it was until recently, and thus perhaps it remains even today, although today there is some reason to think today that the advanced part of our bourgeoisie will radically change its attitude to the political movement of workers. It will try to subordinate it to its own influence. Obviously, this is not in the interests of the Social Democrats [Plekhanov's footnote].

⁸¹ This was a peasant's work song similar to the internationally better-known *Song of the Volga Boatmen*. Sung in numerous variations, it became a revolutionary anthem from the 1860s onwards. Its text refers to the uprooting of trees during the clearing of land for farming.

⁸² i.e. *kvartal'nyi nadziratel'*

fort (*ostrog*) where several 'politicals' were being held.⁸³ Of course, telegrams were sent to the governor. Cossacks moved over from Novocherkassk to put down the revolt and in Taganrog, they began to prepare the artillery.⁸⁴ But for the moment, the town was in the hands of the rebels.

I arrived in Rostov the very next day after the smashing up of the stations and I saw all its consequences. It is impossible to imagine a picture of greater devastation. The floors of the stations had been torn out, glass had been knocked out of the window frames and doors had been torn from their hinges. Stoves had been destroyed, chimneys and rooves wrecked. And over a great area, the pavement, littered with pieces of broken furniture, was strewn with small pieces of torn-up police documents, which looked like snow.

'What savagery!' exclaims some properly brought up reader. Perhaps it is savagery. But the reaction is equal to the action and it is strange to be surprised that the savage tyranny of the police provokes at times the savage anger of the people.

At the same time note that the enraged crowd knew how to fully preserve its dignity. None of those engaged in the destruction permitted themselves to take anything from the police property that was destroyed. This was confirmed by eyewitnesses at the time. Only when they started to smash up the house of the chief of police and threw several pieces of splendid cloth out into the street did some soldier asked for a piece for his shirt. The crowd met the request of the 'serviceman', but immediately destroyed the rest.

There was one more interesting feature. Having smashed up one station and whilst heading towards another, the crowd passed a Jewish synagogue. A boy put a brick through its window. They stopped him immediately. 'Don't touch the Yids', they told him. 'You need to beat the police, not the Yids'.

The real savagery made its appearance only at night, in the person of the numerous itinerants of Rostov. The Rostov 'barefoot team' had a wild night and entertained themselves to their hearts' content! Rejoicing in the absence of the police, it first of all rushed to loot all the drinking establishments and then, having drunk themselves into oblivion, they descended on the brothels and began to beat the unfortunate prostitutes. The troops who appeared the following morning put an end to this disgrace which the workers played no role in and by which they were so disgusted that their anti-police movement would have been brought to an end even without the arrival of the troops, as a natural reaction to the exploits of the 'barefoot team'. Despite the unexpectedly deplorable turn in the Rostov 'revolution', the memory of it would still the spirits of the workers for a long time afterwards, as a clear example of the people teaching a good lesson even to the all-powerful Russian police.

I was told that when rumours of the attack on the Rostov police reached the coal miners in the pits of Donetsk, the latter came in a unit of 150-200 people to give aid to the Rostovians, but learned on the way that order had been restored and hurried back home. I cannot vouch for the truthfulness of this rumour.

As regards the revolutionary workers' circles which existed in the provincial towns, I personally knew such circles in Rostov, Saratov, Kiev and Kharkov. In terms of their composition, they were much more diverse and mixed than those in St Petersburg. They had

⁸³ Nakhichevan'-on-Don was at this time a separate settlement from Rostov, populated mostly by Armenians whose ancestors had been forcibly resettled from in the Crimea following the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-74. Since 1928 the settlement has been a part of the city of Rostov-on-Don.

⁸⁴ Soon after, I became acquainted with one of the artillery officers in Taganrog. 'We officers said that we would not shoot at the people', my new acquaintance told me. I do not know about the others, but this individual did not limit himself to mere words. He later proved his sympathy with the revolutionaries in action [Plekhanov's footnote].

members who in terms of their development and the high level of their requirements conceded nothing to the plant workers of St Petersburg, but alongside them were the completely 'grey' and sometimes the illiterate. It was not uncommon for small independent artisans to predominate in them – not merely journeymen, but owners. I never met such followers of socialism in St Petersburg and felt as if I were in a strange position when a revolutionary-owner happened to advise me to beware of his worker because he was an 'unreliable' person.

'But you realise that you yourself are an exploiter. After all, you have two workers working for you,' the plant worker V. Ia., who had come down from St Petersburg, would sometime joked with his friend, a tailor.

