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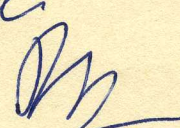
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BASIL BLACKWELL · OXFORD

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THE PREPARATORY PERIOD OF THE REVOLUTIONARY
PARTY: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON FRANCO VENTURIS'
ROOTS OF REVOLUTION*

THE following observations are not intended to give a full appreciation of a book, the masterly and comprehensive character of which has been recognised by all the critics; they are solely intended to discuss the relevance of the movements of the Russian socialist *intelligentsia* in the 1860s and 1870s to the ancestry of the modern communist movement.

My very posing of this question may provoke objections, if not from Professor Venturi himself, at least from Sir Isaiah Berlin: in the opening passages of his Introduction he rejects critics 'who look on all history through the eyes of the victors, and for whom accounts of movements that failed, of martyrs and minorities, seem without interest as such'. Surely we should not look at past stages in the progress of social thought through the eyes of the 'victors'—if for no other reason than because the 'victors', in that case the Russian Social Democrats, in order to continue their predecessors' work on a new stage had to put emphasis on their own contribution rather than on what they had inherited. The Stalinist historians overdid the necessary distinction in their Narodnik inheritance, perhaps because their own ideas on the unlimited power of well-organised élites, on the role of personalities, etc., came so uncomfortably near just to the non-Marxist elements. The start of every great historical movement has to pass through different stages: the Russian Narodnik movement has 'failed' no more than Judaeo-Petrine Christianity failed when triumphant Christianity adopted the ideology and the organisation of the Hellenistic-Pauline trend. The attitude of the later Russian socialists to the developments described in this book was indicated a few years later when Plekhanov, the outstanding theorist of the subsequent stage, wrote in his Preface to Count Thun's History of the Revolutionary Movement in Russia that the Russian Social Democrats 'did not form their opinions from pieces of foreign theories . . . we deduced them, consistently, *from our own revolutionary experience* as illuminated in the bright light of Marxist theory'. Another forty years later it could be written, in Soviet Russia, that the formation of *Iskra* (in 1902) restored the inherent continuity (*preyemstvennost*) of the Russian revolutionary movement, which had

* Published, with an Introduction by Sir Isaiah Berlin, by Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1960. Quotations from the book refer to this edition.

The original Italian edition, of 1952, was published under the simple title *Il Populismo Russo*, which has no implications as to an interpretation of the developments within the revolutionary *intelligentsia* characteristic of the period as a main root of the subsequent revolutionary developments. On the contrary, Professor Venturi clearly states that he did not wish to deal with anything except a certain stage in the development of the Russian socialist movement.

been interrupted by Economism.¹ By promoting the defeat of those who had abused the 'penitent intelligentsia', the memories of Khalturin, Perovskaya, Zhelyabov and so many others helped to shape their country's future.

Professor Venturi defines the period studied in his book as that before Russian socialism was split into differing and sometimes conflicting components (p. xxxii). This statement can be accepted only with reservations: his own masterly presentation of the succession, and inherent connection, of circles and trends within the period is based upon an opposition, from the very start, of emphases on political power on the one hand, and on mobilisation of the broad masses of the people on the other hand. It would be incorrect to assert that, with the end of his period, the different trends were necessarily embodied in different organisations: they continued both within the surviving organisations of *Narodnaya Volya* (a point excluded by Professor Venturi's strict conclusion of his record with the assassination of Alexander II) and in Social Democracy. Here, they were resolved (so far as such disputes can be concluded at all) with the foundation of *Iskra*, nearly twenty years after 1 March 1881 and seventeen years before the Bolshevik revolution. Still it is possible to find a common denominator for the *Narodnik* period: it was that during which the Russian revolutionary *intelligentsia*, though with many delusions, came to realise that the reform of 1861 while leaving the basic aspirations of the peasantry unfulfilled had ended the period of serf insurrections, but had not yet grasped the implications of Russia's incipient industrialisation.

