

The Intelligentsia and the October Revolution*

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ABSTRACT:This article examines the attitude of the “democratic,” left-leaning intelligentsia to the revolutions of 1917. It documents and analyzes the latter’s growing alienation from the popular classes, the workers and peasants, over the course of 1917. That alienation is explained on the background of the deepening class polarization of Russia society, a process that can be traced back to the Revolution of 1905 and even earlier, but which reached its apogee in 1917 in the October Revolution. That revolution is revealed as an exclusively plebeian affair to which the left-leaning intelligentsia was intensely hostile, a situation that deeply worried worker activists.

Key-words: democratic intelligentsia, revolution, alienation

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Tereshchenko, a sugar magnate and the Minister for External Affairs in last coalition Provisional Government, was not merely engaging in small talk, when he asked the sailor escorting him to jail after the storming of the Winter Palace on the night of October 24-25: "How will you manage without the intelligentsia?"¹ That question, in fact, pointed to a critical aspect of the revolutions of 1917 - the alienation between the working class and the intelligentsia, and in particular that part of the intelligentsia that was referred to, and that referred to itself, as "democratic" or "socialist."² Historians have paid relatively little attention to this important aspect of the revolution, perhaps because of the prominence of *intelligenty* at the highest level of the Bolshevik party, in its Central Committee. But, at all levels below that members of the intelligentsia were scarce indeed: the Bolshevik party in 1917 was overwhelmingly proletarian, both in its social composition and in its political orientation.

But the alienation of the left intelligentsia from the workers' movement could, in fact, trace its roots back to the Revolution of 1905, if not earlier. It was briefly reversed by the February Revolution, which for a brief period, created an atmosphere of national unity. But the mutual estrangement reappeared before long, and with a vengeance, reaching a culmination in the October Revolution, which workers overwhelmingly supported, but to which the intelligentsia, including its leftwing elements, was deeply hostile.

1 Cited in S.P. Melgunov, *The Bolshevik Seizure of Power*, (ABC-CAO: 1972), p. 90.

2 In contrast to the "bourgeois intelligentsia," people like P.V. Miliukov, professor of history and leader of the Kadet Party, a liberal party that became hegemonic among the propertied classes ("census society") in 1917, the "democratic intelligentsia" were sympathisers of the popular classes (workers and peasants) and supporters of the various socialist parties. In the contemporary terminology of the Russian Left, they were part of "revolutionary democracy," along with the workers and peasants.

In popular contemporary parlance, *intelligent* was someone who earned his or her living (or who could look forward to doing so - students) in an occupation that required a diploma of at least secondary-level education. For example, when in April 1917 the senior personnel of the Petrograd Post Office decided to form their own union in reaction to the egalitarian aspirations of the existing Union of Post and Telegraph Employees, they called themselves "The Provisional Organising Bureau of *Intelligentnykh* Employees of the Petrograd Central Post Office and Branches" and stressed their "education, upon which you have expended at least a quarter of your lives," in contrast to members of the existing union, "who cannot even spell their names properly."³ V.M. Levin, a Left Socialist Revolutionary (SR) member of the Central Council of Factory Committees of Petrograd, wrote in December 1917 that "People who have had the good fortune to receive a scientific education are abandoning the people... And among the latter instinctively grows a hatred for the educated, for the intelligentsia."⁴

But besides that popular, sociological definition, the term also carried certain moral and political connotation: the intelligentsia were people preoccupied with the "accursed questions," with Russia's fate. The sociologist Pitirim Sorokin, Kerensky's personal secretary in 1917, referred to the intelligentsia as "the carriers of intellect and conscience."⁵ And although most were liberals, or even further to the right, and identified with the interests and world view of the propertied classes ("census society"), the term *intelligentsia* nevertheless had a certain connotation of service to the toiling people.

Historically, that connotation had a certain basis in reality. Over the latter half of the nineteenth century, a significant part of the politically active intelligentsia had actively opposed the autocracy and, though only a minority of the educated population, that group had set the tone for the entire social group.

³ K. Bazilevich, *Professional'noe dvizhenie rabotnikov svyazi* (Moscow: 1927), 33.

⁴ *Znamia truda*, Dec. 17, 1917.

⁵ *Volia naroda*, Nov. 6, 1917. Sorokin was Kerenski's personal secretary, later to become one of the deans of American academic sociology.

The main political task it set for itself was to bridge the gulf separating it from the still dormant people, whom it wanted to arouse to oppose the autocracy. And the intelligentsia as a whole did welcome the February Revolution.

But a closer examination of the period prior to 1917 reveals a more complex picture. For following the Revolution of 1905, a shift to the right took place among the intelligentsia,⁶ a shift that was most marked among the hitherto socialist intelligentsia. A much-discussed sign of this shift was the publication in 1909 of the *Vekhy* collection of articles by a group of intellectuals, some of whom had been Marxists, critical of materialism and radicality of the Russian intelligentsia. In his study of the Socialist Revolutionary party, Russia's peasant party, historian O. Radkey wrote of

a metamorphosis of... the populist intelligentsia from insurrectionaries in 1905 to jaded democrats in the period between the revolutions and then to fervent patriots, partisans of the Entente, and devotees of the cult of the state in the coming war... They clung to the old S.R. label even though the old faith was gone, aside from the residue of interest in political liberation...⁷

The same "flight of the intelligentsia" was observed in the social-democratic parties.⁸ L.H. Haimson observed that the private correspondence of the Menshevik leaders in 1909-1911

...is replete with despondent statements... about the wholesale withdrawal from political and social concerns that seemed to have accompanied the radical intelligentsia's recoil from the underground struggle. Most party members, these letters suggest, had in fact withdrawn from party activities and were wholly absorbed in the prosaic if arduous struggle to resume a normal, day-to-day existence.⁹

In the Bolshevik wing of Russian social democracy, which

6 M. Shatz and J Zimmerman, ed.s, *Vekhy*, Routededge, N.Y., 1994.

7 O. Radkey, *The Sickle under the Hammer*, Columbia University Press, N.Y., 1963, pp. 469-70. See also *Znamia truda* (November 15, 1917), on the populist intelligentsia's support for the Russia's participation in the world war.

