



FELIKS VOLKHOVSKII
A REVOLUTIONARY LIFE

MICHAEL HUGHES



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4. Selling Revolution

The only sources of information about Volkhovskii's flight from Siberia to North America come from Volkhovskii himself. The *Times* published an interview with him soon after he arrived in Britain, describing how the strain of exile had 'broken' his health and left 'his forehead deeply lined by terrible hardship and deprivations'.¹ Volkhovskii also gave details of his escape to George Kennan, who subsequently published an account in his book *Siberia and the Exile System*, which was closely based on his earlier articles in *Century Magazine*.² Volkhovskii and Kennan both knew that a dramatic narrative could highlight the plight of those who challenged the tsarist regime, while the *Times* interview was conducted by William Le Queux, already making a name for himself as the author of melodramatic novels describing how the government in St Petersburg imprisoned its critics in dank dungeons or condemned them to forced labour in Siberia.³ There is however no reason to doubt the basic outlines

- 1 *Times*, 11 October 1890. Volkhovskii gave several interviews over the following years providing more details about his escape including his use of a false passport. See, for example, the highly-coloured account in *Chums*, 3, 118 (12 December 1894).
- 2 George Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, 2 vols (New York: The Century Co., 1891), I, 339–43. Kennan gave a somewhat more detailed and possibly less accurate account shortly after Volkhovskii's death in George Kennan, *A Russian Comedy of Errors with Other Stories and Sketches of Russian Life* (New York: The Century Company, 1915), 162–69. For a valuable biography of Kennan with a particular focus on his role in assisting the revolutionary cause, see Frederick F. Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship, 1865–1924* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1990). Volkhovskii also gave details of his escape to his friend George Perris which informed the account that appeared in G. H. Perris, *Russia in Revolution* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1905), 226–35.
- 3 Chris Patrick and Stephen Baister, *William Le Queux. Master of Mystery* (Purley: C. Patrick and S. Baister, 2007), 23–28. On Le Queux's changing views on Russia, see Michael Hughes, 'William Le Queux and Russia', *Critical Survey*, 32, 1–2 (2020), 119–38. Among Le Queux's novels set in Russia see, for example, *Guilty Bonds* (London: Geo. Routledge and Sons, 1891).

of the story Volkhovskii told to Kennan and Le Queux. His escape from Siberia was arduous and dangerous even if it also subsequently had the potential to serve as good propaganda.

In August 1889, Volkhovskii left Troitskosavsk on the Mongolian border and headed to Stretinsk, described a few years earlier by one British traveller as a 'good-sized' town and the chief port on the upper reaches of the Amur River.⁴ From here he took a steamer down to the town of Khabarovsk. He then travelled up the Ussuri River and across Lake Khanka before moving on to Vladivostok, where he persuaded the captain of a British coal steamer bound for Japan to take him on board. The journey from Troitskosavsk was filled with drama. Volkhovskii at one stage had to dress as an army officer to escape the attention of the authorities. He arrived at Lake Khanka just in time to catch one of the last ferries to make the crossing before the winter ice made passage by boat impossible. Nor were his problems over when he arrived in Nagasaki from Vladivostok. The Japanese government routinely returned escaped Russians to the tsarist authorities, and Volkhovskii was unlucky enough to register at a hotel that was run by a Russian, who viewed the new arrival with suspicion. He was fortunate in winning the sympathy of the local American consul, who helped Volkhovskii to pass himself off as a US citizen, and a few days later he was able to move on to Yokohama. From here he took passage on the British steamer *Batavia* headed for Vancouver. Kennan noted in his account that Volkhovskii so impressed the officers and his fellow passengers with his courtesy and courage that they raised the money he needed to continue his journey from Vancouver on to the East Coast.⁵ A few days after landing he reached Toronto, where he was welcomed by Lazar' Gol'denberg, who had travelled from his home in New York to greet the new arrival.

Kennan first heard that Volkhovskii had arrived in Canada in November 1889, when he received a letter from his old friend telling him

4 Henry Lansdell, *Through Siberia* (London: Samson Low, 1882), 438.

5 For further details on Volkhovskii's flight, see Kennan Papers (NYPL), Box 6, Folder 3, Kennan to Frost, 28 December 1889. Volkhovskii's memories of the kindness he received from his fellow passengers can be found in his introduction to G. Kennan, *Sibir i ssylka v dvukh chastiakh* (St Petersburg: Izdanie VI. Raspopova, 1906), 24–26.

that 'I am at last free'.⁶ The two men met in early December in Albany in upstate New York (Kennan later wrote that he thought Volkhovskii 'was in better health than I expected' but had 'a peculiar hunted expression in his eyes').⁷ They talked for twelve hours, after which Kennan went south to continue his latest lecture tour, while Volkhovskii crossed back into Canada and headed for the city of Berlin in Ontario.⁸ Berlin was the home of Allan Huber, who had been a passenger on the *Batavia*, and over the next few months he provided Volkhovskii with a home and financial support.⁹ Throughout the time he spent in Canada, Volkhovskii lived under the pseudonym Felix Brant, since his young daughter Vera was still in Irkutsk, and her father feared that it would be impossible to smuggle her out of the country if the Russian authorities knew he had fled abroad.¹⁰

During the eight months he spent in Canada, Volkhovskii was extraordinarily energetic in campaigning to raise sympathy for the victims of tsarist oppression (the 'cause' as he regularly described it in letters to Kennan). Within a few weeks of arriving in Ontario, he was giving lectures about his experiences, despite his poor command of spoken English (one newspaper noted that he spoke for three hours 'though his inability at speaking in the English tongue proved somewhat of a disadvantage to him').¹¹ Kennan's recent articles in *Century Magazine* had made the plight of exiles in Siberia a topical issue, and Volkhovskii attracted many collaborators, including a young Mackenzie

6 Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 1, Volkhovskii to Kennan (no date though late November 1889).

7 Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, I, 339.

8 Kennan noted in a letter that he was happy to pay all Volkhovskii's expenses until he could 'establish himself', but was unable to offer him hospitality in person, since he was moving so frequently on his lecture tour. Kennan Papers (NYPL), Box 6, Folder 3, Kennan to Frost, 28 December 1889.

9 The following two paragraphs draw on the letters from Volkhovskii to George Kennan, held in Box 1 of his papers at the Library of Congress, as well as Donald Senese, 'Felix Volkhovskii in Ontario: Rallying Canada to the Revolution', *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 24, 3 (1990), 295–310.

10 Kennan Papers (NYPL), Box 6, Folder 3, Kennan to Frost, 28 December 1889. Kennan told Frost, who had accompanied him on his trip to Siberia four years earlier, that Volkhovskii was afraid his children would be held 'hostage'.

11 *Manitoba Free Press* (12 January 1890). Volkhovskii was inspired by seeing how effective Kennan's lectures were, and for some years to come he consciously modelled himself on his friend, giving lectures wearing chains to dramatise the plight of Siberian exiles.

King (later Prime Minister of Canada).¹² Numerous local newspapers published interviews with him about his experiences in Russia. Despite his recent flight from Siberia, Volkhovskii was still receiving news from Russia, although he was cautious to say nothing in public that might compromise any of his sources there.¹³ He also regularly discussed with Kennan ways of encouraging greater interest in Russian developments among Canadians and Americans.

Volkhovskii not only used his lectures and articles to condemn the tsarist government's harsh treatment of political exiles. He also worked hard to challenge popular misapprehensions about the 'nihilists'. In a piece for *The Globe* (the leading Toronto paper) he sketched out a taxonomy of the revolutionary movement that distinguished between 'oppositionists', 'revolutionists' and 'terrorists'.¹⁴ Volkhovskii was wary of talking in public about 'socialism', instead emphasising that the immediate task of the opposition in Russia was to achieve more political rights, a course of action urged on him by George Kennan, who recognised that such a language was more likely to attract popular support. Kennan introduced his friend at several of his lectures, perpetuating the ruse that the speaker was really 'Felix Brant', ending his prefatory remarks with stories about how 'Volkhovskii' was supposedly still suffering in exile in far-off Siberia.

While Volkhovskii's lectures focused primarily on the harsh treatment of prisoners by the Russian government, along with the need for constitutional rather than economic reform, Kennan was still anxious that the 'cause' might become too strongly associated in the mind of the North American public with socialism and anarchism. He was also cautious about a proposal put forward by Volkhovskii to set up a North American society to mobilise international criticism of the Russian government. Kennan's hesitations may have been prompted in part by a desire to protect his own lucrative lecture tours, but they also reflected his understanding that the image of the Russian revolutionary

12 For further details, see Donald Senese, 'Willie and Felix: Ill-Matched Acquaintances', *Ontario History* 84, 2 (1992), 141–48.

13 Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 1, Volkhovskii to Mrs Kennan, 27 April 1890.

14 [*Toronto*] *Globe* (15 February 1890). Donald Senese has rightly pointed out that such a *schema* was concerned more with matters of tactics than fundamental questions about the nature of the society that should be built in Russia.

movement needed to be carefully crafted, at a time when there was growing public concern in America about the development of violent challenges to the established economic and political order.¹⁵

Kennan's caution was probably a factor in encouraging Volkhovskii to move to Britain in the summer of 1890, to work with Stepniak, although in a letter written to Kennan while still in Canada, Volkhovskii noted that geography alone meant that cities like London and Paris were bound to be the centre of efforts to influence developments in Russia.¹⁶ He also wanted to be in London to greet his daughter Vera—plans had already been put in motion to smuggle her out of Russia—while in private correspondence with Stepniak he suggested that Kennan was despite his best efforts largely 'alone' in the struggle in North America to expose the corruption and brutality of the tsarist government.¹⁷ Volkhovskii's departure from Canada did not signal anything like a break with Kennan. The two men often worked closely together in the years that followed. There was nevertheless a marked difference in their views. Kennan was an American liberal whose support for the 'cause' was rooted in a half-articulated sense of the universal value of the rule of law and constitutional government. Volkhovskii saw political reform in more instrumental terms as one element in the struggle for fundamental social and economic change.

Despite these ambivalences, Volkhovskii's time in Canada was extraordinary both for its energy and ambition. He had arrived in the country in late November as a penniless immigrant who spoke poor English.¹⁸ In just a few months he had shown that he could rouse significant public support for change in Russia. And, guided by Kennan, he was shrewd enough to present Western audiences with an image of

15 Travis notes that Kennan was always well aware of the financial benefits that could flow from writing and lecturing on Russia, even if such pecuniary considerations were not his major concern, and certainly cannot explain why he came to take such a positive view of the Russian revolutionary movement following his trip to Siberia in 1885–86. Travis, *George Kennan*, 95, 225.

16 Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 1, Volkhovskii to Kennan, 13 April 1890.

17 Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (henceforth RGALI), f. 1158, op. 1, ed. khr. 232, Volkhovskii to Stepniak, 12 February 1890.

18 For Volkhovskii's comments on improving his English while in Canada, see Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 1, Volkhovskii to Mrs Kennan, 27 April 1890.

Russian revolutionaries as moderates rather than wild-eyed socialists committed to using dynamite and assassination to smash the existing order. There was of course nothing particularly original in this objective. Kennan had been trying to do something similar with his articles in *Century Magazine*, while Stepniak's *Underground Russia*, which first appeared in English in 1883, had painted a picture of Russian nihilists as morally responsible men and women who had only turned to terrorism in the face of brutal repression.¹⁹ The most striking feature of Volkhovskii's time in Canada was the speed with which he grasped the potential for building opposition to tsarism abroad, even though he had never previously travelled overseas, nor possessed many substantial contacts outside Russia with anyone other than Kennan.

When Volkhovskii arrived in London from Canada, in the early summer of 1890, he was following in the footsteps of many of his compatriots.²⁰ The city had for years provided a refuge for political exiles fleeing tsarist Russia. Aleksandr Herzen lived in London in the 1850s and 1860s. Petr Lavrov spent time there during the 1870s. Many other Russian revolutionaries, including Mikhail Bakunin and Sergei Nechaev, also passed through the city. Few of these visitors made any great effort to immerse themselves in British society,²¹ instead treating London as a place where they could live free from the threat of arrest and extradition, while continuing to work with other Russian exiles across Europe in building opposition to the tsarist government.²² This

19 Sergei Stepniak, *Underground Russia* (London: Smith Elder, 1883). For an interesting piece examining Stepniak's complex attitude towards terrorism through the prism of his writings, see Lynn Ellen Patyk, 'Remembering "The Terrorism": Sergei Stepniak-Kravchinskii's *Underground Russia*', *Slavic Review*, 68, 4 (2009), 758–81. Also see Peter Scotto, 'The Terrorist as Novelist: Sergei Stepniak-Kravchinskii', in Anthony Anemone (ed.), *Just Assassins: The Culture of Terrorism in Russia* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 97–126.