In Chapter III Venturi shows how the past record and the institutional structure of Tsarist Russia prevented her from anticipating the threatening storm by agrarian reforms early enough to avoid the assumption of a revolutionary position by a large section of the *intelligentsia* (the leading minds of which nearly up to 1862 put many hopes on a 'reforming Tsar'). Peter Scheibert, discussing the book in the *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*,² criticises both Venturi and the revolutionaries for failure to assess the limited possibilities of Tsarist Russia realistically, and also the *Narodniks'* failure to elaborate other than dilettante economic solutions. Yet to anyone who does not start from the basic assumption that reformers should not question the institutional structure of their societies, it follows the inherent necessity of the transition of the revolutionary *intelligentsia* from hopes for reform to revolutionary activities, and eventually, with the economic development of Russia herself, the transition to a new intellectual framework, in which the solutions to real economic problems could be sought, namely Marxism.

According to a long-standing tradition of the Russian revolutionary

movement, which Lenin repeatedly recalled in order to make his point about the need to organise the 'subjective factor', objectively revolutionary situations existed both in the early sixties (i.e. at the time of the peasants' emancipation) and then again in the late seventies (i.e. at the time when a large section of the Narodnik movement decided in favour of political terror). There is no need to read into such traditions more than the movement's self-criticism and self-assertion. Having read the evidence collected by Professor Venturi from sources who certainly were not unduly pessimistic from the revolutionary point of view, and also recent Soviet writings on the point,³ I can only maintain my long-standing⁴ scepticism about the very existence of those revolutionary situations, in particular the second one. Venturi's evidence shows that the organisers of *Narodnaya Volya* were even conscious of its absence: their decision to concentrate all the available resources on the assassination of Alexander II, even to the detriment of revolutionary propaganda amongst the masses, implied a decision to replace the revolutionary insurrection, the necessary resources for which were not available, by an action purely demonstrative in character.

True, the significance of the work described in Venturi's book was not the attempted use of two allegedly revolutionary situations but the growth, in the minds of an *intelligentsia* appalled by the horrors of early capitalist development, of concepts which were to bear their fruits much later. Russian capitalism did not, as some of the Narodniks imagined, run into a blind alley; on the contrary, just after having passed, without any progressive change in her regime, the second of the alleged 'revolutionary situations' Russia entered the quickest phase of her pre-1930 industrial development, which found its only counterpart in Japan under an only slightly less reactionary regime. In the Russian revolutionaries' hands lay the power to decide, not what would happen (apart from a change in persons) on or after 1 March 1881, but on which lines the thorough regeneration of Russia would start a quarter of a century later. In this perspective, Professor Venturi's decision to conclude his book with that fateful day of March represents an unjustified tribute to the concepts only of one group of the participants: a glance into the documents published during the 1920s⁵ shows that even *Narodnaya Volya* as such continued to develop during the early 1880s; indeed the development of the workers' and the army organisations was at its strongest between 1881 and 1885. This may to some extent be regarded as the spread of a fire whose heart was already extinguished; but the workers' circles were continuously regenerated, and intellectual developments showed a degree of continuity which is bound to astonish anyone who conceives the history of the Russian revolutionary movement mainly in the light of the self-delimitation

of each of its successive stages from its predecessors (in particular in publications abroad, where there was more opportunity, and demand, for theoretical clarification than in the underground circles inside Russia). Some post-1881 Narodnik publications show a fair balance between economic and political-revolutionary struggle, emphasise the need for a transitional dictatorship of the working class, and differ from Marxist concepts mainly by the vagueness with which the 'urban and rural' working class was fused into one hypothetical unit—a habit which had started in the publications of *Cherny Peredel*, Narodnaya Volya's antagonist in the split of 1879.⁶ Some later Social Democrats⁷ referred to the transition of their circles from the concepts of *Narodnaya Volya* to Marxism as a continuous process: to many underground workers in Russia things must have appeared in that light (certainly, a Narodnik movement which realised only that the workers were at least as important as the peasants, and that armed insurrection was preferable to the assassination of Tsars, was not yet Marxist).

