

The Bolsheviks and the Peasantry:
Their Relationship from 1903 to 1921.

by

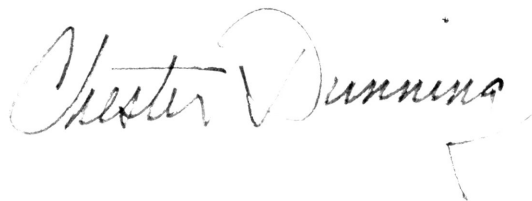
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Approved:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chester Dunning". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the word "Approved:". There is a small mark below the signature, possibly a checkmark or a flourish.

Professor Chester Dunning

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Abstract

The subject of this paper is the relationship of the Bolsheviks and peasantry between 1903 and 1921 with a special focus on the period known as the Russian Revolution. Included in the paper is a discussion of the role of the Socialist Revolutionaries, that party which was labeled as the peasants' party, especially during the revolution of 1917 when a peculiar shift in positions occurred between the Bolsheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries. Issues covered by the paper include: the orthodox Marxist ideology and Lenin's views of the peasantry from his early years through the 1905 revolution, the Stolypin reforms, the 1917 revolution, civil war and NEP. The last three sections focus on the issues of land reform and Bolshevik-peasant relations during the 1917 revolution, civil war and NEP. The main theme of the paper is that the Bolsheviks used the peasantry to help them achieve the proletarian revolution while at the same time because of their suspicions of the peasantry the Bolsheviks refused to allow the peasants to enjoy the fruits of what was essentially the peasants' revolution. The reason for this situation lies in the early formative years of the Russian Marxist revolutionary tradition to which the Bolsheviks belonged. The paper focuses on these issues to demonstrate the consistency of Bolshevik views about the peasantry. A study of this relationship also lends insight into State-peasant relations since the revolution.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
The Participants	2
Orthodox Marxist Position.	8
Lenin's Early Position13
The Revolution of 190515
Between the Revolutions.23
The 1917 Revolution.29
The Civil War.39
The New Economic Policy.45
Conclusion50
Endnotes54
Bibliography60

The Bolsheviks and the Peasantry:
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Introduction

The Russian Revolution and Civil War that followed which lasted from 1917 to 1921 were the culmination of nearly a century of revolutionary activity. Ever since the Decembrist Movement of 1825 there had existed in the Russian Empire an undercurrent of revolutionary thought and activity. The variety, complexity and duration of this tradition make it a topic worthy of volumes and lifetimes of study; fortunately, that is not the scope of my paper. My study focuses on an important topic which developed toward the end of this revolutionary tradition--specifically, the relationship between the Bolsheviks (V.I. Lenin and his followers) and the huge peasant class of the Russian Empire from 1903 through the end of the Russian Civil War. What makes this topic so interesting is that it is one which has been relatively untouched by Western scholars. And, this presents a question: why hasn't this area been more closely scrutinized? The two groups involved--the Bolsheviks and the peasants--were the two most important groups in Russia at that time. The Bolsheviks were the most active revolutionary group and the peasants comprised about 80% of the Russian Empire's population. What makes this area of research important is the insight it allows us into the present situation within the Soviet Union. It was during this period from 1903

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to 1921 that the attitudes of both groups toward each other were established, attitudes which help to explain past and more recent agricultural policies in the Russian Empire and the USSR. In order to understand this complex issue, one needs to have a solid understanding of the participants in these events.

The Participants

Up until 1903 there was no revolutionary group known as the Bolsheviks. Those that were later to become known as Bolsheviks were until then part of a Marxist revolutionary group known as the Social Democrats. The Social Democrats were a relatively recent development in the Russian revolutionary tradition. Their formation can be seen as a direct result of the failure of the Populist Movement in the 1870s. This movement represented a naive faith in a revolutionary, socialist peasantry that existed among the Intelligentsia. After the debacle of "going to the People" in 1874 a section of the Intelligentsia began to focus on the proletariat rather than the peasantry. This group had read Marx and Engels and were also influenced by events in Western Europe. It was the rapid industrialization of Russia after the abolition of serfdom in 1861 that provided the impetus for the formation of the Social Democrats. Industrialization resulted in the formation of a small, but growing, class of urban workers or proletariat.¹ It was the proletariat that this Marxist splinter group of the Intelligentsia came to believe would be the source of a successful revolution. The Social Democrats under the theoretical

guidance of Georgi Plekhanov, began their revolutionary activities in 1898. By 1903, however, internal problems led to a split in the Social Democrats. This split was due to a conflict between Lenin and his followers (i.e. Bolsheviks) and the rest of the Social Democrats led by Martov, Dan and Plekhanov. Lenin believed that the Party should have a selective membership, tightly controlled by the leadership, and that it should begin to recognize the significance of the peasantry in Russia.² The rest of the Social Democrats rejected this approach desiring a more open party. The result of these differences was the split of the Social Democrats in 1903. The Bolsheviks became a new party seeking an active membership within their own party guidelines and beginning to leave the strictly orthodox Marxist fold by seeking, once again, peasant support for their revolution. However, they were to encounter difficulties in dealing with the peasantry and this was due, in part, to a lack of understanding of the peasants' position during this time.

In 1861 Tsar Alexander II signed the Emancipation Act. This signaled the end of serfdom in the Russian Empire and established the landed peasantry. This seemed to be an answer to the demands of the serfs because the focus of the peasant concern was control of the land. It was believed by the peasants that if they controlled the land then all of their economic problems would be over. But the emancipation actually hurt the economic condition of the former serfs:

...not only did they possess an insufficient area of arable land to support themselves, but their failure to obtain other types of land as well made it impossible to achieve the balance necessary in such a finely tuned economic situation.³

The main problem was that the individual peasant had been liberated with less land than he had formerly worked as a serf and, in addition, he was forced to pay exorbitant prices for the land. These payments were known as "redemption payments" and were one of the main reasons that the peasantry as a class was worse off economically in 1903 than before emancipation. This resulted in a continued emphasis by the peasants on land as the solution to all of their problems:

For the peasants, the key to the most satisfactory balance between these factors was greater access to land; it was believed that this would lead to increased production which would relieve the pressure of 'eaters' on resources, help overcome limited soil fertility, and limit the effects of bad weather.

Land was regarded as the key to peasant well-being.⁴ Also, since emancipation a significant demographic shift had occurred among the peasantry. Because of industrialization and population pressures in the countryside, millions of peasants had either gone to the cities permanently and joined the proletariat or they were spending much of the year working in the cities and became what Lenin called the "semi-proletariat." Another social change that had taken place within the peasantry

since 1861 was that they had become more aware of themselves as a class and as a people of worth. This new generation was aware of itself as being free men with rights and they recognized that these rights were being denied by the present system.⁵ With this realization they began to question two of the most fundamental pillars of Russian society at that time: the tsar and the church. Since 1881 and the assassination of Tsar Alexander II a period of repression had set in. One of the goals of the bureaucracy during this time was to reinforce these concepts of church and state. The failure of this policy can be seen by the fact of changing of peasant attitudes throughout this period:

This erosion of peasant faith in the two pillars of patriarchal Russian society--autocracy and Orthodoxy--had led, in Sletov's experience, to the creation of a new group of 'conscious fighters against the existing political and social order.' These men had developed their critique of the status quo quite independently of any influence from the Intelligentsia, but they proved most responsive to revolutionary ideas when they encountered them.⁶

By the early twentieth century the countryside was ripe for revolution and the Bolsheviks, especially Lenin, slowly began to recognize the energy available for revolution to be found in the exploited peasantry. Instead of just focussing on the proletariat, the Bolsheviks recognized that the large, radical rural semi-proletariat was the class with which they had to

work. These people were now poor, land hungry, self-aware and angry. But, the Bolsheviks were supposed to be, as good Marxists, the party of the proletariat not the peasant. So the role of the peasants' party was filled by another revolutionary group known as the Socialist-Revolutionaries.