20 For a discussion of Russian revolutionaries abroad during the mid nineteenth century, see Martin A. Miller, *The Russian Revolutionary Emigres, 1825–1870* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

21 For an argument that Herzen did in fact actively seek to influence British attitudes, see Monica Partridge, 'Alexander Herzen and the English Press', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 36, 87 (1958), 453–70.

22 For useful discussions of Russian revolutionary publishing in London in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Charlotte Alston, 'News of the Struggle:

pattern began to change in the 1880s, when several former Chaikovttsy moved to London, and began to make a determined effort to shape British attitudes towards the Russian government and its revolutionary opponents. Sergei Stepniak and Petr Kropotkin contributed numerous articles to the British press, including some that tried to explain to British readers why the Russian revolutionary movement had turned to the use of terror in the 1870s.²³ Perhaps more important than their words, though, was the way in which both men came to embody the 'cause' in a manner that seemed congenial to the *mores* of late Victorian society. Reports in the British press routinely described Kropotkin as 'gentle' and 'kind-hearted'.²⁴ Much was made of his 'noble blood' and his 'noble antecedents'.²⁵ Oscar Wilde described him as a Christ-like figure. Stepniak was widely portrayed as a man of 'mystery',²⁶ whose powerful stature was reminiscent of 'the gentleness of great powerful beasts',²⁷ with an 'expression [of] ferociousness' that could not mask an underlying 'shadow of sadness'.²⁸ Such images of moral commitment and self-sacrifice bore little resemblance to the picture of the Russian revolutionary movement that had previously characterised reports in British newspapers and journals.

Stepniak's efforts to shape British perceptions of Russia were not limited to journalism and fiction. He also devoted considerable effort

the Russian Political Press in London, 1853–1921', in Constance Bantman and Ana Claudia Suriani da Silva (eds), *The Foreign Political Press in Nineteenth-Century London* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 155–74; Martin A. Miller, 'The Transformation of the Russian Revolutionary Émigré Press at the End of the Nineteenth Century', *Russian History*, 16, 2–4 (1989), 197–207; Kate Sealey Rahman, 'Russian Revolutionaries in London, 1853–70. A. I. Herzen and the Free Press Fund', in Barry Taylor (ed.), *Foreign Language Publishing in London, 1500–1907* (London: British Library, 2002), 227–40; Helen Williams, 'Vesti i slukhi: The Russian Émigré Press to 1905', *Revolutionary Russia*, 13, 2 (2000), 45–61.

- 23 Among the numerous examples, see, for example, Sergius Stepniak, 'Terrorism in Russia and Terrorism in Europe', *Contemporary Review*, 45 (January 1884), 325–41; Prince Kropotkin, 'The Russian Revolutionary Party', *Fortnightly Review*, 37 (May 1882), 654–71. For a general discussion of this issue, including a discussion of some of Stepniak's 'terrorist' novels, see Michael Hughes, 'British Opinion and Russian Terrorism in the 1880s', *European History Quarterly*, 41, 2 (2011), 255–77.
- 24 *Faringdon Advertiser and Vale of the White Horse Gazette* (13 April 1889); *Freeman's Journal* (27 October 1887).
- 25 *Norwich Mercury* (11 May 1887).
- 26 *Glasgow Evening Post* (30 November 1889).
- 27 *Lakes Herald* (6 August 1886).
- 28 *Freeman's Journal* (26 December 1887).

in the late 1880s to establishing a society designed to mobilise 'the working of public opinion of the civilised countries in favour of our cause'.²⁹ Following a number of tentative discussions with socialists including Annie Besant and George Bernard Shaw, his efforts finally bore fruit in 1890 with the creation of The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom (SFRF), which he hoped would shape the attitudes of a section of the British establishment towards Russia.³⁰ The process was given added momentum by growing public anger in Britain at reports about the killing of a group of exiles at Iakutsk in Siberia.³¹ In setting up the SFRF, Stepniak worked closely with the Newcastle solicitor Robert Spence Watson, the long-serving President of the National Liberal Association,³² and (in Stepniak's words) 'perhaps the most influential man out of Parliament and also one of the best and cleverest men I ever met'.³³ While Stepniak had at first been inclined to sound out socialists like Shaw and Besant, within a few years he came to realise that the planned society was likely to be more influential if it drew support from leading figures in the British social and political establishment.

29 Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 1, Stepniak to Kennan, 26 March 1889.

30 On the origins of the SFRF, see Barry Hollingsworth, 'The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom: English Liberals and Russian Socialists, 1890–1917', *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, New Series, 3 (1970), 45–64. See, too, John Slatter, 'Stepniak and the Friends of Russia', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 2, 1 (1983), 33–49. Useful material can also be found in Donald Senese, *S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii: The London Years* (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1987), 46–71; D. M. Nechiporuk, *Vo imia nigilizma. Amerikanskoe obshchestvo druzei russkoi svobody i russkaia revoliutsionnaia emigratsiia, 1890–1930 gg.* (St Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2018), 40–61.

31 Robert Henderson, 'The Hyde Park Rally of 9 March 1890: A British response to Russian atrocities', *European Review of History / Revue européenne d'histoire*, 21, 4 (2014), 451–66.

32 David Saunders, 'Stepniak and the London Emigration: Letters to Robert Spence Watson, 1887–1890', *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, New Series, 13 (1980), 80–93. Stepniak told Petr Lavrov in Paris that Spence Watson was 'very strongly with us'. See S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii, *V Londonskoi emigratsii*, ed. M. E. Ermasheva (Moscow: Nauka, 1968), 270 (Stepniak to Lavrov, 6 February 1890).

33 Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 1, Stepniak to Kennan, 26 March 1889. Stepniak was first introduced to Spence Watson by his close friend and correspondent, Edward Pease, who was a central figure in the founding of the Fabian Society in 1884. The two men first met Spence Watson in 1888, and by February of the following year the Englishman had become a firm advocate of the 'cause', providing both moral and financial support. See Spence Watson / Weiss Papers, Newcastle University Special Collections, henceforth Spence Watson / Weiss Papers (Newcastle University), SW 1/17/83, Stepniak to Spence Watson, 23 March 1889.

Along with Spence Watson, he organised a public appeal, suggesting that sympathy for the cause of the 'Russian Liberals' (*sic*) should be natural in a country like Britain, where 'Mazzini, Garibaldi, Kossuth, and many another patriot of foreign name, are familiar as household words, and beloved as more than national heroes'.³⁴ The appeal led to the formation of a Managing Committee to oversee the new Society that included among its members eight Members of Parliament (MPs) and several prominent academics and journalists. A smaller Sub-Committee chaired by Spence Watson managed the day-to-day affairs of the new organisation (other members included the publisher Thomas Unwin, and the prominent member of the Fabian Society, Edward Pease).³⁵ The Society's monthly newspaper—*Free Russia*—first appeared in June 1890 edited by Stepniak himself.³⁶

Many members of the Society were, like Spence Watson, not only Liberals, but also life-long Quakers, and natural proponents of a 'Nonconformist Conscience' that sought to articulate dissenting values in public life.³⁷ The amalgam of instincts and values associated with the Nonconformist Conscience also helped to shape responses to developments abroad, whether fostering humanitarian intervention

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- 34 Spence Watson took the lead in publicising the appeal apparently to provide it with a suitable imprimatur of respectability. See, for example, *Pall Mall Gazette* (10 February 1890). See, too, Stepniak-Kravchinskii, *V Londonskoi emigratsii*, 266 (Spence Watson to Stepniak, 12 December 1889); 267 (Spence Watson to Stepniak, 22 December 1899); 268 (Spence Watson to Stepniak, 22 January 1890). Stepniak for his part was clear that the appeal was very much the work of English supporters, declining to have his name appended to it, although he kept a close eye on efforts to create a new Society devoted to the cause of Russian Freedom. See Spence Watson / Weiss Papers (Newcastle University), SW 1/17/84, Stepniak to Spence Watson, 15 November 1889; SW 1/17/85, Stepniak to Mrs Spence Watson, 15 December 1889; SW 1/17/86, Stepniak to Spence Watson, 19 December 1889.
- 35 Stepniak expressed himself well-pleased that the high profile of many committee members was likely to make it easier to raise money. See Spence Watson / Weiss Papers (Newcastle University), SW 1/17/91, Stepniak to Spence Watson, 14 April 1890.
- 36 For the decision to name the paper *Free Russia*, see Stepniak-Kravchinskii, *V Londonskoi emigratsii*, 279 (Spence-Watson to Stepniak, 25 February 1890). On Spence Watson's favourable view of the first number, see Stepniak-Kravchinskii, *V Londonskoi emigratsii*, 285 (Spence Watson to Stepniak, 28 May 1890).
- 37 The only biography of Spence Watson remains Percy Corder, *The Life of Robert Spence Watson* (London: Headley Bros., London, 1914). On the elusive concept of the Nonconformist Conscience, see D. W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics, 1870–1914* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982).

to relieve human suffering, or garnering support for opponents of governments who mistreated and abused their people.³⁸ Yet the nature of such support could create significant division. Spence Watson had, as a young man, praised the national liberation movements in southern and south-eastern Europe, arguing that leaders like Kossuth and Mazzini were justified in using force to free their compatriots from oppression. He was in later life ready to accept, albeit reluctantly, that bringing about political change in Russia might similarly involve violence (even though he served for a time as President of the Peace Society).³⁹ Many other supporters of the SFRF were by contrast convinced that the use of force could never be justified whatever the value of the ends it was designed to achieve. It was a disagreement that regularly caused tension within the Society during the first ten or fifteen years of its existence.⁴⁰

The SFRF also attracted many Fabians (the Fabian Society had been set up in 1884, and while its early supporters articulated a variety of creeds, its best-known members espoused a somewhat ill-defined 'reformist' socialism). Edward Pease, Graham Wallas and Adolphe Smith all took part in running the Society. Other supporters from the Fabian movement include Edith Nesbit and her husband Hugo Bland (the two had woven a Russian theme into their jointly authored novel *The Prophet's Mantle*, in the person of a Russian aristocrat and revolutionary named Michael Litvinoff, who was almost certainly modelled on Kropotkin).⁴¹ The

38 Luke Kelly, *British Humanitarian Activity in Russia, 1890–1923* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 32 ff.

39 For Spence Watson's views on civil disobedience, see his *The Proper Limits of Obedience to the Law* (Gateshead: Howe Brothers, 1887).

40 Spence Watson himself was clearly still nervous in the first few months of 1890 about Stepniak's radicalism, asking the publisher Thomas Unwin to sound out Kennan's views of him. Kennan for his part noted that while 'Stepniak belongs to the extreme wing of the Russian revolutionary party' his writings were 'so far as I have had an opportunity of testing them ... substantially true'. Spence Watson / Weiss Papers (Newcastle University), SW 1/17/92, Unwin to Spence Watson, 7 March 1890.

41 Nesbit and Bland published the book under the name Fabian Bland, *The Prophet's Mantle* (London: Drane, 1889). For a useful discussion of the book, see Matthew Ingleby, 'Double Standards: Reading the Revolutionary Doppelgänger in *The Prophet's Mantle*', in Darrah Downes and Trish Ferguson (eds), *Victorian Fiction beyond the Canon* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 181–199; Julia Briggs, *A Woman of Passion. The Life of E. Nesbit, 1858–1924* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 71–76. See, too, Haia Shpayer-Makov, 'The Reception of Peter Kropotkin in Britain, 1886–1917', *Albion*, 19, 3 (1987), 373–90.

division between 'Liberals' and 'Fabians' was never a precise one. J. F. Green, who served for many years as Treasurer of the SFRF, left the Liberal Party to join the Fabians and later served as a Labour MP. The journalist G. H. Perris, who for many years contributed extensively to *Free Russia*, resigned from the Liberals in 1907 to join the Labour Party in protest at the signing of the Anglo-Russian Convention.⁴² More radical figures were also involved in the Society from time to time, although Stepniak was anxious that their presence should not weaken efforts to change perceptions of Russian revolutionaries in Britain, nor undermine the 'respectable' character of the SFRF. William Morris attended many meetings of the Society in the early 1890s,⁴³ a few years after he had broken with the Social Democratic Foundation to create the anarchist-inspired Socialist League, while the Marxist Theodore Rothstein was for a period an active contributor to *Free Russia*.⁴⁴ And, as will be seen in later chapters, in the years after 1900 the Society increasingly drew its support from more left-wing figures active in the trade unions and the Independent Labour Party (ILP).

