The Narodniks in the Russian Revolution: Russia's Socialist-revolutionaries in 1917: [a Documentary History], Francis King, Socialist History Society, 2007, 0955513820, 9780955513824, .


The Russian Civil War, Evan Mawdsley, Mar 1, 2007, History, 362 pages. Examines the causes and events of the 1917 revolution in Russia that led to the rise of Communism.

The Career of a nihilist a novel, S. StepniД—Nи‰’ÂadolД—Nи‰’Дžk, 1889, , 320 pages. .


A.V. Chayanov on the Theory of Peasant Economy, Aleksandr VasilД—nё—вич ChaiД—Nи‰’ÂadolД—Nи‰’Дžnov, 1986, Business & Economics, 316 pages. The work of A. V. Chayanov is today drawing more attention among Western scholars than ever before. Largely ignored in his native Russia because they differed from Marxist ....

From the Other Shore: Russian Social Democracy After 1921, Volume 5; Volume 125 Russian Social Democracy After 1921, AndrГ© Liebich, 1997, History, 476 pages. This book is an inquiry into the possibilities of politics in exile. Russian Mensheviks, driven out of Soviet Russia and their party stripped of legal existence, functioned ....


A People's Tragedy The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924, Orlando Figes, 1997, Russia, 923 pages. This is a single-volume history of the century's most tragic and brutal revolution. The author has been able to exploit the newly opened files in Moscow and other cities and to ....

The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party Before the First World War, Manfred Hildermeier, 2000, Populism, 385 pages. " The Socialist Revolutionary Party played an important role in the history of the Russian revolutionary movement. The author seeks to explain why this party--which continued ....

Entangled in Terror The Azef Affair and the Russian Revolution, Anna Geifman, Jan 1, 2000,
The party's ideology was built upon the philosophical foundation of Russia's narodnik—Populist movement of the 1860s-70s and its worldview developed primarily by Alexander Herzen and Pyotr Lavrov. After a period of decline and marginalization in the 1880s, the Populist/narodnik school of thought about social change in Russia was revived and substantially modified by a group of writers and activists known as "neonarodniki" (neo-Populists), particularly Viktor Chernov. Their main innovation was a renewed dialogue with Marxism and integration of some of the key Marxist concepts into their thinking and practice. In this way, with the economic spurt and industrialization in Russia in the 1890s, they attempted to broaden their appeal in order to attract the rapidly growing urban workforce to their traditionally peasant-oriented programme. The intention was to widen the concept of the 'people' so that it encompassed all elements in the society that were opposed to the Tsarist regime.

The Socialist Revolutionary Party was established in 1902 out of the Northern Union of Socialist Revolutionaries (founded in 1896), bringing together numerous local socialist-revolutionary groups which had been established in the 1890s, most notably Workers' Party of Political Liberation of Russia created by Catherine Breshkovsky and Grigory Gershuni in 1899. Victor Chernov, the editor of the first party organ, Revolutsionnaya Rossiya (Revolutionary Russia), emerged as the primary party theorist. Later party periodicals included Znamia Truda (Labor's Banner), Delo Naroda (People's Cause), and Volia Naroda (People's Will). Gershuni, Breshkovsky, AA Argunov, ND Avksentiev, MR Gots, Mark Natanson, NI Rakitnikov (Maksimov), Vadim Rudnev, NS Rusanov, IA Rubanovich, and Boris Savinkov were among the party's leaders.

The party's program was both democratic socialist and agrarian socialist in nature; it garnered much support amongst Russia's rural peasantry, who in particular supported their program of land-socialization as opposed to the Bolshevik programme of land-nationalisation—division of land to peasant tenants rather than collectivization in state management. Their policy platform differed from that of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Parties—both Bolshevik and Menshevik—in that it was not officially Marxist (though some of its ideologues considered themselves such); the SRs believed that the 'labouring peasantry', as well as the industrial proletariat, would be the revolutionary class in Russia. Whereas Russian SDs defined class membership in terms of ownership of the means of production, Chernov and other SR theorists defined class membership in terms of extraction of surplus value from labour. On the first definition, small-holding subsistence farmers who do not employ wage labour are, as owners of their land, members of the petty bourgeoisie; on the second definition, they can be grouped with all who provide, rather than purchase, labour-power, and hence with the proletariat as part of the 'labouring class'. Chernov nevertheless considered the proletariat the 'vanguard', with the peasantry forming the 'main body' of the revolutionary army.[1]