8 L.M. Kleinbort, *Ocherki rabochei intelligentsii*, Petrograd, 1923, pp. 176-177.

9 L.H. Haimson, "The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905-1917", in M. Cherniavsky, *The Structure of Russian History*, N. Y., Random House, 1970, p. 346.

came to dominate the workers' movement in the immediate pre-war years of renewed labour upsurge, following the defeat of the Revolution of 1905, was subject to the same phenomenon. Workers' memoirs document their sense of betrayal by the Bolshevik intelligentsia. A. S. Shliapnikov, a metalworker and prominent party leader, wrote of an "ebb" that had begun in 1906-1907 and left so few intellectuals among Petersburg Bolsheviks that there were barely enough "literary forces" to meet the needs of the Bolshevik fraction in the State Duma and the party's daily newspapers: "In place of the *raznochintsy-intelligenty*,¹⁰ of the young students, a worker-intelligentsia appeared with calloused hands, a highly developed intellect, and continuous links with the workers."¹¹

Kiril Orlov (Ivan Egorov), another Petersburg metalworker and member of the Bolshevik Petersburg Committee during the war, recalled:

During the war there was absolutely no party intelligentsia among the entire membership of the Petersburg Committee. It lived a totally separate existence somewhere in the city, nestled around Maxim Gorky. But neither the proletariat nor its districts knew or had any information about it. We felt that we, the proletarians, were alone. There was not even anyone to write a small pamphlet or an appeal. They all sat with their arms folded, grieved, and ran from illegal work like the devil flees from incense. The workers were left to their own resources.¹²

The sense of betrayal was even stronger in the provinces, where the intelligentsia was much less numerous. A. Martsionovskii, a Bolshevik carpenter, recalled:

In a whole series of cities where I participated in illegal activity, almost everywhere the party committee consisted exclusively of workers. The intelligentsia was absent, with the exception of those who came on tour for two or three days. In the most difficult years of reaction, the workers practically remained without leaders from among the intelligentsia. They [*intelligenty*] said that they were tired, that

10 *Raznochintsy* - from the non-aristocratic classes.

11 A. S. Shliapnikov, *Kanun semnadsatovo goda*, Moscow-Petrograd, 1923, p. 99.

12 K. Orlov, *Zhizn' rabochego revoliutsionnera. Ot 1905 k 1917 g.*, Leningrad, 1925, p. 29.

young people were coming to take their place. But in the meanwhile, the youth got carried away with *artsybashevshchina*.¹³ Some sought new gods, others went abroad and the rest led lives of philistines. But that was the period following the destruction of our organisation. Somewhat later, the intellectuals decided it was not good to be revolutionaries and set actively to a new current of liquidators.¹⁴ At the start of the imperialist war, they stood for the defence of the country and denied their fundamental slogans, taking with them many workers who had not yet had time to think matters through... We, the underground workers, had to conduct our activity without the intelligentsia, except for a few individuals. However, after the February Revolution, they turned up, beat their breasts and shouted "We are revolutionaries," etc. But, in fact, none of them had conducted revolutionary work, and we had not seen them in the underground.¹⁵

As Martsionovskii indicated, a certain rapprochement between workers and the former left intelligentsia took place following the February revolution, during the latter's "honeymoon period" of national unity. Once the revolution in the capital had become a fait accompli, the propertied classes, hitherto profoundly fearful of popular revolution, rallied to it. That shift greatly facilitated the revolution's victory in the rest of the country and at the front.¹⁶ But the rosy atmosphere of

13 M.P. Artsybaev, a popular writer of the period, whose writings were considered pornographic.

14 Social-democrats who, following the defeat of the Revolution of 1905, argued for the abandonment of illegal political organization and activity.

15 A. Martsionovskii, *Zapiski revoliutsionnera-bol'shevika*, (Saratov, 1923), 89. This was Martsionovskii's perception of the situation. In fact, in the capitals at least, students played a not insignificant role in 1912-14, especially in the early stages (see for example, E.E. Kruze's article in *Istoria rabochikh leningrada*, vol. I, (Leningrad: 1972, 419). But that role was not even remotely comparable to their role in 1905 or in the liberation movement that had preceded it. But as far as the intelligentsia as a whole is concerned, Martsionovskii's picture is essentially accurate.

16 V.B. Stankevich, a Popular Socialist (moderate left), wrote of the propertied classes in this period: "Officially, they celebrated, blessed the revolution, shouted "hurray" for the fighters for freedom, decorated themselves with ribbons and marched around sporting red banners. Everyone said "we", "our" revolution, "our" victory, "our" freedom. But in their hearts, in intimate conversation, they were horrified, they shuddered and felt themselves captives of a hostile elemental milieu that was travelling along an unknown path." V.B. Stankevich, *Vospominaniya 1914-1919*, L., 1926, p. 33.

February proved short-lived. Before long, already in April, the polarization that opposed the popular classes to the propertied classes was once again making itself felt.

Among workers, more slowly among soldiers, and finally in the villages, the conviction grew that the propertied classes were opposed to the democratic and anti-war goals of the revolution, that they were, in fact, determined to crush the revolution with a military dictatorship. This conviction led to growing popular support for the demand to transfer political power to the soviet of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies, that is, to a government that would exclude any influence of the propertied classes on policy, a position advocated by the Bolshevik party. By the fall of 1917, all the soviets in urban centres of any significance, and increasingly the soliders at the front, were demanding an end to the governmental coalition with political representatives of the propertied classes and the transfer of power to the soviets. At the Second All-Russian Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Soviets in October 25-27 1917 that established a soviet government, 390 of the 650 delegates were Bolsheviks and another 90 were Left SRs, who sooned joined the Bolshheviks in a coalition government. An All-Russian Congress of Peasant Deputies in 10-25 November also voted to support the Soviet government.

It was on this background of deepening class polarization that the former rift between the workers and the intelligentsia reappeared at a conference on adult education a few days before the October insurrection, prominent Bolshevik intellectual A.V. Lunacharskii (later People's Commissar of Education in the first Soviet government), reported on the state of worker-intelligentsia cooperation in the area of culture. He noted the great thirst for knowledge among workers that was going unsatisfied because "at present, one observes that the proletariat itself is isolated from the intelligentsia... thanks to the fact that the proletariat has crossed over to the banner of the extreme left wing of democracy, while the intelligentsia found itself on the right." These words provoked protests among the representatives of the intelligentsia who were present. But Lunacharskii insisted that "the proletariat is not to blame, but

rather the intelligentsia, which has a strongly negative attitude toward the political tasks the proletariat has put forth."¹⁷

Revealing in this respect is the end-of-the-year survey of Russian journalism for 1917, of "that collective physiognomy that until recently reflected the soul of our so-called intelligentsia, our spiritual aristocracy. It was written by V.P. Polonskii, a left Menshevik historian and literary critic, himself highly critical of "Bolshevik craziness" (*sumasbrodstvo*) and of the Soviet regime:

One would be hard pressed to find another group of people, aside from the intelligentsia, in whose thinking and moods the revolution has wreaked more cruel havoc.

I have before me a pile of newspapers, magazines, brochures. Amidst the current material, one most often encounters the old, most sensitive theme in our intelligentsia's consciousness – the theme of "the intelligentsia and the people".

And as one reads, a picture emerges that is most unexpected. Until recently, the predominant type of *intelligent* was *the intelligent-narodnik* [populist], the well-wisher, kindly and sympathetically sighing over the lot of our "younger brother". But, alas, this type is now an anachronism. In his place has appeared the malevolent *intelligent*, hostile to the muzhik, to the worker, to the entire benighted, toiling mass.

The contemporary ones are no longer striving, as before, to fill in some sort of abyss separating them from the muzhik. On the contrary, they want to demarcate themselves from the muzhik with a clear and impassable line...