Any discussion of the events covered by this paper would be incomplete without acknowledging the presence and activities of the Socialist-Revolutionaries. They were not only the party of the peasant throughout this period, but they were also the Bolsheviks' main opponent among the socialists fighting for domination of the Russian Revolution. The origins of the Socialist-Revolutionaries lay in the shattered pieces of the Populist movement. After the failure of the 1870s the Populists split into two groups: the Black Repartition and the People's Will. The Black Repartition maintained the basic Populist program on paper; although, in reality, they had begun to seek support among the urban working class. They eventually disappeared from the scene as many of their more effective members, including Plekhanov and Axelrod, left for Western Europe where they established the Russian Marxist movement. In some ways the People's Will had a more spectacular career. They adopted a policy of active terrorism against the Empire in order to trigger a revolution among the masses. This campaign of terror culminated in 1881 with the *assasination* of Tsar Alexander II. The reaction to this event was not what they had hoped. The people did not rise in revolution and the reaction of the government eliminated the People's Will as an effective revolu-

tionary group. In 1891 a famine in the countryside sparked a renewal of the revolutionary orientation toward the peasantry.⁷ This resurgent movement of revolutionary populism resulted in the formation of a united Socialist-Revolutionary Party in 1901.⁸ Although they were considered the peasants' party, it was only after the 1905 revolution that their membership base broadened from the standard Intelligentsia core to include many peasants and workers: "...7.7% were peasants, 45.6% workers and artisans, 12.8% clerical and shop workers, 12.4% members of the minor professions (mainly teachers), 4.1% professional men, and 16.5% students."⁹ This type of membership would cause problems as the leadership of the party was frequently out of touch with those who were supposedly its constituents. By 1902 the Socialist-Revolutionaries, who will be called simply "SRs" throughout the rest of this paper, had begun to realize this peculiar situation. Up until that time they had concentrated their resources on the urban workers, not the peasantry. Recent violence in the countryside and the approaches of Lenin towards the peasantry forced the SR leadership to switch targets for their propaganda from urban areas to the countryside. And so began the competition between the Bolsheviks and the SRs for the hearts and minds of the peasants.¹⁰

The peasants, after all, wanted revolution and were willing to support those who would deliver on this desire. However, once the revolution was over they found that they had not attained what they thought they should. The reasons for this lie in the orthodox Marxist position in regards to the

peasantry. With this in mind it becomes necessary to have a firm understanding of the orthodox Marxist position and attitude concerning the peasantry and of how Lenin altered this position while maintaining the underlying attitudes.

Orthodox Marxist Position

The position of the early Russian Marxists has been called orthodox because it was a direct reflection of both Marx's and Engels's position with only one exception. Throughout his works Marx maintained a very strong empirical basis for his views; only in the case of the peasantry did he fail to uphold this strict methodology:

In his major works, tillers of the soil were portrayed either as the pathetic remnants of feudal society or as incipient capitalists and proletarians. In the first instance they were an ineffective obstacle to modern capitalist development, and in the second, a temporary phenomenon whose sympathies lay with the exploiters and whose fate, in most cases, was to be oppressed.¹¹

There was no role for the peasant in his formal theories. For Marx only the proletariat and the bourgeoisie had roles in modern society. To understand Marx it is necessary to understand what he meant when he mentioned the proletariat, bourgeoisie and their respective roles.

The proletariat has been mentioned earlier in this paper. They were the urban working class of the factory and, most

especially, wage laborers. The proletariat were being exploited for their labor by the capitalist bourgeoisie and alienated from themselves, their labor, the world and each other. Eventually, according to Marx, they would rise up as a class in a revolution and seize the means of production from the bourgeoisie and, thereby, end both the exploitation and alienation. This revolution would result in a communist society.¹²

This brings us to the bourgeoisie. This was the class responsible for throwing off the shackles of feudalism and establishing capitalism. The bourgeoisie were the owners of the means of production and capital. Because of this fact they necessarily exploited the proletariat in the name of competition and alienated him by the use of large, efficient factories and wage labor. However, Marx theorized, this stage was necessary because it resulted in the formation of cities, increased production and raised the consciousness of the proletariat.¹³

This model of social development left no place for the peasants. The early Russian Marxists picked up on this attitude; and so, in the future society no peasant worked the land. This contempt for the peasant and his way of life clouded their theories for decades until Lenin began to notice that the peasant wasn't going away and *that* he was a potential source of revolutionary energy. Ironically, this attitude of Russian Marxists toward the peasants was unnecessary had they only given credence to the words of Marx himself.

These words were written to Vera Zasulich who was a member of the Populist tradition and very worried about the fate

of the mir. In order to more fully understand the relationship of the both the Bolsheviks and the SRs with the peasantry an understanding of their concept of the mir is of importance. In Russian the word mir has many different meanings. It can be defined as the world, peace, and for our purposes, village or commune. The mir was the primary institution of peasant society during and after serfdom. After emancipation the bureaucracy used the mir as its means of controlling the peasant. Land was distributed to commune members by the council's elders, taxes were collected by the mir, and it was nearly impossible to leave the mir even though each family owned its own land. Despite all of these oppressive uses, as a whole, the peasantry supported the mir for the role it had played in earlier years. It was the concept of the mir from Russia's past that the Populists and SRs saw as Russia's salvation. Here was an institution, communistic in concept, that was native to Russia. In its previous role, before emancipation and as a native Russian institution, it lacked the taint of Western corruption. It was a tool by which they could fulfill their goal of agrarian socialism. The Russian Marxists had a different view of the mir. Even though it was seen as a dying institution, due to the effects of capitalism in the countryside, it still served as an obstacle to a capitalist revolution among the rural masses since commune members could not be counted as true individual proprietors.¹⁴ Considering Marx's views on the peasant and the "statistics" that showed the mir was dying, Zaslulich wrote Marx a letter asking whether or not, given Russia's special

situation, the mir was worth saving.¹⁵

Marx's reply was interesting, surprising and had possibilities. He replied that the theories he had constructed up to that point had been modeled upon developments in Western Europe and that Russia, due to its unique history, may very well have exceptions to his theories. Marx ends the letter by saying:

The analysis in Capital therefore provides no reasons either for or against the vitality of the Russian commune. But the special study I have made of it, including a search for original source material, has convinced me that the commune is the fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia. But in order that it might function as such, the harmful influences assailing it from all sides must first be eliminated, and it must then be assured the normal conditions for spontaneous development.¹⁶

So, according to Marx, there was hope for the mir. Two requirements, however, had to be met in order for it to survive: the destruction of the Tsarist autocracy and a supporting proletarian revolution in the West and Russia.¹⁷ The problem lay in the fact that the impetus for these necessary political changes could not come from inside the commune itself. Left on its own the mir was doomed to failure and death due to advancing capitalist agriculture and the low productivity of communal agriculture.¹⁸ But, Plekhanov and the rest of the Marxists only gave credence to the last statement--that the mir was doomed. They ignored entirely Marx's statement of the unique-

ness of Russia's position.

If any single person can be said to be responsible for the orthodox Marxist position of the Russian's it is Georgi Plekhanov. Plekhanov accepted deeply and totally the Westernizer's view of the peasantry. This was an intellectual tradition which believed that Russia's salvation lay in emulating as closely as possible Western Europe. According to this tradition the peasants and their institutions were "Asiatic" and Plekhanov upheld this attitude.

...Plekhanov found the Russian peasant no better than the Chinese, a 'barbarian-tiller of the soil,' cruel and merciless, 'a beast of burden' whose life provided no opportunity for the luxury of thought.¹⁹

Zasulich and others of the Populist tradition attacked him for these beliefs and his refusal to acknowledge the letters from Marx about the mir. Plekhanov replied to this charge with agricultural statistics that showed the growth of capitalism in the countryside, that predicted the failure of the mir and pronounced the peasantry as being hopelessly backward. The problem for future Marxists and their position was that the statistics he used were extremely selective.²⁰ This attitude and the manner in which it would affect their interpretation of Marx and the facts led to what became the basic Social Democrat position on the peasant question:

In his view, the Russian revolutionary movement, which had tried to minister to the needs of the peasantry, had met with no peasant support, sympathy, or under-

standing. Their political indifference and intellectual backwardness, claimed Plekhanov, were proof that peasants were traditionally the strongest supporters of Russian absolutism.²¹

This position proved to be universal among the Social Democrats until Lenin began his career in the mid-1890s. Of all the people in the early Russian Marxist tradition only Lenin seemed aware that no Russian revolutionary, even Marxist, could ignore the peasant majority of the Empire's population.²²

Lenin's Early Position

Realizing that one could not ignore what amounted to a majority of the population, Lenin in 1895 wrote a series of demands in regards to the peasants' plight. There were four of these demands: abolition of redemption payments, return of the lands not received during emancipation, abolition of collective tax responsibility, and suspension of all laws that prevented the peasant from doing what he wanted with his allotment. The demands were aimed at relieving the peasant from his feudal bonds, not turn him into a socialist. First, the peasant had to go through the capitalist stage and Lenin refused to acknowledge the mir as anything but a dying institution of a dying class.²³ The events of 1902 changed Lenin's attitudes to a limited degree and in 1903 he published his pamphlet To the Rural Poor.