The tailor would become embarrassed. 'But what on earth can be done about his, my friend? I too am not happy that we have this system, but I also need to live! Come the revolution, I won't be an exploiter.'

I wanted to inquire where the discontent came from in the people of this layer, and which of the negative sides of their situation was reflected mostly clearly of all in their consciousness. 'The дума really oppresses us, all municipal expenditures are dumped on us, the poor', one Rostov townsman explained to me, an ardent revolutionary with his own blacksmith's forge and several journeymen. It is possible that many other artisan-revolutionaries were motivated most of all by the disgrace which is our municipal government.

Booze and drunkenness are unfortunately sometimes too attractive to Russian artisans. In this regard, they leave the mill and plant workers far behind, among whom I rarely noted an inclination towards the serious abuse of alcohol.

On the Volga and the Don, people who had earlier belonged to the Dissenters showed up among the revolutionary workers. The schism does not have and never has had serious significance as an oppositional social force. Often it acted in a directly harmful way, accustoming people to ritual, hair-splitting and distracting their thoughts from earthly needs towards some vague beatitude.⁸⁵ But hard experience and the urge to read had taught the Dissenters not to fear banned books and to respect those who suffered for their convictions.

Land and Freedom propagandised a young Runaway on the Volga, a very capable fellow. On their request, he wrote a memoir of his life among the Dissenters. From this memoir, I still remember the place where he spoke of his meeting with some exiled Poles. When he was still only a child, he went with his father from Tyumen to one of the interior provinces of European Russia. On the road, they ran into a group of Poles. 'Who are these people?' the boy asked his father. 'Those, my dear, are Poles. The tsar persecutes them worse than us sinners. They get a lot of grief from the government.' This ability to sympathise with a political criminal can in itself serve as a guarantee of close relations with this criminal and then, in the right conditions, of the complete assimilation of his way of thinking. This is all the more so because passionate and restless seekers of the truth, incapable of long being satisfied by sectarian dogma, can be found among the Dissenters.

I knew one former Dissenter who came into the revolutionary party as an old man of fifty years. This man had 'walked in faith' all his life and had even wandered in Turkey, seeking

⁸⁵ Note to the second edition. Not for nothing did Marx name religion 'the opium of the people' and say that the criticism of religion naturally turns into criticism of social relations [Plekhanov's footnote].

'real people' and 'the real truth' among local Dissenters, and had finally found the truth he was looking for in socialism, breaking for ever with the tsar of heaven and coming to hate the tsar on earth with all his soul. I had never met such a passionate, indefatigable preacher. He often happened to recall some schismatic, who had obviously at one time had great influence on him. 'Were I to meet him now', he would exclaim, 'I would tell him what the truth was!' He was the soul of the workers' circle (where this was I will not say from 'fear of the Jews') and it was impossible to frighten him with any persecution. From his very earliest years, he knew how good it was to accept the crown of martyrdom for one's convictions. He died in Siberia.

To repeat, wherever the intelligentsia took the trouble to approach the provincial workers, it could boast very noteworthy successes. And if they had devoted but half of the effort and means they had expended on settlements and various agitational experiments among the peasantry to building bridges to the workers, then at the end of the seventies, the social-revolutionary party would have already found its feet on Russian soil. Workers willingly sought common ground with the intelligentsia.⁸⁶ In Kharkov, Kiev and Rostov-on-Don, I heard the very same complaints and the very same requests: the intelligentsia are forgetting about us; get involved in the cause of the workers; send at least a few knowledgeable and clever people from St Petersburg – you will see how well they go down in our town.

In view of this, the intention of the central circle of the Northern-Russian Workers' Union to enter into regular relations with the provincial workers could not have been more timely. Among its members were people who, owing to their knowledge, energy and experience, could debate any member of the intelligentsia. Stepan Khalturin, by way of example, was one of these.

I have already several times mentioned his name, who occupies one of the most honourable places in the history of the Russian workers' movement. Now it is time to familiarise the reader more closely with this remarkable personality.

VI.