The party played an active role in the Revolution of 1905, and in the Moscow and St. Petersburg Soviets. Although the party officially boycotted the first State Duma in 1906, 34 SRs were elected, while 37 were elected to the second Duma in 1907; the party boycotted both the third and fourth Dumas in 1907–1917. In this period, party membership drastically declined, and most of its leaders emigrated from Russia.

A distinctive feature of party tactics in its early period (until about 1909) was its heavy reliance upon assassinations of individual government officials. These tactics (inherited from SRs' predecessor in the Populist movement, People's Will, a conspiratorial organization of the 1880s) were intended to embolden the "masses" and to intimidate ("terrorize") the Tsarist government into political concessions. (This tactic became known as "terrorism" and its practitioners "terrorists", though it is not to be confused with the current usage of this term, in reference to mass murder or to violence against civilians.) The SR Combat Organization, responsible for assassinating government officials, was initially led by Gershuni and operated separately from the party so as not to jeopardize its
political actions. SRCO agents assassinated two Ministers of the Interior, Dmitry Sipyagin and V. K. von Plehve, Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich, the Governor of Ufa N. M. Bogdanovich, and many other high-ranking officials.

In 1903, Gershuni was betrayed by his deputy, Yevno Azef, an agent of the Okhrana secret police, arrested, convicted of terrorism and sentenced to life at hard labor, managing to escape, flee overseas and go into exile. Azef became the new leader of the SRCO, and continued working for both the SRCO and the Okhrana, simultaneously orchestrating terrorist acts and betraying his comrades. Boris Savinkov ran many of the actual operations, notably the assassination attempt on Admiral Fyodor Dubasov.

Terrorism was controversial for the party from the beginning, however. At its Second Congress in Imatra in 1906, the controversy over terrorism was one of the main reasons for the defection of the SR Maximalists on the left and the Popular Socialists on the right. The Maximalists endorsed not only attacks on political and government targets but also 'economic terror' (i.e., attacks on landowners, factory owners etc.); the Popular Socialists rejected all terrorism. Other issues also divided the defectors from the PSR: The Maximalists disagreed with the SRs' version of a 'two-stage' revolution (the first stage being 'popular-democratic' and the second 'labour-socialist'), a theory advocated by Chernov, which, to the Maximalists, smacked of the Social-Democrats' distinction between 'bourgeois-democratic' and 'proletarian-socialist' stages of the revolution. Maximalism stood for immediate socialist revolution. The Popular Socialists, meanwhile, disagreed with the party's proposal to 'socialise' the land (i.e., turn it over to collective peasant ownership) and instead wanted to 'nationalise' it (i.e., turn it over to the state; they also wanted landowners to be compensated, while the PSR rejected indemnities).

In late 1908, a Russian narodnik and amateur spy hunter Vladimir Burtsev suggested that Azef might be a police spy. The party's Central Committee was outraged and set up a tribunal to try Burtsev for slander. When Azef was confronted with the evidence at the trial and was caught lying, he fled and left the party in disarray. The party's Central Committee, most of whose members had close ties to Azef, felt obliged to resign. Many regional organizations, already weakened in the wake of the revolution's defeat in 1907, collapsed or became inactive. Savinkov's attempt to rebuild the SRCO proved unsuccessful and it was suspended in 1911. Ironically, Gershuni had defended Azef from exile in Zurich until his death there.

With the start of World War I, the party found itself divided on the issue of Russia's participation in the war. Most SR activists and leaders, particularly those remaining in Russia, chose to support the Tsarist government mobilization against Germany. Together with the like-minded members of the Menshevik party, they became known as "oborontsy" (defensists). Many younger defensists living in exile joined the French army as Russia's closest ally in the war. A smaller group, the internationalists, which included Chernov, favored the pursuit of peace through cooperation with socialist parties in both military blocs. This led them to participation in the Zimmerwald and Kienthal conferences with Bolshevik emigres led by Lenin. This fact was later used against Chernov and his followers by their right-wing opponents as evidence of their lack of patriotism and alleged Bolshevik sympathies.

