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From City Workers to Peasantry: The Beginning of the Russian Movement "To the People"

The student-led Russian working-class movement of the early 1870s, only lightly studied to date, is intimately connected with the beginnings of the famous "to the people" movement of 1874. The main purpose of this essay is to explore this connection. When radical students in the cities experienced unexpected limitations on their efforts to organize city workers, they reformulated their plan and eventually decided that direct contact with the peasantry was possible. Thus the populism of the movement "to the people," generally considered a student phenomenon inspired by books alone, may in fact have been the result of practical work among city workers, characterized by much trial and error.

The activist worker-followers could not provoke in their turn a sizable response among fellow workers. In their search for receptive ground, they began disappearing into the countryside, heading for village localities where they or their families were known. This move inadvertently taught young Russian students, eager to create a city working class organization, the fundamental fact that city workers in Russia kept close ties with the countryside, in some cases spending as much of the year there as in the city. These students, and in particular members of the Chaikovskii circle, though initially in despair and hastily scrambling to salvage something of their working-class activity, soon came up with a major revision of their plans. They speculated that perhaps propagandized workers, though unable to pull other city workers into a central organization, might instead become revolutionary emissaries to the peasantry. A third stage in the developing events occurred in November 1873, when students began accompanying their worker-emissaries into the countryside. This more than any other single occurrence triggered the famous movement "to the people" of 1874. In summary, the relationship between workers and radical students changed rapidly over the course of the first half of the 1870s and left a decisive imprint on Russian populism.

Though the intensity of the worker effort had not been typical of Russian populism up to that time, student activity among the workers in 1872–73 was consistent with the earlier national concern over the masses. Several writers and a handful of student activists throughout the 1860s had shown interest in radically altering the living conditions of the common people. The Russian concept of *narod*, "the people," included both workers and peasants, and the two might be considered individually in any discussion or program of activity. For example, Mark Natanson, who in 1869 founded the most important group of the early 1870s, the Chaikovskii circle, declared that its basic goal was to lay the founda-

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tion for a "chistaia narodnaia partiia," a party of the fourth estate. The early program of circle activity probably authored by Mark Natanson devotes equal consideration to city workers and peasantry. It is important to note that Russian radicals did not consider workers or peasants either as subordinate to one another or as means for contacting the other. Both were considered valuable in themselves and important to the future party.[1]

It is likely that the widely read literature on the French revolutions of 1789 and 1848 and the French Commune of 1871 complemented, and perhaps even fostered, the radicals' concept of the *narod*. This literature, circulated widely by the Chaikovskii circle, dwelt on the revolutionary lower classes, *le peuple*, and focused at times on peasant revolt, at other times on the revolutionary Parisian masses. Russian students deliberately chose to call themselves "radicals," a label with West European connotations (reminiscent of contemporary French revolutionaries and eighteenth-century English democrats), and saw themselves as the Russian successors to the Girondists, Lamartine and Louis Blanc, the spokesmen for the French lower class.[2]

Between 1870 and 1873, some of the students, such as Anatolii Serdiukov, Alexander Ivanchin-Pisarev, Sofia Perovskaia, and Alexandra Obodovskaia, had made intermittent and unsatisfying attempts to work in the zemstvo and cooperative institutions in the countryside. Partly because of government restraints and partly because the European leftist literature they read and distributed sought to discredit such legal and socially worthy activities, the students soon abandoned these institutions, coming to the conclusion that the party of the "fourth estate" might coalesce around city workers instead. From the second half of 1872 onward, they began forming contacts with the St. Petersburg working class. The consensus of a meeting of Chaikovskyites held in early 1873 was that city worker activity was of primary importance.[3]

1. Nikolai Chaikovskii, one of the original members of the circle, reported Natanson's intentions in "Cherez pol stoletiia," *Golos minuvshego na chuzhoi storone*, 1926, no. 3, pp. 179–80. Also see his letter to Leonid Shishko written in 1902 in K. G. Liashchenko, "Versiia trebuet utochnenie," *Istoriia SSSR*, 1968, no. 5, p. 132. The program is published in "Programma dlia kruzhkov samoobrazovaniia i prakticheskoi deiatel'nosti," ed. Ia. B[aum], *Katorga i ssylka*, 1930, no. 6, pp. 95–106. Troitskii has demonstrated convincingly that this program originated in Mark Natanson's circle in St. Petersburg (N. A. Troitskii, "O pervoi programme revoliutsionnogo narodnichestva 1870-kh godov," *Voprosy istorii*, 1961, no. 6, pp. 208–10). It is interesting that, although the author of the program devoted separate sections to the city workers and to the peasantry, his recommendations for both groups were virtually the same (strikes and employment bureaus for peasantry, for example). This fact seems to indicate not that the author believed the two to be the same sort of "toiler," but that he simply did not know how to approach the peasantry. Less sophisticated students did indeed tend to lump together city workers and peasantry. See, for example, Vladimir I. Debagorii-Mokrievich, *Vospominaniia* (Paris, 1894), pp. 14–15; or Pavel B. Aksel'rod, *Perezhitoe i peredumannoe* (Berlin, 1932), p. 72.

2. A list of many of the books circulated is contained in B. S. Itenberg et al., eds., *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo semidesiatykh godov XIX veka: Sbornik dokumentov*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1964–65), 1:226–28. On the use of the term "radical," see Nikolai Morozov, *Povesti moei zhizni*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1962), 1:73. On the influences of the French Revolution, see Lev A. Tikhomirov, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow, 1927), pp. 30–31; Leonid E. Shishko, *Sergei Kravchinskii i kruzhok chaikovtsev* (St. Petersburg, 1906), pp. 6-7; Osip V. Aptekman, *Obshchestvo "Zemlia i Volia" v 1870kh godov* (Moscow, 1924), pp. 61 and 67; and E. N. Koval'skaia, "Po povodu pis'ma V. Maliutina," *Katorga i ssylka*, 1926, no. 1, p. 137.

3. For a study of the Chaikovskyites' earlier efforts to work within the zemstvo and cooperative institutions in the countryside, see Pamela Sears McKinsey, "The Chaikovskii

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Special interest in the city working class was reinforced not only by French writings on revolutionary crowds, but also by new writings on workers. Natanson and his friends read the works of Robert Owen, Fourier, Karl Marx, and such chronicles of the Russian and West European working-class movements as *Associations* by A. Mikhailov. Of the other writings, the works of the German Socialist Ferdinand Lassalle were by far the most widely admired. The first volume of his collected works appeared in Russian in 1870 and very rapidly was sold out. As one radical noted, only Peter Lavrov's *Historical Letters* rivaled the first volume of Lassalle's writings in popularity. Lassalle's influence affected interest in worker organization and shaped attitudes in other areas as well.[4] In the memoir literature, he is often mentioned in the same breath as French revolutionary figures. One Chaikovskyite wrote, "the majority of the people of that time was educated on the literature of the worker question and on scorn for liberalism and politics. The French literature of 1848 taught this, Lassalle and the Social Democrats emphasized this. . . ." Shishko and others studied revolutionary action in terms of the "leading and all-absorbing roles of the distinguished historical heroes, Danton, Camille Desmoulins, and Lassalle, with his agitational speeches." Historians have not fully appreciated the breadth and depth of Lassalle's impact upon young Russians, however.[5]

More than any other source, Lassalle's "Workingman's Programme," published in the first volume of his collected works, inspired interest in organizing the working class. Lassalle held that, since everyone who was useful to the community was a worker, working-class interests were synonymous with the interests of the entire world. The interest of the working class was "in truth the interest of the *whole of humanity*, its freedom is the freedom of humanity itself, and its domination is the domination of all."[6] When the state came to be dominated by workers, one need no longer fear, since a ruling working class logically could not create laws making itself a new privileged class. Instead, it would promote

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Circle and the Origins of Russian Populism" (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, 1974), pp. 60–136, and my forthcoming history of the circle. On the meeting in January 1873, see Nikolai A. Charushin, *O dalekom proshlom: Kruzhok chaikovtsev* (Moscow, 1927), p. 115.