If we treat the material, not as the formation process of a definite ideology, broken off by the catastrophe of 1 March 1881, but as the preparation of subsequent developments, we may note, at first, that the preoccupation with the *obshchina* (village community) as the supposedly central institution of the Russian socialism to come was the contribution of a few émigré authors which dominated the underground movement only in the 1870s. In Chernyshevski's concepts the *obshchina* played no part larger than that naturally conditioned by the fact that Russia was a peasant country and that some peasant protest was in evidence while no industrial labour movement was yet in existence. More relevant than romantic tribute paid to the form of life of the overwhelming majority of the people to be emancipated is the question of how far the early revolutionaries realised the positive need for Russia's industrialisation, i.e. that very task in fulfilling which the Bolsheviks eventually scored their major achievement and are at present making their impact upon many underdeveloped countries, the conditions of some of which are comparable to those of pre-capitalist Russia. From Venturi's book it is evident that *no* one of the contending trends envisaged industrialisation of Russia (even on the lines of 'cooperative socialism') as an outcome of the revolution. Even Tkachev, who in some respects came nearest to later Bolshevik concepts, merely advocated an egalitarian distribution of the national income without devoting much attention to the problem of increasing it—not to speak of systematic industrialisation, which would have appeared to him as a Western concept irrelevant for Russia. Yet the mere urgency of a peasant problem plus its corollary, the predominance, in the revolutionary movement, of an *intelligentsia* dominated by

idealisation of the peasantry, does not lead to relevant results, even if parts of this *intelligentsia* (a minority amongst the Narodniks) have developed concepts of a revolutionary vanguard which, in appearance, approach the later treatment of 'the organisation problem' by the Leninists.

The circles of the young intellectuals served as a clearing house through which thought-material supplied by the early and mid-nineteenth century progressive writers entered Russia; this material was digested through trial and error in the course of the circles' own activities. In the very first stages, the Utopian socialists, Feuerbach (in particular with Chernyshevski) and Comte were prominent, but Marx's early work figured in the library of the Petrashevski group; from the late 1860s onwards he was regarded as the outstanding teacher of economics even by those who disagreed with his sociological and political theories. Yet at the end of the period Kibalchich, writing on behalf of *Narodnaya Volya*, opposed Plekhanov's (at that time) under-estimation of political institutions by reference to Marx's political writings, which excluded an interpretation of *Capital* in the sense of a purely economic determinism (pp. 679-80); Marx himself (whose letters to the Editor of *Otechestvenniya zapiski* have, unhappily, not been quoted by Venturi) would have fully supported the argument, eager as he was to avoid distortion of his theory into a 'supra-historical schematism'. The one-sidedness culminated in the remark reluctantly made by Vera Zasulich, the unwilling heroine of terrorism who, on the very eve of her acceptance of Marxism, deemed that it would restrict the new party to quiet organisational work until, after decades, if not centuries, Russia would have become ripe for a revolution of the industrial proletariat, superseding a fully developed capitalism.⁸ Marx himself, however, envisaged the possibility of a direct transition of the Russian village community to socialism, avoiding the capitalist stage of development: as he hoped at that time, the industrial basis required for such a transition would be created by socialist revolutions in Western Europe, to which a democratic revolution in Russia might give the decisive impulse.⁹ There is a logical continuity between this assessment of the potentialities of pre-capitalist Russia by Marx, and the present communists' envisaging a non-capitalist development of former colonial countries, supported by the Soviet industry created, during the half-century following Marx's letter, by the sequence of capitalist and Soviet industrialisation of Russia.

Emphasis on the more spectacular, namely the terrorist, side of the activities of *Narodnaya Volya*, and the fact that Russian Social Democracy started with a self-delimitation of *Cherny Peredel* (redistribution of land without compensation) from its earlier emphasis on amorphous