Such is the emerging, portentous confusion. It manifests itself with great clarity in the literature. In a great number of articles devoted to the theme of the people and the intelligentsia, the people is treated as a benighted, brutalized, grasping, unbridled mass, a rabble. And its present leaders – as demagogues, worthless nullities, émigrés, careerists, who have adopted the motto of the bourgeoisie of old France: *Après nous, le déluge*...

If you will recall what yesterday's sympathizers and advocates of the people have written of late about "mob rule," the extremely alarming fact of our present existence will appear indisputable: the intelligentsia has completed its departure

¹⁷ *Novaia zhizn'*, Oct. 18, 1917.

from the people. The *intelligenty* had just enough powder left to bid good night to the “one who suffers all in the name of Christ, whose severe eyes do not weep, whose hurting mouth does not complain.”

And that one, the eternal sufferer, had only to rise to his feet, to mightily straighten his shoulders and take a deep breath for the intelligentsia to feel disillusioned.

And it is not the excesses of the October Days, nor the craziness of Bolshevism that are the reason for this. The departure of the intelligentsia, the transformation of the “populists” into “evil-wishers,” began long ago, almost on the day after the [February] revolution...

Writers and poets, essayists and artists (not all, of course, but many, many) have turned their backs on the people. “You have stood up on your feet too soon. You are a rank barbarian. Your path is not ours...”¹⁸

A parallel process of estrangement took place within the socialist parties themselves. Radkey writes that when the SR Party finally split in September 1917 into left and right wings (the right continuing to support the coalition government with the liberals, representatives of the propertied classes),

...nearly all the sailors and a large majority of the workers and army went with the L[eft] SRs, most of the *intelligenty* and white collar workers stayed where they were, and the peasantry divided into two camps, the larger loyal to the [Right] SR but the lesser one already sizable and steadily growing... From every quarter came complaints of a dearth of intellectuals which seriously impeded the activity of the new party. Sukhanov termed it the party of the rural plebs and ranked it even lower on the cultural scale than the Bolsheviks, the party of the urban plebs.¹⁹

At the Second Petrograd Conference of the Bolshevik Party in July 1917, the local Bolshevik leader V. Volodarskii complained of the “wholesale desertion of the intelligentsia”:

The intelligentsia, in accordance with its social background, has crossed over to the defencists [supporters of the coalition government] and does not want to carry the revolution further. It does not come to us, and it has everywhere adop-

¹⁸ Op.cit., Jan. 4, 1918..

¹⁹ Radkey, op. cit., 159.

ted the position of resisting the revolutionary steps of the workers.²⁰

A few weeks later, at the Sixth Party Congress, Volodarskii stated the following in his report on the Petrograd Bolshevik organisation:

Work is being conducted by local forces from among the worker masses. There are very few *intelligentnye* forces. All organisational work is being conducted by the workers themselves. The members of the Central Committee took little part in our organisational work. Lenin and Zinoviev very rarely, as they were preoccupied with other work. Our organisation has grown from below.²¹

In the provinces the absence of *intelligentsy* was even more marked. The Bolshevik Central Committee was being bombarded with urgent requests from the provinces to send "literary forces," "at least one *intelligent*." But the Central Committee's secretary, Ya. M. Sverdlov, almost invariably replied that no one could be spared, and that the situation in the capital was hardly better.²²

As a result, workers came increasingly to identify the Bolsheviks with workers and the Mensheviks and (right) SRs with intellectuals. For example, in June 1917, a Menshevik journalist visited a tea-packing plant in Moscow. Moscow's workers lagged behind Petrograd politically, and all the members of the factory committee were still Mensheviks, except for one. When the latter was asked by the journalist why not a Menshevik like the others, he replied that, although he belonged to no party, he voted for the Bolsheviks because "on their list there are workers. The Mensheviks are all *gospoda* [gentlemen] - doctors, lawyers, etc." He added that the Bolsheviks stood for soviet power and workers' control.²³ Speaking on October 14 at the soviet of Orekhovo-Zuevsk, a textile town

20 Vtoraia i tret'ia obshchegorodskie konferentsii bol'shevikov v iule i sentiabre 1917g., (Moscow-Leningrad: 1927), p. 28.

21 Shestoi vserossiiskii s'ezd RSDRP(b). Protokoly, Moscow, 1958, p. 45.

22 See Perepiska sekretariata TseKa RSDRP(b) s metsnymi organizatsiamy, mart-oktiabr' 1917, Moscow, 1957, passim.

23 *Rabochaia gazeta*, June 20, 1917.

not far from Moscow, Baryshnikov, a local Bolshevik worker, explained:

Due to the fact that the ideology and politics of the working class call for a radical reformation of the present system, the relations the so-called *intelligentsia*, the SRs and Mensheviks, to the workers have become very strained. And, therefore, already there exist no ties between us, and in the eyes of the working class they have once and for all defined themselves as servants of bourgeois society.²⁴

As the workers' position moved to the left and they abandoned their previous support for a political coalition with representatives of "census society," worker conferences became increasingly plebian affairs. Typical was this report on a conference of railway workers in November 1917: "Almost complete absence of intelligentsia. Even the praesidium almost completely consists of 'rank-and-file'."²⁵ This conference was called by the workers of the railway depots and workshops of Moscow and Petrograd in opposition to the All-Russian Railway Union, which had opposed the October insurrection and the Soviet government. That union included all railway employees, including white-collar and managerial personnel. The All-Russian union was at this time led by Menshevik-Internationalists opposed the October insurrection. By contrast, two thirds of the delegates to the conference of depot and workshop workers were Bolsheviks, the rest being Left SRs. There were only a few Menshevik-Internationalists.

It was in the aftermath of the July Days that the workers were forced to directly confront the implications of their growing isolation from the intelligentsia. On July 3 and 4 Petrograd's industrial workers, along with some military units from the local garrison, marched to the Tauride Palace in a peaceful demonstration to pressure the Central Executive Committee (CEC) of Soviets, whose majority at the time was composed of Mensheviks and SRs, to end the governmental coalition with representatives of the propertied classes and to take power on its own, that is, to form a soviet government, one in which

²⁴ Nakanune Oktiabr'skovo vooruzhennovo vosstania v Petrograde, Moscow: 1957, p. 152.

²⁵ *Znamia truda*, November 17, 1917.

only the workers, soldiers and peasants would be represented. But the unthinkable happened: not only did these Mensheviks and SRs refuse to heed the will of the workers, they actually stood by while the government, in which their party leaders were participating, unleashed a wave of repressions against workers, Bolsheviks, and other left socialists who opposed to the coalition government. The Minister of Internal Affairs directly responsible for this policy was none other than the Menshevik leader, I. G. Tsereteli.

Until that moment, the radicalized workers had been thinking in terms of a peaceful transfer of power to the soviets. That was possible since the soviets enjoyed the allegiance of the soldiers. But the refusal of the leaders of the CEC of Soviets to take power and their willingness to adopt repressive measures against workers profoundly altered the situation. Among other things, this forced the workers to face the prospect of taking power by armed insurrection. It also meant the new government would not enjoy the support even of the left intelligentsia, whose knowledge and skills were so needed for managing the economic and state machinery of the country.

