



FELIKS VOLKHOVSKII  
A REVOLUTIONARY LIFE

MICHAEL HUGHES



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Michael Hughes, *Feliks Volkhovskii: A Revolutionary Life*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0385>

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ISBN Paperback: 978-1-80511-194-8

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-80511-195-5

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80511-196-2

ISBN Digital eBook (EPUB): 978-1-80511-197-9

ISBN HTML: 978-1-80511-199-3

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0385

Cover image: Portrait originally published in an obituary of Volkhovskii by Nikolai Chaikovskii in *Golos minuushago*, 10 (2014), 231–35.

Cover design: Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal

## 6. Returning to the Revolutionary Fray

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The trial and conviction of Vladimir Burtsev highlighted the declining sympathy in Britain for revolutionary opponents of the Russian government. The appeal of the 'cause' had for some years been damaged by growing concern about anarchism, along with the Salisbury Government's determination to reduce the threat to public order supposedly posed by aliens living in Britain.<sup>1</sup> Volkhovskii's anger at the outcome of the Burtsev case was clear on the pages of *Free Russia*, where he was unusually trenchant in criticising not only the legal process, but other aspects of life in modern Britain as well. In May 1898, he wrote a piece condemning the poor quality of food and medical care in British prisons, arguing that 'English prison life might be greatly improved by borrowing from Russia that humanitarian disposition and attitude of mind towards the fallen which characterises the Russian people'.<sup>2</sup> Eighteen months later, at the Annual Meeting of the SFRF, he spoke dismissively of the 'Podsnappian' complacency that permeated public life in Britain (a reference to the character in Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* who embodied smug insularity and reluctance to face unpleasant truths). He described how, at one of his lectures, the local

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- 1 For an examination of the development of anti-alien discourses before 1905, see David Glover, *Literature, Immigration and Diaspora in Fin-de-Siècle England. A Cultural History of the 1905 Aliens Act* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For a more dated but still useful discussion, see Bernard Gainer, *The Alien Invasion. The Origins of the 1905 Aliens Act* (London: Heinemann, 1972). Much of the focus in these debates was on the Jewish population in London's East End. For an imaginative spatial analysis of shifting attitudes towards British Jews in this period, and the way the associated discourses paved the way for the 1905 Aliens Act, see Hannah Ewence, *The Alien Jew in the British Imagination, 1881–1905. Space, Mobility and Territoriality* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).
  - 2 F. Volkhovsky, 'English & Russian Prisons', *Free Russia* (1 May 1898).

mayor 'patted him on the shoulder, and urged him never to go back to Russia since "there was no country above England"'. Volkhovskii told his audience that while he had:

nothing against "Mr Podsnap's" pride in his country, he had everything against that gentleman imagining that any man of any nationality must be happy in being turned—forcibly, if necessary—into a Britisher. "Mr Podsnap" forgets, or does not understand that to every man *his own* country and *his own* personality is dear—whatever be the glory and advantages of England and the English.<sup>3</sup>

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Volkhovskii's words partly reflected his disdain for the outburst of jingoism that erupted in Britain at the end of 1899, following the outbreak of the South African War,<sup>4</sup> but they also hinted at wider changes in his outlook that shaped his activities during the last fifteen years of his life. While he never abandoned the campaign to influence perceptions of the Russian revolutionary movement abroad, Volkhovskii devoted less time to it in the years after 1900, focusing more attention on producing propaganda designed to foment revolutionary sentiment in Russia itself. He also became less concerned about reassuring his British audience about the essential moderation of the Russian opposition movement, acknowledging even on the pages of *Free Russia* that many revolutionaries like himself wanted to bring about not just political reform in Russia, but more far-reaching social and economic change as well.

