Introduction

HOWEVER ONE may interpret and evaluate the Russian revolutions of 1917, it is impossible to deny the decisive role in their outcome that was played by industrial workers. Yet, although most Western accounts of 1917 have at least recognized the importance of the attitudes and actions of the workers, it is only recently that American authors have attempted to delve into the earlier history of this segment of Russia's population and its place in Russian society.[1] Except for a handful of articles, even the recent studies have examined the Russian workers only in the narrow context of their relations with revolutionary Marxist intellectuals and political groups.[2] Moreover, few of them look further back than the early 1890's.

This neglect of the history of Russia's industrial workers has been symptomatic of the more general failure to examine the processes of Russian industrialization in the period before the "take-off" of the 1890's. Major studies in this area, covering the first half of the nineteenth century, have appeared only in the past three years.[3] No one to date has tried to examine the situation of the nineteenth-century Russian worker as a part of the context of early industrialization, to assess the impact of the early experiences of Russian laborers upon their subsequent political evolution, or to investigate the interaction between the workers' situation and the attitudes and actions of other segments of society before the 1890's.

This book is intended to be the first step in such an endeavor. The year 1855 has been chosen as a point of departure because the death of Nicholas I in that year, and the termination of the Crimean War in 1856, set the stage for a fresh assessment of government policy toward industrialization and hence toward industrial workers. A new pro-industrial attitude emerged from that assessment, and although there was considerable vacillation in the choice

and implementation of particular policies in the years that followed, the tsarist regime would never again revert to the ambiguity about industrialization that had characterized the reign of Nicholas I (1825–55). From this point of view, the years 1855–1917 constitute a discrete and continuous period. It may be subdivided according to such criteria as the vigor with which industrialization was pursued and the degree of success with which it was implemented, but the basic pro-industrial posture assumed by Alexander II early in his reign remained as tsarist policy during the reigns of his successors. The year 1855–56 thus marks an important point from which to begin to follow the evolution of the general context in which the history of the industrial worker transpired. Moreover, the relative relaxation of autocratic control that marked Alexander's advent to the throne opened up new possibilities for public discussion and debate about industry, labor, and related questions, which had been severely restricted during the reign of Nicholas. Anticipation of the forthcoming emancipation of the serfs infused the atmosphere with the spirit of social reform, which was partially transformed into public concern with the situation of factory workers. In turn, public discussion at times spilled over into concrete activity aimed at improving the lot of the industrial laborer.

The year 1870 has been chosen as the terminal point for this book because the following year marked the beginning of a process of cross-fertilization between urban factory workers and the radical intelligentsia. From 1871 until the assassination of Alexander in 1881, there was a fairly steady interaction between radical Populists and a significant segment of the industrial workers of St. Petersburg (and, to a lesser extent, between Populists and workers in other cities) that, despite some interruptions in the 1880's, formed a continuum with the interaction between workers and Marxists in the 1890's. In contrast to the post-1870 period, the first fifteen years of Alexander's reign saw virtually no contact between industrial workers and the radical intelligentsia, whose attention was focused on other areas. These years form a discrete period, then, in that they give us the only opportunity between the Crimean War and 1917 to study the situation of urban workers independently of the history of revolutionary politics. Such a study is essential if we

are to reach a fuller understanding of the social and political conditions in which the labor movement and the radical movement of the intelligentsia later began to interact.*

My decision to concentrate this study on the city of St. Petersburg may be questioned by some. Insofar as I deal with such topics as tsarist labor policy and the attitudes toward factory labor expressed in the press, the topic of necessity transcends the boundaries of any particular region. It is true, nonetheless, that both the government and unofficial commentators, to the extent that they expressed concern with the problems of urban factory workers, tended to concentrate their attention on the city of St. Petersburg and its immediate environs during the period under consideration. St. Petersburg was both the seat of government and the center of intellectual life. It was natural for officials, professional journalists, and other writers to be concerned primarily with those workers who were closest at hand, and by the time of the Crimean War, St. Petersburg had become the most highly industrialized city in Russia. Factories and factory workers were simply more visible there than in most other Russian cities. For these reasons, even a study that purported to cover all the urban industrial areas of Russia would necessarily place a very heavy emphasis on the St. Petersburg region. I have found it more satisfactory to focus my study expressly on that region, while drawing attention to other areas or to the Empire as a whole where it seems useful.