This prospect very much worried workers. This emerged clearly at the Conference of Factory Committees of Petrograd on August 10-12, 1917. The general consensus at the conference was that industry was fast heading toward collapse, aided by the sabotage of the industrialists, who were counting on mass unemployment to undermine the workers' movement, and by the Provisional government, which, under pressure from the industrialists, refused to adopt regulatory measures to arrest the deepening economic dislocation. The delegates were becoming aware of the likely prospect that they would be forced to assume responsibility for the economy, something they had not imagined at the moment of the February Revolution, which they had viewed in purely liberal-democratic, not socialist, terms.

One of the delegates to the conference summed up the situation: "We have to exert all our energy in this struggle [to prepare our own economic apparatus for the moment of collapse

of the capitalist economy]. Especially as class contradictions are more and more revealed, and the intelligentsia leaves us, we have to rely only on ourselves and take all our organisations into our workers' hands."²⁶ The delegates were painfully aware of the tremendous difficulty of the task. "Through all the reports," observed one of them, "like a red thread, runs the cry of a lack of [educated] people."²⁷ "Tsarism did everything to leave us unprepared," lamented another delegate, "and naturally, everywhere, in both political and economic organs, we lack [educated] people."²⁸

How were they to proceed in such circumstances? Sedov, a Menshevik delegate, argued that there could be no question of the workers taking power on their own:

We are alone. We have few workers capable of understanding state affairs and of controlling. It is necessary to organise courses in government affairs and in control of production. If we take power, the masses will crucify us. The bourgeoisie is organised and has at its disposal a mass of experienced people. But we do not, and we will, therefore, not be in a position to hold power.²⁹

But the overwhelming majority of the delegates to the conference disagreed. Their position was expressed by a delegate from the Wireless Telephone and Telegraph Factory:

The bourgeoisie knows its interest better than the petty bourgeois parties [Mensheviks and SRs]. The bourgeoisie completely understands the situation and has expressed itself very clearly in the words of Riabushinskii,³⁰ who said

26 *Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsia i fabzavkomy*, Moscow, 1927, vol I, p.189.

27 *Op. cit.*, p. 188.

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Op. cit.*, 208

30 P.P. Riabushinskii was a major banker and industrialist, considered to be on the left wing of his class. But in a speech in August 1917 before representatives of the business class, he bitterly attacked the soviets, declaring that "long bony hand of hunger" would probably have to grasp those false firms of the people, "those members of various committees and soviets," in order for them to come to their senses. (*Ekonomicheskoe polozhenie Rossii nakanune Velikoi Oktiabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii*, vol. 1, M. 1957, pp. 200-201.) In left and workers' circles generally, this was received as an open admission that the industrialists were indeed conducting a creeping, hidden lockout, closing down the factories and creating mass unemployment in order to then crush a weakened workers' movement militarily.

that they will wait until hunger seizes us by the throat and destroys all that we have won. But while they are grabbing for our throats, we will fight and we won't retreat from the struggle.³¹

Over and over again, delegates urged each other to abandon the workers' old habit of relying on the intelligentsia.

The working class has always been isolated. It always has to conduct its policy alone. But in a revolution, the working class is the vanguard. It must lead the other classes, including the peasantry. It all depends on the activity of workers in the various organisations, commissions, etc., where we must constitute a majority of workers. Against the approaching hunger, we must put forward the activity of the masses. We must throw off the Slavic spirit of laziness and together cut a path through the forest that will lead the working class to socialism.³²

When someone suggested that the number of working groups be limited, due to the complexity of the issues to be discussed and the shortage of "active forces", S.P. Voskov, a carpenter from the Sestroretsk Rifle Factory, retorted:

The absence of *intelligent*y in no way impedes the work of the sections. It is high time the workers renounce the bad habit of constantly looking over their shoulder at the *intelligent*y. All the participants at this conference must join some section and work there independently.³³

In fact, these workers worst fears did materialise in October. The Mensheviks and SRs walked out of the Congress of Soviets that elected a Soviet government, the very principle of which – a government responsible to the soviets - they rejected. Middle and senior level technical and administrative personnel of state and banking institutions, as well as doctors and teachers went on strike.³⁴ In the factories, the higher technical and administrative personel also refused to recognise

Riabushinksii, as a result, became the personification of the *kapitalist-lokautchik* in left and worker circles.

31 Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsia i fabzavkomy, vol. 1, p. 208.

32 Op. cit., p. 206.

33 Op. cit. p. 167.

34 *Novaia zhizn'*, Nov. 13, Dec. 8, 22 and 30, 1917.

the new government or to cooperate with workers' control.³⁵ The depth of left intelligentsia's hostility to the October insurrection and to the Soviet government – which had no counterpart even among the most conservative workers – is forcefully expressed in the following resolution adopted by the Executive Bureau of the Socialist Group of Engineers in late October 1917:

A band of utopians and demagogues, exploiting the fatigue of the workers and soldiers, exploiting utopian appeals to social revolution, through deliberate deceit and slander of the Provincial Government, has attracted to its side the benighted masses, and, in opposition to the will the vast part of the Russian people, on the eve of the Constituent Assembly, they have seized power in the capitals and in certain cities of Russia. With the aid of arrests, violence against the free word and press, with the aid of terror, a band of usurpers is trying to maintain itself in power. The Bureau of the Socialist Group of Engineers, decisively protesting against this takeover, against the arrest of Kerenskii, against murders, violence, against the closing of newspapers, against persecutions and terror, declares that the acts of these usurpers have nothing in common with socialist ideals and that they destroy the freedom won by the people... True socialists cannot give the slightest support either to the usurpers of power or to those who will not decisively and firmly break with them.³⁶

But the lower white-collar and manual workers of government and financial institution refused to take part in the strikes and condemned the higher-level employees for doing so. After the October Revolution, the Soviet government dissolved the Petrograd Duma (municipal assembly), when it refused to recognise the new regime. It held new elections, that were boycotted by all the parties except for the Bolsheviks and Left SRs. When the new Duma met, its head, M.I. Kalinin, reported that the Duma's "*intelligentnye* employees were clearly disrespectful when... [I] tried to talk with them, and they stated

35 Zaniatia pervoi moskovskoi oblastnoi konferentsii (Moscow: 1918), 47-48, cited in N. Lampert, *The Technical Intelligentsia in the Soviet Union 1926-1935*, PhD thesis, C.R.E.E.S., University of Birmingham, U.K.: 1976, 19.

36 A.L. Popov, *Oktiabr'skii perevorot*, (Petrograd: 1919), 364.

their intention of resisting. But the municipal workers and lower white-collars employees were happy about the transfer of power to the workers."³⁷

Alexander Blok was one of the rare major literary figures of the older generation who embraced the October Revolution. Writing in the winter months following the October Revolution, he portrayed the state of mind of the left intelligentsia in the following words:

"Russia is perishing," "Russia is no more," "Eternal memory to Russia" – that is what I hear on all sides...