4. See Mark Natanson's memoir outline, in B. P. Koz'min, "S. G. Nechaev i ego protivniki v 1868–1869-kh gg.," in B. I. Gorev and B. P. Koz'min, eds., *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie 1860-kh godov: Sbornik* (Moscow, 1932), p. 132. Extravagant praise was heaped on the works of Lassalle by such leaders as Vladimir Debagorii-Mokrievich (*Vospominaniia*, p. 14), Charushin (*O dalekom proshlom*, p. 63), Pavel Aksel'rod (*Perezhitoe*, p. 73), and Alexandra Kornilova-Moroz ("Perovskaia i osnovanie kruzhka chaikovtsev," *Katorga i ssylka*, 1926, no. 1, p. 16). Lassalle's writings had a broad impact on Russian radicals of the early 1870s. Lassalle's *Essence of a Constitution*, which argued that a constitution imposed from above was worthless, coincided well with the Chaikovskyites' own antielitist attitudes engendered originally by their opposition to Sergei Nechaev. Lassalle's writings on cooperative organizations, especially his essay against the Schulze von Delitzsch cooperatives in Germany, were also widely read and admired (McKinsey, "Chaikovskii Circle," pp. 61–66, 126–33; see also, for example, N. A. Charushin, "Chto bylo na sobranii u professora Tagantseva," *Katorga i ssylka*, 1925, no. 2, pp. 100–101; Itenberg et al., *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, 1:235 and 238; I. E. Deniker, "Vospominaniia," *Katorga i ssylka*, 1924, no. 6, pp. 27 and 34; O. V. Aptekman, "Moskovskie revoliutsionnye kruzhki," *Russkoe proshloe*, 1923, no. 2, p. 91).

5. Itenberg et al., *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, 1:122; Leonid E. Shishko, "K kharakteristike dvizheniia nachala 70-kh godov," *Russkoe bogatstvo*, 1906, no. 10, p. 56.

6. Ferdinand Lassalle, *The Workingman's Programme*, trans. and intro. by Edward Peters (New York, 1899), pp. 46–50; emphasis in the original.

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universal "reconciliation" and "love" between social classes. This philosophy had a powerful appeal to young Russians. One student later wrote, "We were especially impressed by Lassalle's phrase where he said that the workers, in trying to further their own private interests, were serving universal human progress, since in the present epoch the worker is the bearer of progress, like the bourgeoisie in the preceding epoch."[7] The student Pavel Aksel'rod found justification for abandoning the more exclusive struggle for oppressed Russian Jews by deciding that the emancipation of the working class would automatically solve the Jewish problem.[8]

In sum, when, in early 1873, radical Russian students concluded that organizing city workers was the activity most worthy of their attention, they were at least passably acquainted with the literature of European working-class movements. Several people, including Peter Kropotkin and Alexandra Kornilova, had traveled abroad, partly in an effort to learn more about specific working-class organizations in Switzerland and Vienna.[9] It is not surprising that activity among the St. Petersburg workers was a natural interest of the Russian radicals, and when zemstvo work in the countryside seemed unfruitful, city worker organization became their most absorbing interest.

Two other developments undoubtedly helped to stimulate interest in city worker organization in the early 1870s, although their impact is more difficult to gauge. The first is worker unrest. Several strikes in or near St. Petersburg in the early 1870s received considerable newspaper coverage: the Nevskii Cotton-Spinning Factory strike in 1870, the very large Krengol'm Textile Factory strike in August and September 1872, a strike at the joiners' workshop of Alekseev in November 1872, a strike of steel and iron workers in the Golubev plant in early 1873, and several more strikes in 1874. Curiously, there is no direct echo of these events in contemporary student discussions and manifestoes. Yet perhaps it is more than coincidence that the Chaikovskyites declared that the cause of the worker was their most important concern in early 1873, only several months after the conclusion of the massive Krengol'm strike.[10]

Finally, reverberations of the Sunday school movement can be discerned in the activity of the radicals in the 1870s. Although the government had outlawed Sunday schools in 1862, several philanthropic societies continued to provide Saturday and Sunday lectures for workers into the 1870s. In addition, some students continued to organize their own informal lectures for workers, emphasizing

7. Debagorii-Mokrievich, *Vospominaniia*, pp. 14–15.

8. Aksel'rod, *Perezhitoe*, p. 73.

9. Peter A. Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (New York, 1968), p. 269; Itenberg et al., *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, 1:230; memoirs of Alexandra I. Kornilova-Moroz, *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' Russkogo bibliograficheskogo instituta Granat*, 58 vols. (Moscow, 1912–40), s.v. "Sotsializm," vol. 40, col. 216.

10. In late 1873 and early 1874, one of the workers in Peter Kropotkin's worker circle on the Vyborg side was Villem Preisman who had been a leader of the Krengol'm strike. As far as I have been able to determine, the Chaikovskyites had not sought him out, but of course welcomed him into the circle (Shishko, *Kravchinskii*, pp. 27–28). For police reports and worker depositions on the strikes and agitation, see Esfir A. Korol'chuk, ed., *Rabochee dvizhenie semidesiatykh godov: Sbornik arkhivnykh dokumentov* (Moscow, 1934), pp. 21–109. Korol'chuk also includes bibliographies of the newspaper coverage. For reference to Preisman, see Korol'chuk, *Rabochee dvizhenie*, pp. 53–57.

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the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic, in an effort to encourage self-improvement among the lower classes.[11]

In its main outlines, the Chaikovskyites' goals for the Russian city working class remained consistent from the early days of the circle up to mid-1873. The program of circle activity, probably written (at the very latest in April 1871, and probably several months earlier) by Mark Natanson, "the program for circles of self-education and practical activity," sheds light on the students' original plans for city workers. Their distant goal was "to declare war on all the old and upon the ruins to erect a new form of social structure based on full self-government, on universal participation of the people, men and women, in solving common problems, on the principle of a federative republic with the motto of democratic socialism."[12] The struggle was to be carried out by Natanson's "true people's party," composed and led by representatives of three classes: educated society, city workers, and the peasantry. Natanson and his followers would organize circles of self-education and practical activity in each milieu to prepare for the future appearance of the party.[13]

The program sketched the students' plans for the city workers: "The formation, from the most outstanding workers, of a leadership [*initsiatorskii*] circle (for a given factory, a given trade, and subsequently for a given locality), acquainting it with the theoretical side of the worker question and with its practical course in the West." Other points proposed setting up a system of small unofficial schools whose main goal was to be "literacy and *acquaintance*," setting up "libraries of *narodnye* books in the schools and in the leadership circles," creating mutual aid and savings and loan funds, and organizing producers' and consumers' cooperatives. The last two points mentioned were "preparatory work for strikes, resistance funds for factories, and workshops" and "seeking means for uniting factories and trades already prepared."[14]

11. Several individuals who became members of the Chaikovskii circle or were close to it took part in Sunday schools in the late 1860s. As a gymnasium student in Samara, Dmitrii Klements taught in a Sunday school there. Alexander Kornilov, older brother of the Chaikovskyites Alexandra, Vera, and Liubov', taught in a Sunday school in St. Petersburg in 1867 or 1868. In 1871, Ia. I. Koval'skii, an acquaintance of Mark Natanson's circle, and E. M. Solntseva taught in a Khar'kov Sunday school founded by N. N. Beketov and personally organized additional instruction for workers (D. A. Klements, *Iz proshlogo* [Leningrad, 1925], p. 85; Kornilova-Moroz, "Perovskaia," p. 12; Koval'skaia, "Po povodu pis'ma," p. 136). Workers remembered and valued the Sunday schools (see G. V. Plekhanov, "Russkii rabochii v revoliutsionnom dvizhenii [Po lichnym vospominaniiam]," *Sochineniia*, 24 vols. [Moscow, 1923–28], 3:138–39; Leonid E. Shishko, *Pamiati Leonida Emmanuilovicha Shishko* [n.p., 1910], p. 52). The group of Vasil'evskii Island munitions workers taken over by the Chaikovskyites Anatolii Serdiukov and Nikolai Chaikovskii was previously gathered and given lessons by a student, K. K. Dovodchikov, in a purely instructional, Sunday school manner. Contacts were established with workers on the St. Petersburg side when the owners of a chemical plant sought out students to offer night classes to their workers (*Gosudarstvennye prestupleniia v Rossii v XIX veke*, 3 vols., ed. Bazilevskii [V. Ia. Iakovlev] [Paris, 1905], 3:10–11; Sergei S. Sinegub, "Vospominaniia chaikovtsa," in three parts, in *Byloe*, 1906, nos. 8, 9, 10, see no. 8, pp. 39–41).