Underlying this choice, and perhaps more basic to it, is my feeling that the general state of the field of Russian history in the United States requires more concentration on regional studies, confined within fairly narrow chronological limits. Broad works of synthesis and interpretation, based mainly on the research of Soviet scholars, seem to be yielding a diminishing margin of intellectual profit. Since at least some American scholars can now undertake basic research in the Soviet Union, intellectual history has ceased to be the sole domain in which Americans can add to the building blocks of historical synthesis, as several recent studies attest. By taking advantage of new opportunities, we can examine basic historical problems within manageable regional and chronological limits,

* The period 1871–81, the years of Populist-worker interaction, will be the subject of a second volume of this study.

eventually achieving new syntheses and general understandings of Russian history. In my particular undertaking, the hope is that by narrowly focusing on a single but vitally important region during a short but formative period, I may contribute to our ultimate understanding of the role of factory workers in the Russian revolutionary movement, and of the social and political repercussions of industrialization as it was carried out in the context of the Russian autocratic system.

Although Soviet writings on the history of industrial labor in nineteenth-century Russia have been voluminous, the scholarly yield has been rather limited. The most useful Soviet contributions have been the collection and publication of documents dealing with labor unrest, some of which have been indispensable to my investigation, and the publication of some statistical studies. Most interpretive studies, however, the best of which date back to the 1920's, suffer from a predictable tendency to present the history of factory workers in as heroic a light as possible, and to ignore those aspects of Russian labor history that cannot be directly related to the revolutionary struggle. Somewhat like their Western counterparts, Soviet historians have not been much interested in the situation of industrial labor during periods of apparent calm or muted, undramatic struggle. While searching further into the past than American historians, they have tended to restrict the object of their search to moments of unrest and defiance and to magnify the significance of these events in order to foreshadow the heroic revolutionary role that industrial workers were to play in later years. Thus, although a few valuable articles have appeared relating to some of the unspectacular aspects of Russian labor history in the period with which I am dealing, most recent Soviet work in this area has been restricted to the role of labor unrest in the so-called revolutionary situation of 1859–61.[4]

A more significant shortcoming in the work of Soviet historians follows from their overly schematic conception of the historical evolution of the industrial working class. Although there have been significant differences in interpretation, there has been little variety in basic approach.[5] Typically, a strong emphasis is placed on the degree to which the Russian industrial worker underwent a historical evolution similar to that of his Western European coun-

terpart. Differences are recognized, but are usually viewed as epiphenomenal. Broadly speaking, Soviet historians postulate a more or less linear development that began with the penetration of the industrial revolution into Russian economic life, usually ascribed to the 1840's, and reached its climax with the conscious revolutionary activity of the fully proletarianized workers in 1917. Seen as important milestones along this path are the emancipation of the peasantry in 1861, which set the stage for completing the process of proletarianization, and the birth of the Marxist movement in the 1890's, which was the necessary condition for infusing the proletariat with revolutionary consciousness.

This schema has its attractive features, and should not be dismissed out of hand. Many important aspects of Russian labor history can be placed within its framework without doing serious violence to historical accuracy. Yet it fails ultimately, in my opinion, to provide satisfactory answers to some crucial questions; or perhaps more accurately, it fails to ask them.

Why were the urban industrial workers of Russia inclined toward revolutionary action in 1905 and 1917? If our response to this question invokes their advanced degree of proletarianization—that is, their severance from traditional agrarian and craft occupations, extensive specialization and division of labor, psychological acceptance of industrial labor as a permanent way of life—then surely we have not come to grips with it. For we know that revolutionary predilections were considerably weaker among the workers of countries where the degree of proletarianization was unquestionably more advanced. Recent events in France should militate against the smug assumption by Western historians and sociologists that industrial advancement has closed the door to the emergence of radical activism among workers in all highly developed nations. Nevertheless, the history of the past hundred years compels us to seek other explanations for labor radicalism than advanced proletarianization, as defined above.

On the other hand the degree of proletarianization becomes germane if approached concretely within the context of the flow of Russian history, and not as a reflection of any sociological law that purports to fix a certain level of development as the threshold of revolutionary activism among industrial workers. Such an approach

EIGHT

The Labor Question, 1867–1870

DURING THE EARLY YEARS of Alexander II's reign, a number of loosely associated pro-industrial economists, publicists, and academicians—many of them with connections in the Finance Ministry—had become the first to manifest a serious concern with the plight and fate of industrial workers in Russia. Drawing on both practical and humanitarian arguments, these professionals had called for the development of a free, independent, and educated post-emanicipation working class, guarded from the vicissitudes of free enterprise by a network of protective institutions ranging from Terner's "associations" to a comprehensive body of factory legislation. Although the termination of the Shtakel'berg Commission—whose draft legislation had embodied most of these proposals—did not end all hope for their implementation, it did mark the beginning of a hiatus in public discussion of the labor question.