What were you thinking? That the revolution is an idyll? That creativity does not destroy anything in its path? That the people is a good little girl?..

And the best people say: "We are disappointed in our people"... and they see nothing around themselves but boorishness and bestiality (but man is right here, besides them); the best people even say: "There hasn't even been any revolution"; those who were obsessed with hatred of "tsarism" are ready to fling themselves back into its arms, just to be able to forget what is now happening; yesterday's "defeatists"³⁸ are now crying about "German oppression";³⁹ yesterday's "internationalists" weep for "Holy Russia"; born atheists are ready to light votive candles, praying for victory over the internal and external enemy internal foes...

So it turns out you were chopping away at the very branch on which you were sitting? A pitiable situation: with voluptuous malice you stuck firewood, shavings, dry logs into a pile of timber damp from the snow and rain, and when the flame suddenly erupted and flared up to the sky (like a banner), you run around and crying: "Oh, ah, we're on fire!"⁴⁰

Workers did not take the final step of seizing power in

37 *Novaia zhizn'*, December 5, 1917. See also *Oktiabr'skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde* (Moscow: 1957), 368, 514-75, and C. Volin, "Deiatel' nost' men'shevikov v profsoiuzakh pri sovetskoi vlasti," Inter-University Project on the History of Menshevism, paper N° 13, October 1962, p. 28.

38 Those who called for Russia's defeat in the war as a spur to revolution.

39 Reference to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk of March 1918 that ceded large parts of the former Russian empire to the Germans in return for ending the war with Russia.

40 *Znamia truda*, January 18, 1918. V.V. Veresaev's little-known, but beautifully written, novel, *V tupike*, about the civil war in Crimea (first published in 1924) offers a strikingly similar portrayal of the political outlook of the left intelligentsia.

October with a light heart. In fact, most, while desperately desiring soviet power, hesitated and temporised before the "action" (*vystuplenie*). The insurrection was the action of the decisive minority of workers, those in an or close to the Bolshevik party. (In the capital alone, the party had 30,000 workers in its ranks.) When they forced the issue, the overwhelming majority of the rest rallied to their support. Yet even then, the workers were worried about their political isolation. In the days following the insurrection, there was broad worker support, including within the ranks of the Bolshevik party, for the formation of a "homogeneous socialist government," that is, a coalition of all socialist parties, from left to right.

But the negotiations to form such a government, undertaken under the auspices of the Railway Workers' Union, then headed by Menshevik-Internationalists (leftwing Mensheviks), failed, because the moderate Mensheviks and SRs, and those to the right of them, refused to participate in a government responsible uniquely, or mainly, to the soviets. Such a government would have a majority of Bolsheviks, as they had been the majority at the recent Congress of Soviets. Behind this refusal was the conviction of the moderate socialists that the revolution would be doomed without the support of the bourgeoisie. Related to this was the fear that a government led by Bolsheviks, whose base was in the working class, would undertake "socialist experiments".

After the talks broke down precisely over the issue of responsibility to the soviets, the Left SRs decided to take part in the Soviet government in coalition with the Bolsheviks. Their newspaper opined that "even had we achieved such a 'homogeneous government,' it would have, in fact, been a coalition with the most radical part of the bourgeoisie."⁴¹ But the Menshevik-Internationalists, the Menshevik party's left wing that soon took over the party's leadership, refused to follow the Left SRs. In an article entitled "2 x 2 = 5", the Menshevik-Internationalist economist V.L. Bazarov expressed his

⁴¹ *Znamia truda*, November, 8, 1917.

irritation at what he regarded at the workers' confusion: they were calling for the formation of an all-socialist coalition but they wanted that coalition to be responsible to the soviets.

...Resolutions are being passed that demand at once a homogeneous democratic government based upon an agreement of all the socialist parties and [at the same time] recognition of the current [overwhelmingly Bolshevik] TsIK [the Central Executive Committee of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, elected at the recent Soviet Congress] as the organ to which the government should be responsible... But at present a purely soviet government can only be Bolshevik. And with each day it becomes clearer that the Bolsheviks cannot govern: decrees are issued like hotcakes and they cannot be put into practice... Thus, even if what the Bolsheviks say is true, that the socialist parties do not have any masses behind them but are purely intellectual... even then, large concessions would be necessary. The proletariat cannot rule without the intelligentsia... The TsIK has to be only one of the institutions to which the government is responsible.⁴²

The Menshevik-Internationalists shared the Bolsheviks' view of the bourgeoisie as fundamentally counter-revolutionary. But they also shared the conviction with the rightwing of their own party that economically backward, overwhelming peasant Russia lacked the social and political conditions for socialism. And so, while the more rightwing Mensheviks, together with the SRs, continued to call for a coalition with representatives of the bourgeoisie, the Menshevik-Internationalists stressed the necessity of retaining the support at least of society's "middle strata," the petty bourgeoisie and first and foremost of the intelligentsia. The problem was, however, that the latter had overwhelmingly taken the side of the bourgeoisie. As a result, the left Mensheviks were condemned to remain passive onlookers to the unfolding revolution.

As for the workers themselves, once it became clear to them that the real issue was soviet power or renewed coalition with the bourgeoisie, in one or another form, they gave their support to the soviet government, even before the Left SRs deci-

42 *Novaia zhizn'*, November 4, 1917.

ded to join. At a meeting on October 29, during the talks on the formation of an all-socialist coalition government, a general assembly of workers of the Admiralteiskii Shipyards appealed to all workers,

regardless of your party hue, to exert pressure on your political centres to achieve an immediate accord of all socialist parties, from Bolsheviks to Popular Socialists inclusive, and to form a socialist cabinet responsible to the Soviet of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies on the following platform: Immediate proposal of democratic peace. Immediate transfer of land to the hands of the peasant committees. Workers' control of production. Convocation of the Constituent Assembly at the assigned date.⁴³

This was an example of what Bazarov saw as the workers' political confusion: they wanted a government coalition of all socialist parties but also wanted that government to be responsible to the soviets. But a week later, after the collapse of the negotiations, with the Bolsheviks remaining alone in the government, those same workers now decided

to speak out for full and undivided soviet power and against coalition with parties of defencist conciliators. We have sacrificed much for the revolution and we are prepared, if it is necessary, for new sacrifices, but we will not give up power to those from whom it was taken in a bloody battle.⁴⁴

When the Left SRs decided to enter the government, having concluded that "even if we had obtained such a 'homogeneous government.' it would have been in fact a coalition with the most radical part of the bourgeoisie,"⁴⁵ workers breathed a collective sigh of relief: unity had been achieved at least "from below", among the *nizy*, the Left SRs being mainly a peasant party. An assembly of workers at the Putilov factory declared on that occasion:

We, workers, greet, as one person, this unification that we have long desired and we send all our warm greetings to our

43 Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Sankt-Peterburga, opis' 9, fond 2, delo 11, list 45.