Stepan Khalturin was born in Viatka. His parents, poor townfolk, sent him in childhood to some school and then apprenticed him to a joiner. At the start of the seventies, he came to St Petersburg, where he soon found a position in a plant. I do not know when exactly or under what circumstances the revolutionary wave seized him, but in 1875–76, he was already an active propagandist. If I am not mistaken, the first time I met him was two days before the funerals of the workers killed by the explosion at the Munitions Works described in the first

⁸⁶ In the sixties, A Kh Khristoforov, who later left Russia, lived under police surveillance. He made contact with many local workers and they long remembered him. In 1877, they told members of Land and Freedom that since the time of his presence in Saratov, the spark of revolutionary thought he had lit among the workers had never died. People who had known him personally traced their mental pedigree back to him. Every good influence leaves such a mark in this environment [Plekhanov's footnote]. Alexander Khristoforovich Khristoforov (1838–1913), the educated son of a peasant, was active in the first Land and Freedom organisation and the Ishutin Circle, and was sent to Saratov in 1861 following his arrest in connection with the former. There he engaged in propaganda among the workers until he was again arrested and, at the end of 1864, deported to Pinega, Arkhangelsk province.

article.⁸⁷ I was among those Rebels invited to take part in the demonstration planned in relation to this, whereas he was among the workers preparing the demonstration.

He was one of those people whose physical appearance gave not even an approximately accurate reflection of his character. Young, tall and well built, with a healthy complexion and striking eyes, he gave the impression of a very handsome man, but there was more to him than this. This attractive but sufficiently ordinary appearance suggested nothing regarding strength of character or an outstanding mind. His manners were marked by a certain shyness and an almost feminine gentleness. When you spoke with him, it was as if he were embarrassed and feared to offend you with an inappropriate remark or a sharply expressed opinion. He always wore a somewhat bashful smile, as if he wanted to tell you in advance: this is what I think, but if you do not like it, do forgive me. Back in the good old days, well brought up young people from the provinces were sometimes marked by such manners during the first stages of their careers in society. But this scarcely suited a worker, and at any rate, it could not convince you that you were dealing with a person who was far from fault with regard to his excessive softness of character and absence of self-assurance.

It was possible to get close to him only through work. The worker in general is not given to those endless conversations which the intelligentsia love to indulge in over tea, and in which the interlocutors pour out their souls in front of one another. Stepan in particular did not like emotional outpourings. Although his shyness would appear to disappear on closer acquaintance with a person, he always kept the latter on his guard, making that moral state signified by the words 'one's heart on one's sleeve' impossible for him.

He was not adverse to conversation, not only with his fellow workers, but also with members of the intelligentsia. When he was still living legally, he even lived among students and sought out the latter's acquaintance, borrowing books and acquiring all sorts of information from them. Often he stayed up until past midnight with such neighbours. But he did not say much there. He would come start a conversation about some theoretical matter. The host would grow lively, gladdened by the opportunity to enlighten an ignorant worker and would speak at length, intelligibly and in as 'popular' a style as possible. Stepan would listen, only occasionally interjecting a word and attentively, somewhat frowningly looking at his interlocutor with his clever eyes, in which from time to time the expression of good-natured mockery would appear.

In his attitude towards students, there was always a portion of humour, perhaps even irony: 'I know the value of your radicalism; so long as you are all studying, you are passionate revolutionaries, but when you finish your course and get a job, your revolutionary mood will disappear in an instant!' He also laughed at the students' industriousness. 'I have seen how they work', he would say, 'it really is work! Sit for a couple of hours in lectures, read a book for another and you're all set to go and drink tea and your friend's place and talk!'

He took a different attitude to the workers, and did not allow himself or anybody else, especially the intelligentsia, to joke about them. He flared up like a flame when a member of the intelligentsia gave some not entirely flattering assessment of a worker. He saw in the

⁸⁷ The text of this pamphlet was first published in №№ 3 and 4 of the journal *Sotsial Demokrat*, which was published by the Emancipation of Labour Group between 1888 and 1892. The 'first article' is therefore that section of the text appearing in №3.

workers the most reliable and innate revolutionaries and he attended to their needs as like a governess: he taught, supplied books, 'assigned roles', reconciled those who had quarrelled and chided the guilty. The comrades loved him very much. He knew this and repaid them with even more love.

Despite this, I do not think that in his communication with them he dropped his habitual reserve. I do not know how he conducted himself with those workers he recruited to the cause, in private revolutionary conversations. Maybe then he let out all that was boiling in his soul. But he spoke rarely and unwillingly in the meetings of the workers' circles. Only whenever things were not working out, when those who were gathered were saying something irrelevant or were deviating from the subject of the meeting did Stepan break his silence. He was not eloquent: he almost never used the foreign words with which the other workers loved to show off, but he spoke passionately, sensibly and with conviction. His speeches usually brought debates to an end. And this was not because his outstanding personality oppressed those around him.