The SFRF was only a few months old when Volkhovskii arrived in London at the start of July 1890, where many members of the Russian exile community already knew him from their time in Russia, including former Chaikovtsy like Stepniak, Kropotkin and Nikolai Chaikovskii himself.⁴⁵ He was also a familiar figure to British readers of Kennan's *Century Magazine* articles. Stepniak was delighted to have the chance to work with a man he had known for many years, not least because he

42 On Perris, see Robert Gomme, *George Herbert Perris 1866–1920: The Life and Times of a Radical* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003).

43 On the origins of Morris's interest in Russia, see Evgeniia Taratuta, *S. M. Stepniak Krauchinskii—Revoliutsioner i pisatel'* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1973), 332–34; E. P. Thompson, *William Morris. Romantic to Revolutionary* (London: Merlin Press, 1996), 306–07.

44 On Rothstein see David Burke, 'Theodore Rothstein, Russian Émigré and British Socialist', in John Slatter (ed.), *From the Other Shore. Russian Political Emigrants in Britain, 1880–1917* (London: Frank Cass, 1984), 81–99. A longer discussion of Rothstein and a more general discussion of radical Russian émigrés in London can be found in David Burke, *Russia and the British Left. From the 1848 Revolution to the General Strike* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2018). For a sense of Rothstein's Marxist views in the 1890s, see his piece 'The Russian Revolutionary Movement' in *Justice* (1 May 1897).

45 For a valuable first-hand account of the London emigration in the 1890s, see Dioneo [I. V. Shklovskii], 'Staraia londonskaia emigratsiia', *Golos minushego na chuzhoi storone*, 4 (1926), 41–62.

already found the demands of editing *Free Russia* very onerous, even before the first issue appeared, telling Spence Watson that producing the paper was 'a serious business' that 'weighs heavily upon me'. He also admired the 'tremendous' speed with which Volkhovskii had launched his career as a lecturer on Russian affairs in Canada.⁴⁶ Volkhovskii himself was at first disappointed by the situation in London, believing that public interest in Russian affairs was more muted in Britain than in North America, in contrast to what he had expected to find. He was also deeply frustrated that everything seemed to be done at a slow pace. Volkhovskii was, though, pleased to find that the Committee of the SFRF was made up of 'powerful and influential' people who provided the 'cause' with the establishment *imprimatur* it still lacked on the other side of the Atlantic.⁴⁷ In the weeks following his arrival in London, he set to work with his usual energy, quickly establishing himself among the Russian political exile community and emerging as a central figure in producing *Free Russia*. He brought to the job the skills in newspaper production that he had developed while in Siberia. Volkhovskii was well-aware of Stepniak's shortcomings in this regard, telling Lazar' Gol'denberg in America that his friend was not 'a practical man', and would never be able to provide answers to detailed questions about such mundane things as production runs and printing costs.⁴⁸

The first editorial that appeared in *Free Russia* may have surprised readers whose interest in Russia had been fostered by Kennan's *Century Magazine* articles on the suffering of Russian exiles.⁴⁹ The author—presumably Stepniak himself—argued that 'as Russians, we cannot regard the ill-treatment of political offenders by the Russian government as our greatest grievance'. More important still were 'the wrongs inflicted on millions of peasantry, the stifling of the spiritual life of our whole gifted race [and] the corruption of public morals'. The editorial noted that while foreigners could not 'join those who fight the autocracy upon Russian soil', they were able to foster 'a moral ostracism

46 Spence Watson / Weiss Papers (Newcastle University), SW 1/17/91, Stepniak to Spence Watson, 14 April 1890.

47 Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 1, Volkhovskii to Kennan, n.d. but probably August 1890.

48 Tuckton House Archive (Leeds Brotherton Library), MS 1381/351, Volkhovskii to Gol'denberg, dated 20 November (probably 1892).

49 'Our Plan of Action', *Free Russia* (1 June 1890).

of the Russian autocracy' that would make 'its position ... untenable'. It was a strategy that Stepniak had outlined in a letter to Kennan the previous year.⁵⁰

The second issue of *Free Russia* included a long piece about Volkhovskii's arrival in London,⁵¹ using the language of innocent suffering that was to become such a familiar trope in the British press,⁵² reassuring readers that he had never been involved in 'terrorism or the like'. The article also noted that Volkhovskii had now dropped the pseudonym of Felix Brant, since his young daughter Vera had arrived in Britain, removing any danger that she might be 'laid hold of by the Russian government, as had happened with the children of several political offenders'. Her flight had been dramatic. George Kennan later wrote that he played an important role in planning the escape, using his contacts at the American Embassy in St Petersburg,⁵³ although friends of Volkhovskii were instrumental in transporting her from Irkutsk to European Russia. She was smuggled out of the country by Mikhail Hambourg, a former Professor at the Moscow Conservatoire, who had briefly returned to Russia after moving to Britain the previous year. One of Hambourg's sons later recalled that 'our family consisted at that time of four boys (including myself), and a girl, and our passport had five children's names on it, though I was already in England. So my father conceived the idea of taking Volkowsky's child along with his own children, and dressing her up as a boy, to pass her off as myself'.⁵⁴ The attempt was successful. Vera subsequently remembered how the party had

arrived in London late at night, and next morning my father came for me. I remember his arrival very clearly, but not until he came forward

50 Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 1, Stepniak to Kennan, 26 March 1889.

51 'Felix Volkhovskiy', *Free Russia* (1 September 1890). Such measures were of course commonly used during the Soviet period, to discourage defections, although it is difficult to identify many cases where the tsarist government made use of such a tactic.

52 See, for example, *Glasgow Herald* (14 October 1890), which spoke of Volkhovskii's 'martyrdom'; see, too, *Westmorland Gazette* (18 October 1890).

53 Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, I, 343. It seems from other accounts that Kennan may have exaggerated his role in facilitating Vera's escape. See, for example, Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 1, Volkhovskii to Kennan, 1 November 1890.

54 Mark Hambourg, *From Piano to Forte: A Thousand and One Notes* (London: Cassell, 1931), 28.

and lifted me off the ground as he used to do, did I realise that, at last, I was really with him, and although I felt very happy, I began to cry. When we arrived at the house where my father was then staying I gave him my doll, as I had been told to do. Inside its head had been placed some letters, which were dangerous to send by post. Then the head had been sewn on, and, of course, no one suspected that a little girl of eight and a sawdust doll were carrying forbidden letters across the frontier. This was the end of my adventure, which was really no adventure at all.⁵⁵

Volkhovskii and Stepniak had known each other since the early 1870s, even maintaining a fitful correspondence when the former was still in Siberian exile. Stepniak told Kennan in 1889 that 'Felix is one of my dearest friends and a man whom nobody can ever forget after knowing him'.⁵⁶ It was this long history of personal trust that encouraged him to give Volkhovskii a central role in *Free Russia* and the SFRF. He also provided his friend with introductions to some of the most prominent editors in London. Volkhovskii wrote two long articles shortly after his arrival, one for the *Fortnightly Review* ('My Life in Russian Prisons'), and a second for the *New Review* ('Sufferings of Russian Exiles'). The narrative Volkhovskii set out in 'My Life in Russian Prisons' was designed to emphasise his moderate political views, noting that there was in the propaganda he distributed in Russia 'never any thought of attacking the Czar personally. It was the system we attacked and not the individuals who maintained it'.⁵⁷ Such words (which were decidedly disingenuous) were designed to distance him in the minds of readers from the killers of Aleksandr II. While Stepniak had previously defended terrorism in his books and articles as a legitimate tool in the struggle against autocracy, telling Kennan in 1889 that he supported 'the use of dynamite and bombs in Russia',⁵⁸ he too was, by the early 1890s, increasingly cautious about expressing sympathy for the strategy pursued by Narodnaia volia ten years before. Both men recognised that the association of the Russian revolutionary movement with terrorism would make it harder to win sympathy in Britain.

55 Vera Volkhovsky, 'How I Came from Siberia', *Free Russia* (1 February 1900).

56 Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 1, Stepniak to Kennan, 1 February 1889.

57 F. Volkhovsky, 'My Life in Russian Prisons', *Fortnightly Review*, 48 (November 1890), 782-94 (790).

58 Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 1, Stepniak to Kennan, 26 March 1889.

Volkhovskii used his own experiences to highlight in 'Sufferings of Russian Exiles' the shortcomings of the petty-minded officials who used their power to intimidate those condemned to exile in Siberia:

What is it that makes a Russian 'political' miserable even if he do not suffer from physical privations? To this I will answer unhesitatingly: It is the feeling of one's complete dependence upon the whims of every official to whom one is subjected; it is the consciousness that one is a bond slave of every brute wearing a State uniform, and that one must put up with all his caprices, submit to his arrogance, and endure insults inflicted by him sometimes out of sheer wantonness.⁵⁹

He went on to echo a theme that was a staple of many accounts of the iniquities of tsarism: the abuse of female prisoners and exiles by the regime ('Women and girls placed at the mercy of these brutes are subjected to risks so horrible that it is painful even to think of it'). Such abuses did of course happen. Yet Volkhovskii's own time in Siberia in the 1880s showed how the experience of exile was often complex and contradictory. While his family suffered from enormous material deprivation, which contributed to his wife's mental instability and suicide, Volkhovskii's pivotal role at *Sibirskaia gazeta* demonstrated how a significant degree of freedom could exist alongside poverty and fear. Such nuances were not easy to convey to a foreign audience, and were in any case pushed to the margins, since they could easily compromise efforts to mobilise support for the 'cause' among foreign publics.

Volkhovskii began lecturing on behalf of the SFRF within a few months of arriving in Britain. In the middle of December 1890, he spoke 'about his life' before 'a large audience' at the Portman Rooms in London, calling on his audience to do everything they could to help victims of tsarist persecution still in Russia.⁶⁰ Over the following weeks he lectured in towns and cities across Britain. In January he spoke in Leicester ('in excellent English' according to one newspaper report).⁶¹ The following month he gave a series of talks in the north-east of England on the

59 F. Volkhovskii, 'The Suffering of Russian Exiles', *New Review*, 18, 3 (1890), 414–26 (415).

60 *Birmingham Daily Post* (19 December 1890). According to one of those present, Volkhovskii 'kept up the interest of the audience' despite speaking in 'not very distinct' English. See, too, Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 1, Unwin to Kennan, 19 December 1890.

61 *Leicester Chronicle* (17 January 1891).

'horrors of autocracy'.⁶² By March he was lecturing in Scotland.⁶³ His talks were generally well-received, while extensive reporting in the local press helped to amplify their impact, although a few accounts sounded a rather quizzical note about what practical steps Volkhovskii expected his audience to take to promote the cause of Russian freedom.

Volkhovskii gave at least one hundred talks during his first three years in Britain, many attended by large numbers of people, and he was by the end of 1892 regularly billed as a 'Famous Russian Exile'. His lectures typically focused on using his own experiences as a living testimony to the brutality of the Russian autocracy. Many press accounts in turn presented him as the embodiment of suffering. One local paper in north-east England told readers that the 'iron of Russian oppression' had 'entered into [Volkhovskii's] body and soul'.⁶⁴ An Inverness paper noted that 'in manner and appearance, M. Volkovsky himself bore out the burden of his narrative. His face and frame were thin and wearied looking'.⁶⁵ A newspaper in Lancashire described how Volkhovskii's experiences had made him 'prematurely old'.⁶⁶ Other reports described him as 'an enlightened and cultured man',⁶⁷ who had suffered persecution just for seeking the kind of 'constitutional government ... such as we enjoy'.⁶⁸ Volkhovskii carefully crafted his lectures to focus on subjects that were most likely to attract the sympathy of his audience, avoiding discussion of controversial topics like terrorism or socialism, in favour of graphic descriptions of the sufferings of Russian exiles and prisoners. He also showed himself adept at developing a *persona* that reassured his audience he shared their values despite his foreign accent and bearing.⁶⁹

Volkhovskii also quickly immersed himself in the day-to-day production of *Free Russia*. He edited the paper for several months after

62 *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette* (24 February 1891).

63 *Perthshire Advertiser* (13 March 1891).

64 *Shields Daily Gazette* (24 February 1891).

65 *Inverness Courier* (16 December 1892).

66 *Blackburn Standard* (10 December 1892).

67 *Western Mail* (9 December 1891).

68 *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette* (27 February 1891).

69 For a helpful discussion of ideological congruences between Russians associated with the SFRF and their English hosts, revolving around the values of a benign and socially-conscious imperialism, see Lara Green, 'Russian Revolutionary Terrorism, British Liberals, and the Problem of Empire (1884–1914)', *History of European Ideas*, 46, 5 (2020), 633–48.

