The Agrarian Policy of the Social Revolutionary Party and Its Impact on the Development of the Russian Peasantry into a Politicized Social Class, 1870-1907

Jessica H. Howell
THE AGRARIAN POLICY OF THE SOCIAL REVOLUTIONARY PARTY
AND ITS IMPACT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RUSSIAN PEASANTRY
INTO A POLITICIZED SOCIAL CLASS, 1870-1907

By

JESSICA H. HOWELL

A Dissertation submitted to the
Department of History
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Degree Awarded:
Fall Semester, 2009
The members of the committee approve the dissertation of Jessica Howell defended on August 7, 2009.

__________________________________________
Jonathan Grant
Professor Directing Dissertation

__________________________________________
Michael K. Launer
Outside Committee Member

__________________________________________
Edward Wynot
Committee Member

__________________________________________
Michael Creswell
Committee Member

__________________________________________
Maxine Jones
Committee Member

The Graduate School has verified and approved the above-named committee members.
I dedicated this to my family, especially my husband, Stuart. Without their support and encouragement, the completion of this degree would not have occurred. I am blessed to have each and every one in my life.
I would like to acknowledge the staff at the Bakhmeteff Archives as well as the Hoover Institution Archives. Additionally, much gratitude is extended to my committee members, especially Dr. Michael Launer, who undertook the painstaking task of editing as well as assisting in translations. A special thanks to my doctoral director, Dr. Jonathan Grant, for encouraging me to pursue this topic.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract vi

1. **INTRODUCTION** 1

2. **PEASANT LIFE** 14

3. **THE SOCIALIST-REVOLUTIONARY PARTY** 38

4. **1905: APEX OF INCLUSION?** 77

5. **IN THE WAKE OF THE STORM** 109

6. **PEASANTS AND POLITICS** 131

7. **CONCLUSION** 147

APPENDIX 155

A. **GLOSSARY OF TERMS** 155

B. **RESULTS OF DUMA ELECTIONS** 157

BIBLIOGRAPHY 158

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH 166
ABSTRACT

In the Russian Empire, where so many of its inhabitants were of the peasant class in the 19th and 20th centuries, it is interesting that despite their large numbers, they did not engage themselves regularly in political matters. While some parties attempted to include the peasantry in the years 1902-1907, many were unable to effectively incorporate the peasants within the organizational structure of the party. Peasants, despite their discontent with their circumstances, were unwilling to join organized political parties in the revolutionary movement that was present in Russia during these years. Instead, the peasants demonstrated their ability to become a contender in the realm of politics apart from the Socialist Revolutionary Party (PSR), the one most active among the countryside. There is evidence that both the PSR and the peasants were striving to change the social and political scene in Russia. Although the PSR hoped that the peasants would unite in its efforts to bring forth a revolution to Russia, the peasants acted alone, seeking different concessions from the government. In the end, the peasants are often remembered for their uprisings and revolts directed at their landlords, but it is because of these actions that many parties, and the government, began to rethink the agrarian question. By 1902, the peasants were a political force, regardless of the ultimate outcome of their actions.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

NOTE TO READER:
The transliteration of Russian names and terms poses problems to scholars and students alike. I have opted to use the forms most commonly known for the handful of people the reader is likely to be familiar with already. Otherwise, I follow the Library of Congress transliteration system, modified to eliminate soft and hard signs or in cases when the source gives a different transliteration.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 is often remembered for the concessions made by the Tsar as a result of the chaotic situation that transpired throughout the empire. Even so, the revolution holds a much greater significance, one that has often been overlooked and underestimated by scholars who tend to focus on the victors of events, such as the workers or the rise of the Bolsheviks, rather than analyzing those that failed. At the end of the revolution, all social classes had exhibited their ability and desire to participate in the political process. Perhaps the most surprising social class to become politicized at the turn of the 20th century was the peasantry. The peasants, acting on their own resolve, were politicized by a number of factors.¹

¹ The term “politicized” is used by Abraham Ascher in his monograph The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988). By using this term, he is referring to the rise of political consciousness evidenced by the peasants in the 20th century, coupled with the display of political activism.
The essence of this dissertation lies with the factors that contributed to the politicization of the peasantry, namely through their involvement with the Socialist Revolutionary Party (PSR). Several themes of the PSR have been highlighted by scholars. One area that has been neglected, however, has been the party’s role in the countryside. The PSR has often been credited with being the most influential party among the peasants; yet, most historians stop short of fully elaborating on and evaluating the peasants’ relations with the party. One cannot seriously dispute that the PSR was the most influential party in the countryside, but to assume that the party was responsible for the actions of the peasants would be naïve. Instead, the peasants often acted on their own initiative. It cannot be denied that party agitation often roused peasant revolutionary sentiments, but to credit the party as the primary instigator of peasants action is insulting to the peasants, for it fails to highlight the political activities undertaken by the peasants in their own right.

The discussion of terror has often overshadowed more important and relevant characteristics of the party, such as its role among the peasant class. In recent years, concentration has begun to shift from the party’s use of terror as a political tactic to more ideological concerns. In so doing, the PSR has often been labeled the “peasant party.”² In any event, although recruiting peasants more so than other parties, and with more success, the PSR was not a peasant party. Instead, it was a movement theoretically concerned with the agrarian question, and this concern, at times, manifested itself in actions and agitation among the peasantry. The policies of the PSR can be referred to as agrarian socialism; but the members and participators in the movement were not representative of the peasantry. Undoubtedly, the PSR was the

² While many scholars who specialize on the PSR make several implications that could lead one to term the party as a “peasant party” simply based on their efforts within the villages and success enjoyed over other political parties in regards to the peasantry, only Hannu Immonen states that the party was in fact a “peasant party” in his book The Agrarian Program of the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party, 1900-1914 (Helsinki: Finnish Historical Society, 1988).
organization most involved in the peasant movement, but the suggestion that it was a peasant party is both misleading and inadequate.

In the past fifty years, just a handful of monographs dedicated solely to the PSR have been published, although many articles have appeared. It has only been in the past thirty years that new material and in-depth studies have focused on the Social Revolutionaries. Although there has been an increase in scholarly research on the PSR, that portion appearing in English is relatively small.

The most prevalent theme among the English language studies, whether articles or monographs, is the use of terror by the party. The social dynamics of the party members have been investigated to some extent, although not to the same extent as the use of terror. Research on the social composition of the party concentrates primarily on worker and peasant participation. Therefore, if one desires to explore the politicization of the peasant in relation to the efforts of the party, as is the intent of this research, it is necessary to combine studies on the PSR with those on the Russian peasantry. Only in merging the two can one gain a more complete understanding of the extent of peasant participation in the PSR and the general political situation of the country. In the end, it

---


4 Even Manfred Hildermeier’s seminal work The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party before the First World War (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), was originally published in German. The issue of translation and sources will be discussed later on in the introduction.
may become evident that the peasants did not “belong” to a party at all; rather, they became their own political movement.

Peasant participation is credited, by such historians as Manfred Hildermeier, Abraham Ascher, and Maureen Perrie with being both valuable and essential to the overall movement throughout the country. Therefore, it is necessary to elucidate the actions of the peasants from the years 1890 to 1907 in order to gain an accurate and complete understanding of the revolutionary situation that consumed Russia. The politicization of the peasantry was initiated by the PSR, but the party remained unsuccessful in maintaining its initial gains. As a result, the peasantry as a social class showed newfound political motivations without recognized leadership. This development will serve as the primary objective of my research.

The following chapters are intended to substantiate that the heightened political awareness displayed by the peasants during the revolutionary situation was a result of the agitational efforts undertaken by the PSR. However, it will also reveal that once politicized, the peasants were able to act without guidance from the PSR or any other leading body. In the end, the peasants had become a political force—one that obliged the government to consider their petitions. Whether dealing with adequate grain or demanding more land in earnest, the government realized that left unanswered, the demands of the peasants could lead them to act in a manner that could only result in political turmoil.

The historiography of peasant participation in the revolutionary movement of 1902-1907 is virtually non-existent. Consequently, it has proven necessary to gather information about the PSR and the peasants separately and combine the two. Manfred Hildermeier’s *The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party before the First World War* is the most comprehensive account of the party in English.5 When he began his research on

5 Manfred Hildermeier, *The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party before the First World War* (New York: Saint Martin Press, 2000). The original release of this monograph was in German in 1978.
the SRs, he had to do so with limited resources, as many archives were closed to researchers. Still, from the sources then available, he drew conclusions that have, for the most part, stood for thirty years. For one, Hildermeier presented a compelling argument that the PSR was the only revolutionary party that spoke for the oppressed, therefore no other revolutionary party could claim this label. Realizing that the PSR sought support from a wide range of social classes, Hildermeier also maintained that the party enjoyed a large measure of success among workers. Since Hildermeier’s book, many scholars have come forward to further, and at times, counter these claims.

One area where the conclusions have changed concerns the social profile of the party. This is not to suggest that his assumptions were incorrect; rather, with new sources available, the arguments have become substantiated and more comprehensive. Even though Hildermeier contended that the party was largely unsuccessful in recruiting peasants, even in remote areas, thorough studies using new sources and sample groups help to qualify his thesis. Whereas it may be stated that the party was not *largely* victorious in recruiting peasants to partner with the party *exclusively* in action against the government, it remains true that it could claim substantial achievements in comparison with other parties.

Maureen Perrie, a leading PSR scholar, primarily concentrates on the social profile of the party. Her work offers valuable insight on the *ideological* composition of the party as a result of its social composite. The political program of any given party is often entirely derived from its members. Thus, knowledge of the social dynamics of the party is essential. Perrie, being fully aware of this correlation, delves into the profile of the party.

---

Through her research, Perrie contends that instead of simply concentrating on the workers, the SRs, with limited success, did attempt to enlist the support of the peasants. The amount to which the party actively sought the peasants is where scholars disagree. For the most part, they agree that the party did attempt to employ the peasantry, but were largely unsuccessful. Despite its lack of success, Perrie believes that its involvement with the peasants could be deemed a success, for the SRs fared better than any other national party.

One of the more recent scholars in this field, Michael Melancon, recognizes that the plight of the peasants always figured in party concerns, but the urban proletariat and the workers were the primary participants recruited by the PSR. Prior to the formal organization of the PSR, the populist movement attempted to recruit peasants under the leadership of the proletariat. After many failed attempts to organize the peasants, the populists gave up and turned their attention to the proletariat. In spite of the fact that the populists would accept aid from peasants, they would not neglect the urban proletariat in order to gain support of the masses. For Melancon, the proletariat was the preferred population of the PSR. He believes that only the Southern Party, which is discussed in greater detail in following chapters, considered the importance of peasant involvement at any great length. Melancon goes further to suggest that there were those groups, like the Agrarian League, that maintained a distance from the newly emerging SR parties for the sole purpose of organizing the peasants. In essence, this suggests that neo-populists organizations did not consider the PSR a party of the peasants. Even if the PSR desired to be the preferred organ of the masses, it could not appeal to everyone.

---

Studies on peasant participation are hard to come by in this field. Granting that it may be idealistic to suggest that the party centered on peasants, it is not unreasonable to give serious consideration to the involvement of the peasants. Many authors, including Hildermeier, Perrie, and Melancon, realize the significance of the peasantry, but none devotes adequate attention to their contributions to the party and vice-versa. Considering the sheer number of peasants in Russia—nearly 90 million at the turn of the twentieth century—it is remarkable that their involvement has not gained more attention.

Many factors contribute to the lack of peasant research. For one, few written records from party members were kept regarding peasants, leaving many historians to speculate on the actual participation of the rural classes. Even the records that are available are often in such poor condition that significant portions are indecipherable. Secondly, many scholars deem the peasantry incapable of meaningful participation in revolutionary movements. Thirdly, the Revolution of 1917, which took place without the help of an organized peasantry, resulted in the overthrow of autocracy. Therefore, the failure of parties to involve the peasants in the years preceding 1917 seems irrelevant.

Perhaps one of the biggest reasons for the neglect of peasant political participation by scholars of the PSR is that an examination of the party’s role in the countryside exposes many inherent weaknesses of the party itself. For example, the inability of the party to organize the peasants is mirrored in the party’s inability to organize itself. Moreover, directing research on the struggle to incorporate the peasants into the party program serves to highlight the lack of unity among core members of the

---

party. Consequently, by including the peasants into the study of the party, a handful of weaknesses regarding the party are exposed, which could serve to call into question the validity of the party as a viable opposition to autocracy or as a political entity altogether.

This study seeks to ameliorate the weaknesses of previous studies on the topic. The development of a newly-politicized social class, the peasantry, regardless of their ultimate success in the Russian Revolution of 1917, will be investigated and evaluated in this study. The inclusion of the peasants offers the complete and accurate picture of both the party and the revolution—one that cannot be achieved if their participation is excluded from consideration. Taking into account the fact that the peasants constituted the majority of Russian society and their utter state of oppression, the peasants are the class to organize and rise up. Therefore, if they are the class to organize, why do studies on political movements minimize their role? Does lack of organization translate into neutrality? Omitting the peasant aspect has resulted in an inaccurate analysis of both the social and political situation in Russia at the turn of the twentieth century.

Why then do peasants participate in such causes? What, if anything do they have to gain? And, are they capable of initiating a genuine revolution on their own? In 1905, peasants participated in the revolts because they desired immediate reforms. Often the peasants simply desired more food for their families. Although peasant disturbances have helped incite a broader revolution given that the revolts in the countryside often served to occupy government forces, peasants are not leaders of lasting revolutions nor are they capable of such. Because of their limited education as a class, they lack the organization, communication, and leadership necessary to rouse a revolutionary movement. Yet simply because peasants are not leaders of revolutions, one should not underestimate their impact on such movements or the effects of their involvement on the social structure of the country. Historians, however, have neglected
to consider the peasants as genuine revolutionaries. Consequently, peasants have often been denied their proper credit for successful revolutionary movements.

Curiously, however, the SRs were not significantly more capable of demonstrating the leadership qualities necessary to direct the revolutionary movement. Nonetheless, it is parties such as the SRs that are often depicted as viable participants in the Revolution of 1905. It seems somewhat of a contradiction. The PSR, without clear leadership, communication, or organization is seen as a key player in the revolution. While it is true that historians do not consider the PSR alone as fostering or leading the revolution, the fact remains that political parties have earned a legitimate place in revolutionary history. As a result, peasants have been denied their proper credit for successful revolutionary movements.

In evaluating the role that the peasants played in the years 1902-1917, it is clear that they were active participants and not simply spectators. Those who label the peasants as bystanders frequently do so because they believe that in order to be considered a participant one must align with a political party. This assertion fails to consider that the peasants espoused certain characteristics of a party, albeit not a mainstream or highly ideological one.

As with the term “peasant,” there are varying definitions for a “party.” Most definitions of party include the requirement of selecting candidates for office. Clearly, the peasants did not put forth members of the villages for official candidacy. Does this eliminate the peasants from party consideration? To be sure, there are other definitions of a “party.” Defining the term “party” is not without complications. A political party

---

9 Several authors believe that one of the primary duties of political parties is to enlist and support candidates for public office. These authors include Maurizio Cotta, Bernard Hennessey, Angelo Panebianco, and Neil McDonald. While these authors believe that political candidacy is important to parties, it is not a requirement as such.
can be considered a collection of people who hope to accomplish a specific task.\textsuperscript{10} Going deeper into the aspects of organization, a party is often considered a group that pays dues and elects officials as leaders to represent the body as a whole.\textsuperscript{11} Yet, there are certain cases where, according to William Crotty in \textit{Approaches to the Study of Party Organization}, “the chief concern [of political parties] may be preparation for a revolution.” This definition usually applies to countries that are underdeveloped or in the process of major industrialization efforts.

On one hand, there is no doubt that the SRs were a group that sought to promote and support principles common to its members. On the other hand, in its inability to establish a viable functioning organizational structure, the PSR fell short of fulfilling the basic objective common to \textit{any} political party. Moreover, parties often ascribe to a set of distinguishable functions, including the fact that:

- parties organize general requests for the defense/transformation of the social and political order…the most important aspect of this function is the creation and preservation of collective identities through ideology…[select]…candidates to elective office…participating in forging public policy, i.e. taking part in binding collective decisions.\textsuperscript{12} When weighed against the above functions, the PSR failed to meet the basic requirements of a political party. Conversely, in light of this traditional definition, certain political activities of the peasantry as a whole could easily have been executed by a formal political organization. In essence, some characteristics of peasant political behavior could permit them to be \textit{sui generis} an organized political movement, i.e., a


\textsuperscript{12} Angelo Panebianco, trans. by Marc Silver \textit{Political Parties: Organization and Power}, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 268. The referenced functions were defined by Kirchheimer.
political party. Indeed, on many occasions, their activities were more extensive and effective than those of the PSR.

I contend that the peasantry, in and of itself, should be included as a “party,” understanding that the label of party is a loose one. In other words, the characteristics displayed in political parties are evident in the countryside. For example, the peasants were largely united under two main factors: lack of land and oppression. Therefore, their goals repeatedly related to these issues. Regardless of their location within the country, two requests were usually made by the peasants—more land and freedom from the land. At times, the villages displayed greater unity than other political parties. This unity stems from the lack of a political ideology. Since the peasants failed to align with certain political goals, they did not have to spend time arguing over their interpretation and application. Instead, they were able to concentrate on meeting their immediate goals.

Due to the nature of this study, the number of available primary and secondary sources is scarce. While there are a handful of studies on the PSR and a variety of sources on peasants, few of these link the two together and evaluate their political aspect. Instead, most studies keep the two separate. For example, most of the peasant studies available look at the daily life of the peasants, often noting that they do not involve themselves in politics because they are too concerned with daily survival. On the other hand, the sources on the PSR portray the peasants as backward, unable to participate meaningfully in a political movement. In so doing, both sources have overlooked the inherent strengths of the peasant class. These strengths include their demographic might, as well as the fact that they were the primary source of food production for the Empire. Because of the lack of combined studies on the two, this author has assumed the challenge of analyzing them in parallel.

Several types of sources will be used. My command of Russian will allow me to translate the most critical sources. Moreover, there are several memoirs, diaries, and
other documents in English relating to this topic. Most of these sources come from
government officials from the United States and Great Britain. I have also accessed
several documents relating to the party that have been translated and published in the
United States. I do have access to a volume of the PSR’s official newspaper on
microfilm. The poor quality of the original document and its preservation often renders
it extremely difficult to read.

For those primary sources that are not considered new or groundbreaking, I have
attempted, as all scholars do, to apply them in an innovative manner. Instead of trying
to describe yet again the typical life of a peasant, I have taken studies on peasant life
and highlighted examples that illuminate their political abilities and desires. I have also
employed widely used sources to dispel the common misconceptions about the
backwardness of the countryside, such as its residents’ inability to read. Research on
peasant education in Russia proves most helpful. Furthermore, the sources used in this
study that relate to the party are often shown in relation to their discussions about
peasants, not terror or other commonly highlighted aspects.

In the end, I hope to show the correlation between party agitation and peasant
response, as well as the results of this relationship. This juxtaposition will demonstrate
that the country as a whole was prepared to be politically active in the wake of the 1905
Revolution. Nevertheless, the definition of politically active was vastly different for the
peasants.

The peasants had good reason to avoid the adoption of political dogma. More
likely than not, the peasants were not as politically minded as some credit them. Still,
the fact that they were not viewed as a political party or entity should not undermine
their actions. If the participation in the peasant revolts by the peasants were not
politically inspired, what compelled the peasants to join? The common inciting factor
for their involvement appears to be purely economic. The peasants experienced a series
of poor harvests, consequently affecting their livelihood. Thus, they opted to take
matters into their own hands, hoping to obtain justice through strikes, revolts, and the like.

Still, this explanation does not serve to fully explain their involvement, for they realized few economic gains. One historian has noted that “a distinctive peasant culture and way of seeing the world, and especially a perception of moral norms being transgressed, rather than poverty and economic deprivation per se, tended to spur protest and collective action…”13 The peasants believed that their life diverged from their understanding of a moral life. They thought that their morals were being violated because the gentry completely disregarded their claims to land.

Understanding the peasant response in this manner leads one to believe that they were compelled to revolt due to a sense of strict moral responsibility. In all likelihood, the reasons for the peasants’ involvement are numerous and no single explanation can be applied to the entire movement. It is through the combination of these factors that one is able to understand more extensively the actions of the countryside.

Allowing for the peasantry to be deemed a party enhances the study of the revolutionary period. It allows the peasants to be considered a viable force opposed to the government. Simply because they were not advocating the ideals of the other organized, formal parties, especially when they began to espouse the overthrow of autocracy, should not minimize the role the peasants played, not only in the Revolution of 1905, but in all aspects of Russian life.

---

13 Timothy R. Mixter, “Peasant Collective Action in Saratov Province, 1902-1906,” in Politics and Society, Rex Wade, 200. Although the author is dealing specifically with Saratov, this trend can be applied throughout the countryside.
CHAPTER 2

PEASANT LIFE

Въ борьбѣ обрѣмешь ты право свое!
*In struggle you find your rights!*

Throughout history, the introduction of new machinery, social philosophies, and religious teachings often propels society into a new era, one filled with prosperity and success. Oftentimes, however, these benefits brought about by change are not evenly distributed. One element of society that is repeatedly neglected by advances, both economic and social, is the peasant class. With every new era of modernization, peasants throughout the world witness few positive effects. This generalization holds true for the peasants in Russia from the founding of the empire through the 20th century.

A crucial event occurred in the Russian empire in 1861—the emancipation of the serfs. The Emancipation was a watershed in Russian history. Serfs longed for the day that they would be free. Alexander II believed that the institution was preventing Russia from making progress. As Russia was attempting to compete with the West, the ending of a long standing labor system was hoped to bring about a rapid rise in industrialization, thus propelling Russia to the forefront of the modern world. This did not occur. Although many had high hopes for the Emancipation, the peasants’ way of life remained the same in many ways. Whereas before emancipation the peasants were bound to the noble, they now became tied to the land. They were not free. In the place
of serfdom, however, were years of social and economic unrest, which eventually led to the overthrowing of a dynasty. The peasants played a key role in this development, as their shift in loyalty from the Tsar to revolutionary agendas, whether consciously or not, encouraged social mobility coupled with instability and chaos for the government.

It is essential to establish a few general observations about the life of post-emancipation Russian peasants as well as their general characteristics. These general patterns help one understand the role of peasants in the revolutionary process and their development, or lack thereof, of an ideology.¹

For the purposes of this study, peasants are considered “rural cultivators whose surpluses are transferred to a dominant group of rulers.”² It is not necessary to distinguish between the different levels of peasants. Rather, the important defining characteristic of immediate interest is the exploitation of the peasant class. This includes their lack of ownership of land (or, in the case of the landed peasants, lack of control of the land they did own) and the inability to control their own labor and resources. In essence, in defining “peasant,” it is the intent of this author to look at the rural community that found its fate resting with other people, whether landed or landless peasants. In other words, the subject under consideration is the rural population which found itself constantly exploited. Exploitation of the peasantry is of central concern because it ultimately leads to their oppression, which is the circumstance the peasants hoped to overcome and many revolutionaries hoped would spur the peasantry into action.

¹ For the purposes of this study, ideology refers to the belief system and common goals that a group or party develops together with the hopes of attaining change based on their beliefs.

The life of a peasant varied significantly throughout the Russian Empire, but one factor united all villages—oppression. Some villages were oppressed financially, others physically, but all experienced political oppression.

In the final decade of the 19th century, peasants lived in small communities, whose identity was found solely within the village or local regional clan. Even at the turn of the 20th century, the outside world was relatively unknown to the peasant, and the peasants were ostensibly happy with this arrangement. They were seemingly content with remaining completely isolated from other communities. One observer noted that

[T]he various types of peasants were quite distinctly isolated from the other by language as well as by the locality in which they lived. Peasants working in fields of [adjacent] villages, having no common language, [almost] never spoke to each other. They even viewed each other with suspicion.³

Such isolation left the peasants generally out of touch with those outside of their commune and kept them suspicious of outsiders. This is not to suggest that the villages were completely unaware of the happenings outside their gates. Rather, they preferred to remain aloof, concentrating instead on their daily survival. In the eyes of the peasants, what happened outside of their villages did not concern them. They had the time and energy to focus only on their own survival.

Above all, the peasants were deeply religious people, invoking the power of God in all areas of their lives. In even the most modest of abodes, icons from the Russian Orthodox Church were prominently displayed. For the peasants, their world was dependent on the will of God. The peasants believed that they were given the necessary provisions by Providence and to suggest that they were lacking was blasphemy! This

was especially evident in their farming. When asked about the methods that his village used, one peasant was offended at the suggestion that their techniques were outdated. The peasant remarked, “We are the children of God. If he wants us to have a good harvest, He will give us one. It is sacrilegious to do anything in opposition to His will. All is as God wills.”

Clearly, the peasants were under the impression that a good harvest had more to do with the Providence of God than the technology and methods employed.

The faith of the peasants was impressive. They were perhaps the most religious of all people in the empire. Their steadfast faith was evident to all, natives and foreigners alike. Eunice Parke Detweiler, an American who lived in St. Petersburg from 1889-1902 because of her husband’s job, remarked in a letter home that “a foreigner can hardly realize to what an extent the Russian Church dominates the lives of the peasant class.”

Detweiler sent pictures that illustrated the numerous shrines and icons present throughout the villages as visual evidence for her remarks on their religious nature.

The peasants were always willing and ready to help others in need, out of the deep convictions of their faith. Even when their own situation seemed hopeless, peasants still believed in the complete provisions of Providence. By and large they believed that their circumstances would be made right not by the actions of man, but rather through the grace and mercy of their God. This unending faith was noted by peasant worker Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia:

In God, not in man do the Russian peasants put their hope after all the cruel disillusions they have experienced in the course of their history…everything has

---


5 Eunice Parke Detweiler, “Some Impressions of the Russian People,” Parke Family Papers, Special Collections and Archives Division, Woodruff Library, Emory University, 17.

6 Unfortunately, the photographs contained in the Parke Family Papers collection were of poor quality and reproduction was prohibited during the time of research.
played them false; they have lost faith in all earthly things, but the Creator of Heaven and Earth has remained for them the support which shall give them the strength anew and will lead them unto the path of righteousness and peace...The peasantry has overcome...only by their firm belief that God is always on the side of the downtrodden and for the cause of truth and justice.\textsuperscript{7}

They merely needed to keep the faith. The world had failed the peasants, but their God would prevail. They did not need the help of man to rise above their circumstances. Over time, however, as the conditions of the peasants continued to decline, many began to put their faith into action, still believing in the power of God, but realizing the need to allow God to use them to accomplish His goals.

At the time emancipation was granted, the loyalty of the peasants towards the tsar remained strong. The village had a long standing tradition of supporting the Russian ruler, insisting that the tsar was not fully aware of the desperate situation faced by the peasant residents within the village. Sergei Mikhailovich Kravchinskii, most commonly known as Stepniak, noted that

the rural masses are loyal and devoted to the Czar. If to label aspirations, which, in their very essence, are hostile to the name of Czardom with the name of the Czar can in truth be called loyalty, why then a vast majority of our peasants are most assuredly very loyal indeed.\textsuperscript{8}

This statement is significant because Stepniak, a dedicated revolutionary who began his career in \textit{Zemlia i Volia} (Land and Liberty), was calling on the tsar to increase his trust of

\textsuperscript{7} Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia, Miscellaneous Papers, Box 1, Folder 16 “The Peasantry”, Hoover Institution Archives, n.d., n.p.  

\textsuperscript{8} Stepniak [Sergei Mikhailovich Kravchinskii], \textit{The Russian Peasantry: Their Agrarian Condition, Social Life, and Religion} (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1888), 70-71.
the peasantry. In other words, the degree of loyalty the peasants had to the tsar was not reciprocated in trust from His Majesty. Stepniak believed this should come to an end. If more trust was denied to the peasants, their level of loyalty would begin to decrease. Several years later, Stepniak’s fears in this regard were realized.