Among the St Petersburg workers, there were those who knew not less than he did and who were capable, people who had seen more than he had over the course of their lives, and who had lived abroad. The secret of his great influence, a sort of Stepan-dictatorship, consisted in his indefatigable attention to the whole business. Way in advance of meetings he would negotiate with everybody, familiarise himself with the general mood, think over all sides of the question and thus of course end up being the best prepared. He would express the general mood. What he says, probably every one of his comrades would say but they would not have such a thoughtful attitude to business, some because of laziness, some because they were occupied with other, perhaps even more important business, but Stepan could not relate to anything with carelessness. There was no inconsequential practical task the carrying out of which he could nonchalantly delegate to others. He came to the meeting with a fully formed view on the question under discussion. That is why they agreed with him. Conversely, that is why he grew irritated and heated when debates were drawn out without reason: 'after all, this is quite simple', said his expressive face, 'can such trifles really cause you difficulties?'

It was clear to all how well read Khalturin was.⁸⁸ This made others respect him involuntarily, but this trait could not particularly surprise those who knew plant workers: passionate lovers of reading were by no means rarities among them. On closer acquaintance, it turned out that Stepan read as only a few could. He always knew well the reason for opening some particular book. Moreover, in his case thought always went hand in hand with action. For example, he did not have that interest in natural science which could be noted in many workers. All his attention was taken up by social questions, and all these questions, like radiuses from a common centre, stemmed from one fundamental problem – that of the tasks and needs of the nascent Russian workers' movement. Whatever he read about, be it the English trade unions, the Great Revolution or the contemporary socialist movement, these needs and tasks never escaped his field of vision. From what Khalturin read at that time it was possible to judge the practical plans that were stirring in his head. Long before the organisation of the Northern-Russian Workers' Union, he had taken to studying European constitutions:

⁸⁸ Note to the second edition. He read much more, and more diligently, than the great majority of practical – revolutionaries from the intelligentsia who were known to me at that time [Plekhanov's footnote].

‘Why are you studying these with such relish?’ they would ask him

‘Well, you see, they’re interesting’.

The programme of the Union explained it better. He was studying the constitution with such relish because he was pondering the Russian workers’ political programme. With mental labour, as with everything else, Khalturin had a great ability to concentrate on a given topic without being distracted from it by anything extraneous. His mind was to such a degree occupied with the worker question that he hardly ever took an interest in the notorious ‘fundamental principles’ of peasant life. He became acquainted with members of the intelligentsia, listened to their discussions of the peasant commune, of the schism in the church and about ‘popular ideals’, but the Populist doctrine remained almost entirely alien to him.

‘What are you writing now?’ he asked me not long before his stint at the Winter Palace. I answered that I was writing a review of a book that had only just been published on the history of collective land ownership.⁸⁹ It was a very serious book which did me a great service, since it shook my Populist convictions for the first time, and very strongly at that, even if I disagreed with its conclusions. I was very interested in it and I tried to give an exposition of its contents to Stepan. He listened for a long time and then hit me with an unexpected question: ‘and is this really so important?’ The commune had occupied such an honourable and prominent position in my populist worldview, and he could not even decide whether it was worth breaking spears over!

Now it would not be easy for me to define the socio-political views he held at that time. Back then, I looked at things very differently from the way I look at them now. I can only say that, in comparison with Land and Freedom, Khalturin was an extreme westerniser. Westernism was developed and was maintained in him both by the general conditions of working-class life in the capital – the only thing that interested him – and perhaps in part by certain accidental influences. He had become acquainted with the Lavrists before he had become acquainted with the Rebels and the former knew how to generate interest on the part of the workers in the German Social-Democratic movement. In addition, two of Stepan’s closest comrades had worked abroad for a long time and the western influence spread via them both to him personally, and to the Union as a whole.⁹⁰

Khalturin did not have relatives in St Petersburg. He always lived alone, occupying a small, cell-like student room. He took a careless attitude to his surroundings and his clothes, one worthy of an intelligentsia nihilist. High boots, a broad coat, too long even for a person of his height, with several buttons missing, a rather awkward fur hat – this is the costume in which he is resurrected to my mind’s eye. He did not have ‘Sunday best’, in defiance of the custom of all plant workers. Talking about business somewhere in a tavern or bar, he would willingly drink a couple of bottles of beer, but he would hardly take part in revelry. I sometimes happened to meet other workers slightly drunk, but never him.

⁸⁹ i.e. *The Agrarian Commune and its Probable Future*.