mass-activities, frequently obscures the similarity of some elements within each movement. In spite of the emphasis on the dramatic aspects of *Narodnaya Volya* implied by the arrangement of his book, Professor Venturi avoids this pitfall by his conception of the Populist period as that within which the trends which dominated the further development of the Russian revolutionary movement were not yet differentiated. Professor Berlin, on the other hand, states at the end of his Introduction that 'communist practice . . . borrowed the technique of its rival and adapted it with conspicuous success to serve the precise purpose which it had been invented to resist'. Unless Sir Isaiah refers to purely formal characteristics of the technique of underground struggles, which are conditioned by their very nature and need not be invented in Russia, his observation presumably refers to the intention of *Narodnaya Volya* to use terrorism and armed insurrection as a means, not to establish a new state machine (which would, indeed, contradict the still-surviving anarchist elements in its ideology) but to make free the field for those spontaneous mass-activities from which the new society would emerge. But we must distinguish between the intentions of men, and what they are bound to do by the inherent logic of their actions: once you have crossed the Rubicon you must go on—or accept white terror and the destruction of everything you stand for. The *Narodnovoltsy* themselves envisaged such a possibility though they detested it: in no. 3 of their journal they wrote that 'only in the most unfortunate of cases . . . if the body of the people were to show not even a spark of life' could a step such as the decreeing of the necessary reforms and the establishment of a new political structure by party dictatorship be considered necessary (p. 674). This would have been, in substance, the same 'substitution' process in which even Trotsky, though he immensely disliked it, had to participate when, in 1921, the Russian Communists, victors in the civil war, faced the alternative of either shaping a new structure not just in accordance with their original ideals, or letting counter-revolution triumph through the apathy of the exhausted workers.¹⁰ It is at turning points such as this that Marxism, with its emphasis on economic progress in the new society (even though, according to Marx's own methodological approach, the detailed forms of that progress cannot be anticipated) proves superior to the worship of a glorified mass-spontaneity such as had inspired the Zhelyabovs.

We must now consider the question of the social class the conceptions and activities of which will shape the image of the new society. In China Mao Tse-tung assumed leadership as the representative of a peasant-orientated trend as against the urban tradition of the existing party leadership; representatives of the Cuban revolution emphasise the importance of peasant guerrillas even in distinction from the

struggles of the industrial workers.¹¹ The success of these two revolutions might suggest that the shift of the Russian socialist movement from a peasant to an industrial working class basis was conditioned by a definite historical situation: between the reform of 1861 and the first revolution of 1905, the peasant movement lost its strength while Russia was industrialising and the working class became active. Still the fact remains that the idealised *obshchina* was irrelevant for a country whose starving peasant masses needed industrialisation and forms of agricultural cooperation more suited to an industrial age,¹² while the Marxist theory, in that form in which it had developed in Western industrial countries, could hardly have served as a pattern for countries such as China or Cuba unless it had gone through the modifications implied in its application in a major underdeveloped country. Yet if we assess the transition from a peasant to an industrial orientation of the revolutionary movement in a perspective broader than was accessible to those who had to get rid of an outworn ideology, we get from the development of the working class movement during the 1870s, as described in Chapter XIX, a deep impression of the strength with which overwhelming historical forces imposed themselves upon a setting so alien to modern industrial life as was the worship of the *obshchina* by the revolutionary *intelligentsia*. In 1879 Plekhanov, commenting on the experience of the Petersburg strikes but still within the framework of Narodnik ideology, stated in no. 4 of *Zemlya i volya*, that the importance of the industrial working class now imposed itself upon the intellectual revolutionaries 'in spite of their *a priori* theoretical assumptions'. In his view, the main error of the (intellectual) revolutionaries consisted in their treatment of the industrial workers as raw material from which individual personalities (for propaganda in the villages, and later for terrorist activities) should be recruited instead of as a group whose struggles for its own interests, and whose experiences of common struggle, brought the basic class-antagonisms to the fore. Still Plekhanov regarded the Russian workers as the élite of the peasants, sharing their aspirations and ideas, as distinct from the West European workers who were divorced from the villages. By dispersing into their villages, the urban workers prepared the soil for the coming insurrection which, however, might be suppressed unless the central government was paralysed by an insurrection in the seat of its power.