The tide began to turn for the peasantry in 1902. Instability grew throughout Russia, from the countryside to the cities. While the bulk of the unrest had its basis in economic discontent, several additional factors contributed to the situation. The Emancipation of 1861, which was intended to free the peasants, now–more than ever–tied them to the land. Although peasants had yearned to be free, the Emancipation announced in 1861 disappointed them. Many peasants, unable to pay the heavy redemption payments required by the Emancipation, were forced to return to work on the land, not only for daily subsistence, but also to fulfill the burdensome payment arrangements negotiated by their landlord. Their economic dependence on the landowners in the years after Emancipation only increased. Initially, the dependence seemed manageable, but after 40 years, the situation had only deteriorated. While they were no longer property of anyone, their livelihood still rested with the landowner. The landowner determined when and how much the peasants should be paid. Once their redemption payments had been deducted, the remaining balance often left the peasants with little, if any, earnings.

---


10 Redemption payments were paid by the peasants to the state for 49 years. At the time of the Emancipation, the government realized that it was necessary to give land to peasants, yet at the same time, the government was not willing to take the land outright from the nobles. As a compromise, the state bought the land from the nobles and gave it to the peasants, with the understanding that the peasants were obligated to repay the state over the next 49 years.

Additionally, a new generation of peasantry had come of age by the turn of the 20th century. This generation, innocent about life under the tutelage of serfdom, was fully aware of their freedom and realized that it was being withheld from them on a daily basis. This generation was subject to different economic and social conditions than previous generations. For example, peasants now had greater social mobility. If they wanted to move from one village to another, they could do so with greater ease than in the years prior to the Emancipation.\(^\text{12}\) Their ancestors had not fought for emancipation only to see their descendants remain in bondage, whether socially or economically. Nevertheless, the gentry and government remained paternalistic toward the peasantry. The new generation was unwilling to live under bondage, either physical or psychological. This was the generation that the revolutionaries sought to invigorate.\(^\text{13}\)

Given the changes that had taken place in regards to landed laborers, many peasants had hoped that their quality of life would increase. However, as the years progressed after 1861, the reality of the status quo was evident. Accordingly, many villagers began expressing a desire to help create a new way of life, not just in words, but in deeds. The greatest problems facing the peasants in the years after the Emancipation were their deteriorating social and economic conditions. Several conditions for the peasants worsened after 1861.

It can be argued, in a sense, that peasants were bound to the state even more so after the Emancipation. Prior to their emancipation, the routine functions of local administration (e.g., repair of roads and bridges, maintenance of local police, etc.) was the responsibility of the landowners, although they often delegated such responsibilities to their serfs.\(^\text{14}\) After the Emancipation, the peasants became responsible for these daily

\(^{12}\) Ibid.

functions. Combined with the individual responsibility to their plots of land, this proved to be an unbearable burden for the peasants to handle. “Free time” was a concept unheard of in the peasant world. Every waking hour during the day was spent in the fields. When they were not in the field, peasants were obligated to perform these new chores. Even if they did not have to provide the labor for these tasks, they were responsible for supporting their completion financially. Therefore, this often resulted either in more time spent in the field to earn the extra money needed to maintain these services or in neglect of their agricultural responsibilities because of the need to perform these new chores.\textsuperscript{15} In an attempt to fulfill all of their duties, the peasants became overwhelmed and over exploited, leading to an increase in their social unrest.

Emancipation also reduced the responsibility of the landowner to supply food to the villages when crops failed. Henceforth, when the harvest failed, the peasants could not rely on receiving extra grain from the landholder. Instead, the decision to grant much needed grain was made at the discretion of the property holder. Whenever the village ran low on grain or other materials, a delegated member of the village would approach the landlord to request the needed items. The decision of the landed noble determined how the village would respond. If he refused their request, rioting often resulted. However, if he agreed, the villagers would be satisfied, at least until they needed something else, which was inevitable. Thus, in a sense, the landlord had the power to avoid peasant unrest. On one hand, if he simply shared his profits with the peasants, they would be satisfied. On the other hand, the government also had the ability to thwart disturbances by improving the provisions of the Emancipation


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
Proclamation. However, in most instances neither of the above was ever done, leaving the peasants to take matters into their own hands, even if violence resulted.16

The problems endured by the peasants revolved around one common factor—land. The responsibility of the peasants rested completely on land tenure. This was a seemingly never-ending task. At the end of their efforts, they were often left with little or nothing to show for their labor. Thus, for the peasant, their toils were in vain. The peasants believed that their labor was in vain because they did not have enough land. Their land allotments were inadequate. In some areas of Russia, specifically the Black-Earth zone, an agriculturally rich region, there was an actual shortage of land.17

In addition to a lack of arable land, the housing conditions throughout the villages remained abysmal. Rather than affording them with the ability to relax in their homes after a long day’s work, their houses served as yet another reminder of the inadequate quality of life. They would leave the fields only to come home to a less than adequate house. Most peasant homes lacked adequate living space, ventilation, and circulation. While this was also true prior to Emancipation, given the conditions mentioned previously, poor housing simply added to the rising discontent harbored by the peasants. Oftentimes, the only light seen in a peasant home came from opening the door. In many instances, human odors, combined with animals housed under the same roof, left the peasant home reeking of a foul odor, which would remain for more than half the year.18

As noted above, the primary responsibility of the peasantry was to fulfill their redemption payments and/or rent. Any remaining crops were then set aside for

---


17 Maynard, Russia in Flux, 37.

18 Michael, Russian Experience 1910-1917, 9
personal consumption. Too often, there was little or no food left over for the family. Therefore, proper diet was a constant struggle in the villages. While the availability of adequate nutrition varied among the Empire, the majority of peasants, despite their location in the country, did not have enough to eat, resulting in many peasants finding themselves “near the level of hunger” by the end of winter.19

It is important to keep in perspective the objective of farming for the peasants. Their main objective was subsistence, not profit.20 In the eyes of the peasants, they had carefully thought out their farming techniques. They weighed the resources available to them, given the environmental conditions, and used the results to develop an agricultural system that would allow them to meet their immediate needs. The peasants did not refuse to change; rather, they were slow to change because if the change failed, they would lose precious goods. Actually, they had demonstrated their ability to change when they went from a two crop rotation to a three crop rotation.21 They were not irrationally stubborn, just justifiably cautious. Aside from crop rotations, they simply continued to farm in the manner they knew to work, even if it worked minimally, because it did in fact work.

Although the vast majority of cultivation methods remained the same, the peasant underwent significant change in other areas. Many revolutionaries were aware of the evolving mind of the village. Katerina Breshkovskaia, an avid populist and devout agitator in the countryside (also considered by some to be the founder of the PSR), noted in her memoirs that “in spite of everything I found that the peasant had made a step forward intellectually….The villagers, seeking ways and means for a

19 Ibid., 25
21 While the idea of 3 crop rotation had been introduced in the late 17th century, most Russian peasants maintained their crops on the ancient 2 crop rotation until well into the 19th century.
decent living, had become interested in political and economic questions.” ²² Years of continued repression had opened the village gate to outsiders. By the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the peasants were willing to listen to political propaganda; no longer did they live as recluses. This is quite the opposite of the stereotypical “backwards” peasant. The barrier had been broken. They were able to begin to experience a degree of social mobility. They were, to some extent, becoming part of society.

One of the main reasons that peasants chose to be open to propaganda was due in large part to their belief that the land allotment was still the problem. The government, however, was unconvinced that the land allotments were the problem. Officials believed that the root of the agrarian problem was rooted in the ineffective and inefficient farming techniques used within the villages. When the government sent officials into the villages to evaluate the farming techniques, the peasants were insulted. One peasant expressed his frustration by noting, “The Czar is very clever. He sends you here to show us how to grow more corn on our land. We don’t want to grow more corn on our own land. We want more land.” ²³ Peasants were clearly skeptical of the government officials and their intentions. They believed that with more land their problems would be alleviated. The situation, in the eyes of the peasant, could be fixed if the landowner would simply give them more land!

Moreover, the Russian government was not alone in its belief that the amount of land available to the peasantry was not the problem. A British official, Mr. O’Beirne, wrote to his government in 1907 that giving the peasants more land did not make them more efficient. Instead, he discussed the need to increase the amount of capital available to the peasants in order to improve “the standard of cultivation of the lands in the

---


²³ Michael, 15.
hands of the peasants.” Based on his observations, O’Beirne concluded that peasants who were given more land tended to remain at the same subsistence level, that their quality of life was not enhanced simply because they received more land. Nevertheless, the peasants remained convinced that they needed more land and that the landowners were capable of granting this necessity. The fact that the landowner disagreed simply complicated the matter in the eyes of the peasants.

Thus, the landowner was viewed with contempt due to the harsh responsibilities that they placed on the peasants. In most areas, the landowner simply collected rent. All other responsibilities were placed in the hands of the peasant. These responsibilities included the building of bridges, roads, and storage facilities (used to house village supplies). When the peasants were not working the fields, they were occupied with the obligations imposed on them by the landowner. To further the matter, the will of the landlord was law to the peasant. The landowner was permitted to collect his payments as he saw fit, often resulting in a strained and harsh relationship. From the standpoint of the peasantry, their wretched condition was only heightened as a result of the actions of their landowner.

Together with that, the landowners were often considered by the peasants as the prime enemy, followed by the state. As Jeffrey Paige suggests, “fundamentally the actions of the peasants...depend on their relationship with other agricultural classes, with whom they must share the proceeds of their labor.” Thus, as the landowner and government continued to exploit the peasant, the hostility of the peasant continued to escalate.

---


Understanding the condition of the peasantry and the mindset prevailing in the village is an essential prerequisite to understanding participation by the peasant in any revolutionary movement. It would be expected that with a general decline in peasant conditions, the incidence of revolts would increase. Unfortunately for many revolutionary groups throughout Russia in the late 1800s, this was not the case. Despite the dismal conditions of the peasants, they were not in a constant state of revolt. In this regard, John Tutino offers conditions which served as catalysts to peasant action:

[Rapid and severe deteriorations of rural social conditions, often but not always associated with the sudden imposition of commercial capitalism, create essential bases of discontent. For discontent to become acute, peasant difficulties must be clearly perceived as caused by human actors—landed elites, the state, or both … However outraged, the rural poor generally wait for evidence that power holders are weak and/or divided before they will actually take the risk of an uprising.  

While Tutino is mostly concerned with the agrarian situation in Mexico, his analysis can certainly be applied to other peasant societies. Tutino suggests that peasants do not rise up more frequently because they do not believe they would be successful. In its place, they would resist when they believed that they had the greatest chance of achieving their goals. Unless they thought that the government was weak and on the verge of collapse, they did not believe that their actions could be fruitful. With a seemingly weak government, the chance for immediate repression was reduced, thus allowing a greater possibility of being successful. More often than not, however, the peasants were eventually calmed, and the government was restored, even more convinced of the need to keep the countryside quiet.

The question then remains, why is it that peasants have frequent rural disturbances, either during times of governmental weakness or not, while the working class continue on, albeit grudgingly, seemingly without action? It can be suggested that for the peasants, there is much more to gain, while at the same time, much to lose, such as separation from their families or communal tools. Halvdan Koht argues:

[S]uch a struggle in its real historical sense occurs only when a lower class, that is, an unprivileged group whose work and earnings are being exploited by a higher class favored by privileges or riches, rebels against this upper order...Only an oppressed class wages a real class struggle.\(^{27}\)

Simply put, peasants revolt because they are indeed oppressed. Over time, their labor far outweighs the end result and they decide to take action against those above them in hopes that their voices will be heard.

Although the working class may have certain desires that they would like to see met, they are not oppressed in the same manner as the peasants. Specifically, the working class often had a valuable tool that the peasants lacked—a political voice. Workers unions were formed by the government in an attempt to alleviate the grievances and strikes by the workers. Through this union, the workers were given, in theory, an element of organization that could be used to voice concerns directly to the tsar and his ministers.

The peasants were viewed by the state as a lower class, one not capable of, even desiring, a political venue. Whatever the peasants needed, in theory, the government supplied for them. In the eyes of the government, this eliminated the need to give the peasants a voice. The government would speak for them. The problem with this stance was that the rest of Russia had a stereotypical view of the Russian peasantry. Many believed that “the Russian peasant has not his own fundamental ideas, no purposes and

\(^{27}\) Halvdan Koht, “The Importance of Class Struggle in Modern History,” *The Journal of Modern History* 1(September, 1929): 356.
does only what is indicated or ordered by others. The Russian peasant seems to be a Chinese doll, that lays when you lay it and stands when you put it up."\(^{28}\) This age old view of the peasant class still penetrated Russian society well into the twentieth century. This opinion persuaded, the government to deny granting political freedoms to the peasantry. The peasants had always been told what to do, and if the government gave them freedom, they would not know what to do with it. Therefore, things stayed the same, and justifiably so for the government.

Accordingly, peasant revolts seek a unifying outcome—redistribution of land and more land. Peasants do not necessarily seek to gain a political voice or greater advances in their economic situation, they unmistakably desire more arable land.\(^{29}\) Samuel Huntington recognizes that peasant uprisings "have typically aimed at the elimination of specific evils and abuses."\(^{30}\) These evils and abuses refer to the government’s lack of land redistribution and its failure to redress peasant concerns. Peasants revolt only when there are direct incentives for their involvement, such as the promise of more land or resources. When this demand has been met, the peasant movement dissolves. They have no long-range political goals and for this reason, peasants only revolt and are not the leaders of revolutions.

In addition to the general state of oppression, many peasants asserted that it was because of the state apparatus that they were in such a position. In the peasants’ eyes, the state should be the protector of the people, regardless of one’s social status. Given this, when frictions arose between the landowner and the peasant, the peasant expected the state to intervene on behalf of their cause. More often than not, however, the state responded by crushing any peasant movement, further undermining the people’s faith

---

\(^{28}\) Breshkovskaia Miscellaneous Papers, Box 1, Folder 16, Hoover Institution Archives, 12.

\(^{29}\) Paige, *Agrarian Revolution*, 93.

\(^{30}\) Landsberger, 37.
in the authorities. Rather than fulfilling its role as the protector, the state seemingly sided with the landowners or merely ignored the peasants. The peasants likely viewed this as an open display of betrayal, which intensified their sense of oppression.

It may be suggested that peasants were forced by the state to revolt. Peasants were not allowed any political venue in which to express their discontent. For the peasantry, revolts and uprisings were their only alternative. Jeffrey Paige remarks, There are no other political options open to cultivators who are denied participation in politics, access to the legal system, or the right to engage in the pursuit of profit through small-scale farming. Such conflicts may not occur in all systems dependent on landed estates, but where landed estates exist, the potential for violent conflict is always present.\(^{31}\)

This statement appears to justify the revolts of the peasants, implying that the state gave them no political voice and incited them to turn to violence. Although this may appear as a fact, it would be naïve to suggest such a theory. The state apparatus did not see the need to give the peasants a political voice as the state would provide for their needs. In the eyes of the state, the peasants did have a voice, the landowners would serve as the voice for the peasants. However, what the state saw as needs and the peasant saw as needs differed greatly. When the landowners failed to speak for the peasants in a beneficial manner, the peasants seemed left with few plausible options. One option was to revolt. The choice to revolt, however, posed problems. If the path to revolt were to be taken, the question then lay in what would be the objective of a revolt—land or a new social order. Both objectives were quite ambitious, but invoking a new social order especially so. Even if the peasants were willing and ready to rid the people of the state system and implement a new order, they lacked the necessary means to do so. For one,

\(^{31}\) Paige, 19.
the peasants were hard to organize. Many peasants worked alone under varying conditions. Teodor Shanin notes,

The political impact of the peasantry has been marked on the whole by its sociopolitical weaknesses. The segmentation of peasants into families, local communities and clans and the differentiation of interest within the communities has made for difficulties in the crystallizing of nationwide aims and symbols and developing national leadership and organizations.\(^{32}\)

Secondly, peasants were usually in constant competition with other peasants for community resources needed to cultivate their land. Contrary to popular belief, the peasantry were not a tightly knitted commune, banding together at all times. They also operated on a regular routine—harvesting, planning, preparing the fields, etc. They did not have luxury time that would allow for the organization of uprisings. For these reasons, many peasant revolts were unorganized, spontaneous, and independent of one another. Again, the option of a widespread revolt to establish a new social order was dubious.

Despite the factors discussed above cautioning against peasant revolts, indeed, peasants began taking matters into their own hands as conditions worsened. In the 1880s, peasants were encouraged to take action by some political parties, most notably the Partiia narodnoi voli (People’s Will). In the party program that was released by the Partiia narodnoi voli in January 1880, peasants were encouraged to “arise by communities and send in petitions.”\(^{33}\) To ensure that the residents throughout the countryside knew exactly how to approach their landlords, the Narodnaila volia


\(^{33}\) Russian Subject Collection, Box 6 Folder 5, Revolutionary Parties, “Program of the Executive Committee of the ‘Party of the People’s Will,’” Hoover Institution Archives, n.p.
executive committee included a template for the peasants to follow when issuing petitions:

Petitions are to be as follows:
1. Let the Tzar order a new allotment of land without redemption.
2. Let him lower the taxes.
3. Let neither officials nor the police interfere with community affairs.
4. Let the Tzar call into the Senate, for advice and instruction, elected representatives from villages and the people so that in the future not the gentry but the peasants might be the Tzar’s advisers. Let the Tzar undertake nothing without the advice of these representatives—neither impose taxes nor declare war.34

The party did not simply want the peasants to send in a petition; rather, the party strove to ensure that the government understood the peasants wanted political recognition and freedoms. Accordingly, the party wanted to make sure that the peasants voiced their demands in a manner that would be clear to the government. For that reason, the petition template also called for granting representation to the people—in particular, to the peasantry—as a mechanism for limiting the power of the Tsar and the government.

Due largely to the response by the peasants of the Narodnaiia volia program, in the years following its release, peasants showed an inclination to respond to their oppression. Hence, many revolutionaries began to see the need for propaganda throughout even the most remote villages in the empire. With the help of the Agrarian Socialist League, to be discussed in the following chapter, revolutionary literature began to make its way to the countryside. Initially, five pieces were composed and dispersed. The response was overwhelming, and soon the supply was depleted. However, the need and desire for rural-oriented propaganda had not disappeared.

---

With the help of Breshkovskaiia, the first peasant newspaper, *Krest’ianskoe delo*, was published in Saratov guberniia in 1901. The main objective of the paper was to show that the poverty of the peasants was a consequence of their exploitation by the *pomeshchiki* and government; a just social order could only be established in the countryside as a result of the socialisation (sic!) of the land; to this end a union of peasants and workers was necessary—together they could fight for the implementation of the political demands of the SRs.  

The language used in *Krest’ianskoe delo* was simple and straightforward; the writers wanted to ensure that the wording was clear so peasants could understand the message. The newspaper enjoyed considerable success in the villages; however, this success was overshadowed by the fact that the newspaper was unable to maintain publication as a result of increased demand and a lack of supplies to reproduce. A second issue was not possible. They basically lacked the means to print and distribute enough copies. This propaganda effort could be seen as the first union between politics and peasant, even though the latter unaware of a political affiliation. In reading the literature, the peasants displayed their willingness to be a participant and not merely a passive spectator.  

Simply because the party was unable to fund the release of further propaganda at the time should not discount the attempt entirely. After all, the paper was deemed a success based on its acceptance in the villages. While the party had failed in its ability to produce and maintain mass propaganda throughout the countryside, the hopes of revolutionaries remained alive. The attempt to revolutionize the countryside did prove to be beneficial for it showed the peasantry’s willingness to listen. Much had changed since the “going to the people” movement of the 1870s. The village gate was no longer

---

closed to outsiders, and the peasants were ready to take matters into their own hands, with or without political backing. The time appeared to be ripe for revolutionary activity.

Accordingly, revolutionaries were active in Kiev in the winter of 1901-1902. Breshkovskaia commented in her memoirs that

During the winter of 1901-1902 a group of Socialist-Revolutionary students worked in Kiev and in a wide area surrounding the city. Their proclamations were energetic protests against the political and financial oppression of the peasant population and laid particular emphasis on the peasants’ right to land. They did not by a single word urge the peasants to rebellion, but their propaganda had a surprising result...They were at the end of their patience and ready to listen with approval to all agitators.\textsuperscript{36}

The peasants interpreted the agitation efforts as a call to revolt. Breshkovskaia believed that agitators provided the impetus for peasant response. As such, they were able to capitalize on the frustrations of the peasants. Although Breshkovskaia does not credit the SRs with calling the peasants to revolt, she does believe their propaganda efforts were directed at the right place at the right time.

There were several instances in which the villages displayed their political capacity. Oftentimes, they issued demands to the government or the landlords in hopes of receiving a positive reply and thus eliminating the need to rebel. The peasants of Tver guberniia issued one such declaration on June 9, 1905. They demanded, among other things, the following:

That the person of the peasant, yes, of the people as a whole, be inviolable...peasant education...grade schools must be introduced that teach various trades such as...shoemaking, tailoring, etc., along with banking,

\textsuperscript{36} Breshkovskaia, \textit{Hidden Springs}, 281.
horticulture...and market-gardening...All government organs without exception must be under control of popular representatives, elected by the people themselves under their own system without any educational qualifications...Do not think that our needs ban be satisfied by half measures. We have become so demoralized, so in need of land, and ruined under your wardship that the measures we ask can bring us help only after several years....Either you give us all we have asked for or you can shoot us all and live on...But to us life is actually a hundred times more burdensome than death, and therefore we dare to face it...37

The peasants believed that their demands were fair and meritorious and not at all unreasonable. Perhaps the most telling aspect of this conviction is the author’s willingness to die for his desires. He believed, and presented the petition on behalf of all the peasants in his village, that their life could not become any worse, and even death was a more appealing alternative.

The petitions were clearly initiated and drafted by the peasants, although outside influence contributed to a degree. One such petition, sent from Tashino, Kherson province, in mid-May 1905, is typical of the countryside petitions:

Our needs are great, Your Majesty! For many centuries peasants have endured all the adversaries, all the blunder of the state: our ancestors spilled their blood for the expansion of Russia; for two and a half centuries we endured servitude and thereby made it possible for the privileged classes to live in clover; we alone carried the burden of harsh military service; for many centuries we have had to pay an unbearable amount in taxes and dues. For our unfailing centuries-old service to the state we received a wretched allotment of land with high

37 Paige, 73.
redemption dues, [and] we were deprived of all rights, for centuries we stagnated in ignorance, and we remain in that condition today.\textsuperscript{38}

The petition goes on to express the peasants’ demands, which were consistent with those of the liberals in the zemstvos. However, throughout the petition, the peasants repeatedly express their loyalty to the Tsar. This loyalty had nonetheless become conditional. The peasants would remain loyal if and only if the Tsar embarked on a reform program, meeting their demands and those of the liberals. This was quite a departure from the unconditional loyalty of the peasants prior to January 9, 1905, or Bloody Sunday. After the government’s unnecessary use of force against the demonstrators, peasant loyalty to the throne became conditional. This, in and of itself, was a revolutionary act for the peasantry. Regardless of their desire to remain non-revolutionary, they had entered into the realm of action.

Within their petitions, peasants often held the landlord responsible for riots or rebellions. They believed the landlord had the ability to meet the demands of the petition, thus eliminating the need to revolt. One such example, which was sent to the landlord Yuri V. Trubnikov, reads as follows:

\begin{quote}
Much respected gracious master, Yuir Vladimirovich. We ask you, please, for God’s sake, to pity us…Don’t let rebellion rise within us and cause yourself troubles…things are so bad that we are beside ourselves…The time has come to break loose…If you do not give us the land that we ask for, then we won’t get it. But we won’t do the harvesting…Let us know whether you will or will not give us what we ask.\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

The peasants attempted to have their needs met peacefully. Often, however, the landlords responded negatively. Therefore, the peasants were forced either to resort to

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 165.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 74.
violence or turn to a political organization for assistance. Their political awareness, and subsequent participation, was increasing. Moreover, the response of the government to the peasants was declining. The peasants needed another outlet.

While peasant participation in revolts occasionally resorted to the use of violence, one should not allow this violent method of the peasants to overshadow the goal of the revolt or the “relative rarity of large-scale peasant uprisings, and the particular conditions under which the uprisings took place” should be considered. It is more important to remember the reasons surrounding the revolt than the actual revolt itself. In other words, even though the means may have been violent at times, the events leading them to violence should be weighed heavily. Moreover, “the means used by the peasantry, are generally not violent, nor—and this is even more the point—are their goals at all revolutionary.” While the peasants may have been driven to a state of action, once they fulfilled their immediate means, they often returned to “normal” peasant life. Their demands were generally rather limited and specific. They were more concerned with maintaining their crops and livelihood than becoming a revolutionary. Most of the peasants voiced their grievances to the landowner hoping that he would take care of the concerns. If a peasant is ignored repeatedly over a long period, he may be pushed to revolt as his only alternative.

In the years after the Emancipation, peasants remained enslaved. The freedom that they had hoped for had yet to come. They were too consumed with redemption payments, harvesting, sowing, and upholding their responsibilities to their landowner to rise above the level of bondage known by their class for centuries. At the turn of the twentieth century, many peasants were ready for a new way of life. This life would involve more land and freedom. The peasants were not calling for a new political life, as

---

40 Landsberger, 36.

41 Ibid., 37.
they were only concerned with freedoms that would bring them immediate relief. The peasants failed to understand how the government was responsible for their inadequate state of subsistence. Therefore, the peasants blamed their misery on the landowners. As a result, they made demands of the landowners and took matters into their own hands on a scale unknown to the Russian government and revolutionaries.
CHAPTER 3

THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

“Yet the people can always count on a loyal ally—the socialist-revolutionary party.”

Many members of Russia’s political parties did not consider peasants to be politically minded in and of themselves. Still, the peasantry did possess certain political impulses, even though these were rarely noticeable to outside observers. In fact, most peasants were even unaware of these qualities, which were basically inherent due to the nature of the peasants.

While peasants are not leaders *per se*, their participation in revolutionary movements is essential and cannot be excluded. Often, such involvement stems from either a political party or a local village leader agitating for agrarian demands. This leads to the development of an ideology. When analyzing the effectiveness of rural participation in revolutionary movements, one can argue that the adoption and implementation of an ideology is an essential element. For Russian peasants, ideology came in the form of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, or PSR. Although this was not a

---

1 Russian Subject Collection, Box 6, Folder 5 “Revolutionary Parties [Partiia Narodnoi Voli],” Hoover Institution Archives, Translated, JHH.

2 Even the notable “peasant” party of the 1800s, Narodnaya Volia, stated in its program, “In view of the oppression of the people...the party must take it upon itself, to take the lead in effecting the revolution, not awaiting the moment when the people might act without its help.” Russian Subject Collection, Box 6 Folder 5, Russkaya Istoricheskaya Biblioteka, Hoover Institution Archives, January 1, 1880.
peasant party, it was the largest party that agitated in the countryside and it was the one that achieved the greatest success.

The official formation of the PSR is hard to determine. Beginning with 1898, several key SR organizations existed throughout the country, each one independent of another. Notable organizations included the Southern Party, the Northern Union, and the Agrarian Socialist League (ASL). Each one of these groups functioned according to its own agenda. The Southern Party considered the peasant involvement key to the success of a social revolution. The ASL shared many views with the Southern Party. In fact, the ASL was perhaps the most obstinate in their beliefs regarding the peasantry. For this reason, their involvement proved essential to the SRs. Over time, it became apparent that agitation among the peasantry was much too consuming for one local group to perform. From 1902 on, the above groups began to work in conjunction with each other and became collectively known as the PSR. Even though it would not be until 1906 that the official program of the PSR was released, it is commonly agreed that the PSR was in existence as early as 1902 as a somewhat cohesive group.³

The PSR had long observed the actions in the countryside. By the turn of the century, many members realized that the peasants seemed more concerned about political issues than in previous decades. Although the rural masses had once been considered non-threatening, the party understood that they could become a powerful political force. The peasants, through widespread uprisings of 1902, had also demonstrated that they could revolt, given the right circumstances. This caused the party to think seriously about including an agrarian program in their political platform.