In 1902 there was a wave of peasant violence in the countryside. The causes for this movement were economic: another

famine following two years of bad harvests, the effects of redemption payments and even heavier taxes (due to the industrialization program of Serge Witte). To this situation was added another factor--revolutionary propaganda to which a new generation of free peasants were willing and able to give credence.²⁴ This movement marks the beginning of Lenin's active interest in the peasant as a revolutionary even though he had been writing about the position of the peasantry since the mid-1890s.

To the Rural Poor was a landmark pamphlet aimed at this new active peasantry. It was written to be understood by the peasant and to serve as a primer so that they might understand what the "Social Democratic" revolution sought for the toilers of Russia. In many ways this pamphlet served as a continuation of Lenin's attack upon economism which he stated in his earlier work What Is To Be Done? (1902). Lenin emphasized that political conditions had to change before permanent economic improvements could be expected. Lenin also theorized that the peasant was still under feudal bonds and, therefore, a semi-serf.²⁵

It is interesting to note that at this time Lenin was still loathe to attack the Tsar personally in front of the peasantry. This was because he still recognized the lingering effects of "naive monarchism."²⁶ Lenin does, however, continue his attacks on the mir. He knew that because the mir's membership included all the villagers it would forever be dominated by the kulak or rich peasant, and therefore, could never serve as an instrument of the revolution.²⁷

Lenin introduced several important concepts and specific

aims in To the Rural Poor. His basic demands for the peasantry, beside political freedom, reflect his anti-feudal program of 1895. In addition he called for a National Assembly, revolution in the countryside and for the peasant to join with the urban worker.²⁸ And most importantly, as far as the peasant was concerned, Lenin called for all land to go to the peasants. But, he left himself an out, "...in so far as these do not employ labour, do not try to imitate the rich and, do not take the side of the bourgeoisie."²⁹ This would allow him to promote collectivization later and remain theoretically consistent and "true" to his words. Finally, in this pamphlet one finds the fully developed concept of the semi-proletariat and the splitting of the peasantry into kulak, middle peasant and poor peasant. To the Rural Poor shows Lenin's growing interest in the peasantry, but not until after the 1905 revolution would he finally commit himself and seek the peasants' support.

The Revolution of 1905

The revolution of 1917 was not the first Russian revolution. That honor belongs to the events of 1905 and 1906. Although any revolution has a multiplicity of causes, there were two principle ones for the 1905 Russian revolution. The first of these was Serge Witte's economic policies. He had promoted rapid industrialization at the expense of the agricultural sector in the hope that a "trickle down" effect might aid the peasantry. But, his policies failed. The industrialization proceeded too inefficiently and in the wrong areas, and the

agricultural policy led to the famines of 1901-03, worsening the already dismal conditions of the peasants. The second cause was the loss of, and disastrous showing in, the Russo-Japanese War. The war lasted from 1904 to 1905 and as news of the losses kept arriving from the front agitation for some kind of change began to grow.

The countryside had never really calmed after events in 1902 and in 1904 rural unrest began to increase. By the end of the year strikes among the urban workers became a common occurrence and then Bloody Sunday occurred. On January 9, 1905 a peaceful demonstration of workers, their wives and children led by Father Gapon was attacked on its way to deliver a petition to the Tsar. They never got there. The Tsar's guard opened fire on the crowds, killing and injuring hundreds. This triggered revolution. General strikes followed as did mass violence in the countryside. By October of 1905 the rural uprisings were so bad that Tsar Nicholas II signed the famous October Manifesto. This document had the potential of making Russia a constitutional monarchy and effectively took the wind out of the revolution's sails. Rural unrest continued throughout 1906 but at a decreasing level and on May 6, 1906 Nicholas signed the Fundamental Law. This decree established a Duma (Russian parliament); however, Nicholas was able to retain nearly all power as absolute monarch. The first Russian revolution was essentially over.³⁰

What exactly was the peasant's role in the 1905 revolution? They were heavily involved in rural violence and to a certain

degree were politicized by the events. Throughout this paper rural unrest and violence have been mentioned. It is necessary at this point to understand what these phrases mean and the reasons for this activity. Rural unrest meant that the peasantry was actively opposing and rectifying the injustices of emancipation. They would destroy estates, cut wood illegally, strike, seize pasture and fodder, till illegally (i.e. the estate lands), seize grain and fields and refuse to pay rent (or send less than previously). Between 1905 and 1907 there was a total of 7,165 such disturbances recorded, the majority in the central Black Earth provinces (Russia's most fertile land).³¹ The height of this activity occurred in the fall of 1905:

The explosion of peasant violence in September and October provoked increased government repression and elicited unprecedented concessions...the tsar issued a manifesto on October 17, 1905, which promised civil liberties and a legislative duma, as well as a reduction and eventual cancellation of all peasant redemption payments.³²

So even the tsar recognized the magnitude of social unrest and was forced to respond in a seemingly constructive manner. The particulars that made the peasant so especially violent now rather than in 1902 were best summed up by the tsar's own police:

Very often the peasants do not have enough allotment of land, and during the year cannot feed themselves, clothe themselves, heat their homes, keep their tools and livestock, secure seed for sowing and, lastly,

discharge all their taxes and obligations to the state, the zemstvo and the commune.³³

It had all gotten to be too much. Still feeling the effects of a famine, being taxed heavily to support a losing war and the increasing dissatisfaction among the liberals and workers all led to the massive rural unrest of 1905-1907. However, the peasants were also involved in peaceful activities during the 1905 revolution.

At the end of July, 1905 the first Peasant Congress was held in Moscow. The principle concern, as with all peasants, was land. The basic idea was to make the land "the property of the entire people," although even more specific resolutions were also passed such as; the abolition of private property and the transfer of land to those who worked it. Of secondary importance was the recognition that some sort of organization was needed for the activities of the peasantry. This desire for organization came primarily from SR, Social Democratic and liberal delegates that attended the Congress. In November a second congress was held where reports of peasant actions were made and the issues of land and organization were gone over again.³⁴ This would be the last Peasant Congress of the 1905 revolution. In 1906 the tsar used his returning army to suppress the uprisings in the countryside and the cities. This was a peasant army and it was the last time that the peasants would allow themselves to be used against their own class. Of course the tsar didn't know this until 1917 and by then it would be too late.³⁵

Even though the 1905 revolution was essentially a failure, it had several profound effects upon the peasantry. They were able to receive some economic and political concessions; also, it led to greater organization among the peasants as a revolutionary class. The political consciousness of the peasantry increased dramatically; they had a greater feel for the issues, other classes and their own self-identity. Finally, in what would have great repercussions in 1917, "naive monarchism," the belief in a good tsar with evil advisors, received its death blow on "Bloody Sunday" and the suppression of revolution in 1906.

Meanwhile the peasant's party, the SRs, were very busy doing what revolutionary groups normally did: defining issues, propagandizing and organizing. It was at this time that, under the guidance of Victor Chernov, the SRs made concrete definitions of the class of peasants. These definitions differed greatly from those of the Bolsheviki and were to form the core of the differences between the two revolutionary groups. Chernov divided the peasants into two groups: the working peasantry and the rural bourgeoisie. What distinguished these two groups was that the working peasantry lived by exploiting their own labor while the rural bourgeoisie lived by exploiting the labor of others. The working peasantry along with the urban proletariat formed a single working class capable of leading a socialist revolution.³⁶ This definition would form the core of SR theory and allow Chernov to claim that the peasantry in 1905 was not only anti-feudal, but also anti-capitalist.³⁷ Chernov was also

active in determining the SR position on the land issue and in guiding the activities of the party. His views on the land issue were presented first in 1904 and later reprinted in May 1905 as an editorial:

Insofar as the party slogan for this movement should be the gaining of the land, this should consist not in the seizure of particular plots by particular individuals or even small groups, but in the abolition of the boundaries and borders of private ownership, in the declaration of the land to be common property, and in the demand for its general, egalitarian and universal distribution for the use of those who work it.³⁸

So Chernov called for an organized seizure of land and redistribution, not a chaotic one, and it is on this basis that Chernov was able to attack Lenin's land policy. Throughout the 1905 revolution Lenin called for the peasants to seize the land on their own accord. But as far as the SRs were concerned, Lenin made the "mistake" of not calling for organized seizures. Chernov seized on this and called Lenin a demagogue whose desire was for short-term political gains. He accused Lenin of being indifferent to the possibility that his call for chaotic land seizures might actually benefit the rural bourgeoisie more than the people as a whole.³⁹ The SRs, however, were not in any better position. For all of their talk and attempts at organization, in the end they failed miserably:

In fact, as might have been predicted from the evidence of the local reports at the congress, the party did not possess an adequate organization in the countryside to ensure the realisation of its plan...Spontaneity remained the keynote of the peasant movement throughout 1905, and if its course sometimes corresponded to the blueprint set out for it by the SRs, this was due more to coincidence than to design.⁴⁰

This same state of affairs would be the SRs' hallmark in the coming years and seal their fate in 1917.

