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## THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT IN THE 1880s

The book deals with the various revolutionary groups active in Russia in the 1880s. The first chapter attempts a definition of Populism, examines the main strategies on which revolutionary activity was based in the 1870s, traces the development of the main organisations of that decade and discusses their relationship to the prevailing theories. The three following chapters examine the history of the organisations of the 1880s in the light of this discussion and against the background of a reactionary political atmosphere, cultural stagnation, despondency in the intelligentsia, and industrial development. Separate chapters are devoted to each of the main categories into which groups might broadly speaking be divided – those adhering to or sustaining the tradition of *Narodnaya Volya*; Populists opposed to political terrorism and intent on patient propagandistic activity, and miscellaneous related groups; and groups leaning in the direction of Social Democracy. Considerable attention is devoted to such subjects as the growth of circles in the higher educational institutions; attempts at propaganda in the working class and the armed forces; views on organisational matters and on the relative importance of ‘political’ and ‘economic’ objectives and forms of struggle; and attitudes towards the peasantry, terrorism, the development of capitalism in Russia, and Western European Social Democracy. The early political activity and sympathies of Lenin are also discussed at some length. The conclusion assesses the significance of the organisations of the 1880s in the larger history of the Russian revolutionary movement.

The main importance of the book should be threefold. Firstly, it should provide a brief general history of the Russian revolutionary movement in a little-known phase. Secondly, it demonstrates that the 1880s represent not what they are usually perceived to be in the history of the revolutionary movement – that is, a vacuum between the dynamic Populism of the 1870s and the rise of Social Democracy in the 1890s – but a period of intense activity that kept alive the revolutionary tradition in unfavourable conditions. Thirdly, it reveals that there was no clear-cut divergence between Populism and Social Democracy, rather that theoretical allegiances were in general extremely confused and that the early groups that are usually described as Social Democratic, in particular, are of a much less clearly defined Marxist orientation than is generally supposed.

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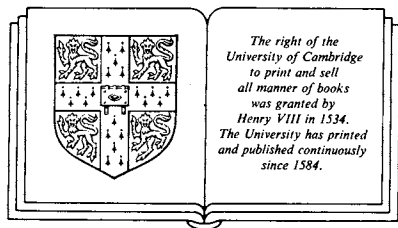


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FOR MY MOTHER AND IN  
MEMORY OF MY FATHER



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## *PREFACE*

The purpose of this work is to examine the course of the revolutionary movement in Russia in the 1880s. An attempt is made briefly to describe the main revolutionary organisations and groups, together with their thinking and activity, to indicate their complexion and inter-relationships, to assess their contribution to the movement as a whole and to discuss the way in which they reflected its fortunes.

It is perhaps as well at the outset to enumerate the problems, all of them of perennial importance to Russian socialists, to which the revolutionaries of the decade had to address themselves. What was the relationship of Russia to Western Europe and, in particular, how did her path of economic development compare with that of the West? Was it the peasantry or the proletariat which would provide the main revolutionary force in Russia, and what was the relationship between the peasants, who constituted the vast majority of the population, and the emergent working class of the towns? What should be the respective roles of the intelligentsia and the masses in revolutionary activity, and would revolution come about at the instigation of the former or of the volition of the latter? Should revolutionaries strive primarily to secure economic improvements in the condition of the masses or to transform political institutions? Was revolution an imminent or a distant prospect, and what should the tempo of the movement be? By what means would the goal be best promoted – by cautious and thorough propaganda or by militant agitation, even armed struggle against the authorities? What sort of revolutionary organisation

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was it desirable or necessary to create, given the ideals of the revolutionaries and the nature of the society in which they were operating? And last, but never least in the thinking of the Russian intelligentsia, what moral considerations impinged on all these problems?

