



Chernov 'icons' (Chernov as the Virgin Mother, with Kolchak as the Child Jesus and Denikin and Iudenich as angels - drawn by Viktor Denei) first appeared during the 20 June, 1922 demonstrations in Moscow during the trials of Socialist Revolutionaries.

Cartoon in *Bolshaiia Sovetskia Entsiklopediia* (Great Soviet Encyclopaedia) ed. O.Iu. Shmidt vol.61, 1934, p.301.

THE REVOLUTIONARY CAREER OF VIKTOR MIKHAILOVICH

CHERNOV

(1873-1952)



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Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma in any university, and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no copy or paraphrase of material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Alexander Trapeznik", is written over a horizontal dashed line.

Alexander Trapeznik

ABSTRACT

Viktor Mikhailovich Chernov (1873-1952) was a Russian revolutionary figure and chief theoretician of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. During the 1890s he led the Populist groups away from a program of anarchism, violence and despair into a closer harmony with the new problems facing Russia at the turn of the century - urbanisation, Marxism and industrialisation. He played a central role in shaping the political perceptions and tactics that came to be the hallmark of 'neo-populism'. Chernov was instrumental in the coalescing of discordant Populist elements into the formation of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, and despite splits and secessions he remained at its helm until its final demise around 1920. He was concerned with the overthrow of autocracy and socialist revolution. He persuaded his fellow party members to accept the existence of an industrial proletariat in Russia and of its revolutionary vanguard role, leading the peasantry as a mass strike force. He argued that the small peasant producers formed part of the working class with a similar interest in socialism to that of the proletariat. Chernov also succeeded in forming an agrarian policy which was summarised in the slogan 'the land belongs to no one and labour alone confers the right to use it'.

Virtually all that Chernov wrote between 1899 and 1917, during his long stay in Europe, broken only briefly in 1905, was designed to adapt Western political strategy to the peculiarities of the Russian situation. However, the endeavour, at times, suffered from obvious defects and weaknesses. He took an 'internationalist' stance to the First World War and returned to Russia in April, 1917, and in May, he joined Lvov's Provisional Government as Minister of Agriculture. Chernov proved to be an ineffectual and impotent minister, and he resigned from the Provisional Government in September, 1917. He was powerless to prevent the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

As leader of the majority party, he was elected president of the Constituent Assembly in January, 1918. Upon its dispersal by the Bolsheviks, he fought a propaganda war on 'two fronts' against the Bolsheviks and the reactionary forces, arguing that the SRs constituted a democratic 'third force'. Harassed by the Cheka, Chernov left Russia in 1920, once again for a long and melancholy exile in the West.

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The bulk of the research was undertaken in Tasmania, and I am deeply indebted to Mrs. Anne Sumner and the staff in the Inter Library Loans section of the Morris Miller Library of the University of Tasmania for their patience, tolerance and efforts on my behalf.

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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND DATING

The system of transliteration adopted here is that of the Library of Congress, with a few modifications; diacritical marks are omitted, and spellings of the better-known proper names follow a more familiar usage: thus Trotsky not Trotskii, Aksentiev not Aksent'ev. Similarly with some names of non-Russian origin: Kronstadt is preferred to Kronshtadt.

Where events in Russia occur before 1 February 1918, they are dated according to the Julian (Old Style) calendar then observed in Russia, which in the nineteenth century ran twelve days, and in the twentieth century ran thirteen days, behind the Gregorian (New Style) calendar in use in Western Europe. The change-over in Russia to the Western calendar occurred on the day following 31 January 1918 (O.S.), which was declared to be 14 February (N.S.).

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INTRODUCTION

The Russian revolutionary movement in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and indeed, up until 1917, faced an unprecedented task in the history of the socialist movement. It was the task of deciding what was the best socialist tactical policy in a country that was essentially economically backward and peasant based. The question was not solely centred on the most suitable organisational form for socialist transformation, but also centred on the ideological debate between Populists and Marxists as to the future development of Russia.

This study will focus on the problem of a socialist revolution in a backward agricultural land through the eyes of one of its leading participants, Viktor Mikhailovich Chernov. I have chosen Chernov because I believe that a study of his intellectual and political career will enlarge our understanding of 'modern populism', a movement within the Russian revolutionary tradition that from 1901 to 1917 was the major rival of Russian Marxism. Although Chernov's name has long been associated with a theoretical tendency and a strategy of Russian revolutionary populism, he himself has never been presented fully as a thinker and actor in the movement. In this respect, he is possibly the most neglected of all the major figures in the history of the Russian revolutionary

movement. This neglect is perhaps due to a critical defect in an approach to history that seems to regard only the successful as meriting close examination.

Moreover, from the early 1900s to 1917, it was by no means a foregone conclusion that Lenin would emerge as the major figure in the Russian revolutionary movement, let alone as the ruler of Russia. Chernov, Martov and Trotsky could equally have been heirs apparent to the throne. Indeed, there were occasions when it appeared that Chernov's Socialist Revolutionary Party (SRs) would succeed in dominating the Russian revolutionary movement, and for much of 1917, they exercised far more influence over the working class and in the country at large than did the Bolsheviks or Mensheviks. In fact, it can be argued that SR policies and blunders in 1917 contributed as much to the Bolshevik triumph as did the actions of the Leninists themselves.

No one played a more central role than Chernov in shaping the political perceptions and tactics that came to be the hallmark of 'modern populism'. On all the questions that separated the SRs from the Social Democratic Parties - the organisation and structure of the party, the nature of the revolution against the autocracy, the relationship between the working class and peasantry - Chernov's

views proved prophetic. He was the spokesman for the SR Party, and was the party's chief ideologist, and he established the theoretical underpinnings of many of its most important political positions. He contributed more than any other party member towards developing 'modern populism' into a distinct ideological and political force.

Because Chernov was concerned with the overthrow of autocracy, and socialist revolution, an examination of his ideas and proposals brings into sharp relief the practical problems that arose from an attempt to introduce Populist ideals into a country undergoing industrialisation and the encroachment of a capitalist system in the countryside. Virtually all that Chernov wrote between 1899 and 1917 during his long stay in Europe, only returning briefly in 1905, was designed to adapt Western political strategy, which he had mastered, to the peculiarities of the Russian situation. Though thoroughly inventive and sophisticated, the endeavour suffered from obvious defects and weaknesses. The very effort to create a mass based party in an autocratic police state was bound to be painful and problematical. It is not surprising that a number of individuals within the SR Party challenged Chernov's conceptions and so provoked some of the most dramatic and momentous splits

in the movement. In the attendant debates both Chernov and his opponents were forced to clarify their positions, and analyses of these discussions illuminate the issues that were at stake and provide clues as to why the SR Party developed as it did.

Chernov was acutely aware of the direct connection between tactics and ideology. This awareness led him to conclude, sooner than most SRs, that terrorist tactics were unproductive and detrimental to the political program for advancing socialism.

An examination of Chernov's political and intellectual career also illuminates several other radical currents in Russia. Active in revolutionary movements as a student revolutionary in the 1890s, as a revolutionary in emigration in the West up until 1917, and as a revolutionary in power in 1917, Chernov's experiences of those years yield further insight into the political restlessness of the radical intelligentsia.

The radicals of the 1870s were agitated by several important questions, but the one that most troubled Chernov was to haunt the revolutionary intelligentsia for decades to come: given Russia's general backwardness (as compared to Western Europe), the lack of a strong and politically assertive middle class, the lack of a numerically strong and politically conscious working class, the absence of civil liberties and political freedom, and the extension of

capitalistic large-scale methods to the countryside, how could a revolutionary party hope to be effective? Should it devote itself to mobilising mass support and, if so, how? Or should it concentrate on training a radical elite that would somehow deal a deathblow to the archaic autocracy? The choice of one or the other alternative could not, as Chernov realised, be made simply on the basis of the pragmatic criterion of effectiveness. The choice bore long-term implications: it would not only determine the nature of the revolutionary movement, but ultimately that of Russian society on the morrow of the revolution.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century Populism was for Russia the dominant revolutionary ideology. Imbued by a romantic, naive and mystical vision of Russia and the revolutionary potential of the peasantry, the populists martyred themselves to their noble cause. The Populism of the nineteenth century was not, however, a coherent body of philosophical, political and social thought. It was very much heterogeneous in nature. Populism was not so much a concrete body of political or social doctrine as a broad range of ideas and attitudes, a matrix from which emerged various specific (and often contradictory) ideologies and movements. Russian Populism was never a unified political

ideology; it was a loose, non-hierarchical movement that permitted varying interpretations by the remarkable array of strong-minded individuals who placed themselves under its banner. The attempt to realise often varying objectives as part of a vaster program of social change led to a number of controversies within the Populist intelligentsia, especially ones concerning the nature of the organisational framework best able to support the movement's energies in its struggle against the autocracy. The appeal of secret, conspiratorial, ruthless and hierarchical revolutionary organisations, such as those espoused by Tkachev and practiced by Nechaev, was always quite limited. It was instead the written word that the intelligentsia used as its primary weapon, and it did so superbly. Chernov exemplified this tradition. It is virtually the only tradition that links the populism of old and Chernov's 'modern populism' or neo-populism.

The philosophical foundations of neo-populism draw upon Populist ideals, but do not rest exclusively on them. The neo-populism of Chernov is a fundamentally radical departure from the utopian socialist ideology of Herzen, Chernyshevsky, Lavrov and Mikhailovsky. Neo-populism was far more than a reaction to a demographic phenomenon, a consequence of capitalism. Instead, it

reacted against the forms of governance, social relations, economic organisation and culture which came to prevail in major urban centres. To ignore this relationship is to misunderstand the nature of neo-populism. Chernov's neo-populism was urban in Russia because it was a reaction against the development and expansion of capitalism, which had undergone a rapid expansion in organisational and productive capacity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Capitalism was enormously efficient, but it depended on, among other things, concentrating capital and decision making in urban centres. Chernov provided a distinctive and original socialist revolutionary theory - neo-populism of the twentieth century - that fulfilled the requirements of revolution making in a predominantly agriculturally based economy undergoing rapid capitalist expansion.

This study in part will attempt to examine how Chernov attempted the implementation of theory into practice, ideology into reality.

The intellectual Viktor Chernov (1873-1952), son of a tsarist official enobled for his services to the state, and an active socialist from his student days, unlike most of the other SR leaders, was a keen student of Marxism and well acquainted with the Socialist movements of the West. Before the Revolution of 1917, he had

lived long in exile, mainly in Switzerland, where he had edited the chief SR organ *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* (Revolutionary Russia) before the Revolution of 1905. In exile he had learnt to regard as obsolete the old *Narodnik* doctrine which looked to the building of a peasant Socialism on the basis of the ancient communes. He had also shed his opposition to industrial development, while retaining a strong objection to the extension of capitalistic large-scale methods to the countryside. Chernov even saw a role for the industrial proletariat to play the part of vanguard in the coming revolution, which, in his view, would supply most of the direction, with the peasants forming the main body of the army of progress. A proletariat-peasant alliance was conceived by Chernov before Lenin's theoretical pronouncements on the matter. Chernov also learnt to reject the *Narodnik* way of thinking of the entire peasantry as constituting a single revolutionary class. In the Revolution, he said, the poorer peasants would contend with the rural bourgeoisie, while the urban proletariat dealt with the bourgeoisie of the towns. He was critical of Marxist class analysis which categorised the peasantry as petty bourgeois. By emphasising the distribution relations rather than relations to the means of production, Chernov argued small producers were not petty capitalists, and hence, not petty bourgeois. As for the bourgeois

revolution, to which the Social Democrats looked forward as a future event, Chernov placed it in the past, as having taken place already when the serfs were emancipated and supplies of workers for industry were thus made available from the country districts. Accordingly, there could be no place for a further bourgeois revolution. Nevertheless, Chernov believed that the coming revolution would have two stages, where the first or 'minimum program' would end tsarism, establish a bourgeois democracy, and preserve the peasantry from capitalist contamination, and the second or 'maximum program' would build voluntary, socialist cooperatives of an advanced type throughout the countryside, and then set up a loose socialist government in the capitals, eventually turning the cities, too, into a network of voluntary cooperatives. Chernov believed that his 'Constructive Socialism' combined what was good in Marxism with what was good in Utopian Socialism.

The advent of the First World War further added to the problems of an already disunited and disorientated party. The SR Party developed an insidious and, as it turned out, permanent split on the question of supporting the Russian war effort. Many party members, especially at home, became the 'defensists'. Chernov did not. Instead, he became the leading light among the Russian

delegations to the left, socialist conventions held in Switzerland, at Zimmerwald in 1915 and Kienthal in 1916.

Chernov spent most of the war in Switzerland. He returned to Russia after the February Revolution of 1917, arriving in Petrograd on 8 April, five days after Lenin. In May, he joined Lvov's Provisional Government as Minister of Agriculture. As a minister, however, he appears to have made no effective impression on his colleagues, and his position in the government was fatal to his prospects of gaining popular support. Wishing for peace, he found himself committed to a continuance of the war. Similarly, he was eager to get the land for the peasants, but he had as minister to do what he could to prevent them from taking it for themselves without waiting for the Constituent Assembly to give it to them. He found himself under attack from the right because of his Zimmerwaldian record, and from the left as a hanger on of the bourgeoisie and an opponent of Soviet influence. He was, indeed, evidently at a loss as to what to do, and unable to give his party any effective leadership. His declining hold over the masses was shown in July 1917, when he was saved by Trotsky from the hands of an angry crowd. As the leader of the largest socialist party, his position should have been one of commanding strength, but it was, in fact,

one of increasing weakness.

Chernov resigned from the Provisional Government in September 1917. He was powerless to prevent the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks. The SR Party once again was chiefly concerned with, and distracted by, factional infighting and the elections to the Constituent Assembly. The Assembly duly convened in Petrograd on 5 January, 1918. It met for only one day, during which it elected Chernov as chairman. Chernov was called on by some of his colleagues to summon his supporters to its aid, but he refused, saying that he would not be a party to the shedding of blood in internecine socialist conflict.

Civil wars broke out in the course of 1918. Chernov made his way to Samara on the Volga, where many leading SRs had come together with a few Mensheviks, and were attempting to set up a new Provisional Government made up of members of the dispersed Constituent Assembly. In November 1918, Admiral Kolchak brought off his own putsch, seized power in his own hands, and arrested the democratic and socialist leaders. Chernov managed to escape and declared his intention of continuing an unarmed struggle against the Bolsheviks on the one hand, and the right wing counter-revolutionaries on the other.

Chernov's last appearance in Russia seems to have been in May 1920, when he arrived in Moscow in disguise, and made a speech at a meeting organised by the mainly Menshevik Printers' Union, with the British Labour Delegation then visiting Russia. From there he began a long and melancholy exile, in Reval (now Tallin), in Prague, in Paris, and finally in New York. During thirty two years of frustration, recriminations, and feelings of guilt, Chernov defended himself, split from most of his colleagues, denounced the Bolsheviks and wrote histories and memoirs, but all in vain; the Bolsheviks maintained power in Russia. The prospects for the society and the life that Chernov had striven for had faded. In 1952, Chernov died in a tiny, gloomy apartment in New York.

The end of the SR Party came in 1922, when its remaining leaders in Russia were tried for treason and condemned to death. The SR Party, always an amalgam of many groups and tendencies, had owed what theoretical coherence it ever had almost entirely to Chernov. Chernov virtually had been the sole architect of its program in 1906, and had retained his leadership despite his evident practical incapacity, as there was no-one else to take his place. There were, of course, other leaders, such as, M.Gots and G.Gershuni, but none of them ever formulated a coherent policy, and were instead primarily concerned with tactical and

organisational matters.

This study in essence will examine the program Chernov devised, and more importantly, how he attempted to implement it. It will examine Chernov as a revolutionary figure from his student days to his emigration in 1920. It will also, by necessity, be a study of Russian social, economic and political life during this period.

Moreover, although history is made in a definite economic setting, on a definite economic base, without an understanding of which itself would be incomprehensible to us, history nevertheless is made by living human beings who need not be directly motivated by economic factors. The analysis of these motives, even of those that are completely individual, does not in the least lead us away from the ground of the historical materialist method, and does not change us into 'psychologists'.

Viktor Chernov was a prolific writer and the SR party's leading theoretician. Nikolai Sukhanov described Chernov in his memoirs as '... the only substantial theoretician of any kind it had - and a universal one at that. If Chernov's writings were removed from the Socialist Revolutionary Party literature almost nothing would be left.'¹ Chernov describes himself as '... a theorist, a man of speech,

¹ N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution 1917*, edited, abridged and translated by J Carmichael, Oxford University Press, 1955, p.305.

literature, the writing desk and lecture platform rather than a professional politician.² The foundation for a study of Chernov's development both as a revolutionary figure and writer are his two memoirs both of which provide an indispensable starting point. *Zapiski Sotsialista-Revoliutsionera* (Notes of a Socialist-Revolutionary) Berlin, 1922 Book 1 (of which no more were published) encompassess the period from the late 1880s to the late 1890s when he went abroad, and was written in Moscow at a time when Chernov was residing there illegally from 1919-1920. The book complements his other memoir work, *Pered Burei* (Before the Storm) New York, 1954. In the last years of his life, Chernov was gravely ill, and although he had hoped to complete the writing of his memoirs, he had no longer the strength to do so. D.N. Shub took it upon himself to oversee this project by collecting material. If it was not for his effort, *Pered Burei* would never have seen the light of day. Together his memoirs cover his life from birth through to exile after the Bolshevik suppression of the Constituent Assembly in January, 1918. The central part of *Pered Burei* repeats, with some deletion, material from the *Zapiski*. Both are essential, of course, in any attempt to reconstruct Chernov's development,

² V.M. Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution*, translated and abridged by P E Mosely, Russell & Russell, New York, 1966, p. 398.

and *Pered Burei* is indispensable for a history of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. The *Zapiski* are more informative of action than *Pered Burei*. Many pages of *Pered Burei* are devoted to sketches of Chernov's friends in the movement and this tends to obscure Chernov himself. Chernov does not speak of his personal life in his memoirs. For example, he makes no mention of the fact that about 1910 he left his first wife, Anastasia Nikolaevna Sletova, nor does he tell how and where he met his second wife, Olga Kolbasina Chernova. However, this study holds no pretensions of being a full scale biography: personal details, the psychology of his mind, or a sociological approach are beyond its scope. T.B. Cross, however, attempts to analyse the psychological structure of Chernov's thinking in the introduction of *Viktor Chernov: Reason and Will in a Morality for Revolution*, Ph.D thesis, Indiana University, 1968. The social philosophy of Chernov is directly descendant from Mikhailovsky, or so states Randall in the only other work which purports to analyse Chernov's ideology, *The Major Prophets of Russian Peasant Socialism: A Study in the Social Thought of N.K. Mikhailovskii and V.M. Chernov*, Ph.D thesis, Columbia University, 1961.

Major accounts of the history of the SR Party in Western languages

are: A. Spiridovitch, *Histoire du Terrorisme Russe, 1886-1917*, Paris, 1930; O.H. Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism: Promise and Default of the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries, February to October 1917*, New York, 1958; Radkey, *The Sickle under the Hammer: The Russian Socialist Revolutionaries in the Early Months of Soviet Rule*, New York, 1963; Maureen Perrie, *The Agrarian Policy of the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party: From Its Origins through the Revolution of 1905-1907*, Cambridge, 1976; M. Hildermeier, *Die Sozialrevolutionäre Partei Russlands: Agrarsozialismus und Modernisierung im Zarenreich (1900-1914)*, Cologne and Vienna, 1978; J. Baynac, *Les Socialistes - Revolutionnaires de Mars 1881 à Mars 1917*, Paris, 1979; and M. Jansen, *A Show Trial Under Lenin. The Trial of the Socialist Revolutionaries. Moscow 1922*, The Hague, 1982.

The studies cited above unfortunately focus primarily on the history of the party, its splits, terrorist policy and agrarian policy in the turbulent period between 1905 and 1917, emphasising its peasant orientation. Chernov's revolutionary career, political and social thought, his contributions to the revolutionary tradition, and in particular to the development of a socialist tactical policy for a socialist revolution in an agricultural country where absolute

monarchy was still dominant, are only treated in a cursory manner. This study will hopefully go some way to remedying this imbalance.

Soviet histories of the SR Party first began appearing in 1921, although the subject only began to be investigated in some depth by Soviet historians in the 1950s. The principal work is by Gusev, *Krakh partii levyykh eserov*, (The Failure of the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party) Moscow. 1963. The subsequent articles and books by Soviet historians tend to emphasise the period March to October 1917 and characterise the SRs as a bankrupt petty bourgeois party. They also tend to focus on the left wing of the party and its brief period of cohabitation with the Bolsheviki. Chernov is accorded only superficial treatment, and until now, there appears little discernible difference in their perception of Chernov, though their vitriolic rhetoric has abated. He is now described an 'interventionist', and a 'counter-revolutionary'. This study will throw Chernov a lifeline and rescue him from politically motivated ideological assassination.

Chernov's view of the events of 1917 can be studied by consulting two main works: *The Great Russian Revolution*, New York, 1966 translated and abridged by P. Mosely, and *Rozhdenie revoliutsionnoi Rossii Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia*, Paris, 1934 which

was the basis for the Mosely translation, and is the same as *Velikaia russkaia revoliutsiia*, Paris, 1934 volume 1 of which was published, while the rest of it remains only in manuscript form. In the early period, Chernov's abundant output of writings are contained largely in four periodicals all published in Paris: *Russkoe Bogatstvo* (Russian Riches); *Viestnik Russkoi Revoliutsii* (Herald of the Russian Revolution); *Nakanunie* (On the Eve); and *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* (Revolutionary Russia). From 1899 to 1905 Chernov published in these journals, but only one, *Russkoe Bogatstvo*, continued to appear after 1905. Chernov's *Filosofskie i sotsiologicheskie etiudy* (Philosophical and sociological studies, Moscow, 1907), are based on his publications in *Russkoe Bogatstvo* between 1899 and 1902. *Nakanunie* had a short life, only appearing from 1899 to 1901. *Viestnik* appeared irregularly between 1901 and 1904. *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* appeared between 1901 and 1905.

After 1905, *Znamia Truda* (Banner of Toil) and *Sotsialist-Revoliutsioner* (Socialist-Revolutionary), both published in Paris, carried the burden of Chernov's thinking. *Znamia Truda* came out periodically from 1907 to 1912 and *Sotsialist-Revoliutsioner* had just four issues from 1908 through to 1913. Chernov did not

substantially modify the political and social outlook he formed during the period 1899 and 1914. Between 1914 and 1917 Chernov's attention focussed on the stance socialists should take toward the war. His articles appeared in *Zaviety* (Legacies), published in Paris between 1912 and 1914. During 1917 *Delo Naroda* (The People's Cause), published in Petrograd, carried much of the burden of Chernov's thinking. After the revolution Chernov continued to write for various exile journals.

Since the considerable archival resources in the Soviet Union, Europe, and the United States were not available for use, this study will be substantially based upon published sources. Chernov's published works; journals, newspaper articles and party congress reports provide ample material to justify the exercise. Moreover, the archival materials of various collections are explored in some depth by Radkey, Perrie, Janson and Hildermeirer. By utilising these sources what would seem an apparent deficiency in such a study, in fact becomes negligible.

The notable archival sources are the large *Partiia Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov* (PSR) Archive and the smaller collection of V.M. Chernov papers held at the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam. The Hoover Institute at Stanford University

holds various papers and manuscripts in the Chernov Collection. The *Okhrana* files held by the Institute contain police reports, dispatches, circulars and photographs. The B.I. Nicolaevsky Collection also contains a small number of Chernov's personal papers.

In dealing with Chernov's writings, we should bear in mind that the majority of accounts were written many years after the Revolution, and they relied largely on memory, varied widely at times from the facts. We must also be aware that, although some seventy years have elapsed since the Revolution, the accounts of events presented in Chernov's memoirs still reflect the original emotions and the conflict of ideas that characterised the fateful year, 1917. The task, therefore, is for the writer of Chernov's 'revolutionary career' to evaluate for himself the testimonies presented.

Chernov's revolutionary career is set out in a chronological fashion with the narrative interwoven with analysis. This format also encompasses a detailed exposition and analysis of Chernov's critique of Marx's theory of class and the agrarian problem, which forms an integral part of his political thought, and therefore is worthy of special consideration.

Chapter 1

Youthful Enthusiasm

The *Narodniki* or Russian populists took their name from the Russian word *narod* meaning 'people'. The name is an apt one since, although the populist movement included many diverse elements, its most typical concern was that of activating the Russian population against tsarism. The movement was orientated towards the people. The term 'movement' is used deliberately as the *Narodnik* influence was much wider than that of the political parties it spawned. It was a literary influence and a general cultural trend as well as a specifically political movement and few Russian intellectuals who reached maturity between the years 1861 and 1905 escaped its influence.

Because of the universality of its influence Russian populism is difficult to define exactly. The political attitudes of the populists, as distinct from their political programs, included a distrust of liberalism and parliamentary democracy, a belief in the possibility of an autonomous development of socialism in Russia through the preservation of the village community (the *obshchina*) and the avoidance of capitalism. The object of 'going to the people' was primarily designed to broaden the popular resistance to tsarist autocracy. It was not necessarily based on any veneration of the Russian peasant, although this was often present. Since nine-tenths

of the Russian population were rural dwellers, and since the majority of them were peasants, it was natural that any political movement seeking to secure a popular basis should be concerned with activating the peasantry. At times, as with the Chaikovskists in 1872-1873, Russian populists concentrated on organising the urban workers. Yet even here the concentration was sometimes not on urban workers as a developing industrial proletariat, but on urban workers as peasants temporarily employed in the cities, who were better educated than their fellow villagers, and therefore more easy to influence. It was expected that they would return to their villages taking the message of populism back with them.

Populism, like earlier movements based essentially on intellectuals, favoured the 'study group' form of organisation. Groups of students, writers, teachers and others formed clandestinely for the organisation of libraries of prohibited books, the compilation of books of political extracts, publication of popular pamphlets and political education. These groups soon extended to include workers and peasants. In the early years of the movement the groups were locally organised and only loosely linked. This was true even with the first *Zemlya i Volya* (Land and Freedom) groups which were organised during the early 1860s. Although these groups were soon

shattered by arrests, new exile groups with new leaders and a similar orientation and purpose replaced them. In 1876, a new *Zemlya i Volya* organisation was formed. Unlike the earlier organisation of the same name, this was more disciplined and more centralised, and was, in fact, a political party in the modern sense. The influence of this second *Zemlya i Volya* was wider than the first. In addition to a central group of about twenty-five, there were fixed centres in several provincial towns. From these centres teachers, students, doctors and *zemstvo* officials and other intellectuals moved out to influence the peasantry in the surrounding countryside. The organisation reached a new stage in October 1878 with the appearance of the journal *Zemlya i Volya*. This was printed abroad but was widely distributed inside Russia. However, even at the time when this journal was launched, the organisation was showing signs of internal strain. In response to increased police persecution and the failure of the policy of arousing the peasants, a large section of its members increasingly favoured terrorism as a political method. In 1879, this group organised within the *Zemlya i Volya*, a tightly disciplined terrorist group called the *Narodnaya Volya* (Peoples Will). The non-terrorists, including the later socialist G.V. Plekhanov, separated

themselves from the *Narodnaya Volya* and formed the *Cherny Peredel* (Black Redistribution).¹ Whereas the former group concentrated its activities increasingly towards the assassination of the Tsar, the latter group continued the older emphasis on influencing workers and peasants and on popularising its program of immediate reforms. The division between the terrorist and non-terrorist wings of the populist movement was largely confined to differences over political strategy. Both groups favoured the same sort of political program. This involved demanding the election of a Constituent Assembly based on universal suffrage, regional self-administration based on the autonomy of the *mir* (commune), land nationalisation and the distribution of the landed estates to the peasantry, workers' control of factories, and freedom of conscience, speech, press, meeting, association and electoral agitation.²

The assassination of Alexander II on 1 March, 1881 led to a quick and savage retaliation. Hundreds of *Narodniks* were arrested; several were executed, and the remainder were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment and exile. Police control was strengthened, especially in the larger towns. Populist political organisation did not recover from this attack, although remnants of the *Narodnik*

¹ They took their name from their central objective of dividing up the landed estates among the peasantry.

² F. Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, London, 1960, pp.677-678.

influence survived in the later SR Party. Many of the early Russian Marxists, including Plekhanov and Lenin, were influenced by populism, and the early Marxist groups, despite their repudiation of populism, absorbed much of its tradition and some of its program. The fact that Marxist writers such as Plekhanov, Martov and Lenin were forced to devote a good deal of their time and energy, as late as 1900 to exposing the 'errors' of populism, is a tribute to the strength of the populist tradition in Russia.³ They were later to devote as much attention to the neo-populism of Chernov.

It is within this historical tradition that Viktor Chernov must be placed. Although the continuity of thought is by no means a direct one, the philosophical foundations of neo-populism draw upon populist ideals. However, they do not rest exclusively on them, as the subsequent chapters shall demonstrate.

Viktor Mikhailovich Chernov was born in the town of Kamyshin, in the Samara district situated on the Volga, on 19 November, 1873.

Chernov's father was born into a peasant serf family. His grandfather, on gaining his freedom, resolved to spare his son from

³ For example see, Plekhanov's works *Socialism and the Political Struggle*, (1883); *Our Differences*, (1885); *On the Development of the Monistic View of History*, (1895); *On the Materialist Conception of History*, (1897) and *On the Role of the Individual in History*, (1898); and Lenin's *What the 'Friends of the People' are*, (1894) and *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, (1899).

the rigours of muzhik exploitation. Chernov's father became a rural school teacher and later entered tsarist service, initially as a young clerical assistant to the district treasury. Slowly and methodically he progressed up the hierarchical ladder. In the end, after some forty years service, he reached the top of the treasury administration, and became District Treasurer. With this position came the order of Saint Vladimir and personal nobility, together with the title Councillor of State.⁴

In his memoirs, Viktor Chernov relates how, in his early years, he suffered under the daily and hourly oppression of his stepmother, whom he rejected, and how he consequently sought solace in the society of street children, absorbing their experiences like a sponge absorbs water.⁵ Chernov's mother died when the boy was still in infancy, although he speaks of her as 'fine and deep'. His stepmother was kind to her husband's children until she bore her own. Then the house divided, the old family lived downstairs, the new family lived in the second storey. They met only for meals, which was a 'strained and boring ritual' for the members of the lower house. The children referred to their home as bicameral. Chernov's attraction to, and empathy with the downtrodden is

⁴ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, (Before the Storm) New York, 1953, p.27.

⁵ Chernov, *Zapiski Sotsialista- Revoliutsionera*, (Notes of a Socialist Revolutionary), Berlin, 1932, pp.13-14.

linked to his perception of his stepmother: 'I myself grew up under constant "humiliation and insult"; and for me it was so natural an urge to be attracted to all who were "humiliated and insulted".⁶ While Chernov's stepmother alienated him, his father influenced Viktor's view of the world: 'I inherited from him a plebeian outlook on life.'⁷

In his adolescent years, Chernov turned to literature, and was inspired by the poet Nekrasov, so much so, that he memorised much of his work. In Chernov's estimation he breathed life into the 'people'. Nekrasov was just one of many authors Chernov read, though in no systematic order.⁸ The influence of writers and poets in the Russian revolutionary movement was characteristic of the nineteenth century as a whole, but it was especially characteristic of the period from 1820 onwards. Pushkin and some of his contemporaries were involved in the Decembrist movement and later writers developed under the stimulus of its heroic failure. Herzen, Belinsky, Turgenev, Goncharov, Chernyshevsky and many others were actively involved in revolutionary agitation. Dostoevsky, Saltykov-Shedrin and Chernyshevsky were all directly

⁶ *ibid*, p.14.

⁷ Chernov, *Zapiski*, p.87.

⁸ *ibid*, p.14.

influenced by the revolutionary Petrashevsky in the 1840s. Nekrasov was actively associated for a time with the Populist movement. His best poems are those in which he expressed either his love for his Polish-born mother or his compassion for the long suffering Russian peasant. Nekrasov did not succeed in creating a school of his own: no 'peasant' poets came in his wake. But he, more than any other Russian poet, made his contemporaries aware of the existence of the peasant and his problems. Few knew as much as he about the Russian peasant. Still fewer could express the truth as artistically and as powerfully.

Immersed in the world of literature, Chernov continued to live a secluded intellectual life. He described his adolescent years as uneventful '...an unusually dull, lacklustre time.... In a revolutionary sense, society was absolutely lifeless.'⁹ It was not until the latter half of the 1880s that Chernov started to live a politically conscious life.¹⁰ His introduction to politics was at the instigation of his elder brother, Vladimir. It was he who introduced Chernov to his political circle, which was organised by a Tolstoian army officer. From this initial encounter Chernov went on to participate in other political circles. His involvement in such

⁹ *ibid*, p.13.

¹⁰ *ibid*, p.13.

political activity did not go unnoticed. In 1890, A.V. Sazonov was arrested, and Chernov was also taken into custody; he was searched, questioned and released.¹¹

Towards the end of his schooling in Saratov, Chernov met the veteran Populist Mark Natanson,¹² describing him as '... no writer, no orator, nor an adventurer, whose affairs vividly speak for themselves. He was an organiser.'¹³ In order to avoid further police prosecution, Chernov in the autumn of 1891, travelled to Derpt¹⁴ in Estonia to continue his studies. While there, he made the acquaintance of like-minded students and this led to the formation of an organisational circle, in which Chernov carried on his propaganda. It was here that he met and became a close friend of Karl Parts, a member of the Estonian Constitutional Democratic Party. Chernov completed his school-leaving certificate and returned to Saratov.

In 1892, Chernov continued his formal education at Moscow

¹¹ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, pp.50-51.

¹² Mark Andreevich Natanson (1850-1919) was one of the founders of the Chaikovsky circle and of *Zemlya i Volya* (Land and Freedom); after the split in the latter organisation, he affiliated himself with *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Will). Natanson founded the People's Right Party in 1893 and was leader until 1894, when he was arrested. In 1905, Natanson joined the Socialist Revolutionary Party associating himself with its left wing, and became a member of the party's central committee. Natanson joined the Left Socialist Revolutionaries in 1917.

¹³ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.46.

¹⁴ Renamed Iurev.

University, where he enrolled in the Faculty of Law. It was during this period at university that Chernov first encountered Marx's writings. Chernov's study of Marx was espoused in these terms:

We are not Marxists, we studied Marx to know him better, rather than to be converted. This at times turned into for us a sort of sport. We had to know all the main authors who may be utilised in an argument.... We appeared to the young Marxists as utopians and petit bourgeois; "moss-grown troglodytes" we were called by one of their prominent Marxist publications in the mid-1890s.¹⁵

Chernov's activities in his early university life were confined to ideological debates and discussion. While at university he became involved in a student organisation called 'Union of Soviets', a populist circle which irregularly published a journal entitled, 'The Struggle for Public Power in Russia'.¹⁶

Národnoe Pravo (People's Right Party) emerged in 1893 under the headship of M.A. Natanson. It was through Natanson that Chernov's friend E. Iakovlev (who at one time was a disciple of Natanson's, back in Saratov), joined People's Right, and through him, Chernov's brother Vladimir also joined. The Party's goal was to unite revolutionary and liberal elements in order to overthrow despotism. In the party program, printed in Smolensk, one can find populist demands such as representative government based on

¹⁵ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, pp.55-56.

¹⁶ *ibid*, pp.56-57, p.71.

universal suffrage, freedom of religion, press and assembly, inviolability of the person, and political self-determination of nations.¹⁷

The Party quickly crumbled after the arrests of its leading members in April, 1894. Among those arrested were Chernov's brother Vladimir, his sister Nadejda and E. Iakovlev. Chernov himself was arrested at this time; he was only twenty years old. The police accused him of playing a prominent role in the party organisation and having in his possession numerous illegal publications. While in police custody, Chernov wrote an autobiographical account of his life up until his arrest for his interrogators. It makes for interesting reading, although the accuracy of his statements must obviously be called into question in view of his particular circumstances and the audience it was intended for.¹⁸ Chernov states that up until the completion of his schooling in Derpt, he did not participate in any

¹⁷ G.A. Kuklin (ed.), *Itogi revoliutsionnago dvizheniia v Rossii za sorok liet 1862-1902*, (Compilations of the revolutionary movement in Russia for forty years, 1862-1902). Geneva. 1903, p.283. See also Chernov *Pered Burei*, pp.73-79, and *Zapiski*, p.182ff. The program of the party can be consulted in V. Burtsev (ed.), *Za Sto Liet 1800-1896*, (After a hundred years: 1800-1896). London, 1897, p.250, and also in Kuklin in *ibid*, pp.76-77. For a Soviet history refer to V.V. Shirokova, *Partiia 'Narodnogo' Prava*, (People's Right Party), Saratov, 1972.

¹⁸ For an account of Chernov's experiences in People's Right refer to V.M. Chernov 'K istorii Partii Narodnoe Pravo', (Toward a history of the party of People's Right), *Krasnyi Arkhiv* (Red Archive), 1 (1922), pp.282-288. As mentioned in the text, this is a peculiar document. Chernov tried to convince his interrogators (1894) that he was a Marxist, and he also denied belonging to the People's Right.

circles, and his interest at that time centred instead on questions of morality and philosophy. Upon his arrival in Moscow, his interest changed from exploring philosophical questions to the study of economics and politics, reading Marx's *Capital* and other selected works, and mastering the theoretical components of socialism. This, in turn, generated an interest in applying this theoretical knowledge to Russian society. For Chernov, Russia was a land of agriculture, poor, and dominated by small landowners. The Russian peasant lived a more primitive, and hence, more well-rounded life, and a more communal, fraternal, and hence more moral life, than other Russians or Europeans. Chernov believed that the peasant commune, the peasant joint workshop and the peasants' cooperative habits were priceless moral survivors of primitive socialism, which should not be destroyed by competitive, divisive capitalism from Western Europe. 'Capitalism for Russia played and will play a destructive role, more so than a creative one.'¹⁹ Chernov held that the Tsarist state machine, and all other Leviathan states, should be dismantled after the revolution, to give way to small-scale, local, cooperative, and largely non-coercive community governments.

¹⁹ *ibid*, p.284.

After initial questioning by the police, Chernov was transferred to Petropavlovsk prison in St. Petersburg.²⁰ From Petropavlovsk prison, he was transferred to a less stringent detention centre before his trial. This transfer provided him with the opportunity to write and to have access to reading material.²¹ 'With a quill pen in my hands I felt in myself immediately a sense of mental strength....'²² While still under detention, Chernov resolved to write an article in which he would look at the critique of philosophy, continuing questions in the methods of sociology, the theory of struggle for individuality, individual freedom, the fate and destiny of capitalism in Russia, the proletariat and the peasantry, and agrarian revolution. After three months this article was completed. The title was long and awkward, just like its contents: 'Philosophical flaws in the doctrine of economic materialism'.

In January, 1895, after the petition of his father and uncle, Chernov was released and exiled to his native province Saratov, and his home town of Kamyshin. Thus came to an end Chernov's first

²⁰ Chernov's cell neighbours were N.C. Tiutchev and E. Iakovlev with whom he communicated by tapping noises on the cell wall.

²¹ Chernov provides us with a list of his reading material. E. Kant *Critique of Pure Reason*, F.A. Lange *Historical Materialism*, K. Marx *Capital*, P.S. Struve, *Critical notes on the question of the development of Capitalism in Russia* and Beltova *On the question of the Monistic interpretation of history*. Chernov, *Zapiski*, pp.232-233.

²² Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.89.

period of imprisonment. He was later to name this period his abridged nine months university course.²³ Life in Kamyshin proved to be difficult; he was subjected to verbal abuse and harassment for his revolutionary activities. Chernov left Kamyshin, and after a brief stay in Saratov (the city) where he engaged in political debates in the Argunov circle, Chernov arrived in Tambov.²⁴ Tambov at this time was the scene of more agrarian unrest than any other Russian province. Undaunted by the past experiences of the 'going to the people' movement, Chernov and a group consisting of Anastasia Nikolaevna Sletova (later to become Chernov's first wife), her brother S.N. Sletov, P.A. Dobronravov, the brothers Volski and others initiated the first revolutionary peasants' organisation in Russia during the years 1896-1897 in the village of Pavlodar, Borisoglebsk *uezd* (district). From here the movement gradually spread to the surrounding districts of Tambov province until the multiplication of 'brotherhoods', as these revolutionary units were called, culminated in the large-scale insurrections of 1905.²⁵ It was a neo-populist 'going to the people'

²³ Chernov, *Zapiski*, p.236.

²⁴ For an account of this period refer to A.A. Argunov, 'Iz proshlago Partii Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov' (From the past of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party), *Byloe* (The Past), no. 10/22, October, 1907. pp.94-112.

²⁵ O.H. Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism, Promise and Default of the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries February to October 1917*,

movement revitalised, though with a different orientation.

Chernov envisaged the movement as a mass people's movement, based upon a close organisational union between the proletariat in the cities and the labouring peasants in the country villages. It was a town-country alliance that was to later become the cornerstone of his revolutionary strategy for the transformation of Russian society. However, such activity was not enough to placate Chernov, for he had an irrepressible urge to travel abroad, to submerge himself entirely in the revolutionary struggle in the West, to absorb and re-shape the 'most recent words' in world socialist thought. His intention was to stay for a two or three year period, long enough, he thought, to assimilate the various philosophical and political trends. After nine months imprisonment and three years 'administrative exile' under police supervision (1895-1899), Chernov in 1899 obtained a passport to go abroad. He intended to go via St.Petersburg so as to be able to meet Mikhailovsky and the other revolutionaries, N.F. Annenski, V.G. Korolenko, V.A. Miakotin and A.V. Peshekanov. In the end, Chernov was only able to meet with Mikhailovsky, to whom he would later refer as, '...friend, collaborator, teacher, my second father...'²⁶ In the course

Columbia University Press: 1958, p.56.

²⁶ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.55.

of his life, Chernov wrote a number of articles on Mikhailovsky, including personal memoirs and defences of his thought.²⁷ Chernov loved to argue in print by using a series of quotations from others' works, and it is characteristic that his final quotations, presented to close a given argument, usually came from Mikhailovsky. Chernov felt that it was patriotic to praise Mikhailovsky before the world, to assert that Mikhailovsky, a true Russian, had anticipated Western thought in many ways, and had phrased certain strands of Western thought more cogently than any Westerner.²⁸

Mikhailovsky enjoyed great popularity among democratic and revolutionary circles in Russia in the late nineteenth century. In his various writings he called on the Russian intelligentsia to serve the people, sought to arouse a sense of personal responsibility for the country's future, defended democratic traditions, and opposed

²⁷ For example see 'N.K. Mikhailovskii, k 20 letiu do dnia smerti' (N.K. Mikhailovsky on the 20th Anniversary of his Death), *Volia Rossii* (Russia's Will), no.3, Prague, 1924, pp.44-54; *Pamiati N.K. Mikhailovskago*, (In Memory of N.K. Mikhailovsky). Geneva, 1904; 'N.K. Mikhailovskii kak eticheskoi myslitel' (N.K. Mikhailovsky as ethical thinker), *Zaviety* (Legacies), no.1 Janary, 1914, pp.1-46; 'Gdie Klivch k ponimaniiu N.K. Mikhailovskago' (Where is the key to understanding Mikhailovsky), *Zaviety* (Legacies), no.3 March, 1913, pp.88-131; 'Filosofskii osnovy ucheniia N.K. Mikhailovskago' (Philosophical foundations of the teachings of Mikhailovsky), in *Filosofskie i sotsiologicheskie etudy* (Philosophical and sociological studies), Moscow, 1907. pp.5-29.

²⁸ Chernov, *Zapiski*, p.249.

reactionary ideology.

Mikhailovsky considered himself the preserver and continuator of Chernyshevsky's tradition. In sociology, Mikhailovsky, along with P.L. Lavrov, elaborated the idea of a free choice of an 'ideal', which provided the philosophical foundation for the view that social development could be changed in a direction chosen by the progressive intelligentsia. This idea underlies the 'subjective' method in sociology, proclaiming the individual, the 'irreducible' element, to be the starting point for historical research and the supreme measure of social progress. Mikhailovsky rejected Marxism without qualification. His political views were influenced by the Narodnik movements of the 1870s.

Mikhailovsky divided history into three stages in which technology became more complex while human beings, fragmented by increasing division of labour, became more oppressed by giant systems such as Christianity, the tsarist state, and European capitalism. Only the Russian peasant, he asserted, retained in many ways the older, more well-rounded way of life, and only the Russian village commune might serve as a model for the future, small-scale, democratic, socialist communities after the passing of tsarism and capitalism. Although a radical, Mikhailovsky usually

opposed terrorist activity to overthrow the regime. In his last decade, he spent much time controverting Russian Marxists.²⁹

At their St. Petersburg meeting Mikhailovsky gave his blessing to Chernov to study European socialism at its source. 'You of course, are right, seclusion in some sort of Russian national provincialism is unnatural and harmful.'³⁰

In 1899, Chernov left Russia for Switzerland.

²⁹ See J.H. Billington, *Mikhailovsky and Russian Populism*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1958.

³⁰ Chernov, *Zapiski*, p.358.

Chapter 2

The Formation of Social Revolutionism

In 1899 Chernov made the first of a number of trips abroad, not only for further education, but also in order to have a freer hand at revolutionary agitation. After leaving Russia, Chernov arrived in Zurich. The Russian emigre community at this time was primarily composed of young social-democrats involved in the Emancipation of Labour Group, a Russian revolutionary organisation, organised on Marxist principles. Its chief ideologist was G.V. Plekhanov. Chernov met Plekhanov through Axelrod, and was later to recount in his autobiography that the relationship between the two failed - it failed to develop and blossom.¹ In such an atmosphere Chernov's espousal of populist sentiments and peasant revolution found few political adherents or sympathisers. However, one populist group, the Union of Russian Social-Revolutionaries Abroad, did attract Chernov's attention. Under Zhitlovskii's leadership it functioned as the Northern Union's branch abroad.² While in Zurich, Chernov and Zhitlovskii were inseparable. Zhitlovskii advised Chernov to leave Zurich and to travel to Berne, where Zhitlovskii himself was based, in order to enrol as a student at Berne University, The idea was for Chernov to

¹ V. Chernov, *Pered Burei* (Before the Storm), p.103.