12. "Programma dlia kruzhkov," p. 97.

13. This plan is confirmed by a memoirist who wrote, "'our cause' had to be [this]: to gather our forces in good time and to organize ourselves into a party with roots in the people themselves and the working class . . ." (Itenberg et al., *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, 1:222).

14. "Programma dlia kruzhkov," p. 103; emphasis in the original.

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The thrust of these proposals was to lay down the outlines for an independent working-class movement within the context of a future broader-based party. Lassalle had insisted on the independence of such a movement, and the students agreed that for the party to succeed its foundation must rest upon the lower classes. Charushin later remarked that the students "were aware that the cause of the people in the final analysis must be in its own hands, and its emancipation must wholly depend on the degree of its consciousness, which had to be secured at all costs."[15]

Historians have generally believed that the activity among city workers in the early 1870s was an attempt to find quick, convenient access to the peasantry. But this evaluation applies a later concept to an earlier and simpler outlook. Students hoped to organize the city working population along the lines of Western working-class movements not because workers were "accessible peasants" and thus useful conduits to the countryside, but because city worker organization had been a part of their plans from the outset. When the students became disappointed with their attempts to work in the various new institutions in the countryside, city worker activity seemed the most promising. Consequently, city worker organization, as determined at the meeting of the Chaikovskyites in early 1873, henceforth absorbed their main energies.[16]

There is additional supporting evidence that student radicals took their city organizing work seriously and did not view workers simply as "accessible peasants." First, Nikolai Charushin of the St. Petersburg Chaikovskii circle visited provincial circles in several cities in February 1873 to announce the Chaikovskyites' decision to organize city workers. After seeing the city of Orel, Charushin commented that since it had no industry (and hence no industrial workers) there was really no point to his visit. In addition, although at the time Kiev had about seventy-five thousand inhabitants, it also had virtually no industry. The circles there were sympathetic to Charushin's idea of organizing city workers, but for lack of a better target, were forced to focus their energies on a carpenters' artel. Second, in the spring of 1872, the student Anatolii Serdiukov brought to a Samara circle a number of brochures (probably containing the program of the International Workingmen's Association) that emphasized the need to contact factory workers and to organize strikes. However, when the circle found only one factory employing a total of four workers, it lost faith in organizing workers.[17]

15. Charushin, *O dalekom proshlom*, p. 111. See also Itenberg et al., *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, 1:246. In an effort to stimulate autonomous activity among one group of skilled workers, the Chaikovskyites set up a library and a mutual aid fund, which they then turned over to the workers themselves to manage (Itenberg et al., *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, 1:247–48). Leonid Shishko expressed most succinctly the future goal of this worker activity: "The circle of Chaikovskyites posited as their future task the uniting of all these separate groups [of workers] with the goal of creating from them an autonomous worker organization; but they did not manage to realize this plan as a result of the arrests that soon began" (Shishko, *Kravchinskii*, p. 23). Kropotkin exhorted his worker pupils, "Agitate, organize" (Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 327).

16. Among the historians who believe that the students saw workers as a means of access to the peasantry, see Sh. M. Levin, "Kruzhok chaikovtsev i propaganda sredi peterburgskikh rabochikh v nachale 1870-kh gg.," *Katorga i ssylka*, 1929, no. 12, p. 7; and Reginald E. Zelnik, "Populists and Workers," *Soviet Studies*, 24, no. 2 (October 1972): 252–53.

17. Charushin, *O dalekom proshlom*, pp. 115–20; Nikolai K. Bukh, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow, 1927), p. 42. See also the testimony of L. S. Gorodetskii, in Itenberg et al., *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, 1:297.

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The message of St. Petersburg radicals, then, was to contact not "peasants in the city," but city factory workers. Indeed, even though students took seriously Lavrov's writings on the educated person's debt to the common people whose toil supported him, they were pessimistic about their ability to affect the peasantry. Sofia Perovskaia's remarks in a letter to a friend are representative: the peasantry thought of nothing more, she wrote, than to perform the same routines day after day. It was a "lifeless machine set in perpetual motion, and still moving in the established way. . . . You want to rouse this dead flesh, but all you can do is stand gazing at it."[18] Aside from some scattered imitations of zemstvo statistics gathering in the countryside during summer vacation, radical students preferred other fields of activity. Perhaps the most striking example of student frustration when confronted with the vast unmoving peasantry was the appearance in Kiev of a circle dedicated to founding agricultural communes *in the United States.*[19]

Contacts with workers in St. Petersburg expanded in 1872 and 1873, but problems were encountered. A first hint of disillusionment surfaced when radical St. Petersburg students found some skilled metalworkers unenthusiastic about their mentors' ideas. The Chaikovskyites Peter Kropotkin, Sergei Kravchinskii, and Dmitrii Klements all had difficulties with metalworkers: both the skilled, well-paid workers at the government munitions plant on Vasil'evskii Island in St. Petersburg and the workers of the Semiannikov machine plant in the eastern suburbs. Let us consider why disillusionment occurred, as the question is related to the issue of working-class consciousness.

The earliest reported case of failure concerns an acquaintance of the Chaikovskyites, a student named Sokolovskii (first name unknown). In the fall of 1872, Sokolovskii mingled among workers in a metalsmelting workshop. Sokolovskii did not attempt to learn the craft, but simply tried to gather the more receptive workers together and propagandize while they worked in the sand bed into which the molten metal was poured. Unfortunately, with his "slight figure and burning gaze . . . preaching hatred of the bourgeoisie and struggle with it," Sokolovskii made a comical impression. At one point, while he was preaching, some workers stole up to him from behind and smeared his face with black grease. With workers jeering after him, Sokolovskii ran out of the workshop. His experience undoubtedly served to give some metalworkers a bad name among student radicals, but the details of the case are too scanty to establish any reason besides poor delivery for his failure.[20]

18. "Pis'ma S. L. Perovskoi," *Krasnyi arkhiv,* 1923, no. 3, pp. 246–47.

19. On the "American circle," see "Vospominaniia N. K. Sudzilovskogo (Russelia)" in the International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, typed copy, n.d., unpaginated; and Debagorii-Mokrievich, *Vospominaniia,* pp. 10–17.

Evidence of a few attempts to distribute revolutionary proclamations among the peasantry throughout the decade has been compiled by Boris S. Itenberg in *Dvizhenie revoliutsionnogo narodnichestva* (Moscow, 1965), pp. 268, 272–73, 161–71. The Chaikovskyites' skeptical reaction to such acts is summed up by Dmitrii Rogachev's comment to the "Proclamationist" A. Dolgushin, "But are the people really ready?" (ibid., p. 164). See also *Gosudarstvennye prestupleniia,* p. 232.

20. Bukh, *Vospominaniia,* p. 51. Sokolovskii and his friends, A. A. Pypin and A. A. Charykov, had set out together to contact *zavodskie* and propagandize them. Pypin and

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The students also clashed head-on with a remarkable munitions plant worker named Ignatii Bachin. Bachin's appraising eye discerned both good and bad in their efforts to form an organized city worker movement. At one point he told another worker that he "laughed at Prince Kropotkin. . . . You must take books from the students, but when they begin to teach you nonsense, you must knock them down," he continued.[21] Bachin remained a problem for the students. He continued to attend meetings, and, given his intelligence, he undoubtedly would have proved a formidable ally, yet he maintained his reservations.