The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, did nothing of substance during the 1905 revolution. They participated in the Third Party Congress and decided on their reaction to the events of 1905, but had no active participation as a party. The land policy that Lenin promoted was the same anti-feudal program of To the Rural Poor in which he urged the peasants to seize the land. Lenin did change his belief in certain alliances, however. In 1903 Lenin appealed to the poor peasant to ally himself with the kulak in order to throw off their feudal bonds. By 1905 he told that rural poor that they had to recognize that the material differences with the kulak were too large and that they could only have trustworthy allies within the proletariat.⁴¹ As for the Third Party Congress, in general, revolutionary resolutions dominated:

The masses must be prepared for the 'inevitable' armed uprising, and social democrats must be ready to take control of the spontaneous movement; class warfare

among the peasants must be exacerbated; and liberals must only be supported if they in turn are really on the side of revolution.⁴²

Lenin also argued, in regard to the peasant issue, that it would be incorrect to establish a program of specific reform since political reform of society was necessary before the implementation of economic reforms.⁴³ It was this ambiguity that Chernov attacked.

The key to all of this ambiguity and inactivity lay in the Bolshevik belief that the 1905 revolution could not possibly be the right one. As a whole, the Russian Marxists were constrained by their fanatical belief in Marx's model for social development. Russia must go through a capitalist phase, even though Marx in the later years acknowledged that Russia's development could very well differ from Western Europe. As noted earlier the Social Democrats ignored this which resulted in their belief that Russia was not yet ready for a socialist revolution:

Yet at this very Congress in April Lenin confessed the ^{im}possibility of achieving a Socialist revolution.

'If we were now to promise to the Russian proletariat that we can seize full power we would be repeating the error of the Socialist Revolutionaries.'⁴⁴

On this issue the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks agreed, but they differed on two other issues: the peasantry and the liberals.

With the 1905 revolution winding down Lenin realized that for any overthrow of the tsar and the existing system the

revolution must have peasant support. So Lenin began to actively incorporate the peasantry into his plans for the "next" revolution. The Mensheviks refuted this theory by being "proper" Marxists and relying solely on the proletariat. Finally, Lenin condemned the Mensheviks for refusing to support the liberal calls for a duma and refusing to participate in a duma if one was formed, saying that only by participating would socialists be able to shorten the period between this bourgeois revolution and the coming socialist revolution.⁴⁵ But for all of this support, Lenin was still ambivalent about the peasant and he summed up his position best at the end of July 1906:

We support the peasantry to the extent that it is revolutionary-democratic. We are ready (doing so now, at once) to fight it when and to the extent that it becomes reactionary and anti-proletarian. The essence of Marxism lies in that double task, which only those who do not understand Marxism can vulgarize or compress into a single or simple truth.⁴⁶

Between the Revolutions

The period between the revolutions was a time of great confusion and continual dissatisfaction for most Russians. Of primary importance for the context of this paper are the reforms attempted by Tsar Nicholas II's premier, Peter Stolypin. Stolypin was made premier in 1906, and almost immediately he began to formulate and implement his reforms. These reforms concentrated in two areas which he viewed as necessarily tied

together: agricultural policy and local government administration.

The cornerstone of all the reforms Stolypin proposed was the breakup of the mir. Since 1905 many of the empire's administrators had begun to view the mir as an obstacle to agricultural modernization and a hot-bed of revolutionary activity. Before Stolypin's agrarian reform could take place effectively, administrative reforms on the local level needed to be implemented:

The decision to break up the mir in favor of individual holdings had a dual impact on local governance. First, much of the implementation of the reform would fall to provincial and district organs, which therefore had to be in good working order. Secondly, the disappearance of communal landholding logically implied the restructuring of village administration. The decision to remove the estate element from land ownership through the abolition of communal restrictions on the peasantry raised the issue of similarly removing the corporate principle from governance as well.⁴⁷

What this meant in practice was that participation in local politics would be determined by property ownership, not estate (gentry) or incorporated (communal) status.⁴⁸ Besides making it easier for the peasant to leave the commune, Stolypin also made it easier for them to move out of European Russia altogether and claim land further east. This policy of Siberian

emigration transferred a total of 3½ million peasants between 1906 and 1915, although after 1909 emigration had begun to diminish. Conditions nearer home had begun to improve and the best land in the east had already been taken.⁴⁹ Stolypin didn't enact these reforms solely for the good of the people. He had definite goals in mind when promoting these policies. What Stolypin sought was a solution to the political instability in Russia. This instability threatened an end to the tsarist bureaucracy and autocracy and Stolypin feared the results of such a radical change. His was an attempt at social engineering that even he acknowledged would take at least 20 years to be effective.⁵⁰ Stolypin sought the formation of a new conservative class of peasant farmers who "...would serve both as bulwark against revolution and as a source of material progress for the country."⁵¹ His method consisted of land consolidation reforms. The administrative reforms would result in expanding the base of political participation by forming a new social class uniting the interests of the gentry and the most successful of the new peasants.⁵² With the emigration policy Stolypin tried to solve three problems. First, he attempted to alleviate the problem of over-population in European Russia by moving the population east. Secondly, he could dispatch much of the poor peasant population and thereby rid himself of a politically unreliable and unstable social group. And finally, this would all help to protect the estates of the rural gentry and strengthen the kulaks' position.⁵³ Of course, how well these reforms would work depended on the peasants reaction to them.

To put it simply the peasants did not appreciate the efforts Stolypin made on their behalf. "The Stolypin legislation aroused a great deal of resistance among commune peasants, and the most recent scholarship on the subject has emphasized the ephemeral character of the reforms impact."⁵⁴ The mir, however, did suffer and many peasants left, becoming independent farmers. Between 1905 and 1915 of 9.5 million peasant households 2.7 million applied for separation and 2 million were completed.⁵⁵ But, even these statistics were marred by peasant resistance to the reforms. Only about 20% of those that left the mir did so on their own initiative. Many of those observing these reforms testified that they were enacted by force and protested violently by the peasantry.⁵⁶ Stolypin's reforms had the further effect of accelerating the politicization of the peasantry. In some ways this was what he sought, but the peasant that became politicized was not the force for stability that was needed to preserve the empire. This would become painfully obvious in 1916 and 1917. The peasants were not the only ones to despise these reforms; the SRs viewed them as a frontal assault on their agrarian program. The SRs felt this way because they saw that the Stolypin reforms threatened to undermine their entire view of the Russian countryside:

According to Chernovian theory, SR hopes for the socialisation of the land derived not from the existence of the repartitional commune--this, as we shall see later, simply constituted a bonus--but from their view of the mass of small peasant producers as

members not of the petty bourgeoisie but of the working class, and their consequent receptivity to socialist ideas.⁵⁷

The SR attachment to the mir was really no more than an emotional bond to the mythic mir of ages past. Rather, Chernov and others were frightened by the possible results of Stolypin's social engineering. They had pinned their theories on the middle or working peasant as the active revolutionary class in the countryside. If socialist theory was correct then Stolypin's reforms would make the working peasant extinct. Either he would become one of the rural bourgeoisie (kulak) by becoming a successful independent farmer, or become one of the landless poor peasant (rural proletariat). Therefore, it is not too surprising that during the first two dumas Stolypin had a lot of trouble dealing with the SRs and their rhetoric. This opposition led Stolypin to suppress the SRs and other dissident parties by changing the election laws to limit their participation in the Duma. The dissident parties, especially the SRs, responded by increasing terroristic activities and were then brutally suppressed even more. The reaction of the SRs differs markedly from that of the Bolsheviks.