Toward the end of the decade, as was just seen, the silence was broken by a number of medical doctors, whose narrow professional interest in public health eventually brought them around to a thoroughgoing discussion of the labor question. Similarly, it was their expertise and professionalism that permitted economic and technological specialists to revive their public discussion of the labor question during roughly the same years, 1867–70. Though general discussions of the labor question as it affected Russia were notably absent from the periodical press after 1863,* the government's

* Occasional references to "the labor question" by populist-oriented writers of the Left (especially in the journal *Otechestvennye zapiski*, beginning in 1868) were not really discussions of the labor question as defined in this study, but variations on the theme of the peasant question. Nor were they of any particular significance to developments in Russia during the period treated here. They are, however, important to an understanding of the Populist attitude toward industrial workers in the 1870's, a topic that I intend to treat in a sequel to the present study. Despite its title, V. Bervi-Flerovskii's study "The Situation of the Working Class in Russia" (*Polozhenie rabochego klassa v Rossii*), published in 1869, does not, in my view, qualify as an exception to the above statement. See below, p. 382n.

continued interest in industrial progress, especially after the Austro-Prussian War of 1866, precluded the continued silence of those persons responsible for the technical side of industrialization—economists, engineers, professors, and some manufacturers.

The mid-1860's marked the beginning of a new professionalism in Russia, which is most commonly discussed in terms of the legal and medical professions but was equally important in the areas of industrial technology, economic statistics, and other specialized endeavors related to industrial activity. In 1866 official permission was granted for people in these professions to establish in St. Petersburg, with the sponsorship and collaboration of the government, the so-called Imperial Russian Technical Society (Imperatorskoe Russkoe Tekhnicheskoe Obshchestvo), which was followed in 1867 by the somewhat less professional Society for the Encouragement of the Development of Industry and Commerce* (Obshchestvo dlia sodeistviia razvitiiu promyshlennosti i torgovli).[1] These organizations quickly replaced the Imperial Geographic Society as the natural forum or semipublic arena in which those in the forefront of Russia's economic modernization could discuss and debate such matters as tariff policy, railroads, inventions and patents, government subsidization of industry, and, inevitably, the labor question. The composition of these organizations—which in addition to professional experts included a number of prominent St. Petersburg industrialists—dictated that the emphasis in their discussions would fall more on the practical and instrumental than on the abstract or theoretical side of things. What this meant with respect to the labor question was that the concrete experience of the last several years of post-emancipation industrial life would be brought to bear on their deliberations, thus providing us, in effect, with a practical test of the government's failure to encourage the development of an independent and permanent urban labor force buttressed by an up-to-date industrial code. If the practical interests of persons involved in bringing about economic modernization differ substantially from the narrower police interests of an autocratic regime, those persons may find themselves moving inadvertently in a different direction from the very government that first had promoted their activities. This was the case in St. Petersburg in the late 1860's.

* Hereafter called Technical Society and Industrial Society, respectively.

The Imperial Russian Technical Society

The Technical Society, at first the more active and outspoken of the two new organizations, was officially chartered in April 1866 and began functioning in November of that year. Its secretary and guiding spirit at that time, E. N. Andreev, was an official of the Ministry of Finance and a professor at the St. Petersburg Forestry Institute. He was also one of the liberal economists who had been consulted by Ignat'ev's commission on the labor question.[2] The Technical Society's first chairman, Baron A. I. Del'vig, was chief inspector of railroads; and its honorary chairman, whose appointment was evidently intended to symbolize the close ties between the Society and the regime, was Duke Nikolai Maksimilianovich Leikhtenbergskii (Leuchtenberg), grandson of Nicholas I, president of the Mineralogical Society since 1865, and an active St. Petersburg industrialist.[3] The Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich (whose close relations with members of the circle of liberal economists were noted in Chapter 3) was considered too controversial for the position of honorary chairman, but he did become the patron of one of the Technical Society's departments.[4]

With this kind of prestigious support behind it, the Technical Society soon became an active and flourishing organization. Its charter membership of two hundred dues-paying members quickly rose to five hundred (at ten rubles each per annum). Free office space was given to it by the Ministry of State Property. More important, the Society received large contributions from individual backers, most notably from prominent railroad entrepreneurs who were anxious to curry Del'vig's favor.[5] These resources enabled the Society to begin publishing its own journal, *Notes of the Imperial Russian Technical Society*,[6] in 1867.