Stepniak left Britain in December 1890 for a long lecture tour in the US, just a few weeks after first arriving in London from Canada, a reflection of the trust that existed between the two men. Stepniak's wife Fanni went so far as to refer to it as Volkhovskii's paper in this period.⁷⁰ He also began to contribute articles to the paper under his own name. In December 1890, *Free Russia* carried a detailed account of Volkhovskii's interview with the Irish Republican Michael Davitt, who had served a lengthy prison sentence in the 1870s for arms smuggling,⁷¹ and retained radical views on questions of land reform even though he had moved away from advocating violence to end British rule in Ireland. Volkhovskii's interview largely avoided controversial questions. Davitt for his part told his interviewer that he was sympathetic to the cause of Russian freedom ('a suffering Russian is as near to me as an Irishman') and noted that he was aware that much 'nonsense' was talked in Britain about the 'so-called Russian nihilists'. Volkhovskii told the Irishman that he was, like many Russian exiles, well-aware of the shortcomings of the British political system. He nevertheless stressed that he still believed that constitutional reform in Russia could 'give to the Russian people better conditions for development than a bureaucratic autocracy'. He added that it was impossible to 'have

70 *Indianapolis News* (1 June 1891). For the reasons why Stepniak was so determined to go on a lecture tour of the USA, see Stepniak-Kravchinskii, *V Londonskoi emigratsii*, 286–87 (Stepniak to Pease, 14 August 1890). Also see Michael J. Lyons, 'An Army Like that of Gideon. Communities of Transnational Reform on the Pages of Free Russia', *American Journalism*, 32, 1 (2015), 2–22; Nechiporuk, *Vo imia nigilizma*, 88 ff; Travis, *George Kennan*, 199–206. On the international dimension of anti-tsarist radicalism see, for example, Ron Grant, 'The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom (1890–1917): A Case-Study in Internationalism', *Scottish Labour History Society*, 3 (1970), 3–24; Green, 'Russian Revolutionary Terrorism'; Lutz Häfner, 'An Entangled World at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century: Socialist Revolutionary Terrorism, Transatlantic Public Sphere and American Capital', in Franz Jacobs and Mario Keßler (eds), *Transnational Radicalism. Socialist and Anarchist Exchanges in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021), 23–56; Faith Hillis, *Utopia's Discontents: Russian Émigrés and the Quest for Freedom, 1830s–1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

71 F. Volkhovskiy, 'My Interview with Michael Davitt', *Free Russia* (1 December 1890). The two men continued to write to one another in the years that followed. See, for example, Tuckton House Archive (Leeds Brotherton Library), MS 1381/358, Davitt to Volkhovskii, 3 July 1896. Davitt himself visited Russia several times in the early 1900s, to see at first-hand anti-Jewish violence, writing a book *Within the Pale. The True Story of Anti-Semitic Persecutions in Russia* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1903).

everything at once'. His words were telling. Volkhovskii saw political freedom—at least in Russia—as a pathway to more radical social and economic change.

Volkhovskii's correspondence shows that he continued to play a pivotal role in editing *Free Russia* even after Stepniak returned from America in the summer of 1891.⁷² The paper polemicised furiously with writers who sought to whitewash the tsarist regime, including the former editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* William Stead, along with 'the MP for Russia' Olga Novikova.⁷³ Novikova was a well-connected Russian *grande dame*, and friend of William Gladstone, who spent much of her time in London trying to influence British foreign policy in a Russophile direction (George Kennan described her as 'a dangerous antagonist' who was 'personally adroit' and 'skilful in newspaper controversy').⁷⁴ Even more reviled was Harry de Windt, who used his account of a journey through Russia, *Siberia as It Is* (1892), to challenge George Kennan's description of the harsh character of the Russian penal system.⁷⁵ De Windt had little knowledge of Russia, and his trip to Siberia almost certainly received indirect financial support from the Russian government through Novikova, who had excellent links with senior officials including the influential Konstantin Pobedonostsev, Procurator of the Holy Synod, and sometime tutor of the future Tsar Nicholas II.⁷⁶ In April 1892, an unsigned piece in *Free Russia*—the sarcastic tone is characteristic of Volkhovskii—attacked foreign travellers who wrote books about Russia that were no more than 'floating impressions of

72 For Volkhovskii's correspondence with Stepniak in the early 1890s, see RGALI, f. 1158, op. 1, ed. khr. 232.

73 The name was applied flippantly by Disraeli, but was happily appropriated by Novikova, and used by Stead in the collection of her letters he edited. See W. T. Stead, *The M.P. for Russia. Reminiscences and Correspondence of Madame Olga Novikoff*, 2 vols (London: Melrose, 1909). Among Novikova's numerous pieces in the British press (or translations into English of pieces in the Russian press) see Olga Novikoff, 'A Cask of Honey with a Spoonful of Tears', *Contemporary Review*, 55 (February 1889), 207–15; 'Russia and the Re-Discovery of Europe', *Fortnightly Review*, 61 (April 1897), 479–91.

74 Tuckton House Archive (Leeds Brotherton Library), MS 1381/225, Kennan to Gol'denberg, 27 March 1893.

75 Harry de Windt, *Siberia as It Is* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1892).

76 On Pobedonostsev see Robert Byrnes, *Pobedonostsev: His Life and Thought* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1968); A. Iu. Polunov, *K. P. Pobedonostsev v obshchestvenno-politicheskoi i dukhovnoi zhizni Rossii* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2010).

tourists who do not speak a word of Russian'. The author argued that such 'superficial' works showed 'malice' in failing to provide the kind of honest account that would help 'in the formation of a truly enlightened public opinion'.⁷⁷ He suggested that readers should give more credence to books by well-informed foreigners like Kennan and his fellow American Edmund Noble.⁷⁸

Free Russia devoted a good deal of attention during its first few years to religious freedom in Russia, a sensitive issue for many of its readers, particularly those from a nonconformist background. It printed many pieces describing the harsh treatment of non-Orthodox Christian groups, including the Stundists, evangelical protestants whose doctrine and practice was closely related to the German Mennonites.⁷⁹ The paper also subsequently covered the plight of the Doukhobors after it was dramatically raised by Tolstoi.⁸⁰ Numerous articles condemned the harsh treatment of the country's Jewish population, including a long piece by Stepniak in the second number, deploring 'the disgraceful' antisemitism of the tsarist government.⁸¹ *Free Russia* also devoted significant attention to the parlous situation of the Russian peasantry, particularly during the famine that swept through the countryside in 1891-92, which led to hundreds of thousands of deaths. The tsarist government's response was widely condemned as inadequate, both in Russia and beyond, and the SFRF sent two 'commissioners' to investigate the situation. It also set up a fund to aid relief efforts.⁸² The editorial policy of *Free Russia* was, in short, carefully designed to appeal to the nonconformist-humanitarian instincts that characterised so many of its readers. Stepniak and

77 Opening editorial, *Free Russia* (1 April 1892).

78 See, for example, Edmund Noble, *The Russian Revolt: Its Causes, Condition and Prospects* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1885).

79 See, for example, G. Lazarev, 'The History of Elisey Sukach, the Stundist', *Free Russia* (1 May 1893). For a very helpful discussion of how concern about religious freedom related to broader humanitarian issues, see Kelly, *British Humanitarian Activity in Russia*, 85-111.

80 For a brief overview of Tolstoi's intervention, see, for example, Nina and James Kolesnikoff, 'Leo Tolstoy and the Doukhobors', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 20, suppl. 1 (1978), 37-44.

81 Stepniak, 'The Jews in Russia', *Free Russia* (1 September 1890).

82 For an excellent discussion of responses in Britain to the famine, see Kelly, *British Humanitarian Activity*, 53-84. See, too, Richard Robbins, *Famine in Russia, 1891-1892: The Russian Government Responds to a Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975).

Volkhovskii were both astute enough to craft the 'pitch' of the paper in ways that would encourage its readers to see the situation in Russia through a sympathetic lens.

The articles in *Free Russia* were regularly mentioned in the mainstream press, both national and local, which helped to increase the paper's influence. The creation of the SFRF in 1890 had also been widely reported, usually with approval, and in the years that followed many newspapers routinely carried accounts of meetings held by the Society both in London and the provinces.⁸³ Supporters used articles and letters in the press to reassure readers that the Society was run by such respectable figures as Spence Watson, who would never sanction the use of its funds 'to support offences against morality, law and order'.⁸⁴ Despite such positive coverage, though, membership of the SFRF never rose above a few hundred. Sales of *Free Russia* were generally disappointing (and declined further as time went by). Volkhovskii told Kennan at the end of 1890 that five thousand copies of *Free Russia* were printed, but it is not clear how many were sold rather than distributed *gratis*, while the print run was sharply reduced soon afterwards.⁸⁵ Financial woes were to preoccupy supporters of the 'cause' right down to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.

Stepniak's lengthy visit to America, in the first half of 1891, was prompted by his long-standing conviction that successfully mobilising international opinion against the tsarist government depended on increasing support there (not least as source of funds). He had suggested to Kennan two years earlier that funds should be raised in the USA to establish a new journal to provide 'active and direct assistance to those who are fighting at such awful disadvantages for the cause of Russian emancipation'.⁸⁶ Stepniak's 1891 trip was largely designed to build on this earlier proposal. He told Kennan during his visit that 'English soil' was 'violently not favourable' to promoting the 'cause', and suggested that *Free Russia* should be transferred to New York and

83 See, for example, the account of a 'packed' meeting in *Daily News* (3 December 1891).

84 *Worcestershire Chronicle* (12 December 1891), letter to the editor by Albert Webb.

85 Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 1, Volkhovskii to Kennan, 1 November 1890.

86 Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 1, Stepniak to Kennan, 26 March 1889.

Volkhovskii should come over with it as the acting editor and ... you should become what the French call *Redacteur Politique*. You will certainly have no difficulty in agreeing with Volk[hovskii] ... you will not be compelled to devote to the paper more time than you can afford. With your name at the head of it, the paper will immediately appeal to a broad public and is sure to be a viable business. Now it seems to me that only if it becomes self-supporting is the paper worth publishing. Otherwise it is simply a waste of time and energy.⁸⁷

Kennan was sceptical, pointing out that while he himself believed in the need for such a paper in America, the times were not propitious for raising the necessary capital.⁸⁸ It also seems unlikely that Volkhovskii would have been ready to return to north America, not least because Vera was settling in Britain, although he did recognise the importance of efforts to build support there.⁸⁹ He told Kennan in April 1891 that while the movement in Britain was 'going on all right ... we simply creep along from month to month. Please, make the Americans understand, that [*Free Russia*] cannot improve either in size or content without having direct pecuniary support from America'.⁹⁰

Such hopes were not to be realised. Stepniak at first had some modest success in building up support for the American version of the SFRF.⁹¹ The American Society drew much of its membership from a small number of families who had been active in the abolitionist movement and subsequently played a role in various reform campaigns. Yet, although it won some support in Boston and New York, attracting several

87 Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 2, Stepniak to Kennan, 29 March 1891.

88 For evidence that Kennan despite his reservations was still keen to ensure the success of *Free Russia* in America, see Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 1, Volkhovskii to Kennan, 1 November 1890. See, too, Tuckton House Archive (Leeds Brotherton Library), MS 1381/77, Gol'denberg to Garrison, 24 October 1891.

89 By May 1891, Stepniak too seems to have recognised that Volkhovskii might be reluctant to edit a North American edition of *Free Russia*, noting that 'I for my part would not press upon him to go: everything that has to succeed must be done willingly and with a cheerful heart'. See Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 2, Stepniak to Kennan, 9 May 1891.

90 Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 2, Volkhovskii to Kennan, 2 April 1891.

91 On the American SFRF see Nechiporuk, *Vo imia nigilizma*, passim; Travis, *Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship*, 195–248. For a more general discussion of American attitudes towards Russia in this period, see David S. Foglesong, *The American Mission and the "Evil Empire": The Crusade for a "Free Russia" since 1881* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 7–33.

high-profile figures like Mark Twain,⁹² the Society struggled to acquire real momentum. Membership seldom rose to more than two hundred or so. Stepniak corresponded regularly with influential figures in the American Society—including Francis Garrison, Edmund Noble and Lillie Chace—but even his energy could not build widespread popular support for the ‘cause’. The Society published an American edition of *Free Russia*, although it mainly reprinted articles from the English version, along with extra pieces judged to be of particular interest to American readers. George Kennan himself appears to have been decidedly ambivalent about the American edition of *Free Russia*. Although he was supportive in the early days, giving advice about questions of pricing and distribution to Lazar’ Gol’denberg,⁹³ who oversaw the production of the paper in New York, he privately doubted whether members of the American SFRF possessed the expertise to build on his work raising interest in Russian affairs. He also believed that the paper should be produced in Russian as well as English, to increase its circulation both inside the Tsarist Empire and among émigré communities abroad, and by 1893 he was actively raising money for a new publication.⁹⁴ Although he discussed the project with Stepniak and Volkhovskii on a trip to Europe, Kennan seems to have been oblivious to the problems that his plans would pose to *Free Russia* on both sides of the Atlantic, not least by increasing their financial challenges still further.

