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MASTER THESIS

**FROM THE DECEMBRISTS TO THE NARODNIKS: THE RADICAL
OPPOSITION IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE AND ITS LEGACY**

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Abstract

The paper is an overview of how the opposition was first shaped in the Russian Empire in the first half of the 19th century and focus in the emergence of socialism in the late 40s and its impact in the new current of radical opposition; the Narodniks. The paper was conducted through examining and comparing the different intellectual movements in this time period.

Introduction

In 1547, Ivan IV became the first Tsar of all Rus, a title¹ used to refer to the monarch of the Russia up until 1917, when Nicholas II abdicated after the February Revolution of the same year. A few months later the October revolution put an irreversible end to Tsardom by eradicating its members and establishing the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the world's first self-proclaimed socialist state, thus closing a chapter in the Russian history, in which the society, or at least parts of it, questioned the tsarist regime. The 19th century in Europe is characterized by its tendency to revolution. In Russia, anti-government forces started emerging too after the first decade and continued to question the Tsar's authority throughout the century.

The opposition at this period was a) not united b) heterogeneous c) lacking support from the mass d) under a strict and authoritarian regime which provided little space of free expression and e) had different social and political demands. Throughout the many years that this paper covers, the opposition was represented by many intellectual movements and by many personalities that embodied these movements. However, due to lack of space and time, I preferred to focus only in the intellectual trends and not in the personalities, with some exceptions. Therefore, due to the objective conditions of the paper's requirements, there is a trace of "unfairness" in how these trends are presented.

The views of each of these movements and the interaction between them is examined through a comparative method, considering how this process led to the creation of the first

¹ In 1721 Peter I the Great raised Russia to an empire and decreed that the title emperor should be used instead of "tsar", thus the word retained an informal use.

current of socialism in Russia, its immediate successors, the increasing radicalization and how the social movement began its timid steps. Furthermore, the changing political and socio-economic environment during this period in the Russian Empire is taken into consideration; three different tsars –Alexander I (1801-1825), Nicholas I (1825-1855) and Alexander II (1855-1881): the devastating military loss, i.e. the Crimean War: the internal suffocating situation: the end of the serfdom and the inauguration of the capitalist reformation of the economy. Thus, in terms of chronologic setting, the paper covers roughly the era from 1820s till 1870s.

In Chapter I, the focus is on why and how the Decembrists were formed in the Post-Patriotic war of 1812 Russia, and in their actions and their significance regarding the following oppositional forces despite their failure. Chapter II looks into the two separate ideological movements -the Slavophiles and the Westernizers- that came into existence in the late 30s in the suffocating environment of Nicholas' reign. In the third Chapter, the paper examines the thought of the first advocates of socialism in Russia i.e. Herzen, Bakunin and the Petrashevskys Circle, and their fundamental ideas which were pivotal for the creation of Narodism/Populism². The fourth Chapter describes the reasons behind the final split between the socialists and the rest of the opposition, and also looks into the ideas and practices of Narodism and to the conflicting relationship between the new advocates of socialism and the older ones.

The idea for this paper came when I was first introduced to the Decembrists during Professor Yakovaki's course «Interconnected histories: The Balkans and the Black Sea from the 18th to the 20th centuries» in my Master's Programme in Southeastern European Studies. A special gratitude is addressed to her because she also introduced me to Herzen and to other important intellectuals of this era and because of her general recommendations regarding literature and writing process. Furthermore, a special mention should be made to Dr. Nikolaos Chrissidis for his literature recommendations.

² It should be noted that because of the time period (19th century) and the place (Russian Empire) this paper deals with, many words do not correspond with the relevant meaning they have in the then European or modern framework. Thus, Populism (or social democracy) has a different connotation compared to their current use.

Literature Review

Due to lack of knowledge of the Russian language, lack of accessibility in archives and lack of time, the use of secondary sources was preferred. Thus, primary sources consists of a collection of works of Herzen, four articles by Michael Bakounin and two novels –Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons* and Chernyshevsky’s *What is to be Done*- mostly used for a better understanding of the personalities. Since the paper covers a wide range of events and personalities, the literature was structured accordingly. The general historic framework in Russia was provided by Lieven’s *The Cambridge History of Russia* (2006) and Bushkovitch’s *A Concise History of Russia* (2011). Regarding the Decembrists a plethora of information was taken from the recent works of O’ Meara -*The Decembrist Pavel Pestel, Russia’s First Republican* (2003)- and Trigou -*The Decembrist Myth in Russian Culture* (2009)- together with Mazour’s *The First Russian Revolution* (1937).

The two books that this paper used more, concern the radical opposition; Venturi’s *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century* (first Italian edition 1952) and Walicki’s *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism* (1979). Both of these books provide an abundant range of information and analysis for Herzen, Bakunin and the Narodniks. Herzen, being an intellectual “landmark” for the paper, attracted separated literature too; Malia’s *Alexander Herzen and the birth of Russia socialism* (1961), Berlin’s *Russian Thinkers* (1978) and Pattridge’s *Alexander Herzen: 1812-1870* (1984).

A better understanding for non-socialists intellectuals in the 19th century in Russia was provided by Walicki, Offord’s *Nineteenth Century Russia: Opposition to Autocracy* (1999), Diala’s *Η Ρωσία Απέναντι Στα Βαλκάνια: Ιδεολογία και πολιτική στο δεύτερο μισό του 19ου αιώνα* (2009) and the edited work by Hamburg & Poole *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830-1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity* (2013).

Judging by the bibliography there seems to be a renewed interest in the political thought of 19th century Russia. However, in this literature there is a tendency to overlook the cross-correlation between political thought and society.

Chapter I: The First Revolutionaries in the 19th Century

Decembrists is the name assigned to different groups with various purposes due to their action in December 1825, when they turned against the new Tsar, Nicholas I. After Alexander's sudden death, there was confusion on who was going to be his successor unknown to almost everyone, Constantine had granted his right to the throne and Nicholas was the legitimate successor. Nicholas did not know about this and thus he swore his allegiance to his brother. However, Constantine had done the same. The Decembrists tried to benefit from this interregnum in order to achieve their goals, but they were ill prepared, as they had not chosen this day but it chose them. Firstly, one group, called the Northern Society, gathered in the Senate Square with a firepower of 3.000 men in 14th of December acting on a standing" rebellion, and two weeks later another society, the Southern, together with the United Slavs, initiated a rebellion in the south. Both of these ventures failed, with 121 people being sentenced, while 5, Kakhovsky, Pestel, Ryleev and Bestuzhev-Ryumin were executed. Despite their failure a "legacy was created", setting a precedent to the radical and revolutionary movements that followed suit.

Origins

The beginning of the 19th century saw the expansion of secret societies in many countries. Some were a continuation of the Masonic lodges, like the Tugendbund in Germany, while others emerged in Italy, France, Greece, etc.

We can trace a common ground in many of these groups on two events: a) the Napoleonic wars and b) the subsequent reaction. Like the French Carbonaries, most of the Decembrists were coming from the army³. Soldiers that had participated in the war travelled all across Europe gaining experience that allowed them to compare their homeland with other countries. Fonvizin, one of the Decembrists noted that "during the campaign through Germany and France our young men became acquainted with European civilization, which produced upon them strong impression. They were able to compare all

³ F. Artz (1934) *Reaction & Revolution, 1814-1832*, New York & London, Harper Brothers, p. 153.

that they had seen abroad with what confronted them at every step at home”⁴. Some of the soldiers because of the war had also developed leadership skills⁵.

The Russian army came back victorious facing a more despotic regime than the one they had been sent to fight and with their situation deteriorating. Already in 1810, Alexander had started setting up military colonies in his effort to reduce army expenditures: the army would be sent to settle to new lands where it could be self-sufficient. The plan was orchestrated by the “symbol of darkest reaction and cruelest oppression”, Count Arakcheev⁶. The plan was logical as it would reduce the expenses, which had become unbearable for the state, but these colonies resulted only in heavier oppression for the soldiers and even the children living there were forced to wear uniforms. Some revolts did indeed break out, but they were faced with brutality. Count Vorontsov – following a mutiny in the army in 1820- acknowledged the dangers of having the military in such miserable state: “Carbonari appear only when people is led to a state of despair, and we have the elements for its appearance, beginning with the defenders of the state themselves. The military men are the only ones who are esteemed in our country, and at the same time they are the most unfortunate people”⁷.

The relative regression of Russia was not limited only to the treatment of the military. The most extraordinary difference compared to the other European states involved in the war was serfdom. This situation was complicated by the fact that abolition of serfdom had occurred in 1807 in Poland and also by 1819 had been implemented in the Baltics. Furthermore, Poland and Finland had been granted by Alexander a constitution that was considered “the most advanced instrument of government that existed anywhere on the continent”⁸, and had also been granted to them an independent administration – Poland’s autonomy ended after the failed Polish November Uprising in 1830⁹, while Finland’s lasted

⁴ As cited in A. Mazour (1937) *The First Russian Revolution, 1825, The Decembrist Movement: Its Origins, Developments and Significance*, California, Stanford University Press, p. 55.

⁵ The Spanish government feared the most the experienced army officers, see: Artz, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

⁶ Mazour, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

⁷ As cited in *ibid.*, p. 62.

⁸ Artz, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁹ The Polish Question is a major topic throughout the same period that I am referring in this paper. Apart from the consequences that the two Polish uprisings, firstly in 1830 and then in 1863, had for the Polish people and the structure of the Empire herself –like in the internal legislation or in the foreign policy- , they also influenced the developments, as we shall see in later chapters, in the various ideological movements in Russia.

until the country became independent in 1917¹⁰. On contrary, Russia had to wait till 1906 for a constitution. By 1818 the liberal tendencies of Alexander had ended, together with the notion of a Russian constitution – simultaneously his previous backing of liberals in Italy and France ended too. The Tsar’s contradictory policy of that time was accurately summarized by Byron in his poem *Age of Bronze*:

«How should the autocrat of bondage, be The king of serfs, and set the nations free»¹¹.

Under these conditions, some officers established a secret, Masonic-like, society in 1816 called Union of Salvation. Among the members were the future leaders Pestel, Sergey Muravyov-Apostol, and the planned to be dictator -if the revolution would succeed-, Prince Sergei Trubetskoy, who eventually sought refuge in the Austrian Embassy during the uprising. The Union of Salvation disbanded in 1818 in favor of a restructured new secret society, the Union of Welfare. As with the Union of Salvation, the Union of Welfare was plagued by internal conflicts of the two distinct separate currents; the radicals, who were in favor of a Jacobin Republicanism –led by Pestel- and the moderates who advocated a constitutional monarchy. Again, the disputes led to another disbanding, and two groups emerged: the Southern Society and the Northern Society.