⁹⁰ One of these colleagues was Victor Pavlovich Obnorskii (1851–1919), a metalworker from Vologda Province who had been active in socialist circles since 1869. During this time, he spent two periods abroad making contact with revolutionary emigres and familiarising himself with the labour movement in London, Paris and Geneva. The identity of the other is not known to the translator.

And yet this reserved, practical man was, if you like, a big dreamer. His dreams permanently ran far ahead of the real successes of the Russian workers' movement. He dreamt for a rather long time about a general strike involving all the St Petersburg workers. That dream was of course not realised. But it had its use: Stepan would tirelessly race off from one suburb to another, establishing contacts everywhere, everywhere gathering information about the number of workers, pay, the length of the working day, fines, etc. His presence everywhere served as a stimulant and he himself acquired new valuable information about the position of the working class in St Petersburg.

Thinking about a general strike, he as usual sought suitable guidance in books. He needed to know the size of St Petersburg's working population. But statistics gave him very little in this regard. 'It amazing', he said to me more than once, 'the statistical information about St Petersburg's mills and plants is useless. Where there are in fact three-hundred workers, it is written that there are fifty and where there are fifty, it is written that there are one or two hundred. And in St Petersburg overall there are incomparably more workers than are included in the statistics.' What was to be done about it? 'We ourselves will gather the necessary information better than any statistician', Stepan decided and took to distributing special leaflets around the mills and plants requesting that workers known to us write precise answers to the questions contained in the leaflet. Of course, not everybody answered properly, and many simply forgot to answer. But over time, Stepan nonetheless gathered a lot of information. Regarding several factories, he boasted to me that he had managed to work out all the outgoings and income of the owner and in this way was able to work out the degree to which the workers were exploited. He was going to publish the appropriate conclusions in a special brochure.

He was also fascinated with dreams about a future all-Russian workers' organisation. When Khalturin talked about this, his interlocutor would unwittingly think, under the influence of the speaker's passionate faith, that obstacles to such an organisation had already been removed, that links had everywhere been established, and that it remained only to work for this organisation's further development. But there was nothing of the Manilov in these dreams.⁹¹ As early as the summer of 1878, several months prior to the foundation of the Northern Union, Khalturin took a trip to the Volga and there went from plant to plant, establishing close connections with the local workers. He also prepared to make his way over to the Urals, but the St Petersburg comrades convinced him to return to St Petersburg. He was needed there too much.

Right after the foundation of the Northern Union, the idea arose of publishing a workers' newspaper. The author of the article 'Khalturin's Time at the Winter Palace' ascribed this idea exclusively to Stepan.⁹² He is mistaken. To whom did the idea of publishing *Zemlia i Volia* belong? To all Land and Freedom members in general, and none of them in particular. The same must be said regarding the proposed publication of a workers' newspaper. The workers had long since felt the need for it. The anarchist newspaper *Rabotnik*, which was published in Geneva in 1875, was the first attempt to satisfy this demand. Many of the workers who later joined the Northern Russian Workers' Union had taken an active interest in the publication of

⁹¹ Manilov was one of the many gentry landowners from whom the hero of Gogol's *Dead Souls* tried to buy titles to dead serfs. He is a sentimental and ineffective dreamer.

⁹² In *Kalendar Narodnoi Voli* [Plekhanov's footnote].

Rabotnik. When Land and Freedom established a secret press in St Petersburg, the idea of a workers' newspaper took on a new form. It began to be said that the press organ of the Russian workers should be published inside Russia. The growing success of the workers' movement made this ever more necessary. The question became recurrent. And Stepan was tacitly and unanimously recognised as the editor of this future newspaper. In this way, he became head of a matter which had been initiated by the whole Union.

The future editor adhered to the opinion that the newspaper should have a purely agitational character. The Union had many links with the workers. There could never be a lack of reliable reports about the negative sides of factory life. Their appearance in print would meet with the sympathy of all workers. And such reports really should have taken pride of place in the columns of the newspaper. It was left for the authors of the leading articles to place this material, taken directly from the lives of the workers, in an appropriate light. With the spread of the organisation to provincial towns, the possibility of securing news from these places would also arise.

All this was very practical, and it would have seemed that the Land and Freedom organisation ought to have given full support to the enterprise the workers had thought up. Land and Freedom had done much to develop the workers' movement in Russia. To pull away from it now, when it had started to grow and strengthen so quickly would be, to say the least, strange. And Land and Freedom did not pull away from the workers' movement consciously, but unnoticeably, life gave their activity a completely new character. They had no time to think of a workers' newspaper.

VII.