The period between the revolutions was not a good one for the Bolshevik party. In light of Stolypin's anti-revolutionary activities, by December of 1907 Lenin was forced to leave Russia for nearly a decade of exile. It is very difficult to direct a revolution by correspondence as Lenin was to find out. However, Lenin would continue to write his opinions about Stolypin

and the SRs throughout this period. Lenin's reaction to the Stolypin reforms was mixed; in some ways he welcomed the reforms as resulting in quickening the proletarianization of Russia. Those industrial proletariat from the village would have no place to return after the redistribution of land. The reforms would also serve to hasten the formation of a rural proletariat that would then oppose their more well-to-do neighbors, the kulaks.⁵⁸ But Lenin didn't feel that Stolypin had chosen the proper kind of reform or that he had gone far enough, "...he claimed as well that the 'Prussian-Stolypin' reforms were inadequate because they failed to completely clear the land for capitalist development."⁵⁹ Again, Lenin's western orientation affected his solution to the problem of rural development. What Lenin desired was a solution whereby the government owned the land allowing peasants to make labor and capital investments without worrying about purchase or rent. This nationalization would destroy the estates, eliminate any remaining feudal bonds and stop the further fragmentation of land which prevented efficient agricultural methods.⁶⁰ However, for all of his progressive (although, capitalistic) land solutions, Lenin still held onto his earlier opinions of the peasants and SRs. The peasantry and its supporters viewed themselves as socialists, but Lenin would continue to deny these claims throughout his life.⁶¹ Lenin was willing to support the peasants insofar as they were working for a capitalist revolution in the countryside yet because of these capitalist (or petty bourgeois) tendencies, the peasantry would never be a reliable ally during a

socialist revolution.⁶² The SRs also received the sting of Lenin's lash. He accused them of being inconsistent and fickle. They supported the peasantry during good times and abandoned them during the bad. They would then go into ideological paralysis or resort to acts of terror. Neither did much to provide a solution to the nation's social ills.⁶³

But all of these trials and tribulations were for nought because Stolypin's reforms failed. He had too little time. Stolypin was only premier from 1906 until his assassination in 1911; and the reforms only lasted until 1917. This wasn't even close to the 20 years that he himself admitted would be needed. There was too much peasant resistance and not enough of the peasantry changed. Also, political forces were working against Stolypin (as they did against all effective people in the tsar's bureaucracy). Stolypin was viewed as an oppressor by the liberals and revolutionaries. On the other hand, the reactionaries (especially bureaucrats) felt threatened by his reforms.⁶⁴ So the reforms never really had a chance. All they did was create more chaos in the countryside, add fuel to the fire of peasant unrest, and infuriate the surviving revolutionary groups.

The 1917 Revolution

1917 was a calamitous final year for the Russian Empire. Autocracy had been in trouble for decades but one factor proved to be decisive in the tsar's fall--World War I. War at any time is an expensive business but a losing war is ruinous. This was

especially evident in the Russian countryside. The war proved to be the straw that broke the back of the Russian agricultural economy:

The countryside was now brought to the brink of total disorganisation and economic collapse by the unrestrained withdrawal of manpower, draught animals, food and raw materials, the imposition of even heavier taxes and the introduction of numerous additional duties for the rural population.⁶⁵

The numbers of Russian peasants involved in mobilization for World War I are staggering: by the end of 1916 a total of 14.5 million men had been called up. This meant that about half of all the working male peasants were in the army and not farming, leaving close to a third of all Russia's farm without male workers⁶⁶ The effect of this drain of resources was agricultural collapse: sowing areas and livestock were reduced, fields lost their fertility, harvests grew smaller, total agricultural output fell and a tremendous food shortage developed.⁶⁷ Then at the end of 1916 the tsarist government began a policy that spelled its doom. In September 1916 food requisitioning began, and by February of 1917 the tsar was forced to abdicate. The government could not withstand both a war with Germany and its own peasantry.⁶⁸ However, before one begins to examine the roles of the three protagonists in 1917 it is necessary to review the major events of that year.

The Russian Empire effectively ended on February 23, 1917. On this day general strikes paralyzed Petrograd and two insti-

tutions arose to fulfill the former tsarist government's duties: the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet. The Petrograd Soviet was made of many smaller soviets. The term soviet meant any organized group of revolutionary workers. However, for the purposes of this paper I'll deal strictly with the Provisional Government. The Provisional Government was formed from the core of the former duma and consisted primarily of liberals from the Cadet party. The Cadets were a party that held onto the agenda from the 1905 revolution that called for a Western style form of government and reforms. By May this body was on the verge of collapse as the revolution began to bypass them. The Cadets refused to deliver on the land issue in a constructive manner and continued to prosecute the war with Germany in order to keep alive their ties with Western Europe. In order to avert this collapse the Cadets invited the SRs and Mensheviks to participate in the Provisional Government to create a supposed bourgeois/socialist coalition. An SR, Alexander Kerensky, became the effective head of the Provisional Government and continued to implement the Cadet's land and war policies instead of their own program of 1905. The inability of an SR led Provisional Government to deliver on these two issues formed the core of Lenin's attacks against the Provisional Government.

Throughout 1917 the peasants weren't sitting on their hands. They had contributed greatly to the fall of Nicholas II and so had certain expectations about the results of their work:

In their eyes, moreover, the destruction of the autocracy in February 1917 left them but one short step away from the achievement of their traditional dream: the seizure of all non-peasant agricultural land and its redistribution among themselves.⁶⁹

The peasants gave the Provisional Government a chance. They were willing to wait for the Provisional Government to convene a constituent assembly to decide upon the land question. However, they also believed the constituent assembly to be imminent so the Provisional Government really needed to work quickly.⁷⁰ But the problems between the peasants and the Provisional Government began almost immediately. This also marked the beginning of the seesaw battle between the SRs and the Bolsheviks.

The first problem between the peasantry and the Provisional Government occurred in the area of rural administration. Once in power the Provisional Government kept the same administrative structure; but more importantly they kept the same tsarist administrators in authority. The peasants thought they were rid of these onerous masters; instead, they realized that nothing had changed. The purposes of local government bodies were the same as before; defense of the established order and maintenance of the power of the landlords.⁷¹ In response to this development the peasantry began to form itself into committees. In effect these were rural soviets that served the peasantry and reflected its desires. These were very democratic bodies where all males voted, were eligible

for positions and subject to recall if it was felt they no longer represented the interests of the peasants.⁷² By the end of April 1917 the Provisional Government formed land committees to study the land issue; but it was too late, the peasantry had expected the land issue to be decided by this time. This delay was a direct effect of the liberal attitude that private property had to be preserved.⁷³ The peasants deserved justice, but this justice had to be legal, not the result of revolutionary chaos. The peasantry resented this further delay so by July and August they had begun to seize crops and refused to sell grain to the Provisional Government because of the grain monopoly and fixed price that had been established.⁷⁴ This was just a sign of things to come; by summer's end the peasantry set out on its own:

...but they no longer seemed as concerned to send the petitions or demands to the central government. Their initial enthusiasm dampened by government inaction on issues that concerned them most, peasants had by August begun in increasing numbers to ignore government directives, to seize land and to burn gentry estates by the thousands.⁷⁵

One of the reasons for the extent of this violence, besides the war, was a crop failure in the heartland of Russia.⁷⁶ All of this led to the result that the Provisional Government had no influence in rural Russia by the end of summer 1917. Again, it must be emphasized that all of this resulted from the inability or unwillingness of the Provisional Government to deal

with the land issue in a manner that the peasantry would consider as constructive. Because of this the real power in the countryside lay in the Peasant Committees and the effect on the provisional Government was inevitable, "...in the face of active peasant opposition, the government could not last."⁷⁷

Of no great surprise during 1917 was the resurrection of the mir in rural life. Peasant Committees often were formed from the core of old mir councils. When seizures began it was usually done in the name of the mir; and the land redistributed by the mir among its members. Finally, the mir re-established its authority over those peasants that had left during the Stolypin reforms. This proved to be a great surprise to the socialists, especially Lenin and the Bolsheviks,⁷⁸ The peasantry and the mir had surprised the intelligentsia by their tenacity. What was even more surprising in 1917 was the political shift that occurred between the Bolsheviks and SRs.