Perhaps because of Bachin, some students developed a certain antipathy toward skilled metalworkers, especially those from the government munitions plant on Vasil'evskii Island in St. Petersburg, where Bachin worked. A. V. Nizovkin, a student and at one time close to the Chaikovskyites (though subsequently hostile to them when he was refused admission into the circle), may have been referring to these munitions workers when he told police that the Chaikovskii circle neglected "a certain part of the factory [*zavodskie*] workers, namely, the artisans of thin metalware, who received an excellent salary. . . ."[22] Peter Kropotkin's memoirs, written some three decades later, still express hostility toward the workers at the munitions plant. He considered their attitudes elitist, similar to those of the Geneva watchmakers.[23]

The Chaikovskyites had two things to offer the workers and one thing to ask in return. They offered instruction in reading, writing (or more advanced education for those interested), and organization, and in return they asked that their followers make additional converts among the St. Petersburg working population. The skilled metalworkers were less than enthusiastic about the exchange. Many had acquired some education before contact with the students. For example, the munitions worker Viktor Obnorskii had completed grammar school in Vologda county prior to serving a two-year metalworking apprenticeship. Other metalworkers, such as Stepan Khalturin and Ignatii Bachin, had also acquired some education. These workers willingly sampled the sociological and historical literature given them by the students. Kropotkin subsequently wrote, with some exaggeration, that "they soon became quite familiar with the current radical and socialist literature—Buckle, Lassalle, Mill, Draper, Spielhagen, were familiar

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Charykov became involved with workers of the Semiannikov plant (*Gosudarstvennye prestupleniia*, pp. 53–54). Thus it is possible, though there is no direct evidence, that Sokolovskii also was working among the Semiannikov workers. See below for the Chaikovskyites' later experiences with these workers.

21. *Gosudarstvennye prestupleniia*, p. 51. Peter Kropotkin's lectures to the workers may have been too theoretical. One of Kropotkin's lecture outlines has been preserved and is published in I. Miroshnikov, *Viktor Obnorskii—vydaiushchiisia rabochii-revoliutsioner* (Moscow, 1960), p. 21. Conceivably, Bachin was responsible for the antistudent attitudes of the workers associated with *Zemlia i volia* in 1876–79. Mark Natanson, the founder of *Zemlia i volia*, later remarked that in order to suppress Bachin's agitation in 1876–77 they had to arrange his removal from St. Petersburg, under the pretext of having him contact provincial workers (G. Golosov, "K biografii odnogo iz osnovatelei 'Severo-Russkogo Rabochego Soiuza,' I. A. Bachin i ego drama," *Katorga i ssylka*, 1924, no. 6, p. 57).

22. A. V. Nizovkin's statement to the prosecutor, undated, in vol. 11 of the inquest of the "Trial of the 193"; quoted in Levin, "Kruzhok," p. 9, n. 2. (I have not been able to find this statement in the selected trial material published in *Gosudarstvennye prestupleniia*.)

23. Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 325.

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names to them; and in their aspect these engineers differed little from students." But these already literate skilled workers were not inclined toward hero worship of the students. Bachin may well have expressed the general attitude with his advice to "take books from the students" but knock them down when they "begin to teach nonsense."[24]

This statement can be interpreted in several ways. Soviet historians have suggested that Bachin's statement is evidence of a nascent class consciousness among the metalworkers. There is another explanation, however, for which there is stronger evidence: metalworkers did not want to mix with the unskilled workers of St. Petersburg to make converts. And this was the one request that the students had made to skilled workers. Kropotkin later wrote:

> Our hopes . . . that these young men [the Vasil'evskii Island metalworkers] would grow into ardent propagandists amidst less privileged classes of workers were not fully realized. In a free country they would have been the habitual speakers at public meetings; but, like the privileged workers of the watch trade in Geneva, they treated the mass of factory hands with a sort of contempt, and were in no haste to become martyrs to the socialist cause.[25]

Nikolai Charushin also recalled students' fears that the worker "aristocracy" on Vasil'evskii Island would not give itself wholeheartedly to the cause. Perhaps the "contempt" for the less prosperous workers was expressed by Bachin. Some sharp social distinctions existed among city workers, and it is not surprising that skilled workers had no desire to mingle with workers whom they considered inferiors.[26] The evidence suggests that the antipathy of the skilled workers toward the Chaikovskyites' propaganda was as much a result of hostility between different social strata within the working class as it was a result of hostility of working-class members toward the intelligentsia.

The Chaikovskii circle also attempted to propagandize among the workers of the Semiannikov mechanized machine plant on the Schlüsselberg Road and the Putilov steel rolling mills in the southern suburbs, but both efforts failed to yield satisfactory results. In the summer of 1873, Sergei Kravchinskii and Dmitrii Klements attempted to propagandize the Semiannikov workers, but with no success. In the autumn, Dmitrii Rogachev and Viktor Shleisner (brother of Olga Natanson) joined the Putilov rolling mills as workers, hoping to befriend their fellow workers. A statement to police made by Nizovkin seems to describe accurately the Chaikovskii circle's attitude in the fall of 1873: members were disappointed with the Semiannikov machine workers, but still hopeful of successes in the Putilov plant (and perhaps among other metalworkers). Nizovkin's statement is also interesting and valuable for its detail. The Chaikovskyites, he reported,

> generally were cold toward the factory workers [*rabochikh zavodskikh*] of a machine shop, and considered [them] bad revolutionary material; whereas

24. Miroshnikov, *Obnorskii*, p. 6; Golosov, "K biografii," p. 60; Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 325.

25. Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 325.

26. Charushin, *O dalekom proshlom*, p. 152; but see Levin, "Kruzhok," pp. 24 ff.

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> they considered excellent material, of course, the *zavod* workers of other shops: the smithy, the pattern-making [shop], the foundry, the rolling mill, and the unskilled *zavod* workers.[27]

The effort in the Putilov rolling mills, as that in the Semiannikov plant, eventually came to naught. Rogachev, working at the Putilov plant, soon found that hard labor sapped all of his energy, so exhausting him that he had none left for propagandizing the workers.[28]

The students of the Chaikovskii circle were also in contact with a large number of relatively unskilled weavers and spinners employed in the textile industry. In the usage of the time, these workers were referred to as *fabrichnye* instead of *zavodskie*. Peter Kropotkin distinguished between the two on the basis of skill: "The fact is that besides workers who become continuous city dwellers and have a definite trade, that is, *zavodskie*, there exists a much broader class of workers, the so-called *fabrichnye* who do not know a definite laboring trade and who join all available factories as weavers." Nizovkin observed interesting distinctions in the social behavior of the two groups:

> I must say that the *zavodskie* bore on themselves, so to speak, the imprint of the city civilization; they dressed very well, lived not in masses, not in artels, but separately, especially the workers of the machine plants; they did not drink scandalously and in general had an excellent appearance; the *fabrichnye*, on the contrary, dressed like peasants, lived untidily and always in groups, and drank scandalously.[29]

Sergei Sinegub later wrote that the textile workers were more correctly "weaver-peasants, who came from the village to the city for work," the majority of whom would labor in the city "through the fall, winter, and part of the spring up to the beginning of ploughing and sowing, trying to return to the countryside towards the time of field work," though many did not manage to do it. They "were closely connected with the countryside," and considered "the sorrows and joys of the countryside their own sorrows and joys."[30]

Student hopes for a movement incorporating all the workers of St. Petersburg soon faded. The different groups of workers were sharply aware of the social distinctions separating them. The "real city workers," Sinegub observed, "such as the workers of the Semiannikov machine plant or the munitions plant on Vasil'evskii Island, regarded these country people, the textile workers, with condescension and disdain, and called them 'gray.' " Nizovkin also remarked to police that "*zavodskie* considered it demeaning and confusing for one to have business with a *fabrichnyi*, and the *fabrichnyi* considered himself on the contrary flattered if a *zavodskii* spoke to him."[31]

27. Levin, "Kruzhok," p. 9, n. 2.

28. Shishko, *Kravchinskii*, p. 29; Sinegub, "Vospominaniia," no. 9, p. 111; Charushin, *O dalekom proshlom*, p. 114.

29. Nizovkin's testimony is quoted in Levin, "Kruzhok," p. 9; Kropotkin's remark is in Itenberg et al., *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, 1:53.