Already by the spring of 1879, i.e. when the Northern Russian Workers' Union had only been in existence for several months, half of the Land and Freedom organisation, having previously adhered to the Rebel trend turned terrorist. Those of its members who remained true to the old programme lived for the most part among the people in settlements dispersed around different localities in the mid and lower Volga regions, on the Don, and in Voronezh and Tambov provinces. The majority of Land and Freedom members living in St Petersburg with the zeal of new converts stood for terrorist activity or, as it was then expressed, for the disorganisation of the government. Nobody rejected the workers cause in principle. But in reality, the forces and resources devoted to it began to decrease very noticeably. Many young revolutionaries who had started their activity with work among the workers dropped this work under the influence of Land and Freedom members who were preaching 'the disorganisation of the government'.

The revolutionary movement of the intelligentsia took on an undoubtedly sharper character, but its scope became more and more narrow. The intelligentsia stopped thinking about how to attract the popular masses to struggle. The task of the movement was reduced to a duel between the government and the revolutionary intelligentsia. In April 1879, several days before the Soloviev attempt, I had been obliged to leave St Petersburg and I transferred

'relations with the workers' to the late Shiraev.⁹³ Returning in autumn of the same year, I found Khalturin in a state of serious discontent against the intelligentsia in general, and against Land and Freedom in particular.

'The man to whom you introduced me prior to your departure came to us just once', he said, 'and promised to get us type for our printing press, but he's now disappeared and I haven't met with him for two months. And we already have a machine made, and there is a typesetter and the flat is ready. Only the type is holding us up. And apart from the type, there is an important matter – we need to negotiate with one of yours and we don't know where to find him.'⁹⁴

I was certain that the new business which had come up for Stepan related, as always, to the workers' movement. This turned out not to be the case.

Since its very foundation, the Northern Russian Workers' Union had been placed in a sufficiently difficult position by the terrorist tactics of the intelligentsia. With every new terrorist act, the severity of the police increased, searches, arrests and expulsions multiplied. For revolutionaries without proper legal status, this white terror was for the moment almost completely harmless, as they managed to hide their traces from the most experienced of detectives. Revolutionaries with legal status who had somewhat managed to attract the unfavourable attention of the gendarme leadership were in a different position. They had to be ready for the most unpleasant surprises.

There were not many people without legal status in the Workers' Union. Apart from Khalturin, 'illegal' since 1878, there were perhaps two or three other people. But there were many 'legal' members of it – often the most active, experienced and influential members – who had long since been known to the police. They suffered badly from the white terror. They were seized, held in prison and exiled. Such losses told badly on a still weak organisation and it is not surprising that the Northern Russian Workers' Union took a very disapproving stance towards the new method of political struggle from the beginning.

'It is nothing but trouble,' exclaimed Khalturin, 'the thing had only just got going and bang! The intelligentsia hits somebody and there is another raid. If only you let us strengthen a little.'

But revolutionary terror intensified all the more and so did the white. The raids became more frequent. Soloviev's shot drove police severity to unheard of extremes. At the same time, it to all appearances also indicated a way out of the unbearable situation. 'If the tsar falls, so

⁹³ Stepan Grigorievich Shiraev (1857–81) was a native of Saratov, the son of a liberated serf. A revolutionary from his schooldays, he went abroad in 1876, dropping his university studies and eventually trained as an electrician in London, where he became acquainted with Lavrov. He was involved in the killing of a police agent, and supported Soloviev's attempt on the life of the tsar, siding with People's Will during the split in Land and Freedom. As a member of the People's Will Executive Committee, he established a dynamite-manufacturing operation. He was arrested in connection with this and was a defendant in the Trial of the 16 in October 1880. He was initially sentenced to death, but this was commuted to life at hard labour. He died in the Peter-Paul Fortress, officially from tuberculosis, though revolutionaries insisted he was beaten to death.

⁹⁴ Given the situation at that time: the departure from St Petersburg of the all the 'illegal' Land and Freedom members (and this was the majority) prior to Soloviev's assassination attempt; the fuss provoked by the summer revolutionary congresses at Lipetsk and Voronezh and, finally, the formal split of the Land and Freedom organisation in the autumn, it was hard to blame Shiraev for his negligence. But Khalturin did not know these mitigating circumstances and so his irritation was entirely understandable [Plekhanov's footnote].

does tsarism, and a new era, an era of freedom will begin'. Many thought this back then. Workers too began to think this.