These were the main questions which to a greater or lesser extent exercised the minds of all Russian socialists in the 1880s. In order fully to understand the way in which revolutionaries of that decade approached them, however, we need to see their thinking and activity against an earlier background, for the movement of the 1880s represents in the main a final and decadent phase of the revolutionary Populism which had its roots in the 1860s and its heyday in the 1870s. In the first chapter a preliminary attempt is therefore made to describe Populist doctrine (which is perhaps best seen against a rather broader cultural canvas than is generally sketched in histories of the revolutionary movement), to outline the most important revolutionary strategies on which practical activity was based, to chart the rapid growth of revolutionary organisations in the 1870s, and to draw attention to the main modifications made to strategy and tactics in that decade in the light of practical experience in a harsh reality. It was the theoretical premisses of Populism – which proved very durable – and a reverence for certain forms of struggle tested in the 1870s that revolutionaries of the 1880s inherited; and in a sense their history is a history of struggle with that heritage as well as with the régime they despised.

The revolutionary Populism of the 1860s and the 1870s has been very thoroughly studied. All who are interested in the movement of those decades are indebted to the Italian historian, Venturi, whose monumental work on the subject, written some thirty years ago, remains unsurpassed in any language.<sup>1</sup> A further readable, though more popular, survey was provided at approximately the same time by Yarmolinsky. More recently the Polish historian of philosophy, Walicki, has made important contributions to the discussion of major Populist thinkers. In the Soviet Union – where vigorous research into the pre-Marxist phase of the revolutionary movement was abruptly curtailed in the early 1930s – much attention has been devoted to Populism by scholars of the post-Stalin period and useful monographs – by Levin, Tkachenko, Itenberg, Volk, Sedov, Tvardovskaya and others – have now appeared in Russian on the major organisations of the 1870s. The movement of the 1880s, on the other hand, has never been examined in any work in English – or Russian – except in the most selective way. Yarmolinsky and Volk have a few pages on the decline of Narodnaya Volya after 1 March 1881. There is a very brief – though



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valuable – article by Utechin on various organisations other than Narodnaya Volya which were active in the 1880s. Several historians, both Soviet and Western, have explored the circumstances in which Lenin began his revolutionary career in the late 1880s and have examined the plot to assassinate Alexander III, in which Lenin's elder brother was involved in 1887. Baron's major study of Plekhanov deals comprehensively with the émigré Social Democrats of the 'Emancipation of Labour' group. Another American historian, Pipes, devotes some contentious pages to the St Petersburg labour movement of the mid and late 1880s. And a number of Soviet historians, notably Polevoy and Kazakevich, have studied those groups of the 1880s which may to some extent be seen as pioneers of Russian Social Democracy (though the degree to which these groups developed a specifically Marxian socialism has often been greatly exaggerated). But the picture which emerges from these sources of the Russian revolutionary movement of the 1880s is neither coherent nor entirely accurate, for it is fragmentary and creates the misleading impression that groups were isolated, inactive and few.

The 1880s could be characterised, it is true, as a period of failure and despondency in the ranks of revolutionaries, as in Russian intellectual and cultural life in general. Populism was in decline and revolutionaries fumbled for alternative paths to socialism. All the same, the history of the movement during that decade does deserve to be known, and not merely in order that a large lacuna should be filled, for, firstly, it is only when set against the decline of the 1880s that the exploits of the revolutionaries of the 1870s and their contribution to the movement in its broadest perspective come sharply into focus – only then do on the one hand the delusiveness of their ideals and on the other their capacity to inspire others, both the shortcomings and the quixotic virtues of revolutionary Populism, become fully apparent; and secondly, and more importantly, the revolutionaries of the 1880s make their own contribution to the movement as a whole. It was in this decade that attention shifted from the countryside to the towns, in practice if not often in theory. Developments in organisation and tactics were made which to some extent ran counter to previous theory and practice and provided models and even foundations for the new generation of revolutionaries who were to operate in the more propitious climate of the 1890s. Greater attention began to be paid to the theoretical preparation of the revolutionary. Moreover, the organisations of the 1880s served as both a training ground for revolutionaries of the following decade and a bridge between the Populism of the 1870s and the reanimated movement of the

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1890s. It was in this milieu that a new wave of the revolutionary movement gathered its at first unsuspected force and that many revolutionaries, the young Lenin included, made their first acquaintance with socialist thought, gained their earliest experience of illegal activity and began preparing for a revolutionary vocation.