The cornerstone of SR actions in 1917 was their participation in the Provisional Government. In May a coalition was formed between the Cadets and the socialist parties of the SRs and the Mensheviks. As seen earlier this was necessary in order to preserve the effectiveness and legitimacy of the Provisional Government in the eyes of the revolutionary masses. However, the SRs never used their new position within the Provisional Government to enact their own program. They accepted the approach of the Cadets in attempting to solve the agrarian problems.⁷⁹ There were rationalizations for this inactivity, the most important being their desire to maintain a high level

of grain production. It was believed by those in power in the Provisional Government that any radical changes in land ownership would disrupt the already precarious position of agriculture; therefore, the SRs were willing to defer resolution of the land issue until a constituent assembly could be convened at some future date after the conclusion of the war.⁸⁰ And so an unusual situation existed--the party that had advocated immediate land transfer in 1905 was stalling and urging the peasants not to seize the land or commit other uncommissioned acts.⁸¹

The SR participation in the Provisional Government tainted them in the eyes of the masses--especially the peasantry. Only one high ranking member of the SR hierarchy seemed to avoid this taint and that was Victor Chernov. He held the portfolio of Minister of Agriculture in the Provisional Government and given this fact one would think that effective agrarian reforms would be implemented. Only Chernov seemed to keep true to his SR origins and in early May he tried to effect two measures to help the peasantry. The first measure would use the land committees to settle land disputes and in an orderly manner transfer the land "to the toiling masses." The second measure would ban all land transactions. The peasants feared that the estates would be sold off before they could be transferred to the masses. However, these two proposals were rejected by the rest of the Provisional Government.⁸² Throughout 1917 Chernov was opposed by Kerensky and most of his SR colleagues, "...even though the Agriculture Minister was doing little more than

attempting to implement the formal SR program. Chernov was virtually isolated in the government."⁸³ When the Cadets withdrew from the coalition in mid-July Chernov tried to implement these policies: land transactions were suspended, the Stolypin reforms null and void and orderly land transfer begun by the land committees. The very next day Peshekhonov, the SR minister of food, issued an order canceling the attempted land reform and warning the peasantry to behave or else.⁸⁴ The SR leadership had lost touch with the revolution. This state of being out-of-touch was made especially evident at the All Russian Peasant Congress in May 1917:

Even when some of the peasant delegates openly declared themselves "fed up" with promises rather than action on the land question, SR moderates refused to recognize the political implications of the fact that their prime constituents were unwilling to peacefully await the granting of benefits at some later date.⁸⁵

At about the same time some of the SRs began to resent the moderate policy of the leadership and started to form their own organization. These SR dissidents became the party known as the Left SRs. They established a secret bureau to trade information and criticisms of the party leadership. They would formally split after the October revolution.⁸⁶

1917 was a peculiar year. There was a near reversal of roles between SR and Bolshevik. In 1917 it was the SRs that were incapable of effective action on the land issue; even though they had a place in the Provisional Government. In

fact, they became non-revolutionary in their policies and actively opposed with force peasant land seizures and other revolutionary activities. On the other hand, the Bolsheviks adopted the SR position of 1905, advocated its immediate implementation and when in power acted upon it. This would create a situation in which the peasantry actively opposed its "leadership" and allowed the Bolsheviks to take control:

It was this traditionalist upsurge from the countryside which sapped the strength of the [Provisional] government and so weakened it that the Bolsheviks were able easily to push it from power. The October revolution owed more to traditional forces than Lenin cared to admit.⁸⁷

Bolshevik actions throughout 1917 deserve a volume in themselves. For the purposes of this paper, however, only their actions in regard to the peasantry and land policy are of importance. Until April the Bolsheviks in Russia were without the leadership of Lenin and many of the more prominent party members. Lenin returned from exile on April 4, 1917, and he delivered his famous April Theses. In this speech he advocated "all power to the soviets and socialist parties" which was an utter rejection of the Provisional Government. Lenin also wanted to get out of the war with Germany. Finally, Lenin proposed an immediate transfer of all estates to committees of poor peasants:⁸⁸

Nationalization of all lands in the country, the land to be disposed of by the local Soviets of Agricultural

Laborers' and Peasants' Deputies...The setting up of a model farm on each of the large estates...under the control of the Soviets of Agricultural Laborers' Deputies and for the public good.⁸⁹

So, in effect, Lenin was proposing for the peasantry what the SRs had advocated in 1905, "Lenin's immediate policy would seem, therefore, to have accepted the double Populist principle of land nationalization and distribution."⁹⁰ These policies were exactly what the peasantry and that portion of the SR party that would become the Left SRs were demanding. It was these policies which Lenin established in April that would be responsible for the dramatic rise in Bolshevik prestige throughout 1917. This combined with the failure of the SRs to deliver on the land issue resulted in a situation where the peasants applauded the change in leadership that the October revolution represented.

On October 25, 1917, the Bolsheviks seized control of the Russian ruling organs in the name of the Soviets. Lenin utilized the fact that at this time there was no support for the Provisional Government among the workers or peasantry. However, he knew that he would have to deliver on the land issue in order to maintain good relations with the peasantry during this crucial early period. Therefore, on October 26, 1917, Lenin issued his Decree on Land. The sources for these policies were primarily from the 242 peasant mandates and the SR agrarian program. Private property was abolished. All land was to be part of a national land preserve and distributed by local land

committees or soviets in accordance with each individual peasant family's needs. Periodically the land would be repartitioned; however, anyone willing to work the land was allowed an allotment.⁹¹ Lenin recognized the necessity of this act but acknowledged that it was appeasement, "The 'law' had little of Marxism about it: it was purely and simply an attempt to appease the mass of peasants and to reconcile them to the Bolshevik rule."⁹² This was because for all of his pro-peasant policies during 1917 Lenin never trusted the peasantry. He encouraged their seizures and other revolutionary activities but viewed these activities as those of petty capitalists. Lenin ignored any implication that the peasantry was socialistic insisting the best that the peasantry could be were "second rate socialist material."⁹³ So during this time Lenin began to hint at the future with collectivism by saying socialism in the countryside could only be possible with large scale production.⁹⁴ However, this period immediately following the October revolution in which the peasant thought that the revolution would turn out the way they thought it should, would only last a period of a few months. The civil war began in spring of 1918 as did a new Bolshevik agrarian policy.

The Civil War

After the Bolshevik seizure of power there began a period of "peace" in Russia. This period, which lasted until March 1918, was a period during which political forces were jockeying for power and preparing for civil war. The Russian Civil War

began in earnest after the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk which ended the war with Germany. When most people think of the Russian Civil War they think about a fledgling Red Army battling the remnants of the conservative tsarist forces or Whites. But some of their most dedicated opponents were fellow socialists. These socialists were Mensheviks, Right SRs and later, Left SRs. The one common element among these forces (except for possibly the Left SRs) was their rallying around the dismissed Constituent Assembly as the legitimate voice of the Russian people. The Russian Civil War can be said to have started in late-spring of 1918 and ended in 1921. The only time that the Bolsheviks were in any trouble was the summer of 1918. After that, although fighting was fierce, the revolution was in no real danger. What highlighted the period of the civil war in Bolshevik relations was the policy known as War Communism.

There were many reasons for the policies known collectively as War Communism. Behind the practical reasons lay the fact that:

Having destroyed the existing food distribution apparatus and prohibited private trade, the new government discovered that the peasants were unwilling to deliver food to the towns for nothing in return. By the summer of 1918 supplies of food had dropped catastrophically. The communists now sought the solution in force.⁹⁵

The policy had three principles in regards to the countryside. First, the Bolsheviks attempted to institute a system that exchanged manufactured goods for grain. Secondly, they established the Committees of Poor Peasants. And finally, they sent armed detachments of townsmen into the countryside to requisition and confiscate grain.⁹⁶ The purpose of the new system of exchange was to eliminate purchase and sale on the market. What Lenin wanted was to establish a socialist system of direct exchange of products in kind, thereby eliminating the market and the use of money.⁹⁷ The Bolsheviks, however, had problems because the State still had too few goods to offer the peasants in exchange for the grain. So the peasantry refused to offer their grain willingly to the State. This is where the two other policies enter in. The purpose of the Committees of the Poor Peasants was to split the village and start a class war between the poor peasants and the kulaks and, all too often, the middle peasants as well. These committees would confiscate the land of the kulaks and cooperate with the food detachments in confiscating grain from the "hoarders" (i.e. kulaks and middle peasantry). For the most part the committees failed because of the ancient tradition of village solidarity and the "poorer" peasants had, for the most part, received land during 1917 and 1918.⁹⁸ Finally, the food detachments entered the countryside. These were groups of armed townsmen and army personnel that appropriated from the peasantry, especially kulak and middle peasant, any grain surplus. If the townspeople had goods then the grain would be exchanged, otherwise

the grain would be confiscated. Of all the policies this was the most successful and saved the Bolshevik party during the civil war by allowing them to keep the cities fed and thus maintain the support of the proletariat.⁹⁹ However, the Bolsheviks were to pay a heavy price for this policy in the lasting bitterness it created among the peasant class throughout Russia.

