International Colloquium on Workers and the Intelligentsia in Russia in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

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Recently, the study of workers in late Imperial Russia has been dismissed by some as an exhausted and marginal subject. In Russia itself, since the fall of communism, the study of labor has seemed retrograde and even suspect to many democratic-minded intellectuals. In the West, too, critics have seen in the collapse of the East European "workers' states" an argument against the pertinence of Russian working-class history.

The organizers of this conference—Reginald Zelnik (Berkeley), Mark Steinberg (Yale), Leopold Haimson (Columbia University), Sergei Potolov (St. Petersburg section of the Institute of Russian History, Russian Academy of Sciences) and Iurii Kir'ianov (Moscow section of the Institute)—were motivated by the belief that the time was ripe for fresh thinking about the history of Russian workers. Whereas specialists in the history of French, British, German, and other working-class and labor movements have increasingly recognized the need to view their topic in a less linear, teleological and materialist fashion, to place the spotlight on problems of experience, identity, and representations, and on the full variety of social and cultural interactions, specialists in the Russian field (with significant exceptions), especially in the former Soviet Union itself, have been slower to consider new approaches. The conference was meant as a prod to Russian and Western scholars alike to rethink approaches to the study of Russian workers.

The five-day conference was held June 11–16, 1995, in the film screening room of the former Communist party hotel in St. Petersburg, across the

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street from the Smolnyi Institute, the former revolutionary headquarters of the Bolsheviks in 1917. The conference was supported by a grant from the International Research and Exchanges Board, with funds provided by the NEH, administered by Berkeley's Center for Slavic and East European Studies. About sixty people participated in the conference—half as formal paper-givers or discussants. They came from Russia, the United States, England, Germany, France, Finland, Azerbaijan, and Australia. Both senior scholars and younger historians were well represented and took active part. To facilitate open and thoughtful discussion, papers were distributed in advance (in Russian), and authors began each session with ten-minute presentations of their papers, followed by formal comments by discussants, open discussion, and responses from the authors.

The first of three thematic sessions of the conference was devoted to exploring questions of worker "identity and mentality." A highlight of this session, amounting in some respects to a keynote talk for the entire conference, was a presentation by Iurii Kir'ianov, considered by many the premier Soviet historian of Russian labor. In the 1960s, at a time of relative intellectual liberalization, Kir'ianov introduced the concept of *oblik* into the Soviet historiographical lexicon, daringly challenging the dominant materialist paradigm in Soviet social history and its cut-and-dried picture of what class consciousness necessarily entailed, with a notion of the subtleties of psychology, morality, identity, and social and political awareness. As Pavel Volobuev and other senior Russian labor historians later reminded us poignantly, Kir'ianov suffered for his originality. Now, he went further and invoked the French Annales school's notion of *mentalité* (in Russian, *mentalitet*). The deliberate use of this newer, European, term was emblematic of a powerful desire on the part of many of the Russian participants to explore once-restricted and foreign interpretive terrains—not just, as some former-Soviet historians have been doing in recent years, to invert (or defend) old arguments.

Throughout the first session—indeed, throughout the conference—speakers raised questions about interpreting workers' intellectual and moral worlds. Leopold Haimson reviewed recent approaches to the mutual "representations" of workers and *intelligenty* in the Social Democratic movement, especially the varied ways (discursive, behavioral, symbolic) in which workers expressed their emerging personal and social identities. Evgenii Ol'khovskii proposed a more precise definition of the worker intelligentsia and described the conditions of its emergence. Mark Steinberg took a less conventional approach to the worker intelligentsia in a paper exploring the various and often contradictory ways individual worker-writers (in poetry, essays, and other writings) made use of notions of the individual and the self. Similarly, Eugene Anthony Swift looked at how such cultured workers "appropriated the culture of the intelligentsia" in workers' theaters.

Whereas these papers spoke of the growing self-consciousness and

self-assertiveness of influential minorities of workers, Nikolai Mikhailov focused on the collectivist, even "tribal" psychology that characterized many workers, arguing (and thereby provoking intense discussion) that it was shaped by peasant cultural and institutional traditions. Similarly, the anthropologist Ninel' Polishchuk described collective rituals connected to the everyday lives of industrial workers. Parvin Akhanchi discussed the relations among ethno-religious groups in the Baku oil industry. Laura Engelstein, as a designated discussant (the others were Ziva Galili and Louise McReynolds) opened a lively discussion of these papers that addressed such questions as the heuristic value (and political construction) of the terms "working class" and "worker intelligentsia"; the hazards of simplified dichotomies such as workers versus peasants; and the need to be more sensitive to the ambivalences, contradictions, and fractures in workers' social, political, and moral world views.