30. Sinegub, "Vospominaniia," no. 8, p. 51.

31. Ibid., p. 52; Levin, "Kruzhok," p. 9. Nizovkin continued, "The Chaikovskyites worked predominantly with the *fabrichnye* and they disdained the general mass of the *zavodskie* and

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The students' educational approach attracted large numbers of weavers and spinners into their circles. According to Kropotkin, "The movement spread like wildfire among them. . . . We had to restrain the zeal of our new friends; otherwise they would have brought to our lodgings hundreds at a time, young and old."[32] The Chaikovskyites intended basic education to be a substantial part of their service, and it was the desire to learn that attracted the *fabrichnye* to the students. Sinegub told workers that he was an unemployed teacher and that he gave "lessons and a number of workers have learned to read and write from me." Soon workers, learning that he taught workers, began seeking him out. Some who could read and write a little wanted to learn geometry and geography. If a worker seemed curious about these young teachers who were so willing to help them, he might be told that the teachers were "without a school" and looking for work.[33] Tikhomirov remarks that these courses were literally "adult education courses," and he has left us a fascinating description of one typical evening class:

> Of our workers some knew nothing, some barely knew how to read, others could read well, but did not know arithmetic. Some advanced ones were learning geography. I was Sinegub's assistant. I would give an arithmetic problem to one; while he was solving it I would explain the alphabet to another. Then I would assign a lesson to one who could read—then explain a map to others.
>
> I never had such diligent students as these workers. They worked hard and it was a true pleasure to give them lessons. Everything interested them. One figured out how many steps it took to go from his village to Petersburg. I got general enthusiasm by measuring the height of the room by geometric calculation. We explained how one measures, for example, the distance between the earth and the sun.
>
> Concerning our experiments in physics and chemistry, they always asked us questions about devils and the thousand fanciful beings who filled the fields and forests.
>
> "So, the will-o'-the-wisps are also phosphoric?"
>
> "So the wood goblin is only our shadow, or something like the shadow of a magic lantern?" Then we explained. The entire audience let go of pencils and pens. [We seemed to be] speaking of miracles, of saints, and so on.[34]

After several hours of lessons, the workers tired, and the teachers then read stories about factory and village life to them in an attempt to provoke greater awareness of their social condition. However, it seems clear that the attraction that the "teaching students" had for the workers was not attributable to their

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considered them unsuitable for agitation for the welfare of the masses." However, as we have seen above, Nizovkin also made a much more qualified (and more correct) statement regarding the Chaikovskyites' beliefs in the fall of 1873. Shishko also noted that the workers on Vasil'evskii Island were "more independent and kept themselves separate from the factory workers" (Shishko, *Kravchinskii*, p. 31).

32. Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, p. 326.

33. Sinegub, "Vospominaniia," no. 9, pp. 109–10.

34. Leon A. Tikhomirov, *Conspirateurs et policiers* (Paris, 1887), p. 47. Though later a reactionary, in 1885–86 when writing this book Tikhomirov was still a dedicated member of *Narodnaia volia*. See also Itenberg et al., *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, 1:234.

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ideas on worker exploitation or plans for organization, but rather to the Chaikovskyites' basic educational work.[35]

A recent hypothesis, first proposed by Leopold Haimson in a much less simplified version, suggests that workers recently uprooted from the countryside may be more inclined toward activism than traditionally urban laborers.[36] In the case under consideration, it is true that large numbers of uneducated and unskilled workers sought out the Chaikovskyites. However, the teaching students' popularity among workers seems to have resulted not from fondness for propaganda or organization, but from the Chaikovskyites' willingness to teach. In summary, although students believed that *fabrichnye* were a more fertile ground for revolutionary propaganda than *zavodskie*, *fabrichnye* were in fact attracted to student radicals by a simpler motive, the desire to learn reading and writing.

Following the example of the Chaikovskii circle, larger groups of young St. Petersburg students became interested in forming classes for workers. From late 1872 through 1873, the activity of the circle, as the Chaikovskyite Nikolai Charushin later remarked, "involuntarily affected the mood of the student youth, especially that part of it that came into contact with the Chaikovskyites." Soon, "thanks to the surge of new forces, the activity in the worker milieu broadened, capturing new worker regions."[37]

35. Tikhomirov, *Conspirateurs*, p. 47. The memoir literature fails to differentiate between those workers attracted by the educational work and those attracted by the propaganda. However, Tikhomirov commented that of the hundreds of workers with whom their circle came into contact "there was quite a small number, perhaps twenty" who became convinced socialists, and these were mostly the very educated workers (ibid., p. 50). Undoubtedly, he had in mind those *zavodskie*, such as Viktor Obnorskii, who were the founders of the Northern Russian Workers' Union in 1877. Indeed, though the worker pupils included such *fabrichnye* as Peter Alekseev, later a member of the All-Russian Social Revolutionary Organization, we know of very few socialist *fabrichnye*.

36. See Leopold Haimson, "The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905–1917," *Slavic Review*, 23, no. 4 (December 1964): 632. Haimson suggests that the mass of industrial workers in 1910–17 who were most active and prone to violence may have been recently uprooted from the countryside. Reginald E. Zelnik, in his *Labor and Society in Tsarist Russia: The Factory Workers of St. Petersburg, 1855–1870* (Stanford, Calif., 1971), p. 6, suggests that such a nontraditional schema may be true of mid-nineteenth-century workers. However, some of his evidence would seem to be at variance with this thesis (see pp. 342–43). Admittedly, this is not an easy question and Zelnik emphasizes that cases differ.

37. These students include a circle in Mikhailovskii Artillery Academy, a circle led by the student V. L. Ivanovskii, two circles drawn mainly from students of the technological institute, a circle of students from Tula, and a circle of students from Samara. Even members of circles that were hostile to the Chaikovskyites—such as N. I. Paevskii and A. K. Artamonov of the circle of Sergei Kovalik, a Bakuninist—followed the Chaikovskyites' example. Infected with a "passion for a new cause," Charushin wrote, "the young willingly went to meet the new tendency, taking an active part in the labor with the workers" and organizing into "autonomous auxiliary circles" (Charushin, *O dalekom proshlom*, p. 110). Concerning this activity, see Itenberg et al., *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, 1:250, 456–57, 449; Bukh, *Vospominaniia*, p. 52; Vasilii Perovskii, *Vospominaniia o sestre (Sof'e Perovskoi)* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1927), pp. 55–56; N. F. Tsvilenev, *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' instituta Granat*, "Sotsializm," cols. 518–19; Starik [Sergei F. Kovalik], "Dvizhenie revoliutsionnogo narodnichestva po bol'shomu protsessu (193-kh)," in three parts, *Byloe*, 1906, nos. 10, 11, 12, see no. 10, p. 77; R. V. Filippov, *Iz istorii narodnicheskogo dvizheniia na pervom etape khozhdeniia v narod 1863–1874* (Petrozavodsk, 1967), pp. 188–93.

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In contrast to the many workers attracted to the educational work of the Chaikovskyites and others, those few workers who took students' propaganda to heart and attempted to propagandize soon met with failure. When the handful of propagandized workers discovered that they could not recruit fellow worker-revolutionaries among city cohorts, they turned to their native villages in search of adherents.

Chaikovskyites were caught unawares in mid-1873 by the decisions of several propagandized workers to turn to the countryside. Actually, they should have been forewarned. In 1872, Sergei Sinegub's propagandized worker from a small Zhdanov chemical factory, Liapunov, had disappeared into the countryside to propagandize and was never seen again.[38]

One of the Chaikovskyites' favorite followers was a youth named Mikhail A. Orlov. Orlov was an office clerk of the Semiannikov machine plant, but Chaikovskyites considered him essentially a worker. Shishko, for example, called him "one of the best workers" among a group that met in the winter of 1872–73. The following summer, Orlov settled with Sergei Kravchinskii and Dmitrii Klements near the Semiannikov machine plant. He left his clerking and began to learn foundry work in order to have more of an opportunity to converse with Semiannikov workers. However, he soon gave up the effort (and, as a result, students decided that workers in machine plants were unsuitable revolutionary material). To the disappointment of the Chaikovskyites, Orlov began preparing to become a public school teacher.[39]