One would think that the party would be much more dedicated in their efforts to align the peasants with their organization. If the peasants acted, which they had proven they could do, they could force the revolutionary movement in their direction. This

---

³ For a more elaborate discussion of the formation of the PSR, see Manfred Hildermeier’s *The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party Before the First World War*. 
meant that whatever party they aligned with would also benefit. Therefore, if for no other reason, the party ought to have included the peasants in order to avoid losing them to another party.

Growing out of the populist tradition, members of the PSR identified themselves as a party of all oppressed people—the workers, peasantry, and intelligentsia. The inclusion and concentration on the peasantry by the PSR waivered in priority throughout the years leading up to the 1917 Revolution, but many key party collaborators maintained a desire to seek the participation of the villages. Not since the infamous “going to the people” movement of the 1870s had any group seriously included the peasantry in the revolutionary process. Decades of continued oppression had further revolutionized the peasantry, so some members of the PSR believed. The year 1902 proved the accuracy of this supposition, and the time appeared ideal to seek peasant participation. Accordingly, the extent to which the party was to become involved in peasant agitation remained a central question throughout the party’s development. However, it was clear that the peasantry was not to be left out. With the revolutionary tendencies displayed by the peasants in the early 1900s, the PSR believed the time was ripe for the inclusion of the peasants in the movement as a whole. The party needed to resolve how to include the peasants through action and not just words. They wanted to make sure that their agrarian program was more than mere rhetoric. ⁴

By 1898, Victor Chernov, a member of the populist circle and future theorist of the PSR, believed that the peasantry needed to be reached. At that time, however, the peasantry was not open to political ideas. Regardless, Chernov understood the importance of including the peasantry in the revolutionary movement. Even prior to the release of the first official program of the PSR in 1906, Chernov voiced his views of the revolutionary situation and its future:

---

⁴ Perrie, The Agrarian Policy, 16
We are deeply convinced that in Russia the future can belong only to the party that manages to find a fulcrum for its struggle not only in the city but also in the village, a party that can construct a harmonious program which would enable it to represent and defend simultaneously the interests of the industrial working class and those of the toiling peasantry. Without some support among the peasantry—and still less against its will—no revolutionary party in Russia will be able to strike a serious decisive blow to the bourgeois-capitalist regime...only an alliance between urban and rural workers will represent a vital force strong enough to break the power of the existing order and prepare the triumph of the ideals of socialism and revolution.\(^5\)

Chernov was convinced that only the unity of the intelligentsia, workers, and peasants could forge a successful revolution.

Even other political parties noted the role that the PSR played in the countryside. As early as 1881, the Partiia narodnoi voli, in its monthly publication Rabochaia gazeta, stated “Yet the people can always count on a loyal ally—the socialist-revolutionary party. Members of this party are drafted from all classes of the Russian land.”\(^6\) Chernov wanted to ensure that the PSR, which traced its roots to the parties of the 1880s, remained true to the original intentions of its predecessors by reaching out to the peasantry. In light of Chernov’s early writings, it seems clear that he was concerned with the peasantry years before he had any concrete reason to believe they would participate. However, the measure to which he was concerned and would include them in the party is not as clear.

---

\(^5\) Victor Chernov, Ocherednoi vopros revoliutsionnogo dela (ASL, 1900) “Chernov on Socialism and Revolution, 1900,” Translated, JHH, Bahkmeteff Archives.

\(^6\) Russian Subject Collection, Box 6 Folder 5, Preliminary Work of the Party, Hoover Institution Archives, 8 December 1881, 18.
Four years later, in 1902, Chernov organized a group of revolutionaries and sent them to the countryside to spread propaganda among the villages. Various pieces of revolutionary propaganda were distributed to the peasants. The prevailing belief remained that the peasants needed to be told what to do, thus increasing the need for propaganda. Additionally, propaganda was considered “the conquest of human hearts and souls, and a propagandist can truly be called a ‘fisher of souls.’” The peasants were surprisingly receptive. Chernov summarized this response by noting that “the little books would return dog-eared from being thumbed through by the peasants’ horny hands…the audience was invariably extremely grateful and responsive.” This was quite a difference from the response seen by the Populists in the 1870s. Now, the peasants seemed willing to listen to outsiders. The propaganda served as an impetus in the process of political development for the peasants as well as the PSR.

The party had needed to resolve how to maintain this revolutionary tendency within the villages and to incorporate it into their political agenda. This meant developing a working agrarian program. After several years and drafts, the party finally settled on an agrarian ideology, issuing a program that called for a variety of reforms and demands. The ultimate goal of the program was social freedoms, such as freedom of speech, press, assembly, and elections. In this sense, the program appealed to a wide spectrum of social classes. Surprisingly, there was almost no mention of distinctions. This was perhaps the greatest flaw of the program—it did not appeal directly to one class over the other! Hence, it remained largely idealistic, causing many

---

7 Perrie, The Agrarian Policy, 16.

8 V.M. Zenzinov, Papers, Box 13, “Memoirs: The beginning of my revolutionary career,” Bakhmeteff Archives.

9 Ibid., 17.

10 Hildermier, The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party, 91.
members of the party to demand reevaluation. If left unchanged, the program of the PSR would have sounded quite similar to those of rival revolutionary groups.

Fortunately for the SRs, it decided to reach the peasantry at a time when they were ripe for persuasion. Otherwise, the decision to go to the peasants could have shown the same disastrous results of the 1870s. As a matter of fact, the peasants were so eager to receive the propaganda pieces that the revolutionaries could not keep up with their demand. They ran out of literature and had to return to the cities. This decision to return to the cities was a catastrophic mistake for the party. Instead of remaining in the countryside and attempting to broaden their appeal among the peasants, the revolutionaries returned to the cities to engage in more rhetoric. Clearly, the PSR was not prepared to stay in the countryside without literature to distribute. They were so far removed from the lives of the villagers that they failed to maintain the sense of revolutionary fervor that had developed as a result of propaganda. Without their literature, the PSR was unable to agitate in the countryside, a clear indication of the party’s aloofness from the one group of people they so desperately, in theory, wanted to include—the peasants. This decision to abandon the countryside resulted in a tremendous loss of momentum from the peasants, a loss that the party would spend years trying to regain.

Still, there was a different means of reaching the peasants and encouraging them to become active in politics. Surprisingly, the Russian government played a role in this development, albeit indirectly. After the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, the government began to consider education within the countryside. In an effort to “civilize” the countryside, the government sent teachers into the villages. These teachers were members of the zemstvo third element and were charged with the task of integrating the peasants into the industrializing Russian society. The teachers were expected to introduce the peasants to reading, writing, and cultural elements. What they would read and write, however, remained at the discretion of the teachers. The
government did not foresee that the teachers would turn to political propaganda to aid in making the peasants a literate class. In fact, Breshkovskaia originally began legally agitating in the country under the auspices of a teacher. Once she began to shift from mere cultural education to political education, the government began shutting down schools.\textsuperscript{11}

The political work of the teachers was first evidenced in the wave of agrarian revolts in 1902. The teachers “immersed themselves in peasant politics through peasant unions, political parties, and election campaigns to the State Duma.”\textsuperscript{12} The teachers had exceeded the task of civilizing the peasants. They had joined in the activities of the peasants and engendered a critical attitude against the government. Due to their involvement, many teachers throughout the Empire were arrested and detained.

The PSR took note of the actions by the teachers. The party was inspired to further the political education of the peasants. In an attempt to avoid raising government suspicion, the party decided to allow the teachers to continue the education process. This time, however, the party would “…instill in teachers a sense of their historic mission to help deliver the peasantry out of social and political bondage.”\textsuperscript{13} In other words, the party would relay the information to the peasants through the teachers. Moreover, they would convince the teachers that it was not enough to simply teach the peasants how to read; rather, the party wanted the teachers to involve the peasants in Russian society and for the party, this meant teaching “of the need to struggle for their own liberation, which meant political struggle against the autocracy.”\textsuperscript{14} The party was

\textsuperscript{11} Breshko-Breshkovskaia Miscellaneous Papers, Box 1 Folder 3 “K.K. Breshkovskaia: Eia Druz’ia v Istorii Rossii”, Hoover Institution Archives, 3.


\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 89.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 91, 95.
so committed to the influence of teachers among peasants that by 1905, the PSR had the highest activity among the teachers than any other party in the country. They even established a union of SR teachers, known as the *Soiuze naradnykh uchitelei P.S.R.* While there is considerable debate regarding the viability of this Union, the fact remains that the PSR believed teachers had become a legal means to influence the peasants. The government overlooked that an instrument under their authority could actually be used against them! By the end of 1906, the teachers demonstrated a commitment to political tasks over professional ones. Obviously, this was not the intention of the government, but the SRs had found a way to make others spread propaganda throughout the countryside. The teachers became such an essential means of political education (politicizing, if you will, the peasants) that the PSR decided to tap into this resource more heavily. For the PSR, the teachers were seen as a “natural conduit of revolutionary socialism in the countryside.”

While the decision to spread propaganda among the peasantry was not a disaster, it was not a widespread success. Even Breshkovskaia admitted that when considering the total peasant population, those who were affected by the propaganda were only a small percentage. However, “a measure of party success lay in the fact that the areas affected by peasant disturbances in 1902 had been those in which SR propaganda was most widely distributed.” If propaganda among the peasantry could have been continued on a larger scale, more villages may have participated in the disturbances. Unfortunately for the PSR, there were far too many peasants and far too few revolutionaries. Moreover, the finances of individual party cells had been dramatically depleted. The lack of coordination among them also militated against the widespread response the revolutionaries had hoped to evoke from the villages. The

---

15 Ibid., 89.

party remained a conglomeration of many different organizations, which proved problematic in coordinating propaganda efforts. The desire to agitate throughout the empire trumped party organization.

There was still no national SR organization in 1900. The PSR still consisted of the workings of a handful of populist circles. In order to successfully penetrate the countryside, men and women were needed to distribute the propaganda, printing presses were needed to supply the literature, and money was needed to finance the operation. These requirements were too overwhelming for the local groups to fulfill. It was evident that a larger, unified movement was needed.

From this moment on, Chernov would focus his attention on creating a national organization. Chernov believed that a coordinated national organization would allow for more success in the agitation effort, both among the workers and peasants. However, despite the initiatives that had been taken to organize the party, this process never completely and successfully achieved its goals.

Aside from national organization, the party remained concerned about the composition of its members and sympathizers, specifically in regards to the peasantry. The Populist movement attempted to recruit peasants under the leadership of the proletariat. After many failed attempts to organize the peasants, the Populists gave up and focused more on the proletariat. Although the Populists would accept assistance from the peasants, they would not neglect the urban proletariat in order to gain support from the rural masses. The PSR directed its attention at gaining control and support from the ASL, as the PSR believed that the ASL shared the most beliefs with the PSR. For this reason, ASL involvement proved essential for the SRs. However, it was because of its view regarding the peasantry that the ASL maintained a distance from any type of national SR party. The ASL thought that the SRs did realize the value and necessity of

\[\text{17 Perrie, The Agrarian Policy, 23.}\]
peasant agitation. Furthermore, the ASL did not want to compromise its beliefs in order to gain national recognition.\textsuperscript{18}

Due to their determination to politicize the peasantry, the ASL deserves some elaboration. The death of Peter Lavrov, a mentor to Chernov and a devout populist dedicated to improving the lifestyle of the rural populace, occasioned the birth of the Agrarian Socialist League for “[his] funeral became the christening party of our Agrarian-Socialist League.”\textsuperscript{19} From its inception, the League concentrated one hundred percent of its efforts in the countryside. Their main mode of agitation was the distribution of propaganda in the villages. Essential to their propaganda campaign was the language of their literature. They realized the necessity of clear and precise wording that the peasants could comprehend. For this reason they supported Breshkovskaia in her attempts to establish a paper focusing on the issues and interests of the peasants.\textsuperscript{20}

Even though the PSR sought to form an alliance with the ASL, the Agrarian League saw the immediate role of the peasants differently than the PSR. The League indefatigably encouraged the peasants to voice and or express discontent over their oppression through protests, petitions, or violence. The League wanted the villages to become involved in the political movement spreading throughout the country. The ASL sought to allow “active peasant masses to participate in the movement.”\textsuperscript{21} This was the most controversial aspect of the League’s mission. The ASL was advocating for actions by the peasants at a time when others, notably the PSR, viewed the peasantry as essential to the revolution, but not yet mature enough to participate outright. The ASL learned through the 1902 disturbances what the SRs did not—that the peasants could

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 46.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 29.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 30.
and would act on their own initiative. However, the ASL went a step further. They envisioned an eventual peasant-led movement in the countryside, an idea that terrified many SR leaders. To include the peasantry was one aspect, but to allow them to lead was altogether a different objective. The party was not yet willing to buttress the ASL mission. As a result, for the time being, the ASL and SRs would remain separate, mostly by choice of the ASL.

The Agrarian League based its aloofness from the SRs on various publications, which revealed the intentions of the SRs in the countryside. One such publication was the new SR central paper, Revoliutsionnaia Rossia. In early 1902, a program for the Northern Union and the Southern Party was published in Revoliutsionnaia Rossia that stated:

the party gives its attention primarily to effort in two layers of the population: the factory workers in large centers and the intelligentsia...The working class...concentrated in large towns and industrial centers, provides the chief support of the party.22

Despite the efforts of Chernov and other party theorists, the SRs did not intend to include the peasants in their revolutionary struggle at this time. Regardless of the implicit meaning of the program, the ASL viewed it with contempt, as the document was seen as an evasion of true agrarian agitation. This publication further alienated the Agrarian League from joining a national SR organization. The SRs failed to even mention the role the peasantry would play. The ASL did not want to abandon their priority of agitation among the peasantry.

Again, the PSR made a critical mistake in the life of the party. From the years 1898 to 1902, the PSR had oscillated in its position on the involvement with the

---

peasants. The reality of the conditions and desires of the peasants often clashed with
the rhetoric of the party. The rhetoric itself waffled throughout the years. Perhaps the
PSR had become too elite or cosmopolitan over the years. Those who were primarily
responsible for party theory, such as Chernov, knew little of life within the villages. Yet
he wrote in such a manner that served to belittle and undermine the peasants, believing
that the peasants could not take action apart from involvement with a larger
organization, i.e. the PSR. In addition, the sheer size of the country and the diversity in
the conditions of its people led to the development of a cosmopolitan party. The
attempts to include a variety of organizations throughout Russia under the umbrella of
the PSR resulted in the inability to come to a lasting consensus of party objectives.
Moreover, in Chernov’s attempts to focus on the peasantry, he neglected other aspects
of party formation, most notably organization. Given that the PSR had been in
operation since the late 1890s, albeit not as a fully functioning or coherent unit, the
release of an official party program in 1906 came far too late. The party may have
found more success if the above failings were not present, or at the very least, not as
pronounced. In the end, it seems that the party, not the peasants, was the one who
failed to act.

The “peasant question” took center stage in light of the peasant uprisings of
1902. The sudden and explosive outbreak of rural disturbances forced not only proto-SR
organizations to consider their role in revolution, but also made the PSR realize that
peasant participation was critical to the success of their party. As one historian
observed, “[f]rom this time forward for the balance of history, the PSR devoted
passionate attention to peasant affairs.”23 In June 1902, the entire issue of
Revoliutsionnaia Rossia was devoted to the peasant question. The peasant uprisings of
1902 did not change the theory of the party; rather, the party altered its program to

23 Melancon, “The Socialist Revolutionaries from 1902 to 1907: Peasant and Workers Party,” Russian
include the peasants. This inclusion of the peasantry, however, did not extend beyond mere political dogma. Whereas prior to the 1902 incidents the PSR focused primarily on the workers, after the uprisings, the peasants became part of a triumvirate—the workers, intelligentsia, and peasants. Simply because the party now focused on the peasants should not be equated with the party’s desire to “ politicize,” or bring about a political revolution, of the peasantry. Instead, the PSR was now aware that if the peasants were not included in its party program, they may fall prey to other competing political options, or distract from the revolution altogether, ultimately resulting in a failed overhaul of Russia’s social, political, and economic institutions. Moreover, the peasants were being introduced to political action. As a result, the peasants were also learning how to become more involved and active. At this rate, it would only be a matter of time before the peasants were capable of standing on their own initiative.

In the eyes of the party, the peasants would never stand on their own, and would thus need the backing of the party. While it is clear that the party was now considering the involvement of the peasantry, the party was still questioning the proper extent of that involvement. In an article published in the June 25, 1902 issue of Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia, the party released a manifesto that seemed to question the necessity of active party agitation among the peasants. The manifesto stated in part:

…[t]he peasantry gives autocracy an enormous portion of its material strength: money and soldiers; tsarist power rests upon peasant ignorance as a heretofore unshakable foundation. Therefore, it is not even absolutely necessary for the entire peasantry to attack autocracy with armed force in order to destroy it.  

---


However, even within this single issue of the party paper, the position towards the peasants remained unclear. In the column just prior to this statement, the party had apparently recognized the foolishness of beginning a proletariat revolution without the backing of the peasantry. They realized that without some inclusion of the peasantry, the proletarian revolution could be crushed by an angry mob of excluded peasants.26 The party may have understood something that the peasants did not. According to the party, it was unnecessary to foment actual revolt in the countryside. If the peasants would simply stop fulfilling their duties, the autocracy would crumble. However, the peasants did not seem to make this connection and instead interpreted the lack of explicit inclusion as an implicit exclusion from the objectives of the PSR.

Meanwhile, the party moved forward with its goal of uniting with the ASL. The party welcomed the merger, as it brought in desperately needed resources. Shortly after the merging of the ASL with the PSR, the SR Peasant Union was established. The Union served as a symbol that the party was now ready to include the peasantry in the revolutionary movement, although to what extent was still unanswered. The priority of the Union was “realization of the socialist ideal in all its fullness.”27 The Union was especially interested in the role of the peasants, as is evident by the following:

Leaving open…the question as to what extent the peasantry is ready for a purely political struggle, we must at any rate do everything we can to draw the greatest possible section of it into this struggle, and to strengthen and extend the political element in every economic movement of the peasantry….28

The SR Peasant Union was, theoretically, the party’s direct link to the peasantry. As the PSR was attempting to assert more dominance over the various SR organizations, the

26 Ibid., 3-4.

27 Perrie, The Agrarian Policy, 63.

28 Ibid.
Peasant Union would function as the umbrella organization for the party in relation to the countryside. The Union was charged with organizing the village into revolutionary circles that would spread the socialist propaganda of the party. The Union also had to ensure that any concessions made by the government due to widespread revolt were not viewed as legitimate by the villages. The Union did not want the peasantry to become appeased through minor compromises that the government might make due to fear. The SRs and the Union realized that any such compromises would be short lived; indeed, they would be issued only as a means to quiet the countryside.

Despite the fact that the PSR had always asserted that the role of the peasantry was essential, now more than ever it began to shift its attention to these toilers. However, the notion that the party was dedicated now more than ever to the peasants should not be overstated. It is one thing to talk about including the peasants. Their actual inclusion is altogether a separate issue. The increased number of articles that appeared in the party newspaper did not equate to tangible peasant inclusion. To be fair, the reality that the PSR was including the peasants more in their program was an accomplishment; however, the PSR was quickly falling into the cycle of revolutionaries who had preceded them—all talk, and little or no action.

The SRs also had more experience with the villages than they did in the 1870s when the “revolutionaries had had nothing except their faith in the peasants to rely on; there was now available a large amount of information about the peasants and the peasants way of life...”\(^{29}\) The SRs could no longer exclude the peasantry from either their rhetoric or action. The circumstances within the villages had altered considerably. Not only had the general rural environment changed, but so had the attitude toward political engagement of the peasants.

\(^{29}\) Immonen, *The Agrarian Program of the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party, 1900-1914*, 47.
While the party was still trying to determine if the peasants were ready to be included, the peasants revolted. The disturbances, which began in Khar’kov and Poltava in March of 1902, highlighted the peasantry’s ability to act. The primary aim of the peasant rising was to obtain more grain to feed their families. Many villages had experienced poor harvests in 1901, and their food supply had long since been depleted. They merely needed and wanted more food. They approached the landowners for more grain. It was often because of the negative response of the landowners that the disturbances occurred. In essence, when a landowner refused, the villagers simply took matters into their own hands. The actions of 1902 took the party by complete surprise. Perhaps this was the case because the party had been physically removed from the countryside for quite some time. Instead of living within and among the villagers, the PSR remained detached from the countryside, preferring instead to theorize about peasants rather than witness the desires and conditions of the peasants first-hand. The peasants had also demonstrated that they could revolt, given the right circumstances. Although the party, and the government for that matter, had once considered the peasants non-threatening, the party now realized that the rural masses could be a powerful force.

Four years had passed since Chernov began actively joining the various SR organizations throughout the empire, and still there was no cohesive party program. As a substitute of developing a party program and then taking steps to accomplish their objectives, the party resorted to discussing issues that were irrelevant to the situation at large while neglecting areas that could have been used for their benefit.

One area of significant neglect was the party’s failure to capitalize on the loss of stature given to the tsar by the peasants in the years following 1905. Whereas traditionally the peasants viewed the tsar as “benevolent,” their circumstances since Emancipation had forced them to reevaluate their belief in the tsar. Still, the ruler was not the target of their anger. The landlord was enemy number one, often followed by
local government officials. Nonetheless, although their complete faith in the tsar was not shattered totally until Bloody Sunday, they were no longer blind followers of him.\(^\text{30}\) Many of the publications released by the party often accentuated the gains that the gentry made at the expense of the peasantry. The tsar, of course, had the ability to change this. But the party was quick to point out his lack of sympathy. The party could have used this neglect of the tsar in a manner much more fruitfully than they did. If it would have relayed to the peasants the power that the ruler possessed, the peasants may have considered the party’s appeals. The party was unable to demonstrate this relationship effectively in the countryside.

The party felt that it needed to come to terms with the commune, essentially the governing body of the village, comprised of senior peasants from the community, before it could develop a party program. The commune had two major functions. First, the commune was the lowest territorial local authority. It functioned as an administrative unit under the auspices of the bureaucracy of the tsar.\(^\text{31}\) Secondly, the commune was the economic wing of the village. It maintained legal ownership of the land and assumed all responsibilities associated with that land ownership.\(^\text{32}\) As long as the commune ruled within the confines of the tsarist government, they were permitted to oversee those two functions. In essence, then, the commune performed as a government of the peasants, by the peasants, for the peasants. Instead of using the commune as an institution to further the program of the party, the PSR viewed the commune as a problem that needed to be fixed before it could concentrate on the development of a program.


\(^\text{32}\) Ibid.
The SRs focused their attention on the commune because it viewed the relationship between the peasant and the commune as a problem instead of viewing it as a possible vehicle for the spread of its objective. In the eyes of the SRs, the commune had become a barrier between the agitators and the peasants; it did not help further the socialist ideals of the party and was therefore unnecessary. In one instance, Breshkovskaia traveled to a village to highlight the horrible conditions experienced by the peasants of Russia. While giving her speech, many peasants were moved to tears. She ended her speech with a call to join in her efforts, imploring, “Brothers and sisters, will you join us in this movement for justice and equality?” Believing that they would rush to join in, Breshkovskaia was shocked at their response:

We are all in full sympathy with you, but we cannot decide upon anything till our eldest brother, Ryobachapka, is here to advise us. Catherine continues, ‘Any [of] you have no wills of your own—no minds of your own?’ It is wiser to wait for him, they continued. He attends to all of our affairs and he once traveled all the way to St. Petersburg in our cause.

The commune had formed a seemingly unbreakable barrier to spontaneous and individual action. Leadership and ranks had developed within the communes, and the party no longer enjoyed an unorganized, naïve village. The peasants were displaying even more signs of political involvement and organization, and the party needed to insure that this increased activity served to benefit the goals of the PSR.

Originally, the party looked upon the commune as a launching pad for socialist ideals. This idea never came to fruition. Clinging to the perceptions of the 1890s, many SRs felt “that the commune…was disintegrating under the influence of capitalist


34 Ibid.
The commune no longer appeared to be a source of aid for the revolutionaries. They believed that it had been diseased by capitalist tendencies. Eventually, it was necessary to pay the commune in order to maintain a business. The commune was now participating in an exchange of money for business rights.

Nevertheless, some party members believed that, if nothing else, the commune had provided an example of socialization of the land. Capitalist or not, the commune served as a working model for the SRs’ central agrarian device—socialization of the land. Additionally, the commune “had prevented the infiltration of individualist influences among the peasants.” Without the commune, the peasants may have become private landowners, an achievement that would have countered the basis of the SR ideology.

With the ever-changing environment in the rural parts of the Empire, the executive committee of the PSR understood the importance of solidifying the program of the party. The development of the SR program began as early as 1902, when Chernov first began to publish his ideas about the socialization of the land, although it had not been named as yet. There were other aspects of the party’s program aside from land socialization. From the beginning, differences arose among party leaders regarding the nature of the program and the party’s revolutionary activity. Chernov envisioned a program consisting of two parts, a ‘minimum’ and ‘maximum’ agenda. Some members of the central committee saw the division of the program into separate spheres as “an expression of reformism.” To these members, this separation was seen as cowardly. They wanted the party to focus on the heart of the nation. In a predominately agrarian country, they thought that the program of the party should be directly related to

---


36 Immonen, 70.

37 Ibid., 61.
improving the life of rural society. This would require that the PSR focus on the maximum program first. However, the minimum program was designated as the starting point in the eyes of Chernov and other party theorists. Only after the minimum program had been achieved would the party look toward the maximum program. The maximum program is, more likely than not, where the peasant appeal rested, and the failure of the party to highlight this aspect resulted in yet more negative consequences.

In an effort to appease the party, Chernov compromised on the minimum and maximum aspects of the program. He added a third section intended to serve as a link between the two. In so doing, he hoped to lessen the distance between them, thus winning support for the overall program. He also hoped to secure support of the peasantry by placing the foundation of the PSR program—socialization of the land—in the minimum program.³⁸

Chernov had developed this idea in the early years, and was now able to incorporate it into the party’s platform. Chernov’s ‘socialization’ referred to two main things: “ownership of all land by the peasants collectively through some form of local self-governing institution, and equal rights of individuals to the use of land.”³⁹ It is interesting to point out that the peasant commune, viewed as especially problematic by Chernov, served to fulfill the first aspect of socialization of the land. The commune was a local self-governing institution that was observable throughout most villages in the empire. For years, Chernov had sought to destroy this institution. Again, this reality points to the extreme disconnect between the reality of the countryside and the rhetoric of the party. It also displays the ability of the peasants to organize themselves in order

³⁸ Ibid.

to achieve gains, albeit region specific. Regardless, the issue of the commune was yet another missed opportunity by the PSR.

Even though Chernov and other party strategists failed to use the communes to the benefit of larger party objectives, the desire to achieve socialization of the land remained. The purpose behind socialization of the land was two-fold:

first, to preserve the Russian peasantry from the contagion of property instincts which would have accompanied the triumph of capitalism in the village…and, second, to open an irreparable breach in the dike of bourgeois society through which the waters of socialism would flow until eventually everything should have been inundated.\(^{40}\)

The idea of private ownership of land was not widely accepted among the peasantry. They held to the idea that the rights to the land went to the person who worked the land. Thus, socialization of the land was appealing to the peasants, even though they may not have fully understood its goals. According to Oliver Radkey, it was the policy of socialization of the land that propelled populist parties, of which the PSR enjoyed the greatest majority, to win the favor of the agrarian population throughout the Empire even up to 1917. Speaking of the adoption of the first official party program, Radkey stated, “The program and activity that accompanied it made neo-Populism the chief force in rural Russia and gave it in 1917 an advantage over its rivals which the war soon destroyed.”\(^{41}\) No other party could develop a program regarding the land that was as appealing to the peasants as that of the SRs.

The development of socialization of the land came about as an alternative to the Social Democrats’ “nationalization of the land.”\(^{42}\) Chernov wanted to assure his party


\(^{41}\) Oliver H. Radkey, “Chernov and Agrarian Socialism Before 1918” in Continuity and Change in Russian Soviet History, edited by E.J. Simmons, 66.
that his ideas did not represent nationalization of the land with a new name. He went to
great lengths to try to clarify this concept. As an alternate to land becoming the
property of the state to distribute and control at will, under socialization the land would
become a part of a co-operative which would be democratically organized. Again, the
village commune was seen as an example of the program. At the time, the commune
oversaw the land. The SRs would replace the commune with their cooperatives.
According to Chernov, it was precisely the socialization of the land concept that
successfully attracted peasants to the SRs. Chernov wrote, “[socialization of the land] is
what to a large extent accounts for the extraordinary success of the Socialist
Revolutionaries in the village.” However, Chernov failed to realize that the SR party
program did not incorporate the peasants in any other area aside from the socialization
of the land. Apart from this concept, the peasants were virtually excluded.