In March of 1919 the Seventh Party Congress was held and new rural policies were decided upon. War Communism was still in effect; and it was at this time the first attempts to establish collectives and cooperatives is found:

In view of the new situation the Party took the line of speeding up the socialisation of agriculture. The production amalgamation of the peasant farms in agricultural collectives and the organisation of a broad network of state-run farms was pushed ahead.¹⁰⁰

The Bolsheviks instituted a policy to increase the cooperation between town and country. They also clarified their position on the three different peasant classes of the poor, middle and kulak peasant.¹⁰¹ It has been argued that War Communism was largely a pragmatic response to the civil war. There is, however, a very good case to be made that War Communism had a solid theoretical base and was not just a collection of expediciencies. During the period of War Communism Lenin did not say that the program was forced upon the Bolsheviks by the civil war or that he saw it as temporary. Rather, Lenin viewed it as a way to build socialism more rapidly.¹⁰² In fact these

policies were seen as necessary by Lenin in order to prevent the return of capitalism. A system of socialist exchange was necessary or the market would exert its anti-revolutionary influence. What did differ because of the civil war was the manner in which these policies were implemented. Surplus appropriation ^{became} confiscation by food detachments because of the civil war. This argument doesn't mean to say that these policies were planned from the beginning or part of a comprehensive party program; instead, they were, "implicit in the doctrine of revolutionary Marxian socialism."¹⁰³ The reason that War Communism failed was because of the civil war and because the policies had been misapplied. Russia, as a nation, just wasn't ready for these socialist measures. In other words, the doctrine was sound, just administered incorrectly.¹⁰⁴

Immediately after the October revolution the Bolsheviks, because of their professed agrarian policy, had two unexpected allies: that portion of the SR party known as the Left SRs and the peasantry. War Communism alienated both these groups and made them bitter opponents. The Left SRs had formed a coalition government with the Bolsheviks in November 1917. The coalition collapsed as a result of the humiliating Treaty of Brest-Litovsk although tacit cooperation continued. Those policies known as War Communism severed this tenuous bond between the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs. The Left SRs objected to the injustice of the use of food detachments and the violence against the peasantry that these groups represented.¹⁰⁵ However, the real problem was the formation of the Committees

of Poor Peasants. The Left SRs saw these as a threat to their rural base of support and they cut their remaining ties with the Bolsheviks.¹⁰⁶ The Bolsheviks were quite willing to accept the collapse of this "coalition" as, in their view, it had outlived its purpose.¹⁰⁷ Of more importance was the fact that the Bolsheviks had lost nearly all peasant support as well. In response to the policy of confiscation the peasantry eventually just reduced their planting to subsistence level, thereby eliminating any surplus for the food detachments.¹⁰⁸ This reaction was in some ways justified because what the Bolsheviks considered surplus a peasant considered his "safety net" in case of disaster. They had no incentive to produce more, so they didn't.¹⁰⁹ Another policy that acted to separate Bolshevik and peasant was the Bolshevik opposition to the mir and advocating its replacement by the collective and cooperative. Although relatively ineffective, these policies only served to increase peasant suspicions about the Bolsheviks, further alienating the two groups.¹¹⁰ The only good thing about War Communism was that it did allow the Bolsheviks to obtain enough grain to survive the civil war. Otherwise, all it did was to alienate the peasantry from the Bolsheviks, virtually eliminating the possibility of future cooperation and destroying any trust between the groups. War Communism also provided the final step in the collapse of the Bolshevik/Left SR coalition. It also served to ruin the Russian agriculture economy. The war with Germany put agriculture on the brink of disaster and War Communism pushed it over the edge. "By 1921-2 production

on the land had fallen to about half of the total for 1913, and the land under cultivation to three-quarters."¹¹¹ It would take all of the coming New Economic Policy (NEP) to make up for this loss. And this was the final result of War Communism--NEP. This future policy was needed to recover from the war and from civil war. The inception of NEP in many ways marks the end of the civil war.

The New Economic Policy

The year 1921 was a year of transition for the Bolsheviks and Russia. The civil war had essentially ended and with it the threats of foreign intervention and rival political parties. The Bolsheviks survived this political crisis due in great part to the policies known as War Communism. These policies allowed the Bolsheviks to feed the towns which were their base of support during the civil war. But, these same policies led to an economic and political crisis that proved an even greater threat than the civil war. Lenin's solution to this crisis became known as the New Economic Policy or NEP.

The purpose of the policies known as NEP were twofold: to restore a shattered economy and ease the tensions among the non-proletarian peoples of Russia. In other words, it had both economic and political goals.¹¹² Both of these problems had their basis in the countryside (except for the collapse of the industrial sector). By 1921 the peasantry had become so resentful of War Communism that the situation threatened to reignite into another civil war. As seen earlier the agricultural

economy had ceased to function and, in addition:

...two consecutive years of drought had brought the Volga and other agricultural regions to the brink of famine. Deaths from hunger and epidemics in 1921-22 would exceed the combined total of casualties in the First World War and Civil War.¹¹³

So the policies of NEP were implemented to end this crisis. But they also served to solve the political problems caused by War Communism. These were policies devoted to appease the peasantry, for Lenin recognized that the Bolshevik regime's survival ultimately rested with the peasantry. Although these policies were necessary the Bolsheviks never acknowledged that they were the true goal of the revolution and were never pleased about their implementation.¹¹⁴ However, the problems had gotten so bad that the Bolsheviks were threatened with the loss of the proletariat support. At this time the revolt at Kronstadt took place, partially in response to the plight of the peasantry. Sympathy between the armed forces and the peasantry often ran high as ties between the two ran deep. NEP was also an attempt by the Bolsheviks to forge an alliance between town and country, "...but in principle the objective of NEP was the construction of an alliance between the working class and the poor and middle peasantry."¹¹⁵ It was during the Tenth Party Congress that Lenin pushed through these reforms, although he knew that changes were necessary as early as late 1920.

On March 15, 1921, a resolution was passed which stopped

the policy of confiscation and the depredations of the food detachments and replaced them with a graduated tax-in-kind. In other words, the peasantry could now be certain of what they owed the government, certain that no more than that would be taken and therefore more willing to plant a surplus.¹¹⁶ The Bolsheviks would quickly increase this willingness by sanctioning a limited form of local exchange. The market was legally reborn in Russia after a three year illicit existence.¹¹⁷ By this measure the Bolsheviks were attempting to get Russia's production and distribution systems back in working order. Factors which inhibited the effectiveness of these systems were removed by NEP.¹¹⁸ The Bolsheviks also signaled a shift in which peasant group they sought support. During War Communism they were seeking the poor peasant as a base for rural support. NEP was a bid for the support of the middle peasantry and, in part, a successful bid. But these resolutions were only the beginning. In March 1922 the tax-in-kind was limited to 10% of a peasant's production. And in May 1922 the party decreed that the peasant could lease his holding and hire labor to work on it.¹¹⁹ Then in April 1923 the tax-in-kind was replaced by a monetary tax.¹²⁰ NEP basically turned Russian agriculture into a capitalistic style economic sector. The anomaly about this period was that the peasantry seemed to be favored over the proletariat. While concessions were the order of the day for the peasantry; workers' wages were frozen, strikes broken up and industrial discipline became quite "rigorous." The truth was that all during this time of

capitalistic advances, a socialist future was in the process of formation.