The Societies

The distinction of the two groups, briefly, was based on geographical, political, social and finally strategical terms. The Northern Society was located in St. Petersburg, while the Southern in Tulchyn, a small town in western Ukraine. On the political scale they were both against the Tsar’s autocracy, but the Northern Society was aiming for a constitutional monarchy, while the Southern for Jacobin Republicanism, a position held by Pestel since 1819, resulting in two separate constitutions-manifestos being drafted: Northern Society’s proposal for a constitutional monarchy and a federated Russian state, by Nikita Muraviev, and Pestel’s *Russian Justice*, which aspired for a russocentric Republic¹². Pestel’s

¹⁰ Finland not only retained her administrative autonomy, but the Grand Duchy of Finland, as it was called, was the first European country to introduce women's suffrage in 1907.

¹¹ I was directed to this poem by Artz who quotes (p. 149) another passage; *On Andes' and on Athos' peaks unfurled, The self-same standard streams o'er either world.*

¹² Pestel himself was a russified Lutheran German.

republicanism was to be established by a 10-year long provisional government with a dictator in charge¹³.

The social status of the members played a role in the formation of their respective programs. The Northern Society consisted of members coming from noble families and prestigious landowners. In contrary, the radicalism of the Southern society can be attributed to the lack of any financial status of the poorer army officers, with some deprived of land¹⁴. Pestel's *Russian Justice*, apart from the political provisions, foresaw redistribution of land¹⁵, while the Northern Society's constitution provided emancipation of the serfs but with the land ownership unchanged and only the personal property (e.g. tools) used until then by the serfs should belong to them¹⁶. Similar social stratification with the Southern Society also applies to the United Slavs: low rank officers with a small salary and not remarkable property¹⁷.

The different goals provided different strategies. The radicals advocated for regicide, something that neither the moderates nor their Polish allies supported. Furthermore, the radicals were noted for their effort to approach other secret organizations, namely the society of United Slavs, the Polish Patriotic Society and Pestel's efforts to unite the Northern and Southern Societies.

Impact

The Decembrists are characterized by internal conflicts, vague plans and evidently failure in their efforts. The Tsar remained in his throne until his death in 1855, serfdom remained a basic social and economic trait of Russia for another 36 years and the reactivity of the regime became stronger. The Decembrists were a prelude of the ensuing battle of radical opposing forces against the Tsardom, be it democratic, socialist, anarchist or communist, a battle that ended in a way that some of the Decembrist wanted: by slaughtering the Tsar and his family¹⁸.

¹³ P. O' Meara (2003) *The Decembrist Pavel Pestel, Russia's First Republican*. 1st ed. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 86.

¹⁴ Mazour, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

¹⁵ O' Meara, *op.cit.*, p. 102.

¹⁶ Mazour, *op. cit.*, p. 91. When the serfs were indeed emancipated by Alexander II, the final plan resembled Muratiev's.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

The following revolutionary currents always regarded the Decembrists as the forerunners of their cause. A fourteen year old Herzen, upon learning the news, “swore to avenge the executed men”¹⁹ and like Ogarev vowed to sacrifice their entire lives to the struggle that the Decembrists had begun²⁰. While the official narrative portrayed them as “madmen” and “apes of the West”²¹ without any real reasons of revolting, Herzen noted that the characteristics that made the Decembrists his “great father” were their “hatred against slavery, a respect for the West and revolution, a faith in the possibility of revolution in Russia”²², which remained part of the radical movements for almost a century, being the first of the many generations of revolutionaries.

The influence of the Decembrists does not end with the following revolutionaries. Intellectuals played a huge part in forming the Decembrists’ legacy. Pushkin²³, their contemporary and friend, Nekrasov (1821-1877) - whose poem *Russian Women* is about two wives of the Decembrists, who followed their husbands to their exile in Siberia- are two main examples of intellectuals. Furthermore, they were a point of interest for Tolstoy, whose *War and Peace* began by an effort to write a story about a Decembrist who returned in 1856 from his exile, and when he started writing for his youth he went back in 1812 so he turned his attention in this period²⁴, resulting in an incomplete novel called the Decembrist. Finally, other novels and films during the soviet era were also focused in their cause. However, in the 200 years that have passed from these events not everyone has depicted them positively, particularly during the last soviet decades²⁵.

They had an unexpected legacy too; Nicholas I developed a “Decembrist” syndrome and his foreign policy was devoted to the eradication of liberalism and radicalism in other European countries which resulted in Russia sending her army to the Habsburg Empire in 1849 to suppress the revolution.

Ryleev, a poet in trade, was right when he said that “I foresee that there will be no success, but an upheaval is necessary, for it will awaken Russia, and we with our failure

¹⁹ As cited in Trigos, L. A. (2009) *The Decembrist Myth in Russian Culture*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 18.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

²¹ As cited in Mazour, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

²² Trigos, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

²³ Pushkin’s relationship with the Decembrists has been a widely discussed topic. See: Trigos, *op. cit.*, chapter 1.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

²⁵ Ibid., chapter 7 & 8.

will teach others”²⁶. The Decembrists did indeed fail and they –especially Ryleev and the other four- paid a heavy price for it. Capital punishment was not common in the Russian Empire. Before the hanging of the Decembrists, the last time capital punishment implemented was in 1764 for Vasily Mirovich, a guard of Ivan IV, who had tried to rescue him from his 20 years old imprisonment, and his failure resulted in Ivan IV getting assassinated and Mirovich executed. The rest of the convicted Decembrists were exiled in Siberia, being the first political prisoners to be sent there, an unfortunate tradition that ended only with the fall of USSR.

The Decembrists were neither the first nor the last ones who turned against the Tsar. Particularly after Peter the Great who changed the order of succession to the throne, palace coups were a common phenomenon. Ivan IV was a victim of a palace coup. Additionally, Alexander’s and Nicholas’s father, the Tsar Paul I, was assassinated by disgruntled officers 24 years previous to the December events.

The peasant and Cossacks rebellions of the past like the ones of Razin, Bulavin and Pugachev, who like the Decembrists had a lasting influence in the revolutionary legacy, had social reform demands, but they had no aspirations for a state change. Even though the Decembrists did not have a common and exclusive goal between them, they all turned against the institution of Tsardom, either by eliminating it completely or by reducing its provision, and were the first ones who drafted the future course of Russia. The failure of the rebellion to eliminate absolutism did not diminish the revolutionary seed planted by the Decembrists. Until then, the reforms happening in the Russian Empire were initiated by the head of the states themselves, in the motive of enlightened absolutism. As we shall see, Peter the Great was still highly regarded by many parts of the opposition in the following decades, but the time of absolutism had eclipsed. According to Malia, with “the Decembrists the idea of reform became the idea of revolt, and the goals envisaged became correspondingly more daring –either a constitutional monarchy or a Jacobin republic”²⁷. They also established a trend; the post-Decembrists oppositional and revolutionary forces

²⁶ Mazour, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

²⁷ M. Malia (1961) *Alexander Herzen and the birth of Russia socialism*, New York, Grosset & Dunlap, p. 416.

(at least until the late 50s) came from the same social group, the gentry. All these resulted to the Decembrists being regarded as the fathers of the Russian revolutionary movement²⁸.

²⁸ Their heritage continued to be disputed by numerous organizations, reaching the point when both the Bolsheviks and the White Guard were “claiming” it during the revolution in 1917.

Chapter II: The opposition during Nicholas' reactionary era

Nicholas inherited an empire which was considered one of the leading powers in Europe and was responsible for the normality in the European affairs, but had many obvious obsolete characteristics. Nicholas' reign has notoriously been known for its repression, stagnation and inefficiency²⁹. Herzen wrote about his reign that “to those who lived through it, it seemed that this dark tunnel was destined to lead nowhere”³⁰. Despite the need for progress and industrialization, Nicholas neither did try to abolish the existing feudal remnants in Russia, nor to provide constitution. Serf emancipation, which ultimately came in 1861 by Nicholas' successor, Alexander the II, was necessary for social and economic reasons; the state faced financial difficulties and many landlords were unable to repay their debts as they had defaulted³¹. The development of the industry was delayed and the peasants could not be taxed any further³². Russia was “compensating” her weaknesses with her vast lands and her sheer manpower³³. Also, her new status as one of the most powerful empires led to the birth of a mass Russophobia in Britain³⁴, a common phenomenon in the 20th century (perhaps Sovietphobia is a more suitable word), which I fear that in the last few years is making a comeback.

In addition, throughout his reign Nicholas followed an expansive foreign policy. He was successful against Russia's southern enemies as he seized the last territories in the Caucasus held by Persia with the Russo-Persian War (1826–28), and he led Russia with success in the Russo-Turkish War (1828–29). Furthermore, Russia was again on the winning side in the Egyptian–Ottoman War (1839–41), and aided the Hapsburg Empire in the repression of the revolution in 1849. Finally, he led Russia in the Crimean War (1853–1856), which was a decisive defeat for the Empire³⁵.

²⁹ A. Yarmolinsky (1959) *Road to Revolution: A Century of Russian Radicalism*, New York, Macmillan Company, p. 57.

³⁰ As cited in I. Berlin (1978) *Russian Thinkers*, Eds. Hardy, H. & Kelly, A. London, Hogarth Press, p. 18.

³¹ Mazour, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³³ Hobsbawm provides an interesting statistic; in 1780, the French population was almost equal to the Russian, but by 1830, Russians were 50% more than the French. As cited in E. J. Hobsbawm (1962) *The Age of Revolution Europe 1789-1848*. I use the translated edition in Greek: *Η Εποχή των Επανάστασεων 1789-1848*, Μορφωτικό Ίδρυμα Εθνικής Τραπέζης, Αθήνα, 2015, p. 159.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 157.

³⁵ More information about the foreign policy of that era in D. Schimmelpenninck Van der Oye (2006) “Russian foreign policy, 1815–1891” in Lieven, D. (ed.) (2006) *The Cambridge History of Russia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 554-574.

The European Theatre

Post-napoleonic Europe had two leading powers (Britain and Russia), one former, albeit still strong, leading power (France) and two major powers (the Hapsburg Empire and Prussia)³⁶, and they all shared the same two fears; a generalized war and social disorder. The first was more or less avoided, since until 1914, only the Crimean War was a conflict between the two biggest powers in the continent. In the second point, Europe had less success. In 1830, four major revolutions occurred and a minor one; the Belgian revolution against the Netherlands, the July revolution in France, the aforementioned November Uprising in Poland, the Ustertag in Switzerland and a minor rebellion in Italy. At the same time, a civil war erupted in Portugal (from 1828 till 1834) and Spain was at the brink of the following civil war, the First Carlist War, which started in 1834 and ended in 1840. Then in 1848, revolutions again broke out almost everywhere in Europe. We should not forget that simultaneously another revolution was occurring, which because of its nature is difficult to define chronologically, the Industrial Revolution. Therefore, Nicholas' reign coincided with the last decades of the period, starting from 1789 until 1848, which Eric Hobsbawm has named the Age of Revolution.