The development of the party’s goals reached completion on May 5, 1904, when
a draft of the program was published in Revoliutsionnaia Rossia. The resulting program
was clearly influenced and written by Chernov. In this draft program, Chernov
attempted to use precise vocabulary in the hope that it would draw a clear picture of his
intentions. However, while he focused on precise wording, the overall program
remained largely elusive. Some aspects of the final agrarian program are printed below
at length in an attempt to show Chernov’s vagueness:

the Social Revolutionary Party bases its views on the question of a reform of
relationships to the land on the beliefs, traditions, and forms of existence of the
Russian peasantry regarding land possession, land work and especially the

---

42 Hildermeier, The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party, 75.

43 Ibid., 76.

44 Boris Nicolaevsky Collection, Box 629, Leaflets, Hoover Institution Archives.

45 Immonen, 78. The development of the program was completed and printed in May of 1904. However, the party will not assemble to approve the program until 1905.
conviction of the peasantry that no one may possess working land as private property...In accord with its fundamental beliefs concerning the tasks of the revolution in the countryside, the party demands the socialization of the land,...those who suffer losses as a consequence of this change of property relations have the right to state support during the period in which they must accommodate themselves to the new conditions.\textsuperscript{46}

Although Chernov was a suitable leader for the party in many areas, “the shortcomings of Chernov are likewise only too faithfully reflected in the program which he formulated.”\textsuperscript{47} While the socialization of the land was popular in phrase, the theoretical principles behind the concept were never clarified. Instead of a working agrarian program, the party had approved a new party slogan.\textsuperscript{48}

In speaking of the development of the agrarian policy, Oliver Radkey attacks Chernov as the author of the policy. According to Radkey:

There can be no doubt that the program faithfully reflected the will of the overwhelming majority of party members. It was their misfortune, and the misfortune of their popular following, that it was more a declaration of general principles than a carefully thought-out plan of action, more a statement of objectives than an indication of how they were to be attained...\textsuperscript{49}

Had the party attempted to define their goals in a less Chernovian manner, Radkey believed that it might have fared better. However, since the entirety of the program revolved around Chernov, the party was doomed. Chernov did not want to share power with other leaders. Had he allowed more collaboration, the program may have

\textsuperscript{46} Hildermeier, \textit{The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party}, 79.

\textsuperscript{47} Radkey, “An Alternative to Bolshevism,” 25.

\textsuperscript{48} Hildermeier, \textit{The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party}, 79.

\textsuperscript{49} Radkey, “An Alternative to Bolshevism,” 39.
been more successful. Instead, the program remained ambiguous, opening up the party to criticism. The SRs encountered this problem over and over again. They were never able to turn their words into works, a tragic mistake in the long run.

Even V.I. Lenin noticed the failings of the party. Lenin also had great contempt for the party and believed that their program was fraudulent. In an article published in *Iskra*, Lenin wrote, “the Socialist-Revolutionaries are deceiving the peasant...[they] confuse socialization of the land with bourgeois nationalization of the land.” ⁵⁰ Lenin furthered his contempt for the SRs by noting that the SRs “have neither a clear idea of their ultimate aim, nor a correct understanding of the road leading to that aim, nor yet an accurate conception of the real state of affairs at the present stage...” ⁵¹ Lenin believed that the SRs were blindly leading the peasantry into a revolution, with no real method, goals, or ideologies to support them. He saw the confusion among the party members and he was aware of their lack of vision for the peasantry. The ambiguous nature of the agrarian program of the PSR was not only evident within the party. Its rivals and skeptics clearly saw the problems with the program. Unfortunately for Chernov, his pride prevented him from reevaluating his program, thereby undermining its applicability.

Several problems are evident in the program advanced by Chernov. For one, in devising a property-less system, the SRs were assuming that the peasants did not desire to obtain their own property. The party was working on the assumption that peasants did not want to become landowners. Due to the disappointment by the rural masses in the land allotments assigned according to Emancipation, their common attitude was that he who worked the land owned the land. Therefore, in the eyes of the peasants, they already held property. They simply needed recognition of this ownership. They

---


⁵¹ Ibid.
truly believed that the tsar would give them the land that they had worked, regardless
of who held the property title. The SRs failed to consider that in the years since
Emancipation, the peasants had changed their outlook regarding property ownership.
Circumstances had changed, but the SRs seemed to base their theory on past beliefs.
Now, the peasants may have been willing to become owners; however, they were never
asked what they wanted.

A second issue left unanswered by the program was state property. The tenets of
the program dealt only with privately owned property. There was no mention of the
party’s intentions with regards to state owned property. Their failure to confront this
issue reveals that the party had not devised a solution to this problem. Apparently, the
party thought that the peasants were primarily concerned with property held by private
landowners. In retrospect, it is clear that the peasantry was growing ever more
discontented with the state apparatus. In fact, they had made several futile requests to
expropriate land from the state. A British observer, Mr. Cecil Spring-Rice, was in Russia
in 1906 and witnessed the growing activism displayed by the peasants. He was aware
of their petitions to receive land from the state, and even more aware of the denials the
peasants received from the government. With each rejection, the peasants appeared
more inclined to take action. In a letter to Sir Edward Gray, Mr. Spring-Rice noted:

The agrarian movement for the present is not marked. It is believed on all
hands that in the spring it will be renewed, and is certainly true that in many
parts of the country the conviction prevails that the peasants will shortly be in
possession of the land…Government is taking precautionary measures. The
Emperor,…had expressly warned the peasants against listening to the voice of
agitators…But there seems to be a great deal of wild talk as to ‘waiting for the
peasants to rise,’ or ‘till the ground is soft enough to dig trenches,’ and there is much anxiety. Not only was Spring-Rice commenting on the increased activity among the peasants, but he also noted the influence of the agitators among the villages. Moreover, the government remained cautious, realizing the severity of the situation. The threat was there, and the government was aware of this fact.

The SRs, however, did not have a solution to the issue of state property at the time, and would fail to adequately answer the question during its establishment. The issue of state versus private property remained a central problem throughout tsarist Russian history. If the party could have offered a workable solution, it may have gained more support from the peasantry. Consequently, it backed down from the issue, hoping the problem would disappear on its own.

Due to the fact that the peasants had one major goal, more land, the party’s focus on a property-less society created quite a stir among the villages. Logistically, the idea of a property-less society was a problem in itself. According to the program, the land, once socialized, would become the property of no one. Chernov envisioned that the socialized land would not belong to anyone, either the state or private citizens. As opposed to nationalization, in which the property would be turned over to the state, socialization would essentially no longer permit property of any sort. Chernov believed that due to his program of land socialization, “property” would cease to exist. What would replace “property,” however, was never specified.

Regardless of the problems resulting from the vague and ill-defined socialization of the land policy, the development of the agrarian program as a whole of the Social Revolutionaries was a long process. The peasantry, always on the agenda of the party,

52 Bourne, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, vol. 4, 10.

finally received well-earned recognition after 1902. From this point forward, all parties, not just the PSR, realized the revolutionary capability of the peasantry; however, the difference lay in the level of involvement each party was willing to accept. Regardless, the PSR decided to develop a program that would no longer alienate the peasant class. For this reason, some historians have referred to the party as a “party of the peasants.” Manfred Hildermeier and Maureen Perrie are quick to use this label, although they differ on the precise meaning of “peasant party.” On one hand, for example, Hildermeier believes that they can be considered the “party of the peasants” because they had a large peasant membership, much greater than any other party at the time.\footnote{Hildermeier makes this claim in his book \textit{The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party Before the First World War} as well as his article “Neopopulism and Modernization: The Debate on Theory and Tactics in the Socialist Revolutionary Party, 1904-1914.”.} Perrie, on the other hand, believes that they can be labeled as such because they were the only party that actively included peasants in their program.\footnote{Maureen Pierre makes this claim in her works previously cited.} Michael Melancon is prompt to point out the faults in both of these labels.\footnote{Michael Melancon, a more recent scholar in the field than Hildemeier and Perrie, argues this fact in his publications previously cited.} In any event, close examination of the PSR program makes it clear that the PSR never intended to be such a party. Instead, their program was aimed at the toiling masses. Although the main aspect of their program, that of the socialization of the land, was aimed at the peasants, this was, in its simplest form, a socialist ideal. And it was for this reason alone – the SRs were, after all, socialists –that the party pursued it.

The party believed that since they had included the peasants it was now up to the peasants to include the party. However, the party did not illustrate to the village that the participation of the peasants was considered essential to the party’s success. In the eyes of the peasants, they were still on their own. They did not align with the party as the party had hoped – even expected – that they would. No party, not just the PSR,
could convince the Russian peasants’ that political alliance with a party was necessary in order to earn agrarian concessions. In essence, the efforts of the party were in vain. The peasants failed to understand the benefits of a political party, nor did they have the abilities to organize themselves and formulate an ideology. They did not even have a strong agrarian leader, one who was able to voice demands and seek political and social compromises. Although an ideology was attempted for the peasants, it failed miserably. The interim between 1902 and 1905 exhibited the continued resentment of the peasants towards the party and the party’s hesitation towards the peasant.

Even in the midst of formally including the peasantry in the party’s platform, many members realized the need to sustain a visible and active relationship with the countryside. While the party was left to work out the specifics of peasant participation, individual members continued to reach out to the rural dwellers. These members wanted to maintain the spread of propaganda and agitation within the villages. The members that stayed within the countryside realized what the party had failed to—sustaining an observable and tangible presence throughout the countryside was essential to the eventual success of the party.

Despite the shortcomings of the party organization and operations, after 1902, the party began to enjoy a growth, not only in members, but also in party units. During the 1903-1904 period, local SR organizations doubled to almost forty. In addition, the number of available printing presses rose from a mere four in 1902 to ten in 1903.57 Given this rapid growth, one would expect that the party would now embark on a propaganda mission to the countryside. However, the successes enjoyed by the party were neither long-lived nor effective. There were too many factors working against the party at this time. It is important to note that the party was still acting as an illegal organization, making it hard to capitalize on quick gains. Every decision made by the

party had to be done slowly and discretely. Furthermore, its financial condition did not allow the party to begin a massive propaganda effort. While the addition of supplementary printing presses and local committees were welcomed by the party, it simply lacked the necessary resources to use them to their fullest potential.

Still, the party had to continue some degree of communication with the countryside. Due to many logistical reasons, the agitation among the peasantry was limited to a handful of provinces. The party was not widespread enough to tackle the villages of vast rural Russia and as a result usually resulted in the party infiltrating only villages on the periphery of the central party operations locations, where the party still had a difficult time penetrating these villages.

Always aware of the peasant attitude towards outsiders, as well as the memories of the ‘going to the people movement,’ many members never set foot inside the village gate. In place of entering the village, they would leave the necessary materials in the street or fields. In this way, the villagers would still receive the necessary information, but the risk of being treated as an “outsider” was eliminated. The drawback to this method, however, was the party did not establish a personal relationship with the peasants, remaining instead an impersonal group to the village, one of pamphlets and propaganda. Thus the peasants did not develop a loyalty to the party. Without any personal connections to party members, the peasants remained outsiders, despite the desire of the party to include them. While it is understandable that the leadership of the party, notably Chernov, wanted to be cautious in their approach to the village, the caution taken by the party went beyond mere carefulness. The result was a party that had no relationship with the largest group in the empire, and the group that the party had agonized over for years. The leadership of the PSR had become not only a problem, but a detriment to the larger cause. Notwithstanding the lack of a personal

58 Ibid., 109.
relationship with the villagers, there were other ways that the party attempted to reach the villages.

The SR Peasant Union, as discussed previously, served as an outlet for the peasants to participate in the political movement. The party believed that with the establishment of the Union, coupled with the eagerness of the peasants to join, the peasants were demonstrating that they were ready and willing to participate in politics. While the peasants were seeking participation, they were not necessarily aligning themselves with the party. It is important to remember that although the Peasant Union was envisioned to eventually be the source of peasant involvement, the leaders and organizers of the Union remained the party, not the villagers. Fundamentally, the Union was meant to serve as a watchdog organization for the SRs. One objective of the Union was to persuade the peasants to revolt alongside the party; according to Perrie, another was to ensure that the peasants did not rise up prematurely, resulting in a disaster similar to the Pugachev affair, the failed peasant uprising of 1773-1774. Still, the existence of the Union provided an avenue for peasants to participate politically. Additionally, operating in this capacity required the peasants to involve themselves and not simply read literature placed at the village gates. Essentially, the party was hoping that the peasants would take the lead, thus requiring virtually no organization or leadership by the PSR.

The PSR hoped to accomplish these goals through the establishment of peasant collectives. The party assumed that these cooperatives would prepare the peasants for the Party’s agricultural policies after the success of the revolution. In the end, these ambitions went unfulfilled, forcing the Union to seek other methods of peasant alignment.

59 Perrie, The Agrarian Policy, 62.
Still, the party was determined to continue its work in the countryside. The Union, working in conjunction with the Agrarian Socialist League, also continued to publish and distribute revolutionary literature in the months after the 1902 disturbances. Several revolutionary pamphlets were distributed throughout the countryside. Some of these pamphlets were completely new, but most were only reprints of earlier versions. Regardless, the key point is more that the party remained active distributing propaganda in the country, irrespective of the content of the pamphlets. Overall, the total number of SR publications in 1903 reached 395,000 as opposed to 317,000 in 1902.\footnote{Perrie, \textit{The Agrarian Policy}, 68-69. This number reflects the total number of copies distributed, not necessarily representative of the different versions of propaganda released by the party.} This increase proves that the party realized the importance of maintaining contact with the village. The fact that the party remained largely unsuccessful in this endeavor is unsurprising. Given the multitude of problems faced by the party, its inability to capitalize on a growing number of propaganda is to be expected, although unfortunate for both the party and the peasants.

Lacking a credible relationship with the village, the party did not experience a successful, large-scale agitation campaign. Certainly, though, other factors contributed to its failure. S.N. Sletov, a member of the Central Committee and an avid supporter of peasant agitation, conceded in 1904 “that SR work in the village ‘had not taken on a clear form’, that the methods of agitation were ineffective because they were poorly thought out, that everywhere there was not enough literature and propagandists, that—in short—the ‘organizational work among the peasantry was simply weak’.”\footnote{Hildermeier, \textit{The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party}, 109.} Clearly, it was not just the lack of a relationship that hindered the party’s efforts in the countryside. The overall lack of organization greatly added to their failure.

Many members of Russia’s political parties did not consider peasants to be politically minded in and of themselves. E. Roubanovitch, a Socialist-Revolutionary-in-
exile and editor of *Le Tribune Russe*, found himself defending the PSR’s position of including the peasantry. In a rebuttal to an article that appeared in the newspaper *Justice*, Roubanovitch stated,

> The Revolutionary Socialists firmly believe that even now the Russian peasantry—not only rural proletarians, but also little land owners, possibly eaten out by fiscal extortions and country usurers—are able to understand pretty well some Socialistic ideas .... [Reaching the peasants] is...the most valuable Socialistic action, particularly needed in agricultural districts.⁶²

Despite any concrete evidence of peasant interest, Roubanovitch was unwavering in his belief that the peasants were not only ready, but also eager to involve themselves, either by their own actions or actions of revolutionaries, in political affairs.

In addition to their willingness and desire to rise up against landlords, the peasantry did possess other political impulses, even though they were rarely noticeable to outside observers. Actually, most peasants were themselves unaware of these qualities. They were simply inherent due to the nature of the peasants. Perhaps the most widely displayed traditional political trait of the Russian peasant was that “they were staunch monarchists, convinced believers in the uniquely valid authority of the rightful tsar.”⁶³ One British official commented:

> The reverence of the peasantry for the Tsar is unshaken. Their political horizon does not extend beyond the acts of the loyal police officer...In their minds, the tsar remains incapable of doing wrong, and if they are oppressed with taxes and

---

⁶² Felix Volkovskii Collection, Box 4 Folder 4, “Rubanovich, I., 1904-1914, March 9, 1904,” Hoover Institution Archives.

steeped in poverty their ‘Little Father’ is not held in blame, as their misery is not known to him... 64.

The SRs were aware of this belief and struggled to overcome it, but this proved to be a major challenge. The party had to convince the village that the tsar was the problem.

In order for the party to gain a degree of influence in the countryside, the myth of the tsar as “benevolent father” had to be shattered. Many SRs hoped that the uprisings of 1902 would eliminate this barrier. While the disturbances had encouraged the SRs regarding the peasants’ willingness and readiness to participate in a revolution, it appeared that many still remained loyal to the tsar. One report published in 1903 in “Voices from the Countryside” stated that peasants had no desire to revolt and were still under the impression that their condition would improve “when the tsar knew how badly” they lived. 65

The party hoped to undermine the stronghold of the tsar through issuing fake proclamations and decrees to the villages. The peasants, believing that these were from the tsar, would demand that the proclamation be fulfilled – or so the logic went. Meanwhile, landlords and local government officials would ignore their requests, resulting in peasant violence as they demanded action. When the government suppressed the violence, the villages, in theory, would begin to question the tsar. The peasants would be left to wonder, if the tsar made these decrees, why would he not support our demands to implement them? Rarely, of course, did the situation play out as the party had envisioned. Instead, the peasants simply continued to place blame on the government. They insisted that if the tsar knew what the government was doing, he would intervene on behalf of the peasants. In the final analysis, these fake proclamations did not have the desired effect on the peasantry. The peasants failed to

64 Bourne, British Documents, Volume 2, 234.

understand that these proclamations were yet another tactic by the party nor did the party foresee the inability of the peasants to draw parallels between the tsar’s rule and their conditions.

As late as 1913, peasant loyalty to the tsar was still evident to foreign officials, as noted by Sir Edward Grey’s correspondence to Mr. O’Beirne of England:

There is no doubt that in this strong attachment of the masses of the Russian peasants to the person of the Emperor lies the great strength of the Russian autocracy. The Emperor does not often come into direct contact with the peasants, but when he does so the effect created appears to reduce political grievances and discontent to insignificance.66

Even though the British official had observed several signs that would lead him to conclude that the peasants were loyal to the tsar, it must be pointed out that the 300th anniversary of the Romanov dynasty was celebrated in 1913. As a part of the celebration, Nicholas II had orchestrated several tributes to autocracy, many of which included displays of loyalty by many members of the Russian empire.67 The party understood the hold that the tsar had on the villages, but it was unable to sever it completely. Successful or not, the party attempted to weaken the peasants’ loyalty in the tsar, but their dedication to the tsar proved impervious to the schemes of the party.

Even though the SRs attempts to weaken the hold of the tsar on the peasants were not widely successful at this point, the effort itself was significant. On the whole, the party realized that “the decisive factor in making a peasant rebellion possible lies in the relation of the peasantry to the field of power which surrounds it.”68 For the village,

---

66 Bourne, British Documents, Volume 6, 324.

the tsar possessed the field of power. The landlords simply held the control, but the tsar was the one with the power. Until this power could be broken, the peasants would not rise up, and no party was more aware of this than the PSR. The challenge of the hold of the tsar over the peasantry was yet one more uphill climb for the party, but the PSR continued to climb, and they were not alone in their efforts.

While the SRs were the dominant party working among the peasantry, other movements were also involved in the countryside. Whether or not an outside agitator was affiliated with the SRs, certain common elements were usually present. Teodor Shanin observed that

this common element is the existence of a closely-knit group of activists, having its own impetus, specific organizational structure, aims, and leadership—a group for which the peasantry is an object of leadership or manipulation. The peasants’ interests and attitudes are only one of the factors to be taken into account by them.69

Even though revolutionaries welcomed any attempt to politicize the peasants, this created an “identity crisis,” in that it was relatively difficult for the peasants to identify the differences among political groups. The identity crisis added to the SR’s difficulty in recruiting peasants. The peasants misunderstood the significance of party loyalty. They were secluded from the competing forces of the socialist parties. For the peasants, it mattered not what party an agitator was affiliated with as long as the ideas expressed appealed to their needs. If the party truly desired to earn the support of the peasants, it should have attempted to alleviate this identity crisis through personal contacts with them. Breshkovskaya served as a good example that the party could have


followed. She managed to be both a revolutionary and a friend to the villages, which is evidenced through her memoirs.

In the minds of the political activists, alignment with a party would bring many rewards. However, the peasant saw no real benefit to joining any one specific movement. Thus, some believed that “the revolutionary political parties which seek to mobilize the poor peasantry through parliamentary political contests, have little to offer to break the power of the landlords over them other than their rhetoric and exhortations to arouse class consciousness.” The peasants were not easily persuaded to join a party. The control exercised by the landlord, combined with the power of the tsar himself, was simply too strong for the party to destroy. Realizing these strongholds, the party should have developed a plan that would have worked within this framework. In so doing, the party would have utilized the strengths of the village as opposed to concentrating on their weaknesses.

This is not to suggest, however, that the peasants were completely unresponsive to the actions of the PSR. Even though they did not enroll in the party on a widespread scale, the party still made an impression in the countryside. By 1904, one observer noted that “organization of the revolutionary Socialist party finds ready and abundant support, because the people see in this party a power that is not only willing, but able to take the lead in the development of affairs.” While the observer is taking note of the rise in peasant willingness to participate in political activities, what he is neglecting to mention is that their participation still failed to go beyond immediate gratification. While the peasants, by 1905, were ready to act, they were still unwilling to act beyond their immediate needs. The party was incapable of harnessing the readiness of the peasants and synchronizing it with the aims of the party.

---


There was not a large-scale official peasant membership in the party due to most peasants’ inability to commit the time and effort required of members. Nonetheless, it should not be denied that several peasants were in fact party members. The extent to which peasants were sympathizers versus members is hard to distinguish. Take for example 1904, when dozens of peasants were arrested and charged with being members of the PSR. Officials entered the villages and raided peasants’ homes. They came across various pieces of revolutionary literature, many distributed by the PSR, and levied their charges accordingly. The government quickly realized that it was virtually impossible to know which peasants were actual members and not mere sympathizers to the party. Although it is difficult to prove just how many peasants belonged to the party, the truth remains that there certainly were peasant members in addition to peasant sympathizers. An official even remarked, “this is the pass we have come to: peasants are messing in politics.”

The party had attempted to promote the need for the formal organization of peasants as well as recruiting them as members of the party. Aside from these efforts, the PSR also helped the peasants learn a “new” language and, in some cases, taught peasants new tactics. In an attempt to encourage the peasants to act, the revolutionaries helped them compose declarations, petitions, and instructions, and they circulated prototypes of these documents. They explained non-land issues and current political discourse, especially foreign-based words like “regime” and “corporation.” They weaned some peasants from their beliefs in the tsar and religion and translated such traditional peasant concepts of customary law as the labor principle—God-created


73 The peasants’ were taught a “new” language in an effort to increase their communication skills. In teaching them proper grammar, the agitators hoped that the peasants would be received with a greater degree of respect.
land to those who work it—to accord with political platforms calling for the socialization of the land.\textsuperscript{74} In an effort to explain the essence of the land program, party propagandist by the nickname “Blue Eyes” distributed the following passage throughout the countryside:

Is it not theft when men go ahead in advance of population and get land they have no use whatever for, and then, as people come into the world and population increases, will not let this increasing population use the land until they pay an exorbitant price? That is the sort of theft on which our first families are founded. Is it not as clearly a violation of the commandment, ‘Thou shalt not steal,’ as taking the money out of a man’s pocket? Not merely the men who monopolize the land—they are not to blame above anyone else—but we who permit them to monopolize land are parties to theft.\textsuperscript{75}

Essentially, the peasants were being educated in the areas fundamental to their political participation. The party focused on these areas and presented solutions to the peasants, albeit ones favoring alignment with the party.

The party was hoping to educate the peasants politically but only if this politicization served to bolster the aims of the SRs. One goal of the revolutionaries was to provide the peasants with a model of organization that would assist the peasants in increasing their level of political participation. Through organization, the party hoped to increase the effectiveness of peasant disturbances. A degree of organization would also establish a sense of greater peasant identification with the movement. The problems encountered by the party in its attempts to develop such an organization rested more with the party itself than with the peasants. In essence, the party attempted


\textsuperscript{75} Zenzinov, “Memoirs: The Beginning of my revolutionary career.” This passage can be found in Henry George’s “Progress and Poverty”
to achieve within the villages what they could not do themselves—organize! This attempt, though noteworthy, did not produce impressive results.

From its inception as an informal political party, the PSR struggled to join not only its executive strategists, but also the largest element of society—the peasants. The revolutionaries were aware of the determining elements of peasant life and attempted to alter them and convert the peasants to a socialist way of thinking. However, even if a political agitator was able to convince villagers that they were being treated unfairly, it was next to impossible to convince them that they needed to rise up. Typically, “peasants are especially handicapped in passing from passive recognition of wrongs to political participation as a means of setting them right.”76 For the peasant, action equated to lost time in the fields. This was simply not an option for a people whose very survival depended on their labor. While the party identified various obstacles between the peasants and the urban population, it was unable to devise solutions. The party had worked hard on developing a working program that would be both appealing and understandable to its members and targeted areas of society. By the end of 1904, the party was still quite unorganized and lacked a unified plan, especially one dealing with the inclusion and involvement of the peasants. Had the party been more organized and program driven, it might have been able to change the tide of the events of 1905. Instead, these events represented another missed opportunity for the PSR to rise to the top with peasants in hand.

CHAPTER 4

1905—APEX OF INCLUSION?

“It seemed to us that history herself had imposed on us a mission to reveal to the people a truth which we alone knew, and thereby to produce a social miracle, and thus to free the people from the sufferings and humiliations which they had borne in order that we might enjoy education and culture. This was our irredeemable debt to the people, a debt which demanded of us supreme deeds that the people might be saved.”

Including the peasants in the SR political program and maintaining contact with the villages was only half the battle. The real challenge came when it was time to rally patronage from the peasantry and organize their support. Three years had passed since the disturbances of 1902. Still, the peasants had not experienced any tangible change. Their economic conditions continued to decline, giving rise to their resentment. Peasants in the countryside had not become more extreme, but more dissatisfied due to recognition of their deplorable conditions. The SRs had remained active, albeit minimally, in the countryside. The demands of the people had not been met. The time had come to call the peasants into action. The year was 1905.

By the end of 1904, as the country continued to suffer humiliating losses in the Russo-Japanese War, the masses were beginning to show signs of a greater political awareness. One newspaper reported,

---

1 Breshko-Breshkovskaia Miscellaneous Papers, Box 1, Folder 3, Kerensky, Alexander, Hover Institution Archives.
The effects of the oriental war are being felt as severely in Russia as they are on her forces and interests in the Far East... It is evident that a crisis in Russia’s industrial condition is close at hand and is liable to give the Government quite as much concern as the prosecution of the war in the Far East. Idleness among the industrial classes of the country will cause untold distress and that is sure to breed discontent and result ultimately in internal disorders which may seriously affect Russian sovereignty....

It was obvious to outside observers that the disastrous foreign entanglement had great potential to spill over into a calamitous domestic crisis. The Russian people wanted to be kept abreast of the situation abroad, and in so doing, the inadequacies of the government were highlighted. In an attempt to ensure that the weaknesses of the Russian government were illuminated, an unidentified member of the PSR wrote a letter to the editor of *Jitsusyo-no-Nihon*, a Tokyo periodical, essentially pleading for the Japanese government to obliterate the Russian government. The essence of the letter was that the Russian government was not acting in accord with the will of the people and therefore it must be taken down. According to the letter, the war was showing the weaknesses of the Russian government and the people. The tone of the letter expressed hope that the Japanese would prove victorious if only to show the corruption within the Russian government. The oppositional parties were desperate to reveal the inadequacies displayed by the Russian government. The revolutionary organizations had taken their propagandizing efforts abroad.