In the summer of 1879, the job of a joiner at the Winter Palace was offered to some member of the Union. He spoke about this to his closest comrades. 'Well, go on,' said one of them, 'and finish the tsar off while you're at it.' This was said in jest. But the joke produced a profound impression on those present, and they gave serious thought to regicide. They called Khalturin for advice. On the first occasion, he expressed himself indefinitely: he advised them only not to chatter and to find out more about the job on offer. He wanted to think the matter through carefully, though he had probably decided there and then that he would take on the task himself, provided that he found it possible and useful. And he had a lot to think about.

However terribly the Union had suffered from the white terror, its position was far from hopeless. This was already being shown by the fact that, despite all the police severity, the workers were able to make nearly all the necessary preparations for the publication of their newspaper. Connections with the provincial towns were only just beginning and again, despite the crackdown, promised success. Members of the Union identified by the police had been expelled one after another, but others who had not been identified and who, given careful conduct of affairs, could hold out sufficiently long appeared in their places. A new attempt on the life of Alexander II, if it were unsuccessful, would probably cause the Union new losses, all the more in that Khalturin himself would face an almost certain death. He knew what disorder his death would bring into the affairs of the Union. But none of these considerations could outweigh one: the death of Alexander II would bring about political freedom. And with political freedom, the workers' movement would not be as it was before. Then we would not have such unions, we would not have to hide with our workers' newspapers.⁹⁵ Stepan did not waver for long. Access to the palace was guaranteed. It remained only to stockpile explosives.

How Khalturin behaved in the winter palace is related in *Kalendar Naraodnoi Voli*.⁹⁶ It is probably known to the reader what bravery and self-possession he showed there. The arrest of Kviatovskii, on whom a plan of the Winter Palace was found, put Khalturin, in the words of the author of the account, 'in a truly unbearable position'.⁹⁷ On the plan taken from Kviatovskii, the tsar's dining room was marked with a cross, and this circumstance made the palace police regard the joiners living in the basement right under the dining room with suspicion.⁹⁸ They put a gendarme in the same room as Khalturin and they often carried out searches without

⁹⁵ These were the actual words of Khalturin [Plekhanov's footnote].

⁹⁶ Khalturin in the Winter Palace [Plekhanov's footnote].

⁹⁷ Alexander Alexandrovich Kviatovskii (1852–80) was involved in settlement propaganda from 1874, working a variety of manual jobs, despite having previously studied at the Technology Institute in St Petersburg. He sided with the terrorist faction in 1879 and assisted Soloviev in his attempt on the tsar's life in April of that year. He was arrested in November 1879 in a flat containing a large amount of revolutionary literature, explosives, false passports and hand-drawn plans of the Winter Palace. At the end of October 1880, he was a defendant in the Trial of the 16, at which he was sentenced to death. This trial took place several months after Khalturin's attack on the Winter Palace (5 [17] February 1880) and Kviatovskii received this sentence despite being in prison at the time of this attack.

⁹⁸ Khalturin's trade is often described as that of a carpenter in English-language documents. In Russian-language, the term *stoliar* (joiner) rather than *plotnik* (carpenter) is invariably used. Carpenters generally make and install the fundamental wooden structures of a building (e.g., rafters, floors, staircases, window and door frames). Site joiners are engaged more in the production of a building's internal wooden fittings and decorative elements. These might include fitted furniture, bannisters, balustrades, cornices, windowsills, skirting boards and doors.

warning. The dynamite had to be kept under his pillow.⁹⁹ The enterprise, and with it Stepan's life, hung by a thread. With striking cool-headedness he sidestepped all difficulties and overcame all obstacles, and when the preparations were complete, when the fatal fuse had already been lit, he 'simply delighted Zheliabov' with the composure with which he uttered 'as if it were a phrase from the most ordinary of conversations', the momentous word 'ready'. Only his subsequent state revealed how much the moment had tortured him. Arriving at the conspiratorial flat that had been prepared for him after the explosion, 'tired and sick, he could scarcely stand, he only inquired immediately if there were enough weapons in the flat. "They will not take me alive", he said.'

'News of the fact that the tsar had survived told on Khalturin in the most oppressive manner. He fell sick and only accounts of the great impression the 5 February had produced on the whole of Russia could console him to some degree, though he did not want to be reconciled to his failure.'¹⁰⁰ He had not expected this from his attempt...

After 5 February, he remained active for more than two years. He tried to return to his favoured activity among the workers. But the logic of a *modus operandi* once adopted placed irresistible demands. Stepan once more took up terror. His participation in the killing of Strelnikov is well known.¹⁰¹ He died on the scaffold on 22 March 1882. When arrested he defended himself, arms in hand.