The primary sources available for a study of the revolutionary movement in the 1880s are sufficient, if not abundant. The theoretical writings of the major revolutionary thinkers who were influential at the time are preserved, mainly in posthumous collections or selections of their works. Also extant are the journals of the main revolutionary organisations, many of the pamphlets, proclamations and programmatic documents written by their members, the correspondence of individual revolutionaries and their testimonies to the police (which were often understandably evasive or misleading but sometimes entirely ‘frank’ and usually forthright on matters of theory or principle). A great deal of all this material, as well as transcripts or summaries of the trials of many revolutionary groups, has been published in anthologies or in journals devoted largely to elucidation of the history of the revolutionary movement (*Byloye, Golos minushego, Katorga i ssylka, Krasnaya letopis', Krasnyy arkhiv, Letopis' revolyutsii, Proletarskaya revolyutsiya*), the majority of which sprang up in the Soviet Union in the decade following the triumph of Bolshevism. We have in addition the memoirs of former revolutionaries themselves. Admittedly, the fallibility of memory – many of these accounts were written more than forty years after the events described – and the frequent desire of memoirists to paint their past in colours acceptable to readers in another time require one in many instances to treat these writings with caution. Nevertheless, memoirs remain the greatest source of first-hand material on the movement which has been available to me. They may be supplemented by various official documents which, although less sensitive to the niceties of revolutionary theory and sometimes liable to confuse various groups operating independently of one another, are extremely informative on points of fact. Of particular use are the reports of police investigations into the revolutionary movement which were compiled by clerks of the Ministry of the Interior during the 1880s and which are now housed in the Central State Archive of the October Revolution (TsGAOR) in Moscow.

A few remarks need to be made, too, on the scope of my study. The selection of dates within which to concentrate one’s attention inevitably has an element of arbitrariness, and a particular decade may not completely embrace a given stage of some movement or historical process. The distinct

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phases of the Russian revolutionary movement, in so far as phases can be distinguished clearly from one another, do not coincide entirely with the decades of the second half of the nineteenth century, although certain decades have come to be associated with various social and intellectual moods and a predilection for particular forms of revolutionary activity. Roughly speaking, the 1880s do coincide with what has variously been described as the ‘decadent’ period of revolutionary Populism and a ‘preparatory’ period prior to the emergence of Social Democracy as a powerful force in the 1890s, and the decade is associated in particular with the phenomenon of *kruzhkovshchina* (the formation of circles, *kruzhki*) for the purpose of ‘self-education’ or theoretical preparation; but it could not be said that by the end of the decade the decline of Populism was complete, or interest in self-education exhausted, or the ascendancy of Marxism assured. All the same, I have for two reasons excluded from consideration events which took place from 1890 on. Firstly, it seemed important to sketch in some detail the events of the 1880s, which are so little known, and indeed a study much larger than the present one would be required if adequate coverage were also to be given to the in any case more familiar developments of the early 1890s, such as the most intensive activity of the Brusnev group in 1890–2, the rapid development of the labour movement in St Petersburg in those years, the proliferation of Marxist circles in the early 1890s, Lenin’s stay in Samara from 1889 to 1893 and his study of Marxism there, the responses of revolutionaries to the famine of 1891–2, and the new enthusiasm for agitation in the factories at the beginning of the 1890s. Secondly, the developments to which I have devoted most attention – the decline of Populism in all its forms, the growth of interest in the urban workers, the increasing concern to build secure organisations and undertake careful preparation – are sufficiently clearly apparent by 1889–90 for us to be able legitimately to treat those years as a divide no less distinct than 1879, which marks the first crisis in revolutionary Populism, and 1881, the year of both the triumph and defeat of the Populists’ terrorist wing.

Finally, it is a pleasant obligation to thank those whose help has enabled me to complete this study. I am grateful to the staff of the British Library, the School of Slavonic and East European Studies of London University, the London School of Economics, the Lenin Library and the Central State Archive of the October Revolution in Moscow, in all of which I have received much assistance, and to Professor Sedov of Moscow State University, who gave generously of his time in 1972–3 when I was a British Council Scholar in the Soviet Union working on the doctoral thesis out of

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which the present study has grown. Most of all I am indebted to the late Professor Leonard Schapiro, of the London School of Economics, who supervised that thesis and who on many occasions after its defence in 1974 gave invaluable encouragement and advice (though responsibility for whatever faults and errors the work may contain lies, of course, with me alone). Warmest thanks are due, too, to Mrs Anne Merriman and Mrs Barbara Case, who have at various times contrived with good humour and much skill to convert difficult manuscripts into typescripts of high quality, and to Keith Lloyd for his final meticulous perusal and improvement of that typescript. And last, but by no means least, I thank my wife for the patience and toleration she has mustered over the many years it has taken me to bring this study to completion.