The domestic agitation efforts continued. Propaganda and newspapers were not only making their way to the villages at a more consistent rate, but the villages were

---

2 There is no title of the periodical, but there is a stamped date of May 25, 1904. Russian Subject Collection, Box 6, “Russo Japanese War newspaper clippings,” Hoover Institution Archives.

3 Ekaterina N. Vagner Papers, Box 1, Folder 9, “From SR Party to editor of the Jitsusyo-no-Nihon, Tokyo,” Hoover Institution archives, n.d. Due to the poor quality of the document, the current author is unable to provide any quotes at length from the letter.
actually asking for these items. Although in the past peasants had played a minimal role in politics, now peasants were beginning to realize the desperation of their situation. As one historian observed, the peasants “were probably the chief sufferers from the reactionary and sterile policies of the last two Czars…” They were now ready to become active political participants, at least to some measure. This was evident in their desire for propaganda. Whereas previously political literature was read only by a select few, now entire villages were consumed with revolutionary propaganda. One revolutionary noted, “In the recent past, out of some thousands of proclamations distributed by the socialist parties, it was to be expected that a hundred or so reach the people and be read by them. Now, tens of thousands of revolutionary leaflets were accepted…” The socialist parties could not get the peasants enough materials to read. For the first time, the peasants themselves initiated the desire for information. Now the PSR had to fulfill their demands to the best of its ability.

The year 1905 began with a ruthless suppression of peaceful demonstrators. Prior to January 9, or “Bloody Sunday,” a wave of workers’ strikes had occurred in the cities. Each day, the numbers continued to swell. Father Georgii Gapon, a police operative and workers’ union official, decided that the Tsar needed to know why the workers were striking. Gapon organized a processional to the Winter Palace where the workers could present their petitions to the Tsar. The demonstrators envisioned the Tsar graciously receiving their petition and vowing to take their requests into consideration.

The workers had sent a notice to the palace informing the Tsar that they wanted to meet with him. Immediately, various ministers met to discuss how to handle the

---


5 Ibid., 199. The revolutionary goes on to say “Until recently, a newspaper was considered by the broad masses—and especially by the peasantry—as a ‘seigneurial’ matter...Now, it was carefully, even eagerly smoothed out and handed to the literate ones, and the crowd, holding its breath, avidly listened...”

situation. It was decided that the Tsar would go out to Gatchina and the police would communicate with the workers “in good time, and in this manner the demonstration would be prevented and there would be no gathering at the Winter Palace.” The ministers did not believe that the Tsar should make any concessions to the workers. Still, the ministers doubted that the event would turn violent. Nicholas II, being fearful of organized protests, had no intention of being present for the demonstration, should the workers prove obstinate. In the event of an outbreak, he ordered that the workers be turned back, using whatever means necessary.

The day arrived when the demonstrators marched to the palace. They were not armed; in place of weapons, they carried icons and pictures of the Tsar. Acting on the orders of the Tsar to use whatever force necessary to turn the protesters away, troops opened fire on the marchers, shooting many in the back as they attempted to flee. In the end, hundreds of workers were killed or wounded. From this moment forward, the loyalty of the people to the Tsar was forever broken. Once the petition was refused by the Tsar, “the people knew that the Czar was no longer ‘the little father,’ and they ran through the streets shrieking ‘Down with the Czar!’”

The change in attitude towards the tsar was a tremendous accomplishment for revolutionaries throughout the Russian Empire. For decades, they had attempted to convince the people that it was the tsar who was responsible for their situation. Now,

---


8 Ibid., 40.

9 Abraham Ascher, The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 91-92. Although there is quite a disparity in the reported number of casualties, the official reports stated 130 killed and 299 seriously wounded.

with the events of Bloody Sunday, the people finally associated the actions of the military with the orders of the tsar.

Even a journalist remarked on the significance of the breakdown of loyalty to the tsar in his article “The Russian Crisis” on January 24, 1905:

"The greatest danger to the existing dynasty and the reign of autocracy lies, however, in the demoralizing effect of the events of Sunday on the people of the provinces and the destruction of that childlike faith which the lower classes throughout Russia have hitherto placed in the paternal care assumed to be exercised by the Czar, as ‘the little father’ over the welfare of his subjects. The latter illusion was effectively dispelled by the genius of Father Gapon, and as a result, for the first time on record in the history of the Romanoffs, the streets of the imperial capital rang…with cries of ‘down with the Czar’.

Even for those non-natives who found themselves in the midst of the Russian Revolution of 1905, there was a noticeable shift in the people’s devotion to the tsar. Eunice Parke Detweiler wrote home to family in the United States that the outbreak of 1905 was “the one event in Russian history that did more to estrange the Czar and his people than any other that ever happened.”

This shift in reverence, which seemingly happened overnight, had been in the works for years. The political parties and agrarian agitators attempted to highlight the way in which the tsars had manipulated the populace and the devastating effects tsarist policies had had on the villages for centuries. The villages were reluctant to believe the agitators, opting to see the landlord or other government bureaucrats as the middleman, the one responsible for hindering their access to the tsar. The common

11 Ibid.

12 Eunice Parke Detweiler, “Some Impressions of the Russian People,” Parke Family Papers, Box 4, Special Collections and Archives, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, 22.
thought was “if only the Tsar knew our condition.” The truth of the matter was that the tsar did know the state of affairs for the peasants. After years of work, the revolutionaries finally had a victory. Now, they needed to capitalize on this break and press the peasants to act on their emotions before the tsar had a chance to redeem his credibility and restore their faith in autocracy.

The suppression of Bloody Sunday did not end the revolutionary situation as the government had anticipated. In place of eliminating the movement, resistance intensified and spread throughout the country. Bloody Sunday was, “an occasion that the government could have exploited to its advantage [that] became instead a rallying cry for the opposition.”13 The government had given the workers an opportunity to send a committee to meet with the tsar, but the workers had refused. In the eyes of the government, it had attempted to redress the needs of the workers, but the workers would not work to find a diplomatic solution. In a sense, the workers appeared tenacious in their desire to stage a demonstration.14

Workers’ strikes continued in the days after Bloody Sunday. Instead of remaining a workers’ movement, however, universities soon became consumed with rallies and protests. The government began to see the fullness of the discontent. People were no longer making simple economic requests. They were challenging the very foundations of the government and voicing their political demands.15

To complicate the situation even further, the rural areas of Russia soon exploded into chaos. When the first major peasant disturbance broke out in February 1905, in Dmitrov, there was a surprising degree of organization to the disturbance. Although there was no uniting objective for their actions or even their demands, they were

13 Ascher, 92.

14 Fisher, 39.

15 Ibid.
organized to an extent. For instance, the burning of straw was a signal that it was time
to gather for an attack. Once the signal for the attack was made, peasants went to
neighboring villages and incited them to join. Still, the peasants’ actions were not
revolutionary. They were not calling for a change in the system; rather, they were
simply asking for more land or access to resources. Often, the landowners were told the
exact timing of a disturbance. While in years past the peasants were very rarely
physically violent to the landlords, times had changed. Their once docile behavior
seemed to send a message to the Tsar that they were not acting in a revolutionary
manner. Now, however, the peasants were becoming more vocal in their demands of
the landlord and even expressing the potential and willingness to act on their demands.
For the SRs, the months following Bloody Sunday were its opportunity to make the
events revolutionary. For the peasants, the immediate aftermath of 1905 demonstrated
a surprising degree of political maturity. They were acting in many ways similar to an
organized political party, or at least one attempting organization.

The SRs greeted the growing unrest as a sign that their long awaited revolution
had finally arrived. The SRs were not going to be idle in the “threshold of the
revolution.” The unrest in the countryside began in February, largely due to rumors
that land was going to redistributed once the troops returned from the war with Japan.
The SRs capitalized on this rumor and distributed a proclamation titled “Brother
Peasants!” The SRs did not want the movement to end, so the issuance of the
proclamation, in their eyes, was a method of maintaining the situation. Obviously, the
SRs thought, erroneously, that such a proclamation would entice the peasants to
maintain their aggression. In reality, the proclamation did little to maintain the
situation. This action by the PSR seemingly demonstrated once again their lack of a
genuine understanding of the desires and conditions experienced throughout the
countryside while at the same time highlighting the development of the peasants into a
loosely defined political entity.
Peasants rose up over the course of the year 1905, and the unrest continued into 1906. After their harvests were in, the peasants could revolt and make their demands known to the government. From October to December 1905 alone, over 300 districts were devastated by peasant protests. Thousands of manorial houses were burned and looted. The peasants were not simply demanding more land; they were now crying, “Drive out the squires and transfer the land to the people.” They would no longer be appeased by larger allotments. They wanted the land that they worked to be transferred to their ownership, thus removing the reins of the landlord. In so doing, the peasants were loosely unified in their demands, thus fulfilling one basic aspect essential to all political parties. In essence, based upon events previously discussed, the peasants had become “individuals clustering around an interest whose furtherance they make an issue and whose value they generalize into an ideal,” which is a defining factor of political parties.

Although the peasant movements seemed to be spontaneous and haphazard, one can detect a rhythm. In the beginnings of 1905, the disturbances were as follows: 17 in January, 109 in February, 103 in March, and 144 in May. However, after May, the numbers jump to a shocking 492 in June and 248 in July. When harvest time returned, the disturbances declined to 155 in August and 71 in September. Finally, toward the end of the year, the numbers again rose to 219 in October, 796 in November and 575 in December. These numbers reveal that the peasants revolted on their own time-table, not that of the workers or the revolutionaries. The outbreaks were like a never-ending cycle. As one region would quiet down, another would rise up. Obviously, the Tsar was

---


frustrated with the situation and the inability of his government to control the circumstances. Nicholas II even wrote “[i]t makes me sick to read the news!...On the whole, the position is still very serious as the agrarian disturbances continue unabated...”\textsuperscript{19} It is also possible that the Tsar was in a state of shock, believing that he had provided and cared for the peasants in an appropriate and humane manner. Whatever the case, the Tsar could not deny that the peasants were a viable threat to the stability of the empire, and he had not yet determined how to solve the situation.

With every quelled uprising, the government hoped it was the final round. In a sense, the government received a false sense of security with each revolt that it crushed. Their celebrations were short-lived, however, as the next region exploded just as troops hoped to return home. Cecil Spring-Rice described the impending situation in the countryside and its unforeseeable near-ending in February 1906, to British officials. He wrote:

Discontent still exists...whether temporarily or not, the insurrectionary movement is quieting down...it is confidently expected that risings will take place in the spring...it is as yet unknown what solution will be proposed for the land question, but it is agreed on all sides that some solution must be found or that the consequences for the Empire will be most serious.\textsuperscript{20}

The answer was unclear. The only clear aspect of the revolution at this point was that it had not ended and in fact could intensify. The government needed to solve the problem before the people took over.

With the troops at war against Japan, the peasants realized that if they acted now, their chances of succeeding were increased. Even for those peasants who did not

\textsuperscript{19} Edward J. Bing, ed., \textit{The Secret Letters of the Last Tsar}, Being the Confidential correspondence between Nicholas II and his mother, Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1938), 183, 194.

\textsuperscript{20} Bourne, \textit{British Documents}, Volume 4, 2-3.
necessarily think they could gain any long lasting and meaningful concessions (i.e. land allotments, reduction in redemption payments), the reality that the government did not have the resources adequate to put the uprisings down in a timely manner was not debated. For once, the country as a whole, if it chose to revolt, could render the government helpless, forcing concessions. Due to the reality that the peasants were the most numerous and arguably the most oppressed, it seems only natural that they would be more likely to rise up during this time. In fact, if they did rise up, they had the most potential to levy serious consequences against autocracy. A mere halt in agricultural production would be crippling to any government, let alone one already in peril. Therefore, any participation by the peasants served to maintain the revolution in the cities. While it is true that the urban revolution occurred without the peasants, it is also true that had the countryside not erupted, the workers’ movement may have been speedily crushed. Certainly, the frustration of the government was heightened with two often competing segments of society erupting.

The government desperately tried to keep the events in the cities from reaching the villages, and vice-versa. This was almost impossible for the government to do, and the two groups helped to foster a perpetual continuation of eruptions throughout the empire. In fact, it was often through the workers returning to the villages that the peasants learned of the revolutionary movement. One governor observed, “At my disposal are…indications that workers returning from factories in the chief cities and persons sent from factories and workshops to their places of registry [in the communes] act as disturbing elements among the peasants.”21 News of the worker revolts were spread to the peasants by the workers themselves. The villages were not necessarily receiving word from outside sources regarding the revolutionary situation in the cities. While the PSR tried to claim credit for the peasant actions, oftentimes these occurred

---
without the direct involvement or encouragement from any party. The countryside was becoming a participant in the situation, even though their participation came independent – and at times ahead – of the demands of political parties.

The revolution in the countryside was more than a continuance of the workers’ movement. Clearly, the peasantry had demands that were different from the workers. The reasons for the agrarian unrest were many. These included the following:

- an acute shortage of land,
- hunger,
- bad harvests,
- the sacrifices of the war against Japan...

...all this strengthened the conviction of the peasantry in many parts of European Russia, especially in the black-earth zone, that only expelling the noble landowners would end their misery. The latent dissatisfaction of the peasantry was now openly expressed.\(^\text{22}\)

Years of oppression and disregard had finally led to an eruption from village to village. The involvement of the peasantry now seemed inevitable. While these conditions had been prevalent in the countryside for years, their combination with the Russo-Japanese War helped the villages explode. It was now obvious to all, not just those within the Russian Empire, that the conditions of the peasantry were deplorable.

While there were times when the movements in the countryside and the city erupted simultaneously, the rural uprising did not develop on the same pattern as the workers’ revolt, nor did they have the same objectives. Whereas the workers’ demanded rights such as labor unions and eight hour workdays, the peasantry had different goals. More often than not, the peasants needed one of two things—land or food. However, because of their need for food, the peasantry could not revolt at whim. They had to wait until the harvest was in and the fields were ready for the next season. This meant that they often revolted at different times than the cities. The workers’ were not tied to the calendar of the crops. Additionally, the method of revolt differed from

---

\(^{22}\) Hildermeier, *The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party*, 130.
region to region. While the majority of rural Russia revolted against the landlords, the Baltic provinces and the Caucasus directed their grievances towards the government.\textsuperscript{23} Not all regions believed that the government was on their side, and they acted accordingly. There was little unity in the demands of both the workers and the peasants. In actuality, there was little unity throughout rural society. The truth of the matter is there were simply too many people seeking too many different goals. This fact helped to save the government from the Revolution of 1905.

The peasantry was much more widespread geographically than were the workers. This had both a positive and negative impact. On the positive side, the widespread population kept the momentum going. When one region would fade away, another would join in the movement. However, the diversity and geography of the population also contributed to the negative aspect. Their extensive dispersal prevented any meaningful attempt to organize the movement and have the peasantry act as a unified class. Had the movement in the countryside been united, its effect could have been far greater. Peasants lacked the resources and know-how required to unite. In essence, they became separate, competing movements. The differences among and within the peasantry were more pronounced than the differences among the workers, but this did not stop them from acting. They were willing to contribute to the movement to the best of their ability. More importantly, they were not as isolated from the outside as was often thought to be the case, as is evident in reports previously mentioned.

The common attitude toward the peasantry is that of seclusion and backwardness. In a newspaper dated December 29, 1904, the author claimed that if a revolt were to occur, the peasants would not be changed at all. He goes on to state that the peasants “have not known enough to be discontented with their lot, no matter how

\textsuperscript{23} Ascher, \textit{The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray}, 162.
hard it was. Held in the strong bonds of ignorance and superstition, they have looked upon the Czar as almost a supernatural personage…” Inexplicably, this author was still of the belief that the peasant was naïve and uninterested. His statement seems more rooted in traditional thought of peasant intellectual capabilities rather than more recent developments, as the peasants had clearly displayed a propensity to advance. It must also be assumed that since the article was printed in the newspaper, journalists had to be sure to reflect the general practices and beliefs of the government. This assumption would then lend to the conclusion that during this time, even the government believed that the peasants were still non-threatening. In the days following Bloody Sunday, however, the government had to realize the falsity of this belief.

While still skeptical of outsiders, some villagers now would cooperate with agitators. Even when the peasants would not listen to the agitators, their very presence served as a reminder to the village that all was not well. The agitators enjoyed greater success in some regions, while they remained virtually non-existent in others. On April 7, 1905, in a report to the Minister of the Interior, Prince Urusov, Governor of Tver Guberniya, observed, “equally small is the influence of agitators, trying to involve the people in the anti-government struggle on questions of constitutions and political rights. These matters on the whole interest the peasants little…” In his region, Urusov had noticed little if any effect of agitators. Other regions, however, were certainly susceptible to outsiders. The most successful agitators were those who could advocate demands that appealed to the peasants. They had to convey the message that their lives could be better if the demands addressed by the party were met. The problem was that even the party could not agree on the demands!

24 Russian Subject Collection, Box 6, “Russo Japanese War newspaper clippings,” Hoover Institution Archives.

25 Arnot, A Short History of the Revolution from 1905 to Present Day, 70.
Even though the government was concerned about the actions of revolutionaries among the peasants, the government had not yet realized that the peasantry, in and of itself, had developed into a political force. By 1905, the peasants were a contender, as they had not only opened up their gates to outsiders, they had also ventured outward. It is also commonplace to portray the village as closed to outsiders. While it is true that peasants were extremely suspicious of outsiders, the village gate was not the bounds of their world. Many villages sought information from non-peasants. Some villages would even send residents into the city to read periodicals.\(^26\) This was their way of bringing information into the village rather than wait for outsiders to bring it to them.

Often, the peasantry is overlooked or excluded completely from studies of the 1905 Revolution. Although their participation is not denied, the extent to which they were critical participants is often underestimated. The Revolution of 1905 would not have lasted as long as it did had it not been for the peasantry. The workers had not planned or counted on the peasants participating in the revolt. Had it remained concentrated in the cities, the government would have been able to handle the situation and possibly extinguish it within weeks. Rather, the peasants were able to further dissipate the resources of the government throughout the Empire, which resulted in a slow response, allowing for more to join in and further complicate the situation. Certainly, then, the peasants were not ignorant of outside activities. They did not believe that they had initiated a movement. They knew that the cities were erupting and saw an opportunity to do the same.

The peasants were kept abreast of the revolutionary movement through a number of methods. They were able to obtain newspapers recounting the strikes in the cities. Although the majority of peasants were illiterate, “peasant illiteracy was no impediment to the influence of the press—literate peasants simply read aloud to their

neighbors. The village was hardly isolated from the outside world.”  

Furthering his report previously mentioned, Prince Urusov remarked, “one must admit that the influence of the papers on the peasantry is at present very great and that the papers’ present tone of passion, of disquiet with respect to all issues, regardless of their political position, helps to excite the people….”  

The government had recognized the impact of newsprint on the peasantry, and the villages evinced not only an interest but an understanding of the situation. Furthermore, this understanding led to greater involvement, bearing striking resemblance to the formation of a political party, even if only the initial stages of development.

The movement in the countryside was even furthered by the landlords themselves. When a landlord was in desperate need of laborers due to strikes that occurred on his own property, he would often send word to other villages seeking extra hands. The village interpreted this cry as a sign of continued unrest. They knew that if a landlord was seeking more toilers, it was because of strikes. In times of peace, the availability of workers was plentiful. Therefore, peasants would often rise up, attempting to maintain the revolutionary momentum. It was also standard for the landlord to send for troops from neighboring villages during an uprising. It must be remembered that troops were often comprised of peasants! Immediately, the peasants in the village were alerted of an uprising. What had started as an isolated attack against one landlord now spread to surrounding villages. Peasants in the “relief” village began to question if they could benefit from a revolt. More often than not, they resolved that they may not benefit, per se, but they certainly did not have much to lose. Now, instead


of receiving military backing to help put down a revolt, the peasant soldiers joined the revolt, furthering the chaotic situation in the rural regions.

The growing militancy of the peasantry was also often furthered through the commune. The heads of household met and discussed the possibility of action. The commune held debates and discussions of tactics, which fostered peasant action. Considered the voice of authority for the village, the commune decided how the village would respond. Their willingness to participate in the revolution infuriated government officials who believed that the purpose of the commune was to prevent revolutionary ideas from entering the village. Instead, the commune was becoming the socialist structure that revolutionaries had longed for and the government feared. It has been noted that, “in the 1905-06 revolution, the Russian peasant commune dramatically revealed its additional latent function as a generator of egalitarian ideology and as a school for collective action of a kind capable of turning into revolt overnight.”

Whereas the SRs had evoked the commune in the past for its help in the spread of revolutionary ideas, the commune now appeared to act without influence of the party. When the SRs failed to penetrate the commune for its benefit, the party sought to eliminate it, seeing it as a competition rather than an aid in accomplishing its policy of socialization of the land. On the contrary, in the months following Bloody Sunday, the commune had acted on its own, advancing a step in front of the party, and once again displaying qualities attributed to politicization.

Once again it is necessary to confront the issue of the commune, as it posed problems for not just the PSR, but also for the government. The primary objective of the commune was to serve as a governmental arm for the countryside. Its purpose was to oversee the daily activities within each village. For the party, the commune was viewed as an organization that fostered a sense of individual ownership and regulation. This

---

30 Shanin, The Awkward Class, 37.
was certainly not the case. If anything, the commune should have been used by the party as an experiment in peasant organization and leadership. Nonetheless, the party dedicated its efforts regarding the commune at destruction.\textsuperscript{31}

On the other side, the government seemed to view the commune as a means of giving the peasants ownership in their livelihood. The government did not foresee the peasants using the commune as a means of political organization, which obviously occurred in the months after the Revolution of 1905. As a result of the events following the Revolution, the government actively sought to destroy the peasant commune, thus recognizing the potential political ramifications of a politically motivated peasant class.\textsuperscript{32}

The disturbances in the countryside took several forms. In some instances, the peasants simply refused to pay rent and taxes. In others, however, they refused to work. Still, some peasants were involved in the illegal pasturing of livestock and felling of timber.\textsuperscript{33} Many kept as their goal achieving land, either at the expense of the landowner or the state. When violence was used, primarily in the black-earth region, it was for a purpose. Many peasants resorted to violence as a means to discourage the landowners from returning to their manors.

It is important to remember that even now peasants attempted to resolve their grievances without resorting to violence.\textsuperscript{34} They often petitioned and signed declarations in an attempt to have their demands met. They did not threaten the government or the landlords. The only threat mentioned involved harm to themselves.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{33} Walkin, The Rise of Democracy in Pre-Revolutionary Russia: Political and Social Institutions Under the Last Three Czars, 206.

\textsuperscript{34} Examples of these petitions can be found in Chapter 2, page 31.
The government responded initially to the events of 1905 by releasing concessions specific to the region in protest. The government wanted to avoid releasing decrees that would change the social order, yet it needed to appease the peasants. The Tsar relied on the ignorance of the countryside to blindly accept the provisions released by the government, but the revolutionaries were immediately skeptical of any governmental concessions. One group of exiled revolutionaries meeting in London released a “resolution” in February 1905 in which they stated, “This public meeting…expresses its complete want of confidence in the new attempts of the Czar’s government to avert by means of partial concessions which they have neither desire nor ability to carry out, the inevitable downfall of Czarism in Russia.”

The revolutionaries abroad recognized the falsehood in the concessions and were hoping to relate this to the top party officials in Russia. They recognized the government’s desire to simply end the situation, with little or no attempt to change.

While these revolutionaries were releasing this information from abroad, its importance should not be minimized. Those in exile were highly regarded party intellectuals and Chernov often heeded the advice of intellectuals of the like. Moreover, it is sometimes those who are on the outside who have the most accurate view of the situation. They were removed from the chaotic reality of what Russia had become, thus allowing them to think and rationalize in a more coherent and logical fashion.

The problem with the London resolution was that they were encouraging the party to act in response to the government. In other words, the PSR had not been visible to the majority of the peasants since the inception of the revolutionary situation in 1905. Now, when the government attempted to redress the peasants’ concerns, the members in exile were encouraging the party to jump in, urging the villages to refute the

concessions alluded by the government. In the eyes of the rural masses, the party had secluded itself from their affairs unless it appeared that the villages might do something to counteract the objectives of the party.

The Tsar was alarmed at the growing political activities among the peasant class. The monarchy had enjoyed centuries of uncontested rule throughout the countryside. Now, the peasants were directly challenging the leadership of the Tsar, either intentionally or not. The Tsar sent a message to the Prime Minister, P.A. Stolypin, on August 6, 1906 giving instructions on how the Tsar wanted the situation among the peasants handled. He stated,

If the rural communities have really empowered their representatives to address themselves to me with such petitions, it is necessary to explain to them all the insolence of such an act and warn them of the grave consequences, to which they subject themselves….³⁶

Nearly two weeks later, Nicholas II continued to Stolypin:

the very life of the people is in danger. By the Manifesto of July 9th it was declared that no insubordination or lawlessness will be permitted and law breakers will be compelled to obey the Tsar’s will. The time has come to carry out the words of the Manifesto….³⁷

It is clear from these letters the Tsar understood that the situation was getting out of hand and that it required action. He hoped to reassert his authority and entice the peasants back into a state of blind submission, using force if necessary. Nicholas II explained to Stolypin the seriousness of the peasant actions. The problem is that this message was not related to the peasants. Stolypin acted as a middle man between the Tsar and the peasants. The biggest problem facing the government at the time,

³⁶ Frank Golder Collection, Box 14, Folder 10 “Nicholas II, Emperor of Russia, 1868-1918, Correspondance, Stolypin, P.A., 1906-1911,” Hoover Institution Archives.

³⁷ Ibid., letter dated August 14, 1906.
however, was the lack of troops available to quash the revolts. The Tsar wrote to his mother on November 17, 1905, that

another unhappy week has passed. For the most part the peasant disturbances are still going on—in some places they are over, but in others only just beginning. They are difficult to put down because there are not enough troops or Cossacks to go round.\textsuperscript{38}

Although the Tsar shared his most intimate fears and frustrations with his mother during this time, to the rest of the Russian Empire he appeared steadfast in his resolve—and belief—that he would prevail, even if he did not know how.

The peasants had managed to gain not only the attention of the government, but also the PSR, as well as display their political potential to the Tsar, his ministers, and revolutionaries alike. The government returned to the use of terror tactics to scare the peasants into acquiescence. The tsar believed that the peasants had been provoked into action and simply needed to be reminded of their position in the social estate system in Russia for the state of affairs to return to “normal.” This use of violence was just what the party needed to demonstrate to the peasants the cruel nature of the Tsar. Yet the party once again failed to capitalize on the brutality with which the government, acting on orders by the Tsar, responded to the peasant actions.

The failure for the party to exploit this development is rooted in the party’s view of peasant participation in revolutionary movements in general. While the SRs realized the importance of immediate action, they remained dubious of the peasants’ ability to participate meaningfully in a revolution. Situations that seemed ripe for action had presented themselves to peasants over the years. Nevertheless, the peasants had remained passive, fomenting an occasional disturbance or two. The party wanted 1905 to be different. The ability of the peasants to respond was evident in 1902. The party

\textsuperscript{38} Bing, Nicholas II, Emperor of Russia, 192.
was counting on them again. However, the revolt was no longer about failed harvests.
It was about a failed government. The SRs had to relay this message to the countryside, which still thought in matters relative to their survival. Many in the party still believed that

when peasants do act, the only way in which they can improve their economic position is through the seizure of lords’ lands. The acquisition of additional lands, not the change of the political system, is the ultimate objective of cultivators who draw their income from the land. In fact the peasants are seldom beneficiaries of the political changes set in motion.\(^{39}\)

Therefore, the task of the SRs was to convince the peasants that political changes would benefit the peasantry. Regardless of what their program stated on paper, the SRs had to show the peasantry that they were in fact the “party of the people”; accordingly, the party had to help foster a political mindset among the peasantry that would translate into actions that would endorse the PSR.