The February Revolution allowed the SRs to return to an active political role. Party leaders, including Chernov, were now able to return to Russia. They played a major role in the formation and leadership of the Soviets, albeit in most cases playing second fiddle to the Mensheviks. One member, Alexander Kerensky, joined the Provisional Government in March 1917 as Minister of Justice, eventually becoming the head of a coalition socialist-liberal government in July 1917, although his connection with the party was rather tenuous. (He had served in the Duma with the Trudoviks, breakaway SRs that defied the party's refusal to participate in the Duma.)

After the fall of the first coalition in April-May 1917 and the reshuffling of the Provisional Government, the party played a larger role. Its key government official at the time was Chernov who joined the government as Minister of Agriculture. He also tried to play a larger role, particularly in foreign affairs, but soon found himself marginalized and his proposals of far-reaching agrarian
reform blocked by more conservative members of the government. After the failed Bolshevik uprising of July 1917, Chernov found himself on the defensive as allegedly soft on the Bolsheviks and was excluded from the revamped coalition in August 1917. The party was now represented in the government by Nikolai Avksentiev, a right-wing defensist, as Minister of the Interior.

This weakening of the party's position intensified the growing divide within it between supporters of the coalition with the Mensheviks and those inclined toward more resolute, unilateral action. In August 1917, Maria Spiridonova, leader of the Left SRs, advocated scuttling the coalition and forming an SR-only government, but was not supported by Chernov and his followers. This spurred the formation of the left-wing faction and its growing support for cooperation with the Bolsheviks. The Left SRs believed that Russia should withdraw immediately from World War I, and they were frustrated that the Provisional Government wanted to postpone addressing the land question until after the convocation of the Russian Constituent Assembly instead of immediately confiscating the land from the landowners and redistributing it to the peasants.

Left SRs and Bolsheviks referred to the mainstream SR party as the "Right SR party" whereas mainstream SRs referred to the party as just "SR" and reserved the term "Right SR" for the rightwing faction of the party which was led by Breshkovsky and Avksentiev.[2] The primary issues motivating the split were the war and the redistribution of land.

At the Second Congress of Soviets on October 25, 1917, when the Bolsheviks proclaimed the deposition of the Provisional government, the split within the SR party became final. The Left SR stayed at the Congress and were elected to the permanent VTsIK executive (while initially refusing to join the Bolshevik government) while the mainstream SR and their Menshevik allies walked out of the Congress. In late November, the Left SR joined the Bolshevik government, obtaining three ministries.

In the election to the Russian Constituent Assembly held two weeks after the Bolsheviks took power, the party still proved to be by far the most popular party across the country, gaining 58% of the popular vote as opposed to the Bolsheviks' 25%. However, in January 1918 the Bolsheviks disbanded the Assembly and thereafter the SRs became of less political significance. The Left SRs became the coalition partner of the Bolsheviks in the Soviet government, although they resigned their positions after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed. A few Left SRs like Yakov Grigorevich Blumkin joined the Communist Party.

Dissatisfied with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, some Left SRs assassinated the German ambassador to Russia, Count Wilhelm Mirbach. In 1918 they attempted a "Third Russian Revolution" against the Bolsheviks, which failed, leading to the arrest, imprisonment, exile, and execution of party leaders and members. In response, some SRs turned once again to violence. A former SR, Fanny Kaplan, tried to assassinate Lenin on August 30, 1918. Many SRs fought for the Whites or Greens in the Russian Civil War alongside some Mensheviks and other banned moderate socialist elements. The Tambov Rebellion against the Bolsheviks was led by an SR, Aleksandr Antonov. However, after Admiral Kolchak was installed as "Supreme Leader," of the White Movement in November 1918, he expelled all Marxists from the ranks. As a result, many SRs placed their organization behind White lines at the service of the Red Guards and the CHEKA. Later, many Left SRs became Communists.