44 Ibid.

45 *Znamia truda*, November, 8, 1917.

comrades who are working on the platform of the Second All-Russian Congress of Toiling People of the poorest peasantry, workers, and soldiers.⁴⁶

The October Revolution, having officially consecrated the already existing, profound polarization of Russian society, found the bulk of the intelligentsia on the side of the propertied classes,⁴⁷ with what remained of the left intelligentsia suspended somewhere between the two. Workers responded to the perceived betrayal with bitterness. As the Left SR Levin wrote,

At the moment when the old bourgeois chains of state are being smashed by the people, the intelligentsia is deserting the people. Those who had the good fortune to receive a scientific education are abandoning the people, who bore them on their exhausted and lacerated shoulders. And as if that were not enough, in leaving, they mock their helplessness, their illiteracy, their inability painlessly to carry out great transformations, to attain great achievements. And this last is especially bitter to the people. And among the latter, instinctively grows a hatred for the "educated," for the intelligentsia.⁴⁸

The Menshevik-Internalist paper *Novaia zhizn'* published the following report from Moscow in December 1917:

If the external traces of the insurrection are few, the internal division within the population is deep indeed. When they buried the Red Guard and Bolshevik soldiers [following the victory of the insurrection after several days of serious fighting], as I was told, one could not find a single *intelligent* or university or high-school student in the extraordinarily grandiose procession. And during the funeral

46 Op. cit., Nov.8, 1917.

47 Pitirim Sorokin's definition in November 1917 of the "creative forces" of society – which he opposed to "pseudo-democracy" – is telling: "Onto the stage now must come, on the one hand, the intelligentsia, the carrier of intellect and conscience and, on the other, the authentic democracy, the cooperative movement, the Russia of the dumas and zemstvos, and the conscious (!) village. Their time has come" (*Volia naroda*, November 6, 1917). All organizations he listed were dominated by moderate socialists and Kadets and lacked any mass political support. Conspicuous by their absence in Sorokin's list are the workers and soldiers, and, of course, all the "unconscious" village, the peasants who supported the Left SRs and the Bolsheviks and who had refused to wait in vain for the Provisional Government to adopt land reform.

48 *Znamia truda*, Dec. 17, 1917.

of the Junkers [Officer school cadets who had fought on the side of the Provisional Government], there was not a single worker, soldier or plebian in the crowd. The composition of the demonstration in honour of the Constituent Assembly was similar – the five soldiers following behind the banner of the SRs Military Organisation only underlined the absence of the garrison.

Now the abyss separating the two camps has grown particularly deep, thanks to the general strike of municipal employees: teachers of municipal schools, higher personnel of the hospitals, senior tram employees, etc. This strike places the work of the Bolshevik municipal government before extreme difficulties, but even more it exacerbates the hatred in the *nizy* of the population for all the intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie. I myself saw a [tram] conductor force a high school student out of his car: 'They teach you alright, but it seems they don't want to teach our children!'

The strike of the schools and the hospitals is seen by the urban *nizy* as a struggle of the bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia against the popular masses.⁴⁹

In trying to understand the position of the intelligentsia, one must first ask if the workers' perception of "betrayal" had any justification. After all, viewed from one angle, it was the workers who parted ways with the intelligentsia by opting to break with the propertied classes, abandoning the national, all-class alliance that had been formed in February.

The reasons for the workers' subsequent radicalization can briefly be summed up as follows: on the basis of their experience, the workers reached the conclusion that the propertied classes were opposed to the popular goals of the February revolution: a rapidly concluded democratic peace, land reform, the eight-hour workday, convocation of a constituent assembly to establish a democratic republic. But not only did the propertied classes block the realization of these goals (which were purely democratic and in no way socialist), they were intent on crushing the popular classes militarily. This was amply demonstrated by the Kadet party's barely concealed support for General Kornilov's uprising at the end of August

49 *Novaia zhizn'*, Dec. 12, 1917.

as well as by the industrialists' implacable opposition to state measures to prevent the fast-approaching economic collapse.

To workers, the October insurrection and the establishment of Soviet power meant the exclusion of the propertied classes from influence over government policy. October was first and foremost an act of defence of the February Revolution, its actual achievements and its promises, in face of the active hostility of the propertied classes. Why some workers did see in October the potential for a socialist transformation, that was by no means their main goal in October.

When seen in this light, the workers' sense of the betrayal on the part of the intelligentsia becomes comprehensible. As the Menshevik-Internationalist paper (which was hostile to the October Revolution) wrote: "Now each worker could ask the striking doctors and teachers: 'You never struck to protest the regime under the Tsar or under Guchkov.⁵⁰ Why do you strike now, when power is in the hands of the people we recognise as our leaders?'"⁵¹ Even left Mensheviks like Iu. O. Martov, whose dedication to the workers' cause could not be doubted, felt like washing his hands of everything rather than doing "what seems to be our duty - to stand by the working class even when it is wrong... It is tragic. For after all, the entire proletariat stands behind Lenin and expects the overturn to result in social emancipation - realising all the while that it has challenged all the antiproletarian forces."⁵²

Why then did the socialist intelligentsia "run away," as workers perceived it? Writing of the populists, historian Radkey offers the following explanation:

In the trough of the revolution (many) had gone into public service or social work as civil servants in zemstvos and municipalities,

50 N.I. Guchkov, major Russian industrialist and Chairman of the Fourth State Duma.

51 *Novaia zhizn'*. December 6, 1917. Actually, this was not quite accurate, in 1905, the intelligentsia, organised in the Union of Unions, did participate in the strike movement in the fall. But that was the first and last time. They gave no active support to the colossal strike movements of 1912-1914 and 1915-1916.

52 L.H. Haimson, *The Mensheviks* (Chicago: 1975), 102-103. The Mensheviks, as a party, reoriented themselves following the German revolution in November 1918 and adopted a position of loyal opposition to the Soviet government.

as functionaries in the cooperative societies, where the daily routine and outlook induced were alike deadening to the revolutionary split. Others had entered the professions. All were getting older.⁵³

But it seems rather unlikely that so profound a social transformation as the economic integration of the intelligentsia into the existing order could have taken place in the space of a decade. Besides, one has to wonder how the socialist intellectuals earned their living before the defeat of the 1905 revolution, since they could not all have been professional party activists or hungry students. And if the generation of 1905 was getting older, what of the students of 1917, most of whom were also hostile to the October Revolution. The Menshevik A.N. Potresov, who was on the extreme right wing of his party, observed in May 1918: "In February [1917] we saw the common joy of the students and petty bourgeois. In October, students and bourgeois have become synonymous."⁵⁴

A more reasonable explanation of the "flight of the intelligentsia" should be sought in the class polarisation of Russian society that fully emerged in the course of the Revolution of 1905, when the bourgeoisie, frightened by the workers' militancy in promoting their social demands, notably the eight-hour workday, and enticed by very limited political concessions offered by a shaken autocracy, turned against the workers' and peasant movements, notably by organizing in the fall of 1905, together with the state, a mass lockout of Petrograd's workers, who were striking for the eight-hour workday.⁵⁵ When the workers' movement recovered in 1912-14 from the defeat of that revolution, their strikes typically put forth at once both political demands addressed to the autocracy and economic demands for the industrialists. And on their part, the industrialists collaborated closely with the Tsarist police to put down workers' political as well as economic actions and to repress their activists.⁵⁶

53 Radkey. op. cit., 469-470.

54 *Znamia bor'by*, May 21, 1918.