The political involvement of the peasantry is also visible in its response to the Ukase of February 18, 1905. Authorities tried to prevent the Ukase from reaching the villages, but their efforts were in vain. The Ukase was kept from the villagers largely because even those in the government did not understand the message. The Ukase seemed to purport competing claims. It declared that the integrity of the autocratic state was to be maintained, while at the same time encouraged the Committee of Ministers to include the people in the governing process of the state. For many, both in the government and general citizens, the Ukase contradicted itself. Accordingly, upholding the Ukase proved difficult. Many simply chose to ignore the first part of the Ukase, the one dealing with the autocratic state, and instead honor the portion that seemed to

---

grant concessions. In so doing, many citizens believed that they were justified in their actions, whatever those actions may have been.

The arrival of the Ukase to the countryside was largely due to the zemstvos, or local governments. In one province alone the zemstvo distributed 100,000 copies of the ukase in April. The peasant response to the ukase was expected—hundreds of petitions arrived at St. Petersburg. The petitions were clearly initiated and drafted by the peasants, although outside influence contributed to a degree. One newspaper captured the change in attitude, “Heretofore the popular loyalty and devotion to the Czar has not been impaired, but yesterday’s events have changed all of this....” To earn the support of the peasants, the Tsar had to comply with their demands. Gone were the days of unmitigated loyalty. The peasants now wanted to see the fruits of their loyalty.

Never before had the peasants aligned themselves with a political group, and never before had they placed their loyalty on the line. This development alone was representative of the revolutionary advances of the peasantry over the past decade. The peasants had entered the realm of action, despite years of self-imposed exclusion. The party desperately needed to capitalize on this.

While the party strategized on how to incorporate recent developments into their plan, the peasants continued to engage in political action. Perhaps the most impressive testimony to their newly-found political consciousness was evidenced in the summer of 1905 when they stated that “it is necessary...to declare that we are here, that we hate the old system and are prepared to struggle of a new one—in some manner to make

---


41 Ibid, 164.

42 Russian Subject Collection, Box 6, Folder “Russo Japanese War newspaper clippings,” “Bloodshed in St. Petersburg” dated January 23, 1905, Hoover Institution Archives.
ourselves known to the government and the revolutionaries."\(^{43}\) From this statement, it is clear that the peasants were ready to become involved. Exactly what form of involvement was still unclear. All they needed now was an outlet to aid them in their actions.

The peasants still wanted land and they still believed that the landlord could give it to them. The government disagreed with the peasants, as did the landlords for that matter. This disagreement strained relations between the government and rural communities. The Tsar wanted the peasants to think that he was on their side, but he *had* to stay on the side of the landlords in order to maintain cohesion of the Empire. The Ukase of February 18 was still looming in the mind of the peasants. They believed that the land was theirs and the ukase reiterated their long-held claim of land ownership. The landlords felt threatened, but the government as a whole remained confident. The government doubted that the peasants, in and of themselves, could invoke a successful revolution. However, the officials recognized the power that political parties now held over the villages and warned the peasants of their danger. The PSR had long awaited this type of influence in the countryside.

Despite the reality that the PSR was constantly absorbed with the peasant question, the disturbances in the countryside forced the party to once again reevaluate its strategies for engaging the peasantry under SR leadership. Less than a month after the first report of peasant unrest, the party released a manifesto to the peasants stating, “Drive the landlords and the rich villagers out of their warm, profitable places; beat, cut, choke the lackeys of the Tsarist government—beat them without mercy, just as they have no mercy on you, the defenseless ones.”\(^{44}\) In June 1905, the party held a conference


\(^{44}\) Robinson, *Rural Russia Under the Old Regime*, 159.
in order to discuss how it would incorporate the peasantry within the formal PSR structure. Once again, it released a proclamation. This time, the party called for an end of the regime and a return of the land to the peasants.45

Absent from the party’s proclamations were specific orders that the peasants could follow. The proclamations did not give the peasants any direction. In its place, they served as instigators, reminding the peasants of their oppression and encouraging them to revolt. In this regard, it appears as though the SRs inclusion of the peasantry was still theoretical. They could issue declarations that would rouse the village, but they could not figure out how to physically include them in the party and the revolutionary movement. Nonetheless, they would not give up. They continued to try to incorporate the peasantry into their party. They had to determine how to move past mere rhetoric and into action meanwhile competing with the willingness of the peasants to act alone.

By the fall of 1905, the PSR showed signs of a greater inclusion of the peasantry. They knew that if they did not act fast, the moment might pass by, leaving them with the empty results of 1902. Immediately, local SR committees established a peasant commission or enlisted the help of an individual keenly aware of rural lifestyles and attitudes.46 The establishment of such committees was the next step in SR agitation of the peasantry. Prior to 1905, the SRs attempted to reach the peasantry through propaganda alone. Now, it had established a committee that would devise plans to include the peasantry in party functions, as well as employing persons who understood the village way of life. Some functions of the peasant commission included:

[to] publish and distribute…peasant literature, catalogs, and directories,
publish and issue the instructions for working in villages, the laws for peasant brotherhoods, and study manuals…organize conferences of

45 Ibid.
46 Hildermeier, The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party, 141.
working peasants...have agents and instructors which work locally
[within the villages]... and uniting and managing all Party’s work between
peasants without interrupting [other] agents working with the masses.47

The peasant commission would be a liaison between the villages and the party. The realization that the party remained out of touch with the peasant class had necessitated in the development of such a commission. Unfortunately for the party, their overall ineptness prevented the commission from making any significant contribution to the agrarian program of the party.

In 1905, the SRs released yet another party program, intensifying their political goals and ideals. Past party declarations, while alluding to the overthrow of autocracy, never called for it outright. Times were changing for the country, and thus the party realized that it needed to change with the times in order to attain any degree of success. In regard to the autocracy, the new program stated:

The existence of autocracy represents an irreconcilable and progressively intensively contradiction with all of the economic, socio-political and cultural growth. As a reliable ally and pillar of the most exploiting and parasitical classes in Russia, beyond its frontiers Russian autocracy is also one of the main bulwarks of reaction and a great danger to the cause of the freedom struggle of the working parties of other countries. Its overthrow should be the immediate and undelayed objective of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, not only as the first indispensable condition for the solution of the social problem in Russia, but also as a major factor of international progress.48

As to who the party considered responsible for carrying out this mission, the program goes on to state:

---

47 Boris Nicolaevsky, Box 631, PSR papers. Hoover Institution Archives. Trans. JHH.

48 Revoliutsionnaia Rossia No. 76 (October 15, 1905), trans. JHH.
The burden of the struggle with autocracy, irrespective of the liberal-democratic opposition, which primarily includes class elements of the “educated society,” falls on the proletariat, the toiling peasantry, and the revolutionary-socialist intelligentsia. The immediate task of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, which assumes the leading role in this struggle, is to broaden and deepen the social and property changes to pave the way thereby for the overthrow of autocracy.\footnote{Ibid.}

Finally, SR inclusion of the peasantry in its program was to be more participatory. The peasants were now sought by the SRs as a partner to reach their goal of overthrowing the tsar. While the party seems to have made a strong ideological shift, the program certainly had its drawbacks, and these drawbacks would, as in the past, outweigh the advances set forth. Perhaps the greatest downfall of the amended program was its inability to highlight the advantages of peasant participation. The program did not mention what benefits, if any, the peasantry would earn by allying with the party. The party highlighted how they would benefit due to peasant participation, but tangible benefits to the villages were neglected, perhaps intentionally. In all actuality, the party still considered the well-being of the urban classes of primary importance, yet the peasants were essential to a successful overthrow of autocracy if just for their sheer size. Therefore, the party could not elaborate on any benefits to the peasant class, as the party itself had not thought of any.

Meanwhile, as the SRs gained ground with the peasantry, the government was losing support, not just among the peasants, but with the country as a whole. Even before the October Manifesto was released, there was a noticeable weakening of vigilance among the governing officials. The press began to enjoy a considerable relaxation of censorship. Although the government had not issued any decrees allowing less censorship, they simply allowed more items to pass through. The opposition had
become too resolute to suppress, and the government allowed them to publish de facto.\textsuperscript{50} The agitation among the peasantry was a direct result of the lax censorship. Once censorship had been relaxed, it proved to be impossible to tighten the reins. The opposition now had a voice and the government, due to other distractions, in essence allowed them to express themselves.

The introduction of the October Manifesto, October 17, 1905, was meant to stop the spread of revolutionary ideas, while at the same time satisfy various demands of the movement. The government was finally willing to grant concessions that would lead to progress in order to quell chaos. The manifesto listed three concessions. They were as follows:

1. To give to the people the immovable foundation of civic freedom, on the basis of real inviolability of person, freedom of conscience, speech, meeting, and association; 2. While not suspending the duly-ordered elections for the Imperial Duma, now to admit to participation in the Duma,…, those classes of the population who at present are entirely deprived of electoral rights, reserving, after this, the further development of the principle of general electoral right to the newly-constituted legislature procedure; and 3. to establish,…, that no law can have force without the approval of the Imperial Duma.\textsuperscript{51}

The government hoped that these concessions would be received enthusiastically. Nicholas II appealed emotionally to the people of Russia in the October Manifesto. He hoped to reveal himself as a leader who was deeply moved by the actions of the people and was in a state of sorrow. Moreover, he wanted to appeal to the strength of

\textsuperscript{50} Ascher, \textit{The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray}, 128.

\textsuperscript{51} Bourne, \textit{British Documents}, vol. 3, 231.
nationalism by including statements that the current unrest in Russia “threaten[s] the integrity and unity of Our state.”\textsuperscript{52}

In a letter to his mother, Tsar Nicholas II explains how difficult it was to sign the Manifesto. He writes, “My only consolation is that such is the will of God, and this grave decision will lead dear Russia out of the intolerable chaos she has been in for nearly a year.”\textsuperscript{53} Nicholas II believed that he had no other alternative. By signing the manifesto, he assumed that it would bring order and unity to a situation that seemed desperate.

However, the reaction to the manifesto was not it anticipated. Instead of dispelling the revolutionary movement, it furthered it, resulting in a new wave of unrest. In a newspaper article dated November 1, 1905, representatives of the PSR informed the author that the stipulations of the October Manifesto would not pacify the party. Furthermore, the party was resolute in carrying on the struggle. As for the belief that the government could turn the words of the Manifesto into action, one representative simply remarked “that could not be done…the Russian people have entirely ceased to believe that their Government can do any good thing…”\textsuperscript{54}

The turmoil in the countryside was ignited on October 23, 1905 in Chernigov and quickly spread.\textsuperscript{55} According to one scholar, “[i]n late October (1905), the PSR organizers in Saratov guberniia, where the PSR Peasant Brotherhoods were particularly strong, led an uprising in the uezd of Petrovsk.”\textsuperscript{56} While the movement in the cities had already

\textsuperscript{52} Russian Subject Collection, “October Manifesto” Nicholas II, Hoover Institution Archives, trans. JHH.

\textsuperscript{53} Bing, Nicholas II: Emperor of Russia, 185.

\textsuperscript{54} Felix Volkhovskii Collection, Box 20, Folder 20, newspaper clippings, 1900-1905, no title of newspaper, November 1, 1905, Hoover Institution Archives.

\textsuperscript{55} Ascher, The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray, 267.

dissipated, the countryside reached its peak in November. The significance of the renewed disturbances is evident in the increase of violence. While the disturbances took much the same form as in previous years, the level and frequency of violence greatly increased in the latest displays of outrage. Landowners, realizing the renewed fervor of the peasantry, often fled. This flight prevented allout violence by the peasantry. Had more landowners remained on their estates, the use of violence may have been dramatically higher.

As with the first wave of protests, the renewed disturbances in the countryside were deemed to be in line with the will of the Tsar. The peasants’ interpretation of the October Manifesto was such that they believed they were acting within limits. They saw the manifesto as the long-awaited proclamation giving the land to the peasants. Thus when the landowners fled their estates, it “confirmed the peasants in their view of the ruler’s intentions.” 57 The late arrival of the manifesto was also seen as confirmation of the peasants’ views. They believed that the clergy and landowners had purposely delayed the proclamation of the manifesto because it meant that the peasants were now free to take land. However, in reality, the manifesto dealt minimally with the peasantry. 58

The second wave of agrarian unrest was ruthlessly suppressed by the government, as was the first wave. While the movement was contained, the peasants had managed to inflict considerable damage, namely economic. By the end of 1905, the peasants had quieted down and returned to their way of life.

57 Ascher, The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray, 268.

58 Robinson, Rural Russia Under the Old Regime, 167-68. Due to the exclusion of the countryside in the October Manifesto, the government released another manifesto on November 3, 1905. In this manifesto, the peasants redemption payments were to be reduced and eventually eliminated by 1907. Additionally, a Peasant Bank was to be established.
Still, the revolutionaries would not quit. They found ways to participate in agitation in any means possible. At the funeral of a young man who died at the hands of the Cossacks, attendees received a card that included the song lyrics,

You fell a victim in a fatal struggle, in your unlimited love for the people. You gave all you could for them, for their existence, their honor, their freedom. You often languished in humid prisons, the enemy—the executioner—often pronounced over you his pitiless verdict, and you marched weighted with fetters. Yet the Despot feasts in his magnificent palace, and extinguishes his anguish with wine, but the threatening hand has already been, for a long time, tracing on the wall the fatal letters. The arbitrary rule will fall, and the people will awaken great, powerful, and free. Farewell, Brothers, you honestly followed your valorous an noble way. After you follows a squad of fresh fighters prepared for glory and achievements, farewell, Brothers, you faithfully followed your valorous and noble way.\(^{59}\)

As if attendees at a funeral are not emotional enough, this song was intended to evoke a sense of rage and passion to carry on in the struggle of the departed. It was also a way to highlight the acts of revolutionaries as honorable and, perhaps, even venerable. For a true revolutionary, no outlet was off limits or beyond the scope of their desires.

The peasants would not remain quiet for long. In his report to the Tsar in January 1906, Sergei Witte, the prime minister, predicted the continued unrest in the countryside:

As to the agrarian disorders—there the situation is quite different. Not only have these disorders not come to an end, but probably it must be considered that they are only entering upon their initial period. New and stronger manifestations may

be expected in the Spring, if only they are not forestalled by appropriate measures.\textsuperscript{60}

Witte was accurate in his predictions. The countryside did rise up again, but this time their fervor was not as strong. Between harvesting the fields and participating in the disturbances, their energy was exhausted.

In May 1906, the peasants vented their frustrations once again at their continued dejection with a series of strikes. Seeing their opportunity to harness this rural rage, in July, the PSR Central Committee issued the following demand:

All available forces must be moved to the countryside and the peasants must be called to open revolt. All administrative organs in the countryside and at the volost’ level must be dismissed, driven off, or—in the event of armed resistance—violently destroyed. Rebellious peasants must occupy all installations in the countryside; state property as well as funds...must be confiscated for the needs of the revolt...It is essential that the peasant revolt bear the character of an attack and that it not limit itself within the boundaries of individual regions.\textsuperscript{61}

Clearly, the party was calling the peasants to rise up. The peasants, however, failed to heed its summons and once again, the party lost hope of the arrival of the revolution.

The party had asked the peasants to participate in a revolt beyond their means. For one, they were assuming that the villages wanted to drive out the administrative organs. Given that the commune was as close to local government as the peasants had experienced, the thought of eliminating all evidences of structure in the countryside was too much to ask. Secondly, the peasants, as with many other members of the Russian Empire, had not been convinced of the need to use terror. They could not justify hurting those who may not be responsible for their situation. In the words of

\textsuperscript{60} Robinson, \textit{Rural Russia Under the Old Regime}, 188. Some of Witte’s recommendations included harsher repression and a new attitude toward the land-commune.

\textsuperscript{61} Hildermeier, \textit{The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party}, 145.
Breshkovskaia, “There is no other class of people as even-tempered and peaceful as [the peasants]. They never resort to violence…Their patience and endurance are phenomenal, and even when they are finally aroused the desire for vengeance leaves them as soon as the danger has passed.” The peasants did not have the same desires as the party. The PSR wanted the peasants to think outside the walls of their region; the peasants simply wanted their immediate needs met.

The decline of the movement was evident in the middle of the year, and by the end of the year, the disturbances had all but vanished in the majority of the countryside. Once again, the long awaited revolution had not come to fruition. The PSR was now left to evaluate the political awareness of the peasantry and how they had failed to participate properly, at least in the eyes of the party. Nevertheless, for the peasants, their actions earned them far more benefits than any other social class, as well as the realization that their involvement was worthwhile. The peasants had acted on their oppression and received some concessions. Now they seemed to be aware of their innate political capabilities, which could allow them to act without the guidance of a formal organized structure, should they choose to do so. It appeared that the fate of the peasants now rested in their hands.

---

62 Breshkovskaia, Hidden Springs, 306.
CHAPTER 5

IN THE WAKE OF THE STORM

“The seed of reform has been planted and it is sure to sprout and grow.”¹

Given the developments at the beginning of the 20th century, many conditions appeared ripe for a total social—and possibly political—upheaval in Russia. Political parties were conspiring; peasants were expressing the ability to rise to action. There was a substantial disconnect between the actions of the political organizations and those of the peasant class. Had they been united, the upheaval would have been inevitable. But the separation, as demonstrated by the previous chapters, resulted in yet more disappointments for both sectors of society. The problems were numerous, and the consequences were real.

After years of agitation, many revolutionaries began to realize that peasants were unlikely to join a political movement. More importantly, many peasants were even unwilling to join in with other peasants. The level of interest manifested by the peasants varied widely from one village to the next. While one village may have had an adequate supply of land, a neighboring village may have been in desperate need of livestock. Therefore, each village had its own agenda. This helped explain the lack of collective action among the peasants. Although they were united in the sense that all peasants were oppressed, their oppression took different forms. As

¹ Russian Subject Collection, Box 6, Russo Japanese War newspaper clippings, n.p “Reforms in Russia Denied,” Hoover Institution Archives, n.d.
opposed to banding together to meet the needs of peasants country-wide, they sought rather to meet their immediate needs. As mentioned in Chapter 2, many of the complaints voiced from within the villages could be solved by the landowner. Therefore, the village did not see the need in uniting with other villages that had different landowners. This is also a reason why the peasants did not join the revolutionary parties: the parties sought a radical change of the government, but in the eyes of the peasants, overthrowing the government would not bring them any immediate benefits. The landlord functioned as the governing official for the peasant in most villages, and the PSR was concerned with the overthrow of the ultimate governing official, the tsar.

What exactly hindered the SRs labors in the village? In the beginning of their party activity in the late 1890s, the mindset of the peasants certainly kept revolutionaries at bay, yet merely ten years later, the mindset of the peasants had changed sufficiently, which enticed the revolutionaries to enter. Considering the vast population of discontented peasants coupled with persistent revolutionary agitation, one is left to speculate on the lack of peasant rebellions. Why do peasants not act on their oppressions? Why are they often nothing more than mere spectators? The model of a “rational peasant” helps explain the peasants’ dilemma:

A rational peasant is said to reason that ‘if others protest, they do not need me and I will get the benefits anyway.’ The same rational peasant is also said to reason that ‘if others fail to protest, I am not enough and will get no benefits anyway.’ In short, a rational peasant need not even think about his or her colleagues’ behavior. He or she always gains by not protesting. In Lichbach’s construct, the rational peasant is able to weigh the costs and benefits of participation in the revolution. It is clear that the costs would greatly outweigh the

---

benefits, thus inclining the peasant not to act. If the incentive to join revolutionary forces is slim to none, in all likelihood peasants will elect not to participate. Additionally, peasants understood their position in the *soslovie* system.\(^3\) While they may have outnumbered the other social classes, their status remained well below the whole of the Russian empire. Apparently, they accepted the reality that they were at the bottom and therefore not allowed to approach the higher estates.

Not only were peasants cognizant of their position, they were also aware that concessions would not be granted simply because they revolted. If concessions were to be granted, they believed, it would not be because of peasant disturbances.\(^4\) Rather, it was the workers who were able to get a response from the state. When peasants revolted, they were simply crushed by the government. Once suppressed, they returned to their daily activities, remaining oppressed. While 1905 did earn the peasants some concessions, they still elected, consciously or not, to allow the workers to carry on the revolutionary fervor, hoping that eventually greater benefits would be brought to the whole country.

Although there certainly were peasants who rationalized their way out of participation, there were many more who were incapable of such rationalization. Even for those peasants’ who are “rational” in the model offered by Lichbach, many still decide to rebel. This is the paradox of the matter.\(^5\) Why, having evaluated the costs and benefits, would a peasant make such a decision? Often, peasants revolt when they believe that their efforts will be successful.\(^6\) Peasants, rational or not, are disinclined to

---

\(^3\) A *soslovie* is a social estate, not a class. The *sosloviia* system refers to the hierarchy of estates For example, referring to oneself as a noble rather than a landowner. By the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century, people within the Empire were showing signs of advancing away from this rigid system.


\(^5\) Ibid.

\(^6\) Ibid., 393.
rise up against their landlord unless they are confident that they will be able to gain specific demands, i.e., more grain, tools, etc. Certainly this can be applied to all sectors of society. As a general rule, people do not join movements unless they are able to envision potential gains that may be earned as a result of their struggles.

Peasants in particular are also more inclined to revolt when their harvests are in, as demonstrated by the rhythm of revolts mentioned in the previous chapters. They are also more disposed to challenge the government when the government appears to be preoccupied with larger issues, such as the case with the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. One newspaper reported that “[t]he effects of the oriental war are being felt as severely in Russia as they are on her forces and interests in the Far East...It is evident that a crisis...is close at hand and is liable to give the Government quite as much concern as the prosecution of the war in the Far East.”

Once the rational peasants were able to realize that the government was too concerned with the foreign foe, they began to join in the movement. Those who were unable to rationalize the situation, nearly the bulk of the peasantry, remained as before—oppressed, discontent, yet passive. The village seemed almost impenetrable.

However, despite the number of peasants who did not rise up, there were those peasants who did, often acting in tandem with the workers movement. Take, for example, the years 1900 to 1904. Within these years, “there had been around 670 uprisings of peasants, of which 441 were directed against the landlords and 196 against the Government authorities.” The government still had reason to be concerned as the situation in the countryside had not been quelled. In an attempt to appease the peasants and quell the uprisings, the government made concessions. Eventually, the

---

7 Russian Subject Collection, Box 6, “Industrial Distress in Russia” no title of periodical, no page, Hoover Institution Archives, May 25, 1904.

8 Arnot, 55.
government certainly hoped that the peasants would realize the lack of benefits received from uprisings and thus not revolt. Adopting this belief, the state would display its belief in a rational peasant. Although there is no evidence to prove that the government believed in the model of a “rational peasant,” their actions would lead one to believe that they were in actuality attempting to convince the villages that uprisings cost more than they could afford.

Notwithstanding the ability of a peasant to rationalize, all peasants were capable of participating in revolts and revolutions. The degree and effect of this participation is debatable, but nonetheless important. It has been argued that, despite the many weaknesses displayed by the peasantry, they also had major socio-political strengths.\(^9\) For one, they were the country’s main food producers. If the peasantry refused to work, the entire country could face a famine. Secondly, they were secluded from urban Russia, allowing them greater flexibility in many aspects of life. Finally, the peasants were numerous. Their population far surpassed any other social group in Russia.\(^10\) In addition to the above reasons, peasants did not always consider the consequences of their actions. They acted on impulse, so it only took a simple spark to ignite their anger, and they responded. It was for these reasons that many peasants chose to rebel.

Still, this is not to suggest that most peasants were angry or “loose cannons.” In her years dealing with the peasants, Breshkovskaia stated repeatedly that they were perhaps the most passive group of people she had ever encountered. Even Breshkovskaia did not understand the peasants’ passivity. She noted that the common stereotype of the peasants was that “the Russian peasant has not his own fundamental

---

\(^9\) Shanin, The Awkward Class, 214.

\(^10\) Shanin, The Awkward Class, 214. The peasants numbered 80 million in the 1880s and by the 1900s had reached 90 million.
ideas, no purposes and does only what is indicated or ordered by others.” 11 While Breshkovskaia believed that most people no longer advanced this belief, she could not get the peasants to be more proactive, commenting “[t]he peasants even did not appeal to the czar.” 12 She was full of anger towards the government, but the peasants were not. Instead, they simply went on with their lives, seemingly enduring all of its hardships.

It is in this context that the SRs found themselves facing a dilemma. The peasants were oppressed, yet they did not rebel. Political propaganda did not appeal to the peasants in a manner that would have aligned them with the PSR, at least not for the long term. The party needed to attract the peasants to act and to do so as partners with the party. It was in light of these circumstances that the party decided to introduce “agrarian terror” in 1904, as an official undertaking by the party. 13 Peasants were usually responsive to calls for terror when such calls were organized and had a clear purpose. In other words, they were not simply willing to commit terrorist acts without firm grounding. The party, then, was required to create and reveal the grounding on which the peasantry could participate in terror.

The use of terror achieved two purposes. First and foremost, it was appealing to the peasants, resulting in their participation. Terror allowed for peasants to be an active participant and to see immediate results, even if those results were simply destruction of the landlord’s property or the landlord himself. If they wanted more grain, they could threaten the landlord with violence in order to get what they wanted. Secondly, the government would be forced to deal with the situation. It would capture the government’s attention, as well as tie up its resources. Even though the party believed that terror could prove to be a useful tool for the peasants, the PSR needed to convince

11 Breshko-Breshkovskaia, Box 1, Folder 16, “The Peasantry”, n.d., Hoover Institution Archives, 12.

12 Ibid, 28.

13 Perrie, The Agrarian Policy, 94.
the villages of this fact, as previous experience had shown that the peasants were not naturally inclined to be violent.

In addition to the positive aspects of terror, there were also certain factors of concern to various members of the party. One group of party members released the following in response to the official party resolution on agrarian terror in 1904:

[t]he local uncoordinated character of acts of ‘agrarian terror,’ which makes their regulation and control by the party difficult, and, consequently, cannot prevent unwarranted excesses which may be harmful to the moral prestige of the movement; and the danger of the degeneration in the movement if the spread of an ‘agrarian-terrorist’ mood should outstrip the development of the social-revolutionary consciousness and organization of the masses and turn the movement from a collective struggle for the socialization of the land into a guerrilla struggle by individual groups for the immediate improvement of their own economic position.\(^{14}\)

A primary concern, seen through this appeal, was the party losing control of the movement. Some party members feared that if the peasants were incited to act on their own, the party would be unable to stop them, let alone persuade them to join with the party. Thus, while the use of terror may have provoked some peasants to act, it may have also led the peasants away from the party, as the peasants would have a hard time linking the terror to political propaganda of the PSR. Even before the debate over the introduction of agrarian terror, one chief concern within the party surrounding the inclusion of peasants was the spontaneity of the rural class. In fact, spontaneity had proven to be one of the biggest challenges faced by the PSR. In reality, the peasants already participated in agrarian terror, just not terror sanctioned by the party. The

peasants understood that in extreme circumstances, terror was a must. Therefore, the party’s debate was a moot point for the villages.

Ultimately, the party decided to allow agrarian terrorism to be discussed and advocated in closed discussions within the party.¹⁵ The agrarian terrorists were barred at this time from taking their views outside of the party. If they did, the party would revoke their membership. Until the tactics of terror in the countryside could be agreed upon, the discussion would remain within the party.

In an attempt to use terror in a more controlled environment, the party proposed to establish a network of peasant unions. These unions would communicate with one another, coordinating a unified movement.¹⁶ This would prevent another concern of the party’s—sporadic and unconnected peasant terror. If the networks collaborated with each other, the movement, whenever it occurred, would be more uniform, thus having more of an impact.

The turn of the 20th century marked a pivotal moment in the life of the party and the future of the revolution. The peasants had created a disturbing scene for the government in 1902. They showed not only the government, but also the revolutionary parties, that they were capable of participation. Taking heed, the SRs worked feverishly in the aftermath of 1902 to include the peasantry in their program. Once the program had been revised, the party still had to persuade the peasantry to join in the movement. The party had tried to remain active in the countryside. The time had come to see their effects. Would their efforts prove fruitful? The ultimate test for the success of peasant agitation by the PSR was the 1905 Revolution and the ensuing revolts throughout the countryside in the years following.