While the US Senate’s ratification of a new version of the extradition treaty with Russia early in 1893 provoked significant protest across the country, and for a time held out the prospect of providing new life to the ‘cause’,⁹⁵ the Society’s energetic campaign against the treaty ultimately had little impact. Edmund Noble noted at the end of the year that the

92 Mark Twain told Stepniak that he had read *Underground Russia* with ‘a deep and burning interest’. See Stepniak-Kravchinskii, *V Londonskoi emigratsii*, 298 (Samuel Clements to Stepniak, 23 April 1891). For a longer discussion of Twain’s relationship with the American SFRF, see John Andreas Fuchs, ‘Ein Yankee am Hofe des Zaren: Mark Twain und die *Friends of Russian Freedom*’, *Forum für osteuropäische Ideen und Zeitgeschichte*, 15, 2 (2013), 69–86.

93 Tuckton House Archive (Leeds Brotherton Library), MS 1381/163, Kennan to Gol’denberg, 30 July 1890; MS 1381/174, Kennan to Gol’denberg, 22 October 1890.

94 Tuckton House Archive (Leeds Brotherton Library), MS 1381/233, Kennan to Gol’denberg, 9 May 1893.

95 For examples of mass protest meetings and lectures, see *Buffalo Commercial* (20 March 1893); *Boston Globe* (15 June 1893). For a report of Volkhovskii’s attack on the treaty in a lecture in Britain, see *Chicago Tribune* (2 March 1893).

interest provoked by the publication of Kennan's articles in *Century Magazine* a few years earlier was 'dying out'.⁹⁶ The US edition of *Free Russia* never sold many copies and finally folded in 1894.⁹⁷ The reasons for the failure of the American movement were many, but Kennan was not alone in thinking that the Russian revolutionary movement was too bound up in the public mind with political extremism and violence. Mark Twain's celebrated outburst of 'Thank God for dynamite', which he made after attending one of Kennan's lectures, was not shared by most of his compatriots.⁹⁸ The association of 'immigrants' and 'violence' was damaging at a time when nativist sentiment was becoming a pronounced feature of American life. It was also a challenge faced by Stepniak and Volkhovskii back in London as they tried to make the 'cause' respectable in the eyes of the British public.

Volkhovskii wrote many of the unsigned articles that appeared in *Free Russia* in the first half of the 1890s highlighting the fate of those arrested or exiled by the tsarist regime. His reports focused on the treatment of prisoners and exiles, rather than their actions and beliefs, typically arguing that the victims were opposed to violence and condemned simply for demanding reforms that would be unexceptional in a country like Britain. In May 1892, Volkhovskii described a recent meeting in St Petersburg, where a group of 'workmen ... assembled to celebrate the First of May as the holiday of the working people ... and to proclaim the rights of labour in Russia and her solidarity in political and social aspirations with the rest of the civilised world'.⁹⁹ He went on to describe how the speakers—whose 'plain common sense' shone through their sometimes 'clumsy phraseology'—traced their genealogy back to 'the educated Russians of the sixties and seventies who were called in Russia "revolutionists", and abroad "nihilists", and who created a whole political movement in their country'. Volkhovskii

96 Tuckton House Archive (Leeds Brotherton Library), MS 1381/301, Noble to Gol'denberg, 6 December 1893.

97 On the difficult financial position of the American edition of *Free Russia*, see Tuckton House Archive (Leeds Brotherton Library), MS 1381/89, Garrison to Gol'denberg, 20 April 1892; MS 1381/92, Gol'denberg to Garrison, 23 April 1892; MS 1381/125, Garrison to Gol'denberg, 11 December 1893.

98 'The Movement in America', *Free Russia* (1 September 1890). Further useful information can be found in Louise J. Budd, 'Twain, Howells, and the Boston Nihilists', *New England Quarterly*, 32, 3 (1959), 351–71.

99 F. Volkhovskiy, 'May-Day Celebrations in Russia', *Free Russia* (1 May 1892).

praised the speakers for favouring 'evolutionist methods' to bring about change: 'by the ballot, the press, public agitation, organization'. The article was calculated to re-enforce in the minds of readers of *Free Russia* that the Russian opposition movement was shaped above all by a desire for political freedom.

In reality, of course, the revolutionary movement of the 1860s and 1870s included numerous figures who were convinced that change could only come to Russia through violence. And even participants in more 'moderate' groups, like the Chaikovtsy, openly or tacitly recognised that a popular uprising could never be entirely bloodless. Such subtleties were doubtless lost on readers of *Free Russia*, who were encouraged to see the Russian revolutionary movement through a kind of 'Whig' prism, as one that sought the rights and liberties taken for granted in countries like Britain. It was a language that Volkhovskii sometimes even used in private correspondence. When he wrote to Kennan in the spring of 1891, acknowledging a cheque for £25 to help 'comrades lingering in penal servitude in Siberia', he asked him to pass on thanks to 'those generous Americans who, enjoying personal freedom and welfare, thought it their moral duty to assist their brethren in mankind who, in another country, suffer because of having honestly served the cause of truth and honesty'.¹⁰⁰

The difficulty of reassuring cautious supporters of the 'cause' was made more challenging by developments in continental Europe. While 'Fenian fire' had provoked most concern in Britain during the 1870s and 1880s,¹⁰¹ by the start of the 1890s 'anarchism' was becoming the new *bête noire*, seeming to threaten social and political order across Europe and America. London became home to significant numbers of anarchist exiles during the 1880s and 1890s, particularly from France and Italy,¹⁰²

100 Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 2, Volkhovskii to Kennan, 2 April 1891.

101 Christy Campbell, *Fenian Fire. The British Government Plot to Assassinate Queen Victoria* (London: Harper Collins, 2002) argues that the best-known plot was in fact orchestrated from within the British state. For a broader discussion, see Niall Whelehan, *The Dynamiters: Irish Nationalism and Political Violence in the Wider World, 1867–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

102 See Constance Bantman, *The French Anarchists in London, 1890–1914: Exile and Transformation in the First Globalisation* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013); Pietro Di Paola, *The Knights Errant of Anarchy. London and the Italian Anarchist Diaspora (1880–1917)* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013). A lively if somewhat idiosyncratic discussion of the European revolutionary movement

and although political extremism was less globalised than sometimes imagined, much of the British press treated anarchist violence as an alien phenomenon that found little resonance in British political culture.¹⁰³ Such a language also tended to lump together foreign radicals in an undifferentiated way that associated Russian ‘revolutionaries’ with the kind of bombings and assassinations seen in cities across Europe throughout the final decade of the nineteenth century.

Free Russia was forced to address the question as early as its second issue, when it reported on the trial in Paris of a number of ‘so-called Russian dynamiters’, who were caught building explosives supposedly for use either in Russia or in an attack on the Tsar should he visit the French capital.¹⁰⁴ An article in the paper bitterly attacked the French government for using the affair to ‘ingratiate themselves with the Russian government’ by taking action against ‘revolutionaries’ working to destroy tsarism. It also suggested that the Russian police had been ‘able to have their own way in Paris, as if it were a Russian provincial town’, and noted that a ‘provocating agent’ paid by the Russian government had played ‘a conspicuous part’ in events.¹⁰⁵ It was a shrewd analysis. Petr Rachkovskii, head of the Foreign Agency of the *Okhrana* in Paris, had employed an *agent provocateur* named Abraham Hekkelman (*pseud.* Landezen) to persuade the conspirators to manufacture explosive devices, in the hope that the French authorities would on discovering the plot take a harder line towards enemies of the Tsar in the French capital.¹⁰⁶ While the author of the *Free Russia* article on ‘The Paris

during this period can be found in Alex Butterworth, *The World that Never Was: A True Story of Dreamers, Schemers, Anarchists and Secret Agents* (London: Bodley Head, 2010).

- 103 For a useful discussion of how press coverage of anarchism in Britain shaped opinion, see Haia Shpayer-Makov, ‘Anarchism in British Public Opinion, 1880–1914’, *Victorian Studies*, 31, 4 (1988), 487–516. As noted earlier in this chapter, though, Petr Kropotkin attracted remarkably positive press coverage in Britain despite his professed anarchism, perhaps reflecting a pervasive sense that an anarchist drawn from the ranks of the nobility, who was comfortable in ‘polite society’, was less threatening than the anonymous ‘others’ who inhabited the run-down clubs and meeting rooms of Soho and the East End.
- 104 For a discussion of the Paris ‘plot’, see Butterworth, *The World That Never Was*, 264–71.
- 105 ‘The Paris Trial’, *Free Russia* (1 September 1890).
- 106 For details of Rachkovskii’s time in Paris, see Frederic Zuckerman, ‘Policing the Russian Emigration in Paris, 1880–1914: The Twentieth Century as the Century of Political Police’, *French History and Civilisation*, 2 (2009), 218–27. For a broader

Trial' could not be familiar with all the details of the affair, they were astute enough to recognise that it signalled the Russian government's determination to make it harder for its opponents to find refuge abroad. The article was probably written by Volkhovskii shortly after his arrival in London. He certainly recognised that such incidents could do great harm to the 'cause', telling Kennan in November 1890 that it was still widely believed in Britain that *Free Russia* and the SFRF were animated by principles 'analogous with the Russian dynamiters'.¹⁰⁷

The arrest of the Walsall anarchists in 1892 raised more immediate challenges for members of the London emigration, given that the affair took place in Britain itself. The circumstances behind the plot remain somewhat murky, although once again it was prompted by the use of an *agent provocateur*, a French anarchist Auguste Coulon, who was employed by Inspector William Melville of the Special Branch (Melville was to become something of a nemesis for Russian revolutionaries in Britain over the next few years).¹⁰⁸ The group, which included several Britons, planned to manufacture bombs reportedly destined for use in Russia. The trial of the participants inevitably attracted a good deal of press attention, given the sensational nature of the charges,¹⁰⁹ and *Free Russia* once again worked hard to persuade its readers that the whole affair should not diminish the integrity of the Russian opposition movement. It published a short article noting that one of the accused, Fred Charles,

discussion of the Russian secret police abroad, see the same author's *The Tsarist Secret Police Abroad: Policing Europe in a Modernising World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). See, too, V. S. Brachev, *Zagranichnaia agentura departamenta politicii (1883–1917)* (St Petersburg: Stomma, 2001). For a fascinating if not entirely accurate summary of Rachkovskii's career, including his involvement in revolutionary activities, see SR Party Archive, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, henceforth SR Party Archive (Amsterdam), 1048 ('Karera Rachkovskago'). For a still valuable discussion of the foreign activities of the Okhrana, including the work of Rachkovskii, see Ben B. Fisher (ed.), *Okhrana. The Paris Operations of the Russian Secret Police* (Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 1997), which contains a series of declassified articles first written in the 1960s. See too the account based on the findings of a Commission established in 1917 by the Provisional Government to examine the activities of the Okhrana abroad, V. K. Agafonov, *Zagranichnaia okhranka* (Petersburg: Kniga, 1918).

107 Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 1, Volkhovskii to Kennan, 1 November 1890.

108 On the case of the Walsall anarchists, see Andrew Cook, *M. MI5's First Spymaster* (London: Tempus, 2004), 87–93; Butterworth, *The World That Never Was*, 297–300.

109 See, for example, the summary of the trial in the *Daily Telegraph* (5 April 1892).

had said that he was happy to be involved in the manufacture of explosives since he thought they were destined for use in Russia rather than Britain. The author of the unsigned article—again almost certainly Volkhovskii—noted sarcastically that:

We are very much obliged to Citizen Charles for his touching solicitude for Russia (though we would have entreated him to leave her well alone), and we fully endorse his implicit condemnation of the use of violence in this country ... As a warning to others, whatever be your opinion of the use of bombs in Russia, the moment you hear of their being manufactured *in England* you may say with certainty that Russia's spies and *agents provocateurs* are at the bottom of it. Some fools may become their prey.¹¹⁰

The wording was designed to reassure readers that the struggle for Russian freedom would not spill over onto the streets of Britain. Yet the phrase 'whatever be your opinion of the use of bombs in Russia' hinted at the argument long advanced by Stepniak, and tacitly accepted by Volkhovskii, that terrorism could be ethical if it was directed to resisting oppression and promoting liberty (as they believed had been the case with *Narodnaia volia*). It was a balancing act designed not to offend the religious and political sensitivities of readers, while acknowledging that bringing about change in Russia could demand actions that would seem morally reprehensible to many in a country like Britain. *Free Russia* throughout the 1890s effectively presented terrorism as an 'oriental' response to an 'oriental' despotism—but one in which 'the terrorists' were fighting for political reforms that were occidental in character.