² The 'Northern Union of SR's', was founded by Argunov in Saratov in 1896, and removed to Moscow the following year.

extend his philosophical research, an ambition he had held while in Russia. The ultimate goal for Chernov was a doctor's diploma, a matter to which Zhitlovskii attached great importance. Zhitlovskii at this time also promised to publish the Constitution, which Chernov had drafted for the Pavlodar Brotherhood, in the next issue of *Russkii Rabochii* (Russian Worker), a small journal which he edited. In addition, he undertook to open a campaign to redirect the attention of Russian socialists towards the next question on the political agenda: the transfer of the vanguard of a mass organisation from the proletariat in the cities to the peasantry in the countryside.³

Chernov did not hesitate too long as there was nothing in Zurich to keep him there. In the first year that Chernov spent in Berne, rarely a day went by when Chernov did not meet with Zhitlovskii. There was not one question which they had not discussed.⁴ But the harmonious relationship was soon to falter. Chernov states that he soon became aware of ideological differences between the two, although he does not elaborate on this point.⁵ He does however allude to the fact that the failure of Zhitlovskii's *Russkii Rabochii* to publish the Constitution he had drafted greatly

³ V Chernov, *Pered Burei*, pp.102-4.

⁴ *ibid.* p. 105.

⁵ *ibid.* p. 106.

disillusioned and disappointed him.⁶

The Constitution had originally been drafted by Shcherbinin, but Chernov had altered it, as he had altered the name of the organisation, to fit better his plans for wider propaganda among the peasantry. In Shcherbinin's Constitution, according to Chernov, the aims of the society were mentioned very briefly and diffusely. The main content of the Constitution consisted of indicating the obligations of each member towards the whole, and of defining what would happen if he failed in his duty to fulfil them. In this respect the Constitution was more than strict: Chernov noted the recurrent phrase, 'is liable to be deprived of his life.'⁷

Dobronravov delivered the Constitution to Chernov bearing Shcherbinin's title 'Society of brotherly love.' Chernov was to alter it to 'Brotherhood for the defence of the people's rights.'⁸ The original Constitution contained the aim of the society, which was to struggle 'against the *pomeshchiki* and other oppressors of the people who stand between the people and the Tsar.'⁹ This merely reinforced the standard mythology that the tsar was shielded from

⁶ *ibid.* p. 112.

⁷ V. Chernov, *Zapiski Sotsialista-Revoliutsionera*, (Notes of a Socialist Revolutionary), p. 315.

⁸ *ibid.* p. 321.

⁹ *ibid.* p. 322.

the peasants' plight by the gentry and the bureaucracy. The myth was included by Shcherbinin, ostensibly, as Chernov states, to divert suspicion away from the Society should the Constitution fall into the hands of the tsarist police. This contrivance to fool the authorities was abandoned on Chernov's advice, 'so that we should not confuse the people, instead of the authorities (who would not have been fooled in any case).'¹⁰ The published Constitution of the Brotherhood¹¹ contained no explicit mention of the Tsar, but the accompanying 'Letter to the entire Russian peasantry' contained a direct attack on the peasant view that the Tsar himself was innocent of the oppression which was practised in his name.¹² Indeed, perhaps, the most valuable, of all the lessons learned during this period (1896-97) was

that the old bugaboo of the revolutionists, the peasants' loyalty to the throne, could be overcome by skillful propaganda which taught the peasants to look upon the tsar, not as a compassionate father deceived by wicked squires, but as himself the first of the squires and the greatest landowner in all Russia. That was the entering wedge devised by Chernov to split the people from the throne, and it must be admitted that it was an efficacious one, The only trouble was that Chernov did not harvest the fruits of his labor; they were gathered in by the Bolshevik foe.¹³

¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 322.

¹¹ The Constitution was published by the Union in Geneva, in October 1899 - a fact which Chernov's autobiography fails to mention. It was published, not in the journal *Russkii Rabochii*, but as a separate pamphlet, along with an appeal, 'A Letter to the entire Russian peasantry.'

¹² M. Perrie, *The Agrarian policy of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party from its origins through the revolution of 1905-1907*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976, p. 26.

Chernov's vision was to unite the Brotherhoods within Russia, which would be served by a journal published abroad. Semen Akimovich An-Skii (Solomon Rappoport)¹⁴ travelled to Berne in order to meet with Chernov and to unfold to him, on Lavrov's behalf, a plan for an autonomous emigre group, divorced from the existing emigre circles, which would organise the peasant agrarian movement from abroad. This concept was in effect similar to Chernov's own aspirations, and since Lavrov was a most respected if not venerated old Populist Chernov was convinced. When in January, 1900, Chernov arrived in Paris from Berne to meet with Lavrov's group, he was hailed by them as 'the first swallow of Russia's coming revolutionary spring.'¹⁵ Lavrov stood as a magnet for pro-peasant revolutionaries in exile.¹⁶

Unfortunately, Lavrov died on 6th February, 1900, shortly after Chernov's arrival. His funeral attracted Russian Populist emigres from throughout Europe. Far from stifling the concept of a new populist organisation however, his death, in fact, enhanced its

¹³ O. Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, p. 57.

¹⁴ An old populist and former protege of Gleb Uspenskii and at this stage Lavrov's personal secretary in Paris. V. Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p. 113, 114, 116.

¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 191.

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 118.

realisation. The Agrarian Socialist League was founded by Chernov in collaboration with Semen Akimovich An-skii, Leonid Emmanuilovich Shishko, Feliks Vadimovich Volkhovskoi and Egor Egorovich Lazarev. The three last-named had all earlier been involved in London with the 'Fund of the free Russian press'.¹⁷ 'Lavrov's funeral became the christening party of our Agrarian Socialist League: the dear departed was its invisible godfather, and Semen Akimovich An-skii was, as it were the executor of his will concerning the league.'¹⁸ By the end of 1901 the League had released its first publication. At the beginning of 1902, 25,000 copies had already been published under the title *Socialist Revolutionary Party Abroad*.¹⁹ The Agrarian Socialist League had indeed become a major source of radical tracts to be smuggled into Russia.

While he was with the Agrarian Socialist League, Chernov wrote about socialism and the revolutionary process. The policy of the League is set out in an essay entitled *Ocherednoi vopros revoliutsionnogo dela* (The Immediate Task of the Revolutionary Cause), which the League published in London in 1900. Although, the essay was published anonymously, it undoubtedly bears the

¹⁷ V. Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p. 118, pp. 125-27.

¹⁸ *ibid.* p. 124-25.

¹⁹ *ibid.* p. 127-28.

imprint of Chernov.

There is no historical law that says that the socialist organisation of any branch of production may be possible only as a product of preceding capitalist development. There is no historical law that requires that in all branches of production the direct producers first have to pass through a kind of purgatory - the proletarian state - before entering the socialist paradise. For a certain part of the direct producers, for certain branches of production, a more direct transition to socialism is possible through the evolution of various types of communal ownership, including the village commune, to the nationalisation of the land, and through cooperative associations. . . .

We are deeply convinced that in Russia the future can belong only to the party that manages to find a fulcrum for its struggle not only in the city but also in the village, a party that can construct a harmonious program which would enable it to represent and defend simultaneously the interests of the industrial working class and those of the toiling peasantry. Without some support among the peasantry - and still less *against its will* - no revolutionary party in Russia will be able to strike a serious, decisive blow to the bourgeois-capitalist regime, which in our country knows how to live in peaceful harmony with the relics of an age of serf-owning gentry under the wing of Russian absolutism. . . .

Only an alliance between the intelligentsia and the people can transform the spontaneous popular movements of our time into conscious action and direct them along sensible paths. And only an alliance between urban and rural workers will represent a vital force strong enough to break the power of the existing order and prepare the triumph of the ideals of socialism and revolution.²⁰

While confirming the old populist belief - that Russia's future lay in bypassing Western market capitalism - this essay nonetheless

20 *Ocherednoi vopros revoliutsionnogo dela* [The Immediate Task of the Revolutionary Cause] London; Agrarian-Socialist League, 1900, pp.8,23,26.

made an important and radical departure from the traditional view and interpretation of Russian populism. It recognised the fact that capitalism had indeed already emerged in Russia, that Russia had already experienced a substantial amount of industrialisation, and that there had indeed emerged a new class, the industrial proletariat, whose interests should not be ignored, but rather represented and defended. Chernov went one step further and argued for an alliance between the toiling peasantry and the industrial working class. The revolution was no longer to be an exclusively peasant affair.

The traditional view of the later Socialist Revolutionary Party, which Chernov was to lead, portrays it as being primarily peasant - orientated; this is clearly a misapprehension. The Socialist Revolutionaries even from their earliest days took a great interest in the urban proletariat and in return received strong support from workers. In essence, Chernov was advocating a programmatical formulation of a proletarian vanguard leading the peasant masses. One of the tasks which the Agrarian-Socialist League defined as its mission in 1900 was 'the publication and distribution of popular revolutionary literature suitable both for the peasantry, as well as for the urban factory - and craft-worker, especially those having ties

with the village.²¹ While still fundamentally peasant-orientated, the League under Chernov's influence, was concerned with both workers and peasants. The League did not aim at a complete upheaval of the movement's orientation, but it should be recalled that it was Chernov who was the chief theorizer of the concept of a 'proletarian vanguard': the proletariat was given the role of the vanguard; the peasantry the role of the mass strike-force.²²

The emphasis on the proletariat demonstrated the Marxian influence on Chernov's thought. But the key point as regards the idea of the proletarian vanguard in its particular Russian context is that it was of populist rather than Marxist provenance. Until Lenin began his theoretical and programmatic adjustments on the peasantry in 1902 - 1903, Russian Marxists continued to view the proletariat as the revolutionary class *par excellence* and expected little of the petty bourgeois peasantry.²³ While Chernov borrowed much from Marx, he attacked the Marxist view that the peasantry was a reactionary force, together with the view that, in order to achieve socialism, proletarianisation of the peasantry was necessary. While conceding the advent of capitalism in Russia,

21 *ibid.* p.2.

22 V. Chernov, *Zapiski*, p. 336.

23 M. Melanco, *The Socialist Revolutionaries from 1902 to February 1917; A party of the Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers*. Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Indiana University, 1984. p.9.

Chernov argued there was no historical law that determined the compulsory stage of a proletarian purgatory to achieve the socialist ideal. The emergence of capitalism and specifically capitalist agriculture, had not led to the eradication of the small landholding peasant producer who should have been swept away by competition. Indeed, the peasantry had proved much more resilient in the face of agricultural capitalism because it had not been incorporated into large scale production units as was the case of urban industry.

The assumption by classical Marxists, that the working peasantry²⁴ was 'petty bourgeois' was dispelled in the second edition of the pamphlet, *Ocherednoi vopros revoliutsionnogo dela*, published in 1901, as 'both theoretically and practically incorrect.' The term petty bourgeois gave the appearance that the small peasant producer was on the same plane as the large bourgeois. Chernov and his associates in the Agrarian Socialist League argued that there was a qualitative and not just a quantitative characteristic mark distinguishing the economy of the working peasantry and that of the bourgeois capitalist:

24 'working peasantry' [*trudovoe krest'ianstvo* - those who support themselves exclusively by their own labour]

The latter [bourgeois capitalism] is a means of extracting surplus value; the former [peasant economy] is simply a mode of production. The latter guarantees its owner an unearned income; the former does not guarantee its owner against becoming a tributary of capitalism. The great majority of peasants comprise a particular class of independent agricultural producers, the source of whose income is labour - but only labour which is still not alienated from the means of production...In essence, therefore, the working peasantry is an economic category sharply distinct from the bourgeoisie and more closely approximating the proletariat.²⁵

This is not to say that there were not any similarities between the working peasantry, on the one hand and the rural bourgeoisie and agricultural proletariat on the other. The working peasantry, like the bourgeoisie, owned their means of production. However, unlike the bourgeoisie they did not exploit the labour of others. The peasantry like the proletariat supported themselves exclusively by their own personal labour. This labour could be exploited by the privileged classes in the form of taxes and rents. Hence, Chernov among others rationalised that the working peasantry were on the same plane as the proletariat and not the same plane as the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, as Western experience had shown, the peasantry invariably produced popular movements by joining with the proletariat rather than with the bourgeoisie.²⁶ The interests of the working peasantry were thus

²⁵ *Ocherednoi vopros revoliutsionnago dela*, 2nd edition [Geneva, 1901], pp.9-10.

²⁶ *ibid.* pp.42-3.

considered by Chernov to be identical to the interests of the proletariat and he was later to expound on these nebulous and uncoordinated ideas in a much more coherent and cogent fashion in *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*.

The overthrow of the autocratic state was not to be accomplished by the use of terror, a peculiar feature of the old populist movement. Rather, as Chernov states in an early manifesto of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, it could be achieved instead by a passive, peaceful withdrawal of labour and money by the peasants.

What can the intelligentsia and proletariat do *together with the peasantry*? Everything. The peasantry gives autocracy an enormous portion of its material strength: money and soldiers; tsarist power rests upon peasant ignorance as a hitherto unshakable foundation. Therefore, it is not absolutely necessary for the entire peasantry to attack autocracy with armed force in order to destroy it. At the critical moment, for example, merely a mass refusal to pay taxes and furnish recruits may prove sufficient for the chief props of autocracy to totter, and for it to crash down with the first strong push.²⁷

Of course, one had to believe in the potential of peasant revolutionary consciousness. Its genesis came from the populists of the 1870's and was taken up by the neo-populists of the 1890's and early 1900's. However, as stated earlier, the theory of a worker and peasant revolution was essentially a neo-populist concept.²⁸

²⁷ 'Nashi zadachi v derevne' [Our tasks in the village], in *Po voprosam programmy i taktiki. Sbornik statei iz 'Revoliutsionnoi Rossii'* ([Paris:] Tip. Partii Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov, 1903), pp. 28.

Neo-populism with Chernov at the helm recognised and admitted the inevitability of industrialisation and the onset of a capitalist money economy in Russia.²⁹ The Socialist Revolutionaries, as neo-populists, also recognised the deleterious long-term effects of this process on the commune, a point which signified that SR's had eschewed, once and for all, any naive notions of peasant socialism *per se*. They now felt that the still existing communal modes of the peasant economy would smooth the transition to a collectivist economy by serving as a basis for their land socialisation program, which itself was merely a step, albeit an important one, towards socialism. Consequently, Chernov and the SR's were protective of the commune, but did not idealise it, nor were their plans for the achievement of the socialist order based directly upon it.³⁰ Rather, Socialist Revolutionary theory saw the proletariat, a class born of industrialisation, as the leading force in the revolutionary socialist army. As for the peasantry, the SR's, as neo-populists had neglected them not for theoretical reasons, since SR theory believed peasants capable of revolutionary

28 At least until 1905 when Lenin completed his own theory of worker and peasant revolution.

29 D. Treadgold, *Lenin and his rivals*, Methuen, London, 1955, p.65. For a review of neo-populist theory refer to pp.60-82.

30 See especially Perrie, *Agrarian Policy*, pp.177-84; on this crucial point.

consciousness, but because of their decades of long quiescence. Traditional historiography of the SR party implies there was a direct link between early populist theories calling for complete reliance on the peasantry and the rejection of industrialisation for Russia. Riasanovsky states; '... the Socialist Revolutionaries of the twentieth century, led by Victor Chernov... remained essentially faithful to populism staking the future of Russia on the peasants and on a "socialization of land"'.³¹

This is a misinterpretation. While drawing on early populist ideals the neo-populism of the 1890's and the SR party of the first years of the twentieth century was based firmly on the theoretical pronouncements of Viktor Chernov, who devised an original and distinctive Russian theory for peasant revolution.

Meanwhile, the Agrarian-Socialist League continued to fulfil its primary function, the publication and distribution of propaganda literature, especially designed for the peasantry. By January 1902, it had produced 1,000 copies of *'The immediate question of the revolutionary cause'* and a further 1,000 copies of the second edition. In addition to this the League had also published five propaganda pamphlets ; *'How the Minister takes care of the*

31 N. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, Oxford University Press; New York (3rd edition), 1977, p.499.

peasants,' 'How the Hungarian peasants are fighting for their rights,' in (1,000 copies of each) and 2,000 copies each of; *'Peasant unions in Sicily,' 'Sketches from Russian history,'* and *'Conversations about the land.'*³² Unfortunately, the product of their labour was circumvented by an agent provocateur within their ranks. The smuggling of illegal literature into Russia had always been a haphazard affair. In this case N.K.Pauli, who had been assigned the task of overseeing the transportation of the league's publications into Russia, was in the pay of the tsarist secret police, and most of the literature was confiscated at the frontier.³³

In late autumn of 1901, Chernov returned to Berne. It was a time when many of the neo-populist groups felt that the occasion was right to form a national political organisation. The impetus and driving force for unification came from the Southern Union, or more particularly, from two groups within it, Kiev and Voronezh.³⁴ The Party of the Socialist Revolutionaries, as the

32 ' Kassovyi otchet Agrarno-Sotsialisticheskoi Ligi ' (Cash-account of the Agrarian-Socialist League), *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no. 8, 25 June 1902, p.28.

33 E.K Breshko-Breshkovskaia, ' Vospominaniia i Dumy ' (Memoirs and Thoughts) *Sotsialist-Revoliutsioner*, no.4. 1912, pp.104-5, pp.111-12.

34 S. Sletov, ' *K Istorii vozniknoveniia Partii Sotsialistov - Revoliutsionerov*, (Toward the history of the origins of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party), Petrograd, 1917 p.68. Sletov's book is a posthumous reissue of his ' Ocherki po istorii Partii Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov ', published under his party nickname of 'S.Nechetnyi' in *Sotsialist-Revoliutsioner*, no.4 ,1912 pp.1-101. Sletov,while in administrative exile in Tambov (1897) came under the influence of his sister and Chernov,

Southern Union was known, was formed in Voronezh in 1897. The merging of the Southern Union and the only other major grouping, the 'Union of Socialist-Revolutionaries' or Northern Union, (originally centred in Saratov in 1896 by Argunov, but later transferred to Moscow in 1897), saw the birth of the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries. Other, smaller Socialist-Revolutionary groupings in Russia, such as Gershuni's predominantly Jewish 'Workers Party for the political liberation of Russia' and the independent Saratov circles also adhered to the new party at this time.³⁵ While unification was achieved within Russia, the emigre community outside Russia in Western Europe was still in disarray. M.R.Gots³⁶ and Chernov were enthusiastic prime movers in seeking to unite the various quarrelling factions.³⁷ After some deliberations with Evno Azef and Gershuni, who had travelled

Sletov came to reject his social-democratic views, especially those concerning the peasantry. When Chernov left Tambov in 1899, it was Sletov whom he entrusted with the continuation of his work among the peasants. In 1901 Sletov, too, went abroad to Switzerland, where he joined the Agrarian-Socialist League; V. Chernov *Zapiski Sotsialista-Revoliutsionera*, pp. 330-32. Sletov, who was killed on active service in France in 1915, was a prominent member of the SR Central Committee, and the brother-in-law of Viktor Chernov.

35 *ibid.* p.68. For a detailed account of the amalgamation of neo-populist groups forming the united PSR refer to *ibid* pp.67-106.

36 Viktor Chernov's first acquaintance with Mikhail Gots began in Berne in 1901. V.Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.147. Chernov was to later describe him as a 'friend and older brother'. V.Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.146.

37 Sletov, p.107.

abroad as representatives of the embryonic PSR, agreement was reached. The result of long and protracted negotiations was the Socialist Revolutionary Party, formally founded in that year, although it gained cohesion and importance only with the relative freedom within Russia, in 1905-06.

The newspaper '*Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*', originally published by the Northern Union, was to be transferred abroad to Switzerland under the editorship of Chernov and Gots.³⁸ The newspaper was to become the official organ of the newly formed and united party.³⁹ A Central Committee was established to head the party. Among its principal members were M.A.Natanson, E.K.Breshko-Breshkovskaia, N.S.Rusanov, V.M.Chernov, MR.Gots, and G.A.Gershuni. Zhitlovskii's 'Union of Russian Socialist-Revolutionaries' was to be transformed into the 'PSR Organisation Abroad', which was also to include the editorial boards of the two

38 The first two editions of *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* were published in Tomsk. The 3rd edition was published abroad under the editorship of Gots and Chernov after the tsarist police had seized their secret press in Tomsk on the 23rd of September 1901. A.A. Argunov, 'Iz Proshlago Partii Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov' *Byloe*, Vol.10/22 October 1907, pp.110-12.

39 From its third number in January 1902, *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* officially became the organ of the united party. The theoretical organ of the Party was to be *Vestnik Russkoi Revoliutsiia* (Herald of the Russian Revolution), a journal edited in Paris by K.Tarasov (N.S.Rusanov) it appeared irregularly between 1901-1903. *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* appeared between 1901 and 1905. *Sotsialist-Revoliutsioner* another party journal had just four issues from 1910-1912.

party organs, *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* and *Vestnik Russkoi Revoliutsiia*.⁴⁰ The party also at this time, acquired its slogan. *V' bor'be obretesh ty pravo svoe* (In Struggle thou Shalt Win thy Rights!).⁴¹

The Agrarian Socialist League finally merged with the newly formed party in 1902, although not without some trepidation. Several older populists were reluctant to place their faith in a new party, fearing the League's autonomy would be threatened. Some felt the League should remain a non-party organisation open to both socialist-revolutionaries and social-democrats. One social-democrat, D. Soskis, did, in fact, join. But Volkovskoi, in particular, felt that if the League merged, it would lose Soskis and indeed, inhibit future social-democrats from joining.⁴² In fact, of course, C.A. An-skii together with Chernov had originally formed the League as a non-partisan organisation.⁴³ Furthermore, old populists were reluctant to see their faith in agrarian socialism entrusted to a younger group, which did not seem to share their view of the significance of the peasantry for the revolutionary

40 *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no.3, January 1902, p.1.

41 Sletov. p.108. A. Spiridovitch, *Histoire du Terrorisme Russe 1886-1917*, (Paris,1930), pp.102-05.

42 V.Chernov, *Pered Burei*, pp.158-59.

43 *ibid.* p.158.

cause.⁴⁴

Whatever their doubts, the merger was a *fait accompli*. No general party program was adopted by the SR's during the early years. Their views and demands were reflected in the pages of the newspaper *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, the journal *Vestnik russkoi revoliutsii* and the collection *On Questions of Program and Tactics* (1903). What was expected of Chernov was that he should work on the clarification of the party's prospects, program, strategy and tactics. It was a period that Chernov later described as a turning point in his life.⁴⁵

Despite the negotiations and attempts to reach a common cause, however, it is not surprising that within the newly formed SR Party there were divergent views as to the role of the peasantry in the revolution. The Northern Union, for example, placed its faith in the intelligentsia and the industrial proletariat as the vehicle for political liberty. The peasants' role in the contemporary movement was not of primary importance:

The peasantry, representing as it does the overwhelming majority of the working population of Russia, is destined to play an important part in our economic and political future. But while assigning the peasantry such a role in the future, the social-revolutionary party cannot *at present* consider it to be a major support for the achievement of political freedom, nor as suitable soil for social-revolutionary propaganda.

44 *ibid.* pp.158-59.

45 *ibid.* p.136.

Because of its political subjection, its poverty, its ignorance, and its dispersal over the vast territory of Russia, the peasantry is relatively inaccessible to conscious *mass revolutionary* propaganda and a movement of the peasantry is at present impossible.⁴⁶

The movement was to comprise the socialised intelligentsia and the urban proletariat, even though they conceded that the capitalist encroachment into agriculture was rapidly stratifying the peasantry into a class of exploiters and exploited, the majority of whom constituted the exploited 'working class'. Hence, the class position of such a rural proletariat was similar to the socialist aspirations of the urban proletariat. Agitation was therefore to be directed towards the more developed sectors of the peasantry - but according to the Northern Union, not at that moment.

The Southern Union disagreed.

We are convinced that without the sympathy and support of the peasantry, the class of factory and industrial workers, is incapable of destroying the power of the Russian government and of obtaining even political freedom, not to mention the economic transformation of society. And we must recognise that revolutionary activity among the peasantry is completely possible at the present time, since within the peasant estate [*soslovie*] numerous groups have already formed who are as interested in the abolition of the existing economic and political structure as is the industrial proletariat.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *Nashi Zadachi* (Our Tasks) 2nd edition. London, 1900, p. 60.

⁴⁷ *Manifest Partii Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov* (1900); quoted in Perrie, *Agrarian Policy*, p. 45.

Like their northern comrades, the Southern Union agreed that a differentiation or stratification had emerged within the peasantry. They identified three groups, the rural petty bourgeoisie (who exploited hired labour), the rural proletariat (who lived exclusively by hiring out their labour), and the 'land-short' peasantry, who occupied an intermediate position between the first two groups and comprised the great majority of the peasantry.⁴⁸ While, this last group still owned their means of production they were being squeezed into impoverishment and forced like the rural proletariat to sell their labour. Consequently their class position was that of the urban proletariat. However, the struggle for political freedom was to be a gradual long term process. The Southern Union like their northern union counterparts viewed the primary task as the agitation and organisation of the urban proletariat: 'However important and essential revolutionary activity in the countryside may be, we shall at present, out of purely tactical considerations, aim to concentrate our existing forces in the towns - mainly because of the higher cultural level of the urban working population, compared with the rural, and the greater productivity of work in this milieu.'⁴⁹

48 *ibid.* p. 45.

49 *ibid.* p. 46.

The Northern and Southern Unions, with the exception of the Agrarian Socialist League, and some of the Parisian "Old *Narodo-Vol'tsy*" from whom the League had taken much of its membership, viewed their immediate task as the revolutionary agitation and organisation of the urban proletariat. The desire to launch an immediate campaign amongst the peasantry that Chernov and others of the Agrarian Socialist League advocated fell on deaf ears. Not that Chernov was contradicting his earlier stance of a 'proletarian vanguard' when he attempted to enlist support for his work among the peasantry. Essentially the difference at this time lay in pragmatic considerations and tactics, not in theory. The diverse views represented a logical extension of policies in the revolutionary populist circles of earlier decades, rather than an outcome of the a new program.⁵⁰ Thus, even the pro-peasant wing of the newly formed SR Party the Agrarian Socialist League itself, as stated earlier, displayed a lively interest in urban workers.⁵¹

Until Chernov's party program was accepted at the First Party

⁵⁰ In the 1880's and 1890's, revolutionary populist (*Narodo-Vol'tsy*) circles, disillusioned with the peasants after numerous failed attempts to lead them into revolt, concentrated for the most part on the proletariat.

⁵¹ Chernov had attempted earlier in 1898 to enlist these internal Russian groups for his work among the peasantry, but they had failed to hear his call. V. Chernov, *Zapiski*, pp. 332-5.

Congress in Dec. 1905 - Jan. 1906, programmatical formulations were expressed in the various party newspapers and journals. In mid-1901 the new journal *Vestnik russkoi revoliutsii* published an important editorial "Our program" which served as the basis for joint action among the Northern Union, the Paris Old *Narodo-Vol'tsy* and the Workers' Party. "Our program" clearly assigned the major role in the struggle with autocracy to the socialist intelligentsia and the urban workers. The peasants, in this concept, 'constituted only a broad area of secondary support for the democratic revolution, which would be won primarily in the urban centres.'⁵² In early 1902 the new central SR paper *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* - representing the Northern Union and the Southern Party - stated its program as follows:

The party devotes its attention primarily to work among two strata of the population, the industrial workers in large centres, and the intelligentsia... The working class, especially its more advanced sector, concentrated in large towns and industrial centres, constitutes the main support of the party.⁵³

Consequently, the Agrarian League, many of whose members had viewed amalgamation with some suspicion, joined the new party

⁵² 'Nasha programma', *Vestnik Russkoi Revoliutsii*, no.1 (July 1901), p. 12.

⁵³ 'Neotlozhnaya zadacha', *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no.3 (Jan. 1902), p. 8.

only as individuals, and subsequently remained organisationally aloof precisely in order to have the freedom to pursue their foremost mission of propagandising the peasantry.⁵⁴ It is important however, to view the program of the Agrarian Socialist League, which gave primacy to peasant affairs, in its proper context. League members were aware that they were operating in a movement which showed opposite priorities that is, primacy to workers' affairs. The League, under Chernov's tutelage, did not aim at a complete reversal, but at a compromise: attention to both workers *and* peasants.

While the programmatic pronouncements of the various factions relegated the peasantry to a secondary position, the whole question was a matter of degree and not kind. Not one of these groups advocated abandoning the peasantry.

While the sentiments expressed within the new SR party may have antagonised certain members, the year 1902 witnessed events that accelerated the change in SR attitudes toward the peasantry. Peasant risings in the southern provinces of Kharkov and Poltava sparked a huge revolt that quickly spread along the Volga and into the Urals, finally engulfing the entire south of Russia. *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, which had so recently proclaimed the

⁵⁴ V. Chernov, *Pered Burei*, pp. 158-9.

workers as its primary focus of attention, now devoted its entire June 1902 issue to the peasantry.⁵⁵ The Agrarian Socialist League at its First Congress in August 1902 found the attitude sufficiently conciliatory to put aside its former suspicions. It approved of federation with the larger party; and actual union soon followed.⁵⁶ It has been argued that from this time forward the SR party devoted passionate attention to peasant affairs. Indeed, the SR party created armed peasant brotherhoods throughout widespread areas of rural Russia, and created the 'SR Peasant Union' in 1902. Great runs of peasant-orientated agitational literature were printed both abroad for shipment home through secret channels, and inside Russia on illegal presses. SR's founded peasant newspapers. This period has been described by M. Perrie as 'the triumph of Chernov and his "agrarian" faction over the *narodovo-vol'tsy* [pro-worker faction] in the SR party.⁵⁷ Most historians, whether before Perrie or after her, have concurred, resulting in the traditional interpretation of the SR's as a peasant orientated party.

⁵⁵ See *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no.8, 1902.

⁵⁶ *ibid.* no.9,1902. This represented the vindication of Chernov's advice to An-skii (who for a time refused to cooperate with Rusanov the editor of *Vestnik Russkoi Revoliutsii*), that their best tactic was to go along in a united front, hoping that in the course of time their opponents would be converted to the League's point of view. It was a tactic that Chernov was to pursue throughout his revolutionary career, unfortunately not with the same degree of success. V. Chernov, *Pered Burei*, pp.160-61.

⁵⁷ M. Perrie, *Agrarian Policy*, p. 58.

In point of fact, Socialist-Revolutionaries continued to give serious attention to urban workers' affairs after 1902. Socialist Revolutionary attitudes, programs, and practical activities as regards workers have their roots in the intricacies of SR theory. It appears paradoxical, that an organisation which posterity has almost universally proclaimed a peasant party should have seen its initial neo-populist leadership centre their debate on the question of whether or not the peasantry constituted fertile ground for revolutionary propaganda.

Populist programs of the 1870's and certainly neo-populists' of the 1890's, rarely advocated concentration on the peasantry alone. As for workers, all agreed that the proletariat was the vanguard of the revolutionary movement. The chief theoriser of the worker vanguard concept was none other than Viktor Chernov, the doyen of the 'pro-peasant' wing of the party.

Chernov's triumvirate of workers, peasants and intelligentsia represents a fundamental programmatical and theoretical statement which is unaltered throughout the history of the SR party. Also, the order of preference is of primary importance and marks yet another clear distinction between 'Populism' and Chernov's 'neo-populism'. Workers were given first preference,

while the peasantry were assigned a secondary place. In addition, the intelligentsia, since it lacked a mass basis, was last. Its role as a third priority only is important since populist programs of the 1870's had given a certain preeminence to the intelligentsia. But in any case, the conjunction of worker, peasant, and intelligentsia was not new among SRs even in 1902. An editorial in the very first issue of *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* in 1901⁵⁸ proclaimed the necessity of carrying on the struggle in the name of workers, peasants and intelligentsia. The official SR program worked out in 1905 and approved by the First Congress of the SR Party in Dec. 1905 - Jan. 1906, did not contain the precise phrase 'worker vanguard', but a quick glance through the planks of the program will dispel any notion that the SRs were restricting themselves in any way to the peasantry or even favouring them. In the section on 'National Economic Affairs', the question of workers' legislation is, in fact, addressed before the land question, and at just as great a length.⁵⁹ In general, the program of the First SR Congress carefully and fully reflects the triadic theory of the toiling class. The phrase 'toiling class' and the crucial concept it represented were for the most part

⁵⁸ *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no.1, 1901, p.1.

⁵⁹ See *Protokoly Pervogo Sezda Partii Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov*, (Proceedings of the First Congress of the Socialist Revolutionary Party), Paris. 1906.

the products of Chernov's fertile brain.⁶⁰

When the SR Party achieved organisational unity in 1902, it immediately joined the Socialist International with its indubitably Marxist-proletarian orientation.⁶¹ From this time forward, the SR's maintained a full-time representative in the International - first Volkovskii, later Rubanovich - and attended all its conferences and congresses. SR's took part in all International functions from the time they joined until 1917. At the 1904 International Congress in Amsterdam, the SR's were assigned one of the two Russian votes, while the Social Democrats were awarded the other. This was evidence of the International's recognition of the large proletarian component of the SR Party. In their report to the congress, the SR's proclaimed that they were 'defending their positions in the cities, where they sought to convert workers, while at the same time endeavouring to propagate their ideas among the peasantry.'⁶²

Until the Party Congress of December 1905 - January 1906, the party leaders were so enthralled with the feats of the Fighting

⁶⁰ It is intriguing to note that Chernov's triadic 'toiling class' precisely foreshadows current Soviet definitions of its social base: workers, peasants, and toiling intelligentsia.

⁶¹ See *Protokoly Pervogo Sezda*, p. 1.

⁶² *Rapport du Parti Socialiste-Revolutionnaire de Russie au Congres Socialiste International d'Amsterdam* (Paris, 1904), pp. 10-11.

Organisation that they accorded it full autonomy, not even presuming to dictate the choice of victims, to say nothing of regulating its internal affairs or selecting its personnel. However, the wave of terror leading up to the Revolution of 1905 demanded some comment by Chernov, as many of the most spectacular terrorist acts were known to have been perpetrated by individuals and groups connected with the inchoate SR Party. After the assassination of the very powerful reactionary police chief, von Plehve, in 1904, Chernov wrote typically, that '...the stirring events of our day recall to elders among us the tremendous events of twenty five years ago, and the noble fortitude of those who sacrificed their lives at that time.'⁶³

It takes no very profound reader of Aesopian language to deduce that Chernov was praising terror in this article. From 1900 to 1905 Chernov strongly favoured terrorist activity. In the 1890s, before the Socialist Revolutionary Party was organised, Chernov's activities in the black earth provinces of central Russia did not lead him to promote violence. On the contrary any violence on the part of the peasant groups he was forming could have led to restrictive repression before the groups could resist. Recognising this, he

⁶³ Chernov, *Jubilei Nikolaia Poslednago, 1894-1904* (Jubilee of Nikolai the last), n.p. 1904, p.6.

counselled his subordinates to make sure that the peasants understood that the immediate future required restraint.⁶⁴ This advice made no commitments about the period beyond the immediate future.

The outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war at the beginning of 1904 and the assassination of Plehve on 15 July, 1904 prompted the formation of a group within the party who felt that its terrorist activities were too exclusively political and should be more closely integrated into the mass movement by the sanctioning of economic terror. The outspoken faction who advocated this view were called 'agrarian terrorists'.⁶⁵

Chernov opposed the radical tactics the 'agrarian terrorists' advocated. He urged moderation and in response to the 'agrarian terrorist' ascendancy, the official leadership of the SR Party presented a policy statement that was more specific about the party's attitude towards violence. It envisaged the organisation of a network of peasant unions which would coordinate their activities with those of the urban party organisations and prepare for a single

⁶⁴ Chernov, *Zapiski*, p.79.

⁶⁵ 'Agrarian terror' was defined as the use of violence against the lives and property of the economic oppressors of the people, and included such measures as : illicit cattle grazing and woodcutting on the landowner's estate; the seizure of his property by the peasant communes, arson and other destruction of property; the murder of *pomeshchiki*; and armed attacks.

coordinated movement. As a preparation for this rising, the peasants should back up their political and economic demands by a boycott of the landowners and the authorities. Such a boycott would, of course, provoke repressions, and the peasants would then meet violence with violence. At this stage, the local peasant organisations would act as 'combat detachments' and lead the peasants' opposition. A series of such conflicts would amount to a partial or general uprising, supporting or supported by a similar movement in the towns.⁶⁶

This policy statement reinforced the town-country alliance, however the Revolution of 1905 caught Chernov and the SRs by surprise. Detached from events in Geneva, he could do little but to offer spirited advice. Chernov's optimistic hopes of the ability of the SR Party to direct events failed to eventuate.

⁶⁶ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, pp.215-222.

Chapter 3

1905 Revolution

In 1905 for the first time in Russian history a broadly-based liberation movement, feeding on age-old tensions and frustrations, boiled suddenly to the surface. Oppositionist political parties, which had until then laboured in the darkness of the underground, now found themselves thrust into the light of day. The task confronting them was truly awesome. As Chernov later recalled: 'the brief era of freedom revealed to us the depth of the masses.'¹ None of the parties proved equal to the task and the chance of overthrowing the government slipped away. But, as Lenin often pointed out, the revolutionary movement of 1905 was the teacher of 1917. This was a lesson Chernov and the SRs failed to learn. Events outstripped theory and while the SRs were heavily involved in the proceedings they failed to direct them. Spontaneity remained the keynote of the peasant movement throughout 1905, and if its course sometimes corresponded to the blueprint set out for it by the SRs, this was due more to coincidence than to design.

The events of 1905 reinforced Chernov's early views of a peasant-proletariat, town and country alliance. While condoning the spontaneous actions of the peasants in their seizure of the land he advocated party intervention to guide and direct the peasantry.

¹ *Protokoly pervoi obshchepartiinoi konferentsii partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov, avgust 1908.* Paris, 1908. pp.96-97.

The SRs, he said, welcomed all spontaneous expressions of discontent, insofar as they revealed the growth of a revolutionary mood in the countryside. It would be pure demagogy, however, if they were actually to advocate the use of traditional peasant tactics, such as 'agrarian terror'; instead, they should urge organisation and coordination with the urban movement. Similarly, their slogan was not simply 'take the land', but involved the concept of socialisation. This could be achieved by direct action as part of the revolutionary peasant movement. The peasants should:

seize the fields and have them ploughed by the commune; use the pastures and forests on the state and appanage lands and on the gentry estates, in an organised manner; and then *drive out* the authorities and *take possession* of the land. This possession of the land, however, should consist not in the arbitrary seizure of particular plots by particular individuals, but in the abolition of the boundaries and borders of private ownership, in the declaration of the land to be common property, and in the demand for its general, egalitarian and universal distribution for the use of those who work it.²

The social democrats, while conceding the importance of the peasantry in the revolutionary struggle, nevertheless still adhered to the Marxist notion of the peasantry as petty bourgeois and hence antagonistic to the proletariat. Thus during the year 1905, Lenin advocated the view that while the peasant movement was

² 'Reaktsionnaia demagogiia i revoliutsionnii sotsializm', *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no.67, May 1905. p.3.

significant, the solution was 'to support the peasant bourgeoisie against any kind of feudalism and against the feudal landlords; to support the urban proletariat against the peasant bourgeoisie and any other bourgeoisie.'³ Yet this lacked the specifics of the SR land policy and, if anything, can be criticised as being opportunistic, leading to injustice and inequality of distribution.

[On]...the question: to whom shall the confiscated land be given, and how? ... There we shall certainly be with the rural proletariat, with the entire working class, *against* the peasant bourgeoisie. In practice, this may mean the transfer of land to the class of petty peasant proprietors wherever big estates based on bondage and feudal servitude still prevail, where there are as yet no material prerequisites for large-scale socialist production; it may mean nationalization, provided the democratic revolution is completely victorious; or the big capitalist estates may be transferred to *workers' associations*; for from the democratic revolution we shall at once, and exactly in accordance with the measure of our strength, the strength of the class-conscious and organized proletariat, begin to proceed to the socialist revolution. We stand for continuous revolution. We shall not stop halfway. The reason we do not now immediately promise all sorts of "socialization" is simply because we know what is actually required for that task and do not gloss over but reveal the new class struggle that is ripening within the ranks of the peasantry.

At first we shall support the peasantry in general against the landlords, support it to the limit and by every means, including confiscation, and then (or rather not "then," but at the same time) we shall support the proletariat against the peasantry in general.⁴

³ 'The Proletariat and the Peasantry,' *Vpered*, March 10, 1905, quoted in Vernadsky, *A Source Book on Russian History, from Early Times to 1917*, 3 vols, Yale University Press, New Haven: 1972, Vol.III. p.715.

⁴ 'The Attitude of Social Democracy toward the Peasant Movement,' *Proletarii*, no.16, September 1, 1905, quoted in *ibid*, pp.715-716.

One of the most visible and famous aspects of the revolutionary workers' movement in 1905 were the workers' Soviets, which sprang up in the capitals as well as in innumerable provincial towns. SRs participated from the outset, in forming their factions in the numerous Soviets. The peasant revolutionary movement similarly saw the creation of a body which was to rival the revolutionary parties in their claims to represent the interests of the peasantry: the All-Russia Peasant Union.⁵ The SR's attitude towards this union was defined by Chernov in an article in the party's central organ. The party, he said, welcomed the movement as a means of drawing into the political struggle broader strata of society than would be attracted to purely party organisations. SRs were encouraged to join the unions in order to exert an influence on their aims and tactics, and thus to ensure that the party gained the greatest possible advantage from their formation. To this end, Chernov welcomed the extension of the 'Union of unions' to include trade unions of workers and peasants, as well as unions of professional men which had originated the movement.⁶ These

⁵ The congresses of the Peasant Union met in July and November 1905. The initiative for the formation of the All-Russia Peasant Union came in May 1905 from a group of liberals in Moscow who sought to involve the peasantry in the campaign for the formation of professional unions, which were playing such an important part in the development of the revolutionary movement at that time.

⁶ Chernov. 'Organizatsionnii vopros', (The Organisational Question),

sentiments were fully in accord with his earlier pronouncements on a triple alliance.

On August 6 an imperial manifesto created an elective Duma with consultative powers. The proposals were totally rejected by the SRs, who planned to turn a boycott of the elections into a general attack on the autocratic government.

In the towns, Chernov proposed an active boycott to be backed up by a general political strike. In the countryside, the electoral gatherings of heads of households should be replaced by protest meetings of the entire village, and the villages should refuse to pay taxes or supply recruits for the army. The peasants should re-elect their own officials then launch a political strike and boycott of the authorities. Such a movement in the countryside, with the slogan 'land and liberty,' supported by a general strike in the towns, would constitute a major assault on the autocracy.⁷

As always, Chernov was reluctant to predict in advance what might be the extent of the achievement of the forthcoming revolution. Before 1905, the party had assumed that the introduction of socialism would be preceded by a transitional period of

Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia, no.69 June, 1905, pp.2-5.

⁷ Chernov. 'Vneshnii mir i vnutrennyaia voina,' *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no.73 August, 1905, pp.3-5.

indeterminate length, in which power would reside in the hands of the bourgeoisie. At the same time, the party hoped that the revolution would go beyond the framework of bourgeois democracy in its achievements in the field of social and, particularly, agrarian reform. The SR minimum program, which included the demand for the socialisation of land - an anti-capitalist measure - was designed as a guideline for this transitional period, although the SRs insisted that they could not predict in advance what form of state structure would replace the autocracy.⁸

In January 1905, immediately after Bloody Sunday, Chernov argued that the party should aim to extend and expand the revolutionary movement as far as possible, with no preconceived ideas concerning its possible limitations. For the true revolutionary, he claimed there were no limits except the degree of energy, preparedness and consciousness of the masses. It might well be that the revolution would be bourgeois in its outcome, but this did not mean that the party should restrict its program and tactics in advance to the achievement of a purely bourgeois revolution.⁹

⁸ See 'krestianskoe dvizhenie,' *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no.8 June, 1902, pp.3-4; 'Sotsializatsiia zemli i kooperatsiia v selskom khoziaystve,' *ibid*, no.14 December, 1902, pp.5-6, no.15 January, 1903. p.7; 'Proekt programmy PS-Rov,' *ibid*, no.46 May, 1904, pp.1-3.

⁹ All opposition leaders were convinced that they knew what sort of upheaval was in store for Russia. They all knew it was not to be a 'socialist' revolution. They all knew it would eliminate the absolute power of the Tsar,

The SRs should aim to achieve not only political but also social reforms from the revolution.¹⁰

Marxists were criticised by the SRs for merely wishing to sharpen the bourgeois revolution instead of looking ahead to the socialist phase. Political freedom was a necessary first phase of the revolutionary process and in this sense the revolution would be analogous to Western revolutions. Liberty was a prerequisite for organising the masses. Nevertheless, those who championed the class struggle of the workers could not fight for the victory of the middle class. On this crucial point the SRs were in agreement with Lenin. although for social democrats this was a paradoxical position in their eyes.

Thus, it was not the middle class who were to play the leading role (indeed, it must be prevented from doing so, according to Lenin and Chernov) but instead the urban proletariat. N. Onegin in an article in *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, asserted that in view of the weakness of the liberal bourgeoisie, the revolution would have to be made by

and transfer the power to a democracy, that it would inaugurate an era of personal and public freedom, and that it would end in the enactment of sweeping social reforms. Martov called it a 'bourgeois' revolution; Miliukov accepted the term though would not use it himself; Lenin insisted on calling it a 'bourgeois democratic' one; Chernov refused to accept or use the word 'bourgeois' at all, and spoke of a 'toilers (*trudovaia*) or 'political' revolution. Treadgold. p.138.

¹⁰ Chernov. 'Preddverie revoliutsii,' *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no.58 January, 1905, p.2.

the workers and peasants under the leadership of the revolutionary intelligentsia. The overthrow of autocracy would therefore also involve the overthrow of the landed gentry and the bourgeoisie who were its main supporters, and this would guarantee the introduction of socio-economic as well as political change.¹¹ Put simply, the workers and peasants would destroy autocracy, seize power, prevent the entrenchment of the bourgeoisie, establish a democratic republic and sweep on to social revolution without a break. In essence, the attainment of socialism was a revolutionary process of 'permanent revolution', a concept not too dissimilar to Trotsky's concept of 'permanent revolution'.