The second thematic session of the conference was devoted to workers' relations with the "social movement" (*obshchestvennoe dvizhenie*). Many papers and comments in the discussion challenged the usual narrow focus on the "radical intelligentsia" and on the revolutionary potential of the "workers' movement." Joan Neuberger looked at the ways workers in Justice of the Peace courts advanced independent and varied conceptions of state and private authority, legitimate behavior, and especially justice. G. I. Korolev examined key notions in the discourse of the early socialist intelligentsia (property, personal dignity, freedom of personality, and the state), arguing that these were then simply "projected" into interpretations of workers' views (a concept that once would have been unimaginable in Soviet historiography). Deborah Pearl explored organizational and propaganda efforts among workers by the People's Will (*Narodnaia Volia*), challenging stereotypes of the movement as preoccupied with peasants and terror. Anatolii Kasimov, in a paper examining the interactions between workers and members of the intelligentsia in the Black Earth region, away from Moscow and St. Petersburg, similarly criticized the long-standing exaggeration of the role of Marxist parties in propagandizing socialist ideas and ideals among workers; a far broader range of socialists effectively influenced workers. Likewise, Manfred Hildermeier showed that the Socialist Revolutionary party, conventionally treated as a "peasant" party, had many workers as members and exercised much influence in shaping worker outlooks.

The diversity of groups that were active and influential among workers was further underscored in essays on workers and the Orthodox church (S. L. Firsov), on the activities of protofascist Black Hundreds organizations (S. A. Stepanov), on workers' "patriotism" and attitudes toward the state (Hubertus Jahn), and on the way workers were represented, literally and figuratively, by Russian liberals (William Rosenberg). Notwithstanding the substantial indifference of large numbers of workers to institutionalized religion—a fact that church officials viewed with alarm, Firsov showed—

Stepanov and Firsov both indicated that forms of religiosity, if not the organized church, influenced workers' attitudes and behavior. Stepanov further documented the influence of organizational efforts by Black Hundreds among workers and the effectiveness of their appeals to anti-Semitism in explaining workers' ills. Jahn, who also documented the influence of nonradical, even illiberal, attitudes among workers, specifically anti-German patriotism during World War One, placed these analytically in the context of an important argument about the contradictoriness and unevenness of workers' attitudes. Reinforcing these challenges to stereotypes about workers' mentalities, Rosenberg showed how the ways in which Russia's liberals tended to differentiate between "workers," "radicals," and "Black Hundreds" were an important element of liberal efforts to enlist organized labor to the cause of "modernization" along European lines.

The third thematic session turned to the seemingly overworked topic of the relations between workers and the "intelligentsia," the core theme of the conference. The definition and boundaries of this important cultural and political keyword in modern Russian history were implicitly expanded in the paper of Taisiia Kitanina—which described the attentions paid to workers by liberal, regulative-minded members of the Imperial Russian Technical Society, a subject little-studied in Soviet historiography—and in the paper by Sergei Potolov, who took a fresh look at the priest Georgii Gapon's Assembly of Russian Factory Workers. Potolov questioned conventional Soviet treatments of Gaponism, seeing its message as ideologically "economist" and "trade unionist" (though he eschewed Lenin's contemptuous use of these terms), and emphasizing workers' desire to organize apart from intelligentsia tutelage. Gerald Surh also critically revisited "economism"—which Western historians have generally neglected and Soviet historians here misrepresented and prejudged—to reinterpret the alleged economism of the Petersburg Workers' Organization of 1900–1903 as a potent expression of workers' autonomy and democracy. Surh also explored, as did a number of other papers at the conference, the important "moral narrative" concerning human dignity and rights which pervaded the rhetoric of the Workers' Organization.

The remaining papers discussed in this session dealt directly with the oldest theme in the study of Russian workers, one that has suffered the most from teleological, linear, and politicized approaches: the interactions between workers and socialist intellectuals. Reginald Zelnik argued that this relationship should be approached not merely as an ideological relationship, but as a human relationship. He demonstrated this approach by exploring the modes of personal interaction—"political sociability"—between the radical students of the 1870s and the workers they recruited and worked with: for example, rituals of giving and receiving (e.g., books); dress and forms of address; the social geography of the apartments where workers and *intelligenty* studied and sometimes lived together; chronic problems of social distance and class anxiety; and the complex and often-

conflicted feelings among both workers and *intelligenty* concerning their social and personal selves. Conflicts between workers and *intelligenty,* he showed, were as much personal and emotional as doctrinal. As in only a few other papers at the conference, Zelnik looked at the stories of individual workers and situations as essential to reconstructing sufficiently complex generalizations about "workers" and their relations to society.