Internal situation: Reaction in force

Having experienced the trauma of the Decembrist Revolt on the very first day of his reign, and the nationalistic uprising of the Polish in 1830, Nicholas I was determined to restrain the Russian society. The reaction was again reinforced after the revolutionary turmoil that had shaken Europe in 1848 and lasted until the Crimean War³⁷. One of his first acts was the establishment of the Third Section, a secret police, tasked with monitoring and censorship of the society³⁸. Nicholas tried to control institutions such as the Church and the Universities. The Universities in particular faced rigorous controls, since the

³⁶ Here I follow Schroeder's listing of the European powers as found in P., W. Schroeder "Did the Vienna Settlement Rest on a Balance of Power?", *American Historical Review*, 97, 2 (June 1992), 683-706.

³⁷ F. Venturi (1960) *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, p.73.

³⁸ Yarmolinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

governmental sentiment was that in “Russia learning should be dispensed, like a poisonous drug, by government prescription only”³⁹.

In this stifled society, the Emperor attempted to impose a formal national and state ideology, called "Official Nationality", that was proclaimed in 1833, set forth by one of his advisors, Sergey Uvarov. It was a reactionary policy based on orthodoxy in religion, autocracy in government, and Russian nationalism⁴⁰. However, this reaction was not only evident by the Tsar. The dominant class after Peter’s Reforms⁴¹ had become foreign, as they were mostly educated in the West, and developed to a bureaucracy that was gradually alienated by the society, that in the vast majority still had a medieval lifestyle.

In hindsight, we can see that the overwhelming oppression was over the top; for most of Nicholas’ rule there was no mass or strong revolutionary movement compared to the rest of Europe. The Third Section was particularly afraid of peasant disorders, as one of its members had reported that he has “closely observed the spirit of the peasant classes and have noticed a vast change in their attitude. They have grown bolder, more independent, less submissive, and at the same time poorer. They have stopped revering, as they once did, officials and the representatives of constituted authority”⁴². Venturi understands that there was indeed a trend of local peasant uprisings, and there was an average of seven landowners being murdered by peasants per year, and as a consequence between 1835 and 1843, four hundred sixteen people were deported to Siberia⁴³. Yet, no peasant radical movement existed and between the various local skirmishes of the peasants with the landowners, there was no real connection.

Nevertheless, in these regressive conditions, and almost a decade after the defeat of the Decembrists, Nicholas started facing opposition from two groups of people, with different and in many cases hostile to each other ideologies, which had sprung up from the *intelligentsia*⁴⁴, the Slavophiles and the Westernizers.

³⁹ As cited in *ibid.*, p. 57.

⁴⁰ G. M. Hamburg (2006) “Russian Political thought, 1700-1917”, in Lieven, D. (ed.) (2006) *The Cambridge History of Russia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 131.

⁴¹ P. Bushkovitch (2011) *A Concise History of Russia*. I use the translated edition in Greek: *«Ιστορία της Ρωσίας: Πολιτική, οικονομία, κοινωνία, θρησκεία, τέχνες και επιστήμες από τον 9ο αιώνα έως την περσεστρόικα* (2016) Αθήνα, Αιώρα, p. 108.

⁴² As cited in Venturi, *op. cit.*, p., 64.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

⁴⁴ *Intelligentsia* is a vague term, usually referring to the status of the educated members of the society as a “class in between” the rulers and the rest. According to Wirtschafter, despite the numerous debates, the appearance of “the Russian intelligentsia had its origins in the Enlightenment culture of the educated nobility

Slavophiles

What triggered the imminent ideological conflict between the two camps was the work of Petr Chaadaev (1794-1856). Until then, the intelligentsia, disappointed by the failure of the Decembrists and having to face a strict censorship, focused in philosophical and religious topics⁴⁵. Chaadaev, a friend and an associate of the Decembrists⁴⁶, wrote his eight *Philosophical Letters*⁴⁷ between 1828 and 1831, and one of them focused to Russia (it took five years to be published though), where he suggested his thesis that Russia “belonged neither to the East nor to the West, a land without historical continuity, which lacked moral personality”⁴⁸. He castigated Russians, who “like illegitimate children, come to this world without patrimony. [...] Isolated in the world, we have given nothing to the world, we have taken nothing from the world; we have not added a single idea to the mass of human ideas; we have contributed nothing to the progress of the human spirit. And we have disfigured everything we have touched of that progress”⁴⁹. As an admirer of the West, he was of course against serfdom. However, Chaadaev should not be regarded as a revolutionary personality; his condemnation of Russia was based, as Walicki notes, on “the defense of tradition and historical continuity” and he was influenced by French traditionalists and German conservatives⁵⁰. Walicki concludes that in his case there is a paradox, as “in the European context, we would have to call Chaadaev a conservative, but not in the Russian context”⁵¹. Despite his conservatism, his ideas inspired liberals and revolutionaries, like Herzen, who recalled that his *Letter* was “a shot that rang out in the

or educated service classes of the late eighteenth century”. As cited in E., R., Wirtschafter (2006) “The groups between: *raznochintsy*, intelligentsia, professionals” in Lieven, D. (ed.) (2006) *The Cambridge History of Russia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 253.

⁴⁵ Hamburg (2006) *op. cit.*, p. 126, & A. Walicki (1979) *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism*, California, Stanford University Press, pp. 115-116.

⁴⁶ Walicki, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

⁴⁷ It was written in French. A custom of the intelligentsia was to write in other languages, mostly in French and German.

⁴⁸ As cited in Walicki, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁴⁹ As cited in *ibid.*, p. 86.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

dark night” that made them to “wake up”⁵², and, according to Walicki, we can interpret the Slavophiles as “a reply to Chaadaev”⁵³.

The Slavophiles were “a collection of individuals with a shared affection for the way of life and traditions of rural Russia”⁵⁴. The most prominent individuals were the brothers Aksakov, Ivan (1823-1886) and Konstantin (1817-1860), Khomyakov (1804-1860), and Samarin (1819-1876). They vehemently opposed Chaadaev and in general whatever they viewed as “Western”; rationalism, materialism, atheism, individualism, etc⁵⁵. They accepted that Russia had followed a different path than that of Europe, but for them this was positive. Influenced by organicism, they claimed that Russian spirit was based on the principles of “harmony and concord”⁵⁶—contrary to the morally corrupt source that shaped the West, as revealed by the village commune, the *obshchina*. This village commune – a place of idealization for the slavophiles, was founded on the common use of land and mutual agreement⁵⁷ and it was held together by the sense of solidarity and morality and was perceived as a great example of Russian uniqueness. The commune had predated serfdom and Meara notes that it was used also by the Decembrists as the idealization of “ancient Russian freedom”⁵⁸, in their fight against the Tsar. Pestel regarded the *obshchina* “as the embryo of the future Russian republic”⁵⁹ and a guarantee of stability and security⁶⁰. On the other hand, everything in Europe was “artificial; each relationship was based on conditional contract”⁶¹, which unfortunately had influenced negatively Russia too.

In general, the idealization of the ancient Russian peasant culture, life and commune was one of the most important aspects of their viewpoint. According to them, the Orthodox Church⁶² contributed too in the value of the commune with the *sobornost*, meaning

⁵² As cited in *ibid.*, p. 88.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁵⁴ D. Offord (1999) *Nineteenth Century Russia: Opposition to Autocracy*, Harlow, Pearson Education Limited, p. 25.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ S., Horujy (2013) “Slavophiles, Westernizers, and the birth of Russian philosophical humanism” (trans. By P., L., Michelson) in G. M. Hambur.g & R. A. Poole. (eds.) *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830-1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity*, Cambridge University Press, p. 33.

⁵⁷ Walicki, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁵⁸ O’ Meara, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Venturi, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁶¹ As cited in *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁶² The Orthodox doctrine was a point of differentiation, as some Slavophiles did not consider it to be a “criterion of inclusion-exclusion”, for the obvious reason that not all the Slaves were orthodox. See A. Διάλλα

conciliarism, which was the unity of free people⁶³. The society in this ancient commune was held together by a “moral bond” of mutual trust⁶⁴, with the people voluntary being submissive to the commune, but ultimately being free. The freedom of the slavophiles did not refer to freedom in a liberal sense, but, as Walicki points out, to “freedom from politics”, where there was the “right to live according to unwritten laws of faith and tradition, and the right to full self-realization in a moral sphere on which the state would not impinge”⁶⁵. Therefore, according to their belief, a monarchical regime that does not violate the commune could be accepted.

Walicki, convincingly, summarizes their ideology as “conservative utopianism; utopianism because it was a comprehensive and detailed vision of a social idea, sharply contrasted with the realities; and conservatism, or even reactionary, because it was an ideal located in the past”⁶⁶.

So why does Slavophilism stands in the opposition? Granted they were against serfdom, on humanitarian grounds⁶⁷, is this enough to be considered opposition? The Slavophiles were strongly anti-Tsarist, or to be more specific, they were against any Tsar after Peter the Great. By revering an ancient lifestyle, they had to wonder how the situation changed so drastically, and for that change they blamed Peter. According to them, the Petrine reforms changed the social status quo, by discriminating the upper strata from the peasants. They regarded Peter, “who had seduced Rus’ into following the western path”⁶⁸ and his reforms as a fifth column; as Khomiakov claimed “Westernized Russians had become colonizers in their own country”⁶⁹. Some of them loathed the ruling Tsarist bureaucracy so much that believed that a defeat in the Crimean war would benefit Russia⁷⁰ (the same feeling was shared by other radicals and revolutionaries). Therefore, it is

(2009) *Η Ρωσία Απέναντι Στα Βαλκάνια: Ιδεολογία και πολιτική στο δεύτερο μισό του 19ου αιώνα*, Αθήνα, Αλεξάνδρεια, p. 127.

⁶³ Walicki, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Walicki notes the paradox of the Slavophiles; they “adopted one of the chief assumptions of Western European liberal doctrine- the principle of total separation of the political and social sphere”, as cited in *ibid.*, p. 97.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁶⁷ Offord, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁶⁸ As cited in Horujy, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁶⁹ As cited in Walicki, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁷⁰ Berlin (1978), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

understandable why their work was censored and why and some members of the movement were placed under police surveillance and even arrested.

According to Yarmolinsky, Slavophilism was a “backward-looking philosophy of an upper class”, yet “they were not wholly reactionary”⁷¹. He attributes to them a “strongly democratic, or rather populist, bias” because they “idealized the Russian folk at the expense of the privileged classes” and because they extolled the collectivism of the common people⁷². Their love for the Russian commoners sometimes went overboard, as some even started dressing with traditional clothes⁷³. Furthermore, Slavophiles’ laud of the commune was not an isolated custom, but the beginning of a trend· as we shall see in the next chapter the socialists that emerged in the 40s, (and later the one from the 60s and 70s) embraced the same praise for both the *obshchina* and the peasants, which was a cornerstone of the Russian Socialism and Narodism. Finally, the Slavophiles had a last important aspect; they were the negation of another ideological current, the Westernizers.