The forthcoming revolution will be achieved mainly by the efforts of the workers - the proletariat and peasants. They should take from this revolution all that the social conditions permit them to take - the most important of these conditions being the extent of their own consciousness. They should not restrict the scale of this revolution in advance for the benefit of the bourgeoisie, but on the contrary they should turn it into a permanent one, oust the bourgeoisie step by step from the positions it has occupied, give the signal for a European revolution, and then draw strength from there.¹²

The socialisation of land - which was *not* socialism - would give the workers and peasants a strongpoint from which they could

¹¹ N. Onegin. 'Politika i sotsializatsiia zemliv nashe programme,' *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no.67 (Prilozhenie), May, 1905, pp.6-8.

¹² M Gots. 'Iz dnevnika chtatelii,' *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no.70 July 1905, p.12.

advance to build a complete socialist state. There were still to be two phases, but no significant pause between phases. On this point Lenin and Chernov agreed. Tactically speaking a consensus can be said to have been reached in regard to SR and SDs' (both wings) analysis of 1905. The enemy was tsarism; the temporary ally was found in the liberals; the leading force was the urban proletariat; the mass support was the peasantry; and the goal was initially that of a liberal democracy. The sole difference was on the agrarian question. Marxists wished to extend property in land, the SRs wished to socialise it.

In October 1905, the revolutionary movement culminated in an extensive general strike. Paralysed in their essential activities and forced at last to recognise the immensity of the opposition, Nicholas II and his government finally capitulated. On October 17, the tsar, advised by Witte, issued the October Manifesto. This brief document guaranteed civil liberties to the subjects, announced a Duma with the true legislative function of passing or rejecting all proposed laws, and promised a further expansion of the new order in Russia. In short, the October Manifesto made the empire of the Romanovs a constitutional monarchy.

Also, it split the opposition. The liberals and moderates of all sorts

felt fundamentally satisfied. The revolutionaries, such as SDs and SRs, on the contrary, considered the tsar's concessions entirely inadequate and wanted, in any case, a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of the 'four-tailed' system - universal, equal, direct and secret-suffrage, not handouts from above.

Nonetheless, a degree of liberation did occur after October 1905 and provided a freer atmosphere for revolutionaries to operate in. At the end of October the emigre SR leadership, with the exception of Mikhail Gots, who was too ill to travel, returned to Russia from Geneva to take over direct control of the party's activities there. *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* ceased publication,¹³ and Chernov was entrusted with the task of establishing a legal party newspaper in St. Petersburg to take its place. Chernov was the first to travel to Russia on a false passport under the fictitious Jewish name of Arona Futera.¹⁴ Chernov arrived in Helsinfors (Helsinki), Finland, after a boat trip from Stockholm, which landed him originally in Abo (Turku) in Finland. A train from Helsinfors to St.Petersburg completed Chernov's journey to Russia. While in Finland Chernov was able to meet revolutionary activists such as Tideman, Frankengauzer, Volter and Stenbek.

¹³ The last issue being no.77 November, 1905.

¹⁴ Chernov. *Pered Burei*, p.231.

Chernov arrived in St.Petersburg towards the end of October 1905 and went straight to the offices of *Russkoe Bogatstvo* (Russian Wealth), where he was subsequently advised to explore the possibility of taking over a legal populist newspaper *Syn Otechestva* (Son of the Fatherland) as the successor to *Revoliutsionnia Rossiia* and as the official SR newspaper. Indeed, Chernov later stated that of all the populist presses *Syn Otechestva* was the closest to his position.¹⁵ After some preliminary discussion *Syn Otechestva* became the official SR newspaper and began publication in the beginning of November with the SR slogan prominently displayed on the front page. The new editorial board of *Syn Otechestva* was to consist of Shreider, its existing editor; Peshekhonov and Miakotin, from the board of *Russkoe Bogatstvo*; and Chernov and Rusanov, the latter being editor of the SR journal *Vestnik Russkoi Revoliutsii*.

The relative freedom of the post October period engendered in many legal populists a desire to come out from the underground into the open and form a legal party organisation. Indeed, Annenskii wished to make it a precondition for the publishing of *Syn Otechestva*. Chernov urged caution as he viewed the future more pessimistically than Annenskii. Events proved Chernov's

¹⁵ *ibid*, p.237.

stance as being correct. The end of December saw the government, in a new wave of repression close the fledgling newspaper. Its survival can be measured in weeks.¹⁶ The issue of an open and legal party was to re-emerge at the party's First Congress which was to be held towards the end of December. The split that occurred then was to prove to be of a permanent nature and lead to the secession of the 'Popular Socialists' to form a separate party.

Just prior to the party congress Chernov addressed the St.Petersburg Soviet, a proletarian organisation which arose in mid October 1905, largely under Menshevik auspices. The SRs were influential enough to have one of their party leaders, Avksentiev elected as co-chairman of the Soviet.¹⁷ On the key issue of the eight hour day, the SRs, whose program had long sponsored this reform, rejected a Bolshevik resolution calling for the Soviet to demand the *immediate* introduction of the eight hour day in the capital's factories. In his speech Chernov responded with sarcasm and asserted that the Soviet had not yet defeated the autocracy and the Bolsheviks were already wanting to take on the capitalists. SR

¹⁶ For a detailed account of the period refer to Chernov, *Pered Burei*, pp.223-255, which is based on an article that appeared in 1923. See Chernov, 'Ot Revoliutsionnoi Rossii k Synu Otechestva,' (From Revolutionary Russia to Son of the Fatherland), *Letopis Revoljucii*, ed. Grzebin, Berlin 1923, no.1 pp.66-98.

¹⁷ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.256.

opposition to the resolution calling for the *immediate* introduction of the eight hour day was tactical, since populist, Proto-SR, and SR workers' programs had long included planks in favour of limiting the work-day and, in recent years, for the eight hour day. Chernov on several occasions claimed, in fact, that SRs had called for the eight hour day before the SDs. On the question of the eight hour day the SR leadership showed greater sensitivity to the desires of factory level activists and to practical realities than did their Social Democratic cohorts, since SR and SD workers in the factories, including Bolsheviks, considered the immediate demand for the eight hour day impractical.¹⁸ Having passed the resolution, the Soviet almost immediately regretted it. The hasty and premature implementation of the demand caused factory owners to call a lockout devastating to workers.¹⁹ SRs responded by urging the use of forceful means 'to impel the owners to open the factories immediately.'²⁰ SRs and SDs then cooperated in forming the so-called Unemployment Commissions to aid the 70,000 unemployed and locked-out workers in the capital.

The primary lesson to be drawn from consideration of SR

¹⁸ *1905 god v Peterburge. Sovet rabochikh deputatov*, (The year 1905 in Petersburg. Soviet workers deputies). Leningrad, 1925, vol. II, pp.45-59. Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.252.

¹⁹ *ibid.* p.211.

²⁰ *ibid.* p.112.

involvement in the Petersburg and Moscow Soviets is that both bodies, while jealously guarding their proletarian status, recognised the SR party as a major workers' party along with the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. The smaller workers' parties such as the Bund and the Polish Socialists were granted only minor representation. This alone is worthy of notice in view of long-held views about the SRs as a peasant party.

Chapter 4

Marx and the Agrarian Question: Class Analysis

Marxism is a *doctrine* of revolution. Its theories of history, economic relations and class support a revolutionary end-in-view. Russians had been theorising about revolution and how to make one for some time before Marxism appeared to offer Russian thinkers support for the argument that Russia needed a revolution. Viktor Chernov was one of those thinkers. It is safe to say that he would have been a revolutionary if Marx had not ever lived. He did not question Marxist *revolutionism*. He merely posed the question : do Marx's sub-hypotheses on history, economic relations and class support the major theory that revolution must occur as Marx said it would, for the reasons Marx offered, in every social-political unit? Chernov's critique of Marxist class analysis was based on the subjective method, the structure of which denies Marx's theory of history. For Chernov, Marx had started off in the right direction in his appreciation of subjective factors of knowledge and action, but had lost himself in economics. The causes of social-historical phenomena would not reduce to the simple categories of economic relations. Chernov's revision in this area of the general theory fell within the larger question of whether Marxism was universally valid, that is, applicable to a nation in which, to use one of Chernov's recurring phrases, ' the overwhelming majority of the

population ' derived their livelihood from toil on the land. The subjective method in sociology proved extremely useful in this area, for he turned again to early Marxism to discover the source of Marxism's anti-agrarian world-view. In an essay entitled '*Obshchestvenno-psikhologicheskie istochniki pervonachalnykh agrarnykh vozzrienni Marksa i Engel'sa*' (Social-psychological sources of Marx and Engels' original agrarian views), Chernov attempts to apply psycho-social analysis to a given historical problem. It is an interesting early attempt: unfortunately the argument is unprovable.¹

¹ Chernov, '*Obshchestvenno-psikhologicheskie istochniki pervonachalnykh agrarnykh vozzrienni Marksa i Engel'sa*,' in *Marksizm i agrarnyi vopros : istoriko-kriticheskii ocherk*, (Marxism and the agrarian question: a historical-critical essay, Petersburg, 1906, p.132). *Marksizm i agrarnyi vopros*, cited here as *Miav*, is a collection of essays, many of which appeared at the turn of the century in *Russkoe Bogatstvo* (Russian Wealth) and *Nakanunie* (On the Eve). See '*Tipy kapitalisticheskoi i agrarnoi evoliutsia*' (Types of capitalist and agrarian evolution), *Russkoe Bogatstvo*, Nos.4,5,6,10 (April, May, June, October, 1900); and under B.Olenin (one of Chernov's pseudonyms), '*Stranichka iz istorii razvitiia sotsialisticheskoi mysli*, (Pages from the history of development of socialist thought), *Nakanunie*, from II, No. 19 (June, 1900) to III, No. 29 (May, 1901), eight issues. When Chernov collected his essays, he gave them the titles cited here followed by *Miav*, and pagination from that collection. Chernov also developed his theory of a class and class struggle in a series of articles in *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* in 1902 and 1903. In particular refer to '*K teorii klassovoi borby*' (Towards a theory of class struggle), nos.26,27,34, 1903. Also see *Krestianin i Rabochi kak ekonomicheskiia kategorii* (Peasant and Worker as economic categories), Moscow, 1906 and *Marksizm i slavianstvo k voprosu o vneshnei politik sotsializma* (Marxism and Slavdom: toward the question of a foreign policy of socialism), Petrograd, 1917.

For Marx and Engel's, he argued, Paris in 1848 was the centre of the world - the centre of revolutionism and radical thought. They had a large emotional stake in the revolution, especially Engels, who was in Paris during the summer. When the revolution failed, Engels found a scapegoat in the French peasantry, who were propagandised ' through the filthy canal of bourgeois leaflets...'.² Engels' bitter accusations against the peasants were historically correct. The French peasants did cling to their plots of land, were drawn to the name Napoleon, and did display a kind of fanatic hatred of the Parisian proletariat. But why had not the spokesmen of the workers carried out their own propaganda? And who is to blame if the bourgeoisie realised the elemental power of the peasantry ? All the peasants received from the revolutionary government was higher taxes. But Engels had drawn the conclusion that the peasants were reactionary. It was unfortunate, Chernov thought, that Marxism was developing as a world-view just during this epoch of sharpest conflict between village and city. This left its mark on Marxism, and ' traces of it are still not eradicated to the present time.'³

In his judgment as to the causes of Marxist 'peasantophobia'

² . Chernov, 'Obshchestvenno-psikhologicheskie istochniki,' *Miav*, p.135.

³ Chernov, 'Obshchestvenno-psikhologicheskie istochniki,' *Miav*, pp.136-140; Chernov, 'Popravki i ogovorki' (Corrections and exceptions), *Miav*, p.144.

Chernov professed reluctance to question such authorities as Marx and Engels, but added that he did 'not particularly like the way of appealing to the 'church fathers'; it reminds one too much of scholastic orthodox theology.⁴ Moreover, since Marx and Engels had drawn some correct deductions from the lessons of 1848, he proposed to ask a few questions through an analysis of three major Marxist documents which showed that in countries with divided toilers - urban workers and peasants - a revolution could succeed only through union of these forces.⁵

Chernov thought that Marx was already by 1850 shifting his appreciation of the political role of the peasantry in 1848. In considering the 1848 revolution, Marx saw that anti-peasant measures emanating from the cities had turned the peasants against the revolution. And he came to believe that the working class could not carry out the revolution, could not make one step forward until the peasants and petty bourgeoisie accepted the proletariat as its vanguard.⁶ The battle between industrial workers and bourgeoisie

⁴ Chernov, 'Popravki i ogovorki,' *Miav*, p.144.

⁵ Chernov, 'Popravki i ogovorki,' *Miav*, p.145 and throughout. His analysis rests on *Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich, 1848-1850* (Berlin, 1850); *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte*, third edition (Hamburg, 1885); *Der Bürgerkrieg in Frankreich*, third edition (Berlin, 1891). Excerpts from all of these are readily available in L.S. Feuer's (ed.), *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, Fontana, 1978.

had failed to give the struggle a national content. Chernov drew an obvious conclusion. Since reactionary elements had been able to localise the movement in several large centres and create discord between city and village. 'It seems more than clear that the single historical conclusion which we might draw from these events [of 1848] are as follows: in countries where the working population falls into two great parts - industrial proletariat and peasant agriculturists - in such countries only that movement can be vital, rational and successful which will synthesise with earlier unsuccessful movements and unify the concentrated power of the city and the support of the village peasant mass.'⁷ This was, of course, the revolutionary ideal. But did not peasants and proletarians fall into opposing classes? No, and Marx himself showed why.

Marx had seen that 'the agricultural population of France is more than three-quarters of the entire nation, consisting for the most part of so called free landholders.... 'But [Chernov continued to cite Marx] under the system of parcellisation, the land is no more than a tool, a means of toil.' The peasants are exploited by mortgage, rent

⁶ Chernov, 'Popravki i ogovorki,' *Miav*, pp.145-148; see Feuer, *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings*, p.337, p.332-333, p.371. Chernov was working from *Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich* and *Der achtzehnte Brumaire Louis Bonaparte*.

⁷ Chernov, 'Popravki i ogovorki,' *Miav*, p.149, p.171.

and national taxes, and '...the exploitation of the peasant is distinguished only in form from the exploitation of workers. The exploiter is one and the same - capital. Titles of ownership belonging to the peasant serve only as a talisman by means of which it [capital] could charm and bewitch the peasantry - and, on occasion excite the peasantry against the industrial proletariat...'⁸

In Chernov's view Marx was moving towards a view of peasants and proletarians as differing only in the form of their exploitation. In Marx's own terms, he continued, it is difficult to include the toiling peasantry, for whom the land is only a pure 'productions instrument' in the general category of middle class. The peasantry is not an estate, but a class of small independent producers who live by their own toil. They are not excommunicated from the means of production, but are undoubtedly only a part of the huge army of toil, a part of the toiling people, another part of which is the industrial proletariat. There are elements among the peasantry who carry some marks of exploiters, for they live in part by unpaid toil. They are not toilers who earn their bread by the sweat of their brows, but they have not yet become bourgeoisie who live entirely upon the labour of others. To number in the ranks of the

⁸ *ibid.* pp.149-50.

bourgeoisie peasants whose exploitation in the words of Marx differs "only in form" from [the exploitation] of workers - that commits violence on healthy thought. It ignores [peasants'] essential economic position.⁹ Even in *Das Kapital*, Marx says that the land in the hands of the small producers is only a 'productions instrument,' or, in other words ' a small means of production which serves the producer himself as a means of production and not growth in its value by means of the labour of others, [and is] in no sense capital.'¹⁰

Consequently, Chernov continued, small producers are not petty-capitalists and, hence not petty bourgeois. The latter are only quantitatively different from the large bourgeoisie. But between the toiling peasantry and the capitalist class there exists a qualitative difference, a direct opposition, as between exploited and exploiters. On the other hand, between proletariat and peasantry there is only the difference in the form of their exploitation. Hence, it is artificial to tear the toiling peasants out of the common working mass and relegate them to the petty bourgeoisie. 'In this lies one of the essential points of "our differences" with contemporary "Russian" Social Democrats.'¹¹

⁹ *ibid.* p.150.

¹⁰ *ibid.* pp.150-151; he cites *Das Kapital*, I, p.616.

¹¹ *ibid.* pp.150-151.

Chernov had built here a tight argument, a subtle combination of reason and authority which made him appear more scholastic than he might have wished. Again Marx had laid the snare which Chernov sprung on the Marxists, and he had brought off this little coup in enemy territory, in economic analysis. For he had done nothing except show that if one were going to divide classes on the basis of economic exploitation, then Marx and reason demonstrated that peasants were as much exploited as their brother proletarians. It is this matter of exploitation which defined - *economically* - membership in *narod*.

At the same time, Chernov was not blind. He knew that Marx and Engels had made statements about peasants and agricultural economics which were hardly in the spirit of the passages he cited to show how Marx had once accepted peasants in the legions of the righteous. Chernov, using an historian's device, explained the contradictions as a result of time: the views of Marx and Engels had changed as they moved through their lives, just as conditions around them changed their views. Marx in the last volume of *Das Kapital* saw that agriculture and agriculturists suffered from the inroads of 'capital,' yet he, in the *Manifesto*, spoke of the 'idiocy of rural life,' and in his *Der Achtzehnte Brumaire of Louis*

Napoleon, referred to peasants as a 'class of barbarians standing half outside society.' Thus, Chernov thought it 'interesting' to trace the source of these changes in Marx's and Engels' agrarian views and 'at the same time...trace the social-psychological motives of this evaluation.'¹²

The 'evil of the day' when Marxism was taking shape was the collision between city workers and peasants, a collision which led to the failure of democratic movements. The reactionary tactic of divide and rule worked because the forms of exploitation were different, and, as a result, the most pressing demands of peasants and proletarians were different. The peasants were not formal proletarians but prey to the usurer, merchant, landlord and government, and were exploited no less and often more than the pure-blooded proletariat. They did not psychologically join the spirit of the proletariat because they were formally owners of the means of production and considered themselves entrepreneurs. They did not ever come naturally to the idea of a collective state as a means to peasant ends. It was clear to Chernov that the idea of state socialisation would have to come from outside, for the state was, to

¹² Chernov, 'Sviaz agrarnykh vozzrienii Marksa i Engel'sa s ikh pervonachalnym obschim mirosozertsaniem' (The bond of Marx's and Engel's agrarian views with their original general world-view), *Miav*, pp.110-112; 'Agrarnaia teoriia Karla Marksa' (The agrarian theory of Karl Marx), *Miav*, throughout.

the peasants, an alien , external power. One could draw another conclusion: nothing good was to be expected from the peasants, that the peasant was a hopeless individualist, and therefore, bourgeois. Considering the peasants as conservative, even reactionary, Marx and Engels had thought the only hope was for the peasants to lose their narrow interests and assume the world-view of the proletariat.¹³

It was assuming a great deal, Chernov wrote, to expect a whole class to forego its present interests for future, ideal interests.¹⁴ And Marx, with all his genius, was mortal: he could not deduce all development from the limited frame of his epoch. He generalised from the data before him but could not see the limitations to his generalisations which would derive from further development. Now, with the publication of Franz Mehring's *Aus dem literarischen Nachlass von Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels und Ferdinand Lassalle*, (Stuttgart, 1902), one could discover Marx's and Engels' social-political expectations, and (one must draw Chernov's conclusion for him), if one knew their expectations, one could understand their low esteem for peasants.¹⁵

¹³ Chernov, 'Sviaz agrarnykh vozzrienii,' *Miav*, pp.112-116; 'Popravki i ogovorki,' *Miav*,pp.151-152.

¹⁴ Chernov, 'Popravki i ogovorki,' *Miav*,p.152.

¹⁵ Chernov, 'Sviaz agrarnykh vozrienii', *Miav*,pp.118-119. The first three volumes of Mehring's *Nachlass* appeared in 1902, the fourth in

As concerns the problem of class interest, Chernov pointed out that Marx himself had noted that the proletariat had also voted for Louis Napoleon. And he asked why this also was not a 'brilliantly foolish anachronism, a joke of world history, a pathetic farce, etc.'¹⁶ His point is well taken. Why should Marx apply two measuring rods to one social action - one for peasants and another for proletarians? If proletarians were so much more politically aware than peasants, why had they also voted for Louis Napoleon? Had Marx erred in his assessment of what social factors were effective in determining class interests and action?

Marx had argued that the mode of production of *Parzellenbauern* isolated them from each other. They acquire a mode of life more in exchange with nature than in relation to society. If millions of families live in economic conditions which isolate their form of life, interests and education from the life, interests and education of

1922. Since the last contains many pre-1850 works, Chernov probably would have made a stronger argument had he had access to this further material.

¹⁶ Chernov, 'Popravki i ogvorki', *Miav*, p.155. Chernov could have added more: 'The symbol that expressed their [the peasants] entry into the revolutionary movement, clumsily cunning, knavishly naive, doltishly sublime, a calculated superstition, a pathetic burlesque, a cleverly stupid anachronism, a world-historic piece of buffoonery, and an undecipherable hieroglyphic for the understanding of the civilised - this symbol bore the unmistakable features of the class that represents barbarism within civilisation.' See Feuer, *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings*, p.354.

other classes, then these millions of families constitute a class. If there exist between petty peasants exclusively local connections, and their individual interests do not become general, they in no way form a class. Chernov countered: the idea of class is relative. For example, the bourgeoisie is a class in so far as it oppresses workers. However, the bourgeoisie is itself a differentiated and complex aggregate. Witness the conflict between bourgeoisie who live by rent and those who live by capital, an important and dramatic conflict in world history.¹⁷

Furthermore, is it reasonable or real to divide society into just two classes? Chernov would argue in the negative, for society is to the highest degree complex, and was 'wary of an exclusively economic category...' To postulate inevitable struggle between classes necessitates smoothing out all differences within classes. There is no single class *Parzellenbauern*. It is a class only within the limits of social forces which oppose it, and is not a one-sided comparison of its constituent elements. As men become conscious of struggle between elements of society, their narrow personal, group, and professional interests recede before class interests. Society devolves into two powerful forces: the army of toil and the army of exploitation. However, upon the banner of toil there is written the

¹⁷ Chernov, 'Popravik i ogovorki', *Mlav*, pp.155-158.

destruction of all classes and the triumph of the general human ideal, and this general ideal transcends class interests. 'The growing army of toil becomes more and more not only a great material force but, even earlier, a greater intellectual force in contemporary society. And this is because its cause is the cause of all humanity; its reign is not the reign of privilege but the reign of toil, which is itself the general human element.'¹⁸

It must be recognised that the above statement expresses Chernov's vision of man as an individual integrity fulfilling his humanity in society, but the sympathy which informs them is within the spirit of the intellect which made them available to other minds. Chernov presented here an important qualification to the lines of the *Manifesto* which claim 'that in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour...a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift and joins the revolutionary class that holds the future in its hands.' In short, idealisation of class interests does not stop at the limits of economic categories. True, narrow interests coalesce into class interests, but class interests are only, to paraphrase Nietzsche, a rope across the abyss from individual to man. One may argue that middle class merchants and industrialists supported revolution in 1789 and 1848 only to gain direct political victory over landed

¹⁸ *ibid.* pp.158-159.

agriculturally based nobility, but the ideals of revolution were universalised. *The Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen* is not a class document.

For Chernov, Marx and Marxists' insights into the causes of social action were limited by their economic analysis and, as a consequence, could not comprehend that one need not be a Hegelian to see the working of ideals in history. Chernov's understanding that the 'army of toil' was not only a great material force, but a greater intellectual force, is an essential qualification of economic materialism. In turning Hegel right side up, Marx, in effect, misunderstood the truly important thing Hegel had to say: ideas make history go. Chernov pointed out that ideas are not capitalised, not deified, but are no less real, and, while not solving the vast problem of the effect of ideals upon social action, the idea of man as a mental and material individual integrity had at least cast the problem in terms permitting further inquiry. One could use the term class interest and think in terms of economic classes, but it was false to extract the effect of ideals from class structure and action, just as it was 'assuming a great deal to expect a whole class to forego its present interests for future, ideal interests.' Change would come, but how could one relegate peasants to Tartarus when they

had not yet conceived themselves as constituent elements of universal man with universal ideals? In the closing pages of his essay, *Popravki i ogovorki*, Chernov noted that only the Proudhonists had tried to lead and propagandise the peasants in 1848. The peasants, earning their daily bread, heard only distant thunder.¹⁹ In retrospect, one may conclude that Chernov dedicated his life to the attempt to correct in Russia the failures of 1848 in France.

Indeed Engels had apparently inadvertently seen that an even earlier peasant movement could have been successful if it had gained allies. Engels, in *The Peasant War in Germany*, analysed the peasant uprising of the early sixteenth century and concluded that decentralisation as well as poor communication had kept the German peasants from victory. Only an alliance with another estate could have given them victory, but the petty burgers wavered, and the proletariat had little influence. Chernov was delighted Engels had made the peasant movement the locus of revolutionism. The bourgeoisie, with Luther and Melancthon at its head, was extremely superficial, but the sectarians had a completely different character in so far as they represented a direct expression of peasant and plebeian demands. They demanded the restoration of primitive Christian

¹⁹ *ibid.* pp.167-168.

equality between all members of the commune and accepted it as the norm of civil society.' Thomas Munzer, the leader of the peasant movement, considered 'the kingdom of God nothing but a social structure in which no longer existed class differences, private ownership and state power independent of and alien to the members of society.'²⁰

Munzer, as Engels said, was compelled to take over a government in an epoch when the movement was not ready for the domination of the class it represented, but this meant, Chernov underlined, that the movement was not reactionary, but in fact, too far ahead of its time. Moreover, the movement was informed with a spirit of moral asceticism, again as Engels pointed out. Does this not mean

²⁰ Chernov, 'Krestianskii voyny pered sudom Marksiza', (Peasant wars before the court of Marxism), *Miav*, pp.180-182, p.184. Chernov's citation of Engels was not exact. Again he had the meaning right, but he combined passages. Compare the passages which Feuer includes in *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings*, p.465, p.474. '...this program demanded the immediate establishment of the kingdom of God...by restoring the Church to its original status and abolishing all the institutions that conflicted with this allegedly early Christian, but, in fact, very novel church. By the kingdom of God, [Thomas] Munzer understood a society without class differences, private property, and a state authority independent of, and foreign to, the members of society. All the existing authorities, in so far as they refused to submit and join the revolution, were to be overthrown, all work and property shared in common, and complete equality introduced.' p.426. 'Nevertheless, he [Munzer] was bound to his early sermon of Christian equality and evangelical community of ownership, and was compelled at least to attempt its realisation. Community of ownership, universal and equal labor, and abolition of all rights to exercise authority were proclaimed.' p.436.

that a peasant movement can be progressive or even socialist and that a large measure of its drive stems from a sense of morality? Was it correct to consider, as the majority of contemporary Marxists, 'the peasant movement of the past as only externally revolutionary but essentially reactionary?'²¹

Chernov injected a new and important qualification into the idea of class, a qualification Marx had mentioned, but had not developed, in his attempt to found all social actions on the basis of economic theory. Chernov returned to the problem in two essays which are valuable because they provide a systematic analysis of the idea of social classes. Both essays also provide insight into the labours Victor Chernov was willing to devote to the task of getting his thinking straight and making his points clear. His references to numerous works are impressively scholastic.²²

²¹ Chernov, 'Krestianskii voiny,' *Miav*, pp.184-185, p.187.

²² Chernov, *K teorii klassovoi borby*, (Towards a theory of class struggle), Moscow, 1906; Chernov, *Proletariat i trudovoe krestianstvo*, (Proletariat and toiling peasantry), Moscow, 1906. *K teorii* had its foundation in an article under the same title that appeared in *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, NOS. 26, 27, 34. *Proletariat i krestianstvo* duplicates much of the argument of *K teorii*, but adds material from contemporary socialist studies in Europe. Chernov's references in *K teorii* include: Charles Andler, *Le Manifesto Communiste: Introduction historique et commentaire*, Paris, 1901; V. Cherkezov, *Pages of Socialist History*, no edition cited, evidently published in English with the author's name appearing as Tcherkesoff; Benedetto Croce, *Materialisme historique et economie Marxiste*, Paris, 1900; Louis Blanc, *Geschichte der zehn Jahre von 1830 bis 1840*, Zurich and Winterthur, 1843. Friedrich Engels, *Herrn Eugen Duhring's Umwalzung in der Wissenschaft*, cited as *Anti-*

To understand the idea of class, Chernov prepared a short history of the idea. He found Engels in his book about Ludwig Feuerbach noting that in England from 1815 onward many men were beginning to realise that the centre of gravity of political struggle lay between bourgeoisie and landed aristocracy. In France, the same consciousness developed after the Bourbon restoration, and after 1830, in both countries, the working class was recognised as a third element struggling to dominate. French historians such as Louis Adolphe Thiers, Francois Guizot, Francois Mignet and Jacques Thierry were beginning to see class struggle as the key to French history from the middle ages. Chernov called in Labriola to attest to Thierry's influence and saw that Louis Blanc and Guizot, although

Duhring, third edition; Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach*...no edition cited; Friedrich Engels, *Französische und Englische Klassenkämpfe*, included in Mehring's *Nachlass*; Eduard Fuchs, *Wilhelm Weitling* no edition cited; Nikolai G. Chernyshevskii, *Sochineniia*, Geneva, 1870, I; Aleksandr Herzen, *Sochineniia*, no edition cited, I; David Koigen, *Zur vorgeschichte des moderne philosophischen Sozialismus in Deutschland*, Bern, 1901; Antonio Labriola, *Essai sur la conception materialiste de l'histoire* Paris, 1897; Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, no edition cited, III; Karl Kautsky, 'Klasseninteresse-Sonderinteresse-Gemeininteresse,' *Neue Zeit*, XXIV, No.24 1903; Chernov also refers to Kautsky's study on the Erfurt Program of the German Social Democratic Party; *Iskra*, Russian Social-Democratic organ, several issues; Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Wealth of Nations*, Russian edition Petersburg, 1896; Werner Sombart, *Die deutsche Volkswirtschaft im XIX Jahrhundert*, no edition cited; Lorenz von Stein, *Geschichte des Sozialismus und Kommunismus des heutigen Frankreichs*, Leipzig, 1842. This study will cite Chernov's references by author's name in parentheses, e.g. (Labriola), when the author is not specified in the text.

displaying programmatic differences, were operating within a kind of class theory. In Chernov's judgement, Benedetto Croce was a judicious observer of the development of class theory, beginning with Sir Thomas More and directing attention to Lorenz von Stein as an influence upon Marx. In short, he concluded, the idea of class struggle was in the air before Marx used it in his theory of society. Victor Considerant, a Fourierist, had even divided society into possessing and disposed classes, and a secret society in the Babeuf tradition had almost exactly expressed the idea of proletarian dictatorship as the transitional stage between revolution and socialism (Cherkezov). One should not forget, Chernov added, that this *Societe des Saisons* was affiliated with the *Bund der Gerechten*, from which later emerged the Communist League in whose name the *Communist Manifesto* appeared. Marx only added a new expression to an available idea.²³

Even some Russian thinkers had begun to talk in terms of class struggle. Herzen, who was reading Blanc, Saint-Simon, Thierry, Guizot and articles from the young Hegelian *Deutsche Jahrbucher*, already in 1842 had written that in the life of humanity two tendencies appear. 'Two groups struggle to maintain a monopoly over the fruits of labour. This polarity is one of the phenomena of

²³ Chernov, *K teorii*, pp. 4-8.

vital development of humanity, a kind of pulse... that drives humanity forward.' Chernov argued that Herzen, under the influence of Hegel, had also been turning Hegel right side up, for Herzen had written that 'the philosophy of each epoch is an actual historical world, captured in thought.' Furthermore, Herzen had hailed the left revolutionary wing of the young Hegelians, saying that German philosophy was now leaving the auditorium to enter life, to become social, revolutionary, vital and, consequently, direct action in the world of events.²⁴

One must note again Chernov's pattern of argument wherein he emphasizes that Russian thinkers were participating in the movement of European thought. This instance is particularly compelling because it shows, not only that Chernov's intellectual roots were deep in the tradition of Russian idealism, but also because it indicates his insight into the generation of ideas. Martin Malia's study of Herzen also draws attention to Herzen's Hegel period and cites some of the same passages Chernov considered important. In Malia's judgement, Herzen remained an idealist, and Malia considers it difficult to take seriously Soviet historian's treatment (following Plekanov and Lenin) of Herzen's rationalism

²⁴ *ibid.* pp. 9-10.

'as very near to the philosophy - though not the economics or sociology - of Marx....'²⁵ In *K teorii*, Chernov was concerned with economics and sociology, exactly those areas from which Russian Marxists excluded and exclude the labours of Alexander Herzen. If one looks through Chernov's eyes with the aid of Malia's magnifying lens, one sees immediately that Chernov, with the benefit of late nineteenth century social and psychological ideas, thought he saw in Herzen an expression, not of a formal philosophical scheme, but rather an insight into the sociological problems revolving around the action of ideals on social action. Chernov broke into his argument to blaze at Plekhanov, who discounted Marx's debts to his predecessors, and denied that he had ever claimed Marx was a plagiarist. But 'to prove the greatness of a thinker does not mean to place him somewhere above the earth like a *deus ex machina*.' The history of socialist teaching showed that Marxist scientific socialism did not leap into the world but developed from utopian socialism. Certainly there was a difference between them as abstract types. But to realise their connection is to help 'distinguish utopian elements from positive-scientific [socialism].'²⁶ Chernov used 'utopian' here in its broad, idealistic

²⁵ M. Malia, *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism, 1812-1855*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1961. p.250.

sense. For Chernov, Marxists, inexplicably, refused to understand the efficacy of ideals. Marx was not the only one who could read Hegel as mystified sociology and, coupling this reading with current social ideals, derive an entire 'positive scientific' system of social analysis.

Chernov went on from this display of intellect to admonish his readers, in a familiar schoolmasterly tone, that the first rule of scientific thought was to avoid vague terms which are unclear, and always to use the same terms to mean the same thing. He was aiming to show that the term 'class' had suffered an exceptional deprivation of scientific thought. Pre-Marxist social thinkers had rarely achieved the criteria Chernov established, partly because they confused class, caste, and estate, and partly because they did not distinguish clearly between classes and gradations within classes. They used distinctions such as deprived and privileged, poor and rich, persecuted and persecutors.

Of the pre-Marxists, Louis Blanc and Lorenz von Stein had made the strongest attempts to clarify this confusion of terms. Blanc defined 'bourgeoisie' or 'middle class' as those who possessed the tools of toil and were, thus, to a certain degree independent. To the bourgeoisie he opposed 'people,' but twice used the term 'workers'

²⁶ Chernov. *op cit.* pp. 110-115.

in the same category, defining them as those who did not possess capital and are completely dependent in respect to elementary needs of life. Chernov said that the basis of Blanc's criteria was relationship to means of production and dependence on others. Equating means of production with capital was the fault of Blanc's analysis. He had put peasants into the class of industrial capitalists because both possess capital.²⁷ Lorenz von Stein had improved Blanc's categories with an excellent characterisation of the modern industrial proletariat in comparison to classes of earlier periods. And Stein had made many accurate remarks about the psychological content and development of class antagonisms. Stein also included in the term 'bourgeois' the idea of possession. But the proletariat had nothing except its labour and the desire to use it. The proletariat saw the owner as his enemy because the owner stood above it. The proletariat also understood inequality in labour and remuneration. Therefore, the European proletariat was the seedbed for social movement. Revolution was now social, although earlier revolutions had been political.²⁸ Chernov interrupted himself to argue against Werner Sombart, who claimed that Marx had gone no further than Stein. Certainly Marx had used the

²⁷ *ibid.* pp.15-17.

²⁸ *ibid.* pp. 16-17.

categories 'exploited' and 'exploiter', but this did not mean that Marx had stopped at the limits of Stein's categories.²⁹

To show how Marxism built on these earlier ideas of class, Chernov turned to Engels' early *Französische und Englische Klassenkämpfe*. Engels used the expression 'two nations' when speaking of France; a nation of owners and a nation of toilers. The war between these two nations is war between classes. In the *Manifesto*. Marx and Engels had continued this pattern of division, using the terms 'bourgeoisie' and 'proletariat'. But they also recognised: the 'Lumpenproletariat', a remnant of old society; 'aristocracy', also a remnant; and a middle layer consisting of small traders, small industrialists and rentiers, artisans and peasants. In *Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich*, Marx further distinguished between the great landlords as a class, finance aristocracy, industrial bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, peasantry, intelligentsia, lumpenproletariat, and working class. Finally Kautsky, a major inheritor of the tradition, tried to order Marx's classes into 1)

²⁹ *ibid.* p. 17. Tucker's, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx*, Cambridge University Press, second edition, 1972 pp. 114-117, discusses Marx's debt to Stein and argues convincingly that in Stein's book (the same Chernov was using) Marx found the proletariat to fill in the real world his Hegelian category of alienated man. Tucker maximizes Stein's influence, but recognises that another position exists, referring to Sidney Hook. *From Hegel to Marx: Studies in the Intellectual Development of Karl Marx*, (New York, 1950), p. 199. Hook minimizes Stein's influence on Marx. Chernov merely recognised Stein's system as part of a climate of opinion.

possessing classes, either great landowners or exploited owners, and 2) dispossessed; proletarians of capitalist industry, a transitional layer of artisans, special class of servants, lumpenproletariat, *i.e.* beggar proletariat.³⁰

Remembering Chernov's 'first rule of scientific thought,' one can understand his sarcasm when he pointed out that Marxism had not settled on a class for peasants. Peasants appeared in the notion of workers, in the middle layer with petty traders and rentiers, as petty bourgeois, and, finally, among the possessing classes, along with the great owners and wealthy. Is there not something wrong with a system of analysis which shoves peasants around in its categories as Marxism has done?

If one abandons juridical bases of class division into estates and deals only with economic categories, is the problem then only to define relationship to production? Is the basis of class division, participation in wealth? Chernov contended that the acquisition of surplus value - the unpaid toil of others - is that criterion which unifies the bourgeoisie into a solid class. But Social Democrats consider it false to seek the basic distinguishing criterion of class in the source of income because, they say, this would mean allotting

³⁰ Chernov, *K teorii*, pp. 19-20.

first place to 'relations of distribution' which is actually a result of production relationships. Marx pointed out this error and named those who did not recognise it vulgar socialists a long time ago.³¹

Chernov countered this accusation by calling on Marx and Engels to testify that only in the 'final account' were conditions of production responsible for social phenomena. He added his own epitaph that it is 'vulgarised Marxism which wants absolutely to establish a direct parallelism between conditions of production and all other social phenomena.' Division of society is directly related to distribution, and this is the primary criterion for belonging to a class. This is not to deny the connection of class structure with the entire productive structure of a given society.³² Engels in *Anti-Duhring* said explicitly: 'Distribution is not simply a passive product of production and exchange; with them it also exerts a strong counter influence on production and exchange.' And Marx, as the last chapter of volume three of *Das Kapital* proves, had, in fact, not gone beyond the classical economists in respect to classes.

Marx followed Adam Smith's delineation of classes according to their income from land rent, wages, and profits of capital, that is the three basic sources of income upon which the entire population exists.³³ And, once more, Russian social critics were in the stream

³¹ *ibid.* p. 22; Chernov cites *Iskra* (Spark), No.27.

³² *ibid.* pp. 2-24.

of European thought. Chernov took time to point out that forty years earlier Chernyshevsky had stated almost exactly the position Kautsky achieved after study of Marx's statements in *Das Kapital*. People coalesce into classes according to 'the basic, particular source of their income....' 'Stating this opinion we do not pretend to say something new. We merely assume the point of view of N. G. Chernyshevsky.' Adam Smith marked out the solution to the question of class divisions which received its most 'profound statements in the works of socialists - N.G. Chernyshevsky, K. Marx, and K. Kautsky.'³⁴

Where, it is necessary to ask, was Chernov going with his customary horde of citations? He was going to the land with credentials of citizenship for peasants in the community of toil. The Russian Social Democrats (of *Iskra*) had a false theory of class struggle. They chose to throw the Russian *muzhik*, this patient sufferer of toil and hunger, this native brother of the factory worker, from the midst of the workers into the ranks of the bourgeoisie. 'This false theory is not only a logical mistake; it leads inescapably to practical, political errors, each of which may have evil results for the cause of revolutionary socialism.'³⁵ In

³³ *ibid.* pp. 23-25.

³⁴ *ibid.* p. 25, pp. 27-28.

x *Proletariat i trudovoe krestianstvo* Chernov added ^{that} This inclusion of all our "peasantry, in its entirety" in the ranks of the bourgeoisie - even the petty [bourgeoisie] - seems to us a shameless attack not only upon reality but also upon human logic and human feeling....³⁶

Appeals to Adam Smith, Chernyshevsky, Marx and a host of others does not prove whether production or distribution is a more 'primary' economic relationship. It may only prove that Smith and all the rest were wrong, and that Chernov could not distinguish between sound and unsound analyses. It must also be noted that Chernov was not, as he said, trying to prove absolutely the order of precedence between these abstractions. He was only attempting to show that one can distinguish classes by whether they live upon the toil of others. His point about the abandonment of juridical categories to rely exclusively upon economic criteria is well put, for it was the dissolution of legal estates which made social analysis necessary. One may even say that the democratic revolutions made social revolution inevitable because the men who thought about society could no longer rely upon obvious legal limits between classes and had to invent new terms to deal with just as obvious

³⁵ *ibid.* p. 31.

³⁶ Chernov, *Proletariat i trudovoe krestianstvo*, p. 7.

inequalities. Chernov saw the problem in a different light. His problem was to find a way to use economic analysis that would include all who toiled on the side of the guiltless. Just as he did not exclude proletarians from the ranks of the innocent, he could not understand why Marxists insisted there was something evil about peasants who owned a piece of ground. Chernov inclined enough in this direction to view with dismay the post-1905 reforms, which seemed destined to make his peasants into exploiters of others' toil. In the sphere of pure economics, whatever that may be, Chernov had hardly achieved a decisive victory, even if he could prove that 'there is no kind of capital in modern society from which the toiling peasant does not suffer.'³⁷ Nor was victory his if he could prove, with citations from a host of socialist thinkers in western Europe, that peasants, small-holders and country proletariat were excellent material for socialist propaganda and did not have the assumed bourgeois fanaticism for property.³⁸ He could re-cast the problem, and of his achievement here there is no doubt, just as there is no doubt that he understood the political danger in making revolution in the name of a narrow section of the toiling masses. Perhaps it is best to permit Chernov to state his own case, which is,

³⁷ *op cit.* p.37.

³⁸ Chernov, *Proletariat i krestianstvo*, pp. 3-15.

finally, a statement of a world-view which may or may not be supportable with economic data:

[Many Marxists] want to defend the interests of wage labour; we are ready to defend the interests of *toil* generally, whether it is brought to market by its possessors or independently applied to the means of production (in fee simple, communal, joint cooperative [*tovarishcheskii*], or leased ownership). Socialism wants only to raise the basis of his [the toiler's] personal life - toil - to the basis of the entire social order, the fundament of the entire social structure of the future.³⁹

To be just with Chernov's economics, one must admit that few serious economists would consider phenomena from only the production side of the economic equation. By emphasising distribution, Chernov, had, in fact, put demand into the equation and had, thus, demonstrated his appreciation of post-classical economic analysis, an appreciation now overtaking Marxist economic theorists. Chernov was struggling to articulate a humanist philosophy within the context of revolutionism and modern social analysis. His thinking in economics is merely an adjunct to his demand for individual development and social justice. David Mitrany's opinion that Marxism was concerned with production, while populism was concerned with producers, is an appropriate statement of Chernov's position, although Chernov hardly figures in Mitrany's book.⁴⁰

³⁹ *ibid.* p. 16; p. 17.

⁴⁰ David Mitrany, *Marx Against the Peasant: A Study in Social Dogmatism* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1952). p. 52.

Chernov stated at the First Party Congress that, 'Marx is our great common teacher in the realm of economics, but we do not feel constrained to make him an idol'⁴¹ The SRs did not reject the theory of class struggle, they only believed that the basis for division of society by classes ought to be located in some more widely sociological principle, rather than economic consideration. They believed to a certain extent in the theory of increasing concentration of wealth but not in its application to small-scale enterprise in agriculture. About the only Marxian doctrine they accepted whole heartedly was the labour source of value.⁴²

⁴¹ *Protokoly pervago sezda P.S.R.*, p.136; Chernov, *Zapiski*, p.105.

⁴² Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, p.146.

Chapter 5

The Party Ideologue

Towards the end of December 1905 the party turned all its energies to the organisation of the SR's First Congress, held in the town of Imatra, Finland, from 29 December 1905 to 4 January 1906.¹ The party had existed since 1901, when various neo-Populist elements coalesced to form the SR Party. It was to take five years to achieve formal organisational unity and the adoption of a party program. This delay is indicative of the SR Party's lack of organisational discipline, a condition that was to perennially plague the party throughout its history. Any unity achieved was to prove to be momentary, tenuous and fragile. The First Congress was to see a two-fold split in the party.

¹ 'Finland at that time was Russia and yet not Russia.' A remark made by Mark Vishniak, *Dan proshlomo* (Due the Past), New York, 1954, p.119, which accurately sums up Finland's status. Finland had been subject to Russian sovereignty since 1809 and only achieved its independence in December 1917. The delegates met in the 'Tourist' hotel in Imatra, which belonged to a member of the Finnish Party of Active Resistance, a body sympathetic to the SRs. The sessions of the congress were held in the dining room of the wooden building, which stood on a snowy slope beside the waterfall which made Imatra famous as a beauty spot. V. Zenzinov, *Perezhitoe*, New York, 1953, pp.265-256. The congress had been prepared well in advance by an Organisational Bureau: this consisted of Viktor Chernov, Mark Natanson, Ilya Rubanovich, Evno Azef, Vasilli Leonovich and others. V. Zenzinov, *Perezhitoe*, pp.264-265. The Organisational Bureau had drawn up draft procedural rules for the congress, a draft agenda, and the draft organisational statute; the party program was compiled by Chernov. While the Congress was to be held in semi autonomous Finland secrecy was paramount and so all the delegates' names appearing in the published *Protokoly* were pseudonyms. V.M. Chernov's pseudonym during the Congress was 'Tuchkin'.

On the right was the 'Party of Popular Socialists', while on the left was the 'Union of SR-Maximalists'. In contrast to the Bolshevik - Menshevik schism of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) Second Congress in 1903 which effectively split the party right down the middle, the schisms in the SR party were splinters on the periphery, leaving the majority of the party members united.