Both the SFRF and *Free Russia* faced a major financial crisis by the end of the 1890s. Sales of the paper were poor and donations proved elusive in the wake of the Burtsev trial. Members of the Society sought to take advantage of the Russia 'craze' by organising exhibitions of Russian peasant crafts, including one in London's New Bond Street,

3 'Our Annual Gathering', *Free Russia* (1 January 1900). Volkhovskii had used the Podsnap image as a criticism of English insularity as early as 1898 in his preface to G. H. Perris, *Leo Tolstoy. The Grand Mujik* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898).

4 For Volkhovskii's comparatively restrained views on developments in South Africa, see F. Volkhovskii, 'The South African Affair', *Free Russia* (November 1899). His words nevertheless caused controversy among readers, not least because some of them believed that *Free Russia* was *too* cautious in not opposing the war. See, for example, Spence Watson / Weiss Papers (Newcastle University), SW 1/19/3, Volkhovskii to Spence Watson, 4 January 1900. See, too, the article by Robert Spence Watson, 'South Africa and the Russians', *Free Russia*, 1 February 1900.

hoping that such initiatives could provide a useful source of income.<sup>5</sup> *Free Russia* ran illustrated articles explaining how the Russian peasantry had for centuries supplemented their income by making a wide range of high-quality decorative goods.<sup>6</sup> Volkhovskii approached Herbert Thompson, who chaired the SFRF branch in Cardiff, to see if he would provide the capital to fund the expansion of the venture. His answer was unpromising. Thompson noted that 'Such an undertaking ... would require ... an able manager (or manageress) at its head devoting his whole time and energies to it and well-acquainted with the conditions of peasant industry in Russia and of the market for the goods in England. A manager with such qualities would be hard to find'.<sup>7</sup> It was a shrewd assessment of the situation.

The situation in North America was no brighter, but Volkhovskii still hoped to increase sales of *Free Russia* there, as well as attract donations from wealthy sympathisers.<sup>8</sup> In 1899, he corresponded at length with Edmund Noble, a leading figure in the American SFRF, discussing how to increase the appeal of *Free Russia* to an American audience. Noble replied noting pointedly that he could not himself provide financial support, adding that he lacked the right 'social connections' to seek philanthropic funding. He did however agree to write a regular letter 'From Across the Atlantic' reporting on developments in North America. Volkhovskii also discussed potential new publishing ventures with Noble, including a lavishly illustrated magazine depicting scenes of Russian life, as well as a series of 'nihilist' novels about the revolutionary struggle in Russia (a proposal that was less far-fetched than it sounds, given the success that authors including Stepniak and Le Queux had found in writing about Russian revolutionaries). Noble remained sceptical about the prospects for 'making Russian material pay'.<sup>9</sup> There was indeed something rather desperate about Volkhovskii's efforts to

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5 'An Exhibition and Sale of Russian Peasants' Work', *Free Russia* (1 December 1899).

6 'What Are They Capable of?', *Free Russia* (1 April 1899).

7 Volkhovskii Papers (Houghton Library), MS Russ 51, Folder 354, Thompson to Volkhovskii, 29 January 1900.

8 For a discussion of the decline of interest in Russian affairs in the USA in the late 1890s, see D. M. Nechiporuk, *Vo imia nigilizma. Amerikanskoe obshchestvo druzei russkoi svobody i russkaia revoliutsionnaia emigratsiia, 1890–1930 gg.* (St Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia, 2018), 168–85.

9 Volkhovskii Papers (Houghton Library), MS Russ 51, Folder 318, Letters from Noble to Volkhovskii, 16 October 1899; 22 December 1899; 13 February 1899.

put *Free Russia* on a stable footing. The paper appeared less regularly after 1900—typically between four and six editions a year—reflecting both the financial constraints and Volkhovskii's involvement in other activities.