^ Following this pattern, Soviet authorities called the trial of the SR Central Committee in 1922 the "Trial of the Right SRs". Russian emigres and most Western historians used the term "SR" to describe the mainstream party while Soviet historians used the term "Right SR" until the fall of Communism in the USSR.

On the occasion of the ninetieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution of 1917, two more books join the inestimable number of studies of this cataclysmic event. One is a thoroughly researched study that focuses on communications between political elites and ordinary people, whereas the second is a short documentary history of the Socialist Revolutionary Party compiled and annotated with a pro-socialist bias. Sarah BadcockTM's study of the revolution offers a detailed and absorbing analysis of political power in the revolutionary setting of 1917. She meticulously traces the
contradictions and mutual misunderstandings of various social groups—especially urban intellectuals and peasants—from an everyday historical approach. According to the foreword written by the compiler Francis King, the aim of the short documentary history of the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) in 1917 is to present the party’s perspectives, which on many issues differed fundamentally from the position of the Marxist Russian Social Democratic Party, to an English-speaking readership.

Over the last twenty years, Western historiography has devoted increased attention to the study of provinces during the revolutionary year 1917 focusing either on important cities, such as Baku, Odessa, Saratov, Smolensk, and Kharkov, or on whole provinces or regions, such as Saratov, Tambov, Viatka, Voronezh, or the Don region. In her well-researched monograph, Badcock follows this path but, unusually, provides us with a comparative study of two provinces situated along the Volga: Nizhnii Novgorod and Kazan. Her basic aim is twofold. First, she focuses on the attempts of activists of different parties to communicate with ordinary people, and, second, she tries to address the failure of party politics from the viewpoint of ordinary people and their experiences.

The units of comparison are well chosen. These two neighboring provinces were quite distinct. On the one hand, Nizhnii Novgorod was predominantly Great Russian in its ethnic structure. In terms of its economy, it was not only well known for its big annual fair but also for its highly industrialized centers. For instance, metallurgical and other heavy industries were located in Nizhnii Novgorod and its suburbs of Kanavin and Sormovo. Kazan, on the other hand, was ethnically, denominationally, and culturally diverse. Only about 40 percent of the inhabitants of this province were Great Russian and nearly one-third were Tatars. Kazan’s industry was less developed than Nizhnii’s. Neither province belonged to the nearby fertile Black Earth region. But whereas Nizhnii Novgorod counted as a grain consuming province, which had to import grain, Kazan was a net producer that could export its grain surpluses. This was an important aspect of local politics, especially against the background of the provisions crisis that characterized the country during 1917.

The book covers a time period of just eight months, from the February Revolution to the Bolshevik uprising in October. It consists of an introduction and conclusion, and is divided into seven thematically arranged chapters. The second chapter shows how news of the successful February Revolution spread. The third chapter is devoted to the most influential, at least in terms of members, political party in 1917: the Socialist Revolutionary Party. The fourth chapter interestingly switches the point of view to not party politics but the people. This section emphasizes that local affiliations and identities were more important in order to be chosen as local leader than ties to a political party organization. Ideology and political consciousness played only a secondary role in the process of generating social support. The cultural enlightenment campaigns of 1917 form the nucleus of the fifth chapter. The author analyzes how Russia’s political elite was inclined to communicate with ordinary men and women to educate and enlighten them. The issue at stake was whether education could transform the people into conscious and full-fledged democratic citizens. The sixth chapter analyzes the situation of the soldiers and their wives. The last two chapters deal with two issues that had top priority on the political agenda throughout 1917: the land question and the provisions crisis.

Badcock’s study underlines the argument stressed by Don Raleigh that local issues really mattered. She asserts that the big political issues discussed in the capitals did not shape the understanding of what local politics really was; rather, local interests, concerns, and conditions were at the center. Thus, in effect, she supports an argument proffered by the well-known German sociologist Max Weber. In his voluminous sociology of religion first published in 1920, he stated that interests, especially material but also mental, and not ideas, directly dominate people’s actions.