The propagandized worker upon whom the Chaikovskyites pinned their greatest hopes was Grigorii F. Krylov, from the Maltsev textile factory. Krylov was an energetic man with an excitable nature, enthusiastic about socialism, and convinced that a broad revolutionary movement was soon to form in Russia. However, he could recruit no new enthusiasts among fellow workers. As a Chaikovskyite later reported, when Krylov "apparently did not meet sufficient sympathy toward his propaganda" in the factory, he "began to feel that this milieu oppressed him."[40] In the summer of 1873, seeking other ways to gain adherents, he hit upon the idea of becoming a peasant book peddler. He abandoned the factory and began wandering about the rural outskirts of St. Petersburg, attempting to distribute populist booklets written by Chaikovskyites. More than any other single event, this failure to recruit fellow textile workers to the socialist cause damaged the Chaikovskyites' faith in city worker organization. By the end of 1873, Krylov had left the St. Petersburg outskirts and had begun propagandizing in his peasant village in Tver province.[41]

Several other workers in Krylov's circle grew impatient with attempts to propagandize others in their factory, and soon after Krylov abandoned St. Petersburg for the suburbs, they also decided to set out for the countryside. Sometime

38. Sinegub, "Vospominaniia," no. 8, p. 41.

39. Shishko, *Kravchinskii*, p. 29; see also Golosov, "K biografii," p. 51, footnote.

40. Shishko, *Kravchinskii*, p. 29.

41. Ibid. Krylov, in peddling books, was imitating a wandering peddler in *L'histoire d'un paysan*, a popular novel of the time by E. Erckmann and A. Chatrian, published in Russian in 1870–72. An acquaintance of the Chaikovskyites, probably P. V. Zasodimskii, then condensed the two-volume work into a bulky booklet which was widely circulated.

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in the summer or fall of 1873, the "young and daring" weaver Ivan A. Abakumov left for his village, apparently desiring to propagandize among peasants. Shortly afterward, the weaver Nikita P. Shabunin also left.[42] When they failed to recruit their fellow factory workers, these workers found it natural to make a similar effort in the country, where they had maintained ties with friends and relatives.

The failure of the "best" recruiters and their subsequent departure provoked profound discouragement among the Chaikovskyites, an attitude which points to a startling fact. The initial response of radical students to the workers' turn to the countryside was one of *despair*, not one of enthusiasm, and certainly the workers' act was not a plan originated by the circle. Contrary to a widely accepted belief among historians, the radical students were not naïvely encouraging workers and each other to go to the villages, nor were they happy when workers set off for the countryside. Leonid Shishko recalled the very significant impact of the workers' tendency on the students, and his statement is worth quoting at length. Despite the relative success of the Chaikovskyite propaganda among the city workers and the workers' elevated mood, he wrote:

> from the very first steps we were forceably shown that it was difficult to keep this propaganda in the city centers then, among city workers. Conditions of Russian life at that time inevitably had to advance the rural popular masses to the forefront in the revolutionary movement, and I well remember how this began in St. Petersburg in the summer of 1873 [with Krylov's departure from the factory]. . . .
>
> Thus the first impetus toward a movement to the countryside was given in Petersburg by the workers themselves, who had not found in the *fabrichnyi* milieu surrounding them a sufficiently prepared ground for a mass workers' movement. The same thing happened among the *zavodskie* workers [such as Mikhail Orlov].[43]

It is clear, then, that the first push into the countryside for propaganda was made by *the workers themselves*. The subsequent movement "to the people" in the summer of 1874 was not an unprecedented act on the part of the students, but one that succeeded a similar tendency of the propagandized workers.

The Chaikovskyites' initial response to the dismal situation was to try to continue with their original plan. In an effort to bridge the gap that seemed to separate them from the bulk of city workers, students began dressing as workers and joining factories, instead of relying on worker intermediaries to recruit followers. (It was at this time that Dmitrii Rogachev began to work at the Putilov rolling mills.) As one student remarked, "the idea grew among us that it

42. Charushin, *O dalekom proshlom*, pp. 132–33; Shishko, *K pamiati*, p. 52. Workers continued to prepare to go to their homeland throughout the spring and summer of 1874. But by then it is likely that they were under the sway of the subsequent movement "to the people." These workers included the *zavodskii* Grigorii A. Shcheglov, who took a load of pamphlets to his homeland in Kostroma province, the worker P. G. Belilov, and the worker S. P. Zarubaev (*Gosudarstvennye prestupleniia*, pp. 50–51; Golosov, "K biografii," p. 55; Itenberg et al., *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, 1:462).

43. Shishko, *Kravchinskii*, pp. 28–29. Tikhomirov suggests the same development, saying that it was the contacts with the workers that, by 1874, had awakened in the students the hope of "calling the popular masses to a conscious political life. . ." (Tikhomirov, *Conspirateurs*, p. xii).

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was necessary for the propagandist to become a worker."[44] Sinegub, the best teacher, abandoned the methodical teaching effort for what he labeled "mass propaganda," actually haranguing, in an effort to reach a larger number of workers at one time. A further response of the Chaikovskyites to the departure of their "best" workers was a new emphasis on the need to give workers some concrete short-range goals so that others would not despair and flee to the countryside. The circle proposed to focus on such issues as better pay, better working conditions, shorter hours, worker strikes, and stronger worker organization.[45] Plans for combining all the individual circles into one large organization were being made at the same time that doubts over workers' capability of organization were growing. Early in November 1873, at a general meeting of the St. Petersburg Chaikovskyites, the predominant opinion was that "the Russian workers, even the best, were too little developed, too little prepared to be organized in a serious way."[46] According to one participant, this was the opinion of those who "knew the workers best and who were in general practical men." In December 1873, and in February and March 1874, three meetings took place which combined the various remaining worker organizations and set up a treasury and mutual aid fund. However, in March, the last of the worker settlements was destroyed, and Chaikovskyite worker activity came to a halt.

Despite initial disappointment with city workers and attempts to repair and contain the damage, within a few months some students developed the new theory that *fabrichnye* could serve as revolutionary emissaries to the peasants. The thought occurred to several Chaikovskyites that migration of workers to the countryside might establish indirect contact with the peasantry. Heretofore students were unprepared to deal with this "great majority" except through the framework of rural institutions (zemstvos, public schools, cooperatives). By November, several Chaikovskyites, in particular Peter Kropotkin, had developed the strategy that some of the workers, because they returned to their peasant villages during a part of the year, would serve as revolutionary intermediaries carrying propaganda to the peasants. In his lengthy statement "Must we take up an examination of an ideal for a future order?," written by early November 1873, Kropotkin wrote that activity among city *fabrichnye* was important precisely because they maintained ties with the countryside. *Fabrichnye*, Kropotkin wrote, "all have a strip of land in their homeland and keep close ties with their countrymen; few of them live continuously in the city"; rather, they migrate there "from different parts of Russia for a time, and then after a year or two, and frequently in seasons where there is no work, return to their villages for peasant work." As a result,

44. Shishko, *Kravchinskii*, p. 33.

45. Sinegub practiced his "mass propaganda" on two or three occasions on some Tver stonemasons temporarily working in St. Petersburg (Itenberg et al., *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, 1:323 and 326; Shishko, *Kravchinskii*, pp. 32–33; Letter of Sinegub to Tikhomirov, in *Katorga i ssylka*, 1925, no. 4, pp. 83–84). See also Charushin, *O dalekom proshlom*, pp. 132–33, 153.

46. Tikhomirov, among others, described the general gathering of students. At the gathering, Tikhomirov and Kropotkin claimed that those students who felt that the workers were still "too little prepared" for organization were influenced by *intelligentnye* prejudices and habits (Tikhomirov, *Conspirateurs*, p. 61).