Free Russia was on more comfortable ground when discussing Russian literature rather than terrorism. Volkhovskii was instrumental in strengthening the paper's literary 'turn', although the process itself had a distinctly political colour, since he hoped that introducing readers to the richness of Russian culture would show how autocratic rule had not suppressed the creative instincts of the Russian people. The burgeoning interest in Russian literature also provided Volkhovskii himself with an entrée to literary society in his new homeland. A year after arriving

110 'The Walsall Bombs', *Free Russia* (1 May 1892). Stepniak had told Kennan some years earlier that foreigners should avoid becoming directly involved in the struggle against tsarism. See Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Box 1, Stepniak to Kennan, 26 March 1889.

in Britain, he met the literary critic Edward Garnett, who worked as a reader for various publishers including T. H. Unwin. Garnett had along with his wife Constance already developed a considerable interest in Russian writers including Turgenev and Tolstoi (which they read in French translations).¹¹¹ Constance Garnett later recalled how:

One day in 1891 Edward on coming back from London told me 'I have met a man after your heart—a Russian exile—and I have asked him down for a weekend'. This was Felix Volkovsky, who had recently escaped from Siberia and he soon became a great friend. He had no home and ... it was arranged that he should make our cottage his headquarters. He insisted on paying for his board (unlike most Russians) and brought his little girl, Vera, a charming child rather pathetic—about eight years old. He was a curious mixture—on one side a fanatical almost Puritanical revolutionary, pedantic and strict, ready to go to the stake rather than disown or disguise opinions really of no practical importance ... on the other hand, pleasure-loving, vain, rather intriguing, a tremendous 'ladies man', a first-rate actor, fond of dancing. One day he was a pathetic broken-down old man—very sorry for himself—the next day he would look 20 years younger, put a rose in his button-hole, and lay himself out—very successfully—to please and entertain. His terrible deafness—the result of seven years imprisonment in the Peter Paul fortress—made him a tiring companion. But he did me two great services—for which I shall always feel grateful. He made me go out for rather long walks every day ... to the great benefit of my health... and he suggested my learning Russian and gave me a grammar and a dictionary ... Also it was through him I came to know Stepniak.¹¹²

Volkhovskii gave Constance various stories by Ivan Goncharov to translate,¹¹³ and was so impressed by the results that he handed them to Stepniak, who agreed that she had a rare ability to capture the spirit of Russian literature in English prose.¹¹⁴ Over the next twenty-five years,

111 On the Garnetts, see Helen Smith, *The Uncommon Reader: A Life of Edward Garnett* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2017); Richard Garnett, *Constance Garnett: A Heroic Life* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1991).

112 Garnett Family Papers, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University, henceforth Garnett Papers (Northwestern University), Box 14, Folder 5 (Constance Garnett memoir notes), 58–59.

113 Garnett Papers (Northwestern University), Box 14, Folder 5 (Constance Garnett memoir notes), 78.

114 Garnett, *Constance Garnett*, 81. For a discussion of how Constance's background helped shape her interest in Russia, see the paper by Colin Higgins, 'The Guttural Sorrow of the Refugees—Constance Garnett and Felix Volkhovskii in the British

Constance became a prolific translator of Russian literature. Her work played a pivotal role in facilitating the Russia craze by making available in English works of writers including Dostoevskii, Tolstoi and Chekhov.¹¹⁵

For Edward's sister Olive, who regularly met Volkhovskii at her brother's cottage in Surrey, he served as a kind of emblematic figure whose *persona* shaped her view of all things Russian:

It seems that it is a Russian characteristic to live in a world of theories and talk of them with great ease as one would ask for a piece of bread and butter. Volkhovskii indeed breathes theories. I think this must be good for the national character, and it certainly trains the mind and makes life much more interesting ... When Volkhovskii is here we live in quite a little Russian world. It is so curious to wake from Siberia to a Surrey lane.¹¹⁶

Although Olive and Constance both found the Russian a tiring guest, given his deafness, they were grateful for the part he played in opening their eyes to his country's culture. The Garnett family in turn gave Volkhovskii contacts with literary London. Edward Garnett introduced him to Thomas Unwin, who encouraged Volkhovskii to write his

Museum', *Materialy X Mezhdunarodnogo seminara perevodchikov*, <https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/items/ee5b06e9-4ba2-43e4-a40f-4c1b4ed29f96>.

- 115 For an important book examining the impact of Russian culture on British culture, including extensive discussion of the role of members of the London émigré community, see Rebecca Beasley, *Russomania. Russian Culture and the Creation of British Modernism, 1881–1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). Another lucid discussion of the relationship between the literary and political activities of Russian emigres in London in the late 19th century can be found in Carol L. Peeker, 'Reading Revolution. Russian Émigrés and the Reception of Russian Literature in Britain c. 1890–1905' (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2006). Further useful material on Anglo-Russian literary relations can be found in W. Gareth Jones (ed.), *Tolstoi and Britain* (Oxford: Berg, 1995); W. J. Leatherbarrow (ed.), *Dostoevskii and Britain* (Oxford: Berg, 1995); Patrick Waddington (ed.), *Ivan Turgenev and Britain* (Oxford: Berg, 1995).
- 116 Garnett Papers (Northwestern University), Box 21, Olive Garnett to Richard Garnett, 17 November 1891. Olive made numerous references to Volkhovskii in her diary. See Barry C. Johnson, *Tea and Anarchy! The Bloomsbury Diary of Olive Garnett, 1890–1893* (London: Bartlett's Press, 1989). A valuable discussion of Olive's sympathies with Russian radicals in Britain can be found in Anat Vernitski, 'Russian Revolutionaries and English Sympathizers in 1890s London. The Case of Olive Garnett and Sergei Stepniak', *Journal of European Studies*, 35, 3 (2005), 299–314. A useful discussion of Olive Garnett, including material relating to her views of Volkhovskii, can be found in Frances Reading, 'Olive Garnett and Anglo-Russian Cultural Relations from the Crimean War to the Russian Revolutions, 1855–1917' (PhD thesis, University of Kent, 2022).

autobiography, although the project was never completed.¹¹⁷ Unwin also commissioned him to translate some of Vladimir Korolenko's short stories,¹¹⁸ several of which were serialised in *Free Russia*, along with one of Volkhovskii's own pieces 'The "New Life": A Siberian Story' (a translation of his 1884 story 'New Year's Eve'). Volkhovskii also provided an introduction to the English translation of Hermann von Samson-Himmelstern's *Russia under Alexander III*.¹¹⁹ In 1892, Volkhovskii published a translation of some of the children's tales he had written many years earlier, hoping both to earn money and pique the interest of a younger readership in Russia.¹²⁰ He noted sadly in the epilogue to the book that he had originally told the stories to his daughter since her mother was too weary to think up any of her own. The throwaway line would have meant little to Volkhovskii's readers, who knew nothing of his second wife's breakdown and suicide, but his words inevitably cast a little retrospective light on the human cost of exile.

Volkhovskii's friendship with the Garnett family introduced him to a milieu characterised by a distinctive mix of literary ambition and political radicalism. It was through the Garnetts that he first met Ford Maddox Ford and members of the Rossetti family.¹²¹ Ford knew the Garnetts and the Rossettis from childhood in Bloomsbury—the Rossettis were cousins—and was fascinated by Russian literature from his youth. His sister Juliet was later to marry the Russian émigré David Soskice, who played an important role in the SFRE, editing *Free Russia* when Volkhovskii was living abroad in 1904–06. Three of the Rossetti children—Olivia, Arthur and Helen—founded an anarchist journal *The Torch* in 1891, at the precocious ages of, respectively, sixteen, fourteen

117 Volkhovskii Papers (Houghton Library), MS Russ 51, Folder 359, Unwin to Volkhovskii, 1 March 1895; 2 May 1895.

118 F. V. Volkhovskii and V. G. Korolenko, *Russian Stories Vol. I. Makar's Dream and Other Stories* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1892).

119 Hermann von Samson-Himmelstern, *Russia under Alexander III. And in the Preceding Period* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893).

120 Felix Volkhovskii, *A China Cup and Other Stories for Children* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1892).

121 Some insights into the family life of the young Ford Maddox Ford (at that time Ford Maddox Heuffer), can be gleaned at second hand from the book by his sister Juliet M. Soskice, *Chapters from Childhood: Reminiscences from an Artist's Granddaughter* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1922). There are scattered references to the Garnett family in Ford Maddox Ford's own reminiscences *Return to Yesterday* (London: Victor Gollanz, 1931).

and eleven.¹²² Over the next few years, the journal attracted prominent anarchist contributors, including Louise Michel and Enrico Malatesta, and was circulated widely at radical political meetings across the capital. Many years later, Helen and Olivia wrote a fictionalised memoir of this time, *A Girl among the Anarchists*, in which one of the characters was loosely modelled on Volkhovskii.¹²³ During his first few years in London, then, Volkhovskii found himself in a milieu that must have seemed eerily reminiscent of the *kruzhki* he had known back in Russia, in which intense literary and political interests were animated by a critical spirit that sought to transform the world.

While Volkhovskii was a central figure in promoting the 'cause' during the years following his arrival in London, he was—like Stepniak—determined to contribute more directly to the struggle for change, focusing much of his attention on bringing greater unity to the notoriously fissiparous Russian opposition movement. Even before leaving Canada for Britain, Volkhovskii told George Kennan that he believed 'the whole Russian emigration and all the dissatisfied elements of Russia feel the need to unite as quickly as possible for an amicable general course of action and in particular the founding of a free Russian organ in emigration'. He acknowledged that the different factions 'do not know how to come to an agreement', but went on to note, with a certain lack of humility, that:

I stand outside parties and I have many friends in Russia, therefore the eyes of the emigration have inevitably turned to me and I am sure that my presence alone will greatly help the success of the coming together. My position is completely unique and it would be a sin against the cause of Russian freedom to scorn it; moreover even the personal lines of my character are such that, speaking without boastfulness, wherever fate has thrown me—Moscow, Odessa, Stavropol, Tyukalinsk, Tomsk—everywhere I either created a circle or in another form served as a unifying cement between people.¹²⁴

122 For a still valuable account of British anarchism in this period, see John Quail, *The Slow Burning Fuse. The Lost History of the British Anarchists* (London: Paladin, 1978).

123 Isabel Meredith (pseud.), *A Girl among the Anarchists* (London: Duckworth, 1903).

124 Quoted in Donald Senese, 'Felix Volkhovsky in London, 1890–1914', in John Slatter (ed.), *From the Other Shore: Russian Political Emigrants in Britain, 1870–1917* (London: Frank Cass, 1984), 67–78 (74).

Volkhovskii emphasised the importance of fostering greater unity among opposition parties in a letter to Stepniak, written eighteen months later, when staying with the Garnetts at their cottage in Surrey. He took issue with Stepniak's use of the term 'our party' in a manuscript that his old friend had asked him to comment on.¹²⁵ Volkhovskii noted that while many Russian socialists used the term, it was not always clear what was meant by it: 'socialist', 'militant (*voinstvoiuushchaia*) revolutionary', 'old Narodnaia Volia', '*narodniki* [of] 72–74?'. He argued there was no socialist party in Russia, just socialists, and while there were many different groups, each with their own programmes, he and Stepniak did not belong to any of them. Volkhovskii agreed with Stepniak's argument that in the sphere of politics 'our programme is the programme of the Russian liberals', although he questioned his friend's acceptance of the need for a constitutional monarchy, emphasising that the focus should instead be on the principles of 'popular representation, local self-government, and freedom of conscience and a free press'. Above all, though, Volkhovskii believed that opponents of the tsarist autocracy needed to focus on what united them in order to be effective in extracting concessions from the regime.¹²⁶ It echoed the approach he had adopted at a local level twenty years earlier in Odessa, when he had built close relations with liberals in the local Duma, while building an illegal *kruzhok* dedicated to spreading propaganda among workers in the city.

Volkhovskii's letter to Stepniak suggests that he was a more influential actor in the project to create a 'National Front' against autocracy than has sometimes been recognised.¹²⁷ There was indeed something very ambitious, and perhaps even grandiloquent, about articulating such a strategy at a time when the revolutionary movement was becoming increasingly divided between its Marxist and *narodnik* wings.¹²⁸ The development of 'legal' Populism and 'legal' Marxism added to these

125 The manuscript Volkhovskii commented on was almost certainly Stepniak's pamphlet 'Chego nam nuzhno' discussed further below.