Westernizers

If the Slavophiles had a relevant unity in their views, the Westernizers, a movement formed as an answer to Slavophilia, were more heterogeneous. Some of the members include; Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848), Nikolai Ogarev (1813-1877), Konstantin Kavelin (1818-1885), Timofey Granovsky (1813-1855) and Botkin (1812-1869). Important members were also Alexander Herzen and Michail Bakunin.

The Westernizers accepted the somehow different path of Russia and they agreed with the Slavophiles that the pre-Petrine Russia was based on clans, but they believed that Russia belonged in the European family, especially after the Europeanization process by Peter the Great, who, in contrast with the Slavophiles, was respected or adored by them (e.g. Belinsky called him a “god who breathed a living soul into the colossal, sleeping body of ancient Russia”⁷⁴. Kavelin was at the same level of praise; “Peter was a great man, our

⁷¹ Yarmolinski, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁷³ Later in the 60s and 70s the Narodniks (Populists) were also following the lifestyle of the common people, e.g. Rakhmetov, a character in Chernyshevsky’s novel *What Is to Be Done?* was eating oranges only in St. Petersburg, because there the ordinary people ate them, but in the countryside he doesn't eat, as the people do not have them. He also ate only black bread instead of white as it was the one that the common people could afford. Ironically, a modern day Rakhmetov would now eat the cheaper white bread.

⁷⁴ As cited in Hamburg, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

hero and demigod, our hope”⁷⁵). They preferred to note the common aspects of Russian-Western historical and cultural destinies, rather than the distinctiveness. Europe was the key in order for Russia to overcome its socio-economic backwardness, because, as Belinsky claimed, “from all the existing cultures, only Europe had grown beyond the primitive stage of ‘natural immediacy’ into a fully conscious, ‘world-historical civilisation”⁷⁶. Another common characteristic was the significance of the individual; instead of the cult of the commune, they had the cult of the personhood⁷⁷. They considered that prevalence of personhood, which was non-existent in ancient Russia, was “the necessary condition for a people’s spiritual development”⁷⁸.

However, here the common points end. By 1845, the Westernizers were split in two different currents; the liberals, consisted mainly by Granovsky, Kavelin, Botkin and Anenkov and the radicals-left wing, which included Belinsky, Herzen, Ogarev and Bakunin. A note perhaps is useful here; the liberals in Russia in the 1840s and 1850s were not in the same page with the Western liberals, who were at that time committed to *laissez faire*⁷⁹. Raeff argues that since Russia borrowed the terms from the West, it was expected that Russians adjusted the terms in their reality and, as a consequence, “in popular Russian terminology (and thinking) liberalism obtained the meaning of opposition to the government”⁸⁰. Therefore, in this context, the liberal current included those who were not Slavophiles and those who did not move to socialism. But this differentiation is an anachronistic projection, since at that time they did not distinguish themselves by these terms. Herzen’s and Ogarev’s newspaper, *Kolokol* (the Bell), up until the early 60s, included material by the so-called liberals, such as Anenkov, Samarin, Turgenev etc. Their split became more obvious after the Emancipation (1861) and the Polish Uprising (1863), when the gap in the views between the two groups was unmanageable.

The liberals advocated for gradualism and reformism; they believed the reforms could be initiated by an autocratic government⁸¹—they were still vastly influenced by Peter’s charm. The radicals, led mainly by Belinsky and Herzen, preferred immediate change.

⁷⁵ As cited in Horujy, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁷⁶ As cited in Hamburg, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

⁷⁷ Horujy, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁷⁹ Offord (1999) *op. cit.*, p.30.

⁸⁰ M. Raeff (1994) *Political Ideas And Institutions In Imperial Russia*, Westview Press, p. 34.

⁸¹ Offord (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 30.

Belinsky is the most difficult to “categorize”, as he died in 1848, before the tensions between the Westernizers had peaked. “During his lifetime”, Walicki argues, the two groups “differed mainly in their attitudes to religion (the liberals among the Westernizers rejecting Herzen’s and Belinsky’s atheism), in their assessment of the French Revolution (Belinsky’s sympathies being with the Jacobins, whom Granovsky condemned), and in their attitudes to art (the liberals supporting ‘art for art’ sake’, the democrats, led by Belinsky, demanding social comment)”⁸². Offord clearly views him as a member of the radical wing⁸³, while Berlin claims that “he was one of the founders of the movement which culminated in 1917”⁸⁴. Belinsky, who had humble origins compared to the other intellectuals, was a left Hegelian in his youth and he became “the father of the social criticism of literature, not only in Russia but perhaps even in Europe”⁸⁵. In his last days, he considered himself a socialist, as for him socialism was the “idea of ideas, essence of essences... the alpha and the omega of faith and science. They day will come when nobody will be burnt alive, nobody will have his head chopped off... There will be no rich, no poor, no kings and subjects... [men] will be brothers...”⁸⁶.

Nevertheless, he differed vastly with the rest of the radicals in two points; firstly he did not believe in the “mystical faith in the people”⁸⁷, a sentiment shared not only by the Slavophiles, but by Herzen and Bakunin too, a “faith” which was pivotal for the future Russian socialism and Narodism. Furthermore, he rejected Herzen’s and Bakunin’s unconditional reject of the bourgeoisie; he did not view the bourgeoisie in the same way as other liberals (e.g. Botkin hoped that “Heaven grant us our own bourgeoisie!”⁸⁸), as he disliked the pauperization that capitalism brings, but he believed that it was a necessity, which also happened to be a superior system than the backward semifeudal economical system in Russia at that period (“industry” Belinsky claimed “it is not only the source of all evil, but also the source of prosperity”⁸⁹), and socialism will come only after Russia would experience the urgent reforms that Western Europe had already been through. Finally, he rejected to emigrate as he preferred to continue developing the movement in St

⁸² Walicki, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

⁸³ Offord (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁸⁴ Berlin (1978) *op. cit.*, p. 152.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ As cited in *ibid.*, p. 170.

⁸⁷ Walicki, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

⁸⁸ As cited in *ibid.*, p. 145.

⁸⁹ As cited in *ibid.*, p. 146.

Petersburg, leading Venturi to conclude that “he wanted to remain at the head of the ‘Westerners’, the men who later became Liberals”, while “Herzen and Bakunin {...} were then beginning to lay the ideological foundations of Populism”⁹⁰.

The dispute between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers was not a matter of black and white. Herzen commented on this, saying that:

“Yes, we were their opponents, but very peculiar ones. We had only one love, but it did not take the same form. From our earliest years, we were possessed by one powerful, unaccountable, physiological, passionate feeling, which they took for memory of the past, we for a vision of the future... We, like Janus or the double-headed eagle, looked in opposite directions, while one heart beat in us all”⁹¹.

If the Decembrists were the revolutionary ancestors for the socialists, the two movements were the intellectual beginning. The famous ideological conflicts in the salons of Moscow and the literature wars between the two groups provided Herzen and Bakunin with some of the fundamental aspects of early Russian socialism; individualism (Westernizers) and love for the commune (Slavophiles).

⁹⁰ Venturi, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁹¹ As cited in Berlin (1978) *op. cit.*, p. 180.

Chapter III: The Representatives of the Emerging Socialism in Russia

Socialism was introduced to the Russian Empire in the 1840s and at that time, it was still a relatively new vague concept in Europe. The forerunners are considered to be Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, and Robert Owen, to whom is also attributed the spreading of the word⁹². These first socialists, later called Utopian Socialists, developed the concepts of cooperativism and tried to establish experimental small scales communities, e.g Fourier's phalastery, which was a type of building designed for a self-sustained utopian community. In contrary with later socialist currents, utopian socialists did not focus on class struggle⁹³. However, their writings proved to be a catalyst in the development of the socialist movement in the early stages, including in Russia.

Other influential factors that shaped the political thought of the first advocates of socialism in Russia were German Idealism and French revolutionary practice. Herzen, Bakunin, Belinsky, Ogarev were all in their youth left Hegelians, and especially for Herzen, "Hegel's veneration of reason and freedom remained intact for all his life"⁹⁴. Herzen was in Paris during the summer of 1848 and Bakunin participated in various revolutionary schemes across Europe. It was the failure of the 1848 revolutions that pushed the Russian thinkers to highlight their country's characteristics as capable revolutionary features. Compared to other European states, Russia in 1848 had a different social stratification. Russia's economic backwardness led to a weak middle class, and if we also add to this the embryonic industrialization which constrained the emergence of the proletariat, Russia lacked the western elements which provoked the revolutions; there were neither organized political organizations, nor the relative revolutionary elements, as they existed in other European countries. This situation changed in the end of the 19th century⁹⁵, as a

⁹² Yarmolinsky mentions that "the term was apparently used in a French Saint-Simonist review in 1832. Its earliest occurrence in English is dated 1835 in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 9th Edition." According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'socialist' first occurred in 1833, but E.H. Carr (*Studies in Revolution*, p. 10) traces the word back to 1827, when it appeared in an Owenite publication – as cited in Yarmolinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

⁹³ G. Eley (2002) *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe*. I use the Greek translated edition: *Σφυρηλατώντας τη Δημοκρατία: Ιστορία της Ευρωπαϊκής Αριστεράς 1850-1923* (2010) Τόμος Α', Αθήνα, Σαββάλας, p. 88.

⁹⁴ As cited in Berlin, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

⁹⁵ Bushkovitch, *op. cit.*, pp. 224-234.

consequence of the serfs' emancipation in 1861 and the age of the reforms, thus Berlin concludes that "Russia's 1848 occurred in 1905"⁹⁶.

Herzen

Alexander Herzen (1812-1870) is considered the father of Russian socialism and the true founder of Narodism⁹⁷. Born out of wedlock to a rich Russian landowner and a German Protestant woman, in 1847 he left his homeland and never returned, as he regarded Russia as "a monstrous despotism from which there was no escape"⁹⁸. Despite being an émigré for the rest of his life, his heart always remained in Russia. When he went for the first time in Paris, he discovered that European socialists were not interested in the development of the revolutionary and socialist movement in Russia, as they considered it unimportant⁹⁹. Thus, many of his writings thereafter wanted to prove this statement wrong. By 1848, he had already witnessed the failure of two revolutions¹⁰⁰, which arguably led him to re-evaluate his position about revolutionary practices. Herzen considered that failed uprisings pave the way for more reaction, thus revolutions should occur only when success is more likely¹⁰¹. He felt that violent revolution is far too simplistic, as "we call the masses to crush tyrants, { ... } but they want a government to rule for their benefit, but to govern themselves doesn't enter their head"¹⁰². This conclusion did not let apathy prevail on him, since he felt that "open and clear action is needed"¹⁰³. He never stopped spreading radical ideas, usually in his personal expense. Firstly, he created in London, aided by Polish émigrés, the First Russian Press in 1853, then two journals, the Polar Star –its name was inspired by the Decembrists' almanac and its cover included the five executed Decembrists- and the Bell, from 1857 till 1867.