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> they represent an excellent, and in the majority of cases an altogether receptive ground and means for the distribution of social ideas. . . . Since these workers do not at all break their connections with the countryside and do not change their former peasant form of life, it is most convenient to produce [propagandized] people who then in the countryside can serve as kernels for rural peasant circles.[47]

Chaikovskyites taught similar ideas to worker circles in December 1873. Nikolai Charushin, for example, lectured that revolution would begin in the countryside, incited by propagandized city workers who had dispersed to provoke peasants into an uprising.[48]

In light of the evidence, it can be suggested that the departure of the weaver Grigorii Krylov from his factory for the rural outskirts of St. Petersburg and the departure of several valuable propagandized workers from their factories for the countryside generally contributed to a subsequent redefinition of the ideal role of a city working-class movement. The close rural ties of a very large part of the Russian city working class had to be demonstrated firsthand, by Krylov and other workers, before its significance impressed itself upon students.[49]

A final development leading to the movement "to the people" occurred when several Chaikovskyites decided to visit workers who had returned to the countryside. The immediate motivation of these Chaikovskyites was to avoid the police who were close on their trail in St. Petersburg. Several students, including Sinegub and Tikhomirov, were arrested in early November. Realizing that it was advisable to leave the city for a while, Kravchinskii, Rogachev, and Klements decided to dress as workers and accompany *fabrichnye* into the countryside, or to visit those who already had returned to their villages. The voyages served as examples to other students, in St. Petersburg and in other cities, among whom an interest in the peasantry was growing. The Chaikovskyites' visits to the coun-

47. Itenberg et al., *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo,* 1:102–3 (on the dating of this program, see Charushin, *O dalekom proshlom,* p. 158).

48. *Gosudarstvennye prestupleniia,* p. 32. Memoirs also mention this new orientation, though without indicating specifically the date of its adoption. Alexandra Kornilova recalled, "we moved successively to: circle activity at first among the *zavodskie,* afterward the *fabrichnye,* and subsequently to attempts to take mass propaganda among the peasants, in factories and artels" (Kornilova-Moroz, "Perovskaia," p. 30). See also Chaikovskii, "Cherez pol stoletiia," p. 182.

49. I have made a search of the literature, both documentary and memoir, in an effort to determine whether anyone had proposed the idea of a worker-emissary prior to the fall of 1873, but I have not found reliable evidence of any. Bakunin had written that *intelligentnye* revolutionaries should forge ties between the city workers and the countryside; the program of circle activity probably authored by Mark Natanson proposed that students recruit directly in the part of the rural population that came together to practice a trade; L. B. Gol'denberg's memoirs claim that in 1869 he suggested a plan for propagandizing mechanics in St. Petersburg, who in turn would propagandize others at work. Missing from all these schemes is the essential bit of information that many Russian workers felt close to some rural village, and thus might form a bridge between the two milieus (Bakunin's "Appendix A" to *State and Anarchy,* in Itenberg et al., *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo,* 1:53; "Programma dlia kruzhkov," p. 105; L. B. Gol'denberg, "Vospominaniia L. B. Gol'denberga," *Katorga i ssylka,* 1924, no. 3, p. 102). In any case, as a result of circumstances, the Chaikovskyites found themselves the first to take the notion seriously.

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tryside seemed to demonstrate that students could communicate with the peasantry, that the gulf could be bridged. Possibly then the great silent masses could be budged.

The first to set off were Sergei Kravchinskii and Dmitrii Rogachev. They went to the peasant villages neighboring the estate of an acquaintance in Tver province, where the workers on whom Sinegub had tried out "mass propaganda" in St. Petersburg lived. Kravchinskii was also somewhat familiar with the locality, which he had visited briefly during the previous summer.[50] On November 7 or 8, Kravchinskii proposed to Rogachev that he accompany him to the village, and Rogachev agreed. Disguised as simple woodcutters, the two told the peasants that "in America there was no tsar, but in place of him there was a president elected by the people themselves; that in France not long ago [the people] drove out Napoleon and also elected a president; and that in Russia when the people were educated, the same thing would happen."[51] Unfortunately, the men provoked some suspicion, and three days later the volost elder attempted to arrest them. Traveling all night on foot and by train, they managed to reach Moscow quickly, where they convinced many Moscow students that direct propaganda among the peasantry was possible.[52]

The propagandized worker Grigorii Krylov abandoned his book peddling in the rural outskirts of St. Petersburg and went to his native village in early December. He soon asked for a Chaikovskyite to help him propagandize, "since he could not hope to manage such vast [raw] material that was at hand with his own personal means."[53] Later in December 1873, Dmitrii Klements set off to visit Krylov in Tver province. Unfortunately, Klements's criticisms of priests provoked the village priest. Klements was arrested briefly, but he convinced the police that he had merely been looking for land to buy in the area, and he was released. Klements returned to St. Petersburg, where his contact with the peasantry attracted widespread admiration.[54]

Other Chaikovskyites began to make plans to accompany workers into the countryside. Charushin and Leonid Shishko asked the propagandized worker G. A. Shcheglov if they could accompany him to his homeland in Kineshma county, Kostroma province. The circle of artillery students from Orenburg, a group very close to the Chaikovskyites, had a similar experience with a propagandized munitions worker, Mikhail Nikiforov. Nikiforov, falling ill, returned to his native village in Gdov county, St. Petersburg province. The circle did not lose contact with him, and at first members wrote him letters, encouraging him to open a school. When he took their advice and opened a village school in his father's house, two members of the circle forayed into the countryside late in

50. On the earlier visit in August 1873, Kravchinskii had taken with him a lithograph machine, which he installed in the potato cellar, and working at night so that the peasants would not discover his activity and think he was counterfeiting money, printed a popular booklet. He returned shortly to St. Petersburg (Itenberg et al., *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo,* 1:320–21, 323, 325).

51. Ibid., p. 320.

52. Sinegub, "Vospominaniia," no. 9, p. 111; Kropotkin, *Memoirs,* p. 196.

53. Krylov's obituary in *Vpered!,* quoted in Sh. M. Levin, *Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Klements* (Moscow, 1929), p. 21.

54. Starik, "Dvizhenie," no. 10, p. 66; Klements, *Iz proshlogo,* pp. 21 and 122.

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December 1873 to bring him textbooks and popular booklets. Soon others were following this example.[55]

When Klements returned to St. Petersburg from Tver province in December, the main body of moderate students looked upon him as an expert on the peasantry "and listened to him with pleasure." Klements seemed to have broken the secret code of the peasants' world, and many young people were eager to learn from him. Students were particularly intrigued by his mastery of the peasants' speech patterns and dress. Though partly German in ancestry, "his purely Russian [peasant] appearance, as if specially created for activity in the people" and "the habit of defining the subject in sentences both short and appropriate to the peasant spirit . . . produced a strong impression on the young people."[56]

Curiosity about, and sympathy for, Russian peasants was as old as Russian Romanticism, but had been given new life by the Reform of 1861 and, in the last few years, by the publication of Peter Lavrov's *Historical Letters* and the examples of zemstvo statistics gathering. In early 1874, as before but in greater numbers, St. Petersburg students, including many who had taken no part in the worker activity, were making plans to spend summer vacation on their families' estates to observe the local peasantry. The example of the Chaikovskyites, who apparently had already broken the barrier separating them from the peasantry and had talked with peasants on an equal basis, made an impression on the students. The Chaikovskyites resolved students' theoretical discussions about the value and possibility of communicating with the peasants with an optimistic "yes!"[57] Aside from the St. Petersburg Chaikovskyites' role in encouraging the movement "to the people" by their example, they also provided continuous aid to the St. Petersburg students by setting up a metalworking workshop and a blacksmithy where students might learn a craft and by finding jobs in the countryside for those who needed help in contacting the peasantry.[58]

55. According to the Bakuninist student Sergei Kovalik, students—including members of his own circle—who desired access to the peasantry settled in the homes of city worker acquaintances who had returned to their villages to propagandize. Charushin and several others were arrested unexpectedly in January 1874, and their plan came to nothing. Shishko soon left for Moscow to avoid arrest (Itenberg et al., *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, 1:260-61, 421, n. 118, 459; *Gosudarstvennye prestupleniia*, p. 32; Starik, "Dvizhenie," no. 12, p. 66).

56. Starik, "Dvizhenie," no. 10, p. 26; Itenberg et al., *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, 1:215.

57. Their reputation for firsthand acquaintance with the peasantry also helped the Chaikovskyites defeat in debate a small handful of Bakuninist students recently returned from Switzerland, including Sergei Kovalik, who claimed that the Russian peasantry was ready for revolution. Kovalik later described several gatherings where student respect for experience in the peasantry resulted in the "apparent defeat" of the Bakuninists: "This occurred when, concerning the problem of elucidating the conditions of peasant life," from among the more moderate students stepped forward an orator (undoubtedly Klements) "who had been in the people and who knew how to cite appropriate concrete facts against the theoretical position of his opponents." The experienced students insisted that above all one needed to "lounge about" the peasantry and study them firsthand before theorizing about them (Starik, "Dvizhenie," no. 10, p. 26; no. 11, pp. 66–67). As far as Bakunin's influence on the other students is concerned, it suffices here to say that *State and Anarchy*, which became generally known only in the spring of 1874, was used to provide additional justification for a plan of action already decided upon (see McKinsey, "Chaikovskii Circle," pp. 196–215).