I have quoted this article (which played a prominent part in the subsequent discussions amongst the Russian revolutionaries) more amply than Professor Venturi did since it shows the lines on which the Russian revolutionary movement, even if left to its own dynamics, might have developed, had not the last outburst of the delusions

associated with the *obshchina* diverted it from its normal course. Statements such as that just quoted of the still non-Marxian Plekhanov on issues such as who should paralyse the government's forces in order that the other ally might deliver the decisive stroke, required some 'turning upside down' in order to supply a correct forecast of the course of the Russian revolution (still they are no more unorthodox than all the statements, made from 1936 up to the present day, by Mao Tse-tung, in which the obsession of the Chinese party leadership during the first half of the 1930s—and, it might be added, of Comintern which backed it—with the central importance of the industrial proletariat is made responsible for the setbacks suffered by Chinese Communism during that period). In Russia, the intellectuals' obsession with the central importance of the *obshchina* for the Socialist reconstruction of Russia prevented the adoption of Marxism from being a gradual process as had been its supplanting of Lassalleanism as the predominant ideology of the German labour movement. (Plenty of Lassallean ideas were abroad also in the Russian labour movement of the 1870s). There was nothing specifically Russian in the wave of anarchist and even terrorist ideologies and activities: such trends, spreading in reply to the increasingly brutal repression of the labour movement during the 1870s, belonged to its birth-pangs not only in the Romance countries but even in Austria and Germany. The 'specifically Russian' features followed from the unavoidably predominant part played by the *intelligentsia* in the first stages of the revolutionary movement in an underdeveloped country. It produced, on the one hand, men and women who devoted their lives to the cause of emancipation, setting the pattern for the 'professional revolutionaries' who eventually would be victorious. On the other hand it produced a series of theoretical systems which prevented these sacrifices from bearing fruits in the setting of that Russia in which they were elaborated. There was nothing surprising in the fact that young workers' organisations, such as the Northern Union of Russian Workers, broke down under the double stress of economic depression and the Government's oppression. On the contrary, it might be said that Russia's growing readiness for a revolution was illustrated by the speed with which the revolutionary workers' groups recovered from the periodical setbacks. But the specific ideology developed by the revolutionary *intelligentsia* resulted, not only in some of the best worker-revolutionaries reacting to the organisational setbacks by going over to terrorist activities (pp. 698-9), but also in the Executive Committee of *Narodnaya Volya* closing down its Workers' Gazette because it needed the two revolutionaries managing the underground press for the management of one of the clandestine refuges needed for planning the execution of the

Tsar. Venturi is far too charitable to the leaders of *Narodnaya Volya* when stating that the activities of their working class groups 'were in fact subordinated to the execution of the political plan drawn up in the *Programme*' (p. 706). The *Programme* (quoted on pp. 647-8) was, in any case, a political document: in explaining it Tikhomirov described the party as the organiser of a collective force capable of replacing the Tsar 'in a world of railways and telephones' (p. 678). But what political sense was there, the workers' leaders asked, in killing the Tsar before the revolutionaries had at their disposal a force powerful enough to rebel? Khalturin bitterly complained of the intellectuals compelling him (in his organisational work) to start again from scratch after every act of terrorism and its inevitable repression. But then he too was seized by that thirst for immediate action which drove his comrades on to terrorism and which led him to the scaffold with them (p. 706). Eventually, Plekhanov's group—which originally had opposed *Narodnaya Volya*'s politics from the standpoint of an anarchistic belief in mass-spontaneity—laid the ideological foundations of Russian Social Democracy when it re-constituted itself as the Emancipation of Labour group and proclaimed its decision to change its programme 'in the sense of [political] struggle with the absolutist regime and of organisation of the Russian working class in a special party with a definite social and political programme'.

These developments lie outside the scope of Venturi's book. But they form the conclusion of the record not only of the Narodnik movement but even of the organisations the formation and growth of which have been described by him: in a process continuing for a dozen years the transition to Marxism, sometimes very gradual, was performed in the intellectuals' circles (sometimes so gradual that Lenin's group had its early pamphlets printed in the Narodniks' presses). Some of the workers' circles broke down, unavoidably, under a regime of brutal repression; others continued, with more or less guidance by the succession of intellectuals' circles, the last of which (that of 'the Old') during a new wave of strikes re-constituted itself as the Union of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class which, together with similar organisations in other cities, eventually founded the Social Democratic Party.