55 Ia. A. Shuster, *Peterburgski rabochie v 1905-1907 gg.*, (Leningrad: 1976), 166-168.

56 "The Workers' Movement after Lena," in L. H. Haimson, *Russia's Revolutionary Experience*, N.Y., Columbia University Press, 2005, pp. 109-229.

It was during this pre-war period that the Bolsheviks became the hegemonic political force among the workers. What distinguished the Bolshevik wing of social democracy from the Menshevik was its evaluation of the bourgeoisie, including its left, liberal wing, as fundamentally opposed to a democratic revolution. The Mensheviks, on their part, considered that the bourgeoisie's leadership in that revolution was absolutely critical. The peasants, whom Lenin proposed as allies for the workers, were, in the Mensheviks' view, incapable of providing national political leadership. If that role did not fall to the bourgeoisie, then it would of necessity fall to the workers. But the workers at the head of a revolutionary government would inevitably adopt measures that undermined bourgeois property rights. They would make "socialist experiments" that would prove disastrous in backward Russian conditions, leading inevitably to defeat of the revolution. And so, Mensheviks in the pre-war years called in vain on the workers to restrain their "strike passion": they did not want to frighten the liberals, who were growing increasingly alienated from the rotten autocratic regime, away from revolution.

As we have seen, the left intelligentsia embraced the position of the Mensheviks and SRs, not that of the Bolshevik and workers. They argued that a worker-led revolution in a backward peasant country would inevitably be crushed. The following episode, recounted in the memoir of a Petrograd metalworker, illustrates the division between the workers and left intellectuals.

I. Gordkienko, a metalworker and Bolshevik, along with two of his comrades, who, like himself, were originally from Nizhnyi Novgorod, Maksim Gorky's home town, decided to pay their *zemlyak* (fellow countryman) a visit: "Can it be that A. M. Gorky has completely moved away from us?" they asked themselves. In 1918 Gorky was an editor of the Menshevik-Internationalist paper *Novaia zhizn'*, which was harshly critical of the new Soviet regime, attacking especially its ineptitude, a result, in the paper's view, of it having pushed away the intelligentsia. What particularly angered workers was that, while the papers' editors criticized the government, they stood asi-

de and refused to participate in it to make things better. For example, at a conference of Petrograd's factory committees in February 1918, one of the delegates spoke bitterly of the "sabotaging intelligentsia of Gorky's *Novaia zhizn'*, who are busy criticising the Bolshevik government while they themselves do nothing to lighten the tasks of this government."⁵⁷

At Gorky's home, the conversation soon turned to politics:

Aeksei Maksimovich, lost in thought, spoke: "It's hard for you boys, very hard."

"And you, Aleksei Maksimovich, you're not making it any easier," I replied.

"Not only doesn't he help. He is even making it harder for us," said Ivan Chugurin.

"Ekh, boys, boys, you are such fine lads. I feel sorry for you. Listen in this sea, no, in this ocean of petty bourgeois, peasant elemental forces, you are only a speck of sand. How many of you solid Bolsheviks are there? A handful. In life, you are like a drop of oil in the ocean, a thin, thin ribbon. The slightest wind, and it will snap."

"You speak in vain, Aleksei Maksimovich. Come to us, to the Vyborg District. Take a look around. Where there were 600 Bolsheviks, there are thousands now."

"Thousands, but raw, unshod, and in other cities even these are lacking."

"The same is taking place, Aleksei Maksimovich, in the other cities and villages. Everywhere the class struggle is intensifying."

"That's why I love you, for your strong faith. But that's also why I fear for you. You will perish, and then everything will be thrown back hundreds of years. It's terrible to contemplate."

A couple of weeks later, the three returned and found N.N. Sukhanov and D.A. Desnitskii at Gorky's apartment. They too were left-Menshevik intellectuals and editors of *Novaya zhizn'*.

Again, Aleksei Maksimovich spoke of to the petty bourgeois sea. He lamented that there were so few of us old underground Bolsheviks, that the party was so young and inexperienced... Sukhanov and Lopata affirmed that only a

57 *Novaia zhizn'*, Jan. 27, 1918

madman could talk of a proletarian revolution in so backward a country as Russia. We protested determinedly. We said that behind the facade of all-Russian democracy,⁵⁸ they were definding the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie...

In the course of the conversation, Aleksei Maksimovich walked over to the window that overlooked the street. He then quickly walked over to me, seized me by the sleeve and pulled me toward the window. "Take a look", he said in an angry and injured voice. What I saw was really disgraceful. Near a bed of flowers, on the freshly cut green lawn, a group of soldiers was sitting. They were eating herring and throwing the garbage onto the flower bed.

"And it's the same thing at the People's House:⁵⁹ the floors are waxed, spittoons have been placed in every corner and next to the columns. But just look at what they do there," angrily said Maria Fedorovna [Gorky's wife], who managed the People's House.

"And with this crowd, the Bolsheviks intend to make a socialist revolution", spitefully said Lopata. "You have to teach, educate the people, and then make a revolution."

And who is going to teach and educate them? The bourgeoisie?" one of us asked.

"And how would you go about doing it?" inquired Aleksei Maksimovich, now smiling.

"We would like to do it differently", I replied. "First overthrow the bourgeoisie, then educate the people. We'll build schools, clubs, people's houses..."

"But that's not realizable," declared Lopata.

"For you, it isn't; for us it is", I answered.

"Well, maybe they will, the devils, eh?" said Aleksei Maksimovich.

"We definitely will achieve it", one of us replied, "and it will be all the worse for you".

"Oho! You're threatening. How will it be worse for us?" asked Aleksei Maksimovich, laughing.

"In this way: with or without you, we will do what we have

58 The Menshevik-Internationalist position was that the political basis of the government had to be broadened to include all of "democracy." That term was always vague but it meant the middle strata of society, and in particular the intelligentsia.

59 An institution where popular meeting and cultural events were held.

to do under the leadership of Ilyich [Lenin], and then they will ask you where you were and what you were doing when we were having such a hard time.”⁶⁰

Lenin gave a strikingly similar account of a conversation in the summer of 1917 with a well-to-do lawyer.

This lawyer was once a revolutionary, a member of the Social-Democratic, and even Bolshevik, Party. Now he is all fright, all anger at the rampaging and uncompromising workers: “Okay, I understand the inevitability of a social revolution; but here, given the decline in the level of the workers as a result of the the war...⁶¹ that isn’t a revolution, it’s an abyss.”