His first impressions in Europe also shaped another permanent opinion of his: the bourgeoisie cannot and should not be trusted. Herzen claimed that in France, the

⁹⁶ Berlin (1978) *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁹⁷ Venturi, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁹⁸ As cited in D. Offord (2013) "Alexander Herzen" in Hamburg & Poole, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

⁹⁹ M. Patridge (1984) *Alexander Herzen: 1812-1870*. Paris, Unesco, p. 50.

¹⁰⁰ Venturi, *op. cit.*, p. 28. Venturi is referring to the Decembrists and the revolution in Paris in 1848.

¹⁰¹ Patridge, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

¹⁰² As cited in Berlin, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

¹⁰³ Χέρτσεν (1970) *Ανάλεκτα*. Αθήνα, Κάλβος, p. 271.

bourgeoisie was responsible for the dire situation of the people¹⁰⁴. He felt that the “bourgeoisie has no great past and no future. It was only good for a moment, as a negation, as a transition”¹⁰⁵.

Through his intellectual evolution, as Berlin notes, Herzen’s political ideas were unique, not only by Russian, but by European standards¹⁰⁶. Socialist currents, especially during the 19th and 20th century, are notoriously known for their focus on economical determinism, and lack for interest for the individual, and therefore for some aspects of social rights. Herzen desired economic efficiency, which “must always remain secondary to the need of protecting human dignity [...] and the protection of individual from aggression”¹⁰⁷. He did not want the “submission of the individual to society-to the people-to humanity-to the idea”¹⁰⁸, which made him a fervent enemy of sacrifices. His differentiation with other socialists leaders can be summarized in his dialogue with Louis Blanc, who claimed that man must always sacrifice himself for the well-being of the society, to which Herzen replied that “it will never be attained if everyone makes sacrifices and nobody enjoys himself”¹⁰⁹.

In a way, he was a foreteller of the future socialism in Russia and worldwide: “sacrifices became a weapon, which revolutionary leaders use to kill for the society’s sake”¹¹⁰. He was against those who are destroying the present in favor of the future, which was in essence a secular eschatology, as liberty is for the living individuals and no one can be sure that a plan conceived by an ‘x’ generation will function for the ‘y’ generation. Life and history have no libretto¹¹¹, and since nature obeys no plan, no single key can solve the problem of individuals¹¹². This view may contradict with his idealization with the Decembrists, who even in their words acknowledged the sure failure of their uprising in order to awake the future generations. But Herzen considered Pestel a man of his time who acted according to the needs of his time, not an Utopian¹¹³. Similar eschatology dominated

¹⁰⁴ Offord (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 39.

¹⁰⁵ As cited in A. Walicki, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

¹⁰⁶ Berlin (1978) *op. cit.*, p. 83.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p. 87.

¹⁰⁸ As cited in *ibid.* p. 89.

¹⁰⁹ As cited in *ibid.* p. 194.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 89.

¹¹¹ Offord (2013) *op. cit.*, p. 57.

¹¹² Berlin (1978) *op. cit.*, p. 86.

¹¹³ O’ Meara, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

the political aspect of left wing for many decades. Socialism was seen as a certainty. On the other hand, Herzen believed that neither socialism, nor communism were inevitable. Humans are free and therefore do not bound to something certain; they are not “puppets”¹¹⁴. He did not even believe that capitalism was inevitable.

This last notion led him to another conclusion: socialism in Russia was a possibility despite the lack of economic and social conditions that existed in the rest of Europe at that time, like the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Herzen based his assumption on two previous Russian concepts. Firstly, on Chadeev’s thesis that Russia did not have any significant history and should start from the beginning. Therefore, according to Herzen, since Russia lacked the social and historical mechanisms capable of resisting change, social revolution can be achieved¹¹⁵.

Another important concept was the *obshchina*. The term was used by the slavophiles as we saw in the previous chapter and was perceived as a great example of Russian uniqueness. Herzen singled out the village commune for its socialist possibilities. In fact, he was not alone in this remark. Baron August von Haxthausen, a Prussian sociologist, argued in 1847 that in Russia the “Utopia of European revolutionaries is already realized”¹¹⁶, and Herzen agreed that this pre-capitalist institution of Russia will make possible the transformation to socialism, as he claimed that “you go to socialism by proletariat, we by peasants”¹¹⁷. Bestuzhev, a Decembrist exiled in Siberia, described the *obshchina* as “social communism in practice, in which the land is a means for work”¹¹⁸.

Herzen argued –prophetically- that socialism was more possible to be reached in Russia before the other European countries. Russians, according to Herzen had developed a revolutionary leaning through their communal life and from the fact that they were “even poorer than the Bedouins and the Jews, because they had nothing to comfort them”¹¹⁹.

Russian socialism, according to Herzen, existed and it was “the kind of socialism which proceeds from the land and from peasant life, from the actual division and redistribution of fields, common ownership and communal management – and this,

¹¹⁴ Offord (2013) *op. cit.*, p. 58.

¹¹⁵ Walicki, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

¹¹⁶ As cited in Yarmolinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

¹¹⁷ As cited in Berlin (1978) *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹¹⁸ As cited in Venturi, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

¹¹⁹ Χέρτσεν, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

together with the proletarian workshops, represents progress towards economic justice such as socialism in general strives after”¹²⁰

Herzen, having a background in German Idealism, used notions from different and opposing factions e.g. from the Russian liberals and the slavophiles of the 30s and 40s, from materialism and idealism, - which Lenin called later it dialectical materialism¹²¹ - thus laying the foundations of Russian socialism. However, even his socialism was different; he took a theory for the masses to protect the individual.

Bakunin

If there is one pre-Bolshevik, Russian revolutionary with the biggest worldwide influence, that is Mikhail Bakunin. In short, Bakunin's political life can be divided into two parts and roles: the early radical and activist and the later leader of anarchism who is considered among the most influential figures of anarchism. His later life is characterized by his participation in the First International and his frequent conflicts with other radical groups such as the Marxists, resulting to the schism that exists even until today, between communists and anarchists. Most of Bakunin's theoretical books belong to this last period, which is logical if we consider that from 1850 till 1861, he was first imprisoned and then exiled. Since this paper focuses on the beginning of socialism in a specific country, I will not go further on the course of Bakunin's last years or to his explosive relationship with Marx, a dispute not only political but personal, which also included Herzen who sided in this conflict with his friend Bakunin, even though their first clashes occurred in the same period I refer to.

Two years younger than Herzen, Bakunin was born into a Russian noble family and Venturi calls him a “son of the age of Nicholas I and the atmosphere of fear”¹²². He and Herzen shared similar beliefs early in their life and had a common ideological beginning. By the end of their lives, one had moved a bit right while the other one had gone further to the left. Bakunin emigrated earlier than him and participated in the revolution in Dresden and Prague, which resulted in spending a big part of his life in prison and because of this

¹²⁰ As cited in Pattridge, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

¹²¹ Walicki, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

¹²² Venturi, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

difficulties he needed the financial support of his friends, like Herzen. He also started as a left Hegelian, but he did not share Herzen's affiliation with the individual. For example, Belinsky never developed closed friendship with him because he "never loved individual subjects and images"¹²³.

His first article, *The Reaction in Germany*¹²⁴, was published in 1842, where he praised the idea of revolution, and influenced by German idealism, he presented it as a negative and destructive force which dialectically becomes positive and creative; it also provided his most famous quote, that it is an excellent summary of his ideas throughout his life: "The passion for destruction is a creative passion, too".

Obshchina was for him too an important aspect: he claimed that there was an "enormous difference between the agrarian community and the phalanstery"¹²⁵, and regarded it as a possible path to socialism. For Bakunin, Russians have proved in the past, in the cases of Razin and Pugachev that they possess a revolutionary spirit, an idea that he kept till the end. According to him "peasants say our property, not our landlord's property. So the social nature of the Russian Revolution is already determined. It has its roots in the very character of the people and in the organization of the *obschina*"¹²⁶.

The three main positive characteristics of the *obschina* were:

"i) the land belonged to the people ii) the land belong to the community and not to the individual iii) it depended on self-administration, therefore it was against the state. However, three negatives accompanied the positives i) patriarchalism ii) the absorption of the individual into the community (a negative aspect pointed out also by Herzen) and iii) faith in the Tsar"¹²⁷.

Bakunin endorsed agrarian socialism and its potential, and considered that the biggest mistake of the Germans in 1848 was that they did not try to spread their propaganda in the villages as they had done in the cities, claiming that in the villages existed pre-capitalistic elements ready to be taken advantage of¹²⁸. Unlike Herzen though, Bakunin did not single

¹²³ As cited in *ibid.* p. 42.

¹²⁴ M. Bakunin (1842) *The Reaction in Germany*, retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/1842/reaction-germany.htm>

¹²⁵ Venturi, *op. cit.*, p. 52. According to Venturi the enormous difference refers to liberty and autonomy, characteristics that lacked in Fourier's plans.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 436.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

out only the peasants as a possible revolutionary element¹²⁹. Finally, like Herzen, Bakunin because of the disappointments of the 1848 revolutions developed a strong anti-bourgeois rhetoric, and considered it full of compromises that made the Frankfurt parliament the "laughing stock of Europe"¹³⁰, and he tried to link national uprisings with social revolutions.

The political rupture between him and Herzen came much later, in the 60s, when Bakunin had made a leap towards anarchism and remained a passionate supporter of a violent revolution. Bakunin's greatest legacy, according to Eley, lies in essence of revolution itself; he combined rhetoric about freedom, with cunning planning and strict organization with members ready to sacrifice themselves¹³¹. In this aspect, Bakunin and Herzen remained in the opposing pole forever.

The Petrashevsky Circle

Mikhail Petrashevsky (1821-1866), described himself as "one of the oldest propagator of socialism"¹³² and organized a society of literature mainly around the works of Utopian Socialists. The circle consisted of members of a different world from that of Herzen and Bakunin¹³³; writers, teachers, students, minor government officials and army officers, a group of lower status than that of the Decembrists¹³⁴. Petrashevsky himself was a clerk in the Ministry of Foreign affairs. He conceived the smart idea to expose his ideas through a dictionary, *A pocket Dictionary of Foreign Words used in Russian* -Herzen took one of the copies to present it as a sign of change and progress in Russia- where in the entry in some words, they expressed their opinion, e.g. in the word opposition he supported civil liberties and the jury system¹³⁵.

The circle that inaugurated in 1845 started growing and started mixing different political views. They collected many books mainly of Fourier, but they expanded their

¹²⁹ In his *Confession to Tsar Nicholas I*, Bakunin mentions the three groups that would carry the revolution; the townspeople, the youth and the peasants.

¹³⁰ Bakunin, M. (1848) *Appeal to the Slavs*, retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/1848/pan-slavism.htm>

¹³¹ Eley, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

¹³² As cited in Yarmolinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

¹³³ Venturi, *op. cit.*, p.80.