Soon after Khalturin began his employment at the Winter Palace, I was obliged to leave Russia. From that time onwards, I was able to learn about the course of the Russian workers' movement only from the accounts of the comrades who took my place. The author of the article 'Khalturin in the Winter Palace' says that the Northern Russian Workers' Union did manage to set about publishing a newspaper which was, however, seized during the printing of the very first issue along with the printing press, leaving for posterity nothing 'but the memory of an attempt at a purely workers' press organ which has not yet been repeated, even once.'¹⁰² Then, the existence of the Union itself ceased.

Clearly, the programmatic divisions among the intelligentsia at that stage affected the fate of the Union. It is beyond doubt that supporters of the People's Will party had appeared among the St Petersburg workers as early as 1880 (see the Workers Programme of this party, published in November 1880) as well as supporters of Black Redistribution.¹⁰³ At various times in the eighties, several workers' journals were published: *Rabochaia Gazeta* (from 15 December

⁹⁹ Whilst working at the Winter Palace, Khalturin smuggled around thirty kilogrammes of dynamite piecemeal into a joiner's workshop in one of the cellars of the Winter Palace. This material was stored in a case on which he slept. It was detonated on 5/18 February 1880, killing eleven members of the Finnish Life Guards regiment, decorated war veterans, who were attending a dinner in honour of the 25th anniversary of Alexander II's reign in a dining hall directly above the workshop. The tsar himself was late for the event and was unharmed.

¹⁰⁰ *Kalendar*, istorico-literaturnyi otdel, p48 [Plekhanov's footnote].

¹⁰¹ Vasily Stepanovich Strelnikov (1838–1882) was the prosecutor at the Kiev District Military Court. He was heavily involved in the investigation of political cases in Odessa, and was targeted for assassination by the Executive Committee of People's Will. Khalturin, who had been co-opted onto this body following his attempt on the tsar's life, acted alongside Nikolai Alekseevich Zhelvakov (1860–1882), the latter shooting Strelnikov dead in the street but failing to escape when he, along with Khalturin were detained by passers-by. Both were hung four days later.

¹⁰² The author relates this attempt to the period preceding Khalturin's sojourn at the Winter Palace, but this is a mistake [Plekhanov's footnote].

¹⁰³ This document has been translated into English. See Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, pp231–7.

1880 until the end of 1881), *Zerno* (at approximately the same time), and *Rabochii* (1885).¹⁰⁴ True, the workers were only readers of these journals, and they were edited by the intelligentsia, but that was, as they say, only part of the trouble. In the second half of the eighties, these publications too ceased to appear in Russia. It seems that there was a complete lull. But once lit, the flame of thought did not die among the workers, as even the legally permitted press testifies. The workers, almost completely abandoned by the intelligentsia, continued to grow mentally and morally. Already by the end of the eighties, Gleb Uspenskii could congratulate Russian writers on 'new forthcoming readers'. It will not be long before the intelligentsia opponents of tsarism will be able to celebrate new, indispensable and invincible *political allies*.

When our revolutionary intelligentsia feels the insufficiency of its forces and asks itself where it can find support, its well-wishers often give it a sufficiently strange answer: in 'society', among army officers and so forth. Such well-wishers rarely and unwillingly think of the workers. Of course, there is no accounting for taste, but the fact is that the Russian workers have over the course of the last twenty years put incomparably greater forces into the liberation movement than the honourable military estate or, especially, our dear, kind, developed, humane, educated but utterly useless liberals. And of course, so far only the first, admittedly most difficult, but also weakest steps have been taken by our workers' movement. What will happen next? Those with pretences towards political far-sightedness would do well to think about this.

History has long since condemned Russian tsarism irrevocably. But it exists and will continue to exist so long as that same history has not prepared sufficient forces to carry out its sentence. It is actively preparing them, taking them from everywhere. The proletariat is the most powerful of the new social forces created by it. The proletariat is the dynamite with which history will blow up the Russian autocracy.

Yet the old, more or less fantastic revolutionary costumes of the intelligentsia do not suit the working class. Our workers, who as early as the seventies saw the weak side of Populism, will in the nineties stand under the banner of the worldwide workers' party, under the banner of the Social Democrats.

Let that happy time come soon! It will bring much light to our darkened life!

¹⁰⁴ These were the publications of People's Will, Black Redistribution and the Blagoev Group (Party of Russian Social Democrats) respectively.