The SR party since its inception had always been a heterogeneous, diverse amalgam of numerous organisations, incorporating a wide range of interpretations as to socialist principles and the best way of attaining them. A degree of unity nonetheless had existed prior to the First Congress in relation to theory. The central organ of the party, *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* edited by Chernov and M. Gots, published a series of articles between 1902 and 1905 which provided the basis for the development of party theory, program and tactics.² Ostensibly it was this program with minor alterations, that was to be submitted to the First Congress for approval.

The party's chief theoretician was undeniably Viktor Chernov. His distinctive and original theoretical pronouncements were based upon

² In May 1904 a draft program, compiled by the editorial board on the basis of an earlier version which had been circulated to local party committees for discussion and comment, was published in no.46 of *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*.

a variety of ideological influences from Marx, earlier populist writers, Mikhailovsky and Lavrov in particular, the Russian 'subjective school' of sociology which drew heavily on Comte and Avenarius' empiriocriticism³ and Western revisionism. Consequently, the SR view of socialism differed from their Social Democratic rivals. For the SRs socialism was not only historically determined by the development of capitalism, but was also a moral goal which would permit the full development of the human personality. The SRs consequently placed more emphasis on the voluntaristic element in history, the role of the individual and the 'minority of initiative' in the revolutionary struggle. The SRs under Chernov's guidance accepted Marx's concept of class struggle like their SD rivals, but differed from the SD's exclusive identification of the working class with the proletariat. Yes, the proletariat would be the vanguard of the revolution, but it would be in alliance with the peasantry and the intelligentsia. And while the transitional stage to socialism would be a two stage process in the forthcoming revolution, it would be not dissimilar to Trotsky's concept of 'permanent revolution'. It would go beyond the limits of a bourgeois order, though the triumph of

³ For a detailed discussion of Chernov's sociological ideas see Judith E. Zimmerman 'Sociological Ideas in Pre-Revolutionary Russia,' in *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* IX, 3 Fall, 1975, pp.302-323. esp. pp.311-314.

socialism would not be achieved; a sort of limbo stage would be achieved, neither capitalist nor the collective society of the future.

The question of terror as a revolutionary tactic further divided the SRs and SDs and although the SR's campaign of political terror was one of the main distinguishing features of their activities prior to 1905, it would be wrong to categorise them as an exclusively terrorist organisation or to overemphasise this aspect of their revolutionary activities. Its use was only one of a number of other 'mass' forms of party activity.

Chernov presiding over an amorphous grouping of diverse opinion continually utilised the tactic that a united front was the best organisational tactic to pursue, hoping in the course of time that their opponents would be converted to the compromise view. This tactic Chernov pursued throughout his revolutionary career, unfortunately with limited success. Splits continually occurred in the SR party and the First Congress was no exception.

Vishnyak pays tribute to the role of Viktor Chernov in fusing together the different tendencies at the congress and reconciling various interpretations. Certainly Chernov dominated the Congress,

especially in his role as the chief spokesman on the program: his speeches occupy more than one-third of the published texts of the proceedings.⁴ But these texts may exaggerate his role: he himself edited the proceedings and Vishnyak comments wryly that Chernov's own speeches appear in the published record 'in a stylistically polished, corrected and expanded form.'⁵ One function of the publication of the Congress proceedings was to serve as propaganda for the party, and in this respect it was certainly in Chernov's interest to ensure that his defence of the party program was as full and as eloquent as possible. But as Radkey accurately points out 'unfortunately for his party, the deficiencies of Chernov are also only too faithfully reflected in the program which he formulated.'⁶

That the party program presented to the Congress was the work of one individual, V.M. Chernov, is adequately demonstrated by the accolade given by the Congress to the labours of 'the young giant who has borne on his shoulders for five years the whole burden of the

⁴ Apart from the published proceedings of the congress, Chernov's speeches were later published as a separate pamphlet. *K Obosnovaniiu Programmy Partii Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov. Rechi V.M. Chernov (Tuchkina) na pervom partiinom sezde*, (The basis of the Socialist Revolutionary Party program. Speeches of V.M. Chernov at the first party congress). Petrograd, 1918.

⁵ M. Vishnyak, *Dan proshlomu*, p.123.

⁶ O. Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, p.24.

theoretical elaboration of our program.⁷

The draft of the party program submitted to the congress was a revised version of the earlier draft published in May 1904 and circulated to party organisations. The changes were rather superficial except in the area of the agrarian program where more substantial revision was undertaken. The program was divided into two sections - a maximum and minimum. The maximum section reflected Chernov's, and consequently, the SR's view of future society that would arise after the overthrow of autocracy. It is largely theoretical, focussing on the implementation of 'socialist measures after the victory of the working class.' The implementation of the minimum program would necessarily precede the socialist revolution and hence, the maximum program. The minimum program would pave the way for the implementation of the maximum program.

Chernov's maximum program seems to have involved at least two dubious assumptions. First, it assumed that the urban workers would lag behind the peasants in developing active, consciously socialist organisations and programs. Second, it assumed that the bourgeoisie,

⁷ *Protokoly pervago sezda Partii Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov.* (The Proceedings of the First Congress of the Socialist Revolutionary Party), n.p. 1906, p.294.

who according to Chernov's own plan were to be in control of the central government between the two revolutions, would not use their position to take effective measures to forestall the second revolution. Chernov must have thought that the Russian bourgeoisie were a foolish and spineless lot. On his calculations, they did not have the vigour to carry through the first political revolution themselves, or to use the governmental power given to them after the first revolution to defend themselves against the second. Only when their own factories were being seized from under their noses would they be expected to make serious efforts at self-defence, and not necessarily even then.

In these ways capitalism was first to be restricted, and then finally eliminated in Russia. The vagueness of this program was not simply the result of mental softness on the part of Chernov and the Socialist Revolutionaries. It was at least in part the result of a reluctance to plan and predict in detail the developments after the first revolution. Chernov had written that one could not plan in any detail what would come after the Tsar, because so much could happen in the course of the first revolution.⁸

⁸ Chernov, 'Programmnye voprosy', *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no.15 1903, p.6.

To characterise the program into two sections or stages proved to be a controversial undertaking. The majority of the debate at the Congress centred on defining what these divisions meant, and more specifically, the demands incorporated in the minimum program.

Criticisms of Chernov's distinction between the maximum and the minimum program had appeared in the party as early as 1904. Some of the critics alleged that the minimum program was reformist rather than revolutionary; others wanted to include the socialisation of industry in the minimum program along with the socialisation of the land - a proposal which would have made the distinction between the minimum and maximum program superfluous.

During the First Congress a dispute arose within the party over the program which was fused with conflicts over tactics.⁹ Poroshin who

⁹ M.I. Sokolov (Medved) and E. Ustinov (Lozinskii), the leaders of the faction of 'agrarian terrorists', came to advocate the Maximalist program of simultaneous socialisation of the land and factories. The tactic of 'agrarian terror' was extended to cover 'economic terror' in general; the future Maximalists called for the revolutionary expropriation, not only of the land, but of all private property, including factories. By the application of these means, they hoped that a socialist or semi-socialist revolution could be achieved in the immediate future.

In the summer of 1905 Ustinov and other 'agrarian terrorists' in Geneva formed a group of 'Young SRs', who published a journal, *Volnyi Diskussiionnii Listok* (Free Discussion Sheet), which advocated the inclusion of the socialisation of industry in the minimum program. One of the ideas put forward in this journal, which was criticised for anarchist utopianism by the editors of

represented the Maximalist position at the Congress, attacked the existing program for 'duality and inconsistency' in basing its agrarian section on the revolutionary principle of the abolition of private property in land, while the industrial section involved simply demands for social reforms, such as the introduction of the eight hour day. In order to avoid this inconsistency, and to preserve the 'revolutionary spirit' of the party, Poroshin argued that the minimum program should include 'the revolutionary expropriation of factories and works, with the replacement of private property in them by collective and social property'.¹⁰

Chernov's refutation of this argument was quite straightforward. The analogy drawn by Poroshin between the socialisation of land and the socialisation of industry was not, he alleged, a valid one: the true parallel to the socialisation of rural land was the socialisation of land in towns. The socialisation of industry involved the socialisation of

Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia, was that the forthcoming revolution would be socialist in both the towns and the countryside, with communes of peasants and workers socialising both agriculture and industrial production. In December 1905, Ustinov's group seceded altogether from the party and called for the formation of a separate 'Union of Revolutionary Socialists'. This trend had considerable support within Russia, especially in Belorussia, where Belostok (Bialystok) became the headquarters of Maximalism.

¹⁰ *Protokoly pervago sezda...* pp.105-107.

the entire means of production; but the socialisation of agricultural land did not mean that agricultural production would be socialised. The socialisation of the land was therefore a less revolutionary measure than the socialisation of the factories, since agricultural production would remain on a predominantly individual basis. The socialisation of the land would be a revolution only in property relations, whereas the socialisation of the factories would be a revolution in relations of production - a revolution which, since it would involve the creation of a totally new planned economy, required a high degree of organisation and maturity in the working class. It therefore belonged to the party's maximum rather than minimum program.¹¹

Chernov's concept of the minimum and maximum programs implied a two-stage perspective of the revolution which was rejected by Poroshin. The SD's, Poroshin pointed out, adopted a two-stage view of the revolution because they saw the proletariat as the only class capable of making a socialist revolution: the proletariat was still numerically small in Russia, but it would grow as capitalism developed. The minimum program of the SDs was therefore designed to encourage the development of capitalism in Russia, as a

¹¹ *ibid*, pp.147-152.

means to the end of socialist revolution. However, the SRs could adopt a different attitude towards capitalism, because they believed in the socialist potential not only of the proletariat, but also of the peasantry, and these two classes together already comprised the majority of the Russian population. A socialist revolution was therefore immediately possible in Russia, and it was the duty of the SR party to agitate for such a revolution, raising the consciousness of the masses by advocating the immediate introduction of socialist measures.¹² A position similar to Poroshin's was put forward by Rakitnikov, an influential member of the Central Committee, who was supported by one or two delegates. Rakitnikov argued that the minimum program should consist not of those measures which the party ought to demand before it came to power, but of the measures which the party would implement when it came to power. Such measures should include the socialisation of large-scale industry and the socialisation of the land, but not the socialisation of agricultural production, which Rakitnikov believed would have to be introduced gradually. He reminded the delegates that the SRs, unlike the SDs, did not see the forthcoming revolution as a bourgeois revolution;

¹² *ibid*, pp.272-276.

instead, they thought that the revolution could go beyond the framework of a bourgeois society, especially in the realm of agrarian property relations. It was inappropriate, therefore, he argued, for the party to base its minimum program on the reforms which could be gained from the non-socialist parties.¹³

In his reply to these critics, Chernov agreed that the SRs, unlike the SDs, did not set limits in advance to the achievements of the revolution.¹⁴ But in his defence of the minimum program against the Maximalist critique, Chernov implied that in practice he believed that the 'backwardness' of the Russian workers, that is, their low level of organisation and consciousness, would, in the immediate future, limit the gains of the revolution to bourgeois reforms. This, he argued, was a realistic position: to reject the necessity for a minimum program of acceptable reforms was to adopt an 'all or nothing' stance.¹⁵

Decisively defeated on the Congress floor the disillusioned Maximalists decided to sever their association with the party. Immediately after the Congress, in January, 1906, the Maximalist

¹³ *ibid*, pp.109-115.

¹⁴ *ibid*, p.156.

¹⁵ *ibid*, pp.253-269.

leader Sokolov, convened a small conference which decided to leave the SR party and form a separate Maximalist organisation. The 'Union of SR Maximalists' was not officially formed until the autumn of 1906.¹⁶

The SR minimum program was divided into two sections: political/legal and economic. In general, the demands of the SR minimum program were in line with those of the Russian Social Democrats, and indeed, of most European socialist parties. The political section demanded full civil liberties and other democratic reforms; the economic section contained demands for progressive social reforms.

¹⁶ Two of the most notorious Maximalist exploits were: the explosion at Stolypin's villa on Aptekarskii Island in August 1906, and the expropriation on Fonarnyi Pereulok of 600,000 roubles being transported from the St. Petersburg Customs Office to the State Bank. The Union proved to be stillborn. Sokolov was arrested on 1 December and summarily executed the next day. The loss of its leader demoralised the Union, and many other prominent Maximalists were to share Sokolov's fate in the following months. By the middle of 1907, Maximalism as an organised movement had virtually ceased to exist, although some former Maximalists, such as Lozinskii, moved close to an anarchist position in the years following the defeat of the 1905 Revolution. For a discussion of Maximalism see; Chernov, 'K Kharakteristikie Maksimalizma', in *Sotsialist-Revoliutsioner* (Socialist-Revolutionary), no.1 1910, pp.174-307; B.I. Gorev, 'Apoliticheskii i antiparlamentskiiia gruppy', in *Obshchestvennoe dvizhenie v Rossii v nachale XX-go veka*, (Social movements in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century), edited by L. Martov, P. Maslov and A. Potresov, 4 vols. St. Petersburg 1909-1914. vol. III, pp.511-523; M. Perrie, *The Agrarian Policy*, pp.153-159.

The most distinctive feature of the SR program was its agrarian demand for the socialisation of the land, and it was this point which provoked most debate at the Congress.¹⁷ The version presented to the Congress went into great detail concerning the actual mechanism by which the socialised land would be controlled. This was necessary, the party leader explained, because the revolutionary events of the past year had brought the party's agrarian program closer to realisation. Whereas previously the primary need had been to stress the general principle of socialisation, the expropriation of private land was now accepted, at least in part, by both the SDs and the Kadets. It was, therefore, appropriate for the SRs to explain their positive, constructive proposals for the disposal of the confiscated lands in the greatest possible detail.¹⁸

In the course of the debate, some of the delegates expressed their dissatisfaction with the new formulation, and especially with its

¹⁷ For specific discussion of the SR agrarian program see, M. Hildermeier, *Die Sozialrevolutionäre Partei Russlands*, pp.83-105; M. Perrie, *The Agrarian Policy of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party*, pp.143-152; and O.H. Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, pp.24-46; 'An Alternative to Bolshevism: The Program of Russian Social Revolutionism', in *The Journal of Modern History*, no.1, March 1953, pp.25-39 and 'Chernov and Agrarian Socialism before 1918', in *Continuity and Change in Russian and Soviet Thought*, edited by E.J. Simmons Cambridge, Mass. 1955, pp.63-80.

¹⁸ *Protokoly pervago sezda...*pp.85-86.

definition of the socialisation of the land. By introducing a reference to the role of the state, where the first draft had spoken only of 'democratically organised communes and unions of communes', the revised version, its critics objected, paved the way for nationalisation rather than socialisation.¹⁹

In his defence of the revised agrarian program, Chernov claimed that his critics had misunderstood the concept of socialisation. Socialised land would not be owned by either central or local government bodies, since property in land would be completely abolished. The functions of these bodies would simply be to regulate the rights of individuals to use the land. But in general, he added, the SR party accepted that a democratic state could play a role in the egalitarian allocation of land; unlike the anarchists, the SRs did not reject the state as such; although they were critical of the powers of the autocratic state, and of bourgeois states in Western Europe.²⁰

The issue of the relative competence of local and central government bodies in regulating the use of the socialised land led on to the question of how the land was to be socialised. The Legal Populists²¹

¹⁹ *ibid*, pp.181-184, 186-188, 202-205.

²⁰ *ibid*, pp.218-240.

²¹ The Legal Populists desired the formation of a new, open and legal party of 'Populist tendency'. A small conspiratorial organisation could be preserved for

had argued that land could not be socialised 'from below' by revolutionary land seizures, but only 'from above' by legislation by the Constituent Assembly. The Legal Populists feared that land seizures by the peasants might lead not to socialisation, but simply to a redistribution of the land as the private property of individual

terrorist acts, but simultaneously a new mass party should be formed. A major aim of the new party was to attract those who rejected the SR party's terrorist tactics. The new party would not be called the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, but would have a separate name (probably, the Popular-Socialist Party). The Legal Populists were critical of what they saw as the excessive influence of Social Democratic ideas, one could say Marxist ideas on the SR program. In particular, they criticised the distinction between the minimum and the maximum programs. Instead of the minimum, they would have preferred to see a more modest set of demands which could realistically be implemented in the immediate future. The Legal Populists also disagreed with aspects of the SR agrarian program: they preferred the term 'nationalisation' to 'socialisation' of the land; and they rejected the SR view that the land could be socialised 'from below' by peasant seizures of landowners' land. The Legal Populists gained little support for their views.

In the spring of 1906 the Legal Populists decided to go ahead without SR agreement and formed a separate 'Party of Popular Socialists', whose program was limited to immediate demands which were considered practical under existing conditions. The new party, however, gained little mass support, although its leadership was able to exert quite a strong influence over the Labour Group of deputies (Trudoviki) in the first two Dumas. In general, the secession of this group of literary intellectuals caused little harm to the SR party organisation, or to its popular support: in the election to the Second Duma in 1907 the SRs were considerably more successful than the Popular Socialists. No Popular Socialists were elected to the Third Duma, and the party as such ceased to exist after 1907, although it was to re-appear on the political scene in 1917. On the Popular Socialists, see, P.P. Maslov, 'Narodnicheskiia partii', in *Obshchestvennoe dvizhenie v Rossii v nachale XX-go veka*, (Social movements in Russia at the beginning of the 20th Century). edited by L. Martov, P. Maslov and A. Potresov, 4 vols. St. Petersburg 1909-1914, vol.III, pp.151-158.

villages.

The remainder of the debate on the agrarian question was concerned with relatively minor details, such as the hiring of labour and the payment of compensation for expropriated land. Eventually the revised version of the agrarian program was approved by the Congress with only one opposing vote.²²

The entire party program was finally approved on the evening of 2 January. Chernov referred to the program as the 'result of our collective work', a 'symbol of party unity' and asked the Congress to approve it unanimously. In the event there was only one abstention - that of the Maximalist Poroshin.

A number of tactical issues were listed on the Congress agenda, but in practice the debates on the program and the organisational statute occupied so much time that the tactical debates were somewhat truncated.

The Congress resolved unanimously to boycott both the First Duma and the pre-electoral meetings, which only registered voters could participate in. Chernov vigorously defended a tactic advocated by Iuanenkov that the party could use the election meetings to agitate in

²² *Protokoly pervago sezda...* p.253.

favour of a boycott.²³ He was unable to convince the rest of the delegates, at least on this issue.²⁴

The Congress devoted surprisingly little time to the issue of political terror. Political terror had been halted by the Central Committee immediately after the publication of the October Manifesto, and the activity of the *Boevaia Organizatsiia* (Fighting Organisation - the terrorist wing of the SR party) had been suspended. However, this decision had not been rigidly obeyed by the party's terrorist organisations. Acts of political terror, in particular, had continued.²⁵ The resolution on tactics proposed by the tactics commission welcomed these acts as evidence of the involvement of the masses in political terrorism, but expressed concern that they often occurred without the control of local party committees. The resolution also asserted that terror should be continued until true political freedom was obtained.²⁶ Thus the Congress resolution marked an important

²³ *ibid*, refer to pp.11-12, 16-21.

²⁴ The amendment was defeated by 28 votes to 20, and the congress resolved to boycott both the Duma itself and the pre-election meetings. *Protokoly pervago ezda...*, pp.9-23. The Second (Extraordinary) SR Congress, meeting in February, 1907, reversed the boycott decision of the First Congress, and thirty-four SR deputies took part in the Second Duma.

²⁵ B.V. Savinkov, 'Vospominaniia' (Memoirs), *Byloe*, no.3, 1917. pp.116-120.

²⁶ *Protokoly pervago sezda...* p.314.

decision by the party to resume political terror and to restore the activity of the *Boevaia Organizatsiia*. There was, however, no real discussion of the issue by the delegates. Savinkov tells us that the decision to restore 'central' terror was taken behind the scenes at the Congress, by the newly elected Central Committee.²⁷ The issue of economic terror, that is, the extension of the party's terrorist tactics from the political to the economic sphere either in the agrarian area, namely the use or threat of violence against the life and property of the landowners or the use or threat of violence against the life or property of factory owners was rejected by the Congress.²⁸

The First Congress of the SR party offers little illumination on contemporary events in Russia in 1905. The main aim of the congress was to approve the party program, but even on issues such as organisation and tactics, which feature on the agenda, the debates often appear abstract and unreal, detached from the immediate situation in Russia.

²⁷ Savinkov, 'Vospominaniia', *Byloe*, no.1, 1918. p.69.

²⁸ On agrarian terror see M. Perrie, *The Agrarian Policy*, pp.91-97 also Perrie, 'Political and Economic Terror in the Tactics of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party before 1914', in *Social Protest, Violence and Terror in Nineteenth - and Twentieth - Century Europe*, edited by W.J. Mommsen and G. Hirschfeld, London, 1982, pp.63-79.

The main achievement of the Congress was its approval of the party program, and the Congress proceedings serve as a major source for SR theory and ideology. In particular, they provide evidence of Viktor Chernov's ideological dominance in the party. On virtually every issue concerned with the party program Chernov's views predominated, and his ideas were expressed with an eloquence which it would perhaps be unfair to attribute entirely to his editing activity after the Congress.

However, although the views of the two main dissident factions within the party, the Legal Populists and the Maximalists, gained little support from the majority of delegates, the Congress showed that many members were drawn toward these extreme poles. While Chernov can be credited to a certain degree for maintaining party unity despite the secession which did take place in 1906, it was achieved through compromise and organisational flexibility.

Chernov was able to provide his views with a consistent, if somewhat abstract, theoretical justification which no other party leader was able to challenge effectively, and the preservation of a core of unity within the party was a major practical achievement of the First SR Congress. As Radkey correctly states, 'it was their misfortune, and the

misfortune of their popular following, that [the party program] was more a declaration of general principles than a carefully thought-out plan of action, more a statement of objectives than an indication of how they were to be attained'.²⁹ The SR party survived the revolutionary upheaval, yet the inherent weakness of its party program, namely the lack of a plan of action was to prove in later years to be the party's nemesis.

²⁹ O.H. Radkey, 'An Alternative to Bolshevism: The Program of Russian Social Revolutionism', in *The Journal of Modern History*, no.1 March 1953, p.39.

Chapter 6

Crises, Repression, Treachery

If the year 1905 witnessed the fury of a revolution that the government managed to quell, it also saw the beginning of another more solid movement that lasted several years with fateful results for Russia. Revolutionaries later referred to the years 1905-1907 as 'the era of freedom', since the government's brief flirtation with constitutional liberties allowed oppositionist parties considerable leeway in organising the mass elements of society. Even while party leaders were forced to withdraw again into European exile, the Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries conducted massive recruitments into organisational structures which spanned the empire. Chernov in a speech to the SR Party's London conference in 1908 said of his party's efforts that:

Before the revolution we were an insignificant handful... The brief period of freedom revealed before us the depths of the masses of the people: ... the results of our work far exceeded our boldest expectations. We gained many positions amongst the proletariat, who the SDs considered to be their monopoly. In the countryside we had no rivals....¹

Chernov, having first expatiated on successes, then immediately conceded that much of the organisation had already been swept away.

But our successes were only ideological. We could engage only in propaganda, not in organisation, and even that more

¹ *Protokoly pervoi obshchepartiinoi konferentsii partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov, avgust. 1908, Paris 1908, pp.96-97. Chernov, Pered Burei, p.283.*

extensively than intensively. Our influence on the masses grew daily, to such an extent that we could not consolidate it organisationally.... Now... the counter-revolution has again forced us to return to our former secret conditions of work, to our former forms of organisation and struggle.²

The reports to the conference showed clearly that by the middle of 1908 the party organisation in Russia had been virtually destroyed. Maslov's analysis of this disintegration is quite perceptive and indeed correct, when he states that the exponential growth and decline of the party can solely be attributed to the spirit of the times.

During the election campaign for the Second Duma and during the activity of the Duma the PSR was in full flower; later it faded rapidly. Because the party was illegal, and because its growth in the revolutionary period was not so much due to organisational construction as to the upsurge in mood, with the decline of which the party faded away, it is fairly difficult to assess the strength of the party organisation...

In the period of social upsurge, when the party grew to such dimensions, its growth was mainly due to this upsurge. The mass of SR (and SD) members who had joined in this period grew tired of everyday cultural-political work, which seemed too petty, non-revolutionary and opportunistic to hold much attraction for those members who had joined the party under the influence of the revolutionary mood of 1905-06. Amongst the SRs, where militancy was particularly respected, the process of party disintegration was particularly noticeable.³

These developments are clearly demonstrated by Maureen Perrie's study of the Party's composition. Using a sample of 1,029

² *ibid*, p.97. also V.M. Chernov, *Pered Burei*, pp.281-284.

³ P.P. Maslov, 'Narodnicheskii partii', in L.Martov, P.Maslov, A.Potresov (eds.), *Obshchestvennoe dvizhenie v Rossii v nachale 20-go veka*, 4 vols. St.Petersburg, 1909-1914, vol.3, p.125, p.128.

participants in the SR movement, Perrie shows that students and other *intelligenty* predominated until 1904; then from 1905 to 1907 all elements of society contributed to the expansion in membership.⁴ Worthy of special note is that even during that period workers, students, and minor professionals predominated over peasants, in a party traditionally considered to be the champion of the peasantry above all. However, this is not so surprising when one considers Chernov's triadic theory of a proletariat, peasant and intelligentsia alliance, which was firmly imprinted on the mind of the party. Furthermore, workers were relatively easier to organise than the peasantry, their heavy concentrations in factories facilitating organisation and sustaining party ties. In the cities these advantages were further enhanced by many other factors. For example, the presence of students and superior communications facilities made it easier both to reach and to maintain contact with supporters. Moreover, from the standpoint of the SR party membership, the education and politicisation that could be brought about with urban resources, best of all in university towns, could bring the nonintellectual segment of party supporters much sooner to a level of sophistication, which

⁴ M.Perrie, 'The Social Composition and Structure of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party Before 1917' in *Soviet Studies*, vol.24, 1972. p.227.

would make them acceptable as full-fledged party members. And to reiterate the point once more the large proportion of workers in the party's membership was considered to be equally as important as the peasantry as a revolutionary force.

Social Democrats found it difficult conceptually and emotionally to deal with SR successes among workers, since their theory held that Social Democracy was *by definition* the party of the urban workers. As it turned out, by 1907 SRs had stolen the initiative in the workers' movement from the SDs in many important industrial centres and in many others were vying on more or less equal terms. The rapid growth of the party during the 1904-06 period added to the already heterogeneous nature of the party. Schisms appeared as to the means of attaining the socialist revolution. In 1906 the SR Party experienced a two fold split, the Popular Socialists on the extreme right and the Maximalists on the extreme left.

The main significance of Maximalism was that it highlighted several apparent inconsistencies which existed in the SR theory, in spite of Chernov's ingenious formulations. While admitting the advent of capitalism in Russia, Chernov asserted that the Russian revolution would be both anti-feudal and anti-capitalist, and that by socialising the land it could go beyond the framework of a bourgeois

revolution. The Maximalists claimed that the existence of the minimum program meant that the party, in fact, envisaged that the revolution would be democratic in form, but bourgeois-reformist rather than socialist in content.

Although the Maximalist viewpoint might appear to be more consistently revolutionary, the official party line was certainly more realistic; the reforms which emerged from the revolution of 1905 fell far short even of the SR minimum program, and the Maximalist perspective of a socialist economy run by free labour communes of agricultural and industrial workers seems totally utopian in the context of 1905-07.⁵

The Party of Popular Socialists derived its origin from the literary group of 'Legal Populists' working on *Russkoe Bogatstvo*, to whom Chernov had turned for assistance in establishing a legal SR newspaper in Russia after the appearance of the October Manifesto. The 'Legal Populists' sought an open, legal party and rejected Chernov's distinction between the minimum and maximum program, envisaging the transition to socialism as a single process, *albeit* a prolonged one, and disagreed with aspects of SR tactics, rejecting terrorism and conspiracy and the party's attitude towards

⁵ For the Maximalist critique of the SR Party program and Chernov's defence refer to the discussion in the previous chapter.

land seizures by the peasants.⁶

The Second (Extraordinary) Congress of the SR party met at Tammerfors in Finland on 12 February 1907. The main task of the Congress was to decide on the party's tactics towards the Second Duma. Several delegates still favoured a Duma boycott. However, any equivocation in regards to participation was dispelled by a forceful speech by Gershuni, who had recently escaped from Siberia. Gershuni asserted that the party leadership must be responsive to the masses:

For what is the SR party? Is it little groups who sit in committees? The party is the organised working class of workers and peasants. Its will is the will of the party. And when the party decides whether or not to enter the Duma, this in practice means that the workers and peasants are deciding whether or not to elect. And if the voice of the proletariat and peasantry organised by the party clearly and definitely decides to enter, the committees and central institutions of the party, as executive organs of the working class, should implement its decisions.⁷

In the end it was agreed to utilise the Duma for the party revolutionary ends, by forming a fraction of SR deputies.⁸ It was a

⁶ For the Legal Populist critique of the SR Party program refer to the previous chapter. A group of Legal Populists, including Annenskii, Miakotin and Peshekhonov, were invited to attend the First Congress of the SR party with the right to speak but not to vote.

⁷ *Protokoly vtorogo (ekstrennago) sezda Partii Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov*, St.Petersburg, 1907, pp.83-84.

⁸ The decision was virtually unanimous, with only one delegate dissenting. *ibid*, p.163. pp.160-162. 34 SR deputies were elected to the Second Duma; for a biography of delegates with portraits refer to M.M. Boiovich, *Gosudarstvennoi Dumy (portrety, biografii) Vtoroi sozyv 1907-1912g.*

short lived experiment and on the 3 June 1907, the Second Duma was dissolved like its predecessor. The boycottist tactics were resumed in connection with the Third and Fourth Dumas.

Among the objects of the SR attack in the Second Duma were the proposals for agrarian reform introduced by the Prime Minister Stolypin, in his decree of 9 November 1906. The Stolypin reforms sought to encourage withdrawal from the commune by enabling peasants to claim title to their holdings and consolidate their strips into enclosed individual farms. As an attempt to destroy the communal solidarity of the peasantry, and to foster individual proprietorial attitudes, these measures ran directly counter to the aims of the SR agrarian policy. The fundamental cornerstone of the SR agrarian policy was socialisation of the land. Many veteran populists continued to link their hopes of socialisation to the survival of the repartitional commune. Chernov's agrarian theory gave primacy to the class position of the peasantry as the basis of socialisation. According to Chernov's theory, SR hopes for socialisation of land derived not from the existence of the repartitional commune, but from their view of the mass of small peasant producers as members not of the petty bourgeoisie but of the working class, and their consequent receptivity to socialist ideas.

The peasants' desire for land was a progressive aspiration, with both an anti-feudal and anti-capitalist content, and it was the duty of a socialist party to ensure that any agrarian reform which transferred the land to the peasantry created class solidarity and cohesion and prevented the development of 'property fanaticism'. For this reason, the SR minimum program advocated the transfer of the land not to individual peasants as private property, but to democratic communal organisations for egalitarian utilisation.⁹

Chernov made it clear that his arguments in favour of the socialisation of the land applied to Europe as a whole and not specifically to Russia. All European socialists, Chernov argued, should advocate collective rather than individual possession of the land, but the form of collective property in land would depend on individual circumstances in individual countries. Indeed, the scheme of socialisation had been taken over by kindred parties of other nationalities which had no institution resembling the commune.¹⁰ If the central theme of the party had so much appeal

⁹ 'Sotsializatsiia zemli i kooperatsiia v selskom khozyaystve', *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no.14 December, 1904. pp.6-7.

¹⁰ The English Social-Democratic Federation was in favour of nationalisation; whereas the Dutch socialists, preferring greater decentralisation, proposed the 'communalisation' of the land, whilst the Belgians envisaged some kind of balance between local and central control. *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no.15 January, 1903. p.7.

where the *obshchina* did not exist, why should its fortunes in Great Russia be inseparably linked to the fate of that institution?

It is quite clear that for Chernov's agrarian program, in stark contrast to that of some of the earlier populists, the existence of the peasant commune played only a secondary role to the 'objective' class position of the peasantry as a basis for the socialisation of the land. And insofar as they did take the commune into consideration, the SRs saw its main significance not in the institution itself, but in the complex of attitudes which it engendered. These attitudes represented the 'subjective' basis of SR hopes for land socialisation. The SRs always insisted that, unlike some of their Populist predecessors, they did not idealise the contemporary commune. They recognised that its operation was as much bureaucratic as democratic, and that repartition had not prevented the growth of individualism and social differentiation in the countryside in the post-Emancipation period. Nevertheless, they believed that the tradition of communal ownership and disposal of the land, and the practice of its egalitarian redistribution, created attitudes in the peasantry which had more in common with socialist than with individualistic principles. Thus, in one essay from 1908, Chernov urged his fellow Socialist Revolutionaries not to lament the legal

abolition of the village commune too much, because they should remember that 'the old commune' had 'many dark, backward, oppressive sides'. The old commune, for example, had served the autocracy as an instrument of fiscal oppression and was incompatible with the emancipation of women. 'But in spite of its many faults, the old commune was an institution that tended toward human equality, rather than the reverse'.¹¹

The commune had both positive and negative features; the positive aspects however were a 'wild plant which could bear fruit only after skillful grafting by socialist hands'.¹² Chernov, as a consequence of the Stolypin reforms, now stressed equality rather than collectivity.

The egalitarianism of the rural life, engendered by the collective practices and the common misery of the peasants in the village communes, will prove a lasting benefit, because it is built into the very nature of the peasantry.... Communes may live or communes may pass away, but the peasants, no matter how they carry on their appointed duties, will live together in a manner so similar that a feeling of identity will always obtain among them. Some peasants may gain more, some peasants may lose all, but the peasants in a village will always be roughly equal.¹³

This rather optimistic passage is quite definite that peasant egalitarianism would survive, even though he admitted that the

¹¹ Chernov, 'Sotsializatsiia Zemli kak takticheskaia problema', (Socialisation of Land. Tactical problems) in *Zemlia i Pravo; Sobranie Sochinenii*, (Land and Law. Collected works), Petrograd, 1917. p.218.

¹² *ibid*, p.210, p.208.

¹³ *ibid*, p.220.

actual equality of the peasants would be diminished. Thus Chernov abandoned the former stress on the services of the *obshchina* in conditioning the peasantry against private property and sought support for the agrarian program in its egalitarian features.¹⁴

Chernov demystified the romantic ideals of the peasant commune which the veteran populists had cradled. In essence, Chernov was able to illustrate to the party that their agrarian program was not solely reliant on the existence of a peasant commune at all. Chernov stressed the primacy of the class position of the peasantry as the basis for socialisation and stated that even in the West, where there was no commune, agrarian capitalism was making little headway among the peasantry, and that indeed, many Western Marxists shared the SRs view on agrarian policy. In addition he also stressed the egalitarian views associated with the commune. By demonstrating flexibility of mind and revolutionary will and by creating a distinct, original and separate revolutionary populism, he was clearly rejecting the populism of old and was able to restore a semblance of faith in the SR program.

At the First Party Conference which met in August, 1908, in London¹⁵, the debates on the agrarian policy illustrated that not all

¹⁴ O.H. Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, p.84.

¹⁵ In August, 1908 the Central Committee called for a All-Party Conference in London. The Conference opened on the 4 August and sat for 11 days; of the 74 delegates present, 45 travelled from Russia. Chernov, *Pered*

delegates were persuaded by Chernov's rhetoric. Rushing to the defence of the commune from external attack, the conference resolved to conduct a campaign in the countryside to encourage the collectivist aspect of peasant psychology; to combat the government's efforts to strengthen individualism; to seek the improvement of working procedures within the commune; to facilitate the struggle by means of communal decisions, against demands for the separation of holdings; and to obtain the boycott of *kulaks* and those members of a commune who desired the separation of holdings, so as to seize a larger amount of land than would fall to their family in the event of a new repartition.¹⁶ However, in theory, the survival of the commune was not essential for the socialisation of land.

Stolypin's attempts at a fundamental agrarian reform coincided with a program of 'pacification'. This policy aimed at an all-out struggle against the revolutionaries. Increased police suppression after the dismissal of the Second Duma in 1907 forced a precipitous decline in overt party activities. The period of relative freedom which preceded the repression had enabled the SRs to agitate widely

Burei, p.280.

¹⁶ *Protokoly pervoi obshchepartiinoi konferentsii Partii Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov, avgust, 1908.* Paris, 1908. pp.228-229.

and openly among the masses and the relaxation of censorship led to a plethora of party publications pamphlets, newspapers, and books in Russia. In 1907, the party publications continued on a predominantly illegal basis. In July, 1907, *Partiinyya Izvestiia* (Party News), was replaced by *Znamia Truda* (Banner of Toil), as the main party organ. From the beginning of 1908, severe repressions led to the confiscation of most of the party's presses in Russia, and the main focus of the party's publishing activity once again moved abroad.¹⁷ An organisational crisis enveloped the party; the party organisations languished more or less permanently in a state of paralysis. According to Chernov, 'an ideological stupor, a condition of confusion and incomprehension' reigned in the party.¹⁸ Like the SDs, the SRs witnessed the elimination of vital segments of its organisational structure by 1908. After listening to bleak reports from local representatives at the 1908 Conference, Chernov summarised the matter as follows:

Our party has suffered very severe damage;... The general crisis has created immensely difficult conditions for party work, which have greatly hampered the activity of the CC [Central committee]. There are extremely few local workers left, and as a result of this the intermediate links between the masses and the central organs of the party have become weak.

... Almost all [of those presenting reports] note that over the

¹⁷ A. Spiridovich, *Histoire du terrorisme russe, 1886-1917*, Paris, 1930. pp.498-499, p.503.

¹⁸ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, pp.281-285.

current period we have unfortunately become estranged from the masses - not because the masses have become disillusioned in revolution and have abandoned it, but because the organisation has melted away and evaporated... The party is not living through a *political* crisis, its program and tactics have not been undermined by stern experience, but there is no doubt that it is experiencing an *organisational* crisis, and a very severe one.¹⁹

In other words the *Okhrana* (Tsarist Secret Police), had wiped out many intermediary regional *oblast* and provincial *guberniia* committees, cutting off regularised communications. Adding to the party's gradual disintegration were the arrests and imprisonment of many SR activists, while many others were forced to flee abroad to escape persecution.

The real tragedy of the party's situation in 1907-08 in Chernov's view, was that its organisation had become isolated from the masses at the very time when the masses themselves, as a result of their experience of the revolution, were more receptive than ever before to SR ideas.

In an era of repression it was the proletariat which offered the best opportunities for revolutionary work.²⁰ As a consequence, for

¹⁹ 'Report of Comrade Olenin on the activities of the Central Committee'. 'Olenin' was one of the pseudonyms of V.M. Chernov. *Protokoly pervoi obshchepariinoi konferentsii Partii Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov, avgust, 1908*. Paris, 1908. pp.56-57.

²⁰ That this occurred is not all that surprising. Urban workers had achieved a higher degree of literacy, a higher consciousness; and were inherently better organised, concentrated as they were in cities and factories,

some years after 1907, SRs, like Social Democrats, devoted much of their propagandistic and organisational efforts to urban workers. The renowned Chernovian theory of 'toiling class', holding that workers, peasants, and radicalised intelligentsia, united of course under the banner of the SR Party, constituted the social base of the coming revolution, and provided a programmatic justification (indeed injunction) for agitating among all three groups, depending on opportunity and resources. The conditions prevailing in Russia after the onset of the Stolypinist reaction necessitated a temporary narrowing of practical activities to workers, drawing the appropriate response for SRs.

The revelation of Azef's treachery soon after the 1908 party conference completed the process of demoralisation which had begun after the Stolypin repression. Evno Azef unbelievably, successfully combined the roles of the chief informer on the SR party and head of the *Boevaia Organizatsiia* from 1903 to 1908.²¹

than the peasantry. This is not to say that the SR party had abandoned the peasantry; despite all the difficulties, SR organisational contact with the peasantry was never completely disrupted, even in the darkest days of the repression.

²¹ For a detailed discussion of the whole sordid affair refer to, V. Meshcheriia, *Partiia S-R. Sotsialistov Revoliutsionerov*. Moscow, 1922. pp.48-83; B. Savinkov, *Memoirs of a Terrorist*, trans. by J. Shaplen New York, 1972, this is a translation of Savinkov's *Vospominaniia terrorista*; V. Chernov, *Pered Burei*, pp.285-294; O. Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, pp.71-74; P.E. Shchegolev (ed.) *Provokator: Vospominaniia i dokumenty o razoblachenii Azefa*, (Agent Provocateur: Memoirs and

The use of terror as a revolutionary tactic was to be only one of the many means employed to change the course of Russian life. This was a position Chernov had reached on the utilisation of terror in his student days at Moscow University when he compared terror to 'artillery preparation which clears the way for the storm columns of the mass movement'. 'Terror is to be considered as a subordinate weapon of the movement'.²² In a pamphlet *Terroristicheski element v nashei programme* (The terrorist element in our program), Chernov made the subordinate status of terror even more explicit. Terror was not to be any single-handed combat of the gods which decided battles in antiquity; 'terror is merely one kind of weapon in the hands of one part of the revolutionary army'. The SR party did not consider terror as some mystical panacea, the pamphlet continued, but one of the most 'energetic means of struggle with autocratic bureaucracy, a restraint on administrative arbitrariness, [a means] to disorganise the mechanism of government, [a means] of agitation and excitation of society to create enthusiasm and a fighting spirit...'²³ Until circumstances

Documents on the Unmasking of Azef). n.p., 1929; B. Nicolaievsky, *Aseff: The Russian Judas*, translated by G. Reavey, Hurst and Blackett, London, 1934.

This is a translation of Nicolaievsky's *Istoriia Odnogo Predatel'ia: terroristy i politicheskaia politsiia*. Berlin, 1932.

²² Chernov, *Zapiski sotsialista-revoliutsionera*, Berlin, 1922. pp.142-143, pp.184-185.

(Evno Azef's treachery and Grigori Gershuni's death) brought terror to an end, the party centre continued to insist on absolute control of all acts of terror. The reason for insistence on absolute control was that party leadership, particularly Chernov, demanded that terror be used only against representatives of the regime and not against private persons who displayed neutrality in 'the war between the government and the revolutionary people....'²⁴ Contrary to Chernov's expectations the *Boevaia Organizatsiia*, with its need for secrecy, enjoyed considerable autonomy within the party's organisational structure. Although this was supposed to contribute to the effectiveness of its conspiratorial activity, the organisational autonomy of the *Boevaia Organizatsiia* lessened the degree of party control over terrorism. In SR theory, party control served to integrate political terror with the mass movement, and this integration served as a major justification for terrorism. But, in practice, neither control nor integration was achieved. From 1906 to 1908 the problem of terrorist activity was a major issue for the SRs, with implications both for party organisation and for tactics. But

²³ Chernov, *Terroristicheskii Element v nashei programme*, (The terrorist element in our program), n.p. 1902, pp.6-7; the pamphlet was reprinted directly from *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* (Revolutionary Russia), no.7, June, 1902. pp.2-5.

²⁴ *Znamia Truda*, (Banner of Toil), no.3, August 1, 1907. p.12.

these questions were barely discussed at the First Party Congress.

Terror had many possible justifications. The most consistently used and perhaps the most thoughtful was, as Chernov's pamphlet *Terroristicheskii Element v nashei programme* explained, that one is not always '...free in the selection of means. We do not know with what horrors our government fills this land. But we do know that every horror and brutality - which they commit with easy hearts - will be turned on themselves'. And Chernov protested that he would welcome arguments which would save one from '...exchanging the weapon of the living word for the deadly weapon of murder'.²⁵ The use of terror was a means of self-defence '...without which the debauch and unrestrained autocratic arbitrariness passes all limits and becomes unendurable'.²⁶

Another justification, was terror's propaganda effect. Chernov argued that, if terror strikes an official who has caused thousands to suffer, then it is more effective than months of propaganda in directing the thoughts of the sufferers to revolutionaries and their actions.²⁷ The use of terror as a disorganising weapon is closely linked to the idea of artillery before battle. Terror disorganises the opposition. To say that it is a fire-cracker in the entire movement is

²⁵ Chernov, *Terroristicheskii Element...*, pp.1-2.

²⁶ *ibid*, p.1.

²⁷ *ibid*, p.5.

to miss the point that terror is not minor when considered in the context of the whole movement. He then asked rhetorically that if the party considered abandoning terror as a policy then why should it not consider giving give up its other means of struggle, for example, unions or cooperatives.²⁸

When Evno Azef's treachery came to light, Chernov hammered out four articles in which he claimed that the Azef affair acted to disorganise the government's attack as much as it was harmful to the revolutionary movement. Chernov took some glee in telling the truth about Azef to embarrass the government, which denied Azef's participation in the assassination of Interior Minister von Pleve and Grand Duke Sergei. He could not explain his blindness to Azef's treachery except to say that the party needed such organisers. For Azef's motives he could find no explanation except that Azef liked money.²⁹ Azef was a pragmatist and never concealed his contempt for questions of theory and program. He had boasted

²⁸ *Dokumenty po istorii Partii Sotsialistov-Revolutionerov: Vopros o terrore na V Sovete Partii, Mai 1909 god.* (Documents on the history of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party: The question of terror at the fifth Party Conference. May, 1909) in *Sotsialist-Revoliutsioner*, no.2 Paris, 1910. pp.32-33. This is from Chernov's speech.

²⁹ All of the four articles appeared in *Znamia Truda*, no.15 February, 1909. Their titles, with Chernov's pseudonyms are: B. Tuchkin. 'Iz temnago taststvo', (From a dark realm), pp.12-14; Iu. G., 'Tysiacha i odna gipoteza', (A thousand and one hypotheses), pp.7-10; B.T., 'Stolypin ob Azefie', (Stolypin on Azef), pp.14-18; B. Tuchkin, 'Evgenii Azef', (Evno Azef), pp.2-7.

openly that he was not a 'theorist, and that he regarded theorising as mere "idle chatter".' He was no less sceptical in his view of socialism, and he made no bones about it. According to Chernov, 'he put socialism into the distant future'.³⁰ And he differed on many points from the program laid down by the Central Committee. 'He had no belief whatsoever in the masses or mass movements as an independent revolutionary force', Chernov wrote about him. 'His only immediate reality was the struggle for the political freedom and his only revolutionary means, the terror. He would seem to have regarded propaganda work, agitation and mass organisation with contempt as mere educational work, and recognised as "revolution" only the active fighting done by the few members of a secret organisation'.³¹

Azef was the most famous of police spies, but he was by no means the only one. In September of 1905, the party was informed of the infiltration of two police spies, Taratov and Azef.³² The revolutionaries, Chernov amongst them, refused to believe the

³⁰ B. Nicolaievsky, *Aseff: The Russian Judas*, p.98.