¹³⁴ Yarmolinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

¹³⁵ Ibid. More examples of this dictionary are provided in Walicki, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

collection to include works of Proudhon, Marx, Engels, Blanc, Cadet etc. Some members tried to merge Fourier's phalanstery with the *obshchina*¹³⁶. Petrashevsky claimed that the phalanstery will transform the *obshchina* by removing its feudal ties, thus enabling agrarian socialism¹³⁷.

More radical members, like Nikolay Speshnev –he was the prototype for the main character of Dostoevsky's book "Possessed", "pushed" for a secret society aiming to start a rebellion "a la Pugachev"¹³⁸-, but the Fourierist core did not agree and preferred reforms: "Fourierism leads gradually and naturally to what Communism wishes to impose immediately and forcibly"¹³⁹. In any case, because the Tsarist regime feared that the revolutions in Europe would spread to Russia, the repression became stronger and all the members were arrested in 1849. Some of them died while in exile, like Petrashevsky, others, like Dostoevsky, survived the exile and returned. The circle was indeed so non-threatening, that one of the members of the committee of the inquiry later characterized them as a "conspiracy of ideas"¹⁴⁰.

This circle reached the same conclusions about *obshchina* with Herzen and Bakunin, despite the fact that their basis was somehow different, as they saw it mainly in connection with Fourierism. However, even by 1848 they did seem a bit outdated: Dostoevsky claimed in his deposition about Fourierism that "it is already dead, and its followers do not understand that they are only living in dead"¹⁴¹. Walicki highlights the group's anthropotheism, which they traced to Hegel and then Feuerbach¹⁴², and their socialism would aim to "turn this life of torture, disaster [...] into life of harmonious and abundant with joy, and to cover all this poverty-ridden earth with palaces and flowers"¹⁴³. Even their anti-capitalism and pro-socialism was because of nature, e.g. Petrashevsky claimed that "capitalism was against human nature because it stimulated antisocial instincts and benefited only the rich while pauperizing the poor", while "socialism had always been part

¹³⁶ Venturi, *op. cit.*, p.82.

¹³⁷ Ibid. p. 85. Venturi (*ibid.* p. 83) mentions that Petrashevsky tried to build a phalanstery, which was burned probably by the peasants themselves. Berlin (in Berlin, *op. cit.*, p. 16) disagrees saying that there is not much evidence to support this. Walicki (in Walicki, *op. cit.*, p. 154) agrees with Venturi's account.

¹³⁸ Venturi, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

¹³⁹ As cited in *ibid.* 89.

¹⁴⁰ As cited in Berlin (1978) *op. cit.*, p.

¹⁴¹ As cited in Venturi, *op. cit.* p. 86.

¹⁴² Walicki, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

¹⁴³ As cited in Yarmolinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

of human nature and would remain part of it as long as humanity retained the capacity to evolve and perfect itself”¹⁴⁴. In fact, Walicki attributes Dostoevsky’s psychologism in the group’s early influence on him. Furthermore, he claims that his later anti-socialism derived from the anthropotheism of the movement who wanted to put “man in the place of God”¹⁴⁵.

The circle paved the way for the future developments in socialism in Russia; it signaled the mixture of intelligentsia - as a whole group and not as mere individuals - with the peasant socialism that we find in the Narodniks of the 60s and 70s. One of the prominent members of narodism, Chernyshevsky, had developed links with the group through a member of the circle, who introduced him to utopian Socialism, and another member of the group, Dostoevsky, became one of the most important figures of Russian and world literature, and himself acknowledged that the circle, “who had sown many seeds”¹⁴⁶, proved to be a catalyst for the emergence of the socialists in the 60s and 70s.

Nationalism in early Russian Socialism

The multinational character of the Russian Empire led the socialists to face the question of nationalism. Regarding Poland, Herzen, Bakunin and the Petrashevskies continued a tradition that started from the Decembrists, especially from Pestel and the United Slavs. Pestel claimed that Poland “out of pure justice”¹⁴⁷ should be an independent nation. Bakunin’s increasing revolutionary activity corresponded with his attempts to establish ties with Polish nationalists, the first one to attempt it after the Southern Society, dreaming of a pan-slavic revolution. On the occasion of the 17th anniversary of the Polish insurrection of 1830, he gave a speech to Polish émigrés asserting the need to overthrow Nicholas I, something that could be achieved by a Polish-Russian union¹⁴⁸. He claimed that “only a slav federation from the Adriatic to the Black Sea and from the White Sea to Siberia”¹⁴⁹ could guarantee freedom. As he admits in a letter to Herzen and Ogarev in 1861, the “Slavic-Polish cause had become a fixation in my mind since 1846”¹⁵⁰. However,

¹⁴⁴ As cited in Walicki, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 161.

¹⁴⁶ As cited in Venturi, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

¹⁴⁷ O’ Meara, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

¹⁴⁸ Venturi, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

¹⁴⁹ As cited in *ibid.* p. 55.

¹⁵⁰ M. Bakunin (1861) *Letter to Herzen and Ogareff*, retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/1861/herzen-letter.htm>

Bakunin then did not turn on east for revolution for any other reason, than to give a “push” to the international movement against the Empires. It was a strategical plan aiming in the “liberty for the oppressed, for the Poles, the Italians for all!”¹⁵¹. This is why he wanted a Slavic uprising in the Habsburg Empire too¹⁵².

As Venturi notes, Bakunin was a revolutionary Pan Slavist, only if we “put emphasis on the adjective and not on the noun”¹⁵³. Bakunin admits that he was too carried away “by the demonic forces of nationalism”¹⁵⁴ and the last time he used this strategy was only during the failure of the Polish insurrection, in which Bakunin had joined an ill-fated expedition going to join the rebellion.

Herzen had a more russocentric view. After the failure of 1848, he felt that the old European world was dying and the period that Paris inspired other people has vanished¹⁵⁵. Like, Bakunin, he too regarded Russian socialism as the driving force for change in Europe. Russia had a messianic revolutionary mission¹⁵⁶. He, like Bakunin, treated nationalism as a potential revolutionary phenomenon which could lead to “the liberation of the oppressed”¹⁵⁷. Therefore Herzen was a very firm supporter of the Polish struggle. First of all, the establishment of his and his friend Ogarev’s printing press, the Free Russian Press, in London in 1853 was aided by Polish émigrés. One of his first articles published by his press was *The Poles Forgive Us*, which was a plea to Polish people not to despise the Russian soldiers stationed in Poland, as they are there contrary to their will, and was a unity call against the common enemy, the Tsar¹⁵⁸. Unfortunately for Herzen, the Polish question proved to be a point of breach with other radicals; Herzen believed that the upcoming Polish uprising should be postponed –at the same time he supported it in his articles-, while Bakunin was telling him that this modesty “will be considered cowardice” and asked him

¹⁵¹ Bakunin (1848) *op. cit.*,

¹⁵² In the letter to Herzen and Ogarev he says that his “last call will be the destruction of Austria, total destruction”. Bakunin (1861) *op. cit.*,

¹⁵³ Venturi, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

¹⁵⁴ As cited in *ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ Offord (2013) *op. cit.* p. 55.

¹⁵⁶ Malia, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

¹⁵⁷ Διάλλα, *op. cit.*, 267.

¹⁵⁸ Pattridge, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

to “raise his flag”¹⁵⁹. On the other hand, the liberals attacked him for his support on the polish cause and accused him for lack of patriotism¹⁶⁰.

The Petrashevky circle had a strong internationalist character, as they regarded socialism a “cosmopolitan doctrine standing above nationalities”¹⁶¹.

The dilemma for governance

If there is a contradiction in Herzen’s and Bakunin’s thought, that concerns the question of change coming from below or from above. This dilemma also existed in the Decembrists and lasted until the Narodniks in the 60s and 70s; Pestel had envisaged a ten years old provisional government with dictatorial power¹⁶² a plan which, however, was rejected by many members from both societies¹⁶³. later in the 60s and 70s Tkachev claimed that “the masses do not and cannot believe in their own strength” and “they will never on their own initiative begin to fight against the misery that surrounds them”¹⁶⁴, thus it was the duty of an intellectual elite to do that on behalf of the people. Herzen believed that in case of success, Pestel may have aspired to become himself the dictator¹⁶⁵ and in 1858 he commented that Pestel’s plan for a provisional government was “absolutely right”¹⁶⁶. For Herzen individual freedom was an undisputed merit, but he did not foresee any value in the parliamentary institution, for which he reserved some of his harshest comments calling it “a cunning device”, a “bordello, a second-hand market”¹⁶⁷. He did not consider this kind of democracy as a carrier of freedom. He was saying to the Europeans that “you may reproach the Russians as much as you like for being slaves· but in their turn will ask; And what about you? Are you free?”¹⁶⁸.

This attitude is perhaps explained by the then existing weaknesses of these institutions and his personal experiences. The Reform Act in England in 1832 provided the right to

¹⁵⁹ M. Bakunin (1862) *The Cloche and the Polish People*. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/1862/poland.htm>

¹⁶⁰ Pattridge, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

¹⁶¹ As cited in Walicki, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

¹⁶² O’ Meara, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

¹⁶³ Yarmolinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁶⁴ Venturi, *op. cit.*, p. 402.

¹⁶⁵ O’ Meara, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

¹⁶⁶ As cited in *ibid.* p. 156.

¹⁶⁷ As cited in Offord (2013) *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.

¹⁶⁸ As cited in Pattridge, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

vote only to one out of six, of all adult males¹⁶⁹, and in the case of France he claimed it was unfair that the socialists did not have more time to “prepare the people somewhat, especially the peasants”¹⁷⁰.

Bakunin seems to have changed his view on dictatorship, from a positive one to a negative. He has mentioned that an “iron dictatorship” as a transitional process is a necessity¹⁷¹, but he was also critical of Pestel’s dictatorial plans¹⁷². On his *Confession to Tsar Nicholas I* he claims that “in Russia I wanted a republic, but what kind of republic? Not a parliamentary one!! I believe that in Russia, more than anywhere else, a strong dictatorial power will be indispensable, but one which would concern itself solely with raising the standard of living and education of the peasant masses”¹⁷³. There are some explanations to these views;

- Before the 60s, he was a Blanquist: until the emergence of social democratic parties as a form of mass representation of the working class, the Left, with its main representative being Louis Auguste Blanqui, perceived revolution as an action that would cause the general uprising of the people. The rebellion would be carried out by a secret revolutionary organization, whose dictatorial power would ensure the success¹⁷⁴.
- There is a possibility that Bakunin may simply tried not to alienate the Tsar by referring to the enlightened absolutism.