The heterogeneity of the initially very popular SRs caused a problem of perception among the people of the two provinces. The intelligentsia tried hard to be understood by the people. However, their “civilizing mission” and their growing interest in “estate affairs” widened the gap between elites and people. Instead of their amalgamation with the people, which was the party elite’s intention, an insurmountable alienation arose. Some details of her discussion of the SRs seem to be doubtful. She reiterates the often stressed reproach that the party lacked a strong organization. However, it would be unfair to attribute this deficiency solely to this party. Stefan
Karsch has convincingly claimed the opposite in his very thoughtful and recently published book on Voronezh. Moreover, one has to keep in mind that the leading Bolshevik, Iakov M. Sverdlov, was dismayed at the organizational defects of his party in 1917-18, indicating that even the supposedly well-organized Bolsheviks had to fight with the same problems. It is very likely that some of the organizational and financial problems resulted from the rapid development of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. Yet these problems did not prevent the SRs from publishing many newspapers and brochures in 1917. Minor points of critique are that Badcock misnames the leader of the Left SRs in Kazan (Aleksandr instead of Andrei [pp. 73, 258]) as well as Leopold H. Haimson (pp. 78, 249), and some figures contradict each other (pp. 66-67).

These cavils aside, her book is well researched. Drawing on hitherto almost unexploited local archival materials and a huge array of local newspapers, she evaluates the roles of popular institutions and of various social groups. Moreover, she seriously questions the historical paradigm of dual power as an adequate description for the complex relationship of power in the provinces. She stresses that regional government lost control of the countryside in 1917, and this loss of control was precipitated by the provision crisis. Central and local governmental policies on grain procurement widened the gulf between their visions of the countryside and those of the rank and file. Government grain procurement failed because it lacked an effective administration and the willingness of the grain producing peasants to make economic sacrifices in the name of the common good. Thus, Badcock makes a significant contribution to the study of the 1917 revolutions and of Russia’s political, social, and everyday history.

King's documentary account, which covers the historically tumultuous period from the February Revolution to the dissolution of the Russian Constituent Assembly, begins with a foreword and a concise introductory chapter on the populist movement from the 1860s to 1917. The volume consists of forty-seven documents arranged into eleven sections. The third section deals with the February Revolution. The next sections are devoted to important questions of the political agenda in 1917 and of dissension within the Socialist Revolutionary Party. Two sections (the fifth and the eighth) deal with the question of war and peace: the April Crisis about the provisional government’s war aims and the so-called Kerensky Offensive of summer 1917. Sections 6 and 9 are devoted to the relationship of the Socialist Revolutionary Party to other socialist and democratic organizations and to the debates of the warring factions within the party, such as the SR-Maximalist heresy and the internationalist left SRs. Amid the sailors of the Baltic fleet, as well as in the garrisons of port cities of northern Russia, such as Helsingsfors, Reval, Kronstadt, and Petrograd, both left-wing factions had the strongholds. Section 7 focuses on the peasants, the question of land reform, and the provisions crisis. The last four chapters are devoted to important political issues, such as the Kornilov revolt, the Bolshevik coup d’etat and the convocation of the Second Soviet Congress, the All-Russian Constituent Assembly, and the split of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. Regarding the split, the left SRs were expelled from the party right after the overthrow of the provisional government, leading to the formation of an independent party organization by the left SRs.

The compiler selected few documents from contemporary publications and brochures. Most were taken instead from post-Soviet documentary editions, i.e., the proceedings of the Petrograd Soviet or the voluminous editions of such materials on the SRs, left SRs, and SR-Maximalists published by the Russian publishing house ROSSPÄ–N. One document pertaining to everyday life during mid-April 1917 in a hamlet of Tambov Province is taken from a Russian Internet source. The selection of documents is appropriate; the translations are close to the originals and fluidly written.

Unfortunately, omissions in text passages are not always indicated, and annotations and footnotes are rare. Moreover, the edition lacks an index and references for further reading. Nevertheless, this publication is to be welcomed. A great many of the existing documentary editions dealing with the Russian Revolution of 1917 do not cover the viewpoint of the Socialist Revolutionary Party as fully as they should. In this respect, this documentary edition fills a gap. It enhances our opportunity to deal more adequately in undergraduate classes with the SRs during the revolutionary period of 1917.
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