Lenin paid his tribute to the Narodnik share in the ancestry of Bolshevism by stating in *What is to be Done?*¹³ that he expected from the organisation to be created the rise 'of Social Democratic Zhelyabovs from amongst our revolutionaries and of Russian Bebels from amongst our workers who will head [conjointly] the mobilised army and awake the whole people to settle accounts with the shame and scourge of Russia'. The 'Social Democratic Zhelyabovs' are intellectuals turned

professional revolutionaries who share the efficiency and devotion of the old conspirators but have adopted the Marxist theory (under Russian conditions, the 'Russian Bebel's', too, were likely to have even more experience of underground struggle and prison than the German Bebel had had in his young days, long past when Lenin wrote). 'Zhelyabov', of course, stands not for the particular views and delusions of the real Zhelyabov—whose shortcoming, in the eyes of the Bolsheviks, was just that he was *not* a Marxist—but for the final product of the prolonged development process described in Venturi's book. At the start of the process stands Rakhmetov, the prototype of the professional revolutionary created in Chernyshevski's *What is to be Done?* the title of which, for this very reason, was adopted in the fundamental work of Bolshevism. Rakhmetov¹⁴ is a professional revolutionary in the sense that he knows no higher task in life than helping, to use Lenin's later terms, in 'organising the revolution': he is prepared for every sacrifice which serves the cause. Yet the Bolshevik interest in the professional revolutionary, and the organisation served by him, rests upon the assessment of the cause which the latter serves. From this basic standard follows the hollowness of the efforts, made since Dostoyevski's *Possessed* and again flourishing in these days of the 'cold war',¹⁵ to characterise the revolutionary movement by, or to seek the ancestry of Bolshevism in, some pathological phenomena which developed on the fringe of Populism during the phase of its search for a replacement of its internal educational approach by positive action.

Nechayev's organisation (treated in Chapter XV of Venturi's book) had no particular conception of the evils to be overcome and of the tasks to be solved by a Russian revolution. On the contrary, he interpreted revolution as a mere process of destruction: from his sometime friend Bakunin (who made at least an important contribution to the formulation of the Nechayevist documents on the duties of the revolutionary) Nechayev differed by his elevating the organisation serving the destruction process into an absolute value, justifying any crime and suitable for any purpose that its leader might choose. Had there been a Russian fascist movement Nechayev might have been amongst its ancestors. Apart from his personal courage, which left a deep impression, Nechayev's record was one of unprincipled intrigue: for the further development he was important mainly in that this peculiar representative of political revolution helped to provoke the a-political and anarchist attitudes of the following generation of Populists.

More serious problems are presented in a consideration of the importance, in the ideological preparation for Bolshevism, of P. N. Tkachev.

He was the most mature and systematic representative of the 'Jacobin' trend (so named by its first representative, Zaichnevski, one of the members of the 'Young Russia' circle of 1861 (p. 296)), which opposed the concept of an active revolutionary minority to the predominant belief in the miraculous power of peasant spontaneity—a belief which was shared by Nechayev, notwithstanding his fantastic conception of the conspiratorial activities required to unleash that mass-activity of brigands and other elements of 'pure destruction'.

Because of the conflict of his views with the anarchist fashion, Tkachev (a very systematic presentation of whose activities and views is given in Chapter XVI) never succeeded in organising an influential group, but his views influenced other groups, in particular *Narodnaya Volya*. He was the first consistently to interpret revolutions as the work of élites acting on behalf of and in the interest of, but not necessarily with the support of, the masses. His concept was based on a combination of a Marxist explanation of history with a voluntarist interpretation of revolutionary action as controlled by ideals produced by the historical process. Since no industrial working class worth mentioning was yet in existence it followed, in Tkachev's opinion, that a well-organised élite of intellectuals must take quick revolutionary action before the *obshchina* (the idealisation of which by the Populists he did not share) disintegrated under the stress of capitalism and Russia became a kulak-based yet prosperous bourgeois country instead of being transformed into socialist communes. This conception differs from the Leninist one in that the latter treats revolution, though it is led and organised by élites (not mainly of intellectuals since such groups lack the natural regenerative power inherent in the labour movement), as the way out of a crisis which can be progressively solved only by complete reorganisation of the institutional framework; the industrial working class is regarded as the source of the moral and organisational energies required for the carrying through as well as for the defence of the Revolution. When branded by his Menshevik opponents as a 'Jacobin', Lenin replied that 'the revolutionary Social Democrat is the Jacobin inseparably linked with the organisation of a proletariat conscious of its interests'.¹⁶ The qualification, however, is essential: except for quite local, and temporary, circumstances Lenin would never have agreed to the following statement of Mao:

Our principle is that the party commands the gun, and the gun will never be allowed to command the party. But it is also true that with guns at our disposal we can really build up the party organisations, and the Eighth Route Army has built up a powerful party organisation in North China. We can also rear cadres and create schools, culture and mass movements. Everything in Yen-an has been built up by means of the gun. Anything can grow out of the barrel of a gun.

According to the Marxist theory of the state, the army is the chief component of the political power of a state. . . . Some people have ridiculed us as advocates of the 'omnipotence of war': yes, we are, we are the advocates of the omnipotence of the revolutionary war, which is not bad at all, but is good and is Marxist.¹⁷

We find here adherence to the Marxist (but also Tkachevist) principle that armed force is required to overcome the inherent contradictions of society, coupled with a complete equanimity to the choice of the social forces upon which the party, the army and the reconstruction of society is to be based. It is possible to reconcile concepts such as those quoted with Marxism only if the movements which profess them regard themselves as local varieties in a movement operating upon the basic contradiction between the capitalists and the working class, and even if operating in an underdeveloped country regard its quick industrialisation as their central aim, armies being regarded as mere technical devices to prevent invasion and counter-revolution. This taken for granted, the delimitation of modern Communism from Tkachevism rests, not on the question of whether in some particular countries the major part in communist mass-support is played by the labour movement or peasant guerrillas, national emancipation movements, etc.,¹⁸ but on the light in which the organising vanguard regards its social basis. Communism regards itself as the expression of continuous contradictions of society which it should help to solve. Tkachevism regards revolutionary situations as occasions which should be used to establish a dictatorship for the realisation of ideals which have no permanent social basis. Tkachev was very conscious of the instability of his foundations since he demanded the carrying out of the insurrection before the social basis of *obshchina* communism could disappear (p. 412).

On the eve of the October insurrection, Lenin warned against the danger of missing the opportunity to strike. But, very different from Tkachev's 'Now or Never', his statements were made on the purely tactical level: behind them stood a conviction that, however deplorable the missing of a certain revolutionary opportunity would be, the inherent decay of capitalism would create new ones and that the separate organisation of revolutionary socialists was necessary quite independently of the question of whether it would achieve power in October 1917 or on some later occasion. At the heart of Tkachev's political viewpoint, on the other hand, 'was the idea that social revolution in Russia was possible only by stopping, or interrupting, capitalist development'; his Jacobinism as well as his Marxism 'are . . . used as tools for this central aim. They serve to point out the means or to analyse the situation which can bring it about; they do not change his final purpose and essential aspiration' (p. 413). The avoidance of the

capitalist way of development fits well into present communist ideology; and Tkachev was not dogmatic in his conception of the second, constructive stage of the transformation, when the new system of social relationships would be brought into being by a chain of gradual reforms (pp. 419-20). Yet whatever the analogies, he and his friends looked backwards for the source of their inspiration: suppose for a moment that they had been swept into power by some miracle, and that the 'elasticity' of their construction efforts resulted in contradictions to their starting ideology even half as great as those which modern communism has to face, they would have been lost since they would have been incapable of seeing their own aims and tasks as elements in a process of social evolution.

Glasgow University

RUDOLF SCHLESINGER

¹ M. Balabanov, *Ocherki po istorii rabochevo klassa v Rossii*, vol. III (Moscow), *Ekonomicheskaya zhizn*, 1926, p. 553. The *preymstvennost* did obviously refer to the question, not of whether the masses on the spontaneity of which a socialist movement might rely, were workers or peasants by the way, Professor Venturi shows that *Narodnaya Volya* was already far from one-sided reliance upon the peasantry) but of the importance of its own organised initiative in relationship to mass-spontaneity.