Jutta Scherrer, discussing worker and intelligentsia relations as these were played out at the Marxist party schools in Capri and Bologna, showed that these schools reflected not the needs or consciousness of even worker-*intelligenty,* but the consciousness of the *intelligenty* who established and taught at these schools, and especially their representations of what the worker-intelligentsia relationship ought to be. Stephen Smith, in a comparative study (a mode still rare in Russian labor studies) of worker and intelligentsia relations and particularly of the genesis of intelligentsia dominance in St. Petersburg in the 1890s and Shanghai in the 1920s, also showed the importance of the ideological representations that workers and intellectuals had of one another and the ways in which cultural and historical contexts shaped these.

The conference concluded with a lively summary session, beginning with a report by Leopold Haimson. The report and ensuing discussion addressed themes raised throughout the conference: the importance and complexities of workers' representations (of self, group, society, others) in the process of identity formation; the influence on workers' attitudes of their relations to village kin, economy, and social community; the particular importance of the worker intelligentsia as an expression of the workers' self-assertion and of their complex relationships to other social groups; and the need to decipher the real, rather than presumed, shape of workers' understandings and conceptions.

Several speakers in this final session and throughout the conference raised questions about uses of language: the meaning of the words and images that workers and *intelligenty* (as well as of other social groups who interacted with workers) used to formulate their knowledge of themselves and of the world around them, but also the analytical vocabularies and categories historians use. In naming the things we study—working class, intelligentsia, class consciousness—we need to be more aware of what these categories assume and convey. The problem of language was particularly urgent at this international conference. Although we were all communicating in Russian, our varied intellectual backgrounds and outlooks colored the categories we used with differing meanings. The common vocabulary we were all using, one speaker pointed out, often masked the divergent meanings we intended.

The conference was not without confrontational moments, not least of all among Russian scholars themselves, where one occasionally saw conflicts reflecting differences in generational experience, politics, and philosophy. In this respect, bringing together younger and older scholars from

within the former Soviet Union contributed to the gathering's success by further encouraging, in the field of labor history, the open and frank exchange that has now become an important part of Russian historical research. It also strengthened a foundation for continuing mutual discussions and interaction between Russian and international scholars, which occurred in the Soviet past only cautiously. No new singular paradigm was expected or desired from all of this. As Russian scholars question and rethink their own intellectual traditions, they are becoming no less diverse in their methodological and interpretive orientations than their Western colleagues. In this sense, the old intellectual divide between us is becoming increasingly thin.

The proceedings of the conference will soon be published in Russia. We also anticipate publication in English of a large selection of the papers.

Society for French Historical Studies

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The Society for French Historical Studies met March 23–25, 1995 at Emory University for its forty-first annual meeting. Panels and individual papers explored a variety of topics in labor and economic history, particularly that of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

One panel each considered the revolutionary events of May 1968 and the Paris Commune of 1871. The session "Reconsidering 1968" included three revisionist assessments: Lisa Greenwald, "*Les Evénements:* Turning the Tide of Feminism in France"; Michael Bess, "Why in the 1960s? The Historical Trajectory of French Environmentalism"; and Keith Reader, "Symbolic Violence in May 1968." Visual portrayals of Communards appeared in the panel "Representations of the 'Terrible Year': 1870–1871." Hollis Clayson discussed "The Visual Culture of the Prussian Siege In Paris: Parisian Women as the *Sine Qua Non* of Representation in the 'Terrible Year'"; Marc Gottlieb described "Painting Defeat"; and Alice Bullard examined "Self-Representations: The Nostalgia Diagnosis and the National Identity of the Deported Communard." In addition, in a session on public and private violence, Gay Gullickson presented an account of "The Women of Montmartre: Female Violence and the Paris Commune."

In a panel on the Old Regime, "Constructing the Economy: Economic Languages in Eighteenth-Century France," Cynthia Truant presented "Reflections on the Patrimony of Weakness: Parisian Guildswomen Negotiate the Old Regime Economy," which argued that the *corporations* of seam-