³¹ *ibid*, pp.98-99.

³² A copy of the letter received in August, 1905, by the Central Committee denouncing Tatarov and Azef as traitors is reproduced in Savinkov, *Memoirs of a Terrorist*, pp.313-314. The anonymous letter of 1905 was written by the chief of the St. Petersburg *Okhrana*, Colonel Kremenetsky. Savinkov, *Memoirs of a Terrorist*, p.325.

possibility of treachery on the part of the organiser of von Plehve's assassination. No investigation was conducted into the charge and Azef remained free to operate. As for Taratov, the Central Committee in its wisdom set up a committee to investigate the allegations of betrayal. The committee was composed of Bach, Tiutchev, Chernov and Savinkov.³³ It was Chernov who was to lead the questioning which was to last for several days.³⁴ In the end the allegations were proved to be correct. The Central Committee of the party agreed with Savinkov's suggestion that the sentence of death be carried out, the plans of which were privy to Chernov.³⁵

While there is no evidence to implicate Chernov directly in any terrorist activity, he certainly was aware of, and indeed, involved in the planning of terrorist acts. Prior to the elections to the Second Duma the question of a possible assassination attempt against the Tsar was mooted. Chernov and Natanson concluded that while the time was ripe for such an attempt, the moment was unfavourable, as the parties were gaining heavily in the elections for the Second Duma.³⁶ Chernov was to deny such an attempt was being

³³ Nicolaievsky, *Aseff: The Russian Judas*, p.123. Savinkov, *Memoirs of a Terrorist*, p.158.

³⁴ For an account of the interrogation refer to Savinkov, *Memoirs of a Terrorist*, pp.159-167.

³⁵ *ibid*, p.223.

formulated, when Stolypin exposed their plans during a meeting of the Second Duma.³⁷ The question of the Tsar's assassination was brought before the Central Committee again immediately after the dissolution of the Second Duma. This meeting took place in Finland. Chernov supported Gershuni who argued in favour of an attempt. The Central Committee unanimously decided that the time was ripe for the Tsar's assassination, and that the Party should immediately proceed to organise this.³⁸ The resolution was more a statement of principle than any firm resolve to actually carry out the assassination. Organisationally the party at this time was incapable of carrying out such a proposal.

In May, 1908, Vladimir Burtsev, editor of the historical revolutionary journal *Byloe* (The Old Days), informed the Central Committee that he had reason to suspect Azef of being an *agent-provocateur*. Burtsev's allegations were violently attacked by Chernov who rushed to defend Azef's reputation, extolling his revolutionary services.³⁹ The Central Committee of the SR party at a party conference in London, in 1908, decided to have Burtsev tried by Court of Honour. The Court of Honour sat in Paris, and

³⁶ Nicolaievsky, *Aseff: The Russian Judas*, p.206.

³⁷ *ibid*, p.210.

³⁸ *ibid*, pp.216-218.

³⁹ *ibid*, p.253; also Savinkov, *ibid*, p.328.

although Lopatin was the official chairman, the inquiry was in fact conducted principally by Chernov.⁴⁰ After a month, the inquiry found some substance to Burtsev's allegations, and began an investigation into Azef's activities, though with some dissent.

Tchernov [Chernov], Natanson and I decided that in the event of Bourtzev's [Burtsev] acquittal we would openly challenge the court and fight its decision: we still refused to entertain the slightest suspicion of Azev [Azef].⁴¹

The subsequent investigation produced incontrovertible evidence and convinced even the most ardent of sceptics. On 5 January, 1909, at a meeting of the Central Committee, the evidence was presented and a proposed course of action decided. Opinion was divided. Zenzinov, Prokofiev, Sletov and Savinkov voted for the immediate death of Azef. The majority equivocated, with Chernov amongst them, and argued that the killing of Azef would cause a split in the party. They also feared repercussions from the Fighting Organisation, that is, attempts on their own lives as many members of the Fighting Organisation remained loyal to Azef. It was also feared that Azef's execution would lead to reprisals against the emigres. Only Natanson remained unconvinced as to Azef's guilt. A compromise was reached. The meeting decided to continue the

⁴⁰ Nicolaievsky, p.252; Savinkov, *ibid*, p.327.

⁴¹ Savinkov, *Memoirs...*, p.332.

investigation of Azef, while at the same time to prepare for his killing with the least possible damage to the party. The execution of Azef was to take place outside France at a secluded villa. He was to be enticed to the villa under an appropriate pretext by Chernov and Savinkov.⁴² In the meantime, Chernov, Savinkov and Panov were to continue their interrogation of Azef - under strict instructions not to kill Azef. In essence, the Central Committee had decided upon a purely juridical course abandoning any revolutionary solution to the question.⁴³ The initial interrogation of Azef in Paris, on 5 January, 1909, was sufficient enough to confirm his feelings of anguish and Azef fled the following day.

The exposure of Azef dealt a heavy blow to the party and to the idea of terror. 'If one had not lived through those days, it would be difficult to even imagine for oneself the dimensions of how dumbfounded the party was and the feeling of a moral catastrophe'.⁴⁴ At the Fifth Party Conference in May of 1909, Chernov spoke at length on terror, its justifications, and moral and ethical considerations. It is an attempt that failed as he reduced the problem to a subjective foundation, and this meant he could not solve it.

⁴² Nicolaievsky, *ibid*, p.258; Savinkov, *ibid*, p.342.

⁴³ Savinkov, *ibid*, p.343.

⁴⁴ Chernov. *Pered Burei*, p.285.

Out of the mire of the Azef affair, Chernov attempted to salvage some form of party credibility. The party was compromised by its inability to see a provocateur in their midst for so long. But this did not compromise terror itself: the ideas of terror and execution of the idea are distinct.

Chernov swept away all 'rational' justifications of terror and reduced the problem of terror to individual responsibility.

I have always personally carried the profound conviction that, in general, not only a terrorist as such, but also a socialist-revolutionary terrorist, could only be a person who did not enter the Party "especially for" terror, did not enter the party "through terror", but who in his own practice understood, knew, esteemed and sympathised with the total value of our basic organic work.⁴⁵

Chernov continued on with his analysis by drawing the matter of terror down to the fine point of who directs and who executes the decision to kill. It is not a matter of whom the government will hang, because the '..."entrepreneurs" will swing by the neck for the same thing as the actors'. One never knows what punishment will be; the government never acts the same. But this does not concern moral values: 'I do not understand how one can introduce in a moral problem some principle of mechanically equal justice...'. 'It

⁴⁵ *Dokumenty po istorii Partii Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov: Vopros o terrore na V Sovete Partii, Mai 1909 god.* (Documents on the history of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party: The question of terror at the fifth Party Conference. May. 1909) in *Sotsialist-Revoliutsioner*, no.2 Paris, 1910. pp.35-36.

simply does not concern us; that is, it concerns our bodies, but our spirit can never be subordinate to it'.⁴⁶ Those who write of terror are a thousand times safer than organisers and doers. Yet, 'they know, they cannot fail to know, that every written line in defense of terror may be a life surrendered in terrorist struggle in the future'. I say: in a party which practises terror, before each stands, in especially clear relief and with singular force, the moral problem: are you, can you be, ready at any moment to give up your life?' And this problem does not only exist in a terrorist party. Any party which looks to armed rebellion but denies terror faces this problem but forgets it. For 'every line in defence of armed rebellion can perhaps also be a life, and not one, but perhaps hundreds and thousands of lives'. To be a terrorist party means to open the problem, to be reminded of it 'every day, hourly, as a *memento mori* standing before every member': To be a member of a terrorist party means to face this problem. 'And he who does not decide this question he who forgets it, has not decided for himself the great ethical problem, and does not have the right to say that he can be a member of such a party'.⁴⁷

Chernov thus brought the question of terror to the individual

⁴⁶ *ibid*, pp.36-37.

⁴⁷ *ibid*, pp.37-38.

conscience. When the members of the conference voted, Chernov stated that he was for cessation of terror, but, because of his position on the central committee, he abstained from voting. The conference voted six to one with three abstentions, to continue the terror.⁴⁸

To justify terror in individual subjective terms in the end is no justification at all. Shortly after the party conference Chernov attempted to expand the question of terror to a societal, more 'objective' problem. He argued by way of analogy. A commune decided to remove grain from its common barn. However, the local *zemstvo* put the barn under lock. A strong peasant was needed to break the lock. This strong peasant acted alone in the interests of all. The analogy applied to terrorists. 'But terror as a system of struggle can arise only when the popular conscience speaks an unwritten death sentence to its persecutors. Only an atmosphere of general sympathy can give birth to that stream of selflessness which [leads to] the replacement of one fallen terrorist by a second, a third - endlessly, fearlessly, calmly. Terror is only apparently individual...'.⁴⁹ The interaction between terrorist and the mass is intimate. The terrorist had to know he was getting results, he could

⁴⁸ *ibid*, pp.51-52.

⁴⁹ Chernov under the pseudonym B. Olenin. 'Zamietky terrorie', (Notes on terror), *Znamia Truda*, no.19 19 July, 1909, pp.6-11.

not exist cut off from popular sympathy. 'By introducing terror into its program, by accepting before the whole country, nay, before the whole world, responsibility for terrorist acts, a revolutionary party is somewhat nearer to realising the communal "all are responsible".'⁵⁰

Chernov's analogy of the strong peasant was not sufficient, for he could not explain the strong peasant's motives. Moreover, the whole question of terror is insoluble in the context of formal ethics which posits some absolute against killing. It is not clear whether Chernov realised that he had run up against a stone wall in pursuing the question of terror in a framework of formal ethics and then leaped over that wall by considering the problem as a result of societal, and not individual imperatives, wherein the hero is 'moved' even though he considers himself to be the 'mover'. Essentially, that is what he had done; terror is only apparently individual; all are responsible. By reducing criteria for action to an individual level he had lost the possibility of action for any but narrow, self-contained, and perhaps unknowable motives.

The question of terror died a natural death in party activity, leaving Chernov to work out his solutions alone. Nicolaievsky relates a comment Chernov once made that 'terror was not begun by Aseff

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

[Azef], and will not end with him'.⁵¹ Only the former part of this sentence is correct. The exposure of Azef pronounced the death sentence on the party's terrorist campaign. The attempts by Sletov and Savinkov to revive the terrorist campaign made little headway and collapsed. The party was even unable to carry out the death sentence on Azef that the Central Committee ordered. The labours of Chernov in justifying terror rapidly became irrelevant. The whole tardy episode shattered the mystique of moral avengers against an immoral regime forced to rely on repression to survive. It was a mystique that lulled so many SR leaders into such a false sense of security that it confused their judgements. As a consequence, they allowed virtual autonomy of terrorist enterprises and staunchly defended a viper within their midst. By doing so they undermined their own credibility and authority. While they revelled in their successes, the unmasking of the Azef's treachery shattered their party.

The conclusion is inescapable that the practice of terrorism had not paid off in the long run, all the more since its primary purpose, at least in theory, had been to provoke a popular uprising which would sweep the old regime into the dustbin of history.⁵²

51 Nicolaievsky, *Aseff. The Russian Judas*, p.266.

52 Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, p.74.

From the defeat of the 1905 revolution until the outbreak of the war, the party experienced internal crises, repression and treachery. The party under Chernov had foundered and no amount of effort by him could save it. The ship that Chernov had attempted to steer a middle course, a compromise course under a flag of convenience, was one which virtually no one recognised, let alone saluted.

Outside of Russia the leadership in exile was divided into three groups, of which one approached the Maximalist position, another leaned towards Popular Socialism, and a third fell in between the two. The intermediate group under Chernov hewed to the orthodox SR line in spite of hell and high water.⁵³

⁵³ *ibid*, p.81.

Chapter 7

Internationalism

The outbreak of the war in July 1914 confronted Socialist Revolutionaries in the European emigration with a terrible dilemma. Separated from home by hundreds of miles and two military fronts, they were forced to make fateful decisions about the war when deprived of first hand knowledge of what its effects were in Russia. The SR party, of course, was a party already split by dissension on major issues, even on the cardinal question of whether or not to continue operating as an underground revolutionary party. Naturally, individuals already treading such divergent paths could not achieve unanimity on so divisive an issue as the war. On the one hand, moderate SRs, called 'liquidators' because of their desire to 'liquidate' the underground party organisations, and who believed in the possibility of evolutionary development in Russia, chose to support the government in its time of trial. On the other hand, the cadres of party activists who had not relinquished the revolutionary cause found it difficult to overcome the effects of years of frustration and hostility toward the government now that it had engaged the country in a potentially ruinous war against which they had long warned. They either lapsed into a tortured neutrality, gradually edging toward opposition as the war dragged on, or came out

against the war from the very beginning.

Nonetheless, the SR party as a whole remained firmly committed to its former revolutionary tradition, as demonstrated by its policy of rejecting participation in the Duma. SRs refused to make a compromise with the liberal, moderate, and evolutionary policies it symbolised. The SRs basically uncompromised stance on the issue of revolution found its reflection in the party's program on the war issue between 1907 and 1914. SRs like most socialists, had committed themselves to take action against a war if it came. The First Party Congress had pledged the party to oppose by the 'most decisive means' in its power the entrance of Russia into war.¹ Such commitments, of course, were as common as grains of sand on a beach and, as it turned out, signified little when the patriotic slogan to 'defend the fatherland' reached the ears of numerous socialists. There were, however, anti-war stances and anti-war stances. The party reaffirmed its anti-war stance at the Internationalist Socialist Congress at Basel in 1912. The official SR resolution read as follows:

modern war is the inevitable result of the capitalist system.... The Party of Socialist Revolutionaries declares war against war...[and] will with all its force oppose drawing our country into a fratricidal war.... The duty of the party is to protect the working class...[against] the insatiable appetite of Russian

¹ *Protokoly pervago sezda...*, pp.290-291.

imperialism.... The party should utilize growing political unrest in the struggle against tsarism and capitalism.²

The party's resolution on war, when considered in the context of its generally radical stance on major political and social issues, carries the suggestion that the SR party might not renounce its anti-war commitments as easily as many socialists, Russian and non-Russian, found possible. Certain SR positions at the Stuttgart and Copenhagen Congresses of the International, the last two before the war, also indicate that this was so. On the basis of such resolve one would therefore expect numerous SR's to oppose the war when it came.

On 22 August, 1914, in the village of Beaugy-sur-Clarens near Geneva on the dairy farm of E.E. Lazarev, a contingent of distinguished SR emigre leaders gathered for the first time since the outbreak of the war to discuss what to do about the shattering event. The conference was an attempt by the party to act in a unified manner during the war. In the end, it laid the foundation for internationalism and even defeatism (the call for Russia's defeat in the war), a development worthy of note since, according to most historical opinion, only Bolsheviks were supposed to have been defeatist.

² A.I. Spiridovich, *Partiia Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov i ikh Predshestvenniki 1886-1916*. Petrograd. 1918. pp.509-510.

The right wing at the conference consisted of V. Banakov, N. Avksentiev, and V. Rudnev, while the left wing had as its most forceful spokesmen V.M. Chernov and M. Natanson, with the balance of the fifteen or so delegates standing somewhere in between.³ The rightists, whose first speaker was Bunakov, took the position that the democratic entente of France and England was threatened by German militarism. Since Russia, whose existence was also threatened by Germany, had formed an alliance with these powers, her war effort deserved support. Only reform, rather than revolution, could strengthen Russia during the war. As a consequence, socialists must abandon their normal role for the duration of the war; the only goal for socialists was 'the war and its successful conduct'. Chernov, opening speaker for the left, in a statement utterly at odds with that of the right, put the matter as follows: 'Our front [as socialists] is against the war, in defense of the socialist international, which is threatened by it'. This war claimed Chernov, was not defensive for Russia, since she had dynastic rather than national goals. The defeat of Russia, which Chernov conceded as a possibility, should be seen as the defeat of the Russian government, the result of which would be a 'people's government'.

³ *ibid*, p.524.

The party, stated Chernov, cannot remain as a mere onlooker, but must set about to influence events. 'It must prepare arms and... influence the masses to the extent possible. We must be ready for revolution and plan it. We must send an active group into Russia, a kernel around which the party forces we have sown will gather. [We must] be prepared for appropriate action'.⁴ Although he was later to deny it, Chernov had outlined in unmistakable terms a revolutionary defeatist stance for the SR party during the war.

The position of the venerable Natanson, who had in the late 1860's formed the very first full scale revolutionary organisation on Russian soil, was even more radical. Natanson approved of Chernov's idea of sending groups of activists into Russia and urged the party to put aside all internal strife. Furthermore, Natanson, felt that, 'a great evil would result if Russia defeated Germany. This would be against the interests of the people since it would preserve the present order.' Natanson recommended that the party turn not to the bourgeois intelligentsia, but 'to the workers and peasants. Reveal to them the corruption of the government and the

⁴ V.V. Rudnev, 'Iz istorii partii (zagranichnoe soveshchanie tsentralnykh rabotnikov P.S-R. Po voprosu o linii povedeniia v usloviakh mirovoi voiny)', (From the History of the Party [Conference Abroad of Central Workers of the PSR to Determine the Line to be Taken in the World War]), in *Svoboda* (Freedom), no.4 December, 1935, pp.13-18; no.5 July, 1936, pp.6-10.

criminality.' The party should wait for the right moment for the revolution, but, concluded Natanson, 'this is hard to imagine without Russia's defeat'. Chernov, evidently inspired by Natanson's unshakeable dedication to revolution, even ventured a little later to proclaim a Russian victory 'dangerous', since it would carry the empire to Constantinople (Russian war aims included the Dardanelle Straits). 'Our role in victory or defeat is to protest nationalism with extreme means as do Liebknecht and Luxembourg.'⁵

The response of the moderate SRs like Rudnev, Avksentiev and Bunakov to what seemed to them irresponsible extremist views was one of incredulity; they found it difficult to reconcile that party comrades could think about war other than they did. In any case, Chernov and Natanson calmly explained the program they espoused to their old party comrades. As Chernov put it, 'it is necessary to reveal in a socialist manner the anti-people's character of tsarist policy in the war.... We should work not for the victory, but for revolution.' Natanson pointed out that, from the socialist point of view, 'the problem is what to tell the people; the war is not in their interest. The interests of the ruling classes and the people are contrary in spite of the war.... If the masses rise against the war,

⁵ *ibid.*

this is more important than victory of one side or another.' After gruelling debate, a vote was taken on the issue of whether or not to send activists into Russia, with the leftist resolution approving this measure winning the majority of votes.⁶ There then ensued a shorter discussion, followed by another vote, on the question of how the party should relate to the International. Chernov and Natanson felt that the old International, having failed to live up to its commitments to oppose the war, was bankrupt, and required the summoning of another through a conference of socialists opposing the war. This clearly foreshadowed, by the way, the Zimmerwald and Kienthal conferences of a year or two later. As Chernov described the matter: 'The old International is dead, Long live the International!' Speaking for the right wing, Rudnev praised the old International for failing to oppose the war, drawing an acerbic comment from Chernov that such praise was 'worse than any burial.' The extreme right wing represented by Bunakov, Avksentiev, and Rudnev opposed the idea outright, while Chernov and Natanson voted for an immediate convening of a conference of the International; the majority, however, felt that such a conference, while desirable in principle, was premature since passions were still running too high.⁷

⁶ *ibid*, no.4 pp.14-17, no.5 pp.6-10.

Radkey has claimed that the conference was inconclusive since the major decision - to send a group of activists into Russia - proved unattainable for the time being because of wartime disruption of underground channels of communication and travel.⁸ To be fair, it must also be pointed out that the decisions of the conference were not even binding on the emigre comrades, let alone on those at home. In fact, the Beaugy Conference revealed a split in the party on how to relate to the war so profound that the two positions clearly represented not just differing views of the war, but antipodal perceptions of a whole range of crucial political issues. This was a development that did not augur well for the possibility of ever conciliating the two sides of the division. It is of interest that the most ardent proponents of the war at the conference, Bunakov, Rudnev, and Avksentiev, had long associated themselves with and had indeed founded, the liquidator movement in the party, while Chernov and Natanson represented the central core of party activists who, as mentioned, remained dedicated to revolution. All of this notwithstanding, the Beaugy conference was most noteworthy for the fact that it revealed that, from the very earliest

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ O.H. Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*. Columbia University Press. 1962. pp.92-93.

days of the terrible conflict consuming the youth, wealth, and spirit of Europe, SR leaders of the very greatest influence such as Chernov and Natanson not only opposed the war, not only favoured revolution, not only expressed the intention to continue to work toward revolution, but rejected even the idea of a Russian victory and raised (even praised) the prospect of Russia's defeat as a necessary prelude to revolution. This position, erroneously attributed exclusively to Lenin and some Bolsheviks, came to be known as 'defeatism' and represented the most extreme position on the war.

Chernov's doctrine of the Third Force, enunciated by him as early as the Beaugy conference in August, 1914, argued that it should be the duty of true socialists to organise and lead a Third Force of the working masses of Europe, and 'that they must intervene in order to force a settlement that would be fair and equitable, and hence beyond the capacity of either imperialist trust to achieve.'⁹ True socialists only could lead such a movement for Chernov was disgusted by the wholesale rush of bourgeois pacifists in 1914 to support their respective countries' war machines, and was so repelled by the nature of the remaining bourgeois 'pacifists' like Caillaux of France, since individuals like him were only against war

⁹ *ibid*, p.107.

and not against private property.¹⁰

The Third Force was to form in the various belligerent countries, set up mutual contact and be given direction by a revived socialist international. Chernov regarded these as gigantic tasks. It was to propagandise for an end to the dreadful war, and for a just peace without annexations and indemnities. But, more than this, the Third Force was to seize power in any country where it could. From the immensely powerful position of controlling a belligerent government, the Third Force was to expand the pressure for a just peace - an example which, Chernov thought, would surely spread revolution across the whole of Europe.¹¹

Important in this theory was Chernov's conviction that Russia, with the least popular regime and the worst class struggle in Europe, would be the first country to present revolutionary opportunities. Hence, Russia might well be the standard bearer of revolution and peace, a singular honour and an awful responsibility. Revolutionary Russia would then have to tread the

¹⁰ Chernov under the pseudonym Iu. Gardenin 'Lozungi momenta: I. Patsifizm i sotsializm' (Slogans of the Moment: I, Pacifism and Socialism), in *Voina i 'Tretia Sila: Sbornik Statei* (The War and the 'Third Force': A Collection of Articles). Geneva, 1915. pp.25-28; 'K obosnovaniuu nashego lozuna.' (On Providing a Basis for Our Slogan) in *ibid*, pp.31-40.

¹¹ Refer to Chernov, 'Tretia sila' (The Third Force), in *Voina i 'Tretia Sila': Sbornik Statei*. Geneva, 1915. pp.17-20; and Chernov 'Dva techeniia' (Two trends), in *ibid*, pp.7-11.

thin line of continuing the fight against imperial Germany - defensively only - while inspiring and aiding the birth of revolutionary Germany.¹²

It is important to realise that Chernov had formulated the substance of this program and these predictions as early as the Beaugy conference in August, 1914, and had enunciated them clearly, many times over, before the international conference at Zimmerwald in September 1915.¹³

Yet it has been argued that Chernov's formulations of Russia in a revolutionary vanguard role owe their origins to Lenin. With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that interpretations of the Bolsheviks' rise to power in 1917, and indeed in the arena of action, have given them a certain preeminence in many aspects of theory. It would however, be presumptuous to let events overshadow Chernov's role in theory.

Undoubtedly, similarities in outlook occurred in their evaluations of imperialism, the effects of war and proposals in favour of the new international.¹⁴ It is unfair that history, it seems, has chosen

¹² Chernov, 'Komu nachat' (Who Shall Begin), in *ibid*, pp.40-47; and Chernov, 'Imperativy morali i imperativy zhizni', (The Imperatives of Morality and the Imperatives of Life), in *ibid*, pp.47-55.

¹³ A. Senn, *The Russian Revolution in Switzerland 1914-1917*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1971. p.20.

¹⁴ Chernov, 'Lozungi momenta : II, Nash takticheskii lizung' (Slogans of the Moment: II Our Tactical Slogan) in *Voina i 'Tretia Sila'*, pp.28-31 and

to illuminate only Lenin's daring projections with the lustre of prescience. 'In order to exculpate Chernov entirely from the charge of theoretical subservience to Lenin, it is necessary only to remember that affinity does not constitute identity.'¹⁵

There were, however, differences between the two. In Chernov's plan Russia would play the vanguard role in revolution, but it would have to be matched with similar action in Germany and Austria. For unless Russia provided the revolutionary catalyst for imperial Germany, the war would continue and the existence of a revolutionary Russia would be tenuous.

If on one side of the boundary the proletariat rises as one man against the war and deranges the whole machinery of mobilisation, but on the other side the proletariat as one man shoulders its rifles and marches docilely into action, then it turns out that the revolutionarily inclined proletariat has done something that is not at all revolutionary but has simply played into the hands of a foreign aggressor.¹⁶

Hence, an integral part of Chernov's tactic was the concept of reciprocity.

After the Beaugy meeting Chernov soon departed for Paris, where the Okhrana considered his arrival a major turning point in the emergence of an internationalist position among the socialist

'Komu nachat?' in *ibid*, pp.40-47.

¹⁵ Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, pp.111.

¹⁶ Chernov 'Komu nachat', in *Voina i 'Tretia Sila'*, p.41.

emigres.¹⁷ Throughout the autumn of 1914, SRs of both factions continued to meet in various European cities to discuss the possibility of a unified position on the war. In October, 1914, the Paris group of SRs , with Boris Voronov-Lebedev as right wing leader, and Chernov and Lavretskii as leftist spokesmen, met to debate the war. Voronov stated that every socialist living in free, democratic France should volunteer into the French Army in order to fight German imperialism and bring democracy to the German people. 'Volunteerism,' turned out to be another right-left issue in Russian emigre socialism. In any case, Lavretskii replied that it was a senseless mistake. A second speaker from the right felt that Germany's defeat would end militarism in Europe. Finally, Chernov summed up the the two sides of the discussion and then lectured those present about the duties of socialists, which he defined as acting in such a way that at the end of the war socialists could exert influence in redrawing the map of Europe. 'If German militarism is bad,' he concluded, so is Russian tsarism.'¹⁸ A few weeks later, in November, a second conference took place, this time in Chernov's apartment in Lausanne, Switzerland. According to an Okhrana report, it consisted of 'an intimate discussion among

¹⁷ Senn, *The Russian Revolution...*, p.20.

¹⁸ *Archive of the Imperial Russian Secret Police (Okhrana)*, Hoover Institute, Stanford University, SR File, XVI b(3), box 1, report dated October 1914.

leaders,' (one of whom, it so happened, was a provocateur). Attending were Avksentiev, Rudnev, Bunakov, Lazarev from the right and Natanson, Varvara Natanson (Mark Natanson's wife), Iia Sidorych, Chernov and others from the left. As usual, Chernov chaired the meeting, summarising in an opening speech the various views on the war prevalent among SRs. Some, according to Chernov, such as Natanson, espoused full opposition; others, such as Avksentiev, held that Russian revolutionaries should take part in this war; still others felt that socialists should remain neutral, working toward summoning a socialist conference to work out a position for all socialists.¹⁹ Since Chernov did not ascribe this last moderately leftist position to anyone in particular, it is reasonable to assume it to be his own. If so, his views, perhaps under the influence of news of enormous Russian losses, had moderated somewhat. It was also altogether characteristic of Chernov to attempt to reach compromises between two opposing positions, while flirting with leftism. In any case, Chernov's anti-war work had barely begun in November 1914. Slight differences between his views and those of the extreme left (Natanson) surfacing at this time are perhaps more important for explaining his actions in 1917

¹⁹ *ibid*, report dated November 1914.

than for the war-time era.

By the end of the month, pro- and anti-war SRs no longer met together. In late November, an exclusively rightist conference issued a statement, signed, among others, by Voronov, favouring continuation of the war and calling for a Russian victory. A leftist conference then issued a counter-resolution, signed by Chernov, M. Rakitnikov, his wife Olga Rakitnikova, and several others, against the war. This state of affairs, in which right and left worked separately and at cross purposes, characterised SR life in the emigration until the February Revolution, when an uneasy marriage of convenience temporarily bound the two sides together until the final official split in late 1917 gave birth to two SR parties instead of one.

Chernov and Natanson did not restrict themselves to speeches at conferences in defence of their position. The event occurring precisely at the middle of the month making further joint work of the two sides impossible was the appearance on 15 November, 1914, in Paris of the internationalist daily *Mysl* (Idea) under the editorship of V.M. Chernov.²⁰ *Mysl*, along with the left Menshevik *Golos* (Voice) and the Bolshevik *Sotsial-Demokrat*, set the tone for the powerful Russian internationalist movement in

²⁰ Spiridovich, *Partiia Sotsialistov- Revoliutsionerov*, p.530.

Europe in the first year of the war. Lenin, who followed *Mysl* and its successors *Zhizn* (Life) and *Otkliki zhizni* closely, fretting when he missed an issue, nevertheless denigrated their content. In a letter to Bolshevik activist G. Shliapnikov dated 28 November, 1914, Lenin commented that, in 'Paris a daily S.R. *Mysl* (*arch-philistine* phrase-making, playing at "Leftism"). An abundance of papers, phrases from the intelligentsia, today r-r-revolutionary, tomorrow...? (tomorrow they will *make peace* with Kautsky, Plekhanov, the liquidationists "patriotic-chauvinist-opportunist intelligentsia" in Russia)... You cannot trust them in the slightest.'²¹

Lenin's attack notwithstanding, throughout its existence from mid-November 1914 to March 1915, *Mysl* occupied a staunchly internationalist position, espousing the immediate convening of a new Third International and a revolution at home, coupled with frequent bitter attacks against the government. The list contributors to *Mysl* was large, but the main figures were Chernov, usually writing under the pseudonym Iu. Gardenin, M. Rakitnikov, Olga Rakitnikova, Olga Chernova (Chernov's wife), V. Angarskii, and Boris Kamkov. The stern French censorship, applied freely to the

²¹ V.I. Lenin. *Collected Works Letters Feb.1912 - Dec.1922*. Vol.35, Progress Publishers, Moscow 1966. p.176. All linguistic oddities in the original.

pages of *Mysl*, greatly complicates the task of fully ascertaining its positions on some issues, a problem pertaining to the left Menshevik *Golos*, also originating from Paris, but not to Lenin's *Sotsial-Demokrat*, which appeared in Geneva, where the Swiss police displayed sublime indifference to what Russian socialists were saying or doing. (Switzerland, of course, was neutral, whereas France was a participant in the war.) The censors in Paris simply whited out the most radical articles. A large blank space appeared on the first page of the 25 November, 1914 issue, while by February and March the pages were as much white as black. An editorial in one of the last issues warned readers, who could have had no doubts about it, of a growing problem with the censors. A few days later the paper closed down.

Despite the obstacle posed by the French censors, Chernov and the other contributors managed to disclose in the pages of *Mysl* their views on a wide range of important issues of the day. One of the first questions discussed in *Mysl* was 'volunteerism.' Socialists from various countries had been volunteering in sizeable numbers into the allied armies, especially the French Foreign Legion, with the goal of defeating German militarism.²²

²² Among prominent SR volunteers were Sletov Chernov's brother-in-law, who was soon killed.

Articles in *Mysl* unanimously condemned the phenomenon as futile, a violation of the spirit of the International, and disorganising to the socialist cause. An unsigned editorial, obviously written by Chernov, on 28 November stated that, 'Life has taught us too much for such enthusiasms.'²³ Furthermore, wrote Chernov on another occasion, 'we are opposed to entry into the Russian army except with explicitly revolutionary aims.'²⁴

On the war issue there were some differences in nuance among the contributors to *Mysl*, but articles published in the paper were unquestionably internationalist.²⁵ Most articles escaping the censors were left-centrist in tendency - that is, they did not agitate openly for Russia's defeat, but were hostile to the war, backed revolution during the war or immediately after it, as the case might be, and openly criticised the government. They also raised the *possibility* of Russia's defeat, a matter pro-war socialists did allude to. In the very first issue (15 November 1914), a lead article polemicised with the right Menshevik Iordanskii, who proclaimed

²³ *Mysl*, no.12, 28 November, 1914.

²⁴ *ibid*, no.49, 13 January, 1915.

²⁵ Chernov was at pains to make clear that *Mysl* was a 'private endeavour,' rather than an official party organ. In truth the party was too split to allow for a single line, allowing *Mysl* writers some freedom in exploring various strains of internationalism. *Mysl* published no pro-war articles.

in a moderate socialist journal the necessity for the national masses of Russia to take part in the war. The unidentified *Mysl* writer (evidently Chernov) responded sarcastically, ' "a national war". Oh yes, we know from history examples of such wars. The wars of the French Republic and of Garibaldi were real peoples' wars. But there could be no question of a national war in tsarist Russia, where people were not free.'²⁶ The writer then pointed out that on the Russian side the war depended entirely on draftees, there being few volunteers.

Mysl consistently promoted the cause of revolution for the duration of its existence. Chernov wrote on 19 December, 1914, that:

...we must not stand aside from social organisations working in the rear of the army and in the country, even from those *shot* through with a spirit of chauvinism, but on the contrary we must enter them. Enter, not losing ourselves in them... enter assigning ourselves one task - to reveal to the eyes of society the inescapableness of the conflict [revolution] that is already in the womb of the future.²⁷

For, as Chernov expressed it a little later, although, 'at the moment we can't open the revolutionary struggle against the war,... the time may come when this will be obligatory.'²⁸

This theme of impending revolution arose constantly on the pages of *Mysl*. Chernov wrote at one point that:

²⁶ *Mysl*, no.1, 15 November, 1914.

²⁷ *ibid*, no.30, 19 December, 1914.

²⁸ *ibid*, no.49, 13 January, 1915.

...the interests of the people and the interests of the government don't coincide and can't coincide in this war.... The conflict between the government and the country in embryonic form is already contained in the nature of things, in essence of the whole present situation.²⁹

In articles in late December, Chernov reverted on a daily basis to this topic. On 20 December Chernov, advised that 'the conflict with the government is inevitable. What form? Who knows.... Be ready for anything!!' Again on 22 December he stated that 'the interests of the regime and the people are headed for a clash. Enter social organisations.... The benefits: contact with the broad masses.'³⁰ While Chernov employed biological and other circumlocutions, the germ of his thought was that the war was creating the revolution which would overthrow the government. On 1 January 1915, SR activist Ivan Derevenskii attacked pro-war elements calling for socialists to disarm themselves and make an alliance with the tsar. After reciting a list of tsarist abuses, Derevenskii concluded, 'if you like all of this - please, make peace with tsarism. but we prefer to struggle against it even during the war. With this wish we meet the new year of 1915.'³¹ Finally, on 14, February 1915, Chernov defined the leftist position as follows: 'Agitate, especially if

²⁹ *ibid*, no.30, 19 December, 1914.

³⁰ *ibid*, no.31, 20 December, 1914; and no.32, 22 December, 1914.

³¹ *ibid*, no.40, 1 January, 1915.

conditions are ripe for peace and revolution... and "Be prepared!"³²

Mysl also had an impeccably leftist position on the International. Chernov in various articles fought for and defended the convening of an international conference.³³ Chernov warned on 31 January, 1915, that the new International must break sharply with the traditions of the old: 'we need not repeat the same mistakes.' On 7 February, Boris Kamkov explained that the crisis of the International was brought on by the war and that the war had done harm to the solidarity of the working class and of socialism. Finally, 'A.V.,' writing from London on 8 February, 1915, gave the correct leftist slogan (the very one used by Chernov at Beaugy): 'The International is dead. Long live the International!'³⁴

In early 1915, with much fanfare, the London Conference of Allied Socialists gathered. This conference, despite the publicity preceding it, turned out to be something of a non-event. The concept of such a meeting, that socialists from one side of the war gather, was not a felicitous one from the left-socialist standpoint, since it smacked of a division of socialism along lines prescribed by the war-time

³² *ibid*, no.77, 14 February, 1915.

³³ Chernov, especially his long article 'A socialist evaluation of the war (several theses)', *Mysl*. no.6, 21 November, 1914.

³⁴ *Mysl*, no.25, 13 December, 1914, no.42, 5 January, 1915, no.65, 31 January, 1915, no.71, 7 February, 1916, no.76, 13 February, 1915.

alignment of forces. This was precisely what right socialists advocated. Not surprisingly, few leftists and not one Bolshevik attended. From the SRs, A. Argunov and I. Rubanovich of the right and Chernov and Natanson of the left showed up. The conference's resolution called, in fact, for an Allied victory over German militarism.³⁵ The two right SRs voted for the resolution, while Chernov and Natanson abstained, drawing Martov's ire in *Nashe slovo* (Our Word), the left Menshevik newspaper. When Martov inquired why they hadn't voted against the resolution, there resulted a brief polemical flurry between Chernov and Martov. The SR internationalists, claimed Chernov, had repeatedly appealed for an all socialist conference aimed at the creation of a new International, while Social Democrats had shown no interest. He and Natanson had decided, therefore, to refrain from voting in order not to jeopardise their effectiveness in the founding of the Third International at a later date.³⁶

The resolution offered by Chernov and Natanson at the London Conference as well as a statement published by them in *Mysl* reveal the leftist SR position on the war as of early 1915.

³⁵ The text of the conference's resolution is reproduced in O.H. Gankin and H.H. Fisher, *The Bolshevik and the World War: The Origin of the Third International*. Stanford University Press Stanford, 1960. pp.278-279.

³⁶ *Mysl*, no.79, 17 February, 1915, and no.94, 6 March, 1915.

The declaration in *Mysl* stated simply that the task at hand was the rebirth of the International and an end to the war. It warned against the idealisation of war or any warring camp. The correct slogan, announced Chernov and Natanson, was not 'peace at all costs,' but 'peace on conditions favourable to the working classes.' This latter qualification signified that they dissociated themselves from pacifism, espousing instead a revolutionary end to the war - the only outcome which could be 'favourable to the working classes.'³⁷ The Chernov-Natanson program outlined here, with its rejection of civil peace and pacifism, was tantamount to an appeal for general revolution in all warring countries or, as Lenin put it, 'to turn the war into a civil war.'

In the aftermath of the London conference, during the month of March, Chernov travelled through Switzerland to confer with representatives of both the Organisational Committee and the Central Committee, as well as with SR groups. Lecturing in the Eintracht House on March 12, he called for greater pressure by workers' groups on the governments of Europe. On March 15 in Lausanne, he called for peace, to be contracted not by the present government of Russia but by a constituent assembly.³⁸

³⁷ *ibid*, no.87, 26 February, 1915.

³⁸ Cited in Alfred E. Senn, *The Russian Revolution in Switzerland 1914-1917*, Madison University of Wisconsin Press, 1971. p.42.

Meanwhile, by mid-March 1915, the French police were subjecting *Mysl* to such harsh treatment that it was forced to close down. Chernov later complained that 'the pages had come to look like a map of unexplored Africa.'³⁹ The Chernov group almost immediately replaced it with a new paper *Zhizn* (Life).⁴⁰ French authorities, under pressure from the tsarist government, soon applied repressive measures against *Zhizn* as well.⁴¹ The police forbade meetings, the reading of reports, public lectures, or any other activities aimed at raising funds for *Zhizn*. When the editors raised the possibility of moving the paper to Switzerland, which exercised no censorship whatsoever, the printers, perhaps loath to lose the business, warned that if they did so the French government would ban the paper. This confronted leftist SRs with a dilemma, since the socialist public in France was much larger than in Switzerland. Nonetheless, in the latter part of May, the editors, faced with an almost impossible censorship, moved *Zhizn* to Geneva, where it became a weekly instead of a daily. As predicted, the French government blocked entry of the paper into France. Circulation dropped and fund-raising was difficult.⁴² Nevertheless,

³⁹ Quoted in *ibid*, pp.78-79.

⁴⁰ Spiridovich, *Partiia Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov*, p.530.

⁴¹ Senn, *The Russian Revolution...*, p.79.

⁴² *ibid*, p.79.

Zhizn continued publication until early 1916, when it was replaced by two new internationalist SR organs, *Na chuzhbine* (On Foreign Soil) and *Otkliti zhizni* (Echoes of Life), appearing in Geneva and Paris respectively.⁴³ In this way, the internationalists attempted to reach as much of the socialist public as possible.

Like the SRs the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks all experienced deep divisions over what to do about the war. Block alliances were formed among all Russian socialist parties. French secret police reported in the autumn of 1914 that the leading figures in Paris emigre circles were Martov, Lunacharskii, Chernov and Trotsky. They usually marked Chernov as the leader, the others as his lieutenants; the four constantly appeared together at meetings, 'arguing the same case.'⁴⁴ As perplexing as it may seem, the anti-war elements of the three parties had more in common with one another than with the pro-war forces of their own parties. Cooperation in support of, or in opposition to, the war formed along those lines, rather than along party lines.

By the autumn of 1915, the idea of a conference aimed at creating a new International finally reached fruition. The SR internationalists

⁴³ The last issue of *Zhizn* came out on 2 January 1916.

⁴⁴ Michael Shaw, 'The *Nashe Slovo* group and Russian Social Democracy during World War One: the Search for Unity,' *Ph.D. thesis*, Indiana University, 1975. p.84, p.98, p.107.

were enthusiastic participants in what came to be known as the 'Zimmerwald movement' (named after the town in which the first conference met). This was only natural since Chernov and Natanson had come out for this concept as early as August 1914 and had actively promoted it ever since. It is simply not possible to ascertain whether their sponsorship played a major role in the summoning of the Zimmerwald Conference, but, at the very least, it is possible to state that the balance of European anti-war socialism at last came around to a point of view long held by internationalist SRs. The context in which the Zimmerwald movement arose was one of increasing hardening of views in both the pro-war and anti-war camps. For socialists opposed to the war, carrying out actions against the war was now more important than which side of the battle lines fellow socialists came from, rendering possible a conference of like-minded socialists of all warring and neutral nations.

The rise of the Zimmerwald movement came at an opportune time for the leftist SRs, since they too were experiencing a further radicalisation. On 17 September, 1915, a general meeting of anti-war SRs from Berne, Lausanne, and Geneva took place, with Chernov, Vnórovskii, J.Dikker, Koniushin, Natanson, Starynkevich,

Gavronskii, A. Ustinov, and 'Poliak' (the Pole) in attendance. This group once again decided to coordinate actions and to establish contacts in Russia. Despite references to this sort of activity at Beaugy in August, 1914, SR meetings in the intervening months had not devoted much attention to the question of maintaining ties with the internal Russian movement and the sending of groups there; the truth was that the war had so disrupted communications that socialists were impelled to postpone such plans. But, by the autumn of 1915, the mood in Russia had begun to change, a circumstance about which emigre SRs, as well as SDs were informed. It is not accidental that Bolsheviks too began to take steps to re-establish contacts with Russia in this very period. In early October, a second expanded conference of SR internationalists from Geneva, Berne, Zurich, and Lausanne took place. The main topic was the carrying out of agitational and organisational work in Russia. Chernov, as usual the chief speaker, raised a number of issues for discussion, including the ministerial crisis, the State Duma and its legitimacy, the war as an issue turning the masses against the government, the rise of a mass revolutionary movement in Russia, and the advisability of carrying out propaganda among the masses and in the armed forces. Another

speaker raised doubts about the willingness of the Russian people to continue the war in view of reports of growing social and political unrest, as a result of which he recommended setting up routes to forward revolutionary literature into Russia. A final speaker summed up by pointing out that whereas the outbreak of the war had initially weakened the revolutionary movement, its continuation ultimately caused dissatisfaction and distrust among the working masses toward the government. The discussion among SRs at this time, it is worth noting, began to take a more practical turn. A conference such as Zimmerwald, having the goal of working out joint anti-war measures amongst all internationalist socialists, fitted their thinking perfectly.

The Zimmerwald Conference opened on 5 September in Geneva with thirty-eight socialists from eleven countries in attendance. Of these twelve were from Russia and Poland, including Bolsheviks Lenin and Zinoviev, Latvian SD Ia. Berzin, Mensheviks Akselrod and Martov, leftist SD Trotsky, Bundist P. Lemanskii, and SRs Chernov and Natanson.⁴⁵ The Zimmerwald Conference, as well as its successor at Kienthal, was conducted very much in the spirit of

⁴⁵ Gankin and Fisher, *The Bolsheviks and the World War*, p.320. Senn, *The Russian Revolution*, p.92. Natanson represented the SR Central Committee, while Chernov was the delegate for the SR Internationalist newspaper *Zhizn*. Chernov *Pered Burei*, p.310; Senn *The Russian Revolution*, p.92.

socialist cooperation.⁴⁶ There were, of course, differences of opinion at Zimmerwald, even between the two SR representatives. Chernov reported to the conference that the SR Foreign Delegation of the Central Committee and local party committees inside Russia were internationalist and that the latter were issuing anti-war proclamations.⁴⁷ Chernov's estimate of the extent of anti-war sentiment among SRs at home, considered by the Bolsheviks to be an exaggeration, were not inaccurate.⁴⁸ When the time came to vote on the famous Zimmerwald Manifesto,⁴⁹ Chernov criticised

⁴⁶ The site of Zimmerwald was chosen for its isolation and to avoid French and German newspaper correspondents. Delegates were forbidden from sending letters, and they received no news from the outside world. For recreation they could take mountain walks, or else listen to Grimm's yodelling and Viktor Chernov's rendition of Russian folk songs. Senn, *The Russian Revolution*, p.91.

⁴⁷ Chernov's report on the Zimmerwald Conference was published in *Zhizn*, 26 September, 1915.

⁴⁸ A hostile Bolshevik account stated: 'From his report [Chernov's] the whole world would be led to think that the Central Committee of the Socialist-Revolutionists stands firmly and solidly on the basis of internationalism. ... Further, it appeared that the local committees of all the large towns in Russia issued internationalist appeals, while the Conference of the Narodniks in Russia adopted internationalist resolutions. Briefly; "Praise, praise, the brave Russian Socialist-Revolutionist." As is known, the Socialist-Revolutionists were always proficient in phrases and boasting.' Shklovsky, 'Tsimmervald,' *Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia*, no.9 (44), 1925, pp.73-106. Quoted in Gankin and Fisher, *The Bolsheviks and the World War*. p.344.