At the Eleventh Party Congress in April 1922 a resolution was passed to increase the number of village reading rooms (an attempt to increase the revolutionary consciousness of the peasantry). More importantly, another was passed that called for the support of the formation of more state farms.¹²¹ Lenin was also arguing that:

...general collectivization of the peasants is indeed a means of organizing the alliance between them and the town workers, and securing the supply of food. But general collectivization will become possible only when machinery and electrification are generally provided.¹²²

The Bolsheviks never gave up their socialist orientation. Lenin was always firm on two points: the proletariat would always provide the leadership for the revolution and one could only bring the revolution into the countryside by splitting the peasantry.¹²³ The underlying mind-set of the Bolsheviks never changed, although, during NEP they were forced to use policies distasteful to a Marxist. And they worked; NEP was a success. This success was evident as early as late 1922. Serious rural discontent had virtually disappeared and by 1923 agricultural production had risen to three-quarters of the 1913 level.¹²⁴ This agricultural recovery then fueled an industrial recovery. The surplus gathered by the State provided capital for industrial expansion and foreign exchange for industrial moderniza-

tion.¹²⁵ NEP also provided a vital period of rest and recovery for the fledgling Soviet Union. This was necessary as the Bolshevik leadership was busy fighting amongst itself after Lenin's death in 1924. This jockeying for power ended in 1929 with Stalin as the winner.

NEP lasted seven years, ending in 1928 with the defeat of Bukharin by Stalin. Collectivization began in 1929 long before the countryside was ready and much faster than Lenin had deemed advisable. Because of these factors collectivization became, for all practical purposes, a war with the peasantry. And here one finds a parallel with War Communism. Both collectivization and War Communism were policies inherent in the Bolshevik Marxist theory. These attempts to socialize agriculture were inevitable. However, the violence associated with both policies was determined by circumstances: in the case of War Communism by the civil war and in the case of collectivization by Stalin. The state won this war with the peasants and accomplished its goals. One of these goals was to end the dilemma of a hungry proletariat in the cities and a growing, well-fed kulak class. Collectivization was Stalin's device to destroy once and for all the kulaks. Much of the violence of collectivization involved those groups labeled as kulaks. It also provided Stalin with a method to eliminate dissident social groups. More importantly collectivization was necessary in order to fulfill Stalin's industrialization plans. Russia had too small an industrial base to fuel this expansion and there was no way to get any form of foreign investment, *that left only*

the agricultural sector. Collectivization allowed Stalin to exploit the peasantry and drain the countryside of the capital needed for this industrialization efforts; even Stalin admitted that only the agricultural sector could provide this capital. Up until recently this policy of using agriculture to fuel the growth of the other sectors of the Soviet economy was very evident. This situation helps to explain many of the problems and attitudes that color present State/farmer relations.

Conclusion

What conclusions can be drawn from this discussion of the relationship between the Bolsheviks and the peasantry? The most basic one is that the Bolsheviks were remarkably consistent in their relationship with the peasantry. This consistency can be seen in their writings and actions. They placed the peasant in a position inferior to the proletariat within their Marxist ideology and yet were also forced to rely upon the peasantry in order to ensure the success of the socialist revolution. The consistent pragmatism of the Bolsheviks with respect to the peasantry can be seen in three areas: their search for peasant support, the Decree on Land of 1917, and the New Economic Policy. It is important to remember that the orthodox Marxist position held that only the proletariat could ever lead a successful socialist revolution. Lenin supported this doctrine with all of his theoretical genius. However, Lenin also realized that in Russia the proletariat on its own

could not lead a successful revolution; there were simply too few of them. Because of this situation Lenin sought the support of the peasantry; with eighty percent of Russia's population supporting the revolution the tsar could be deposed. In order to win the revolution Lenin sought in April 1917 the backing of the peasantry against all his Marxist beliefs. The Bolshevik land decree of October 1917 was also pragmatic. There was no shred of Marxist theory in this declaration; it was merely a ploy to ensure the support of the peasantry while the new regime was settling into power. The pragmatic Lenin temporarily sacrificed his beliefs in order to ensure the survival of the revolution. And, finally, the series of policies known as NEP were a response to massive peasant unrest and the realization that the revolution would not survive if there was no Russia to support the revolution. Lenin abandoned the truly socialistic policies of War Communism because its effects on a war-torn economy were disastrous. The ultimate success of the revolution depended upon Russia having a strong economy, and NEP was designed to supply a strong economy even though it had a capitalist orientation. Lenin was temporarily to sacrifice some of the ideals of the socialist revolution to ensure the continuation of his revolutionary state. Another feature of the Bolsheviks' consistency was the attitude that they held toward the peasantry throughout this period. The peasants were always viewed with distrust; this distrust was a product of the Bolsheviks' orthodox Marxist origins. The peasantry was always to be in a subordinate position to the proletariat, even during

NEP when they were seemingly favored over the proletariat. According to Marxists, as a class the peasantry was capable only of a petty bourgeois, capitalist mentality. Lenin sincerely supported their position to the extent that the peasants were fighting for an anti-feudal, capitalist revolution in the countryside. A successful, socialist revolution in the countryside would only be possible after the peasantry had been proletarianized under the leadership of the urban proletariat. This attitude made it very easy for the Bolsheviks to justify their exploitation of the peasantry during collectivization by draining the capital necessary to sustain Stalin's massive industrialization effort from the countryside. Collectivization was the fulfillment of the proletarian revolution in Russia because it socialized the countryside; that it also supplied much needed capital was a bonus (although a much sought after bonus). Its role in causing deaths and injuries to millions of peasants and traumatizing the countryside was of little consequence to the Bolshevik led state. Again this is consistent with their Marxist beliefs, but with rather harsh effects some of which are still being felt today in the relations between the USSR leadership and its farmers.

The peasantry never really had a firm grasp of what the Bolsheviks desired for Russia. They wanted to be left alone with their land and to work it as they saw fit. This desire led them to support the Bolsheviks during the October revolution because they saw it as a betrayal of Lenin's earlier promises. The same situation would occur between NEP and collec-

tivization as had occurred between Lenin's October Decree on Land and War Communism. This series of misunderstandings was possible because the peasantry never understood the basic Bolshevik position and were in a sense blinded by their ancient desire for what they viewed as an equitable solution to the land question. All of this was exacerbated by the Bolsheviks who took the time to use the peasantry, but never tried to see beyond their own Marxist stereotype of the peasantry and its role in society.

Endnotes

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- ² Adam Ulam, The Bolsheviks (New York: Collier Books, 1965), pp. 176-93.
- ³ Graeme J. Gill, Peasants and Government in the Russian Revolution (New York: Harper and Row Publishing, Inc., 1979), p. 5.
- ⁴ Gill, p.2.
- ⁵ Maureen Perrie, The Agrarian Policy of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party: From Its Origins Through the Revolution of 1905-1907 (Malta: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 54.
- ⁶ Perrie, p. 54.
- ⁷ Perrie, p.5.
- ⁸ Perrie, p. 42.
- ⁹ Perrie, p. 186.
- ¹⁰ Esther Kingston-Mann, Lenin and the Problem of Marxist Peasant Revolution (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 58-9.
- ¹¹ Kingston-Mann, p. 10.
- ¹² T. B. Bottomore and M. Rubel, Karl Marx: Selected Readings in Sociology and Social Philosophy. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1964), pp. 167-77, 184-6.
- ¹³ Bottomore and Rubel, pp. 136-8.
- ¹⁴ Perrie, pp. 10-11.

¹⁵ Athar Hussain and Keith Tribe, Marxism and the Agrarian Question, vol. 2: Russian Marxism and the Peasantry 1861-1930, (Atlantic Highland, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1981), p. 22.

¹⁶ Teodor Shanin, Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and "The Peripheries of Capitalism" (New York: Monthly Review, 1984), pp. 123-4.

¹⁷ Hussain and Tribe, pp. 21-2.

¹⁸ Donald J. Male, Russian Peasant Organization Before Collectivisation: A Study of Commune and Gathering 1925-1930 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 157.

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²⁰ Kingston-Mann, p. 33.

²¹ Kingston-Mann, p. 34.

²² Kingston-Mann, p. 42.

²³ Kingston-Mann pp. 44-7.

²⁴ Perrie, pp. 53-5.

²⁵ V. I. Lenin, Selected Works (New York: International Publishers, 1943), pp. 245-50.

²⁶ Lenin, Selected Works, p. 247.

²⁷ Lenin, Selected Works, p. 259.

²⁸ Lenin, Selected Works, p. 278, 290-1.

²⁹ Lenin, Selected Works, p. 277.

³⁰ Riasonovsky, pp. 407-9.

³¹ Perrie, p. 120-1.

³² Kingston-Mann, p. 87.

³³ Gill, p. 34.

³⁴ Perrie, pp. 107-9, 114-5.

- 35 Perrie, p. 117.
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