In contrary to Herzen and (the pre-anarchist) Bakunin, the majority of the Petrashevsky circle was against any dictatorial power. When one of the members suggested that there was a need of transitional dictatorial power, he claimed that he will kill the

¹⁶⁹ T. Chivers (2017) *From Magna Carta to universal suffrage, the 1000-year history of British democracy*, accessed at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/general-election-2017-magna-carda-universal-suffrage-1000-year/>. I have always found suitable the sarcastic description of democracy –despite its apparent exaggeration- by the main protagonist of the successful British sitcom, *The Blackadder*: “Marvelous thing, democracy. Look at Manchester: population, 60,000; electoral roll, 3”. R. Curtis (Writer), B. Elton (Writer) & M. Fletcher (Director) (1987) “Dish and Dishonesty”. in R. Curtis (Writer), B. Elton (Writer) & M. Fletcher (Director) (1987) *Blackadder The Third*. BBC.

¹⁷⁰ As cited in Offord (2013) *op. cit.*, p. 65.

¹⁷¹ Berlin (1978) *op. cit.*, p. 109.

¹⁷² O’ Meara, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

¹⁷³ Bakunin (1851) *op. cit.*,

¹⁷⁴ Eley, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

dictator¹⁷⁵. According to Walicki, the most original of their ideas, was exactly the blending of socialism with democratic rights¹⁷⁶.

Russian Socialism

In this chapter, some of the most important individuals of the early socialism in Russia were mentioned. Undoubtedly, there are other important figures of this period, like Ogarev, but due to lack of time, space and sources, I could not focus on them. I also tried to avoid viewing the Petrashevsky circle as unified entity.

Venturi summarizes Russian Populism as “distrust of all democracy; belief in a possible autonomous development of Socialism in Russia; faith in the future possibilities of the *obshchina*”¹⁷⁷. To this we have to add Herzen thesis, that the “educated middle class of Russia, which was part of the gentry –gentry not as a landowning class but its educated members, thus the intelligentsia of the gentry-, was to be the intellectual focus of the future revolution”¹⁷⁸. Therefore, all the characteristics of Narodism came from the very beginning of the socialist ideology in Russia. Despite the close affinity of these two, the relations between the representatives were anything but friendly.

¹⁷⁵ Yarmolinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

¹⁷⁶ Walicki, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

¹⁷⁷ Venturi, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

¹⁷⁸ As cited in Walicki, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

Chapter IV: The Increased Radicalism In A Post-reform Russia

The loss in the Crimean War and Nicholas' succession by his son Alexander II, in 1855, paved the way for the implementation of necessary reforms, a period which lasted until 1870. Immediately after the succession, censorship relaxed, military training for students was abolished and libraries run by the students, which even included works of Herzen¹⁷⁹ appeared. The most important educational reform though, was the fact that universities were accepting more people which led to a rapid boost in accepted students¹⁸⁰. These reforms proved to be a catalyst for the revolutionary movement, since universities provided populism with the necessary manpower¹⁸¹. He also did many reforms in the military and the judicial system¹⁸². In these hopeful times, the Decembrists, still exiled in Siberia, received amnesty from Alexander, 31 years after the events in the Senate Square. A sign of the times is also the emergence, or the revitalization, of many journals.

Emancipation of the Serfs: a polarizing event

If the Crimean War was the last straw and a sign for an immediate change, the Emancipation Act was the quintessence of the change. In 1861, Alexander II instituted his most famous reform, emancipating all of Russia's serfs, for which he is known as Alexander the Liberator, a necessary act for the industrialization and the development of the country. Upon hearing the rumors for the upcoming reform, Herzen hailed it, and promised his support to those "who liberate and as long as they liberate"¹⁸³. However, when the emancipation did happen was not well received by various parts of the society. The landowners lost their centuries-old right to own people and received no compensation for it. In general, the majority of the nobility were against the reformist period as they hoped that their prerogatives would last indefinitely and only a few supported this period, understanding that in the long run, they would benefit from it¹⁸⁴, e.g. the landowners from

¹⁷⁹ Venturi, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. A letter from an official of the Third Section proves that the officials had understood the danger coming from the "so called 'black students', i.e. those who do not come from the upper classes", as cited in *ibid.*, p. 232

¹⁸² For the reforms taken in this era, see; Bushkovitch, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-223.

¹⁸³ Venturi, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 100.

the fertile south were totally opposed to any reform, while those from the barren north envisaged an industrial potential for them as an alternative¹⁸⁵.

In addition, many serfs opposed it because it did not include any plans of granting free land to them. Indeed, for many their lifestyle did not change at all. As a result, the number of peasant revolts increased that year¹⁸⁶.

The intelligentsia was also split. Herzen and Ogarev, stated in their newspaper that the only viable solution was the emancipation with land. Furthermore, they urged for the creation of a national assembly, with the suggested name *Zemskaya Duma* or *Zemksy Sobor*¹⁸⁷ (the name, resembling the name of the assemblies of the 17th century was a unity call to the Slavophiles, who had also demanded in the past a Zemsky Sobor, but as a consultative body¹⁸⁸—Herzen was still seeking a unified opposition). In this Herzen and Ogarev found support from their old friend, and recently out of the exile, Bakunin. Alexander did provide local councils responsibly for issues of local interest, called *zemstvo*, with elected members, but the zemstvos were under heavy restrictions and under surveillance.

Nevertheless, they found difficulties approaching the liberals, who in the end decided that a gradual process is more suitable and then defended the Tsar by saying that “a new era” had begun for Russia¹⁸⁹, and preferred to play a consultative role to the Tsar by giving him various proposals related to administrative and social topics¹⁹⁰. New liberals, like Chicherin, started attacking Herzen, who in return considered them not allies or opponents but enemies¹⁹¹. Disappointed with the situation, Herzen and Ogarev suggested that it would be valuable help to “train the schoolmasters, men who can preach learning to the peasants; the traveling schoolmasters, who can spread useful and applied knowledge from one end of Russia to the other”¹⁹². this was the spirit and the slogan of populism, a current that dominated socialism in Russia the next decades.

Narodism/Populism

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 105.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 109.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 110.

¹⁸⁸ Malia, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

¹⁸⁹ Venturi, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

¹⁹⁰ Offord (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 50.

¹⁹¹ Berlin (1978) *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁹² As cited in Venturi, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

Populism, or *Narodism*, is the name of the radical movement of Russia that acted in the 60s and 70s, and its “golden slumber” was the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881. The movement consisted of various groups¹⁹³, with different aims and means – some groups used individual terrorism as a mean, while other restrained in revolutionary propaganda.

The Narodniks will be briefly presented here; according to Berlin, the central goals were social justice and social equality¹⁹⁴. The Narodniks were “born” in the post-Crimean period, with the peasants still in dire situation, and capitalism on rise. This led them to a strong anti-capitalistic rhetoric, with the *obshchina*, following Herzen and co, being the answer to a non-capitalistic future. Some of the most prominent members include; Nikolay Chernyshevsky (1828-1889), Nikolay Dobrolyubov (1836-1861), Pyotr Lavrov (1823-1900), Pyotr Tkachev (1844-1886), etc. In general, this generation had more humble origins than the generation of the 40s, as they were members of the so called *raznochintsy* (literally ‘people of various ranks’ or ‘people of diverse origins’), a “class in between” which was lower than the gentry¹⁹⁵, e.g. both Chernyshevsky’s and Dobrolyubov’s fathers belonged to the clergy. It was also the first time that women started playing a leading role, like Vera Zasulich and Marya Trubnikov (daughter of the Decembrist Vasily Petrovich Ivashov).

The Narodniks started by distributing leaflets¹⁹⁶. In 1863, Herzen provided his press in London in order to print some of the leaflets. A year before, a leaflet circulated in Odessa “ended thus: ‘Long live the Republic! Long live the great dictator of Russia, A. Iskander’ (Iskander was Herzen pseudonym)¹⁹⁷. It was not the only time that the radicals claimed Herzen to be their leader. A cartoon in the same year showed burnt-out buildings and distressed men and women surrounding a statue of Herzen holding an axe in one hand and a torch in the other. The caption read: To Iskander¹⁹⁸. The young radicals also started

¹⁹³ Walicki suggests another, narrower, historical definition; the term can be strictly applied only to a trend within the radical movement that emerged in the mid 70s and is differentiated from the other currents with its advocacy of the “hegemony of the masses over the educated elite”. As cited in Walicki, *op cit.*, pp. 222.

¹⁹⁴ I. Berlin (1959) “Introduction” in Venturi (1960) *Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia*, p. vii-viii.

¹⁹⁵ Offord (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 47.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹⁹⁷ Yarmolinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

forming various groups; the first *Zemlya i Volya*¹⁹⁹ (Land and Liberty) and Young Russia in 1862, the Organization in 1865 and later in the 70s the Circle of Tchaikovsky and the biggest one, the second *Zemlya i Volya*, which later split into *Narodnaya Volya*, (People's Will)-the organization responsible for the assassination of the Tsar in 1881- and *Chernyi Peredel* (Black Repartition).

Simultaneously, another unprecedented event occurred; a crowd of students made a demonstration in September of 1861, which as Venturi states “it was an orderly demonstration followed by policemen and a large crowd of people, but it had one special feature. Never before had a demonstration taken place in St Petersburg”²⁰⁰. Disputes between students and governmental officials, led to students trying to organize free and open universities, inviting Chernyshevsky and Lavrov as lecturers, which did not last more than a month. Moscow followed suit and in October of the same year, a demonstration in front of the house of the Governor happened. As a result three hundred and forty were arrested and thirty-nine were detained. By 1863 these demonstrations had ended, and Venturi argues that some of these students were behind the creation of the first Land and Liberty organization²⁰¹.

The Narodniks felt that the peasants needed guidance in order for a mass popular movement to be created so, consequently, thousands of Narodniks traveled to peasant villages to educate them in 1873-74. This practice became known as ‘Going to the People’, but it lacked organized structures and varied massively by location. Furthermore, the peasants generally responded with suspicion, viewing the Narodniks as alien bodies. That was hardly unexpected. The following dialogue in Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons* is revealing; after Bazarov, the protagonist of the novel, held a conversation with his serfs, one of his serfs said “we know the masters, they do not understand much”, only for another serf to concur. Turgenev, continues, that “the selfish Bazarov did not even suspect that in

¹⁹⁹ This was the first organization with this name; another more famous organization –a political party - came into existence with the exact same name roughly 15 years after in 1876. Both of the names came from an Ogarev’s article of his which answered the query: What do the people need?: Land and liberty. As cited in *ibid.*, p. 126.

²⁰⁰ Venturi, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

their eyes, anyway, he was nothing more than a buffoon²⁰². Finally, this failure was partially attributed in false Bakunist beliefs about the peasants' readiness²⁰³.

After this failure, some Narodniks reacted by radicalizing and turning to terrorism to promote revolution, a reasoning that actually had been theorized in the 60s by Sergey Nechayev and exercised by Karakokoz, who in 1866 attempted to assassinate the Tsar. Terrorism originated from nihilism, a term which was first popularized by Turgenev in 1862 in his aforementioned novel to characterize the rebellious youths (like Bazarov) who had appeared in Russia in the late 1850s. The nihilists “rejected all authorities” and they looked at everything “from a critical point of view”²⁰⁴. Turgenev connects nihilism with amorality. A leading nihilist was Pisarev, who was imprisoned for four years in 1862 for writing an article defending Herzen. Though influential for the narodniks, they differed as the nihilists glorified the minority of the new intellectuals, while the narodniks idealized the Russian peasants.