⁴⁹ The Manifesto is reprinted in Spiridovich, *Partiia Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov*, pp.530-534. The proceedings of the conference can be found in Gankin and Fisher, *The Bolsheviks and the World War*. pp.322-326.

it for failing to emphasise Russian dynastic interests in starting the war and for claiming that the principal burden fell on the proletariat, whereas in Russia the peasantry suffered more.⁵⁰

Chernov ultimately voted for the Manifesto, but refused to sign it, whereas Natanson not only voted for it, but, along with Lenin and Akselrod, signed the document as well.⁵¹

At the end of the conference, Natanson speaking for the SRs requested that an announcement be added to the protocol of the conference that he and Chernov represented both the internationalist and defensist (social-patriotic, as he put it) wings of the party, since the SRs had been unable to convene a properly constituted conference to determine a single line regarding the war. Natanson may have wished to give the impression that all SRs supported the Zimmerwald movement, which was certainly not the case. Right SRs roundly criticised, in fact, condemned, or perhaps one should say anathematised, the Zimmerwald Conference, its Manifesto, and the Kienthal Conference that followed it. Chernov retained his reserve; on 28 September, 1915, he told an audience in Geneva that the Zimmerwald Conference had not succeeded in founding a new International, since

⁵⁰ Senn, *The Russian Revolution*, p.100; see also Gankin and Fisher, *The Bolsheviks and the World War*. pp.324-325.

⁵¹ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.310; Spiridovich, pp.534-535; Senn, p.101.

representation had been inadequate. Two days earlier in *Zhizn* he had subjected the Zimmerwald resolutions to the same criticisms. he employed at the conference itself, charging them with failure to mention the peasantry and special conditions of Russian imperialism (dynastic tsarism); in all, the manifesto was irrelevant to conditions in Russia.⁵² Frankly, Chernov seemed to cavil on these issues; reference must be made to slight ambivalences in his attitudes toward the war, which, became more important later. Natanson, on the other hand, evinced unbounded enthusiasm, later claiming that Zimmerwald gave birth to the new International, while Kienthal christened it. SRs as a whole, both inside and outside Russia, sided more with Natanson than Chernov. 'Zimmerwald' and 'Kienthal,' the names of the two obscure Swiss towns, became the battle slogans for most SRs, excepting of course the right wing of the party.

By the middle of autumn of 1915, right and left socialists had formed their alliances, held their respective joint conferences, and issued their manifestos. One would expect increasing definition of battle lines to sharpen the war of words, which is precisely what happened in SR circles. In the winter of 1915-1916, the Foreign

⁵² Senn, *The Russian Revolution*, pp.132-133.

Delegation of the Central Committee, now having a four-two majority against the war,⁵³ issued a declaration officially admitting that its members were divided on the war issue; 'these tendencies have by the present time split to such an extent that neither one can take responsibility for the political actions of the other.' Under these circumstances, stated the declaration, the Foreign Delegation, the *de facto* Central Committee, 'could no longer make decisions and would therefore limit itself to technical aid for party organisations inside Russia.'⁵⁴ The Okhrana mistook this for the formation of two separate parties.⁵⁵

The defencist SRs named Chernov and Natanson as the villains in dividing the party.⁵⁶ Each side, then, charged the other with guilt in the split; they both also laid claim, by the way, to the loyalty of

⁵³ At the beginning of the war, the Delegation Abroad of the Central Committee of the SR Party (which consisted of eight members), had split four to four on the question of the proper position toward the war. By 1916, the balance had altered in favour of the internationalists, owing to the voluntary withdrawal of two of the four 'defencists'.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Senn, *The Russian Revolution*, p.113.

⁵⁵ *ibid*, p.113.

⁵⁶ The depth of feeling among right SRs about the leftist SRs was quite strong. Two decades after the events, Argunov stated in an interview with Oliver Radkey that Chernov's views, while less strident than Lenin's were for that very reason more dangerous since they were accepted in quarters turning a deaf ear to Lenin. In a similar interview Rudnev expressed a similar view: 'what Chernov had done to extinguish national sentiment in the breasts of the armed defenders of a youthful and immature people was the one thing that could never be forgiven him.' Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*. pp.122-123.

the majority of comrades at home. With respect to the emigres, the split extended all the way from the Central Committee down to local party groups, with the Zimmerwald Conference and the right SR entry into the *Prizyv* group forming the watershed.

News from Russia, as reported by Chernov at Zimmerwald, disclosed that numerous local Socialist Revolutionary organisations had come out against the war and were engaged in revolutionary agitation. On the basis of information about the party and the general state of affairs at home, several important leftist SR leaders, including Chernov, Natanson, Kamkov, and several activists from Italy, hatched a scheme to travel through underground channels to Russia. Their aim was to provide leadership for the growing revolutionary movement at home. Chernov, Kamkov, and Natanson already had false passports and indeed the plan for the whole trip was so far advanced that it even entailed the closing down of the internationalist paper *Zhizn*, which was in financial straits in any case. Regardless, for reasons unknown, the trip fell through. Chernov seems to have gone instead to Italy, while Kamkov and Natanson remained in Switzerland.⁵⁷

When party leaders decided to abandon publication of *Zhizn* in

⁵⁷ *Delo naroda*, no.107, 22 July, 1917.

early 1916, the emigre leftist organisations were determined to replace it with two monthlies, *Otkliki zhizni* in Paris and *Na Chuzhbine* in Geneva. For no accountable reason, *Otkliki zhizn* dropped into complete obscurity.

Throughout the thirteen issues of *Otkliki*, its writers polemicised with right socialists, triumphantly reported manifestations of the waxing revolutionary movement at home, supported agitation among the armed forces, and so forth.⁵⁸ The first issue of *Na chuzhbine* came out on 14 January, 1916. According to an Okhrana report, initiative for publication of the paper came from Chernov, Natanson, and Kamkov, while the editorial board consisted of Jacques Dikker, Alexander Tsivin, B.I. Nalivaiskii, Vladimir Vnorovskii, A. Cherniavskii, and B. Kliushin.⁵⁹ An editorial in the 14 January, 1916, inaugural issue greeted its readers with the opinion that if the 1905 Revolution had prevailed, the country would not have found itself in the middle of the current war.⁶⁰ The inaugural editorial set the tone for future issues of the paper. The Russian government was so concerned about the SR internationalist journal, which was distributed to the public as well as to prisoners of war, that its mission in Berne demanded on

⁵⁸ Senn, *The Russian Revolution*, pp.136-137.

⁵⁹ *ibid*, pp.136-137.

⁶⁰ Spiridovich, p.540.

several occasions that Swiss authorities close down *Na chuzbine* for its revolutionary activities. Responding that, 'the contents can perhaps be designated "revolutionary" by Russian conceptions, but not ours,' the Swiss government rejected the demand.⁶¹ Fortunately for the leftist SRs, the Swiss government took a remarkably insouciant attitude toward revolutionary activities, also ignoring Lenin's *Sotsial-Demokrat*.

By April of 1916, the long germinating plan to send people to Russia came at last to life with the dispatching of Aleksandrovich by the Foreign Delegation. If other SRs travelled to Russia, specific information about it is lacking. Obviously, a good deal of coming and going was not possible in war time conditions. In any case, Aleksandrovich went.

What happened to Chernov in 1916, both in the sense of his physical whereabouts and his ideological convictions is a complete mystery. When Chernov arrived in Petrograd in 1917, his views had moderated. This defection from the left, while not leading him to embrace the right fully, was a fateful one for the SR party, since Chernov commanded vast loyalty among party activists. For the time being, there is no evidence to suggest why Chernov shed some

⁶¹ Senn, *ibid.* p.137.

of his anti-war fervour between early 1916 and early 1917. Where then, did Chernov disappear to for most of the year 1916? In early 1916, after plans for sending a sizeable group of activists to Russia fell through, Chernov supposedly travelled to Italy. But did he actually go there, and if he did, did he remain there? One cannot help notice Chernov's absence from the SR internationalist movement throughout 1916; reports of the various conferences do not mention him as present, nor did he publish articles in *Otkliki zhizn* and *Na chuzhbine*, although he had helped set up the latter. One might be tempted to suggest that a change of attitude in early 1916 led to this uncharacteristic silence. Interestingly, Tsivin another provocateur reported to his Austro-German mentors in May, 1916, that Chernov had travelled incognito to Russia.⁶²

The so-called project to send a group of activists to Russia in early 1916, replete with forged passports, false identities, etc. may have been a cover to divert the Okhrana's attention from a modest but more realistic plan to send Chernov into Russia alone. Alternatively, he may have simply gone alone after the plan was abandoned. If he did go, perhaps his exposure to the sufferings of the Russian people wrought a spiritual change, accounting for his

⁶² Z. Zeman, *Germany and the Russian Revolution, 1915-1918. Documents from the Archives of the German Foreign Ministry*, Oxford University Press, London 1958, pp.18-23.

eventual softening on the war issue; such a transformation would be very characteristic of Chernov. If one takes the position that he did not go, there is still the thorny problem of accounting for his whereabouts. Chernov's memoirs strangely fail to provide a hint of what he was doing in the last year before the outbreak of the revolution. Again, it would be just like Chernov to keep his counsel, even years and decades later, about a secret trip, cloaked in high intrigue, for mysterious purposes and with incalculable results, to war time Russia.

The SR anti-war movement was a very serious phenomenon in the emigre circles, where most party leaders were residing. The issue of the war split the party and while a number of individuals of great importance in the party's history supported the war, the list of those opposing the war was just as lengthy and, frankly, since it included people like Chernov, Rakitnikov, and Natanson, even more impressive. Chernov preached an anti-war doctrine that arose early and firmly, growing out of long-held international socialist convictions. He asserted his position by publishing newspapers and literature espousing his revolutionary anti-war stance, participated in the anti-war conferences in Europe, and attempted, as much and as often as possible, to influence events at home with a view to

overthrowing the government and ending the war. When considered in light of the February Revolution of 1917, with its undeniable anti-war animus, Chernov's pronouncements are by no means an unimportant aspect of the Russian revolutionary movement. Yet, 1917 was to see Chernov in power over a split and divided party, with a tenuous and fragile unity. It should have been an opportunity for Chernov to put theory into practice, yet that theory had undergone a transformation. When confronted with the responsibility of authority he was to prove impotent.

Chapter 8

Descent to Bolshevism

The call by Chernov to revolution during the war years raises related questions about his conception of the *nature* of the coming revolution. Russian socialists had long agonised over the problem of what the long-heralded revolution would be like in Russia when it finally came. Would it, for instance, merely overthrow the existing regime, replacing it with a liberal bourgeois (non-socialist) government like those in Western Europe, or would it advance rapidly towards socialism? Populist and neo-populist (SR) theory had held that Russia was evolving along a separate path from the West. The original populists argued that Russia would completely bypass capitalism, or as Chernov and the SRs maintained, that it would move quickly through the capitalist stage to the socialist. The latter position was inherently radical, since it forecasted a socialist, rather than a liberal revolution in Russia. According to Chernov, Russia would not, therefore, experience a long phase of capitalist development once tsarism had been overthrown, but would quickly embark on the construction of socialism. Here possibilities for confusion multiply. For instance, it is difficult to reconcile this 'radical' version of SR theory with standard accounts of quite moderate SR policies in 1917.

At least some of the confusion can be dispelled by a consideration of the fact that already in 1908-1910, a group of quite influential party leaders adopted a moderate evolutionist stance towards Russian development, entailing a rejection of the need for further underground revolutionary work and, implicitly, an abandonment of the traditional SR call for a rapid achievement of socialism. Among both SRs and Social Democrats, adherents to this tendency were known as 'liquidators', that is, they wished to 'liquidate' the underground illegal party organisations. However, as the formation of a 'liquidator' wing in Social Democracy did not mean that all Social Democrats had abandoned the cause of socialist revolution, so an analogous development in SR Party did not imply that all SRs had turned moderate on this crucial issue. In fact, party leaders of the greatest prestige such as Chernov, Rakitnikov, and Natanson, together with most of the remaining party organisation inside Russia, adhered to the original radical view. The SRs continued their commitment to the overthrow of both tsarism and capitalism. Unfortunately, commitment and adherence to principle were not enough in 1917 for its implementation.

It is impossible to understand Chernov's actions in 1917 without understanding that the revolutionary tradition led directly to the

idea of a two-stage revolution. At its First Congress, Chernov outlined the party program which was to be divided into maximum and minimum sections. The minimum section contained those demands that could be readily obtainable after the overthrow of tsarism, while the maximum program would only be implemented when the masses had attained a sufficient consciousness, organisation, and economic achievement. Only after the socialisation of land had been achieved under the minimum program would the party proceed to the collectivisation of agriculture, to the socialisation of industry, and to the eradication of all aspects of private economy.

Although these demands in the Party program as outlined at its First Congress were revolutionary and socialist, they were not really very extreme within the context of the political spectrum then emerging. It is worth noting that the last part of the program is liberal-democratic in tone.

The SR Party, waging a direct revolutionary struggle against autocracy, agitates for the convocation of a Constituent Assembly, based on... democratic principles, for liquidation of the autocratic regime and the reconstruction of all contemporary regimes in the spirit of the establishment of free popular government, the necessary personal liberties, and defense of the interests of labour. The Party will defend its program of reform in the Constituent Assembly and will strive to move immediately to the revolutionary period.¹

¹ *Protokoly pervago sezda Partii Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov,*

The Party distinguished clearly between immediate and distant goals, and that the immediate goal was political freedom.² At its First Congress, the SR Party put political freedom before economic demands, and in April of 1917, Chernov declared that the slogan of the party had to be: 'Land through the Constituent Assembly.'³ The future socialist order was predicated on political liberty in a decentralised state.

Revolution to Chernov was a political act to make possible individual choice in governing oneself and electing one's governors. The social revolution in property relationships was to come afterwards, as a result of these individual choices. To preserve positive attributes of the commune was merely one aspect of an entire program which tried to ensure that events of the political revolution would not prejudice possibilities of social revolution. Chernov had formulated a fairly accurate blueprint of the future social order, but he was understandably reluctant to draw it in any detail because he believed that, with adequate propaganda, all those

(Proceedings of the First Congress of the Socialist Revolutionary Party), n.p. 1906. p.365.

² *ibid*, pp.361-362.

³ *ibid*, pp.361-365. Chernov, *Agrarnyi vopros i sovremennyi moment* (The Agrarian question and the immediate moment). Moscow, 1917, pp.13-14. The latter was a public lecture presented by Chernov on his arrival in Petrograd.

individual choices would draw it for him.

In the period preceding the revolution, Chernov relied heavily on cooperatives, both producer and consumer in nature, as institutions which would ease transition to socialism. The difference between Chernov's vision of ultimate goals and western European ends in view is apparent in his consideration of the cooperative movement. For Chernov, both communes and cooperatives were never ends in themselves. He looked at such institutions as means to individual ends; these were necessary means, of course, but subordinate to the requirements of individual development. In a detailed article, he traced the history of the cooperative movement back to Proudhon and Louis Blanc, and offered statistics to support his contention that the movement was growing in nearly all western European countries. He thought German Social-Democrats, under August Bebel's direction, had taken an important step at the Hanover Party Congress (1899) by accepting the idea that in cooperatives the working class learned and developed the talent of economic self-government. The SR Party at its London Conference in 1909, accepted cooperatives as equal to political and union organisations. For each mass organisation, the party accepted full autonomy as the necessary condition for healthy and universal

development. Chernov used a quaint example to illustrate the position of cooperatives in the party program: five times eight equals forty; but which is more important - the five or the eight.⁴

Cooperatives were another school for democracy, or as Chernov put it, the masses had been asleep for a long time and were unable to use democracy once they had achieved it. 'But the forms of democracy are not dead and useless; they do not remain empty, but are gradually filled by more and more real content.'⁵

The most crucial problem of instituting the new order was how to act once the revolution had occurred. There is a gradual shift in Chernov's position from 1905 to 1917, a shift in the direction of permitting wider alternatives in land organisation during the revolutionary period. He understood that in all probability the peasants would seize land indiscriminately when the bonds of old bureaucratism were released, an action made even more likely because growing capitalist agriculture increased attraction for land.

Analogies with the French revolution were sometimes appropriate, wrote Chernov but with the difference that our chief slogan must be equalisation of land and not destruction of feudal obligations, which long ago were destroyed in Russia and replaced with various

⁴ Chernov, 'Koooperatsiia i sotsializm' (Cooperation and socialism), *Sotsialist-Revoliutsioner*, no.2 Paris 1910, pp.266-267, pp.273-278.

⁵ *ibid*, p.299.

forms of economic servitude. What should the party do, he asked, if in the Constituent Assembly the question of legalising peasant seizures arose?⁶ Farsighted defenders of the bourgeois regime dreamt of creating broad strata of economically strong peasants imbued with traditions of private property. But socialists could never support this. There was nothing more dangerous, Chernov continued, than the growth of the idea of private property as one of the elementary civil rights of man. A socialist party could not permit the development of the bourgeois spirit even in its minimum program, that is, in goals to be achieved during revolution.⁷ This is where his program of socialisation becomes important, for socialisation would, by placing political and economic power in local government, protect the interests of the toiling and struggling peasantry in the transitional period when state power might be far from the hands of the people. This would prevent centralisation of decision making and was opposed to the Marxist formula of nationalisation, which would place land ownership in the hands of the state, even a bourgeois state.⁸

The operation of socialisation envisaged no compensation to

⁶ Chernov, *Proletariat i trudovoe krestianstvo*, (Proletariat and toiling peasantry) Moscow, 1906. p.40, pp.43-44.

⁷ *ibid*, pp.45-49.

⁸ *ibid*, p.53.

landlords, for they also would receive land in use tenure. The commune would gain importance as socialisation progressed because communalists were accustomed to redistribution as population increased, and not because of old romantic ideas, as Chernov had made explicit. He understood that the program contained complex problems in equalising rights to land on the basis of the principle that everyone has the right to toil, and he proposed three means of making equalisation functional: 1) taxation of surplus land above an accepted norm of income derived from it, that is, a progressive landed income tax; 2) settlement and resettlement, where he expected a fund of land from landowners who held more land than they could cultivate themselves; and 3) as a last resort, if other means failed, changing boundaries, evidently by some system of arbitration between communes.⁹ In a speech at the First SR Congress, Chernov explained that socialisation would encompass all land, including land in cities, so the program was not narrowly agrarian. Socialisation of land in cities would place ownership of factories, plants, and even homes in greater dependence on the municipalities, an act which could have been a

⁹ Chernov, (under the pseudonym B.lu) 'Razrushenie obshchiny i nasha programma' (Destruction of the commune and our program), *Znamia Truda*, no.37, July, 1911. pp.4-8.

favourable fundament for further organic and creative work in municipalisation, bringing under municipal control those enterprises which by their very nature were suitable for this.¹⁰

As mentioned above, Chernov had devised a fairly accurate blueprint and he strove to make it as exact as possible with the inevitable consideration that the new order would result not only in guidance from above but also in individual choice from below.

In 1917, Chernov spelt out in more detail how the party would attempt to guide land relations. In criticising the Marxist position on the peasantry, he returned to a basic problem of the revolution by asking how the proletariat could lead and the toilers of the land could follow without betraying themselves? If it were possible for proletarians to lead and peasants to follow, then peasant or agrarian socialism could be thought of as the 'basic, non-capitalistic path to "socialisation from below" of agricultural labour and ownership, [and] as the prime method of "rooting" the peasantry in the hoped for future government.' If it was not possible to synthesise agrarian and urban socialism, then the proletariat could only use the peasantry as a means to an end which was alien to them. Chernov added that the original sin of Marxism was unprincipled political intrigue in relation to the peasantry within nations, as well as in

¹⁰ *Protokoly pervago sezda...* pp.148-149.

relation to agricultural nations by industrial nations. Marxism is so much concerned with industrial socialism that it is not a fully integrated socialism and instead is easily 'socialistic imperialism'.¹¹ This prophetic statement underlines Chernov's insistence on getting the people into government to decide how they would deal with the land problem.

On 30 April, 1917, at Shaniavskii University in Moscow, Chernov spoke on a projected new land law without once mentioning socialisation. The main argument of this speech was that reform was inseparably bound to self-government, or in Chernov's words: 'Such a land order includes in itself the great ideal of popular self-government. Its objects become not only abstract, unknown freedom, but a definite possession - our land. This is the best and clearest application of the principle of popular authority in relation to the land....'¹² The new land order, he continued, had to be completely elastic. 'Where there is communal land tenure, there the commune will become a land cooperative which will receive land as a whole from the most immediate organ of government. Where personal homestead use [of land] applies or where the

¹¹ Chernov. *Marksizm i slavianstvo. (K voprosu o vneshnei politike sotsializma)*. [Marxism and Slavdom:(Towards the question of a foreign policy of socialism)]. Petrograd, 1917. pp.90-91.

¹² Chernov, *Agrarnyi vopros i sovremennyi moment*, p.17.

population is not accustomed to the communal order, the *land holder*, as it were, will receive the land *individually*. We sufficiently consider all the difficulties of realising a single legal norm of land holding together with contemporary chaos in that realm.¹³ He went on to propose three norms for land distribution: toil, need and average. The toil norm referred to the land norm a given family could work. Land above this norm would revert to the administration of governmental organs. He understood the need norm as that norm according to which land would be added to the plots of those who had little or no land. The average norm would be established only after a precise, general registration of land and labour power. This average was to become the final, ideal norm for each kind of land, for various soils, etc. 'In time it will replace the first two norms which are called forth by the needs of the moment but [which are] incomparably cruder.'¹⁴

Chernov appeared to be aware of the difficulties of applying the idea of socialisation to Russian reality. At the First Party Congress, he said that he had left socialisation as a general formula because he feared to leave the personal imprint of a foreign literary group (i.e., the emigres), for the program should be left to the party as a

¹³ *ibid*, p.20.

¹⁴ *ibid*, pp.20-21.

whole.¹⁵ As a matter of fact, Chernov had begun to work out the specifics of applying socialisation even during this earlier period, and one can see the influence of Marxism in sharpening Chernov's thinking, for he opposed socialisation, or the demand for the broadest decentralisation and harmony of individual rights, to nationalisation, which would centralise ownership in state hands. The 'nationalisers', he said at the Congress, saw private property and competition as the normal order of the human community. Socialisation, which escaped the terminology of Roman law, was characterised by the starting point as in Chernyshevsky's definition, that the land is his who works it.¹⁶ As Minister of Agriculture in 1917, Chernov was to prove this mere rhetoric.

Chernov was in Switzerland during the February Revolution of 1917. Its spontaneity and the ease with which it was achieved surprised Chernov, though he stressed how the government of Nicholas had collapsed of its own weakness and nullity. Revolutionary parties throughout the spectrum could not claim responsibility for initiating events.

Neither the Bolsheviks, nor the Mensheviks, nor the Workers' Group, nor the Socialist Revolutionaries either separately or collectively, led the workers of Petrograd on the street. It was someone mightier than they: Tsar Hunger.¹⁷

¹⁵ *Protokoly pervago sezda...* pp.85-86.

¹⁶ *ibid*, pp.224-225, pp.227-228.

The February revolution found the bulk of the SR leadership abroad and while those who had professed a defensist stance during the war were virtually unhindered in their return journey to Russia, those that held an internationalist position found the road strewn with obstacles. Chernov returned to Russia via France, then Britain. In Britain, his name had appeared on a proscribed list held by the English authorities due to his opposition to the war, but after some hesitation, the authorities released him in what can only be described as a clandestine operation. He departed from Britain in the company of Avksentiev and Savinkov, two defensists, from a 'secret' port in northern Scotland on a cargo steamship under the escort of two torpedo-boats. After arriving in Stockholm, Chernov proceeded by train through Tornio on the Swedish-Finnish border, after passing through Helsingfors (Helsinki) and Vyborg, and

¹⁷ Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution*, translated and abridged by Philip E. Mosely. New York. Russell and Russell, 1966. p.101. The *Great Russian Revolution* is an abridged translation of Chernov's, *Rozhdenie Revoliutsionnoi Rossii (Fevralskaia Revoliutsiia)*, (The birth of revolutionary Russia: the February Revolution) Jubilee Committee for the Publication of the Works of Viktor Chernov, Paris, Prague, New York. 1934. p.215. In a sense we are lucky to have *Rozhdenie Revoliutsionnoi Rossii*. Whilst in hiding from the Cheka in Moscow in 1919 a police raid late one sub-zero night saw Chernov escape via the window and Olga (his wife) managed to conceal the manuscript inside a coat she was wearing. It was not discovered. See Olga Tchernoff, *New Horizons. Reminiscences of the Russian Revolution*. translated by Crystal Herbert. Hyperion Press, Westport, Connecticut. 1975; reprint of 1936 edition, published by Hutchinson, London. p.157.

finally arrived in Petrograd on 8 April, five days after Lenin.¹⁸

N. Sukhanov and A. Gots were delegated by the Petrograd Executive Committee to welcome Chernov on his triumphant return. To what seems to be an ecstatic welcome, Chernov answered their greetings with a speech, about which Sukhanov comments as follows: 'Not only I, but many other Social Revolutionary party patriots wrinkled our brows and shook our heads, because he chanted so unpleasantly and minced and rolled his eyes - yes, and talked endlessly and without aim or purpose.'¹⁹ Trotsky rather facetiously added that all the further activity of Chernov in the revolution developed in tune with this first speech.²⁰

Shortly after arriving in Petrograd, Chernov addressed the Petrograd Soviet of Workers and Soldiers Deputies at Tauride Palace and was elected onto the Executive Committee, with the 'group of the presidium' led by Tsereteli. He also became a member

¹⁸ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, pp.311-312; L. Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, translated by Max Eastman, London, Victor Gollancz 1965. p.247; G. Katkov, *The Kornilov Affair. Kerensky and the break-up of the Russian army*, Longman, London and New York. 1980. p.54; N.K. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution 1917* edited, abridged and translated by Joel Carmichael from *Zapiski O Revoliutsii*, Oxford University Press, 1955. pp.304-307; and Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, p.138.

¹⁹ N. Sukhanov quoted in L. Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, p.247.

²⁰ *ibid*, p.247.

of the All-Russian Soviet of Workers and Soldiers' Deputies.²¹ His arrival late on the scene and his subsequent involvement in literary activities before his participation in the Provisional Government as Minister of Agriculture meant that his role in the Soviet was minimal. It became more of a sounding board for his polemical skills.

The SR party in the early months of the revolution was confronted with numerous issues, the stance on which led to fissures and later inevitable and irreconcilable splits. The position of power was only one such issue. Should socialists participate and support a non-socialist government, or should they seize power in their own right? The latter proposition was out of the question; the party at the outbreak of the revolution was merely a skeleton with little or no organisational networks in existence, and had only just recently emerged from a prolonged period of underground illegal activity. As a consequence, the party resolved to support the Provisional Government until the convocation of a Constituent Assembly, provided the government allowed political reforms which

²¹ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.314. Along with Chernov, Gots, Bunakov and Zenzinov were also on the Executive Committee. P.N. Miliukov, *The Russian Revolution, Volume 1: The Revolution Divided: Spring, 1917*, edited by R. Stites, translated by Tatyana and Richard Stites, Academic International Press 1978. p.52.

facilitated free and unhindered party political activity in the realm of organisation and propaganda. The support of a non-socialist interim government did not mean participation, let alone coalition.²²

Yet Kerensky's participation, at his own initiative, in the bourgeois government as Minister of Justice obviously contradicted the stated party position. To allay party fears and resentment at such an action by one of its own leaders, (but only nominally so), Chernov drafted a letter, which Kerensky published, in which he stated that his participation was upon his own initiative and was to protect revolutionary democracy, which at the time was in a state of disorganisation, and to provide a connecting link between revolution, democracy and the bourgeois government.²³ This seemed to pacify SR leaders until the Third Congress of the party in May which ratified Kerensky's participation.

Another issue to confront the party was the war. Chernov, energetic and unflagged by schisms in his party, pushed his international position, and specifically, the mobilisation of his third force whose

²² *Delo Naroda*, no.1, 15 March, 1917, p.1 in Browder and Kerensky (ed.) *The Russian Provisional Government 1917: Documents*. vol.III. Stanford University Press. 1961. pp.1203-1204.

²³ Chernov, *Rozhdenie revoliutsionnoi Rossii (Fevralskaia revoliutsiia)*, p.372. *The Great Russian Revolution*, p.205. The letter was in the party central organ *Delo Naroda*, no.33, 26 April, 1917. p.3.

intervention would result in universal democratic peace, a peace without victors or vanquished.²⁴ Almost immediately upon his arrival in Russia, Chernov launched into a vitriolic polemic against Miliukov, the first Provisional Government's Foreign Minister and leader of the bourgeois Kadet (Constitutional Democrats Party), who advocated a peace through total victory. In a speech before the Executive Committee, a speech which was described by Sukhanov as '... a flood of words, ... in an earnest and business-like tone, ... full of revolutionary patriotic sentiment and ... of puns and jokes ...',²⁵ and a speech which was said to have been listened to with interest, Chernov attacked Miliukov's ministerial declaration of 27 March. This was published the following day in the form of a statement to the citizens of Russia and entitled 'The Provisional Government's Declaration on War Aims'. Miliukov stated '... the aim of free Russia is not domination over other peoples, or seizure of their national possessions, or forcible conquest of foreign territory, but the establishment of a lasting peace on the basis of the self-determination of peoples. The Russian people is not endeavouring to enhance its own international power at the expense of other peoples, and does not have the aim of

²⁴ Chernov, *Rozhdenie revoliutsionnoi Rossii*, pp.356-357; *The Great Russian Revolution*, p.194.

²⁵ Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution 1917*, p.310.

enslaving or humiliating anyone'.²⁶ The whole appeal, Chernov states, was called into question as can be seen when the statement concludes with the wording '... while at the same time fully observing the commitments assumed toward our allies.'²⁷ All the communiqués, interviews, etc., of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs meant one thing: the revolution had made absolutely no change in the foreign policy and war aims of Tsarist Russia; the agreements concluded by tsarist diplomacy were still considered inviolable for revolutionary Russia; and no one abroad had even heard of the proclamation on war aims, as it was intended solely for home consumption.²⁸

Chernov's analysis of Miliukov's intentions was correct. Miliukov sought to adhere to the letter the secret treaties signed between Russia and her wartime allies, England, France, and Italy. Among other things, they generously apportioned to each other large tracts of territory and influence in the Ottoman Empire. In April, 1917, in the party press Chernov initiated a stinging campaign against Miliukov whom he scornfully referred to as 'Miliukova - Dardanel'skogo'.²⁹

²⁶ Miliukov, *The Russian Revolution*, p.65.

²⁷ Chernov, *Rozhdenie revoliutsionnoi Rossii*, p.360; Miliukov, *ibid*, p.65; Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution*, pp.196-197.

²⁸ Chernov, *Rozhdenie revoliutsionnoi Rossii*, pp.360-361; Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution*, p.197-198.

The pressure from within the Provisional Government, the Soviet, and in no small way from Chernov's attacks, eventually culminated in Miliukov's capitulation. The declaration of war aims of 28 March was despatched to the Allies as an official document on 18 April. Yet the shrewd Miliukov added a preface identifying the declaration on war aims with the 'lofty ideals which so many leading statesmen of the Allied nations often have expressed.' Miliukov declared that in Russia there was a 'national striving' to carry the war 'to a decisive end, to obtain 'sanctions and guarantees' which would make new wars impossible. Finally, Miliukov once more promised 'the victorious conclusion of the present war in full cooperation with the Allies.'³⁰

The note of 18 April (published on 20 April), provided the catalyst for the April days. The Petrograd proletariat and soldiers and sailors of the garrison marched in the streets protesting against the Provisional Government. In the evening of 20 April, the Provisional Government met with the Executive Committee of the Soviet. The Soviet faced a dilemma, for they had no desire to take over power from the government, but instead, merely sought to

²⁹ Chernov, *Zapiski Sotsialista-Revoliutsionera*, p.16.

³⁰ Miliukov, *The Russian Revolution*, p.71; Chernov, *Rozhdenie revoliutsionnoi Rossii*, p.363; *The Great Russian Revolution*, p.199.

exert pressure upon it. Yet, the Soviet needed to ostensibly show that the anti-war sentiment could not be ignored, and indeed, should be acted upon. Chernov at this meeting severely criticised the entire activity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While acknowledging the abilities of his opponent, Miliukov, he concluded that he might be more useful, for example, as Minister of Education; as Minister of Foreign Affairs he would remain a source of weakness and discord in the government and the country, for by his public recognition of the Tsarist war aims, he had become absolutely unacceptable to the democracy of toilers.³¹

In the end, Miliukov's position was even more undermined. The Petrograd Soviet issued a statement which attempted to clarify the more controversial and ambiguous points of Miliukov's note. However, this did not placate the working class of Petrograd, and further armed street demonstrations occurred on 21 April.

The attacks on the foreign policy of the first Provisional government were a joint aim of the two branches of Social Democracy, that is, the propaganda of Lenin's Bolsheviks and the work of Menshevik Tsereteli, but most of the credit can be squarely rested on the shoulders of Chernov for his forceful, concentrated

³¹. Chernov, *Rozhdenie revoliutsionnoi Rossii*, p.365; *The Great Russian Revolution*, p.201; Miliukov, *The Russian Revolution*, pp.73-74.

attack on Miliukov, which eventually led to his retirement. In a deeper sense, Miliukov's ousting was made inevitable by the momentous decision to transform a non-socialist government into a coalition, a move which Miliukov opposed adamantly. The April days brought to the fore the relationship between the government and the Soviet. On the one hand, formal power without real force, on the other, actual strength without formal power. Powerless government, and governmentless force.³²

In Chernov's opinion this divorce between governmental power and actual strength had to be ended as soon as possible.³³ The solution was a coalition government, but not one with equal socialist and bourgeois representation, it was to be one with socialist representation in key ministries. After vacillating for sometime, the Soviet Executive Committee at an evening session on 1 May, finally voted in favour of participation in the government by a majority of 41 votes to 18, with 3 abstaining.³⁴ After long and protracted negotiations the socialists appropriated six portfolios out of fifteen.³⁵ V.M. Chernov became Minister of Agriculture after

³² Chernov, *Rozhdenie revoliutsionnoi Rossii*, pp.368-369; *The Great Russian Revolution*, p.204.

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ Chernov, *Rozhdenie revoliutsionnoi Rossii*, p.372; *The Great Russian Revolution*, p.206.

³⁵ For an account of the negotiations to form a coalition government see V. Stankevich, *Vospominaniia* (Memoirs), Berlin, 1921. pp.128-132;

initially refusing Foreign Affairs because the tone of the government statement was not sufficiently Zimmerwaldian. A coalition government was formed on 5 May, 1917. With the formation of a coalition government, Miliukov's role in the Revolution was as a private citizen, but still an influential one, as leader of the Kadet party and editor of its newspaper, *Rech* (Speech).

Chernov's position in power as Minister of Agriculture and leader of the largest socialist party in Russia, *albeit* a very tenuously united one, should have been one of a position of commanding strength, but it was, in fact, one of increasing weakness. This was partly because his land policy was based, to a certain extent, on the military pressures of the time which forced him to prevent the peasants from seizing the land as their own, and, as a result, he left it to the Constituent Assembly to deal with the question of transferring land to the toilers. There was also an overemphasised preoccupation with achieving political freedom and too little attention was paid amongst party leaders to attain a social revolution, even if the opportunity arose, as it did in 1917. The declaration of 5 May of the new coalition government stated the new government would 'take

Chernov, *Rozhdenie revoliutsionnoi Rossii*, p.373; *The Great Russian Revolution*, pp.206-207; Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, pp.173-177.

all necessary steps toward ensuring the greatest possible production of grain... and toward furthering the systematic utilisation of the land in the interests of the national economy and of the toiling population.³⁶ This was a far cry from the agrarian socialism epitomised by Chernov's 'socialisation of the land'.

The issue of class collaboration, that is, the participation of socialists in a coalition government, was to be sanctioned at the SR Third Party Congress, which convened toward the end of May. Ten years had elapsed since they had last met, during which time the SR party had been operating as an illegal underground organisation with the bulk of its leaders in emigration.³⁷ May of 1917 was to find the party in power, yet dramatic events had intervened in the interim - war and revolution. Their effects had dramatically altered the psyche and configuration of the party. The congress was to provide the opportunity for a re-evaluation of party policy and direction in light of recent events. The socialist revolution was at hand, the opportunity to transform Russian society had arrived. However, the congress was to prove impotent.

³⁶ *Vestnik Vremennago Pravitelstva* (Herald of the Provisional Government) no.49, 6 May, 1917, p.1. Daily official newspaper of the Provisional Government, Petrograd, 1917 quoted in Browder and Kerensky (ed.), *The Russian Provisional Government, 1917: Documents*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1961, vol. III. p.1277.

³⁷ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.323.

The congress convened in Moscow on 25 May, 1917, and met until 4 June, 1917. It was to see the formal emergence of separate factions of the two extremes, left and right, and a third, centre grouping which sought unity of the party through the art of compromise. This centre grouping included such prominent names as Chernov, Gots, Avksentiev and Rudnev.³⁸ Yet even this centre 'unity' group were divided into left centre and right centre. Radkey states in his inimitable style:

The prestige of Chernov his skill at devising formulas which could face both ways at once and satisfy discordant elements, lay unreservedly at the service of the center. His "all-uniting" (*vseb' ediniushchie*) resolutions, offered on the floor of the Third Congress and eagerly seized upon by the mass of delegates, were like brilliantly colored paper concealing cracks in the wall - and they lasted about as long. For the cracks ran through the center of the structure as well as between it and the two wings.³⁹

The Congress focused its attention on the most burning of issues that confronted the party, the adoption of a party stance as regards to the war. 'Chernov tried to steer the party between Scylla and Charybdis, between the slogans of "all for war," "war to victory," and their opposite, the defeatist tendency.'⁴⁰ This self-evaluation of action written by Chernov sometime after the event is at

³⁸ *ibid*, p.324.

³⁹ Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, p.196.

⁴⁰ Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution*, p.394.

variance with what actually transpired. Three resolutions were proposed with one coming from each of the various factions. The Congress passed a resolution drafted by Abram Gots in the name of the centre.⁴¹ The resolution advocated a continuation of the war, a separate peace or armistice was condemned and the door left open for an offensive effort that would help the British and the French. Chernov supported the resolution. It is now clearly evident that Chernov had purged himself of his Zimmerwaldian position and had adopted a more moderate line. Conspicuous by its absence was any mention of the 'third force', and so as not to damage the unanimity of the Congress, Chernov withdrew his own resolution on the topic, which had been at the drafting stage when the hurried vote on the war resolution was taken. Efforts to reopen the debate were stifled with Chernov's acquiescence, when he became satisfied with revising Gots' resolution after it had been adopted.⁴²

⁴¹ The Congress decided on 28 May, by a vote of 179 to 80 with 5 abstentions, in favour of Gots' resolution over Kamkov's anti-war leftist resolution. The proposed right resolution was withdrawn; *Tretii sezd Partii Sotsialistov Revoliutsionerov* (The Third Congress of the Socialist Revolutionary Party). Petrograd, 1917. p.204, quoted in Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, p.199; for the resolutions adopted at the Third Congress refer to Chernov, *Pered Burei*, pp.325-327 and *Resoliutsii priniatyia na 3-m Sezde P.S.R.* (Resolutions adopted at the Third Congress of the Socialist Revolutionary Party). Moscow, 1917. The latter appears to be a special publication of the Moscow edition of *Zemlia i Volia* (Land and Freedom), no.69, 1917.

⁴² *Tretii sezd P.S.R...* pp.313-319 in Radkey *ibid*, p.201. For a

The adoption of Gots' resolution on war was an important development in the history of the SR Party during 1917. It signalled the rise in preeminence of Gots over Chernov. There had been no formal power struggle or contest, Chernov's obsequiousness was enough. Indeed, his whole conduct throughout 1917 was to be characterised by his continual self-effacing attitude.

On the question of participation in a coalition government, it was Chernov's resolution that the Congress accepted. In his view, the coalition government, which he characterised as half-socialist and half-bourgeois, was a transitory step to an all-socialist government. It was an 'unavoidable step in the pressing struggle to avoid the terrible danger of an all-Russian collapse'; it was an inevitable step, in the necessary struggle, for the strengthening of a new revolutionary Russia, the first citadel of the 'third force' in present day Europe.⁴³ The transitory nature of the government was further stressed, when later in the resolution, Chernov stated that 'Russia [that is, bourgeois Russia] was not in a position to deal with the fateful problems of the present day, and socialist parties are still not compelled to take power into their own hands.'⁴⁴

detailed discussion of the behind the scenes intrigues of the 'lost resolution' see Radkey *ibid*, pp.198-209.

⁴³ *Resoliutsii priniatyia na 3-m Sezde P.S.R.* p.11-12.

⁴⁴ *ibid*, p.12.

This resolution is in stark contrast to Chernov's earlier pronouncements, especially those during the war years, when he called for a revolution and a speedy transition to true socialism. Another flaw was the absence of any criteria to judge the obsolescence of the coalition, and thus, the progression to the next stage. Like the First Congress, it was a declaration of principle rather than a carefully thought-out plan of action. The only consolation in this respect was that the socialist ministers in the coalition were to administer their portfolios in tune with the policy laid down at the congress.⁴⁵

As a matter of priorities, one would have thought that the land problem would have been devoted the same amount of attention as the question of war. The agrarian question had been in abeyance for more than 10 years, yet the Congress deferred any discussion of it to an agrarian commission of the Central Committee⁴⁶ and confined its attention to interim measures pending the convocation of the Constituent Assembly. In doing so, the Third Congress failed to address many of the pertinent issues confronting the Party. One example of this is illustrated by the impediments posed by claims for national or regional autonomy as against the peasants' call for

⁴⁵ *ibid*, p.13.

⁴⁶ The commission which eventually met in August, 1917, failed to address the land question and instead discussed the war issue.

land reform based upon the centralistic, egalitarian principle of the redistribution of all the land among all the toilers. Another issue was the impact of the Stolypin land reforms and the subsequent increase in individual holders, and the inevitable tensions that arose between them and the communal peasants. On the latter point, the Congress reaffirmed the right of the individual as well as the collective use of the land, and promised not to disturb separate holdings that did not exceed the average allotment.⁴⁷ Such an affirmation, ostensibly based upon a sense of class unity, ignored the quite stark differences amongst the peasantry. Belatedly, on the issue of compensation, the Party reaffirmed its policy of confiscation without compensation.⁴⁸

In a surprising about face, the Congress rescinded its support of land seizures which it had held in 1905, to one of opposition to them in 1917. In the same breath, the Congress in its resolution on agrarian politics, stated that all private ownership of land be abolished, and that land should be turned over in common to all the people without compensation for equal general use. The Third Congress called for a fundamental law on land that resolutely enshrined

⁴⁷ *Tretii sezd P.S.R...* p.245, pp.255-256 in Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, p.214.

⁴⁸ *Tretii sezd P.S.R...* pp.430-431, in *ibid*, p.214.

these principles to be promulgated by the Constituent Assembly. The ultimate aim, however, was for land to be socialised.⁴⁹ In the interim, all land was to be transferred to the management of land committees. The democratised land committees would conserve the land fund, livestock, farm equipment, forest and natural resources, prior to the convocation of the Constituent Assembly.⁵⁰ Chernov supported the resolution.

On the nationalities question, Chernov held firm to his internationalist position and recognised no distinctions among peoples. The Congress deferred to the Constituent Assembly each individual case for national or regional autonomy.⁵¹

Perhaps the most fateful blunder of the whole Congress was its choice of members elected on to the Central Committee. After such a long break between congresses, members were elected on the basis of reputation and not on contemporary deeds or thoughts. The composition of the newly elected Committee decidedly listed towards the right, yet, even so, it was by no means a united body; 'the excessive variety within the Central Committee,... made it a "parliament of opinions" with an unstable, fluctuating majority.'⁵²

49 *Resoliutsii priniatyia na 3-m Sezde P.S.R.* p.13.

50 *ibid*, pp.13-14.

51 *ibid*, pp.15-16.

52 Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution*, p.396.

Chernov's fall from unquestioned leadership of the party is no more better demonstrated than in the election results to the Central Committee. Chernov ran 20 votes behind Gots.⁵³ The lack of unity, common purpose and direction within this leading group of the SR Party in the course of what was perhaps the most important six months of the party's history, was to prove devastating.

Kerensky failed by two votes to be elected to the Central Committee (134 to 136). However, the Congress approved Chernov's and Kerensky's participation in the coalition by a vote of 159 to 27 with 29 abstentions.⁵⁴

In the end, the Congress failed to address the crucial issue that confronted the party during the revolution, namely the transition to socialism. The resolutions on war, peace, and the agrarian question were made impotent by compromise for the sake of unity. In regards to tactics, once again the party neglected to formulate any policy, a crucial and inexcusable blunder. Chernov's role in all of this was one of continual acquiescence.

Chernov, as Minister of Agriculture in two coalition governments

⁵³ A. Gots received 260 votes out of 270, N.I. Rakitnikov 258, V.G. Arkhangelski 241, A.I. Rusanov 241, V.M. Chernov 240.

⁵⁴ For a detailed examination of the genesis of the enmity between Chernov and Kerensky and the machinations in regards to Kerensky's non-election to the Central Committee, see Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, pp.224-233.

from May to August 1917, was in a unique position to implement the party's agrarian policy, and as such, the burden for the failure to do so must squarely rest upon his shoulders. Chernov's interim program until the convocation of the Constituent Assembly revolved around a *troika* concept: the abolition of the Stolypin legislation, the cessation of all sale of land, and the pacification of arbitrary anarchic peasant seizures of land through the establishment of land committees, which would determine the immediate utilisation of the land until its final disposal could be determined by the Constituent Assembly. This was not socialisation of land. Lacking a plan of action, substantive measures such as socialisation were deferred to the Constituent Assembly.

In his tenure of office, Chernov only managed on 29 June, to abolish the measures introduced under the Stolypin land reform,⁵⁵ and only did so after having revived the *obshchina*, which he had previously relegated as being non-essential to the party's agrarian program.⁵⁶

In defence of Chernov, one must state that his efforts were continually frustrated by his own colleagues in the Provisional

⁵⁵ 'Of all the submissions of the Minister of Agriculture only the bill abolishing the Stolypin laws, which were directed against the *obshchina*, were passed unanimously.' I. G Tsereteli, 'Rossiiskoe krestianstvo i V.M. Chernov v 1917 godu' (The Russian Peasantry and V.M. Chernov in 1917), *Novyi Zhurnal* (New Journal), vol.24 1952, p.228.