² Vol. 10 (1962), no. 3. In one of the passages referred to by Scheibert, Venturi (p. 66 of his book) gives some indirect allowance for the possibility that a different behaviour of the monarchy in the December days of 1825 might have preserved a reforming wing of the nobility upon which a reforming monarchy might have been able to operate. Yet such a hypothesis could hardly be conceived except by abstracting from the setting of Europe in the days of the Holy Alliance.

³ Cf. M. I. Haifets' article in *Voprosy istorii*, 1962 no. 2 pp. 44 ff.

⁴ Cf. Marx, *His Time and Ours* (London, 1950), p. 257.

⁵ Cf., in particular, V. Levitsky-Tsederbaum, *Partiya 'Narodnaya Volya'* (Moscow, 1928), and the collective work *Narodnaya Volya v dokumentakh i vospominaniyakh*, published by the society of former political prisoners (Moscow, 1930)—most of the contributors were themselves former *Narodovolitsy*.

⁶ Cf. the announcement of the *Vestnik narodnoi voli* 1883, no. 1, reproduced in *Narodnaya Volya*, pp. 67-68.

⁷ See, for example, L. Akselrod (Ortodox) in *Katonga i ssylka*, 1930, no. 2, especially pp. 31 ff., where she speaks of her own and Leo Tishko-Yogische's development in the Vilna circles.

⁸ *Perepiska K. Marksa i F. Engelsa s russkimi politicheskimi deyatelyami* (Moscow, 1947), pp. 240 ff.

⁹ Marx's draft replies, as well as the final text, have been reprinted in *Marx-Engels Archiv*, vol. I (1928). E. Yurevski, writing in *Sotsialisticheski vestnik*, April 1957, asserts on the basis of alleged statements by Plekhanov's widow that Plekhanov, for tactical reasons, had induced Vera Zasulich to treat Marx's reply to her as a secret. Since all those directly concerned have died, it is impossible to check the correctness of such assertions: it may, however, be noticed that in the present position of the Menshevik exiles, tactical considerations originally directed to the withholding of Marx's authority from the 'non-capitalist way of development' have lost their relevance. In any case, the draft letter, as well as the date of the letter to the editor of *Otechestvennyi zapiski* (which preceded the Narodniks' turn to political action) refute the suggestion that Marx's own positive approach to the prospects of *mir* socialism was conditioned by a mere tactical desire to strengthen the Narodniks' anti-Tsarist activities.

¹⁰ Cf. I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed* (London, 1954), pp. 521-2.

¹¹ Cf. *Soviet Studies*, vol. XIII, no. 3 (January 1962), p. 319 note 23.

¹² This may be stated also against Sir Isaiah's claim of Populist inspiration for underdeveloped countries which look for a slower pace of industrialisation than the Russian (p. xxix). Some do, and may even succeed since alternatives to support by capitalist enterprises abroad are available. But the point is not in growth rates but in the very concept of growth, which was rejected by the Populists, so far as they could grasp it.

¹³ *Sochineniya*, 5th ed., vol. 6, p. 171.

¹⁴ Being a literary image he is, of course, not a typical representative of the youths upon whom

Chernyshevski had to operate when helping in the organisation of the first *Zemlya i Volya* but the ideal type to the development of which Chernyshevski wished to draw their aspirations though he makes sufficiently clear that the Rakhmetovs can be only a minority type.

¹⁵ A recent representative of this trend is Michael Prawdin (*The Unmentionable Nechayev, A Key to Bolshevism* (London, 1961)). In his Introduction Prawdin himself emphasises the relevance of the case he has to make for an effective struggle against the Bolshevik threat to Western institutions.

¹⁶ *Sochineniya*, 5th ed., vol. 8, p. 370.

¹⁷ *Selected Works* (published 1954), vol. II, p. 272.

¹⁸ A point much emphasised by some modern critics of communism, for example by R. V. Burks in his *The Dynamics of Communism in Eastern Europe* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1961).