## NOTE ON DATES, TRANSLITERATION AND USE OF RUSSIAN TERMS

### DATES

Unless otherwise indicated, dates given in the text are in the Old Style, that is according to the Julian calendar which was used in Russia until February 1918 and which in the nineteenth century was 12 days behind the Gregorian calendar used then, as now, in Western Europe. (New Style dates are indicated by the abbreviation NS.)

### TRANSLITERATION

The method used in the text, notes and bibliography is that of *The Slavonic and East European Review*. In the text, however, the name Gertsen and the place name Kiyev are rendered in the commonly accepted forms Herzen and Kiev respectively and for the sake of simplicity no indication is given of soft signs in Russian words (hence Kharkov, Zemlevoltsy, etc., instead of Khar'kov, Zemlevo'l'tsy). In the notes and bibliography soft signs are everywhere transliterated.

### USE OF RUSSIAN TERMS

The names of the following revolutionary parties have been left in their Russian forms:

Zemlya i Volya	Land and Liberty
Chornyy Peredel	Black Partition
Narodnaya Volya	People's Will

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## xvi USE OF RUSSIAN TERMS

So, too, have the names of supporters of these parties, which are rendered in Russian with the suffix *-ets* (plural *-tsy*). Thus:

Zemlevolets	<i>pl.</i> Zemlevoltsy
Chernoperedelets	<i>pl.</i> Chernoperedeltsy
Narodovolets	<i>pl.</i> Narodovoltsy

This suffix may also be attached to surnames in order to denote a person or persons associated with a particular individual; hence Nechayevets (*pl.* Nechayevtsy – member or members of Nechayev’s group), Chaykovets (Chaykovtsy), Blagoyevets (Blagoyevtsy), etc.

Words denoting the body of thought associated with the parties listed above and indicated in Russian by the suffix *-chestvo* (equivalent to English *-ism*) are also left in their Russian form; hence Zemlevolchestvo (doctrines of Zemlya i Volya), Chernoperedelchestvo, Narodovolchestvo.

Titles of Russian journals have been left in their Russian form but (with the exception of the journals *Zemlya i volya*, *Chornyy peredel* and *Narodnaya volya*) are also translated when they first occur in the text. Titles of books in Russian, French and German are given in English whenever they occur in the text.



## GLOSSARY

<i>artel</i>	workers' association
<i>bashi-bazouks</i>	Turkish irregular soldiers notorious for their brutality
<i>bosyaki</i>	drifting workers
<i>buntari</i>	Bakuninist agitators
<i>druz'biny</i>	armed bands
<i>dvorniki</i>	concierges
<i>gimnaziya</i>	grammar school
<i>intelligént(y)</i>	member(s) of the intelligentsia. The word implies commitment to some political, social or moral cause as well as intellectual interests and education
<i>iz'ba</i>	peasant hut
<i>kruzhki</i>	circles
<i>kruzhkovshchina</i>	meticulous study in self-education circles
<i>kulaks</i>	wealthy peasants
<i>meshchane</i>	members of the lower middle class
<i>mir</i>	communal assembly
<i>moujiks</i>	peasants
<i>odinochki</i>	lone individuals
<i>pervomartovtsy</i>	those involved in the assassination of Alexander II on 1 March 1881 ( <i>pervoye marta</i> )
<i>poddyovka</i>	man's long-waisted coat
<i>raznochintsy</i>	people of varied social origin, mainly from the lower middle classes or the lower clergy, who assumed a new prominence in the ranks of the Russian intelligentsia after the Crimean War
<i>sermyaga</i>	coarse, undyed cloth, or caftan of this material
<i>zemlyachestvo</i>	society of students from same town or district
<i>zemstvo</i>	elective district council

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