---

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 95.
However, the evidence from 1905 demonstrated substantial failure by the PSR. The result of the 1905 Revolution was not exactly what the party had in mind as far as widespread concessions from the government were concerned. Nevertheless, the party tended to overlook the positive outcomes resulting from the participation of the peasantry. Considering that the government remained intact at the close of the revolutionary movement, the party, most certainly, deemed the events as a failure. In doing so, they virtually alienated the peasants, diminishing the value of their actions. This was perhaps the most devastating outcome of the failed revolution—the inability of the party to take advantage of the new activism already demonstrated by the peasants. Instead of highlighting the actions taken by the peasantry, the party chose to look at their failings.\footnote{Perrie, The Agrarian Policy, 117.}

Accordingly, in the aftermath of the 1905 Revolution, the peasants and the PSR remained two separate, and often competing, groups. After working for decades to bring the two together, without any particular success, the party’s failure to highlight the strengths of the peasants during 1905-07 once again widened the gap between two. What the party failed to realize, however, was that the peasants had indeed responded to the growing revolutionary situation of 1905. The All-Russian Peasant Union, which was formed in the summer of 1905, held two congresses in 1905.\footnote{The All-Russian Peasants Union is discussed further in Chapter 6.} Given the peasants’ general lack of political organization, their attendance at these congresses was quite remarkable—over 100 delegates representing 22 gubernii.\footnote{Ascher, The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray, 167.} Party representation at the All-Russian Peasant Union was not significant. Although there
were patches of SR strongholds, most of the delegates were non-party. Due to
formation of the All-Russian Peasant Union after the release of the October Manifesto,
the Union was considered a legal organization. In this respect, the fact that the
government permitted the union was a way for the peasants to feel as though they had
a political voice without actually giving them any real authority.

Although there is considerable debate among historians regarding the social
composition of the Union, it cannot be denied that, for the first time, the peasants were
now given an avenue to voice their opinions. The historian Donald Treadgold
seemingly dismisses the relevance of the debate:

many writers have minimized the importance of the peasant union, claiming it
was unable to speak for the peasantry in any true sense. This criticism is beside
the point, for the Peasant Union could not be anything but weak in view of the
low level of education and political consciousness among the peasantry.  

Treadgold made two arguments in this statement. First, he believed that the question of
the impact of the Peasant Union on the peasantry was irrelevant. Secondly, a positive
outcome could not have been expected due to the nature of the peasant class. Scott
Seregny disagrees with Treadgold. In his article, “Peasants and Politics: Peasant Unions
During the 1905 Revolution,” Seregny asserted that “in the short run, it seems clear that
the unions were able to inject a modicum of political organization into the peasant
movement…”

Regardless of their ultimate success in bringing about widespread

\[\text{Shanin, The Roots of Otherness, vol. I, 117. “A total of 9% of the 187 delegates were affiliated with a}
\text{party (11 PSR, 5 SDs, 2 Spika).”}

\[\text{Treadgold, Lenin and His Rivals: The Struggle for Russia’s Future, 139. The author continues on in his}
\text{discussion to note that if credit were to be given for peasant political participation, then it should be}
\text{“credited almost wholly to the efforts of the populists who labored for two generations…”}

\[\text{Seregny, “Peasants and Politics: Peasant Unions During the 1905 Revolution,” in Peasant Economy,}
\text{Culture, and Politics of European Russia, 1800-1921, eds. Esther Kingston-Mann, Timothy Mixter}
peasant political participation, Seregny accurately observes, the peasant unions diminished the amount of isolation experienced within the villages. The peasants showed a clear intent to become active political participants. Whether or not they were successful is beside the point. The ultimate hope, for the PSR at least, was that through the Union, they would unite with the larger SR party. It was intended that the peasant delegates would soon become puppets of the party. The establishment of the Union, however, was not enough; the party still needed to confront the peasant issue. The party failed miserably in this respect, as evidenced by the preceding chapters. To further validate the importance of the All-Russian Peasant Union, regardless of the size, demands, or victories won, the establishment of the Union serves as tangible evidence to the formation of a political organization for the peasants, by the peasants. The Union was the party of the peasants.

From these two congresses, it is possible to see a glimpse of peasant demands for their society. Teodor Shanin stated that:

[t]he ideal Russia of their choice was one in which all the land was to belong to the peasants, to be held according to a roughly egalitarian division and worked by family labor only, without the use of wage-workers. A pool of all Russian farming lands was to be established and the land-holdings equalized in accordance with the size of the family…Solidarity was strongly expressed with all those engaged in the confrontation with the government: the workers, the soldiers, the ‘intelligentsia’ and the ‘ethnic peripheries.’

In addition to these ideals, the peasants decided to boycott the Duma, the legislative body conceded by the Tsar in 1905. They opted instead to initiate a peasant strike, which included withholding rent and taxes. Although the congress officially called for

---


24 Ibid., 174.
non-violence, Shanin noted that “every peasant assembly-man knew the difference between a true wish and the recognition of the realities one had to live with.” In other words, the face of oppression would reveal itself in the violent manifestations of the peasants in the years to come. Moreover, with the party openly advocating terror at this point, the level of violence displayed by the peasants was expected to rise.

From the party perspective, 1905 was both disappointing and revealing. Shanin observed that

[t]he PSR ‘official heirs’ to the 19th century revolutionary populism, were, by all contemporary accounts, the most influential of the political parties within the peasant countryside of Russia proper. By 1905, their major theorists had developed a theory concerning peasant participation in social revolutions and the political goals particular to the rural scene.

But theory did not evolve into action. While the PSR may be considered as the party with the most influence among the peasantry, the reach of its influence was not as encompassing as they are often portrayed. Likewise, their inability to use the aftermath of the 1905 situation as an opportunity for reflection and reorganization, which would then translate into action, simply highlighted the inherent weaknesses of the party.

In the midst of the Revolution, the party resorted once again to reviewing and amending the party program through the first party congress, which gave rise to an official party program. As with the drafts written by Chernov in 1902, the main area of contention dealt with the socialization of the land and the party’s maximum and minimum agendas. Many party members questioned Chernov’s proposal for socialization because they did not understand who would possess the land. For

25 Ibid., 175.

Chernov, the question of possession revealed a fundamental flaw. Those that questioned it did not understand the basic tenets of the SR party. Chernov explains:

By socializing the land, we place it in a position in which the usual definitions of private rights to its use are no longer applicable. We make the land the property neither of the commune, nor of the region, nor do we simply transfer it to the category of existing ‘state property’. We make it no-one’s. Precisely as no-one’s does it become the possession of all the people.27

Chernov’s concept of the socialization of the land was such that he did not need to assign possession to anyone or thing. It did not have an owner. Other members of the party could not understand Chernov’s interpretation of land possession. Therefore most of the debate on the socialization of the land stemmed from these uncertainties.

It is interesting to point out that even though the peasants had begun to engage in outright participation, the party still questioned their involvement. The program of 1905-06 dealt more with the overthrow of autocracy and general freedoms than of the peasants’ activities during in the Revolution.28 The party does discuss five key areas—labor legislation, agricultural policy and land relations, financial policy, municipal and land economy, and nationalization—which state the intent of the party in those areas. The bulk of its program centered on labor and financial reforms. In formulating the labor portion of the program, the party called for an eight-hour working day, minimum wage, union rights, and factory inspections. A progressive income tax and the abolition of indirect taxes were some of the reforms called for in the financial section.29 With regard to the agricultural policy, however, all the party did was to restate its intent to


28 The program referenced was published, in parts, in RR, no. 71 (July 1905).

29 Partiia Sotsialistov Revoliutsionerov Collection, Protokoly pervago s’ezda Partii Sotsialistov-Revolyutsionerovy, Hoover Institution Archives, n.p.
socialize the land. Thus, it is easy to understand the lack of peasant commitment to the party agenda. In hindsight, it appears as though the more active the peasantry became, the less they were included in the party’s program.

The party’s official program was finally adopted on January 2, 1906.\(^{30}\) However, acceptance came at a high price. As if the party was not dysfunctional prior to the congress, it virtually fell apart in the years succeeding the meeting. Chernov remained in high esteem. At the end of the congress, one member offered thanks to Chernov for being “the young giant who has for five years carried on his shoulders the entire weight of the theoretical development of our program.”\(^{31}\) Unfortunately for the party, Chernov’s esteem alone was not enough to sustain the party. The problems that emerged in 1902 regarding policy, ideology, and organization, were never resolved. A disorganized party was the result.

Manfred Hildermeier places the blame for failing to recruit the peasantry on the lack of organizational structure within the party. He states:

> whatever explanations or conditions that one wishes to note, whether one recalls the generally unplanned character of the 1905 Revolution or highlights the repression of the Russian state, there can be no doubt about the PSR’s organizational deficiencies…Instead of leading the masses…the PSR simply followed the revolutionary flow of the 1905 revolution.\(^{32}\)

While 1905 caught the PSR by surprise, along with the rest of the country, they had more than enough time to formulate a plan and act accordingly. Rather than debating the logistics of the socialization of the land, they should have been formulating a

---

\(^{30}\) Perrie, *The Agrarian Program*, 152. Unfortunately, the records of RR that were accessible to the current researcher stopped with November 1905 and did not resume until 1907.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

relationship with the residents of the countryside. This would have enabled the party to have a greater understanding of the goals and capabilities of the peasants. The party could have used this new found knowledge to solidify its agrarian ideals. Instead, due to the lack of cohesion among party members and their severe detachment from the peasants, no plan could be agreed upon, which resulted in yet another missed opportunity.

In addition to a lack of organizational structure, the party was unable to offer a clear leader that could direct and facilitate the events of 1905. Even though Chernov can be credited with being leader of the party, his leadership capabilities rested in his ability to theorize and strategize, not implement. In fact, the inability for anyone to strategize effectively was a chief hindrance throughout the party’s development. To further the point, a newspaper article reported that “the fate of the revolution is yet in the balance, for it seems so far lacking in a leader capable of organizing a disorganized mob into a cohesive and effective force.”

Although this statement was made at the beginning of the Revolution, it remained true throughout the revolutionary situation. Had the party taken more ownership of the Revolution from its inception, the tides may have turned in their favor. The events unfolded as a succession of surprises, catching the party and the government off guard.

Whereas party members may have realized their lack of organization, they did not fully grasp its consequences. In failing to do so, it was as though the party believed that those outside the movement were unaware of the strife within. Even if the party did admit its struggles, however, it still did not come to terms with its repercussions, such as loss of support. In the following statement, Chernov highlighted this quandary:

[w]e have survived a crisis, a period of disorganization and disintegration, which has paralyzed us for a long time. Now we have recovered from this paralysis.

---

and can look to the future with hope...The workers and in particular the peasant masses...have only been superficially affected by the crisis.\textsuperscript{34} Chernov believed, as did most of the other members, that the people would be able to overlook the problems within the party. The truth of the matter was that by this time, the party had lost much of its credibility. Even the peasantry recognized its internal problems. The presence of party agitators in the countryside continued to diminish and this reality was undeniable to the peasants. In one village, “they complain that they have been deserted, and wonder whether the party itself has collapsed.”\textsuperscript{35} And, to further exacerbate the situation, the SRs were not doing much to rectify the problem. Instead, they attempted to brush it aside and move on, still in a state of disorganization.

Part of the organizational problem within the party stemmed from its economic shortcomings. The party could not maintain an adequate core of financial benefactors. Although there were years when the party received enough money to spread propaganda throughout the countryside, there were also years when the financial backing was virtually non-existent. The party attempted to receive financial backing, mostly from sympathizers in other countries. One such attempt was written in a letter to the editor in a British publication in 1899. The writer appeals to the heartstrings of the British people in hopes that the people would contribute money to the SRs, not the Russian government. Statements such as “The peasants are resorting to eating the animals’ food” were included in the editorial.\textsuperscript{36} Years later, in 1905, an H. Baillie-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{34} Hildermeier, “Neopopulism and Modernization,” 457. This statement was addressed in a report to the Central Committee in 1908.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Quoted in Perrie, The Agrarian Policy of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party, 193. Originally taken from Protokoly pervoy obshchepartiynoy konferentsii Partii Sotsialistov-Revolyutsionerov v avust 1908.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Felix Volkovskii Collection, Box 8, Folder 10—Famine in Russia, March 24, 1899, no title of newspaper, n.p. Hoover Institution Archives.
\end{itemize}
Weaser (sic) turned down a request for money by the party.\textsuperscript{37} With a lack of secured and guaranteed funds, the party was prevented from implementing a central vision, even though formulating the vision was also challenging to the party. The party needed a budget to plan for the future. Accordingly, the whole of the party suffered. In short, the PSR faced a classic domino effect.

For all intents and purposes, the PSR ceased to exist in the immediate aftermath of the failed 1905 Revolution. Perrie asserted that,

>[f]or the remainder of the pre-war period, the party reverted to its former nature of an underground, conspiratorial organisation, consisting of a squabbling émigré leadership endeavoring to maintain contact with an insecure network of groups and individual sympathizers in Russia.\textsuperscript{38}

The party was overcome with intra-party rivalry, which only drew its attention away from the peasants and the long-awaited revolution. While party members continued to bicker back and forth among themselves, the peasants (and the whole of Russia for that matter) were left to assume control of their own destiny. This was a fatal mistake for the party to make. After years of hard work among the peasantry, they had seemingly lost what little link they had managed to establish with the village.

The party still had a presence in the countryside, albeit a minimal one. Most local party committees in 1907 had some contact with the villages, with the most contact seen in the Ukraine and the Volga.\textsuperscript{39} These contacts were primarily made by members of the SR Brotherhoods, and, as one delegate remarked, “all that is known about some Brotherhoods is that the village was visited by an agitator, that he aroused some

\textsuperscript{37} Felix Volkhovskii Collection, Box 9, Folder 35, Society of Friends of Russian Freedom, Various letters, 1904-1913, February 1, 1905. Hoover Institution Archives. It is interesting to point out that the reason that Mr. Weaser declined to send funds was due to the policy of terror that had been embraced by the party.

\textsuperscript{38} Perrie, \textit{The Agrarian Policy}, 195

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, 187.
widespread sympathy, left a copy of the statutes behind him, and that is all.”40 The party had not learned the necessity of developing and maintaining a personal relationship the villages. They remained a faceless group.

In addition to the intra-party rivalry and a lack of a rapport with the villages, the government was also a challenge to the party’s progress after 1905. Much of the party’s time in the immediate aftermath of the revolution was spent in debates over the issue of its participation in the state Duma. After a failed boycott of the first Duma, the party decided to participate in the second Duma. Once SRs were represented, however, they continued to debate on which reforms should be presented to the Duma and which reforms remain as tasks to be undertaken by the party apart from the government. The party could not function as a united front.

To further complicate the relationship between the peasants and the party, the government announced the Stolypin Plan in November 1906. This plan called for the dissolution of the commune. In its place would emerge individual peasant property owners of consolidated blocks of land. The party had realized that the commune could serve as an aid in their revolutionary attempts after years of viewing it with contempt. Apparently, the government had realized this capability as well. While the peasants welcomed the idea of private ownership of their land, the Stolypin reforms were in direct opposition to the basis of the PSR’s agrarian program—socialization of the land.41 The Stolypin reforms would essentially make the peasants land owners. The SRs, due in large part to the pressure of Chernov, converted to the belief in a property-less society. Therefore, the government dealt the party a strong blow, one that essentially severed the agrarian program of the party.

40 Ibid., 189

After the dissolution of the first two Dumas, the party turned once again to underground organization and formulated the foundations for the major revolution to come. While the party made little headway in the prewar years, its reputation as a viable political party remained. In 1909, however, its reputation was tarnished by the revelation that Evno Azef, a senior terrorist and highly esteemed party member, was an agent provocateur. It has been suggested by some historians that this was tantamount to a death sentence, shaking the party to its foundations.\(^\text{42}\) However, making such a suggestion would be to conclude that the party ever had a reasonably sound foundation! Therefore, the Azef affair should be viewed more in light of the party’s general state of disorganization. It was merely another setback thrown in the overall chaotic situation of the party.

While the party continued to conduct agitation in the countryside, it did so on a much smaller scale than the previous years. In 1909, the party participated and led agitation in only four of the provinces, a dismal half of the total provinces.\(^\text{43}\) Had the party enjoyed success in these provinces, it may have still maintained some credibility; instead, most of the agitation conducted during the period between the 1905 revolution and the start of World War I had “extremely weak organization, extraordinarily limited numbers of party workers, and a complete lack of professional revolutionaries.”\(^\text{44}\) While the party certainly maintained a relative degree of success in various regions of the country, such as in the Volga, this success cannot be applied over the entirety of Russia. Success was the exception, not the norm.

According to Shanin, the peasants viewed their own struggle “as that of a peasant mainstream lagging behind its PSR vanguard on the path toward the people’s


\(^\text{43}\) Ibid., 296.

social revolution.”\textsuperscript{45} In other words, the peasants were always a step behind the party, seemingly acting on their own at their own pace for their own purpose. However, it should also be noted that while the peasants may not have participated in political activism alongside the SRs, by 1905 they had become a major revolutionary force and displayed substantial unity of political purpose.\textsuperscript{46} Much to the dismay of the SRs, of course, the political goals of the peasantry did not always line up with that of the party.

Therefore, one could also suggest that instead of the peasants being a step behind the party, they were actually a step ahead. The peasants moved when the party did not think they were ready for action, with the 1902 peasant revolts as a prime example. The party had not envisioned the possibility of revolutionary activity among the peasants at this time, yet the peasants delivered. It would seem, then, that the peasants were a step ahead of the party. Whether this is the result of peasant organization or party disorganization is beside the point: the evidence remains that the peasants took the initiative, catching the party and the government by surprise.

The peasants also acted on their own in the elections to the state Duma in March and April 1906. The official PSR policy towards the elections was a boycott. However, a policy is relevant only if it is shared with the membership, including sympathizers, as a whole. In this case, the villages, either because they were unaware or defiant, failed to adhere to the boycott policy and participated in the elections.\textsuperscript{47} The peasants voted perhaps because they saw it as an opportunity to acquire long awaited land reforms. Their hopes were quickly shattered when the Tsar dissolved the Duma after only 73 days.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{45} Shanin, \textit{The Roots of Otherness}, vol II, 144.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 185.

\textsuperscript{47} Perrie, \textit{The Agrarian Policy}, 168.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 171.
The Revolution of 1905 came and went without bringing the radical changes that many had hoped for. Still, it is a remarkable moment in Russia’s history. As Scott Seregny accurately concluded,

the long-term effects of [1905] are difficult to calculate, but one could reasonably argue that repression of this experiment, which seemed sanctioned by the government’s own acts of February 18 and October 17, 1905, did little to foster peasant faith in the efficacy of legal norms, political action, or moderate tactics.”

The fact remained that peasants were still unappeased by the government. Therefore, one could assume that the peasants remained open to suggestions for change. The party, not the peasants, is left to shoulder the blame for the lack of success during the revolutionary atmosphere. Their inability to reach the peasantry during revolutionary movement of 1905 and the years immediately following proved that they were not the party of the peasants. Forced underground, the party now had to start theorizing once again. They could only hope that in the future, their theories would become reality.

The Revolution of 1905 affected several aspects of Russian society. No social class or government entity escaped without consequence. Obviously, the underlying aims of the revolution, a genuine constituent assembly and other democratic freedoms, were not realized. However, perhaps renowned historian Abraham Ascher described it best when he commented that, “the most fundamental consequence of the revolution [was] the political mobilization of masses of people in all walks of life.”

For the PSR, the failings of the 1905 movements were devastating. Years of theorizing and strategizing failed to translate into action, and the efforts of the party were swept away by the ebb and flow of the momentum displayed by the Russian

---


50 Ascher, The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray, 341.
people. Indeed, masses of people *had* exhibited a new found political mobilization and the party failed to capitalize on its development, a failure that the party will attempt to rectify in subsequent years.


CHAPTER 6

PEASANTS AND POLITICS

“...revolution is the extreme cause of the explosion of political participation.”

Between the years 1905-1917, perhaps the single most important development was the increased social mobility and activity displayed by the peasant class. During these years, the PSR, along with other political parties, continued to attempt to incorporate the peasantry rapidly into the larger framework of its respective political party. Again, this inclusion may have been more theoretical than actual, but in actuality the point remained that other elements of the soslovie system were viewing the peasantry as a viable participator in political agendas now more than ever, as the actions of the peasantry in 1905 served as a wake-up call to many concerning the inherent, and previously suppressed, political tendencies of the peasants.

As the events of 1905 unfolded, there remained questions about the complete role of peasants in revolutionary and/or political movements. Were the peasants ready for the party? Was the party ready for the peasants? Or, could the peasants participate in revolutionary activity, apart from any organized political group, and engineer change? There are several problems that are exposed when peasants mix with politics, and vice-versa. Ultimately, these problems prevented the peasants from experiencing the fullness of their revolutionary fervor, as they expressed specific demands, rioted if

---

necessary, then returned to their lives with some degree of satisfaction in making gains. The problems endured by the peasants in their quest to join in the political and revolutionary movements in Russia at the turn of the 20th century are the focus of this chapter.

One problem the peasants faced in their quest for political inclusion was the Duma. With the release of the October Manifesto of 1905, all members of Russian society anxiously awaited the positive effects that would result from what some thought was a sweeping tsarist decree. In this manifesto, the tsar conceded to the formation of a quasi-constituent assembly, the Duma. This decision was not easily arrived at by the tsar, but in an effort to quell the riots throughout the country, the tsar and his ministers though that there were no other options. The formation of the Duma was, to be sure, indicative of the weakening of the autocratic regime, since this assembly would have legislative authority, albeit minimal at best.

There were a total of four Dumas from 1906-1917. Each Duma was appointed a five-year term, but under Article 87, Nicholas II was allowed to disband the Duma and call for new elections at will. The first two Dumas were comprised of a majority center-left representatives, and as a result, Nicholas II dissolved them shortly after their formation. Now that the government had given in to some of the demands of the political organizations, as well as the demands of peasants to have an arena in which to voice their concerns, it was up to these groups to decide the capacity in which they would participate within the Duma. While in the previous chapter, the elections to the Duma were discussed, it was done in a manner that sought to highlight the weaknesses of the PSR. It is important to also evaluate the strengths manifested by the peasants in light of the Duma, which is the intent of the following discussion.

In regards to the first Duma, which was scheduled to convene in mid-1906, the SRs decided to abstain from participation in the body. They will reverse this decision for the Second Duma, and win a surprisingly high number of urban votes. The party
decided to boycott the Duma because it believed that the Tsar never intended to enact the concessions given in the October Manifesto or Fundamental Laws, at least in any type of long term capacity. The party did not want to expend time and resources on lobbying for votes to the Duma when it believed no real action would be taken by the Duma once elected. In other words, the Duma was nothing more than a mere meaningless capitulation of the autocratic government and until the Tsar and his establishment were removed, the party would not be appeased. One newspaper reported in November 1905 on the lack of conciliation by the SRs and Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party, or SDs. The journalist even asked the representatives of these parties what it would take in order for them to be placated and “the answers were various, but all agreed in refusing to be pacified just now, and in resolutely carrying on the struggle.” This implies that the party continued to be active in the years following the release of the Manifesto, when in reality, the boycott was the centerpiece of party activity.

Obviously, the party hoped that the peasants would view the first Duma in the same light and respond accordingly. The party was optimistic in that it anticipated the boycott to be a illustration of the strength of the resolve of the people. This was not the case, however, as the peasants widely participated in the 1906 elections on their own accord. Moreover, the Constitutional Democrats, or Kadets, dominated the Duma, as many other political parties had also called for a boycott.

While it is understandable that the party believed the Duma to be a diversion tactic of the tsarist regime, the actions taken by the party did nothing to highlight its disgust and contempt with the government. There were few agitation efforts against the elections to the Duma, nor did the party make great efforts to explain the nature of

---

2 Hildermeier, *The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party*, 160. See RR no. 73 (15 August 1905), 1-5.

3 Felix Volkhovskii Collection, Box 20, Folder 20, “Newspaper Clippings,” Hoover Institution Archives.
the boycott to other groups, namely the peasants. The party erroneously believed that
the boycott was self-explanatory. Yet again, this was a fatal error by the party.

It was not long after the party’s decision to boycott the Duma that they began to
question the resolution. The fact that the peasants had participated in the elections,
combined with the rise of the Kadets, were reason to worry. The party struggled to
reign in the peasantry, while at the same time were forced to contend with the Kadets as
a major oppositional group. While one of these problems would be difficult for any
organization to grapple with, coupled together, they only served to challenge the party
to a degree that would ultimately result in a continued faltering of the party.
Consequently, the party attempted to disavow its previous decision and offer
candidates for election, but it was too late, as elections had been blocked by the time the
party realized the error of its ways.

In the first Duma, which met from April-June 1906, the Kadets enjoyed the
majority, primarily because of the “major” political parties, including the Social
Revolutionaries and the Social Democrats, it was the only one that did not boycott the
elections. The peasants ended up turning out in large numbers to vote for candidates.
In these elections, the peasants did not identify themselves with a party, an indication
that the PSR had failed in its attempts to persuade the peasantry to align with their
movement, as well as indicative of the independent politicization endured by the
peasants. Rather, the peasants simply searched out men of talent and honor. The
results of the elections gave the majority to the Kadets, followed by the Labor Group
(See Appendix B for election results). Due to this composite make up of the first Duma,
the demands were rather revolutionary, including such pleas as full democracy,
amnesty for political prisoners, fair tax system, and land reform. While there were no
official representatives from the SRs in the first Duma, the peasant deputies spoke,
according to one Soviet scholar, in the “language of Socialist-Revolutionaries.” This
seems to substantiate that the propagandizing efforts made by the PSR in the years
prior to 1906 had in fact worked. The peasants illustrated that they had listened, and, more importantly, understood the message of the SRs in the preceding years. Moreover, the peasants took the initiative to act independently of any larger political entity, pointing once again to the realization of peasant participation in political affairs. Just as in previous situations, the SRs had provided the initial tools for the peasants but never explained how to use those tools in a manner which would benefit the party. The SRs were absent from the Duma, leaving the peasants to stand alone, which they did without hesitation. Needless to say, in light of the political tendencies of the elected deputies, the Tsar invoked Article 87 and disbanded the First Duma before any demands were met.

The second Duma, which met from February-June 1907, was faced with much the same fate. This time, the SRs and the SDs decided to participate in the elections, stealing many votes from the Kadets, who by now had become ineffectual, as they were too radical for the liberals and not radical enough for the workers or peasants. The Kadets had become what any party, even modern day, avoids—middle of the road. Even though the second Duma displayed a greater spread of representation among parties, left-leaning organizations still had a majority, giving the government enough motivation to dissolve the second Duma.

The decision for the SRs to partake in elections to the second Duma obviously contributed to the revolutionary composition of its delegates. Given that the SRs had boycotted the first Duma, its participation in the second Duma came as a surprise to some, namely the government. Indeed, one could argue that it was the peasants who forced the PSR to participate in the Second Duma. The peasants were eager to partake in the government’s legislative experiment, as was demonstrated by the fact that they participated in the elections. Aside from the peasants, there were others, again namely the Kadets, who showed signs of working within this newly-formed body. To ignore the Duma, or worse yet, to attempt to undermine it, would be an insult of sorts to the
Russian population. After all, many within the Empire had simply wanted a political voice. For many years, the common sentiment was that the bureaucrats were in the middle and the people merely wanted to get their message to the Tsar. The Duma, by all intents and purposes, was a means to accomplish this longstanding desire. If political parties, especially the SRs, wanted to substantiate its claims that the PSR was a “party of the people,” then it should advocate on behalf of the people from within this newly formed voice for the people. For many people, the government was showing signs of reform, and the people were willing to give the government a chance to save her. The party should, at a minimum, show the same courtesy.

By the time the third Duma is elected, the process for elections had been changed, which reduced the number of seats given to the lower classes. This was done in an attempt to lessen the role that the liberal parties would play in the Duma. Initially, the third Duma ran rather smoothly, and was even able to serve its entire 5 year term. However, the SRs were aware of the limitations of the Duma and, as a result, the SRs resumed their practice of revolutionary terrorism and political assassination. Its target was the Prime Minister, Petr Stolypin, who came to office in 1906. The Stolypin reforms, discussed previously, were seen as detrimental to the party’s efforts in the villages. In 1911, the party was successful, as Stolypin was murdered by a revolutionary acting as an undercover police agent. The Duma experiment, even given the appearances of succeeding, was failing. While in theory Russian citizens were given a political voice through the Duma, the fact that the SRs returned to political terrorism was a strong indication that this was not the case, at least in light of party interpretations.