Many of the pieces Volkhovskii wrote for *Free Russia* following the Burtsev trial continued to attack the tsarist regime's 'militant and cannibalistic attitude towards its own people'.<sup>10</sup> He condemned the 'Philosophy of Reaction' espoused by the Procurator of the Holy Synod, Konstantin Pobedonostsev, who was widely considered by critics of the regime to exert great influence on the Tsar,<sup>11</sup> dismissing Pobedonostsev himself as 'a kind of wooden ruling machine in human shape, to whom the living units of mankind are nothing'.<sup>12</sup> It was a striking image which characterised the tsarist government less as a relic of traditionalism and more as a modern manifestation of arbitrary power.<sup>13</sup> Volkhovskii also continued to criticise the British press for providing too positive a coverage of Nicholas II. When the Tsar put forward proposals in the summer of 1898 for an international conference on disarmament, which attracted positive reactions around the world, he dismissed the idea as a publicity stunt, writing that, while Nicholas called for 'peace on earth', millions of his subjects had 'no bread, no fuel, no fodder and no money; they do not know how to exist until the next crop'.<sup>14</sup>

Volkhovskii devoted much of *Free Russia* to developments in Finland, following the Tsar's proclamation of a manifesto in February 1899 that weakened the authority of the Finnish Diet and promoted further

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10 F. Volkhovsky, 'The Latest Horrors', *Free Russia* (1 November 1898).

11 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). For a treatment of Pobedonostsev as a reactionary rather than a conservative, see Richard Pipes, *Russian Conservatism and Its Critics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 139–44.

12 F. Volkhovsky, 'The Philosophy of Reaction', *Free Russia* (1 January 1900).

13 For a fascinating discussion of the changing pattern of efforts to establish the legitimacy of the tsarist government, including extensive references to Pobedonostsev, who played a critical role in fostering ideas and ceremonies designed to show how the Russian government was rooted in tradition, see Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy from Peter the Great to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

14 F. Volkhovsky, 'Peace on Earth, Goodwill Towards Men', *Free Russia* (March 1899).

Russification of the country.<sup>15</sup> He had for some years been anxious about Russian ambitions to dominate Scandinavia, and hoped that unrest in Finland could resist such a move and foster opposition capable of destabilising the tsarist regime itself.<sup>16</sup> Volkhovskii's knowledge of developments was helped by his long-standing links with many Swedish and Danish socialists, who had for some years played a role in the dispatch of illegal literature into the Tsarist Empire,<sup>17</sup> and shortly after the February Manifesto was issued he urged the leader of the Swedish Social Democrats, Hjalmar Branting, to adopt a stronger anti-Russian position.<sup>18</sup> Volkhovskii described the assault on Finnish autonomy to readers of *Free Russia* as an example of 'Russian Imperialism', and criticised those in Britain, like William Stead and Charles Dilke, who tried to justify the new policy on the grounds that it would help the Russian state to manage ethnic tensions in the western borderlands.<sup>19</sup>

There are other elements in my country. There are Constitutionals, Socialists, and Trade Unionists exercising now influence over thousands of factory workers. There are adherents of Local Self-Government. There are the Polish, Georgian, Oukrainien nationalists and other sections of

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- 15 For a useful series of essays on the Russification of Finland from the late nineteenth century onwards, see Edward C. Thaden (ed.), *Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855–1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981). A more recent account can be found in Tuomo Polvinen, *Imperial Borderland: Bobrikov and the Attempted Russification of Finland, 1898–1904*, trans. Stephen Huxley (London: Hurst and Co., 1995). A brief but helpful discussion of the Russification process in the north-west of the Empire can be found in Kari Alenius, 'Russification in Estonia and Finland Before 1917', *Faravid*, 28 (2004), 181–94. A useful discussion of the Russification process on the western periphery of the Empire other than Finland can be found in Theodore R. Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863–1914* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996).
- 16 The situation in Finland was discussed extensively by Volkhovskii with British members of the SFRE. See, for example, Volkhovskii Papers (Houghton Library), MS Russ 51, Folder 354, Thompson to Volkhovskii, 2 April 1899; MS Russ 51, Folder 362, Spence-Watson to Volkhovskii, 14 March 1899.
- 17 Michael Futrell, *Northern Underground. Episodes of Russian Revolutionary Transport and Communications through Scandinavia and Finland, 1863–1917* (London: Faber, 1963), 37.
- 18 William Copeland, *The Uneasy Alliance: Collaboration between the Finnish Opposition and the Russian Underground, 1899–1904* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1973), 97.
- 19 For a useful review of British policy on the Finnish question in these years, see George Maude, 'Finland in Anglo-Russian Diplomatic Relations, 1899–1910', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 48, 113 (1970), 557–81.