The participation of a number of prominent manufacturers in the activities of the Technical and Industrial Societies represented a new phase in the development of Russian industrialists as a self-conscious social group. A break from their docile past had already begun in the wake of the Crimean defeat, when the growing recognition of the importance of industry encouraged a small number of articulate industrialists to speak out on the positive effects emancipation would have on manufacturing, the need for protective tariffs, and other controversial issues. A few, we know, had even gone

so far as to cautiously criticize some aspects of proposed legislation on the labor question. But these early flashes of class assertiveness had been feeble and largely ineffectual. More importantly, they had aroused hostility toward manufacturers even from those economists, officials, and publicists who were most well-disposed toward the goal of industrialization.[7]

This gap between the active industrialists and the spokesmen for industrialization was bound to close somewhat as industry rose in the order of government priorities. The healing process was facilitated because, almost from the very beginning of the postwar debate over economic issues, critics of Russian manufacturers tended to exempt the more prominent industrialists in St. Petersburg from their general attacks, even while condemning some of them for the intolerable conditions in their factories.[8]

Taken as a group, St. Petersburg industrialists could be described with fair accuracy as more advanced, sophisticated, and—at least in their public postures—more enlightened and conscientious than most of their provincial counterparts. Several of the most prominent among them had distinguished themselves by supporting Sunday schools for workers in the early 1860's. Many others had made it a point to commend labor legislation proposed by the St. Petersburg commission in 1859–60.[9] Besides taking these specific positions, a number of St. Petersburg industrialists were beginning to develop an ingratiating style of discourse that helped bridge the gap between them and their critics. As they exposed their views to the public, these few vocal, active entrepreneurs became increasingly adept at formulating sophisticated arguments, some of them already familiar in the more industrialized countries of Europe, through which they attempted to link their own needs and desires with the alleged needs of the state and of society, and to demonstrate that the policies they advocated were in the national interest.

Typically, these advanced entrepreneurs were industrialists who had recently achieved prominence in the machine and metal-processing industries by virtue of their government-sponsored efforts to develop the private manufacture of war-related products. Most were either of close foreign background[10] or, more commonly, were Russian nobles with advanced technical educations who had served in the government and still retained close ties in one or another ministry.

An outstanding industrialist of this type, one who became a leading member of the Technical Society, was Vasilii Poletika,[11] owner of the widely known Nevskii or Semiannikovskii foundry, whom we encountered earlier as an unsuccessful advocate of protectionism in St. Petersburg's economic press and an organizer of an awkward attempt to demonstrate to the Tsar the gratitude of St. Petersburg workers for their emancipation. Poletika came from an ancient line of Ukrainian nobility, a fact that may explain his self-confidence, his readiness, rare among manufacturers, to express himself openly on public issues. In 1856 he retired from military service with the rank of colonel and settled in St. Petersburg, where, together with Semiannikov, a colleague from his army days, he soon purchased a small foundry on the Schlüsselburg Road by the Nevskii gate. Under the protective wing of the Naval Ministry, the foundry was able to survive the postwar economic crisis. By 1864, when Poletika and his partner acquired the adjacent Thomson foundry, the Nevskii foundry was well on its way to becoming one of the largest mechanized industrial plants in the capital. Toward the end of the decade, it was further enlarged through the purchase of a neighboring textile factory. All this expansion was made possible by large orders from the Naval Ministry for the construction of warships and nautical equipment and, in the latter part of the decade, from the Transportation Ministry for locomotives and railroad equipment.[12]

Not satisfied with pursuing purely entrepreneurial activities, Poletika, who held an advanced degree in mining engineering, began to publish articles and deliver public lectures on controversial economic questions. By the early 1860's, he had already established himself as the most articulate and colorful figure among the industrialists of the capital, and in particular as their leading spokesman for protectionism. His name was fast becoming a St. Petersburg institution, and he himself the prototype of a new kind of urban entrepreneur—of noble birth, educated, connected with government officials, self-assured, at ease in an official milieu and in his relations with fellow industrialists of foreign extraction.*

* According to the annual report of the St. Petersburg Statistical Committee for 1863, almost half of the St. Petersburg enterprises classified as *fabriki* and *zavody* belonged to foreigners. SPSK, *Fabriki i zavody v S.-Peterburge v 1863 godu*, p. 8. Most Soviet historians have been reluctant to acknowledge the relatively large role of foreign entrepreneurs (as distinct from foreign capital) in the early development of Russian industry. Gindin, however, in his recent article, faces the issue squarely and points to the