⁵⁶ Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution*, p.237.

Government, who held diametrically opposing views on the agrarian question. The multiplicity of organisations involved in formulating and implementing an agrarian policy complicated matters even more. "There was a "triangle" of agrarian policy, with the Board of the Chief Land Committee as its center, and the Social Revolutionary Minister of Agriculture and Soviet of Peasants' Deputies influencing it from both sides. But the more closely the three sides of this triangle fused, the harder it became to get its policy adopted by the coalition government."⁵⁷

On 17 May, Chernov attempted to forbid all dealings in regards to land transactions. A joint administrative order with SR Minister of Justice Pereverzev, to this effect was sent out to all notarial bureaus. However, his colleague on 7 June, in a new telegram, removed all prohibition from tax contracts, purchases of non-agricultural land, and several other classes of contracts, and on 23 June, rescinded his joint communique with Chernov entirely.⁵⁸

While Chernov managed to have the reforms of Stolypin abolished he suffered defeats in other areas. The Provisional Government rejected a bill approved by the Chief Land Committee on the use of meadow lands. This bill was designed to protect the interests of the

⁵⁷ *ibid*, p.234.

⁵⁸ *ibid*, p.237.

peasantry which, after the emancipation of 1861, had been deprived of its due share, by transferring excess meadow land to the state. The cabinet rejected another bill to regulate fisheries through mediation by the Land Committees; private monopolies and fisheries contractors had encroached on the interests of fishermen and consumers. The same fate menaced all other bills, particularly those regulating rental relationships and utilisation of forests.⁵⁹

Further intercine strife developed between Chernov and Prince Lvov (Minister of Internal Affairs). On 11 June, Prince Lvov made a special report to the government on the mass of 'revolutionary' decrees issued by local organs of popular government, in violation of the lawful rights of the landowners. He proposed that such decrees be declared invalid, and especially urged the necessity of a public declaration to this effect, signed jointly by himself and Chernov. Chernov refused categorically, for the lack of new agrarian laws from above made 'separate legislation' from below inevitable. Despite the imperfections of local legislation it was a lesser evil than efforts to compel the people to abide by the old tsarist land laws, efforts which could end only in agrarian disorder and anarchy.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *ibid*

⁶⁰ *ibid*, pp.237-238; Tsereteli in *ibid*, pp.238-232.

In light of such developments, the peasants justifiably asked if the revolution had really happened, if it was not just all a dream. Attempts by the land committees to regulate rental relationships and rates were met with threats of court action. The provinces vociferously demanded the new laws promised by the Provisional Government; the Minister of Agriculture could only reply that 'the bills presented to the Provisional Government did not meet with unanimous approval.'⁶¹

Agrarian unrest and food prices increased, food production decreased, and at a local level, Prince Lvov's policy was circumvented by his own officials. Faced with an administrative breakdown of his own policy, Lvov presented his alternative to the Provisional Government: his resignation or Chernov's.⁶²

Prince Lvov accused Chernov of passing 'laws which undermine the people's respect for the law.' These laws, '... not only do not combat illegal seizures, not only fail to normalize and guide land relations, but they seem to justify the ruinous arbitrary seizures which take place all over Russia. They also legalize the seizures which have already taken place, and, as a matter of fact, they try to confront the Constituent Assembly with an accomplished fact.'⁶³

⁶¹ Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution*, p.239.

⁶² Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.335; Tsereteli in *ibid*, pp.232-236.

Such an accusation was misdirected, and incidently, was one that was often advanced against Chernov. Chernov had continually and consistently adhered to the SR Party program and on numerous occasions he declared: 'Naturally in the Constituent Assembly, the land question will occupy first place.... The Socialist Revolutionaries... have attacked any kind of extra - legal seizures and outrages and have therefore instructed the peasantry consciously to prepare for the Constituent Assembly.... The most systematic slogan seems to be "Land through the Constituent Assembly"'.⁶⁴

Chernov was merely attempting to regularise what, in fact, was already happening, ' he felt that the only way in which the agrarian legislator could escape "confirming an accomplished fact", whatever form it might take, was through legislation which would not always lag behind reality, as it had so far, but would hastily dig a new channel for its irresistible current.'⁶⁵ On 7 July, Prince Lvov withdrew from the Provisional Government and Kerensky accepted the post of Minister-President. Several days earlier on 2 July, the Kadet ministers had resigned over the Ukrainian question.

⁶³ *Delo Naroda*, 9 July, 1917. no.96, p.1 cited in Browder and Kerensky, pp.1396-1397; also Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution*, p.242.

⁶⁴ Chernov, *Agrarnyi vopros i sovremennyi moment*, p.14.

⁶⁵ Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution*, p.242.

While Lvov's resignation is directly related to Chernov's policies, it can be argued that the Kadets' resignation from the coalition, while ostensibly based on the question of Ukrainian autonomy, can also be linked to the socialist ministers in the provisional government, and in the eyes of the Kadets, their subsequent undermining of the authority of the coalition. Chernov in particular, more so than the others, was blamed for this.⁶⁶

Chernov was content with pyrrhic victories. At a cabinet session on 7 July, the socialist ministers submitted a list of demands, high on which was the demand for a republic. Yet the 8 July declaration of the government inexplicably makes no mention of a republic. Chernov's letter to Nekrasov (acting head of government in Kerensky's absence and a former member of the Kadet Party), containing his draft of the declaration, which was apparently an appeal to the public with an agrarian section, fails to make any reference to a republic.⁶⁷ However, Nekrasov's draft of the declaration raises the very issue of a democratic republic.⁶⁸ Chernov's inexplicable omission provided Nekrasov with an ideal

⁶⁶ On the Ukrainian question and Chernov's account see *The Great Russian Revolution*, pp.264-288; for a detailed analysis see Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, pp.261-278.

⁶⁷ 'V. Chernov i iulskie dni', (V. Chernov and the July Days), ed. M.G. Fleer, *Krasnyi Arkhiv* (Red Archives), vol.5, 1924, pp.268-270.

⁶⁸ *ibid*, p.270.

opportunity to simply ignore the whole matter. The final declaration, heavily re-edited by Nekrasov, thus neglected the issue and the agrarian section remained unchanged.

On 12 July, Chernov was able to finally put through his legislation forbidding dealings in land until the meeting of the Constituent Assembly, although the legislation had a caveat inserted that land contracts required in each case special permission of the local provincial Land Committee and confirmation by the Minister of Agriculture.⁶⁹

Chernov attributes his legislation forbidding dealings in land as the end of a policy of inaction, of helpless attempts to help the peasantry within the framework of the pre-revolutionary land code. The premise on which this statement was based proved to be false. General Kornilov, commander of the Southwest front, effectively circumvented Chernov's legislation when he issued an order on 8 July, forbidding all 'arbitrary interference' in land relationships by local agencies. On 16 July, Chernov took a new step.

He confirmed the right of the Land Committees to take over land which the landowners were unable to cultivate, and to distribute it among the peasants. He confirmed the power of the local Land Committees as mediators in revising rental contracts between owners and lessors.

Peasants in a privileged situation, after deducting normal feed

⁶⁹ Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution*, p.243.

requirements for their own cattle, were to surrender the rest for war needs at fixed prices. The instruction permitted compulsory utilization of the gentry's animal and mechanical equipment, but required consent by Land and Supply Committees and direct supervision by them. The Land Committees were to supervise protection of forests against predatory lumbering and to secure for the peasants the privilege of taking wood for the actual needs of their households and for public institutions. Protection of model farms, blooded cattle and valuable crops was provided for. In conclusion, the instruction recommended that the Land Committees go half way to satisfy the just and well-founded demands of the toiling peasantry, that they regard themselves as the authorized organs of the state and count on the full support of the Ministry of Agriculture; the latter, in turn, would do everything it could to issue new laws, in order to "end the present precarious and indefinite situation in land relationships, the cause of similar precariousness and indefiniteness in the popular conception of right and law."⁷⁰

Chernov was almost instantaneously attacked from within the Provisional Government. Pereverzev, Minister of Justice led the attack, by asserting that the substance of Chernov's proposal would mean limiting the right to dispose of private property. The government discussed whether the Ministry of Justice could formally indict the Ministry of Agriculture for overstepping its powers. Just prior to this, the attempted Bolshevik insurrection of the famous July days (3-5), where the masses took to the streets calling for the All-Russian Soviet to 'take power into its own hands', took place. Here Chernov's authority and prestige were to

⁷⁰ *ibid*, pp.243-244.

be even further tested.

An incident on 4 July, during the failed insurrection, illustrates Chernov's rapidly waning popularity amongst the masses. On that day, outside the Tauride Palace (where the Duma and Soviet met in Petrograd), an angry crowd of Kronstadt sailors had assembled, chanting that the Soviet take power. Miliukov recounts the incident in his memoirs.

Chernov came out to pacify the crowd. The mob threw itself at him demanding that he be searched for arms. Chernov announced that if they searched him, he would not deign to speak to them. The crowd fell silent. Chernov began a lengthy speech outlining the activities of the socialist ministers in general and his own as minister of agriculture in particular. As far as the Kadet ministers were concerned, he said - "good riddance to them." In answer, voices shouted "why didn't you say this before? Announce at once that the land is going to the toiling people and the power to the Soviets." A sturdy worker, waving his fist in front of the minister's face, cried in a frenzy: "Take power, you son of a bitch, when it is offered to you." Amid the mounting tumult several people grabbed Chernov and pulled him towards a car. Others pulled him towards the palace. After ripping his coat, some Kronstadt sailors pulled him into the car and announced that they would not release him until the Soviet had assumed full power. Some anxious workers broke into the meeting hall crying: Comrades, they are beating up Chernov. Amid the turmoil Chkheidze announced that Comrades Kamenev, Steklov, and Martov were delegated to liberate Chernov. He was freed, however, by Trotsky who had just arrived on the scene. The Kronstadt people listened to him. Accompanied by Trotsky, Chernov returned to the hall.⁷¹

⁷¹ P.N. Miliukov, *The Russian Revolution*, p.202. For Trotsky's version of the story see, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, translated by Max Eastman, Victor Gollancz, London, 1965, pp.551-553 and *My Life*, Peter Smith, Gloucester, 1970, pp.311-313. See also N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution 1917*, edited, abridged and translated by Joel

Chernov makes no mention of this incident in his memoirs; '...how could a "Peoples' minister confess his indebtedness not to his own popularity, but to the intervention of a Bolshevik for the safety of his head?'⁷² It is somewhat ironic that several days later Chernov was part of the government that imprisoned Trotsky.

S.P. Postnikov, in an interview with O. Radkey, recounts the anger of Chernov on the evening of 4 July, at the editorial offices of *Delo Naroda*,⁷³ where at 11 p.m., he sat down and composed eight scorching editorials against Bolshevism, and of which, Postnikov and Ivanov-Razumnik felt just four would amply suffice for one issue. Chernov even wanted to print the documents in the possession of the Ministry of Justice representing the Bolshevik leaders as German agents. The next day, however, in a more sombre

Carmichael from *Zapiski O Revolutsii* (Notes of the Revolution) 7 vols., Berlin 1920, Oxford University Press, 1955, pp.444-447 and M. Pokrovski, 'Grazhdanii Chernov v iulskie dni' (Citizen Chernov in the July Days), *Pravda* (Truth), no.157. 16 July, 1922. Various versions as to the identities of the assailants abound. Trotsky claims agents of the *Okhrana* were responsible. Chernov states that dark elements, acting over the heads of the general mass of the workers and soldiers were responsible. Sukhanov states they were merely angry Kronstadt naval ratings. 'Chernov, refrained from making a public statement on the issue though he presented a secret document on the circumstances of his half-hour arrest addressed to a Commission of Inquiry.' Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, p.553.

⁷² Trotsky, *My Life*, pp.312-313.

⁷³ The offices of *Delo Naroda* were located in Petrograd in the former residence of Grand-Duke Audrey Vladimirovitch, where also the Central Committee of the SR Party met and Chernov and his family lived.

mood, Chernov wrote two editorials in defence of the 'inalienable right' of the people to demonstrate.⁷⁴

In order to quell the disturbances, Kerensky brought troops from the front to Petrograd. Arrests of Bolsheviks began and right wing elements demanded the dispersal of the Soviets as well as the Bolsheviks. Chernov was a principal target in the Right's campaign against the Soviets. He was vilified by individuals from within the government, and by patriotic chauvinists and right Kadets in their respective newspapers from without, for his agrarian policy and his Zimmerwaldian stance on the war. To avenge his defeat of the previous May, Miliukov led the attack. His newspaper, *Rech*, accused Chernov of 'defeatism' because he had participated in the Zimmerwald conference of socialist parties. He was also accused of helping to publish literature 'with German money' for Russian prisoners of war held in Germany. The sole pretext for the latter accusation was his participation in the 'Society for Spiritual Comfort to Russian Prisoners of War', which published a periodical, *Na Chuzhbine*.⁷⁵ The public campaign finally

⁷⁴ Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, pp.284-285. The other two editorials were entitled 'Moment obiazvaet' (The Moment Imposes a Duty), and 'Nado razmezhevatsia' (We Must Draw a Line), *Delo Naroda*, no.93, 6 July, 1917.

⁷⁵ Chernov had, in fact, written only one article for *Na Chuzhbine*, on 'Bulgaria and Russia', and this was reprinted in *Delo Naroda*, no.109, 25

culminated in the rumour that Burtsev and Shchegolev, investigators of espionage, held documents convicting Chernov of 'serving the Germans'.

Chernov demanded that the government investigate all his actions. He declared that he would give up his ministry for a time to facilitate the presentation of accusations. Rushing to the defence of the 'people's minister', various provincial peasant congresses passed resolutions in support of Chernov.⁷⁶ Moreover, it was not just from the countryside that Chernov received support. Urban support for the SR minister was just as great; mass meetings were held in several factories and plants to protest against his departure, and on one occasion in Petrograd at an arsenal plant, 4,000 employees attended a protest meeting.

After Burtsev and Shchegolev had refuted all reference to incriminating documents alleged to be in their possession, the government, in accord with the report of the Ministry of Justice, recognised that the accusations had no factual basis. Four days had elapsed between Chernov's resignation on the 20 July and his

July, 1917.

⁷⁶ Chernov resigned from the Provisional Government on 20 July, 1917. His letter of resignation, which was published in *Izvestiia* 21 July, 1917, no.123, p.5 is reproduced in Browder and Kerensky, pp.1416-1417. For an account of the whole episode from Chernov's perspective see his *Great Russian Revolution*, pp.245-247.

reappointment to the Ministry. In the interim he was redeemed. Indeed, a three day time limit was set by the SR Central Committee and Tsereteli for either Chernov's conviction or rehabilitation. The Central Committee published its decision in the party newspaper *Delo Naroda* on 23 July, 1917.

In the second coalition government cabinet of 24 July, 1917, Chernov was again Minister of Agriculture, though not without staunch opposition from the Kadets. Chernov, as early as April, 1917, had antagonised the Kadets by maintaining his internationalist position on the war, and by doing so had prompted their subsequent vitriolic attack on him in July. As a precondition of their participation in the new coalition, they demanded Chernov's exclusion. In their party newspaper *Rech* they stated, '...the Central Committee [Kadet Party]... deems it necessary to eliminate M.V.(sic) Chernov from the Government. Having met opposition from A.F. Kerensky, the Party declined to raise this issue in the form of an ultimatum. But three of its candidates (F.F. Kokoshkin, N.I. Astrov, and V.D. Nabokov) consider their entry [into the Government] impossible unless this condition is accepted.'⁷⁷ Kerensky's personal hatred of Chernov which

⁷⁷ *Rech*, 16 July, 1917 no.165, p.1 cited in Browder and Kerensky, vol.III, pp.1402-1403. See also G. Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia and other Diplomatic Memoirs*, 2 vols. Cassell, 1923, vol.II, pp.159-160.

eminated from his non-election to the Central Committee of the SR Party at its Third Congress, and for which he blamed Chernov together with the support of the Kadet Party, was however, not enough to exclude him from the coalition government. The Central Committee of the SR party strongly pressured Kerensky for Chernov's retention. Trotsky in his *History of the Russian Revolution*, states, ' the reappointment of Chernov to the post of Minister of Agriculture was nothing more than a tribute paid to the prestige of the ruling party of Social Revolutionaries.'⁷⁸

In the new coalition Chernov once again persisted in his attempts to pass agrarian laws, but these attempts were met with inaction and the usual failure. On 9 August, the Provisional Government devoted a special session to the agrarian question. After listening to a two-hour report by Chernov, the government made no decision. At this session the right wing of the government attacked Chernov for his public pronouncements on the issue. Chernov asserted that any further procrastination in the way of legislation to formulate change in the country's agrarian order could provoke an explosion, chaos, and a Pugachev agrarian revolt.⁷⁹ But Chernov and the

Buchanan was British Ambassador in Petrograd in 1910-1918.

⁷⁸ Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, p.637.

⁷⁹ Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution*, p.249.

majority of the Provisional Government were, 'in Lassalle's expression, "barbarians to one another"; they spoke different languages.'⁸⁰

Chernov's continuance in the Provisional Government had become absolutely purposeless. He had so stated several times to the Central Committee of the party but each time their reply was that his resignation would bring catastrophe. However, in the leading circles of the party the opinion began to take shape that perhaps Chernov's policy could be saved by sacrificing his person.

Kerensky's open conflict with the Commander in Chief, General Kornilov, exposed their very confused and ambiguous relationship and gave Chernov a pretext for breaking with Kerensky in a decisive fashion and returning to the Soviet. On 27 August, Chernov resigned from the Provisional Government. S.L. Maslov, a member of the extreme right of the SR Party, was willingly accepted by Kerensky as Minister of Agriculture.

Chernov now began defending his policy energetically through the press. This preoccupation with words instead of action is a clear indictment of Chernov's tenure as Minister of Agriculture. Instead of realising his agrarian policy when in a position to do so, Chernov's record is one of inaction. And it is a paradox in the

⁸⁰ *ibid*

extreme that after this withdrawal from office he had initiated a public exposition of his policy, when in four months as Minister, he had hardly opened his mouth in dissent to attacks upon it.

Kerensky reinforces the impression of weakness received from Chernov's handling of the law on land committees by affirming that during the four months his opponent held office, never once did he cast a dissenting vote, despite his denunciation of the government's record after his retirement from office.⁸¹

Not only did Chernov write articles when he should have been writing laws, but he even indulged in his craze for scribbling at cabinet meetings. Sometimes Tsereteli would nudge him and say, 'Please listen, Victor Mikhailovich; this is important,' to which Chernov would answer, 'The editorial must be written, and anyhow, I shall vote the way you do.'⁸²

Chernov and the SRs saw the convocation of the Constituent Assembly as the panacea for all the ills that plagued the Provisional Government. As the supreme embodiment of the Russian people's will, all important matters were deferred for its adjudication. In view of its importance, it is difficult to explain why Chernov, in his

81 Oral statement made by Kerensky (Hoover Library, 1955) related in Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, p.333.

82 Interview with Tsereteli in New York (December, 1949) related in Radkey, *ibid*, pp.333-334.

position as a member of the coalition, acquiesced to the deferment of the election date when the government decided to do so on 9 August. The date of 12 November had been previously decided upon under pressure from Tsereteli and Chernov, by the first coalition on 14 June. The date of the convocation of the Assembly had been decided as 28 November.⁸³

The Kornilov fiasco stained the right wing of revolutionary politics, especially the Kadet Party, and it also exposed rifts within the SR Party. Chernov on 3 September in *Delo Naroda*, in a series of four editorials, bitterly attacked Kerensky and the Provisional Government for refusing to purge the High Command and for appointing Kornilov Commander in Chief. The right wing of the party, in particular Argunov and Breshko-Breshkovskaia, rushed to Kerensky's defence. The Kornilov affair prompted a political crisis within the party through September and into October, the central issue being the continued existence and composition of the coalition.

Chernov's position, and consequently that of the left-centre of the SR Party, on the issue of a coalition was based on a theoretical standpoint, namely that while the archaic feudal methods of exploitation had been virtually eradicated, capitalism still had a role

⁸³ Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution*, pp.408-409.

to play in Russia. Large landowners were reactionary and counter-revolutionary and no agreement could be reached with them, while the industrial bourgeoisie were a socially progressive force. It was possible to come to some sort of accommodation with the latter. If they accepted socialisation of land, the SR Party would not attack the present economic order. Such a position was fully in accord with previously stated SR theory of land reform in a capitalist environment.

The Kadet Party represented propertied interests, in particular the estates of the nobility, and thus were a brake on the revolutionary movement in the agrarian sphere. Chernov hoped to drive a wedge between business interests and landed interests and thus make land reform possible. If such a wedge were effective, it would divide the Kadet Party and hopefully bring about its death knell. Chernov wished to exclude the Kadets from power by encouraging the participation of industrial and entrepreneurial capitalists. Class collaboration would continue, a coalition was still possible, but not with the Kadets. If no representatives of capitalism would acquiesce to this proposal, Chernov stated that he would support a purely socialist government.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ 'O postroenii vlasti', (On the Formation of a Government), *Delo Naroda*, no.143, 1 September, 1917. See also Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution*, pp.399-400.

The left wing of the party's position was unambiguous, namely an end to the coalition, while the right centre favoured a 'broad coalition' with a Kadet component, but not with those Kadets implicated in the Kornilov affair, and it totally rejected the possibility of an all socialist government.

Chernov was adamant that a coalition with the Kadets was out of the question. The party equivocated momentarily, but eventually on 27 August it adopted his resolution, which declared an alliance with the Kadet party impossible. An ultimatum to this effect was presented to Kerensky several days later on 31 August. Chernov in a speech to the Soviet of Workers, Soldiers, and Peasants' Deputies outlined the SR Party stance.

...yesterday the Socialist Revolutionary Party announced to Comrade Kerensky, who had outlined a cabinet which contained Kadets, that such a list was unacceptable to the party and that the party will not give a single representative to the Government.... The antagonism between Socialist Revolutionaries and the Kadets has reached a breaking point in the struggle against Kornilovism.⁸⁵

Yet, in an about face on 12 September, the Central Committee of the SR Party passed a resolution stating the desirability of a coalition

⁸⁵ The Plenary Session of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet of Workers, Soldiers, and Peasants' Deputies, 1 September, 1917. *Izvestiia*, no.160, 2 September, 1917, pp.3-4; and no.161, 3 September, 1917, pp.5-7, quoted in Browder and Kerensky, pp.1665-1666.

with 'propertied elements', enlarged and supplemented by responsibility to the 'preliminary parliament'. This resolution was in direct contradiction with the decree against coalition with the Kadets which still remained in force.⁸⁶ The 12 September resolution also established the principle of 'unit voting' for all members of the Central Committee; only the right of 'unmotivated abstention' was granted to those who disagreed.⁸⁷ The latter measure was designed to tighten discipline within the party so as it could present itself in a united voice at the forthcoming Democratic Conference, which was eventually convened on 14 September. In Chernov's own words:

These decrees, passed just before the opening of the Democratic Conference, bound Chernov hand and foot and weakened his position still further. If he was the most "consistent" politician of the Social Revolutionary party, his energy encountered many obstacles.... He was completely satisfied with literary and oratorical successes, which are politically imponderable. It was perhaps splendid, but it was not practical, when he tried by personal example to show how party discipline should be observed; at decisive Soviet meetings and congresses he was at times silent or abstained from voting in order not to violate some decree of the Central Committee with its unstable majority and varying decisions, while other comrades in the committee were unhampered by them. He was still living in the inertia of that period when the leaders of the party had represented a firm moral unity. Those times were far in the past.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution*, p.400.

⁸⁷ *ibid*

⁸⁸ *ibid*, p.401.

On 19 September, the first question before the Democratic Conference was a vote of principle, for or against a coalition. Chernov protested 'that an abstract "coalition in general" did not exist, and that such a vote would be ambiguous and indefinite, and was of no avail.'⁸⁹ During the roll call Chernov, bound by the resolutions of his own Central Committee, could only abstain from voting.⁹⁰ Other members of his own party openly flouted the Central Committee resolution, voting according to factional alliance.

Tsereteli reported to the Democratic Conference that the presidium had concluded that '...within the organized democracy, there is no agreement, no unity of will, which could be translated into reality by the force of the whole democracy or by its greater majority.'⁹¹ Chernov concluded: 'Labor democracy could not have dealt itself a more suicidal blow. Under the prevailing conditions, for democracy to sign its own act of bankruptcy was an indirect admission that the only solution was dictatorship.'⁹²

The onus was now back on Kerensky to form a new coalition in

⁸⁹ *ibid*, p.403.

⁹⁰ *ibid*

⁹¹ *Izvestiia*, no.176, 20 September, 1917, pp.5-7 cited in Browder and Kerensky, p.1686.

⁹² Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution*, p.405.

consultation with the presidium. Naively and rather optimistically, Chernov hoped for an impasse in the subsequent negotiations and the enforced resignation of Kerensky. In the event of such a resignation, Chernov prepared an alternative candidate list. Tsereteli was proposed for Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs. As for himself, he 'preferred to remain outside the government, but was willing if necessary, to return to the Ministry of Agriculture or head a new "Ministry of Nationalities".'⁹³ The presumption upon which it was drafted failed to materialise and Chernov's list came to nothing.

After the behind the scenes intrigues and bickering had subsided, Kerensky announced the new cabinet on 25 September. Any dissent from the SR Party with respect to the composition of the new coalition was to be silenced by the regulation of 27 September, when the SR Central Committee reinforced its earlier decree, obliging all members of the committee to actively carry out the committee's policy and completely prohibiting 'individual voting contrary to the opinion of the Central Committee.'⁹⁴

Another measure designed to muzzle dissent, and aimed in particular at Chernov, was a decision of the Central Committee on

⁹³ *ibid*, p.406.

⁹⁴ *ibid*, p.401.

28 September not to publish an article entitled 'Lessons of the Conference', which was to be the first of a series devoted to a systematic criticism of the mistakes of the revolution.⁹⁵

Matters went so far that a series of Chernov's warning articles was not published in the central organ of the party, even as his personal opinion. The Central Committee decided that the party was so accustomed to regard Chernov's articles as its official position that their divergence from the decisions of the Central Committee might cause general confusion. Even here Chernov submitted to discipline and patiently waited to appeal to the Fourth Party Congress.⁹⁶

Chernov withdrew in the forlorn hope that the Party's Fourth Congress to be held in November-December, 1917, would resolve all. As a consequence, Chernov refrained from active politics by periodically abstaining himself from Central Committee meetings and by completely disassociating himself from the work of the Council of the Republic, the afterbirth of the Democratic Conference. He intended to travel the country, feeling the grass roots will and mobilising support for the Fourth Congress, hoping that it would replace the crown upon his head. But, by then it was too late, as history intervened.

⁹⁵ Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, p.426.

⁹⁶ Chernov, in *ibid*, p.402.

Chapter 9

Aftermath and Exile

The SR Party's preoccupation with intra-party strife blinded it to developments around it, and more importantly, diverted its attention from the task at hand, the task of transforming Russia into a socialist society. The Bolsheviks were, on the whole, unencumbered by internal dissension and had a plan of action for the socialist transformation of Russian society.

The Bolshevik seizure of power on 25 October, 1917, did not act as stimulus for SR Party unity. Splits and incessant bickering remained. Chernov reluctantly delayed his departure from Petrograd until the 22 October, on the advice that an earlier departure would be understood as not being in solidarity with revolutionary anti-Bolshevik forces.¹ Detached from developments, Chernov continued with his favourite pastime, writing articles for the party newspaper. On this occasion the topic was the desirability of an immediate implementation of agrarian reform.

On the evening of 22 October, 1917, Chernov left Petrograd on a speaking tour of Moscow and the Western Front. When questioned by delegates at the Fourth Party Congress as to the reasons for his absence during the days of the Bolshevik uprising, which occurred on the 25 October, he replied that he had not wished to be present at

¹ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.345.

the Second Soviet Congress; as a disciplined member of the party he had no right to defend his personal point of view, and to defend that of the Central Committee was out of the question.²

News of an imminent Bolshevik uprising was not a revelation to the SR Party. The Central Committee on the 15 October 'took the matter under consideration' and decided to 'compose a manifesto'. There was little else it could do.³ It gave the matter further consideration at another committee meeting on the 21 October.

The success of the Bolshevik uprising on 25 October, prompted the SR Party into a counter offensive against the Soviet regime. The Central Committee of the party empowered A. Gots to organise armed resistance against the Bolsheviks through the Military Commission of the SR Central Committee, which Gots, in turn, placed under the auspices of the Committee to Save the Fatherland and Revolution. SR Avksentiev was its chairman. Lacking support from its own elements within the army, Gots fell back on the cadets of Petrograd military schools whose farcical anti-Bolshevik uprising on 29 October was easily suppressed.

Chernov opposed the party's action. Armed resistance was

² *Kratkii otchet o rabotakh Chetvertago Sezda Partii Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov (26 Noiabria - 5 Dekabria 1917 goda)*, (Brief Account of the Work of the Fourth Congress of the Socialist Revolutionary Party [26 November - 5 December, 1917]), Petrograd, 1918. p.108.

³ Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, p.454.

impractical, especially if perceived by the populace, that it sought to restore the Provisional Government. What was needed was a new government of socialists to challenge the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom).

At Mogilev on the Dnieper, the General Army Committee endeavoured to do just this.⁴ The Committee designated V.M. Chernov as their choice for minister-president. His credibility was more intact than most, by his opposition to imperialism, support of peasant interests, and his dissociation from Kerensky and the Provisional Government. Chernov arrived in Mogilev at the invitation of the chairman of the General Army Committee Staff Captain S.V. Perekrestov, from Pskov where the proposal was put to him. Chernov accepted on the proviso that the Central Committee of the SR Party countenance the offer, and the All-Russian Congress of Peasants' Soviets do likewise. The Congress, Chernov requested, should move its forthcoming congress from Petrograd to Mogilev to

⁴ This account of the Mogilev plan is based on Chernov's 'Tsentralnyi Komitet Partii Sotsialistov Revoliutsionerov na rubezhe dvukh revoliutsii' (The Central Committee of the Socialist Revolutionary Party on the border line between two revolutions) as cited in J. Bunyan and H.H. Fisher, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1918: Documents and Materials*. Stanford University Press, 1965; G. Semenov (Vasilev), *Voennaia boevaia rabota Partii Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov za 1917-18*, (Military and Combat Activity of the Socialist Revolutionary Party in 1917-18), Berlin 1922; and Radkey, *The Sickle under the Hammer. The Russian Socialist Revolutionaries in the Early Months of Soviet Rule*, Columbia University Press, 1963, pp.73-91.

add its authority to the exercise. Both acceded and Chernov proceeded with the selection of a cabinet. The General Army Committee called for support of the new government on a program of restoration of civil liberties, transfer of the land to the land committees, and immediate peace negotiations.

The whole endeavour was, however, to come abruptly to an end. On 11 November, only four days after the General Army Committee had announced its intentions, it cancelled them. Outwardly the reason was that many political parties were apprehensive that the initiative to form a new government had come from a military authority, and instead would have preferred it to have come from the civilian arena. Behind the scenes intrigue played a substantial role as well. From his initial acceptance on the eve of 8 November, Chernov on 10 November, suddenly withdrew his candidacy. From his initial elation on the evening of 8 November, Chernov was now 'laying (sic) in a complete moral and physical state of collapse with a compress on his head'.⁵ The answer for this sudden transformation lies with the arrival of Gots and Avksentiev, who promptly took a hostile attitude to the proposal, arguing it

⁵ G. Semenov (Vasilev), *Voennaia i boevaia rabota Partii Sotsialistov - Revoliutsionerov za 1917-1918*, (Military and Combat Activity of the Socialist Revolutionary in 1917-1918), Berlin. 1922, p.9.

would meet with no support in party circles, nor, in fact, in Soviet circles. Furthermore, after initially agreeing to move the site of their forthcoming meeting, the Peasant Executive Committee recanted and stated that the original site of Petrograd would remain.

Chernov also claims that Avksentiev's opposition was motivated by the fact that he had been previously designated to form a new government, and carried with him a letter from Kerensky conferring on Avksentiev the rights and duties of the Prime Minister.⁶

Chernov bowed to the wishes of his party comrades and left Mogilev for Petrograd in order to continue his verbal struggle against Bolshevism at the Peasants' Congress. The Congress opened on 10 November and met until 25 November, electing left SR Maria Spiridonova as chairman after a walkout of right SRs and their sympathisers. It also at this time declared itself a 'Special Congress'.⁷

Upon Chernov's arrival, the peasant delegates to whom he was the messiah, and who had only just recently walked out of the Congress, returned with a motion to elect Chernov as honorary chairman. The Bolshevik Zinoviev attacked Chernov for his association with

⁶ A copy of the letter is reproduced in Browder and Kerensky, pp.1809-1810.

⁷ *Delo Naroda*, no.207, 11 November,1917, p.4.

tsarist generals at Mogilev and accused him as the 'man who once dispersed the Diet of Finland. He appealed to the Left SRs: 'You... must decide once and for all whether you are with us and with the revolutionary workers, soldiers, and peasants or against us.'⁸ Chernov in what was now familiar territory, fended off Zinoviev's accusations claiming they were unfounded. He explained that he had just returned from the army congress at Mogilev where the question of putting an end to the civil war was discussed, and concluded by saying that he was ready to give an explanation at any time.⁹ The combination of Left SR and Bolshevik votes denied Chernov the chair. The congress then divided into two intransigent camps, the Extraordinary Congress of the Left SRs and Bolsheviks, and a Conference of the Executive Committee with its supporters, virtually all of whom were SRs of the centre and right. There was no hope of reconciliation.

The Fourth and last Congress of the SR Party met in Petrograd from 26 November to 5 December, 1917. The main issue confronting the party was the analysis of contemporary events and the tactics to be adopted.¹⁰ While the Left SRs had formally broken away at the

⁸ Sessions of the Peasants' Deputies 10-15 November, 1917 cited in Bunyan and Fisher in *ibid*, p.212.

⁹ *ibid*, p.213.

¹⁰ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, pp.345-346.

Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies (25-26 October), dissension of opinion within the SR Party was still rife. Chernov, like a phoenix, rose from the ashes and was elected as presiding officer together with a left centrist presidium.¹¹

Chernov used the Congress as an opportunity to release months of pent up frustrations at the lack of support given to him during the days of the Provisional Government. Discarding the obligation and discipline which he imposed on himself for the sake of party unity, he launched into a torrent of abuse.¹² V.I. Lebedev took up the challenge and reproached Chernov for his inaction and acquiescence while a member of the Provisional Government and for effectively betraying Kerensky and knifing him in the back.¹³ These recriminations once again strained the unity of an already splintered party.

V.M. Zenzinov, as the spokesman of the Central Committee, presented a report in which he admitted the many deviations from party policy, the lack of unity and discipline at decisive moments, and the lack of leadership and direction.¹⁴ Various delegates further indicted the Central Committee. From the right came the

¹¹ *Kratkii Otchet...* p.4.

¹² *ibid*, pp.118-120.

¹³ *ibid*, p.119, p.121.

¹⁴ *ibid*, pp.64-73, pp.111-112.

characterisation of policy as 'wobbling, zig-zagging, and indefinite'.¹⁵ From the left, the complaint was that the people had been confused by not being able to tell where the party stood on the biggest issues of the day.¹⁶ The inactive and inept leadership of the Central Committee had, in the words of I.A. Prilezhaev, been to such a degree that Chernov's popularity was now gravely compromised.¹⁷ The report of the Central Committee called for the choice of a new committee 'more homogenous' in composition and capable of putting through a firm policy of revolutionary socialism.¹⁸

The newly elected Central Committee saw Chernov's left centre faction supreme, to the great delight of the man himself, winning 11 of the 20 positions and giving a clear indication of Chernov's ascendancy.¹⁹ The crown that Gots had worn since the Third Congress was now back on Chernov's head. The Congress now turned to a discussion on the 'current moment' and future directions. The former involved an analysis as to why the party,

¹⁵ *ibid*, p.91.

¹⁶ *ibid*, p.47.

¹⁷ *ibid*, pp.78-79.

¹⁸ Resolution of the report of the Central Committee in *ibid*, p.143. See also Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution*, p.396.

¹⁹ For a complete list of the successful candidates and their respective votes see *Kratkii Otchet...*p.143.

after being in a position of power, was now on the verge of becoming an illegal organisation, forced once again, into an underground movement. The latter involved what actions should be taken in respect of the Bolshevik regime.

Chernov stated that the SR Party's pro-coalition policy was misguided, that the second trial of coalition had been superfluous and that the third was inexcusable. Under the domination of a clique which had no true majority behind it, the SR concept of a revolution falling between a strictly bourgeois and a thoroughly socialist one, had been scrapped in order to perpetuate a sterile union with the bourgeoisie. However, the SR masses would not accept a purely political revolution and, in not getting their own kind, had turned in large numbers to the maximalist utopia of the extremists.²⁰

As for the future tactics of the SR Party in respect of the Bolshevik regime, Chernov urged patience, and to wait for the inherent negative aspects of Bolshevism to emerge and thus show their true colours. Only then, when the masses were free from the hypnotic trance of Bolshevism, could the party undertake armed resistance,

²⁰ *Kratkii Otchet...* pp.25-26, p.123, pp.144-145 see also Chernov, 'Otkliki pressy' (Echoes of the Press), *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no.32, December, 1923, pp.20-21, and 'Iz itogov proshlogo opyta' (From the Results of Past Experience), *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no.23, December, 1922, pp.3-4.

while being all the time conscious that it did not aid counter-revolutionary elements. The task was to divest Bolshevism of its popular following, and also to wean its allies, the Left SRs and Menshevik Internationalists, before letting things come to an open fight. This could be done only if the SR Party straightened out its line and provided the country with a thoroughly revolutionary alternative to Bolshevism.²¹

In the interim, the question was how could the party check the excesses and facilitate the withering away process? Chernov toyed with the idea of a resumption of terrorism, recalling an old slogan, 'You shall get it according to your deeds', and declaring it to be his party's duty to defend the will of the people against ravishers 'with all the force at its disposal, as in the days of yore'.²² This was to be only a brief flirtation, for the Central Committee, on 12 December, pronounced terrorism to be 'wholly inadmissible' as a means of struggle at this time, and ordered its decision to be communicated to all comrades working on the defence of the Constituent Assembly. Instead, the committee concentrated on agitation in factories in an attempt to recover lost ground and drive a wedge between the Bolshevik Party and its proletarian following. However, Chernov

²¹ Chernov, 'Iz itogov proshlogo opyta' *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, no.23, December, 1922, pp.4-5.

²² *Kratkii Otchet...*p.76, p.35.

ultimately believed that in the end the final confrontation with Bolshevism would be an all out affair where even terrorism would be employed.²³

In recognising the primacy of the Constituent Assembly, the SRs were on a collision course with the Bolshevik soviet system.

Chernov viewed soviets in the following way:

Both in 1905 and in 1917 it was an organization ad hoc, the specific type of organization of a united socialist and revolutionary front in a militant period, in the fire and storm of advancing revolution. Unlike all other militant organizations of the working class, it was built not from above but below, by election at factory and shop meetings, and hence in some features was like a "preliminary parliament" of the working class.²⁴

They were revolutionary improvisations due to the absence of stable, well-established and distinct political parties and trade unions, 'without which the working class is only "human dust". Hence the Soviets arose as a temporary substitute for the trade-union and political organizations of the working class.'²⁵

It was merely a later refurbishing in Russian style of the main idea of South European anarcho-syndicalism, at best, an unconscious parody of it. It is one thing to construct a working-class state on a firm basis, on labor unions forged by many years of mass struggle and practical activity; it is quite another to build it on improvized half clubs, half parliaments,

²³ Chernov, *op cit.*

²⁴ Chernov, *The Great Russian Révolution*, p.103.

²⁵ *ibid.*

without experience, without a definite constitution or regular system of elections.²⁶

In Chernov's opinion, if the latter course was chosen, Soviets would simply provide a facade for the dictatorship of the party which controlled them. The Left SRs and the Bolsheviks took a diametrically opposing view. For the Left SRs, the Soviets assumed an independent value as agencies through which the toilers of Russia could fashion a new order, whereas the Bolsheviks regarded them essentially as organs for the mobilisation of the working class behind its vanguard. Furthermore, in Lenin's view, the Soviets were a higher form of democracy than a Constituent Assembly.

The Fourth Congress of the SR Party took the line that the SRs must thwart Lenin's strategy of opposing the soviets to the Constituent Assembly by getting them out of the field of government, but at the same time preserving them as nuclei of class action and, if need be, of defence against counter-revolution.²⁷ Their various proposals for wresting control of the Soviets from Bolshevik influence, however were to fail. The Soviets as instruments of government were imbued with working class consciousness and the Bolsheviks were too well cemented.

²⁶ *ibid*, p.104.

²⁷ Refer to Sections 10, 11, and 12 of the Resolution on the Current Moment, *Kratkii Otchet...*p.145.

On the question of the war, and more importantly, of peace, radical leftist elements that had failed to break away with the Left SRs, berated Chernov in his report for failing to address the growing disenchantment felt by the troops at the front with the continuation of the war, and praised the Bolshevik declaration for peace. Others demanded an immediate peace, not merely a separate peace, but peace at any price.²⁸ The Congress fell back on its standard mode of operation when dealing with difficult and contentious issues by deferring to the Constituent Assembly. The SRs were to then instruct it to address a note to the Allies proposing a general armistice and the discussion of terms for a general peace in conformity with the principle of the Russian Revolution.²⁹

The Fourth Party Congress of the SR Party failed to heal the wounds of the recent schism within the party with the secession of the left wing. Its proposals to supplant Bolshevik influence in Soviets with its own failed miserably; it skirted the land question and the problem of the equitable land distribution; it failed to resolve a concrete peace proposal, and thus tacitly endorsed the continuation of a demonstrably unpopular war; and the nationalities question was as muddled as ever. In the midst of all this, Chernov

²⁸ *Kratkii Otchet...*p.47, p.50. p.83, p.85.

²⁹ *ibid*, p.157.

congratulated the congress on having laid down a single line of revolutionary socialism and an anti-Bolshevik one at that.³⁰

Coinciding with the Fourth Congress of the SR Party was the meeting of the Second All-Russian Peasants' Congress, which also met in Petrograd on 26 November and was in session until 10 December. For the second time Spiridonova and Chernov opposed each other for the chairmanship of the Congress. . On this occasion Spiridonova emerged triumphant, receiving 269 votes as opposed to Chernov's 230, and took the chair.³¹ The turbulent Congress continually descended into chaotic disorder, with the the Left SRs berating the impotency of the right SRs, and the right SRs decrying the collusion of the Left SRs with Bolshevism. The Bolsheviks were fuelling the fire of the two agrarian protagonists, with the end product of a divided class which posed little opposition to the leadership of Bolshevism. The ultimate aim was the domination of the peasant movement, not so much for class unity, but as a means of destroying their rivals.

Chernov, in his major speech to the Congress, sidestepped the issue of his having six months in power with nothing to show for it, and focused on the defence of the Constituent Assembly. His speech, like

³⁰ *ibid*, p.160.

³¹ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.348.

his nomination to the chair, was greeted with shouts of '*Doloi*' (Down with him). Irreconcilable divisions within the congress eventually led on 4 December to inevitable splits into right and left factions and the walk out of the right SRs. From then until 10 December, the two separate groups continued their fruitless deliberations.

With the imminent arrival of the Constituent Assembly, SR attention focused on its defence against Bolshevik attack. As a precaution against feared Bolshevik violence, a Committee for the Defence of the Constituent Assembly had been formed, cooperating closely with the Military Commission of the SR Party.³² On 18 December, 1917, a squad led by Vecheka³³ collegium member V.V Fomin, acting on Dzerzhinsky's instructions and with Sovnarkom assent, arrested Chernov and other prominent SRs, as well as Tsereteli and other Menshevik leaders, as they attended a rally of the Constituent Assembly Defence Committee. Among them were various delegates elected to the Constituent Assembly.³⁴ When at a Sovnarkom meeting late that night, the Left SR I.N. Steinberg, the

³² For a detailed analysis of the composition and role of the Committee and Commission see Radkey, *The Sickle under the Hammer*, pp.336-349.

³³ *Vserossiiskaia Chrezvychainaia Komissiiia (po borbe s Kontrrevoliutsiei Spekuliatsiei, Sabotazhem i Prestupleniiami po Dolzhnosti)* All-Russian Extraordinary Commission (for Combating Counter-Revolution, Speculation, Sabotage, and Misconduct in Office).

³⁴ The letter of Arrest is reproduced in Bunyan and Fisher in *ibid*, p.366.

recently appointed Commissar of Justice, learned from Lenin of the detention and proposed incarceration of these parliamentarians, he sped to the scene and countermanded Dzerzhinsky's order, releasing those arrested.

The arrests of 18 December provided a clear indication of the Bolsheviks' intention in regards to the Constituent Assembly. To the Bolsheviks the Soviets were a higher form of democracy than any bourgeois institution such as the Constituent Assembly and as the revolution had developed into its proletarian socialist phase, the need for a Constituent Assembly was no longer present. Yet, one must not pre-empt events. Steinberg's timed intervention allowed the Constituent Assembly, the ultimate will of the people of Russia in the SR mind, to meet in Petrograd on 5 January, 1918, with Chernov's participation.

In the elections to the Constituent Assembly held on 12 -14 November, the SR Party amassed 380 deputies, the Left SRs 39, while the Bolsheviks recorded only 24 per cent of the vote with 168 deputies.³⁵ Chernov was elected in five districts, and chose to

³⁵ For a detailed analysis of the elections refer to Radkey, *The Election to the Russian Constituent Assembly of 1917*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1950 also W.A. Dando, 'A Map of the Election to the Russian Constituent Assembly of 1917', *Slavic Review* vol.25, June, 1966, pp.314-319.

represent the farming district of Kharkov. Discord rapidly developed between the elected parliamentarians and the Central Committee of the SR Party. The committee under Chernov's left centrist guidance sought a delay in the convocation of the Constituent Assembly so as to allow time for the disillusionment of the people with Bolshevism, and hence, to provide a more favourable situation in which to provoke a final showdown. The right SRs, who maintained a majority of deputies in the delegation, sought an immediate convocation of the assembly as the expression of the sovereign will of the people, ignoring Soviet rule and the absence of any defence of the assembly.