He would be prepared to recognise the social revolution, if history led up to it as peacefully, calmly, smoothly and accurately as a German express train enters a station. A very proper conductor opens the door of the car and proclaims: “Station “Social Revolution”. *Alle aussteigen* [Everyone out]!” In such a case, why not shift from the position of an engineer working for the Tit Tityches⁶² to that of an engineer working for workers’ organisations...

This man has seen strikes. He knows what a storm of passions the most ordinary strike arouses, even in the most peaceful times. He, of course, understands how many millions of times more powerful this storm must be when the class struggle has raised up the entire toiling people of a huge country, when war and exploitation have brought millions of people almost to despair, people whom the landowners have tortured, whom the capitalists and Tsarist bureaucrats have plundered and oppressed for decades. He understands all this “theoretically”; he recognises all this only with his lips; he is simply frightened by the “extraordinarily complex situation.”⁶³

N. Sukhanov offered a similar explanation for the position of the left Mensheviks:

We stood against the coalition and the bourgeoisie and alongside the Bolsheviks. We did not merge with them be-

60 I. Gordienko, *Iz boevogo proshlovo* (Moscow: 1957), 98-101.

61 Reference to the influx of peasants into the expanding arms factories.

62 Tit Titych was a despotic rich merchant in N. Ostrovsky’s play *Shouldering Another’s Troubles*.

63 V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 5th ed. (Moscow, 1962), vol. 34, 321-322.

cause some aspects of positive Bolshevik creativity, as well as their propaganda methods revealed the future odious face of Bolshevism to us. It was an unbridled, anarchistic, petty-bourgeois elemental force [*stikhiya*], that was eliminated by Bolshevism only when it again had no masses behind it.⁶⁴

Fear of the *stikhiya*, the peasantry first of all, was an important aspect of Menshevism that helps to explain the party's rejection of the October Revolution and its insistence on a coalition with the liberals, and failing that, with "the rest of democracy," notably the intelligentsia.

But the left intelligentsia's concern about the insufficiently developed political culture and consciousness of the popular masses no doubt had a basis, one has to wonder how their decision to stand aside from the struggle could be justified, since the revolution was going ahead in any case. In the conditions of profound polarization between the classes, the alternative to the Soviet government defended by the intelligentsia, left intelligentsia included, was never clear, and least of all to workers. But in fact, there was no alternative, except defeat of the revolution. As a Bolshevik worker told a conference of worker and Red-army delegates in May 1918, "We are accused of sowing civil war. But there is here a big mistake, if not a lie... Class interests are not created by us. They are a question that exists in life, a fact, before which all must bow."⁶⁵ That is why, despite the terrible deprivations and excesses of the civil war, the workers and peasants, some more actively, others passively, continued to support the Soviet regime.

Gorky's concern about the uncultured, politically enenlightend masses was no doubt sincere. But the revolution was proceeding with or without the intelligentsia. On the face of it, it made more sense to take active part in it in order to ease its path and to try to limit its excesses. Some intellectuals, of course, did make that choice. A certain Brik, a cultural figure in Petrograd, wrote this to *Novaia zhizn'* in early December 1917:

64 Sukhanov, op. cit., vol. 6, 192.

65 Pervaya konferentsiya rabochikh i krasngvardveiskikh deputatov 1-go gorodksovo raiona, Petrgrad, 1918, p. 248.

To my surprise, I find myself on the Bolshevik electoral list to the municipal duma. I am not a Bolshevik and am against their cultural policy. But I cannot let matters slide. It would be a disaster if the workers were left to themselves to set policy. Therefore, I will work - but under no (external) discipline. Those who refuse to work and wait for the counterrevolution to restore culture are blind.⁶⁶

In December, a new Union of Internationalist Teachers was formed, after some of the teachers decided to secede from the All-Russian Union of Teachers over the issue of the teachers' strike. The new organization declared that it was "impermissible that schools should be used as a political weapon," and they called upon the teachers to cooperate with the regime to create a new socialist school.⁶⁷

V.B. Stankevich, a Popular Socialist (right populist) and military commissar under the Provisional Government, took a similar position in a letter to his "political friends," written in February or March 1918:

By now, we have to see that the elemental forces of the people are on the side of the new government. There are two paths before us: to continue the irreconcilable struggle for power or to adopt the peaceful, constructive work of a loyal opposition...

Can the former ruling parties [in the Provisional Government] say that they are now so experienced that they can manage the tasks of running the country, which have become harder, not easier? Why, in essence, there is not a single programme that we can oppose to that of the Bolsheviks. And a fight without a programme is in no way better than an adventure of Mexican generals. But even if there were the possibility of creating a programme, we have to see that we lack the forces to carry it out. Why, to overthrow Bolshevism, not formally but in reality, the united forces of all - from the social revolutionaries to the extreme right - would be needed. And even then, the Bolsheviks would turn out to be stronger...

There remains one path: the path of a united popular front,

⁶⁶ *Novaia zhizn'*, Dec. 5, 1917.

⁶⁷ Op. cit., Dec. 6, 9, 13, 1917. Veresaev's novel, mentioned in footnote 42, presents examples of that position, as well as of the other, adopted by most of the left intelligentsia.

united national work, common creation... So what will be tomorrow? Continuation of the aimless, meaningless and, in essence, adventuristic attempt to wrest power? Or working together with the people, feasible efforts to help it deal with the difficulties that stand before Russia, united in peaceful struggle for eternal political principles, for truly democratic foundations of government of the country!⁶⁸

The point is that the position adopted by the majority of the intelligentsia did not seem to follow from the reasons that they offered for it. And that leads one to ask if there were not other reasons. It seems that, when it came down to it, most of the socialist intelligentsia turned out to be only "the most radical part of the bourgeoisie," as the Left SR paper concluded. As long as the task of the revolution had been to overthrow the semifeudal autocracy, to establish a liberal democracy, they could support and even spur on the popular movement. But when it emerged - and it began to emerge already in the course of the Revolution of 1905 - that in Russian conditions, the revolution would transform itself into a struggle against the bourgeoisie itself and so against the social order of the bourgeoisie, the left intelligentsia began to feel the ground tremble under its feet.

They felt their position in society threatened. And despite everything, they enjoyed certain privileges, at least in terms of prestige and status, sometimes also income and professional autonomy. These privileges, and a genuine mistrust and fear of the "unbridled", "uncultured" masses, bound them to the existing social (capitalist), if not political, order.

In retrospect, of course, one is tempted to argue that the left intelligentsia was right. After all, one of Lenin's major themes in his last years was the urgent need to raise the cultural level of the people. That level, especially the level of political culture among the peasantry, which constituted the great mass of the population, was a major factor in the rise to power of the bureaucracy under the leadership of Stalin. But one has to ask if the intelligentsia, by the hostile position it adopted toward the October Revolution, did not itself contribute to this outcome.

68 I.V. Orlov, "Dva puti pered nimi," *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 1997, no. 4, pp. 77-80.

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