Brothers in Arms

In the last decade of his life, Herzen saw intellectuals and revolutionaries attacking him from both sides of the political spectrum. With the liberals the final split came in 1863, when Herzen supported the Polish in their uprising. The Narodniks did not hold back on Herzen either, which was an awkward situation since he was one, if not the biggest, of the major influences on them. Some Narodniks urged him to use his newspaper as an “organ for directing Russian revolutionary activity abroad”²⁰⁵, which Herzen refused to do. His refusal made them believe that he had lost touch with the domestic situation and they believed that if he were a committed revolutionary, he should be prepared to offer his press for the good of their common cause²⁰⁶, and asked him to “ring the alarm! Summon Russia to seize the axe!”²⁰⁷. The sentiment was amicable; according to Venturi, when Herzen met some of the young representatives of Zemlya i Volya, he was unfavorably impressed²⁰⁸.

²⁰² I. Turgenev (1862) *Fathers and sons*. I use the Greek translated edition: *Πατέρες και Παιδιά* (2007) Αθήνα, Ζαχαρόπουλος, p. 268.

²⁰³ Wallicki, *op. cit.*, p. 299.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁰⁵ M. Patridge (1984) *Alexander Herzen: 1812-1870*. Paris, Unesco, p. 121.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

²⁰⁷ Yarmolinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

²⁰⁸ Venturi, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

What perhaps was more of a lamentable event for Herzen was the fact that two of his best friends and comrades for decades, took the side of the younger generation. Both Bakunin and Ogarev²⁰⁹ openly agreed with the younger generation's eagerness to use traditional European conspiratorial methods and Bakunin, mistakenly, believed that a revolution was imminent in Russia. Herzen answered that Bakunin had confused the second month of pregnancy for the ninth²¹⁰. In his last years, Herzen also had his reservations on Bakunin's contribution to the First International²¹¹, as he was "afraid that Bakunin will go too far again"²¹². While Herzen kept his distance from the young émigrés from Russia to Switzerland –where he was living since 1864, Bakunin was eagerly embracing them²¹³, and warned him against the "senile hatred of youth"²¹⁴. Nevertheless, despite his criticism in the younger generation, Herzen, with his unity spirit, felt that they were "devoted to Socialism, so rich in logical audacity, so strong by virtue of their scientific realism and their rejection of all clerical and governmental fetishism that there is no more fear: the idea will not perish"²¹⁵.

²⁰⁹ Pattridge, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

²¹⁰ Yarmolinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

²¹¹ The International Workingmen's Association (1864–1876), was an international organization which tried to unite the various currents of socialism; socialists, communists and anarchists.

²¹² Pattridge, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

²¹³ Venturi, *op. cit.*, p. 431

²¹⁴ Yarmolinky, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 134

Conclusions

When Alexander II was assassinated in 1881, the Russian Empire had been through a series of changes and reforms. With the abolition of serfdom, the economic and social context had changed sharply. However, an immense obstacle remained in the political life of the empire; there was no major progress for democratization. The request for a constitutional monarchy inaugurated with the Decembrists (mainly the Northern Society), and remained an important demand for the opposition throughout the remaining 19th century, and in the beginning of the 20th²¹⁶. The period after the Decembrists signaled the emergence of the opposition, which by the early 60s was split into three distinctive camps; the slavophiles, the liberals and the socialists. By 1861 one of the decisive, and the only unifying, trait of the opposition in Russia had gone; the serfs were emancipated. The liberals were content with Alexander's reforms and some Slavophiles gradually started leaning more to the right; Left's increasing radicalism in the 60s and 70s, provoked the fear of a revolution, which made the descendants of Slavophilism to become "faithful in the repressive state mechanism"²¹⁷. Thus, the differentiation between the opposition became clearer.

In the middle of all these splits we find Herzen, an intellectual whose appeal for socialism and respect of the individual made him a candidate to be "claimed as a precursor of Russian liberals no less than by socialists"²¹⁸. Herzen, together with Belinski, Bakunin, Ogarev and the Petrashevsky circle introduced socialism in Russia, and he was right in the "prophecy" that is mentioned in the closing of the last chapter; the idea of socialism did not perish. Not only that but for almost 70 years it was the official ideology of Russia and the younger generation he was referring to, was destined to have a major impact in the revolutions of the 20th century; Nikolai Tchaikovsky (the name of the Circle Tchaikovsky is named after him), Mark Natanson, Vera Zalusich, Leonid Shishko, Georgi Plekhanov, Pavel Axelrod etc made their first intellectual and revolutionary steps as Narodniks and some were responsible for creating the political offspring of Narodism, the Socialist

²¹⁶ The demand was partially satisfied after the 1905 Revolution, when the Tsar issued the October Manifesto which provided an elected parliament, the *Duma*, without whose approval, no laws were to be enacted in Russia.

²¹⁷ *Διάλλα*, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

²¹⁸ *Malia*, *op. cit.*, p. 424.

Revolutionary Party, which played an active role in all the Russian revolutions that occurred in the 20th century²¹⁹.

Narodism was the ideological and political fruit of various currents, which can be summarized in Herzen's agrarian socialism, Bakunin's revolutionary zeal and in the Petrashevsky circle's involvement of the intelligentsia. Also, the circle paved the way for the new social background of the future Narodniks; the *raznochintsy* started dominating the new radicalism²²⁰, "interrupting" the Decembrist tradition of gentry revolutionaries.

The Narodniks focused on the despair that capitalism brings. All the socialists – except Belinsky as we saw- structured their anti-capitalism rhetoric in the hardship and the pauperization that capitalism brings; the sufferings of the new social class that had emerged in Europe, the proletariat, were the crowning of the evils that capitalism creates. Their solution was to be found in the pre-capitalistic institutions of the agrarian community. That is the main difference they had with the Marxist-led social democrats; the first Marxist group created in 1883, the Emancipation of Labour (which in 1898 became the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party), "self-identified with its polemic towards the Narodniks, denied the sufficiency of the village community"²²¹. Thus, the Marxists at the beginning found themselves in the uncomfortable position of supporting further capitalist penetration against the Narodnik's agrarianism²²².

Despite this significant difference, the Narodism influence is not exhausted only in the common political goal of overthrowing capitalism. Russian Marxists were inspired also in terms of organization and action. As Hobsbawm notes "Lenin's Bolsheviks owe more than they have sometimes admitted to the experience and methods of work of the Buonarrotist-Narodnik tradition"²²³. The relationship of Narodism and Marxism in Russia begins in the early 80s -when the first Marxists started organizing- and ends post-17, when part of the Socialist Revolutionary Party emerged with the Bolsheviks. However, Narodism should not be regarded just as the ancestors of Marxism in Russia; despite their ideological

²¹⁹ They did not follow all the same route; Tchaikovsky, Natanson and Shishko remained Narodniks and created the Socialist Revolutionary Party; Zalusich, Plekhanov and Axelrod moved to Marxism and created the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (which also split into the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks), which firmly opposed the Narodniks.

²²⁰ That trend continued later too; but Trotsky, the undisputed leaders of Bolshevism in 1917 (Lenin, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Stalin and Bucharin) were all coming from the middle or lower strata.

²²¹ Eley, op. cit., p. 184.

²²² Plekhanov's book, *Our Differences*, is an attack to agrarian socialism, which he considered an "antiquated" doctrine.

²²³ E. Hobsbawm (1959) *Primitive Rebels*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, p. 173.

affinity, the two currents evolved differently and were antagonizing for many decades, with violent escalations²²⁴. Furthermore, influence of the Narodniks is not restrained only to Marxists; some of the Narodnik's "ways" survive still in the modern day anarchism. The paper covers the beginning of the Narodism, thus later developments could be a future project.

Another important aspect of the Narodniks' legacy is the introduction of the very first elements of social movements in Russia. Charles Tilly²²⁵ argues that the social movement is developed by the composition of the following three elements;

- a persistent organized public attempt to formulate collective claims against goals, i.e. a campaign,
- use of combinations of the following forms of political action: creation of special purpose associations, public gatherings, vigils, rallies, demonstrations, statements and registrations in the media and distribution of leaflets, i.e. the repertoire, and
- coordination of public representation of Worthiness, Unity, Numbers, and Commitment on the part of themselves and/or their constituencies, i.e. the WUNC displays.

The Narodniks led the emergence of social movements by distributing leaflets, organizing the first demonstrations and public gatherings, organizing the movement "going to the people", making associations etc. Until then the only way that the opposition expressed was either through secret societies (like the Decembrists) or through intellectual critique. In the 60s Herzen and Ogarev understood the importance of the propaganda to the people, while Bakunin still remained an ardent advocate of urgent revolution. Some of the Narodniks, only after their failure in their propaganda moved to more radical means of opposition, such as terrorism. On the other hand, since the liberals and the slavophiles became more lenient to the government - and despite some obstacles, it was usually easier for them to avoid censorship – there was no immediate urge for them to continue opposing strongly the regime for their demands – a majority of them were satisfied during Alexander- thus no need to start differentiating their means of propaganda. I think that the history of the social movements in Russia is usually overlapped by the political developments and could be a field for future research e.g. the correlation of the restrained political

²²⁴ Fanny Kaplan, a member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, tried to assassinate Lenin in 1918.

²²⁵ C. Tilly (2004) *Social Movements, 1768-2004*. I use the Greek translated edition: *Κοινωνικά κινήματα, 1768-2004* (2007), Αθήνα, Σαββάλας, p. 20-21.

environment in the Russian empire with the development of the social movements or why serfdom was not enough for the creation of a broader social movement, compared with the impact that slavery had regarding the social movements in the British Empire²²⁶. Another interesting topic is the relationship between Feminism and the various political movements, e.g. Russian Socialists, compared to their European contemporaries, were pioneers regarding woman's emancipation²²⁷.

Finally, I would like to add that Herzen's general appreciation is a bit limited. He is looked mainly as the creator of Narodism and as an agrarian socialist. In this essay there was an effort to distinguish Herzen from the rest of the Narodniks for one reason; he was indeed an agrarian socialist, but not exclusively. He had identified peasantry as a potential revolutionary class for that specific Russian context; an Empire still maintaining many feudal remnants. He was able to understand that a revolution at that time -in contrast with his ideological contemporaries- will only lead to destruction or to painful repercussions by the regime and his non-determinism differentiates with the following failed Marxist eschatology in Russia.

²²⁶ Tilly, op. cit., p. 84.

²²⁷ Herzen claimed "in the future there will be no marriage and woman will be redeemed from her slavery" (Χέρτσεν, op. cit., p. 34). Vera Pavlovna, the protagonist in Chernyshevsky's aforementioned novel, incarnates the future socialist woman; independent economically and socially.

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