126 RGALI, f. 1158, op. 1, ed. khr. 232, Volkhovskii to Stepniak, 26 August 1891.

127 For a discussion of the strategy, see Donald Senese, 'S. M. Kravchinskii and the National Front Against Autocracy', *Slavic Review*, 34, 3 (1975), 506–22.

128 For a lucid discussion of the division, see Andrzej Walicki, *The Controversy over Capitalism: Studies in the Social Philosophy of the Russian Populists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

complexities.¹²⁹ And, to make things more difficult still, the Russian liberals were in the early 1890s too weak and divided to consider developing close relations with revolutionary groups, even if they shared a common objective of working for constitutional reforms.¹³⁰ Any successful attempt to build a united progressive opposition was bound to raise complex ideological and tactical questions, as well as encountering the personal tensions that invariably added to the bitter divisions within the Russian revolutionary movement, both at home and in emigration. Volkhovskii's confidence in such a project was at least in part a reflection of his own lack of interest in the kind of ideological debate that was so important to many members of the Russian revolutionary *intelligentsia*. His impatience was perhaps understandable, but it sometimes blinded him to the scale of the divisions within the Russian opposition movement, and the likely challenges that would need to be faced in overcoming them.

Petr Lavrov in Paris was sceptical both about plans to mobilise international opinion against the tsarist government as well as prospects for achieving any real unity among members of the opposition. While he had in his *Istoricheskie pis'ma* (*Historical Letters*) emphasised the moral duty of the *intelligentsia* to promote the interests and welfare of the *narod*, twenty years of exile had shown him that abstract ethical doctrine

129 On this topic, see Arthur P. Mendel, *Dilemmas of Progress. Legal Marxism and Legal Populism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961); G. N. Mokshin, *Evoliutsiia ideologii legal'nogo narodnichestva v poslednei trety XIX–nachale XX vv.* (Voronezh: Nauchnaia Kniga, 2010).

130 Among the voluminous literature on Russian Liberalism in the nineteenth century see, for example, Anton A. Fedyashin, *Liberals under Autocracy. Modernization and Civil Society in Russia, 1866–1904* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012); Derek Offord, *Portraits of Early Russian Liberals. A Study of the Thought of T. N. Granovsky, V. P. Botkin, P. V. Annenkov, A. V. Druzhinin, and K. D. Kavelin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Randall Poole, 'Nineteenth-Century Russian Liberalism: Ideals and Realities', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 16, 1 (2015), 157–81; Susanna Rabow-Edling, *Liberalism in Pre-Revolutionary Russia. State, Nation, Empire* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019); Vanessa Rampton, *Liberal Ideas in Tsarist Russia. From Catherine the Great to the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Paul Robinson, *Russian Liberalism* (Ithaca, NY: Northern Illinois University Press, 2023); Konstantin I. Shneider, *Mezhdū svobodoi i samoderzhaviem: istoriia rannego russkogo liberalizma* (Perm: Permskii gos. natsional'nyi issledovatel'skii universitet, 2012); Andrzej Walicki, *Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). A useful collection of essays by Russian scholars translated into English can be found in the special edition of *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 60, 2 (2022).

was often a poor guide to action.¹³¹ His critical idealism had in any case been increasingly supplanted by a materialism that emphasised the importance of economic factors in social development. Although he responded positively to Stepniak's initial plans to publish a newspaper intended to win the sympathy of a Western audience for the Russian opposition movement,¹³² Lavrov was by the spring of 1891 anxious that *Free Russia* was focusing too much on the need for constitutional change in Russia, rather than more forcefully supporting the struggle for social and economic revolution.¹³³ It was a view that had been put to him by several prominent exiles, including the veteran London-based *narodovolets* (member of Narodnaia volia) E. A. Serebriakov, who were sceptical about the value of winning support from Western and Russian liberals. Volkhovskii was editing *Free Russia* at the time, as Stepniak was in America, and he urged his old friend to come back to help repair relations with Lavrov.¹³⁴ Stepniak's return eased the tension, for a while, but relations between Lavrov and members of the London emigration remained cool throughout the following decade.

Another important centre in the Russian revolutionary emigration was found in Geneva, where Georgii Plekhanov, Vera Zasulich and Pavel Aksel'rod formed the nucleus of Gruppya 'Osvobozhdenie truda' (Emancipation of Labour Group), which played a pivotal role in the development of Russian Marxism. Plekhanov unlike Zasulich had opposed the use of terror in the 1870s, 'sharing the contempt for political action',¹³⁵ and his subsequent adoption of Marxism represented a

131 Peter Lavrov, *Historical Letters*, trans. James P. Scanlan (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967). Lavrov's views in exile are best understood through the prism of his correspondence, much of which can be found in Boris Sapir (ed.), *Lavrov. Gody emigratsii*, 2 vols (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1974). The evolution of Lavrov's views is also discussed in B. S. Itenberg, *P. L. Lavrov v russkom revoliutsionnom dvizhenii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1988); Philip Pomper, *Peter Lavrov and the Russian Revolutionary Movement* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1972).

132 Stepniak-Kravchinskii, *V Londonskoi emigratsii*, 270–73 (Stepniak to Lavrov, 6 February 1890); 273–74 (Lavrov to Stepniak, 15 February 1890).

133 Stepniak-Kravchinskii, *V Londonskoi emigratsii*, 291–96 (Lavrov to E. E. Lineva, 2 April 1891). A copy of the original letter, in French, can be found in Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 18, Folder 5.

134 Stepniak expressed his views about 'our Paris friends' in a letter to Edward Pease. See Stepniak-Kravchinskii, *V Londonskoi emigratsii*, 301–02 (Stepniak to Pease, late April or early May 1891).

135 Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), II, 330.

continuing rejection of the kind of voluntarism that had found expression in the rise of Narodnaia volia.¹³⁶ Zaslulich had also come to reject terror, a change that was informed not so much by ethical considerations, but rather because she believed that it could not serve as an effective means of creating lasting social and economic change.¹³⁷ Both Plekhanov and Zaslulich respected Stepniak, and had in the early 1880s suggested that he become a member of the Emancipation of Labour Group,¹³⁸ even though he was at the time one of the most prominent defenders of using terror to combat repression. While Stepniak was alive, the members of Group were usually ready to avoid harsh polemics with the London emigration, although relations soured markedly at the end of 1892 when an article appeared in the German edition of *Free Russia* (*Frei Russland*) criticising Marxist Social Democrats for dividing the revolutionary movement.¹³⁹ The gulf between Plekhanov's doctrinal Marxism and the emphasis of Stepniak and Volkhovskii on prioritising unity among opponents of the tsar hindered close relations between the two groups (perhaps ironically given that an alliance between revolutionaries and bourgeoisie could easily be presented as a logical Marxist strategy in a quasi-feudal country like Russia). It was a tension that later exploded after Stepniak's death in 1895.

The commitment of Stepniak and Volkhovskii to building greater unity within the Russian opposition movement was central to the creation of the Russian Free Press Fund (RFPF). Although Stepniak took the lead in setting up the RFPF, Volkhovskii played a more important role over the following years, working with other émigrés including several who were active Chaikovtsy in the early 1870s (Stepniak himself was seldom closely involved in the day-to-day running of the Fund). Chaikovskii

136 On Plekhanov see Samuel H. Baron, *Plekhanov. The Father of Russian Marxism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963); S. V. Tiutiukin, *G. V. Plekhanov. Sud'ba russkogo marksista* (Moscow: Rosspen, 1997).

137 On Zaslulich's move towards Marxism, see Jay Bergman, *Vera Zaslulich: A Biography* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1983), 63–101.

138 Baron, *Plekhanov*, 128. The invitation was apparently made as early as 1883.

139 For details of this incident, see V. Ia. Laverychev, 'Otnoshenie chlenov gruppy "Osvobozhdenie Truda" k burzhuaznomu liberalizmu', in V. Ia. Laverychev (ed.), *Gruppy "Osvobozhdenie Truda" i obshchestvenno-politicheskaia bor'ba v Rossii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1984), 167–95 (esp. 187–88).

was on the committee that ran the RFPF. So too was Leonid Shishko,¹⁴⁰ who had long been close to Stepniak and Chaikovskii, although he spent most of his time in Paris where he ran the Fund's bookshop, among other activities. Other émigrés active in the RFPF included Egor Lazarev, first arrested for participation in the Going to the People movement of 1874, and Lazar' Gol'denberg, a central figure in the student riots of 1869.¹⁴¹ Both Lazarev and Gol'denberg had been closely involved in running the American edition of *Free Russia* before moving to Europe.¹⁴²

Also active in the RFPF was Wilfrid Voinich, a somewhat mercurial Pole, who had fled from exile in Siberia to Britain, where he married Ethel Boole, daughter of the mathematician George Boole (Ethel subsequently played a significant role in helping to run *Free Russia* and translated some of the material published there).¹⁴³ Voinich acted for a time as business manager for the Fund, which ran a bookshop from its offices in Hammersmith, although he was seldom on easy terms with any of his colleagues (his relationship with Volkhovskii became particularly tense).¹⁴⁴ Voinich subsequently opened his own bookshop in central London, and though he continued for a time to help distribute the Fund's literature, his association with the 'fundists' began to fade by

140 On Shishko, see F. Volkhovskii (ed.), *Pamiati Leonida Emmanuilovicha Shishko* (n.p.: Partia Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov, 1910).

141 For Gol'denberg's memories of this time, including his rejection of Nechaev's attempt to use student unrest to foster a wider *bunt*, see Tuckton House Library (Leeds Brotherton Library), MS 1381/18 (typescript of L. Gol'denberg, 'Reminiscences'), 14-18.

142 For a discussion of the two men's activities in America, see Nechiporuk, *Vo imia nihilizma*, passim.

143 For discussion of Ethel's activities during the 1890s see, for example, Taratuta, *Stepniak*, passim. A more detailed account of Ethel's life can be found in Evgeniia Taratuta, *Nash drug Etel' Lilian Voinich* (Moscow: Pravda, 1957). The article appeared as a supplement to the literary journal *Ogonek*. On Voinich's arrival in London, and Volkhovskii's initial (and positive) views about him, see Kennan Papers (Library of Congress), Volkhovskii to Kennan, 1 November 1890. Although Voinich drifted away from members of the Fund in the second half of the 1890s, at least one agent of the *Okhrana* still believed as late as 1906 that he was involved in funding arms shipments to further revolution in Russia. See Okhrana Archive, Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Stanford University, henceforth Okhrana Archive (HIA), Index VIK, Folder 23, Farce to Rachkovskii, 3 February 1906 (microfilm 108).

144 A great deal about Voinich's career in the 1890s remains mysterious. See for example the cryptic letters, including one written on SFRF headed paper, held by the Grolier Club of New York available at https://www.colinmackinnon.com/attachments/Russian_Letters.pdf.

the middle of the 1890s. He was followed as manager by Lazarev, before he moved on to Switzerland in 1896 after eighteen months in post,¹⁴⁵ to be replaced in turn by Gol'denberg, who condemned his predecessor for being too lax in carrying out his duties. The charge may not have been a fair one. Gol'denberg took pride in his practical skills—among other things he spent many years earning a living through installing electric generators—and he had a low opinion of the practical capacities of many of those he worked with.¹⁴⁶ Lazarev had in fact corresponded regularly with Russian revolutionary émigrés across Western Europe and North America, soliciting and editing contributions for various publications, as well as participating in discussions about how the Fund could best support the revolutionary movement in Russia.¹⁴⁷ The RFPF's annual reports suggest that it was reasonably well-managed throughout the 1890s.¹⁴⁸ Its publications certainly proved more lucrative than *Free Russia*, the revenue coming from the sale of books and pamphlets to Russian communities across Europe, although some material was also smuggled into Russia where it found a wide readership. Finances nevertheless remained tight. Volkhovskii had to make efforts throughout the 1890s to borrow money for the Fund from sympathetic Britons.¹⁴⁹

The Fund sold 'classic' radical literature by authors ranging from Herzen to Drahomanov, including some in Polish, as well as publishing many new works (nearly thirty by 1900). The range of these new publications—both in terms of ideology and subject—was

145 For useful material on Lazarev's earlier career, when still in Russia, see E. Lazarev, *Moia zhizn'. Vospominaniia, stati, pis'ma, materialy* (Prague: Tip-ia Legiografiia, 1935). Useful material on his life after moving to Switzerland can be found in N. A. Ekhhina, 'Emigranty, revoliutsionery i koronovannye osoby: "russkaia volost"' E. E. i Iu. A. Lazarevykh v Bozhi nad Klaranom', *Ezhegodnik Doma russkogo zarubezh'ia im. Aleksandra Solzhenitsyna* (2014–15), 20–30.