In the eyes of Stolypin, the peasantry, in the years after the failed 1905 Revolution, had become somewhat disillusioned with political participation in general. This may help explain why he was such a strong believer in the effectiveness of his reforms. While meeting with a British official, Stolypin stated “the peasantry were
occupied with agricultural operations, and were taking but an indifferent interest in politics. In general, they had lost confidence in the Duma, and closed their ears to agitators.”

This was not the case, however, as rural cultivators continued to display a readiness to join within politics.

Peasants did not make distinctions between political parties, which could explain why the rival organization, the Kadets, enjoyed a considerable degree of success among the countryside post-1905. They simply gave audience to anyone who made sense. In some villages, literature was found from multiple parties, including the PSR, Social Democrats, and the Kadets. The Kadets saw the concessions given in the October Manifesto as a step towards democracy. Although the Kadets were dissatisfied with the provisions agreed upon by the Tsar, the party viewed such compromises as the Duma as one in which the party needed to work with in order to secure even more rights for the Russian people. Moreover, the Kadets did not align themselves with one social base, which made them appealing to a broader range of people, at least initially. While it seemed that no party could secure the exclusive support of the peasantry, attention was turned to the workers in the aftermath of the Revolution of 1905. For all of the advances made by the peasants in the years leading up to the Revolution, the workers seemed to steal the movement away, as political parties began to concentrate more on the urban sector of society.

It could be argued that from the perspective of the PSR, the workers did not steal the Revolution as the peasants never obtained the hopes of success. In the eyes of the SRs, the Revolution of 1905 had occurred within in the cities, attention was turned to the urban sector in the following years. The SRs believed that it was the proletariat who had shown the potential and wherewithal to act in 1905, and that the peasants had merely acted on a whim, not thinking of long term revolutionary goals or strategies. As

---

a result of this line of thinking, the SRs became heavily involved within the cities, competing against the SDs for support. During this time, the SRs did not make much effort within the countryside, thus widening the gap between the village and the party. Other political parties, such as the Kadets, realized that was imperative to develop and maintain a relationship with all segments of society in order for Russia to advance. For this reason, the SRs found themselves losing considerable gains among the peasantry to the Kadets.

The Revolutionary situation in Russia aside, the role of the peasants in a larger framework, within a political and revolutionary one, must be confronted and analyzed. From the years 1890 to 1905, the ground had been laid for a greater inclusion of peasants in politics, or at least revolutionary activities. Still, the peasants had not risen up in large numbers or with the success that the SRs had envisioned. Had the party failed? Were peasants simply incapable of political organization and activity? Arriving at an answer to these questions does not come easily, but can best be explained by combing the two.

The preceding chapters have examined various situations, attempts, complications, and outcomes of peasant involvement in the Russian revolutionary movement at the turn of the 20th century. But how does the situation in Russia fit in with the larger peasant problems around the world throughout history? Certainly, there are standards that can be applied using several generalizations regarding peasant participation in revolutionary movements.

First, the objective of peasants must be undertaken. It has been stated previously that often peasants seek one demand, land. Usually, once that demand has been met, the peasants return to their previous existence. Since the peasants offer a demand then quiet down once it has been met, does this suggest that they are not revolutionary, or politically engaged? Certainly not.
Delving deeper into the basic objective of the peasants, the desire for more land, the essence of this goal is in itself revolutionary. While the request for land and the acquisition for land may not have revolutionary tendencies, the implications and effects of this demand being met are revolutionary. Had the government acquiesced to the call for land by the peasants, this would have undoubtedly altered the *soslovie* system in that the nobles who earned their status, in part, based on landholding, would have diminished. The nobility had already experienced a decline in the years after the Emancipation, and further reducing their entitlements to land would only contribute to their demise. Simply because the peasants were not seeking an overthrow of the tsarist regime should not rule out the revolutionary demands demonstrated by the peasants.

Moreover, the ability of peasants to engage in political affairs has often been overshadowed by the success of larger political entities, such as the Bolsheviks in 1917. Perhaps the most impressive display of peasant political awareness and development is found in the formation of the All-Russian Peasant Union that was created in 1905, mentioned briefly in Chapter 5. This Union should not be confused with the earlier SR Peasant Union. The Unions differed in their creation, membership, and objectives. The All-Russian Peasant Union was designed for peasants, by peasants. This development is a clear indication of the political capabilities of the peasants. By the fall of 1905, the All-Russian Peasant Union “mobilized hundreds of thousands of peasants around a program of radical social and political change, pursued organized tactics, and helped link the peasant movement with the demands of Russian society at large.”

In the initial months of its creation, the Union manifested the desires of the rural population to engage in political activities, including the desire to create its own national organization

---

and produce leaders.\textsuperscript{6} This act, in and of itself, qualifies the peasants as a political party. The inability of the Union to materialize in any of its desires is irrelevant to the present study of peasant participation in political affairs. The point remains that the peasants had taken it upon themselves to enter into the realm of political activity. The creation of the All-Russian Peasant Union, aside from its activities, reveals “the existence of an organized peasant movement, seeking to effect agrarian reform, civil and political rights, local control, and access to education, through political channels and in concert with other groups.”\textsuperscript{7} The Union displayed the apex of peasant political involvement, for it illustrated the organizational capabilities of the rural sector, an element that other segments of Russian society believed was non-existent, if possible at all.

The peasants’ taking the lead in political organizing activity was the moment that the SRs had waited for, and yet they did not capitalize on this event. For example, the party could have gained ground with the peasant movement by enticing the All-Russian Peasant Union to boycott the Duma and continue to press the government for more concessions. To be certain, the party did attempt to work alongside the Peasant Union, but was often charged by the villages with attempting to infiltrate the Union with party agenda.\textsuperscript{8} This accusation highlighted the desire of the peasants to be viewed as a bona fide political entity, one separate from any other existing organization. The party remained unable to convince the peasantry of the necessity to join forces, as the peasants believed that in joining forces, they would have to compromise in their agenda. As with previous attempts to merge with peasant organization, the party simply folded and moved on, seeking its own agenda for the villages.

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 373.
\textsuperscript{8} Perrie, \textit{The Agrarian Policy}, 190.
Even though the party was not able to use the Union to its full advantage, credit must be given to the influence that the party had in regards to the Union. The years of agitation and propaganda had paid off, despite the fact that the peasants were still unwilling to unite with the SRs, for it provided the villages with a framework for their own participation. The peasants learned how to put forth petitions and organize themselves into a larger body. Although much of the etiology of popular grievance was still local in nature, the understanding of the grievances had changed as well as their understanding of the means of redress. In fact, one could assume that without the work in the countryside in the decades prior to the creation of the Peasant Union, it would have never come into existence, for the peasants would have lacked a model of political participation.

Aside from the positive attributes associated with the Peasant Union, the peasants were not able to use their organization effectively. While their numbers continued to grow year after year, its members were often only nominally involved, as the crops still dictated their ability to participate in affairs outside of village life. The failure to the Peasant Union to become a major contender in the political development of the country opened the door for the traditional parties to gain ground once again. As the Kadets began to lose its appeal to the bulk of Russian society around 1910, the SRs found support for its party was reignited.

Despite the failings of the party among the peasantry, discussed at length in the previous chapters, by 1910, the peasants saw the SRs as the only remaining party who sought to include the villages. This helps explain why in 1917, the SRs were the most numerous party, as the bulk of Russian peasants, and by default Russian society, aligned with the PSR. It had also become evident to Russian peasants that the SRs were


the party most inclined to focus on land reforms in a manner with which the villages could support. In the face of the clear numerical advantage enjoyed by the PSR in the years leading up to and including 1917, it was not the winning party, as the Bolsheviks, a break-away of the Social Democrats, seized power through a coup d’état.

After the PSR had included the peasant within their agenda, albeit minimally, the physical inclusion of the peasants remained up to the peasants themselves. However, alignment did not occur. No party, not just the PSR, could convince the Russian peasants’ that political alliance with a party was necessary in order to earn agrarian concessions. In essence, the efforts of the party were in vain, as were the political efforts of the rural actors. The peasants did not understand the benefits of a political party, nor did they have the abilities to organize themselves and formulate an ideology. They did not even have a strong agrarian leader, one who was able to voice demands and seek political and social compromises. Although an ideology was attempted for the peasants through a variety of petitions (see Chapter 2 for specific petitions), it failed miserably. The workers were able to take over the fervor and lead the country into revolution.

In a world historical context, the challenges faced by the Russian peasantry, namely the lack of ideology and a strong, identifiable leader, were distinguishing features of peasant participation in revolutionary movements. Moreover, the inability to identify a clear leader among the peasant classes is one of the defining factors that separates the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 with the Revolutions in Mexico (1910). In other countries where peasants identified with and followed the direction of an agrarian leader, the success was much greater for the countryside.

To continue in a comparison with the Mexican Revolution, the PSR was never able to release an agrarian program that served to not only deal with the peasant concerns adequately, but also allowed for the recruitment of other peasants. In Mexico, Emiliano Zapata was able to do just that—address and recruit the peasants through his
ideology. Zapata’s ideology came in the form of the Plan de Ayala and included the call for the return of hacienda land to the peasants by the peasants “with arms in their hand.”\footnote{Frank Tannenbaum, \textit{The Mexican Agrarian Revolution} (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1929), 60.} Peasant difficulties must be clearly perceived as caused by human actors in order for the villages to rise up. The popularity of the Ayala Plan spread quickly throughout southern and central Mexico. Moreover, “[a]s the Ayala plan gained currency...local leaders learned of its agrarian provisions, and many, whose people had suffered disposessions of land like those in Morelos, declared themselves partisans of Zapata.” Thus, the Plan de Ayala was of greater significance than merely providing an ideological base—it allowed for recruitment of other peasants. The PSR was unable to release a document that had a similar effect to the Plan de Ayala.

The Ayala Plan was able to maintain the momentum of the peasants. While they had no governmental authority to expropriate land, they believed that the Ayala Plan was legal and acted accordingly. They continued to take back land, sometimes with a legitimate deed for the land, other times they simply took it with arms in hand.\footnote{Adolfo Gilly, \textit{The Mexican Revolution}, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso Editions and NLB, 1983), 81.} The Plan functioned as an ideology for the peasants, whether they realized it or not. They acted on their ultimate goal based on propaganda released by one of their heroes. This was significant. The Ayala Plan had brought the peasants into action under Zapata’s umbrella. They were not simply loose cannons in the countryside without any guidelines of long-term desires. This is a fundamental difference between the agrarian events in Russia versus Mexico.

Despite the fact that the Mexican peasants had an ideology and a clear leader, they lacked one aspect that the Russian peasants possessed—cross-class alliance. The peasants were able to ride on the coattails of the workers in Russia, and vice-versa. In
Mexico, however, peasants were able to make their way to the cities, but “once there could do no more than leave power in the hands of a weak and terrified petty bourgeoisie.” Due to the peasants inability to fuse their momentum with another class, the situation in Mexico remained a peasant movement against all other forms of rebellion and classes in Mexico.

This lack of a cross-class alliance may have been precisely what Zapata and other peasants desired. They may have intentionally remained aloof to the workers movement so that they would not have to comprise their lack of ideology. The Russian peasants became second-hand to the worker movement, often being left out of workers demands and political programs. Therefore, the lack of class alliance may have been a blessing in disguise for the Mexican peasants. They maintained a separate ideology and, as a result, did not have to make concessions. The Russian peasant, however, never developed a uniquely agrarian ideology and was thus forced to go with the ebb and flow of other movements.

In the end, for both peasants of Russia and Mexico, the revolution did not lead to newly-formed governments based on agrarian demands. It did, however, prove that the agrarian situation had to be dealt with by the new revolutionary movement. The revolutions also showed the importance of ideology. While some still consider peasant revolt to be without ideology, Alan Knight disagrees with this notion. He states,

[p]easant revolt was certainly not ‘non-ideological,’ it did not (indeed could not) lack political ideas and a broad, normative vision which informed its action, nor, by the same token, can it be said to have been ‘pre-political’ if that somewhat patronising yet popular term denotes an inability to grasp political realities and conceive of ideological alternatives to reality.14

13 Ibid. 78.

In other words, while the peasants may have been “pre-political,” they certainly were not apolitical. However, Knight goes on to suggest that the ideology of the peasants was still vague, ostensibly inconsistent, and inarticulate... Ideology is relatively, not wholly autonomous; it is...important, but not paramount; above all, it can no more be successfully analysed in vacuo than can the relations of production, whose pre-eminent role it has tended to ursurp.  

This should not serve to minimize the importance, or advantages of, a developed ideology. The proof remained that peasant participation in political matters with an ideology, regardless of its vagueness, was better than blind action and often gained more long-term results. While there remain other factors help to contribute to the success and failure of peasant revolutionary activities, ideology encompasses a large degree of eventual outcome.

Peasants have long been incited to participate in uprisings, revolts, strikes, and revolutions. They typically become involved because of personal ambitions, not political motivations. Their oppression among society compels them to resist authority, for they do not gain much by submitting to the state in the first place. Due to the large peasant population in both Mexico and Russia, they were quite a force to reckon with. With participation of the peasants in the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the revolutionaries were successful. Peasant participation in society revolutions has helped in the creation of the world’s most powerful states. Although these revolutions may have been possible without the cooperation of the peasant class, their longevity may not have been.

It was lack of unity among peasants, not incapacity, that led to the failure of the revolutionary situation in Russia from 1905-1907. This realization was added to the

---

15 Ibid,161,163.
series of disappointments endured by the PSR. Unfortunately, by the time the PSR realized the error of its ways and began to experience a degree of popular success, the Bolsheviks seized power, forcing the party to go underground yet again.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

In the initial years of the 1900s in Russia, the social and political system, for the most part, remained the same, much to the dismay of many political organizations throughout the country as well as the peasantry. There were moments of revolutionary potential, to be sure, but neither side, the political groups, namely the PSR, or the rural cultivators were able to organize their efforts and introduce radical change that would subvert the traditional political and social structure that had existed in Russia for centuries.

Central to this discussion of the revolutionary situation that engulfed Russia in the early years of 1900 are two quite different and often competing sectors of society, the peasantry and the Social Revolutionaries. Although the Social Revolutionaries believed that they were the party working among the peasants, and without their efforts, the peasants would remain unaffected, the events prior, during, and after the revolution proved otherwise. Even though the peasants did act and participate in the movement, they often did so independently of the SR party.

The role of the peasant in the 1905 Revolution was somewhat limited. Peasants are often instigated to further a revolution only after the working class had initiated it; on those occasions when they did assume the initiative, often it was due to a poor harvest, as evident in the events discussed earlier. Many times, however, revolutionaries depend upon the peasant to maintain the spread of the revolution. Uprisings in the countryside often include large-scale destruction and violence, which
forces the government to intervene, thus turning the attention of the state away from the urban centers where the proletariat was involved in their own revolutionary activities. Nevertheless, as seen through the preceding chapters, uprisings in the countryside did not earn the peasants overwhelming success, either in the eyes of the villagers or the PSR. After the storm passed and the immediate threat was quelled by the government, life ultimately returned to normal throughout the empire, leaving the peasants unsatisfied yet again.

I have argued that one ought not exclude the peasantry from discussions about the revolutionary movement, and the same considerations should be given to political parties. Although no one party could take credit for the peasant disturbances of 1905-07, it is clear that among the major parties, only the PSR had a presence in the rural areas. It can be considered “the most influential of the political parties within the peasant countryside of Russia proper.”¹ This is not to suggest, however, that the party led the peasants. The peasants had no motivating factor other than their desire to survive. Rather, the party served as an instigator, urging the peasants to voice their grievances. As noted previously, the party initiated an effort to educate the peasants in such a manner that would bring benefits to the party as a whole. Peasants were taught not only how to compose petitions, but also encouraged to take action if their requests remained unanswered. If the party had not introduced the peasants to political action under the guise of education, the peasants may have remained a non-politicized class. Therefore, combining the two main participants, parties and peasants, leads to a more accurate and telling history of not only the revolutionary movement, but the general social situation in Russia.

The SRs were highlighted in this study because of their reputation as the primary political force among the peasantry. It has been assumed that the party had dominance

---

over the countryside, thus earning it the title the “party of the peasants.” However, after investigation, it appears as though the peasants often acted independently of the party. In these cases, the party was left to “catch up” with the movement in the countryside. It should be noted that the SRs, while not obtaining a monopoly over the countryside, did enjoy the greatest success among rival parties working in that milieu. Nonetheless, the peasants proved that they did not need a recognized political party in order to gain concessions, nor did they see the benefits of aligning with a larger movement. The peasants acted as a party in the simplest definition of the term. They had a common goal, the desire for more land (or more accessible and arable land), and united around that central objective in order to seek concessions apart from any other political group. They were individuals with common interests, values, ideals, and even programs. They also had personal ambitions. Perhaps the true delineator of a party lies in its ability to enact change and results that otherwise would not occur without the establishment of a party.² To put this into terms that relate to the peasants, could the countryside have received benefits through individual action, without mass riots or revolts? The strength of the countryside rested in its numbers! Therefore, singular activities certainly would have resulted in failure, as the landlords had the resources to overpower individual acts of insubordination. The peasants were a party, regardless of their recognition of the fact. The ability of the peasantry to display attributes in the likeness of a party may help explain why the PSR was never able to convince the peasantry of the benefits gained by joining its organization. The peasants were willing to listen to the propaganda of the PSR, and ultimately used that propaganda in a manner that would benefit the villages, such as in formulating petitions to landowners. Obviously, the party had hopes of the propaganda being used as a means to show the

² Cotta, 58.
peasants that the government needed to be replaced, not simply that the landlords could be compelled to meet demands.

Although the SR party should be commended for its efforts among the peasantry, the failure to mobilize the peasantry suggests that its goals were overly ambitious. The party could not even mobilize itself, let alone the majority of Russian citizens. The lack of organization within the central core of the party caused a ripple effect throughout the entirety of the structure. Often, the party spent time debating between the “minimum” and “maximum” aspects of the program instead of recruiting the peasants as active members. To some extent, this resulted from a geographical factor. Since most SR members, and virtually the entire leadership, resided in the urban centers, they naturally tended to focus on the needs and grievances of the working class. Thus, however much it recognized the importance of the peasantry to its revolutionary goals, the party could not properly identify and implement a coherent plan for engaging the rural masses.

In the end, the peasants proved that they did not need a formal, established party or revolutionaries to compel them to act. While it is undeniable that in the years prior to 1905 the countryside was inundated with political propaganda which influenced villages across the country to rise up, the decision to do so rested with the peasants alone. The peasants erupted without leadership from any party, least of all the PSR. Although the party did attempt to involve itself in the countryside after the fact, the peasants had taken the initiative themselves. Therefore, one could view the movement in rural Russia as a failure of the party. The years spent agitating the peasants did not persuade the countryside to align with the party as it had intended. The reality of the peasants simply did not align with the rhetoric, or lack thereof, voiced by the party. Rather, the SR efforts aroused the peasants to act on their own, without direction from any outside group or motivation. When this happened, the party did not know how to respond, and thus lost any ground that it had previously gained throughout the
countryside. The peasants were left, once again, to revolt on their own accord, seeking their own goals, using their own methods.

One could presume that the peasants did not want to be leaders of a revolution, but rather simply benefit from a movement. In other words, did the peasants desire to be followers rather than leaders? Perhaps so. As a follower, you often received concessions, yet the punishment was not as severe. Leaders were singled out and punished, and under the constant watch of the government. It was often too difficult for followers to be sought after, as they were far too numerous and would consume nearly all of the government's time, energy, and money. It is feasible that the peasants were actually more intelligent than credited, as they were able to weigh the costs and benefits of leaders and followers, ultimately concluding that the benefits of a follower far outweighed the costs of a leader.

Instead of basing its strategies and tactics on what the peasantry lacked—namely a political consciousness—the party should have focused on what the peasantry possessed. The peasantry held a number of strengths that the party failed to utilize. For one thing, the SRs could never have referred to themselves as a mass party in terms of membership. Quite the opposite held true with the peasants. They outnumbered every other social class in Russia at the time. Yet, the party failed to use this to its advantage. The peasants were also in control of the agricultural output of the country. Obviously, if the peasants simply refused to work the land, they would suffer, but so would the rest of Russian society. The party did not attempt to encourage the peasants to participate in an agricultural boycott. To the party’s credit, however, they may have refrained from doing so because they were aware that this suggestion would not be well received by the village and could have ruined their credibility entirely. Regardless, the fact that the party did not attempt to use the significance of the livelihood of the peasants demonstrated the overall weaknesses inherent in the party strategy.
The party also failed to benefit from the sheer oppression of the peasants. Although the peasantry often displayed animosity towards the landlords and not the government, the party did not attempt to maintain this hostility, at least in any consistent manner. Only at times of peasant uprisings did the party show signs of sustaining their rage. For these reasons, the countryside often caught the party off guard. By the time the party did become involved, it was too late. The peasants exhibited that they were capable of acting on their own for their own benefit and in pursuit of their own goals.

Even though the PSR did not take full advantage of the peasantry, they still can be considered without a doubt the most influential political party among the rural population in the 1905 disturbances. Not only did the PSR display the highest level of agitation in the countryside, their debates about peasant involvement and ultimately the inclusion of the peasantry in their party program reveal that the party did possess a degree of concern for the peasants.

However, this is not to suggest that the party can be considered leaders of the peasant movements of 1905-07. Teodor Shanin sums up peasant action in stating, “the Russian peasant war of 1905-07 was mostly of the peasants, by the peasants, peasant-led and aiming for peasant goals....the peasantry acted as a major revolutionary force and showed considerable unity of political purpose...”\(^3\) Thus, the intentions of the SR party outweighed their actions. The peasants acted apart from party ideals and interests, despite the minimal attempts made by the party to engage them in its activities.

The Revolution of 1905 should be evaluated not just as a failed political movement in Russian history, but also as a combining of social forces which impacted Russian society for years to come. Understanding the role that society plays in times of crisis is essential for scholars for several reasons. For one, it details the different

\(^3\) Shanin, vol. 1, 170, 185.
conditions that were experienced throughout the country. It highlights the status of the workers, peasants, and bureaucrats. Secondly, a more accurate analysis of the country emerges from the process. Instead of evaluating a single social class, one is able to analyze several social aspects, resulting in a more accurate conclusion regarding the situation as a whole. Finally, predictions can be made about the role of society in future disruptions throughout the country. One is forced to look at the entire country, not just one segment of society. In doing so, it becomes easier to understand the relationship between past events and the future of the country.

Such is the case with the Revolution of 1905. The culmination of years of oppression, promises not fulfilled, and a declining economic situation led to eruptions throughout the country. It also highlighted the ability of all segments in society to express discontent. In the years between 1905 and 1917, society was more apt to doubt the government. Especially after Bloody Sunday, society began to question the loyalty and underlying intentions of the tsar. Soon, this questioning led to action. The results of their actions are not as important or significant as the actions themselves. These proved that the Russian people were not simply complacent anymore. In the years after 1907, similar circumstances were evident throughout the country. Therefore, one is tempted to draw parallels between the two, but that goes beyond the scope of the current work.

In addition, it is critical to understand the peasants’ opinions and beliefs regarding political parties in general. Did they understand what it meant to be a member of a party? Or, rather, were they ignorant on the matter, leading them to appear to be uninterested? It is difficult, if not impossible, to expose the exact beliefs of the peasants on political affiliations. The possibility that the peasants were attempting to unite together as a political entity is indeed miniscule. But the size and potential influence of the peasantry could not be denied. When villages joined together against their landlords, they were displaying functions expected of political parties. It is during
these times that the peasants were a de facto political party. They had a common goal, sought revolutionary changes, and acted to bring about these desired changes.

Given that they had the basic function of a political party, why then did the peasants not organize into a formal group, seeking to encompass several key aspects of a party? For the peasants, a big problem that they faced was their diversity. They were separated by regions, which resulted in a difference in desires, needs, and overall objectives. However, this should not exclude their ability to be effective in pushing the government for reforms. Many times, recognized political parties are given credit for their work within a particular country. Those that chose to remain separate from a party have simply been lumped together as “non-members.” But it is wrong to view them as indifferent. Instead, these groups should be looked at as political participants in their own right. Once again, the peasantry as a whole could be viewed as a quasi political party, albeit an extremely loose organization.
In translating from Russian to English, all attempts have been used to provide the most accurate translations. In some cases, however, there is no English equivalent. In cases of the like, the Russian term was used instead, and the following glossary attempts to provide an explanation of the terms.

**Guberniia** — province; a region; large local administrative unit within the Russian Empire; encompasses several uezds.

**Intelligentsia** — a collection of educated, professional persons who often work against the government.

**oblast** — a region, province, domain, or district which is comprised of several guberniia’s; the largest unit in the organizational structure of the PSR.

**pomeshchik (pl. pomeshchiki)** — a landowner, member of the gentry class.

**Soslovie** — a social estate

**Sosloviia** — the hierarchy of social estates

**Skhod** — traditional peasant assembly

**Uezd** — a district; a subdivision of a guberniia, comprised of several volost’s

**ukase** — an edict or declaration released by the government

**Volost’** — a group of rural villages, smallest official administrative unit, subdivision of a uezd; an exclusive peasant institution (unlike the zemstvo)
zemstvo—elected local authority at the guberniia and uezd levels during the years 1864-1918;
APENDIX B

RESULTS OF DUMA ELECTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party or group</th>
<th>First Duma 1906</th>
<th>Second Duma 1907</th>
<th>Third Duma 1907-1912</th>
<th>Fourth Duma 1912-1917</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extreme Right</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalists</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Octobrists</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressists</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dem. Reformers</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kadets</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Group/Trudoviki</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat.’1 Socialist</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRs</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDs</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No affiliation</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>439</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Due to the fact that some of the “parties” that participated in the elections were loosely organized groups, invariably different sources will provide different figures as well as different party representations.

---

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archival Sources

BAKHMETEFF ARCHIVES


HOOVER INSTITUTION ARCHIVES

De Basily, Nicholas A. Zemel’nyi vopros (Agrarian Question). Hoover Institution Archives.

— —. Political Parties History. Hoover Institution Archives.


— —. Box 1,8, 11,631: PSR Papers. Hoover Institution Archives.

— —. Box 145. Iskra. Hoover Institution Archives.

— —. Box 629. PSR Leaflets. Hoover Institution Archives.

Partiia Sotsialistov Revoliutsionerov Collection. Hoover Institution Archives.

Russian Subject Collection. Partiia Narodnoi Voli [Revolutionary Parties]. Hoover Institution Archives.

Russian Subject Collection. Russo Japanese War newspaper clippings. Hoover Institution Archives.

Vagner, Ekaterina N. Papers. Hoover Institution Archives.


— —. Box 6, Preparation for Uprising, 1904-1905, SR documents. Hoover Institution Archives.

— —. Box 20, Newspaper Clippings. Hoover Institution Archives.

— —. Box 8, Famine in Russia. Hoover Institution Archives.

EMORY UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES


PUBLISHED PRIMARY SOURCES

Bing, Edward J., ed. Nicholas II, Emperor of Russia, 1868-1918. The Secret Letters of the last tsar; being confidential correspondence between Nicholas II, and his mother, Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna. New York: Longmas, Green, and Co., 1938

Blackwell, Alice Stone, ed. The Little Grandmother of the Russian Revolution:


No author noted. Living Age 237 (2 May 1903): 312-314.


Revoliutsionnaia Rossia (Russia). No. 1-76 (1900-October 15, 1905).

Secondary Sources


Shanin, Teodor. *The Roots of Otherness: Russia’s Turn of the Century,* Volume I: Russia as a ‘Developing Society.’ New Haven: Yale University Press,


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jessica Howell lives in Saint Augustine, Florida, with her husband, Stuart, and two children, Olivia and Kemp. She teaches Advanced Placement courses at Ponte Vedra High School.