The obvious friction between the two viewpoints led to the creation of a rival centre of authority. On 9 December, the SR Deputies elected a Bureau of the Delegation to act as an executive organ. Of its twenty five members there was one notable omission: V.M. Chernov, the leader of the party.³⁶ This was an obvious and embarrassing rebuff of Chernov's left centrist line. This situation could not continue, and after several re-elections and the arrival of more deputies in Petrograd on 23 December, Chernov's name appeared at the head of a list of successful candidates. However, the

³⁶ *Volia Naroda*, no.190, 10 December, 1917 cited in Radkey, *The Sickle under the Hammer*, p.353.

fundamental rightist orientation of the delegation remained unchanged.

The Fourth Congress in its organisational statutes explicitly stated that all members of the SR delegation in the Soviets, as in the parliament, must heed the injunctions of the party leadership, and that the work of the parliamentary group must proceed under the direct supervision of the Central Committee.³⁷ Yet, as had often been the case, adherence to party policy and discipline was not one of the main strengths of the SR Party, and the right SRs largely acted independently of the Central Committee.

The tactics to be employed on the opening day of the assembly were predicated on a perceivably hostile Bolshevik reaction. So as not to inflame the situation the SR delegation decided to go unarmed to the Tauride Palace, entrusting their personal safety to the people. They also resolved to restrain themselves in the face of any verbal abuse or provocation. And should the electricity be disconnected or delegates deprived of food Anastasia N. Sletova, sister of Stephen Sletov and first wife of Chernov, was to provide candles and a supply of sandwiches.³⁸ 'Thus...', says Trotsky contemptuously, 'democracy entered upon the struggle with dictatorship heavily

³⁷ *Kratkii Otchet...*p.136, p.158.

³⁸ M.V. Vishniak, *Dan proshlomu*, (Tribute to the Past) New York, 1954. p.342.

armed with sandwiches and candles.³⁹ As to policy proposals, the SRs at the first session hoped to pass three pieces of legislation on peace, federalism and land.

As a mask to the factionalism within the party, Chernov was chosen as a candidate for the presidency.⁴⁰ The move can only be seen as a tactical ploy by the right wing rather than a full endorsement of Chernov and his policies. He was still the 'village minister' to millions of peasants. Though they endorsed his candidacy, the right attempted to muzzle his mouth by having his opening speech vetted for content, if not for words. Vishniak states that Chernov agreed to speak to a pre-arranged plan, but would not divulge the general content of his speech.⁴¹

The first session of the Constituent Assembly opened around four o'clock on 5 January, 1918.⁴² Only half, some 400 odd deputies, were

³⁹ Quoted in Bunyan and Fisher, p.370.

⁴⁰ Vishniak, *Dan proshlomu*, pp.343-344.

⁴¹ *ibid*, p.344 see also his article 'The role of the Socialist Revolutionaries in 1917' in *Studies on the Soviet Union*, no.3 vol.III, 1964, pp.172-182.

⁴² Only the salient features pertaining to Chernov and the SRs will be examined. The Constituent Assembly proceedings are adequately covered in some detail by Radkey, *The Sickle under the Hammer*, Chap.VIII; Bunyan and Fisher, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1918*, pp.370-387. For a stenographic report of the session see I.S. Malchevski (ed.) *Vserossiiskoe Uchreditelnoe Sobranie* (The All-Russian Constituent Assembly), Moscow and Leningrad, 1930. For eyewitness accounts see M. Vishniak, *Vserossiisko Uchreditelnoe Sobranie* (The All-Russian Constituent Assembly) Paris, 1932; V.M. Chernov, 'Russia's One-Day Parliament' *The New Leader*, 31 January, 1948 reprinted in Dimitri Von Mohrenschildt,

present out of a possible 800 as provided for by the electoral law. With the assistance of M.S. Uritskii, a Bolshevik who had been appointed Commissar in Charge of the All-Russian Commission for matters concerning the assembly as well as commandant of the Tauride Palace where the Constituent Assembly met, the public galleries were stacked with workers, sailors and soldiers to ensure the deputies received a hostile and vocal reception. Zenzinov commented that; 'We, the deputies, were surrounded by an enraged crowd ready at any moment to throw itself upon us and tear us to pieces.'⁴³

Although the noisy and demonstrative public gallery was pro-Bolshevik, the elections for the Assembly's President demonstrated anti-Bolshevik sentiment, as the Left SRs and Bolsheviks' nomination of Maria Spiridonova was defeated by Chernov. Fears of a desertion amongst the peasant ranks to the left failed to eventuate.

Chernov's nomination proved to be the magnet that prevented the

The Russian Revolution of 1917 Contemporary Accounts, Oxford University Press, New York, 1971, pp.268-272; Chernov, *Pered Burei* (Before the Storm), pp.353-366; V. Zenzinov, *Iz Zhizni Revoliutsionera*, (Out of the Life of a Revolution), Paris, 1919; Ludovic Naudeau 'Russia's Constituent Assembly: An Eyewitness's Story of the Seventeen Fateful Hours That Started the Nation Toward Ruin' in *Current History Magazine of the New York Times*, vol.8 part 2, August 1918, pp.267-275. The above list is by no means exhaustive.

⁴³ V. Zenzinov, *Iz Zhizni Revoliutsionera*, p.99.

peasant deputies' desertion.

My nomination as candidate for the Presidency received even greater support than had been expected. Some leftist peasants evidently could not bring themselves to oppose their own "muzhik minister". I obtained 244 votes against 150.⁴⁴

Chernov's election to the chair was followed by his inaugural address. The content and its reception are vividly recounted in his memoirs.

I delivered my inauguration address, making vigorous efforts to keep self-control. Every sentence of my speech was met with outcries, some ironical, others spiteful, often buttressed by the brandishing of guns. Bolshevik deputies surged forward to the dais. Conscious that the stronger nerves would win, I was determined not to yield to provocation. I said that the nation had made its choice, that the composition of the Assembly was a living testimony to the people's yearning for Socialism, and that its convention marked the end of the hazy transition period. Land reform, I went on, was a foregone conclusion: the land would be equally accessible to all who wished to till it. The Assembly, I said, would inaugurate an era of active foreign policy directed toward peace.

I finished my speech amidst a cross-fire of interruptions and cries. It was now the turn of the Bolshevik speakers - Skvortsov and Bukharin. During their delivery, our sector was a model of restraint and self-discipline. We maintained a cold, dignified silence. The Bolshevik speeches, as usual, were shrill, clamorous, provocative and rude, but they could not break the icy silence of our majority. As President, I was bound in duty to call to order for abusive statements. But I know that this was precisely what they expected. Since the armed guards were under their orders, they wanted clashes, incidents and perhaps a brawl. So I remained silent.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Chernov, 'Russia's One-Day Parliament' in Mohrenschildt *ibid*, p.270; Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.362.

⁴⁵ Chernov, 'Russia' One-Day Parliament' in Mohrenschildt *ibid*, pp.270-271; Chernov, *Pered Burei*, pp.362-363. The text of the speech

In an atmosphere of such hostility, even Zenzinov, a staunch critic of Chernov's from within his own party, conceded that he showed courage.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, for Chernov, the SR Party, and the Assembly, his verbosity and obtuseness pleased virtually no one, not the right wing of his party and certainly not the Left SRs and Bolsheviks. His speech was cautious and ambiguous, or as his wife recalled in her memoirs, his deviation from party policy into the realm of his own ideas gave his speech a duplicity of meaning.⁴⁷ In his speech, Chernov rejected the notion of a separate peace, cautiously put the Constituent Assembly above the Soviets, and on the question of nationalities, indicated his desire to hold the tsarist empire together in a fraternal federation of peoples. On the land question, he once again invoked the slogan of socialisation of land. Slogans and formulas were not enough, their realisation was what counted, and for all their talk, it was something Chernov and the SRs could not provide.

After the failure of the Assembly to make the Bolshevik Declaration

is in I.S. Malchevski (ed.), *Vserossiiskoe Uchreditelnoe Sobranie*, pp.9-23. Excerpts are reproduced in M. Vishniak, *Dan Proshlomy*, pp.366-369.

⁴⁶ Vishniak, *Dan Proshlomy*, p.369.

⁴⁷ Olga Tchernoff, *New Horizons. Reminiscences of the Russian Revolution*, translated from the French by C. Herbert, Hyperion Press, Westport 1975. Reprint of the 1936 edition published by Hutchinson, London. p.101.

of the Rights of Toiling and Exploited Peoples the order of the day, the Bolsheviks withdrew from the assembly, and the Left SRs followed shortly thereafter. The monumental events that followed are related in Chernov's own words.

We knew that the Bolsheviks were in conference, discussing what to do next. I felt sure that we would be arrested. But it was of utmost importance for us to have a chance to say the last word. I declared that the next point on the agenda was the land reform. At this moment somebody pulled at my sleeve.

"You have to finish now. There are orders from the People's Commissar."

Behind me stood a stocky sailor, accompanied by his armed comrades.

"What People's Commissar?"

"We have orders. Anyway, you cannot stay here any longer. The lights will be turned out in a minute. And the guard are tired."

"The members of the Assembly are also tired but cannot rest until they have fulfilled the task entrusted to them by the people - to decide on the land reform and the future form of government."

And leaving the guards no time to collect themselves. I proceeded to read the main paragraphs of the Land Bill, which our party had prepared long ago. But time was running short. Reports and debates had to be omitted. Upon my proposal, the Assembly voted six basic points of the bill. It provided that all land was to be turned into common property, with every tiller possessing equal rights to use it. Amidst incessant shouts: "That's enough! Stop it now! Clear the hall!" the other points of the bill were voted.

Fearing that the lights would be extinguished, somebody managed to procure candles. It was essential that the future form of government be voted upon immediately. Otherwise the Bolsheviks would not fail to charge the Assembly with having left the door open for the restoration of the monarchy. The motion for a republic form of government was carried unanimously.

In the dawn of a foggy and murky morning I declared a recess

until noon.

At the exit a palefaced man pushed his way to me and beseeched me in a trembling voice not to use my official car. A bunch of murderers, he said, was waiting for me. He admitted that he was a Bolshevik, but his conscience revolted against this plot.

I left the building, surrounded by a few friends. We saw several men in sailor's uniforms loitering near my car. We decided to walk. We had a long distance to go, and when I arrived home I learned that rumours were in circulation that the Constituent Assembly had dispersed, and that Chernov and Tseretelli had been shot.

At noon several members of the Assembly were sent in reconnaissance. They reported that the door of the Tauride Palace was sealed and guarded by a patrol with machine guns and two pieces of field artillery. Later in the day a decree of the Sovnarkom was published by which the Constituent Assembly was "dissolved."

Thus ended Russia's first and last democratic parliament.⁴⁸

The question that obviously faced the deputies to the Constituent Assembly is what should they do now? A group of delegates assembled the next day at Gurevich high school to deliberate their fate. Various delegates expressed their desire to continue meeting in some factory under the auspices and protection of the proletariat of Petrograd. An invitation to this effect had been extended via A. Vysotski from the Semiannikov foundry and another from the Obukhov steel mill and cannon foundry. Chernov was among those that supported the idea of reopening the sessions of the Constituent

⁴⁸ Chernov, 'Russia's One-Day Parliament' in Mohrenschildt, *ibid*, pp.271-272; Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.364-366; Vishniak, *Dan Proshlomy*, pp.376-379.

Assembly in such circumstances. Other delegates, who constituted a larger grouping, argued against such an action, claiming that workers' lives would be put at risk if the Bolsheviks used force, particularly with the fire power of a gunboat anchored in the nearby Neva river at their disposal. More importantly, any decisions arrived at would be unenforceable, and there was no mechanism available in which they could publicise the results of their deliberations. The majority view held sway and the delegation decided to turn down the offer.⁴⁹ The delegation moved to Moscow at the behest of the SR Central Committee at the end of January where, according to Chernov, the Bolsheviks were entrenched just as strongly as whence they came.⁵⁰

While in Moscow the SR Party held its Eighth Party Conference on 26 May, 1918, which reviewed the Bolshevik dispersal of the Constituent Assembly and the recent separate peace treaty with Germany in Brest-Litovsk on 3 March, 1918. Though without foreign aid, the party resolved to take up armed resistance against the Bolsheviks. It was thought that such aid could be utilised in the war against Germany on the '...condition that Russia's territorial integrity and political sovereignty will not be violated... and that the

⁴⁹ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, pp.367-368.

⁵⁰ *ibid*, p.368.

appearance of the Allies in Russian territory will be for strategic reasons only....⁵¹

Chernov left Moscow at the beginning of June and initially travelled to Saratov, where both he and the SR Central Committee imagined themselves to be on the eve of liberation.⁵² In order to escape the ever vigilant Cheka, Chernov was forced to go into hiding. Technical and personal complications further held up his passage, and when he finally reached Samara (now Kuibyshev) in mid-September, he had been cut off for eight months from all but underground politics, and for nearly four months from any politics at all. He arrived with the ideas that had been accepted (largely through his own persuasion) by the SR Central Committee at its Eighth Party Conference. The Bolsheviks were pawns and allies of Imperial Germany. Allied military aid might be accepted against the German-Bolshevik alliance, but in the liberation of Russia from Bolshevik tyranny, no section of the SRs could count on any force other than the force of the Russian people.

Chernov's conception of civil war was one of popular uprisings.

Peasant revolt would follow peasant revolt having a snowball effect

⁵¹ Resolutions of the Eighth Conference of the Socialist-Revolutionists of the Right 26 May, 1918, quoted in J.Bunyan, *Intervention, Civil War, and Communism in Russia April-December 1918: Documents and Materials*, Octagon, New York 1976, p.187; Chernov, *Pered Burei*, pp.371-372.

⁵² Zenzinov, *Iz Zhizni Revoliutsionera*, p.103.

until Bolshevik rule was swept away in the avalanche. Civil war, he maintained, was 75 per cent propaganda. He poured scorn on professional soldiers with their hackneyed ideas of fronts and formations and lines of communication. He was keenly alive to the danger of reaction, to the prospect that there might arise 'against the Left-wing Red dictatorship an equally despotic but Right-wing White dictatorship'. In the struggle between these two 'the Socialist Revolutionary Party, if it is to fulfil its historic role, must emerge as a Third Force and fight a determined war for Democracy on two fronts.

Chernov's arrival in Samara was viewed with some apprehension by right-wing SRs. They feared that his arrival and subsequent planned immediate departure for Ufa would jeopardize the Ufa Conference. Accordingly, while he was received with respect, allotted the best room in the Hotel National and given an official banquet and speeches, he was discreetly prevented from going on to Ufa.⁵³ The conference at Ufa was held between 8 September and 23 September in the Urals and was an attempt to organise a counter-government against the Bolsheviks. Twenty-three shades of political opinion were represented; the numerically biggest group was the

⁵³ D. Footman, *Civil War in Russia*, Faber and Faber, London 1961. p.117.

Komuch (Komitet Chlenov Uchreditelnogo Sobraniia- Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly, mainly comprised of Socialist Revolutionaries). The *Komuch* was inaugurated on 8 June, 1918, in the town of Samara on the Volga, with the aim of seizing power in the country on behalf of the Constituent Assembly. With the aid of the Czechs, the *Komuch* gained control over a large part of the Volga region. It declared war on the Soviet regime and Germany and appealed for Allied aid in organising resistance to the Germans and Bolsheviks and to establish a People's Army.⁵⁴

Though numerically superior, the *Komuch* strength at the Ufa Conference was negated by the right of veto accorded to each party, irrespective of size. The Ufa conference, at its fifth and concluding session, managed to form a Directory of five members (consisting of Avksentiev, General Boldyrev, Zenzinov, Vinogradov and Sapozhnikov), which would constitute an All-Russian Provisional Government.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ The proclamation of *Komuch*, its policies, establishment of a People's Army and Allied Intervention are reproduced in J. Bunyan, *Intervention, Civil War and Communism in Russia; April-December 1918: Documents and Materials*, Octagon, New York, 1976. pp.283-290.

⁵⁵ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.377; Zenzinov, *Iz Zhizni Revoliutsionera*, p.110; D. Footman, *Civil War in Russia*, Faber and Faber, London, 1961, p.113. The original Directory of five was to comprise N.D. Avksentiev, N.I. Astrov, General V.G. Boldyrev, P.V. Vologodsky, and N.V. Chaikovsky. Three of these were appointed *in absentia*; the original five members all had substitutes in the event of a vacancy or the non-arrival of a member to the 'liberated' zones. V.A. Vinogradov was to take the place of N.I. Astrov; V.V.

Until the convocation of the All-Russian Constituent Assembly, the All-Russian Provisional Government will be the sole trustee of sovereign authority over all territories of the Russian state.... All functions of sovereignty which... have been exercised provisionally by the different regional governments will be turned over to the All-Russian Provisional Government when claimed by it.⁵⁶

The Directory was to be the national government until sufficient members of the Constituent Assembly of January, 1918, could be assembled. The Directorate initially favoured Yekaterinburg as the seat of government, but was later persuaded in favour of Omsk as the capital, and the new government moved to that city in the early part of October, 1918. It was to have a short-lived existence. The Directorate was overthrown in a *coup d'etat* on 18 November, 1918, and replaced by a military dictatorship led by Admiral Kolchak.

Chernov was highly critical of developments around him upon his arrival in Samara. He later recounted to his wife, '...that eminent members of the Party, our comrades, were among those who helped Koltchak's (sic) dictatorship to happen. They pulled down the bulwark of democracy with their own hands. I foresaw what would happen as soon as I arrived at Samara for I was horrified by the

Sapozhnikov of P.V. Vologodsky; and V.M. Zenzinov of N.V. Chaikovsky. See Bunyan, *ibid*, pp.355-356.

⁵⁶ Excerpt from the Constitution of the Ufa Directorate (Resolution of the State Conference, 23 September, 1918) reproduced in Bunyan, *ibid*, p.353.

progress made by the monarchists, and by the weakness of the moderate ones among us in consenting to a coalition with all the anti-democratic forces.... When the Directory opened its Conference at Ufa I was unable to arrive in time, but I telephoned to the members of our Party and used all my strength to argue against the coalition. I implored them not to take part in the Directory, but of no (sic) avail.⁵⁷

N. Saviatitsky, a member of the Constituent Assembly and prominent in SR circles, recounts those dramatic and divisive developments in the days of the Ufa Directorate.

... Notwithstanding the fact that the Central Committee [of the S.R's]... approved the Ufa Agreement officially, there was no unanimity on that question among its members.... When Chernov and Rakitnikov arrived at Samara and learned of the nature of the proposed agreement... and the composition of the Directorate, they sounded an alarm. V.M. Chernov urged by telegraph..."not to ruin the party and the democracy" by sanctioning the [Ufa] agreement... But Chernov's plea had no success. Of the seven Central Committee members present at Ufa, three were against the agreement and four in favor. The agreement was thus approved by a majority of one....

When the State Conference came to a close, all members of the Central Committee (except V.M. Zenzinov) departed for Samara to call a plenary session [of the Central Committee] and to consider the extremely delicate situation in which the party found itself.... Two points of view at once asserted themselves: that of M. Hendelman, approving the Ufa Agreement..., and that of V. Chernov, sharply denouncing it. Chernov's point of view prevailed and on October 24 the Central Committee... passed a lengthy..."declaration" which

⁵⁷ O. Tchernoff, *New Horizons: Reminiscences of the Russian Revolution*, p.152.

was destined to play an important political role...⁵⁸

Chernov had the greatest possible reservations against the Ufa Agreement. He defended the view that the SR Party should form a democratic 'third force' and should fight on two fronts, that is, against the Bolsheviks and against the bourgeois reactionaries. The Central Committee supported this opinion by six votes to two.

The declaration referred to by Sviatitsky is sometimes referred to as the 'Chernov Manifesto' of 24 October, 1918. The document was not meant for public circulation, but was to be confined for discussion from within the party.⁵⁹ Chernov was the author of the 'manifesto' and in it he was very critical of the Ufa Conference, although he did not renounce the Directorate in so many words. As for the SR negotiators at the conference, this group 'suffered from lack of unity and discipline'. The manifesto goes on to give a long list of the failures and concessions of the Directorate since its appointment. Perhaps its most contentious passage was, however, an appeal to the party to mobilise all of its forces so that, if need be, it could resist the organisers of a counter-revolution behind the anti-Bolshevik front.

⁵⁸ N. Saviatitsky, *K istorii Vserossiiskogo Uchreditelnogo Sobraniia*, (Towards a history of the All-Russian Constituent Assembly), pp.59-60, reproduced in Bunyan, *op.cit*, pp.361-362. See also Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.374. The meeting started in Samara, but was forced to evacuate to Ufa due to the close proximity of the Red Army forces.

⁵⁹ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.389.

In anticipation of possible political crises resulting from counter-revolutionary schemes, all party forces must be mobilized immediately, given military training, and armed, in order to be able to withstand at any moment the attacks of counter-revolutionists who organize civil war in the rear of the anti-Bolshevik front...⁶⁰

The document concluded with the familiar reaffirmation of faith in the Constituent Assembly; '... only the Constituent Assembly with its leading S.R. group can safe-guard the people against a change from Bolshevik tyranny to that of counter-revolution.'⁶¹

The 'Chernov Manifesto' met with an unfavourable reception from non-socialists. A month later, when they ousted the Directory, Kolchak and his supporters did not neglect to produce the 'manifesto' as proof of the unreliability of the Socialist Revolutionaries.

The Directorate in Omsk lacked authority and a power base. While the Directorate was impotent, there remained the Congress of Members of the Constituent Assembly, a body recognised by both the Ufa Conference and by 'Chernov's Manifesto' as a viable political organ. The former saw it as an integral part of the All-Russian Provisional Government, while the latter saw it as a pre-parliament

⁶⁰ *Sovremennyaia Zapiski*, no.45. 1931, pp.348-352 in Bunyan,*op.cit*, p.364.

⁶¹ *ibid*, p365.

to the Constituent Assembly; '...the tactics of the S.R. party should be to rally its forces... around the Constituent Assembly and the Congress of Members of the Constituent Assembly, which is a preliminary to the former....'⁶² The Congress was dominated by the SR Central Committee and the Central Committee was now dominated by Chernov.

The imminent arrival of Red army troops necessitated an immediate evacuation of Samara. The evacuation train carrying Chernov and his colleagues did not reach Ufa until after the departure of the Directorate for Omsk. The immediate task was the location of the Congress, and after considering various options including Omsk, Cheliabinsk and Ufa, it was decided in favour of Yekaterinburg⁶³, with the Congress members eventually arriving on 19 October, 1918.

At Yekaterinburg, there was no crowd ovation as a welcome, accomodation proved to be difficult to obtain, and it was only through the intervention of Czech General Gaida that they were housed in hotel rooms, with two to three having to share each one. An old Diocesan school on the outskirts of Yekaterinburg was obtained as a meeting place, but even this needed repairing before it

⁶² *ibid*, p.364.

⁶³ Until 1924 known as Yekaterinburg, now called Sverdlovsk.

could be utilised.⁶⁴

Lack of proper communication facilities further frustrated Congress members. Sinister rumours spread, one of which was that disgruntled officers with rightist leanings were on their way there to murder Chernov, V.K.Volskii and I.M. Brushvit.⁶⁵

A round-the-clock watch was put on Chernov's room at the Hotel Palais Royal by his closest comrades. On the evening of 17 November the Congress delegates received the news that a *coup d'etat* had taken place in Omsk and that the SR members of the All-Russian Provisional Government, Avksentiev, Zenzinov and Argunov were under arrest.⁶⁶ Further news followed that Admiral Kolchak had assumed power, dissolved the Congress of Members of the Constituent Assembly in Yekaterinburg, ordered the arrest of its members, and installed himself as All-Russian Supreme Ruler.⁶⁷

A hastily organised SR Central Committee meeting with the Bureau of the Congress was convened the same evening to formulate contingency plans in the struggle against reactionary forces. The Central Committee and the Bureau members duly assembled in

⁶⁴ K. Burevoi (left-centrist SR), *Raspad*, 1918-1922 (The Collapse, 1918-1922), Moscow, 1923, pp.35-36.

⁶⁵ *ibid*, p.37.

⁶⁶ Burevoi, *Raspad*, 1918-1922, p.37; Zenzinov, *Iz Zhizni Revoliutsionera*, pp.115-119; Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.390.

⁶⁷ *ibid*, Burevoi.

Chernov's bedroom and decided that the Congress should assume authority in free Russia. This decision was to be ratified by a full session of the Congress to be held at the Diocesan school. It was to be the first and last time that the venue was used. The full Congress was to meet at 11a.m. in the morning on 19 November. The Congress at this session approved the decisions taken the previous night and the Congress of Members of the Constituent Assembly announced their assumption of power.⁶⁸

It was a shallow, symbolic and futile gesture. The Congress had little authority and virtually no power base. Appeals to the workers and soldiers of Yekaterinburg to rally in support of the Congress failed.

In the evening at approximately seven o'clock at the Palais Royal were Chernov, his six bodyguards and a dozen or so Congress members as well as SR party members occupying several rooms of the second floor. The hotel was surrounded by Siberians (monarchists). Earlier in the day, a sympathetic Czech officer warned Chernov of the impending attack on the Congress, and as he was unable to provide an armed escort, the members decided to stay, resolving to defend themselves to the last.

Amid the explosion of two bombs, the troops rushed the hotel.

Their previous resolve to defend themselves to the last wilted, for

68 Burevoi, *ibid*, pp.37-38; Chernov, *ibid*, pp.390-391.

fear of the needless shedding of blood. During the confusion, SR Maksunov was fatally wounded by a revolver shot. Rooms were searched; money and papers, even shaving gear, cigarette cases and brief cases were confiscated.⁶⁹ Chernov, Volskii, Rakitnikov, Burevoi, Chernenkov and others were arrested. In all some 19 individuals were taken into custody.⁷⁰

Orders arrived from General Gaida that they all, except Chernov, were to leave Yekaterinburg immediately for Cheliabinsk. To leave Chernov behind to the mercy of the Siberians would mean his certain death. Numerous appeals to Gaida swayed his mind and he relented. Chernov was to travel with the others.⁷¹

Cheliabinsk was a sanctuary for the Congress members. Most of the Czech National Council was there, and so was Czech Military Headquarters under General Syrový. Upon their arrival, Syrový intended to transfer them to Shadrinsk, a small nearby town. This action would have precluded the Congress members from active participation in politics. They petitioned the Czech authorities for a transfer to Ufa. After some protracted discussion the Czechs relented and the Congress proceeded to Ufa.⁷²

⁶⁹ Burevoi, *ibid*, p.38; Chernov, *ibid*, p.392; O. Tchernoff, *New Horizons: Reminiscences of the Russian Revolution*, p.151.

⁷⁰ *ibid*

⁷¹ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.394.

⁷² Burevoi, *Raspad, 1918-1922*, p.39; Chernov, in *ibid*, p.395.

The inconsequential discussions at the Hotel Volga in Ufa came to an end on 2 December, 1918, with the arrival from Omsk of a special task force in Ufa. Under instructions from Kolchak, it was to suppress the Congress. A final appeal was made to Czech General Voitsekhovskii who was in charge of Czech troops there to support the Congress members. He replied that he was under strict orders of neutrality.⁷³

There was little else Congress members could do in order to survive; their only option was flight. Chernov escaped into hiding in the late evening of the 2 December, 1918, in Ufa. In the early morning the next day the Siberians arrived at the hotel and arrested the remaining thirteen delegates.⁷⁴

Chernov, whilst in hiding, continued to advocate his plan of war on two fronts, the liquidation of the right counter-revolution of Kolchak, for which even terrorist methods could be employed, and the combatting of the Bolshevik influence, with the SRs forming a democratic 'third force' (*tretia sila*).⁷⁵ To postulate such a position in such circumstances, while admirably consistent, was in no way practical and was totally out of touch with reality.

⁷³ Burevoi, *ibid*

⁷⁴ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.395; Burevoi, *Raspad...* p.39, p.58.

⁷⁵ Chernov, *ibid*, p.400; Burevoi, *ibid*, pp.58-59, pp.73-74.

Chernov, irrepensible as ever, conceived of a plan of making his way secretly across Red Russia to the Ukraine. The German military collapse, he reasoned, would entail the fall of Skoropadskii in Kiev, and that would give the Constituent Assembly the opportunity to impose its authority.⁷⁶ The plan, however, failed to materialise.

Meanwhile, the Bolshevik Red Army relentlessly pressed closer and closer towards both Orenburg and Ufa. Their imminent arrival prompted calls from certain quarters within the SR Party that it should establish contacts with the Bolsheviks. Indeed, some even questioned whether the idea of fighting on two fronts was still tenable, and whether it would not be better to drop the fight against the Bolsheviks for the time being and to launch all their forces against Kolchak.

Chernov opposed any direct communication with the Bolsheviks unless they accepted the principle of the sovereignty of the people, embodied in the Constituent Assembly. To stay behind in Ufa, as some SRs advocated, and await the arrival of the Red Army, and then proceed to undertake negotiations for some sort of coalition

⁷⁶ Chernov, *ibid*, pp.396-398; see also V. Tchernov (Chernov), *Mes Tribulations en Russie Sovietique* (My Tribulations in Soviet Russia), translated by V.O., J. Povolozky Paris, 1921, pp.18-20. The latter is an important work as it covers Chernov's activities in Russia from June 1918 to March 1919, and is the same as *Meine Schicksale im Sowjet-Russland*; translated by Elias Hurwicz, Berlin, 'Der Firm', 1921.

government, was impractical, simply because a victorious Red Army would pay scant attention to a few underground revolutionaries. Indeed, Chernov thought that the SRs should only come out of hiding on the precondition of Bolshevik acceptance of his proposal. As direct negotiations were unacceptable, an intermediary could be used. Ivan Volnov, a friend of Maksim Gorky, was available and the plan was for him to cross the front, proceed to Moscow, and inform Gorky of SR intentions for peace, provided all freedoms and the Constituent Assembly were restored.⁷⁷

The proposal to use an intermediary was accepted and shortly before the fall of Ufa to the Red Army, Volnov set off on his mission. Chernov escaped to Orenburg, where he lived in hiding, first from Whites, and later, when the Red Army arrived, from the Bolsheviks. There was no news from Volnov, and unknown to those awaiting his reply, his journey was severely delayed, taking him some months to reach Moscow.⁷⁸

In the meantime, and without the knowledge of Chernov, several Ufa colleagues remained behind to commence direct negotiations with the Bolsheviks. On 31 December, 1918, a delegation was chosen comprising V.K. Volskii, N.A. Shmelov, N.V. Sviatitskii, N.I. Rakitnikov and K. Burevoi.⁷⁹ Chernov only became aware of his

⁷⁷ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, pp.400-401.

⁷⁸ *ibid*, p.402.

colleagues about face when he read a Bolshevik newspaper in Orenburg that contained a signed appeal by Volskii and others calling for the People's Army of the *Komuch* to stop the civil war against the Bolsheviks and to direct their weapons against the Kolchak dictatorship and Allied Imperialists on his side.⁸⁰

However, the 'Ufa delegation' as the group became known, in no way represented general party opinion, and their actions in no way contributed to the legalisation of the Right Socialist Revolutionaries in a decree promulgated by the All-Russian Central Committee on 26 February, 1919, which repealed an earlier decree of 14 June, 1918, outlawing the Right SRs. The SR Party took no steps to achieve its legitimisation, and the decree of 26 February was not based on any agreement between the Soviet government and the Central Committee of the SR Party.

The circumstances that led to the party's legitimisation by the Bolsheviks were that the SR conference of party organisations in Bolshevik controlled territory, which met in Moscow from 6 to 9 February, 1919, had condemned both the idea of armed struggle and the Allied intervention, had rejected cooperation with the bourgeois parties, and had called on its organisations to overthrow the

⁷⁹ Burevoi, *Raspad, 1918-1922*, p.60.

⁸⁰ Chernov, *ibid*, pp.402-403; Burevoi *ibid*, pp.59-61.

reactionary governments.⁸¹

Chernov returned to Moscow in March, 1919, from Orenburg, with the journey taking eleven days.⁸² His arrival coincided with a brief period of freedom for SRs, which enabled them to appear in public. Chernov, however, continued to maintain a low profile, living on the outskirts of Moscow in a house hidden in the depths of a pine forest. He lived there under an assumed name, so as to protect his own identity and that of his family.⁸³

The SR Central Committee was able to meet in Moscow without restraint. They were again able to publish their newspaper *Delo Naroda*, of which they printed 100,000 copies, together with a daily newspaper *Vesna* (Spring). According to Chernov, the leaders of the party were under no illusions. They made use of the opportunity to propagate their opinions in public and to ventilate their criticism of the Bolsheviks, but their organisation was kept secret.⁸⁴ This policy proved to be a correct one, as their freedom for action was to be for only the shortest of durations. After ten days *Delo Naroda* and *Vesna* were banned. The Bolsheviks resumed their campaign against the party and the arrest of party members.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Chernov, *ibid*, p.406; Burevoi, *ibid*, pp.62-63.

⁸² Chernov, *ibid*, pp.403-404.

⁸³ O. Tchernoff, *ibid*, p.153.

⁸⁴ Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.406.

According to Chernov, the legalisation was nothing other than a political manoeuvre with a view to the conference which the Allies wanted to hold on the island of Prinkipo in the Marmara Sea, with the groups and movements that were fighting each other in Russia.⁸⁶ To add credence to the view that the Bolsheviks actually favoured cooperation with the other socialist parties, Sverdlov publically pronounced that the purpose of Chernov's arrival in Moscow was to finalise a secure agreement between his party and the Bolsheviks.⁸⁷

Chernov managed to elude arrest by fortuitously changing his passport and address two days prior to the renewed Bolshevik clamp down.⁸⁸ Others were not so lucky.

Towards the end of 1919, the Cheka began to earnestly hunt down the members of the SR Party's Central Committee. The party's intellectual and political leader, Viktor Chernov, managed to escape his pursuers for some time by continually changing his place of concealment, at times even on a daily basis. He was, however, able to give a speech at a meeting of the Printers' Union with a visiting

85 *ibid*

86 *ibid*

87 V. Tchernov (Chernov), *Mes Tribulations en Russie Sovietique*, p.29; Chernov, *Pered Burei*, pp.405-406.

88 Chernov, *Pered Burei*, p.407.

English delegation in early 1919.⁸⁹ For Chernov, this speech was to mark the end of his period of overt political activity on Russian soil. The increasing vigilance of the Cheka prompted the Central Committee of the party to advise Chernov to leave the country. He left Russia in May, 1920, under a false passport with an Estonian identity, to act as the SR Party's official representative abroad.⁹⁰ In December of 1920, in Reval (Tallin), Estonia, Chernov started publication of *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* (Revolutionary Russia). In October of the following year, the paper became the party's official voice under three editors: Chernov, Postnikov and Soukhomlin.⁹¹ By the middle of 1921, with the exception of those who had left the country, all active members of the Central Committee were in prison. To all intents and purposes, the history of the SR Party had come to an end.

For three years after the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917 Chernov fought the Bolsheviks, and at the same time, opposed collaboration with right-wing reactionary groups and their allied friends. In March, 1921, he sent an offer of help to the Kronstadt sailors.

⁸⁹ *ibid*, pp.409-411.

⁹⁰ *ibid*, p.412.

⁹¹ S. Postnikov 'Historique de la presse periodique de l' emigration socialiste russe, 1917-1937', (History of the periodical press of the Russian Socialist emigration, 1917-1937) *Bulletin of the International Institute for Social History* (Amsterdam) vol.III, 1938, p.97.

The chairman of the Constituent Assembly, Victor Chernov, sends his fraternal greetings to the heroic comrades-sailors, the Red Armists and workers, who for the third time since 1905 are throwing off the yoke of tyranny. He offers to aid them with men and to provision Kronstadt through the Russian co-operatives abroad. Inform what and how much is needed. Am prepared to come in person and place my energies and authority at the service of the people's revolution....

I hail you as the first to raise the banner of the people's liberation! Down with despotism from the left and right!⁹²

The Kronstadt sailors declined politely but firmly.

Berlin became the focal point for the activities of the Foreign Delegation of the SR Party. This was the party's official representation outside Russia and consisted of Chernov, I. Rubanovich, N. Rusanov, V. Soukhomlin and V. Zenzinov. The paper *Golos Rossii* (The Voice of Russia) was produced in Berlin in 1922 by the Foreign Delegation. Its main aim was the defence of SRs (mostly members of the Central Committee) whom the Soviet government had just brought to trial on charges of terrorism and armed struggle against the Bolsheviks.⁹³

A Russian language Bolshevik newspaper *Novyi Mir* (New World), was also published in Berlin in 1922, until April. The editor of the paper, the German Kurt Kersten, published two articles in which the SRs were accused of having perpetrated attacks on

⁹² Reproduced in I.N. Steinberg, *In the Workshop of the Revolution*, Rinehart, New York, 1953. p.284.

⁹³ S. Postnikov, in *ibid*, p.98.

Bolshevik leaders, and of having received funds from the German General Staff, the Russian bishops, and the French mission. Chernov sued Kurt Kersten for libel. The case was heard before a Berlin court on 30 October, and Kurt Rosenfeld appeared as one of Chernov's lawyers. The SRs had intended to use the trial as a publicity mechanism in which they would refute the charges made against those accused in Moscow. The Berlin court did not fall in with this idea, however, but did fine Kersten for contempt.⁹⁴

From Berlin, Chernov travelled to Prague where he organised the Czech supported 'SR centre' there and continued agitation until the O.G.P.U. cut off its Russian contacts. Just ahead of the Gestapo, he fled to Paris in 1938 and then to New York in 1940, taking with him his organ *Za Svobody* (For Liberty), which he published until 1950. On the 15 April, 1952, at the age of 78, Chernov died in a tiny gloomy apartment in New York.

⁹⁴ *Prozess Tschernoff gegen Kersten*, Arkiv, No 777/1 International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam) cited in M. Jansen, *A Show Trial Under Lenin: The Trial of the Socialist Revolutionaries, Moscow, 1922*, translated by J. Sanders, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1982. pp.159-160.

CONCLUSION

For Chernov the motive force behind the revolution was the working class, which he defined, not solely in terms of the industrial proletariat, as orthodox Marxist theory would have it, but instead, he broadened those terms to include the small producers, namely the peasants. It was this adaptation of Marxist theory to Russia's peculiar conditions that earned Chernov and the SRs the ire of Social Democracy.

Chernov possessed a distinctive theory and strategy for a socialist revolution in a backward, agriculturally based economy. As leader and chief party ideologist of the SR Party from its inception to its demise in 1920, he devised his own 'scientific' analysis of the motive force of change, a town-country alliance, with the proletariat in the vanguard role leading the mass peasant based army.

Social Democrats categorised the peasantry as petty bourgeois because they owned their means of production, and their mode of production was individual rather than collective. The former criticism, Chernov argued, was meaningless because the peasantry like the proletariat supported themselves exclusively by their own personal labour. This labour could be exploited by the privileged classes in the form of taxes and rents - their ownership of the means

of production did not constitute 'capital'. As for the latter, a fundamentally more important hurdle, Chernov devised his two stage revolutionary process. The initial minimum stage was to be the socialisation of the land. This was not socialism, it was more of an anti-capitalist anti-feudal measure epitomised by the slogan, that the land belongs to those who work it, that is, equal access to the land. The maximum or second stage was to be the socialisation of agricultural production and industry. Lenin acknowledges his debt to Chernov when he states that it was only by adopting the SR land program in 1917, that he achieved the temporary support of the rural masses.

We achieved victory because we adopted, not our own agrarian programme, but that of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, and actually put it into practice. Our victory lay in the fact that we carried out the programme of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, that is why it was achieved so easily.¹

For Chernov, socialism could not be defined only as an economic system. He did not equate socialism merely with centralised public ownership and planning of the economy, nor did he conceive of socialism as merely being a mode of production. Such a narrow view of the socialist movement, in Chernov's opinion, ignored issues in socialism such as social equality, individual autonomy

¹ V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol.24, Moscow, 1966, p.286.

and self-determination.

Chernov's neo-populism, a distinctive and largely original ideology, emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century in the form of his agrarian program, his two-stage revolution and his concept of the 'third force'. 'The serious and viable Populism of the twentieth century was the creation of the man who died in New York in 1952, in the bitterness and obscurity of a second exile.'² The force of these ideas on SR thinking became most evident in their adoption into the party platform of the SR Party.

Despite Chernov's firm imprint on SR ideology, as leader he presided over a disunited and fragmented party. At the crucial historical moment, that fateful year of 1917, most SRs did not appear to share a general outlook or tactic. On the crucial issues of bourgeois coalition and the war, the party found little common ground, with many unequivocally embracing the Provisional Government, and war to victory. Chernov as a leader proved too inconsistent and weak. He readily admitted himself that as a politician, he was a failure. He was merely a *litterateur*, having a '...genuinely Slav breadth of nature, a certain pliancy and adjustability were combined in him with a tendency to withdraw into the world of ideas, of social diagnosis and prognosis, of

² O. Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, p.4.

intellectual initiative and creative imagination, and to leave to others the concrete organisation of current work.'³

This study has focused on Chernov as a man of action, and the theories he devised to justify and explain his action or inaction. Chernov was guilty at times of both abandoning his principles and ignoring the realities of new circumstances for the sake of party unity. His political outlook cannot be characterised as static. On numerous occasions he formulated new tactics or stressed ideas he had once only tacitly accepted. Yet, he never strayed from the fundamentals of the position he had formulated between the years 1900 and 1905, a position which was incorporated into the SR Party platform at its First Congress in 1905-1906.

On fundamentals, one is indeed struck by unmistakable signs of continuity and consistency. His ideological constancy justifies one viewing him as a prototypical 'neo-populist' whose position on various issues helps in the evaluation of a movement and ideology that have not been easy to define. This is because the protagonists in the intense factional struggles tried to justify their conduct, often long after the battles had lost their significance, by claiming that they had always been motivated by basic convictions and principles.

³ V.M. Chernov, *The Great Russian Revolution*, pp.398-399.

Such was the case with the two divergent tendencies, Maximalism and Popular Socialism, and the Left SRs in 1917.

In a much wider context, the sort of Russian society that Chernov had attempted to transform by his neo-populist socialist revolution is of particular significance and relevance to today. For example, certain present day Latin American and African countries share in having predominantly agriculturally based societies and are undergoing similar capitalist encroachment. In fact, all of the class struggles and national liberation movements of this century have aimed, in one way or another, at creating a more 'democratic' society, in which large numbers of people, especially those hitherto excluded, would play a more direct and more effective part in making the decisions that affect their lives, whether in the workplace, the family, and the local community, or on a national and international scale.

As a political figure in Russia, Chernov cannot be judged a success. He realised few of his aims and was unable to prevent his worst apprehensions from becoming a reality. Nonetheless, in the history of the Russian revolutionary movement, he occupies a special place. He took up the cause of the working class as he saw it, and fully identified with them throughout his political life. Although he proved to be inconsistent at times, his commitment to a new

social order, to a free and socialist society and to a democratic republic on a federative basis for relations between the separate nationalities, remained the dominant themes of his political work. Chernov was not, superficially, a strong personality in the conventional sense. He did not normally try to dominate colleagues, nor did he have any taste for intra-party intrigue. He rarely indulged in the self-righteousness, imperiousness, or vindictiveness that afflicted so many other leaders of the movement. In his dealings with other people he generally exhibited a compassion that matched the humanity that had inspired his political convictions. On the other hand, neither should he be characterised as having a weak personality. In fact, there was in his personality an unusual blend of flexibility and firmness, of pliability and obstinacy.

The free and socialist society Chernov envisaged for Russia failed to materialise with the ascendancy of Bolshevism in 1917. Forced to emigrate in 1920, Chernov spent a long desolate period in exile experiencing self-doubt and self-criticism about what could have been, and his inability to change the course of events. He took no comfort in the knowledge that failed revolutionaries are spared the frustration and disenchantment of attempting to put their socialist ideology into practice.

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Viktor Chernov was a prolific writer, and to compile a bibliography of his works proves a difficult task as most of his writings have never been collected. This is partly because Chernov's political activity, like that of most other political activists or revolutionaries, was subject to severe repression from tsarist forces. Censorship and the ever vigilant secret police necessitated the use of pseudonyms¹, which proved helpful for the publication of revolutionary propaganda, but have proved to be an obstacle, and indeed, a constant frustration for the researcher in his attempts to compile a list of Chernov's writings.

Another difficulty is that a number of his writings are still in manuscript form in various Soviet, European and American libraries. Perhaps the most important of these is the Hoover Institute at Stanford University, which holds the Paris *Okhrana* files, the Chernov Collection and the B.I. Nicolaevsky Collection. Other notable collections are the Russian Archives Abroad in Prague, and the International Institute of Social History,

¹ Chernov used during the course of his revolutionary career some sixteen pseudonyms; V. Ch, Ia Vechev, Iu Gardenin, Iurii Gardenin, V. Lenuar, B. Olenin, Boris Olenin, R.R (with M.R. Gots), Tuchkin, Iu. G., B. Iurev, A. Doverine, Junior, Victor, S.R. Krainy, Bobrov. I.F. Masanov, *Slovar Psevdonomob Russkikh Pisatelei, Uchenykh i Obshchestvennykh Deiatelei* (Dictionary of Pseudonyms of Russian Writers, Scholars and Public Figures), 4 vols. Moscow, 1956.

Amsterdam. For a study of Chernov's revolutionary activity, the *Okhrana* files are useful to locate Chernov's movements. Access to Soviet archives, which hold material not available elsewhere, would be necessary if one wished to attempt a full biography of Chernov's life.

For a study of Chernov's thought and action, his two memoir works *Pered Burei* (Before the Storm) and *Zapiski Sotsialista-Revoliutsionera* (Notes of a Socialist-Revolutionary) are an indispensable foundation. *Zapiski* was written in Moscow, at a time when Chernov was residing there illegally between 1919 and 1920. Together they cover Chernov's life from birth to his exile from Russia in 1920. Many pages of *Pered Burei* repeat, with some deletion, material published elsewhere. For example, excerpts from his *Zapiski* and *Mes Tribulations en Russie Sovietique* (My Tribulations in Soviet Russia) appear in various forms in *Pered Burei*. However, *Pered Burei* also contains material not to be found elsewhere.

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