58. McKinsey, "Chaikovskii Circle," pp. 229–40.

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The evolution that members of the Chaikovskii circle underwent in the fall and winter of 1873—an evolution that in turn had a strong impact on the St. Petersburg students—is perhaps most strikingly confirmed by the inability of the entire Chaikovskii circle to participate in the evolution. Nikolai V. Chaikovskii himself had effectively dissociated himself from the circle by the spring of 1874 and was unable and unwilling to make the last transition from city workers to peasantry. Chaikovskii had been devoted to activity among city workers, as evidenced by his response to Peter Lavrov's article "Knowledge and Revolution." The article seemed to slight activity among lower classes in favor of self-perfection, and Chaikovskii, representing the circle, wrote to Lavrov that the article was "not only indifferent for us but quite hostile."[59] But now Chaikovskii could not convince himself that there was any value in the new tendency of "dunking oneself in the peasantry. . . . I saw few practical results from going to the people and felt that rather than do that we should concentrate all our strength on the job of making successors from the popular milieu, and not scatter to adventures." Chaikovskii tried to convince his friends that their newest inclination, plunging into the countryside, was "*intelligentnyi* adventurism," a spur-of-the-moment fad without any real justification. Some of his friends tried to prove him wrong, and one claimed that Chaikovskii was "hamper[ing] the circle from developing its creative forces." Chaikovskii found that "it became more and more difficult to convince people that you cannot start one activity until you have finished the last one."[60] But the others saw this as "standing in one place." Leonid Shishko summed up the discussion: "Little by little the thought began to captivate us of the countryside as the chief center of the people's life; although certain of us (and in that number Chaikovskii) looked on this then as a heresy, as the introduction of disorganization into the correctly organized worker's cause in St. Petersburg." At the end of 1873, Chaikovskii requested a leave of absence from the circle and soon he had abandoned his former activity for a religious group that seemed to offer peace to his troubled mind.[61]

Thus far I have concentrated on *St. Petersburg* student leaders of the working-class movement who found themselves obliged to focus on the peasantry despite their original inclinations. A few additional remarks should be added to illustrate the impact of their example on students involved in worker organizing in other cities.

Information is spotty concerning the evolution of circles elsewhere in Russia, but in the case of Moscow and Odessa, communications from St. Petersburg undoubtedly were important in changing local attitudes. In Moscow, students such as Mikhail Frolenko had attempted to teach and organize workers partly under the guidance of people associated with the St. Petersburg radicals and partly independently. But the visit of Kravchinskii and Rogachev to Moscow in December after their trek through Tver province as woodcutters caused students to reevaluate their work. The two were enthusiastic about their discovery that, by dressing in peasant clothes and performing peasant work, they had been

59. Chaikovskii's letter was published in *Vpered!: Neperiodicheskoe obozrenie*, 5 vols. (Zurich, 1873–77), 3:147–53.

60. Chaikovskii, "Cherez pol stoletiia," pp. 182 and 186.

61. Shishko, *Kravchinskii*, pp. 32 and 29. On the religion of God-in-man, see, for example, Starik, "Dvizhenie," no. 11, pp. 50–57.

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accepted as equals by the peasants. They further claimed that the peasantry had listened openly to their propagandistic statements and "in the main" had believed them. At this, many Moscow students began asking themselves, as one later recalled, "Does it pay to concern ourselves with the workers? Is it not better, after having prepared ourselves for some sort of trade to go directly to the people, not waiting for sufficient intermediaries to be produced?" The two from St. Petersburg supported this idea. Kravchinskii commented to one Moscow student that city workers were "spoiled" by city life and would not pay attention to student propagandists.[62]

Communications from St. Petersburg also appear to have been influential in altering the orientation of some Odessa students who were organizing workers. One Odessan later recalled that, during the fall and winter of 1873, the Odessa circle centered around Felix Volkhovskii gradually took on a folk character that earlier had been characteristic only of the St. Petersburg Chaikovskyites "who had established close relations with our circle" and "kept up a constant correspondence with it on various practical problems, using codes." Another Odessan subsequently wrote that radical students in Odessa found "propaganda and work in the artels more useful and suitable than propaganda in the milieu of the local *zavodskii* population" because the *zavodskie*, "tainted by city life and letting lapse their ties with the peasantry, were not so receptive to the propaganda of socialism." Furthermore, students felt that "the artel workers who frequently returned home [that is, to the countryside], adhering to socialism, would begin to spread dissatisfaction with the existing social order and to preach a better future to all of the Russian land."[63]

I have tried to illustrate the close relationship between the difficulties arising from students' efforts to organize the St. Petersburg city workers population and the beginning of the "to the people" movement. By examining successive stages of the students' activity among the city working class, one can appreciate the reasonableness, if not the rationale, of the "to the people" movement. The

62. Mikhail F. Frolenko, *Sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1930), pp. 107–12, 185–88; *Gosudarstvennye prestupleniia*, p. 145; Charushin, *O dalekom proshlom*, p. 118; Tikhomirov, *Vospominaniia*, p. 64; Morozov, *Povesti*, 1:76. Early in December 1873, Kropotkin also visited Moscow, sent by his St. Petersburg friends to see if students in Moscow were also discouraged about activity among the workers, and if they felt that the activity was really necessary in the first place. (Kropotkin encountered Kravchinskii there, who had just escaped from Tver province.) After discussions, Moscow students decided "that we had to stop this kind of activity and begin to get ready to go to the people in the spring" (Kropotkin, *Memoirs*, pp. 266–67; Frolenko, *Sobranie*, p. 188). Martin Miller, in *Kropotkin* (Chicago, 1976), p. 94, puts this visit in the summer of 1873, mistakenly, it would seem. On Moscow students who accompanied workers into the countryside, see Morozov, *Povesti*, 1:240–79; *Gosudarstvennye prestupleniia*, p. 192; and Frolenko, *Sobranie*, pp. 189–90.

63. Words of Semen Langans quoted in Peter L. Lavrov, *Narodniki-propagandisty 1873–1878 godov* (St. Petersburg, 1907), p. 217; Semen L. Chudnovskii, *Iz davnikh let* (Moscow, 1926), pp. 77 and 81. The Kievan student leader Katerina Breshkovskaia during a visit to St. Petersburg fell under the spell of the growing enthusiasm for going "to the people" and found that her concepts on meaningful work in the countryside had changed drastically (Catherine Breshkovsky, *The Little Grandmother of the Revolution*, ed. Alice Stone Blackwell [Boston, 1918], p. 37; Katerina Breshkovskaia, *Hidden Springs of the Russian Revolution*, ed. Lincoln Hutchinson [Stanford, 1931], pp. 16–17, 22–24).

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teaching and organizational activity of radical students in the milieu of the city factory workers was their most innovative undertaking, and it influenced future generations of Russian leftists. However, during the period under discussion, the experiment was not very successful. Social distinctions between groups of workers hindered the formation of a broad coalition of city workers, to a point where the students began losing interest. Further, students' emphasis on basic education, though it attracted masses of illiterate workers, had limited appeal to skilled and literate workers. Only a handful of workers were inclined toward social action, and these could not manage to win adherents among coworkers. Failure in the city drew these workers to the countryside, where they had close ties. Brought up short by this development, the Chaikovskyites drastically reformulated their plans and incorporated a theory of the peasant worker as an agent to spread propaganda in the countryside. When several Chaikovskyites decided to accompany their "agents" into the countryside, they set an example for other student youth. Communication with the peasant masses seemed possible. The movement "to the people" had begun. The "to the people" movement, then, so often viewed as an idealistic escapade on the part of bookish romantics, may have been, to a considerable extent, an event set off by a confrontation with the very nature of a large part of the contemporary working class.

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