146 Tuckton House Archive (Leeds Brotherton Archive), MS 1381/26 (typescript of later parts of L. Gol'denberg, 'Reminiscences'), 54–55. Gol'denberg noted in his memoirs that the Committee of the Free Press Fund had sent him a telegram asking him to 'come and save us', adding that when he arrived in London, he found the Fund's premises in Hammersmith in a terrible state of disorder.

147 Some sense of the scale of the Fund's activities, including the material submitted for publication and the role of the individuals associated with it, can be found in Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 8 (various folders); Box 10 (various folders).

148 See, for example, SR Party Archive (Amsterdam), 111 (1893 Report and Accounts for the RFPF).

149 See, for example, Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 8, Folder 3, Lionel Hobhouse to Volkhovskii, 20 May (no year).

strikingly eclectic. During its ten-year life, the Fund published Vladimir Burtsev's *Za sto let (Over a Hundred Years)*, which contained a valuable documentary record of the Russian revolutionary movement, as well as books and pamphlets on such subjects as religious persecution and the censorship of Tolstoi's works. S. L. Dickstein contributed a Marxist exposition of the labour theory of value complete with an afterword by Plekhanov. Also published by the Fund was a Russian translation of Eduard Bernstein's revisionist *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus (The Prerequisites for Socialism)*. The choice of publications reflected the ideological tolerance that the fundists believed was necessary to create a broad opposition movement.

Among the earliest of the Fund's publications were pamphlets by Stepniak and Volkhovskii calling for closer relations between revolutionaries and liberals. Stepniak's 1892 *Chego nam nuzhno? (What Do We Need?)* provided a programmatic statement of its author's commitment to building a broad opposition that bridged the (uncertain) gap between revolutionaries and liberals, while remaining firmly committed to the principle that 'socialism is the strongest moral force in modern society'.¹⁵⁰ He urged all revolutionary factions to accept the principle that political change should precede radical social and economic reform ('regarding the introduction of socialism into life we are evolutionists ... We believe that political liberty gives all that is needed for the solution of the social question'). Stepniak also argued that political change could best be secured by members of the *intelligentsia* committed to decisive action,¹⁵¹ rather than peasants or workers, and urged liberals to recognise that violence was often a necessary means of securing political concessions. The pamphlet, despite its comparatively moderate tone, defended the principle that 'bombs and dynamite' could be vital in bringing about political change.

150 S. Stepniak, *Chego nam nuzhno? i Nachalo kontsa* (London: Izdanie Fonda Russkoi Vol'noi Pressy, 1892).

151 For a brief but useful discussion of Stepniak's changing views, including his scepticism about the revolutionary potential of the *narod* throughout the last twenty years of his life, see A. I. Kondratenko, 'Ot khozhdeniia v narod—k sozdaniiu fonda vol'noi russkoi pressy. S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii, ego politicheskie vzgliady i propagandistskaia deiatel'nost' v kontekste obshchestvennogo dvizheniia v Rossii 1870–1890-kh godov', *Istoriia: Fakty i Simboly*, 3, 12 (2017), 62–72.

It was almost certainly the manuscript of *Chego nam nuzhno?* that Volkhovskii was commenting on a few months earlier when he suggested that Stepniak should make it clear that he did not belong to any specific party or faction. The pamphlet was nevertheless an expression of both men's views as well as the fundists more generally. The same was true of Volkhovskii's 1894 pamphlet *Chemu uchit 'Konstitutsiia gr. Loris-Melikova'?* (*What Are the Lessons of the Loris-Melikov Constitution?*), a reference to the political reforms put forward by the Minister of Interior in 1881, which were abandoned after the assassination of Aleksandr II.¹⁵² Volkhovskii argued that the refusal of Aleksandr III to take forward the reforms showed how liberal opinion had been mistaken in refusing to support Narodnaia volia. He echoed Stepniak in calling for a political revolution, arguing that the government would only make concessions if it was scared by the 'bogeyman' (*buk*) of revolution.¹⁵³ In acknowledging that violence might be needed to force the tsarist government into making concessions, both Stepniak and Volkhovskii showed themselves ready to write in terms that they would probably have avoided—or at least softened—when addressing a British or American audience.

The Russian Free Press Fund also produced a fly-sheet—*Letuchie listki*—that appeared regularly from the end of 1893. It was edited by Volkhovskii, who often included long editorial articles on subjects ranging from international politics to observations about the rule of Nicholas II,¹⁵⁴ although Nikolai Chaikovskii became increasingly involved in its production during the second half of the 1890s. The first number noted that 'in our hands we have accumulated many fragments of information, obtained from both Russian correspondents and the foreign press, which we are not able to publish in the form of pamphlets'.¹⁵⁵ The *listki* were designed to collate this material, presenting readers with news about developments in Russia in general, and the opposition movement in particular. The factual tone was intended to preserve its independence in the fractious debates that raged within the Russian

152 F. Volkhovskii, *Chemu uchit 'Konstitutsiia gr. Loris-Melikova'?* (London: Russian Free Press Fund, 1894).

153 For a somewhat different interpretation, that focuses more on Volkhovskii's positive views of liberal reforms, see Senese, *Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, 76–77.

154 F. Volkhovskii, 'Gladston i imperatorskaia diplomatiia', *Letuchie listki*, 31 (23 April 1896); 'Koronatsiia', *Letuchie listki*, 32 (20 May 1896).

155 *Letuchie listki*, 1 (25 December 1893).

opposition movement both in Russia and abroad. The *listki* typically had a print run of a few thousand, although on occasion the number rose to 10,000, probably more than any other émigré publication. Volkhovskii sent copies to senior officials in Petersburg in the hope of appealing to the more liberal *chinovniki*.¹⁵⁶ The *listki* circulated widely both in Russia and abroad, providing an important source of information about revolutionary developments inside the Tsarist Empire, although its silence on tactical and ideological questions did little to moderate the sceptical view among some émigrés about the ‘National Front’ strategy pursued by Stepniak and Volkhovskii.¹⁵⁷

The growing number of pages in each edition of the *listki* suggests that its editors had no problem obtaining information (a good deal was translated and included in more digestible form in *Free Russia*).¹⁵⁸ Some material was sent from Russia through the regular mail. Volkhovskii used a series of aliases—‘Ivan’, Jenkins, Miss Privik—to deceive the tsarist authorities so that they would not open letters and packages addressed to him.¹⁵⁹ The same was true of other members of the Fund. Many Britons who were sympathetic to the ‘cause’ also received and forwarded correspondence.¹⁶⁰ A good deal of material was sent via third countries such as Sweden.¹⁶¹ Some was sent in code.¹⁶² The records of the *Okhrana* show that such ruses were not always successful. The Russian secret police were adept in the art of perustration, intercepting letters before forwarding them seemingly unopened, in order to fool the recipient into assuming they had a secure means of communication

156 *Letuchie listki*, 15 (9 February 1895).

157 The best account of this strategy remains Senese, ‘S. M. Kravchinskii and the National Front against Autocracy’.

158 Senese by contrast suggests that members of the London emigration sometimes struggled to fill the pages of the *listki* although without much evidence to support the claim. See Senese, *Stepniak-Kravchinskii*, 83.

159 Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 17, Folder 9 (Archivist’s note).

160 See, for example, Volkhovskii Papers (Houghton Library), MS Russ 51, 345, Cecily Sidgwick to Volkhovskii (n.d.).

161 Michael Futrell, *Northern Underground. Episodes of Russian Revolutionary Transport and Communications through Scandinavia and Finland, 1863–1917* (London: Faber, 1963), 37.

162 For an example of the code sheet used to decrypt information, along with other useful material about the transportation of illegal material, see Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 10, Folder 6.

which the authorities could then ‘tap’ into in the future.¹⁶³ The *Okhrana* also had more code-breaking expertise than any other police force in the world. The vulnerability of the mail meant that a good deal of material was carried out of Russia by tourists and students travelling to Western Europe. Exile communities across Europe also sometimes forwarded information to London. The sheer quantity of information published in the *listki* shows that information continued to flow out of Russia despite the best efforts of the tsarist authorities to maintain a ‘fence around the empire’.

It was still more challenging to smuggle printed material *into* Russia. Some copies of *Free Russia* and *Letuchie listki* were printed on thin paper that made them easier to conceal in luggage.¹⁶⁴ Volkhovskii had in the 1870s played an important role, along with Chudnovskii, in the clandestine import of illegal books and journals into Russia, either shipped through Odessa or smuggled across the frontier with the Habsburg Empire. Twenty years later, the RFPF revived the Odessa corridor. Both Wilfrid and Ethel Voinich had links with Ukrainians living in the Austro-Hungarian Empire which they used to smuggle literature across the Russian border. Ethel visited Lvov (Ukr. L'viv) on several occasions, where she met Ukrainian nationalists including Mykhailo Pavlik and Mykhailo Drahomanov, who introduced her to individuals ready to take material into Russia.¹⁶⁵ Volkhovskii also established cordial relations with radicals in Sweden and Finland—the latter was at the time part of the Tsarist Empire—who helped to smuggle printed material into Russia with the help of trade unionists in north-east England.¹⁶⁶ Both the Northern Underground and the Odessa corridor were subsequently used in the early twentieth century to smuggle guns and explosives into Russia, an enterprise in which several members of the London emigration were involved, but in the 1890s the contraband

163 For a detailed account of the development of these techniques in Russia over many centuries, see V. S. Izmozik, “*Chernye kabinety*”. *Istoriia rossiiskoi perliustratsii. XVIII-nachalo XX veka* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2015).

164 Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 17, Folder 6, Volkhovskii to Aström, 10 February 1895.

165 Taratuta, *Nash drug Etel' Lilian Voinich*, 20 ff.

166 For the role of trade unionists in Britain in assisting the dispatch of illegal material to Russia, see Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 10, Folder 5, Tom Chambers to Volkhovskii, 29 September 1897; J. H. Bell to Volkhovskii, 11 October 1897; Volkhovskii to Bell (n.d.).

seems to have been limited to printed works. The cost of such operations was prohibitive, particularly given that it was virtually impossible for the Fund to receive payment from Russia, but Volkhovskii was confident that material produced in London by the Fund played an important role in helping to build effective revolutionary networks.

The dispatch of money to Russia raised—if anything—still more difficult challenges. The SFRF from its inception launched appeals for funds to help alleviate the victims of famine in Russia. Other appeals were made for money to support the families of political prisoners. Many British supporters of the ‘cause’ were anxious that their donations should not be used to support terrorism or other forms of violence.¹⁶⁷ The surviving records of the Society do not give any insight into how the money was distributed, but such concerns were almost certainly not ill-founded. When Constance Garnett first visited Russia in 1894, she took with her both letters and cash that Stepniak asked her to distribute, although it is not clear who received the money (her son later wrote that while the money was ostensibly designed for humanitarian relief, there was some doubt whether it would ‘get into the right hands’).¹⁶⁸ Other visitors also acted as financial couriers. There was no way of knowing how such money would be used. The SFRF noted in its appeals to the British public that donors could specify how they wanted their gifts to be spent, but even if the money was not used to finance any form of violent action, the boundary between ‘humanitarian’ and ‘political’ activities was at best uncertain. The accounting distinctions in the Society’s records were in any case almost meaningless. Funds that found their way to Russia were not managed in ways familiar to donors accustomed to the more transparent finances of a club or society in late Victorian Britain.

The plans put in motion by Stepniak and Volkhovskii to develop a ‘National Front’ against autocracy were naïve in underestimating the personal and ideological divisions within the Russian opposition movement. While it was in principle reasonable to hope that a focus on constitutional reform could alleviate the concerns of moderates, most Russian liberals were well aware that many of their putative revolutionary

167 See, for example, Volkhovskii Papers (Houghton Library), MS Russ 51, Folder 345, Cecily Sidgwick to Volkhovskii (n.d.).

168 David Garnett, *The Golden Echo* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1954), 11.

allies saw such a development as a step on the road to more fundamental social and economic revolution. And, in any case, many revolutionary *narodniki* shared Petr Lavrov's sense that a real revolution could never be brought about by political means. Yet although the challenges facing efforts to build a common front against autocracy were formidable, the mere prospect of such a development caused considerable anxiety back in St Petersburg. The authorities in Russia were not always adept at following the twists and turns of the émigré imbroglio, but they were intensely sensitive to developments beyond the Empire's borders, not least because critics of tsarism used exile abroad to continue the struggle for change. The London emigration was, for much of the 1890s, viewed as a powerful threat to the security of the tsarist regime. The following chapter examines how ministers and *chinovniki* in St Petersburg, along with Russian diplomats and police officials in Western Europe, sought to contain the threat supposedly posed by the small number of exiles grouped around *Free Russia* and the Russian Free Press Fund.