the educated and semi-educated class, whose ideas about systems of government are decidedly different from those of Mr Pobyedonostev and Company. And all these very large sections of the population have certainly more right to claim the representation of the National view than a handful of Reactionaries and Imperialists, who profit by their strong position at Court and in ruling circles to put a new blot on the honour of the Russian people.<sup>20</sup>

While the harsh treatment of Finland made for excellent anti-tsarist propaganda, Volkhovskii was still more struck by the changing character of the opposition movement in Russia itself. The student unrest that broke out in Moscow and St Petersburg early in 1899 signalled the beginning of a long period of disruption in Russian universities. Student protests were hardly unprecedented in pre-revolutionary Russia—Volkhovskii himself had helped to foment student unrest when a young man—but the protests of 1899-1901 were notable for the sympathy they attracted from sections of the urban workforce.<sup>21</sup> The disturbances also took place at a time of growing unrest in the Russian countryside. For Volkhovskii, as for many others, the start of the twentieth century seemed to mark the start of a new phase in the revolutionary struggle which brought together student and worker and peasant in a common front against the government. He was keen to explain the significance of developments to his Western readers.

In the spring of 1901, Volkhovskii published an article in *Free Russia* on 'The Meaning of Recent Events', telling his readers that

the Russian people are making their first attempt at no less a thing than the turning of a new leaf in their history. The Russian people long ago became sick of the lack of any personal security and of any official regard for the law, but they have been divided in their estimate of the causes of this state of things, and consequently in the recognition of their friends and enemies.

The change now was that 'thousands of artizans, factory workers, cabmen and journeymen' in cities across Russia responded to 'the cry of

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20 F. Volkhovskii, 'Russian Imperialism and the Finns', *Free Russia* (1 April 1899).

21 On the student unrest in this period, see Samuel D. Kassow, *Students, Professors and the State in Tsarist Russia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 88-140. For a rather different discussion of the student movement in the years before Revolution, see Susan K. Morrissey, *Heralds of Revolution: Russian Students and the Mythologies of Radicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).



the students for justice'. Volkhovskii also suggested that faith in the Tsar as the 'little father' of his people was fading rapidly in the countryside, as the peasantry began to understand how their poverty was rooted in the very structure of the existing social and economic order.<sup>22</sup> Volkhovskii expanded on these ideas in an article on the 'Russian Awakening' that appeared in the *Contemporary Review*, in which he once again argued that students and workers were joined in close bonds of sympathy ('a hearty compact') against 'horrible' assaults by Cossack troops armed with whips and guns. He also described how the authorities were using force to suppress peasant unrest in provinces like Poltava and Kharkov, where many peasants had been shot or birched, suggesting that such repressive measures were bound to fail given the level of discontent.<sup>23</sup> His views seemed to be confirmed in the spring of 1902, when further outbreaks of peasant unrest took place across the Empire, which Volkhovskii told readers of *Free Russia* was 'a thing expected and only a matter of time'.<sup>24</sup> He was confident that more extensive disorder would soon erupt in both the countryside and the city.

Many *narodniki* of the 1870s had believed that revolution could halt the development of capitalism in Russia and preserve intact the egalitarian instincts of the Russian peasantry.<sup>25</sup> Such hopes were by 1900 clearly untenable. Population growth in the countryside had created pervasive land hunger and poverty, as well as considerable economic differentiation, while the rapid growth of major urban centres created complex patterns of rural migration that disrupted traditional patterns of behaviour and belief.<sup>26</sup> It was for this reason that, by the closing years of the nineteenth century, several groups had emerged within the Tsarist Empire which—while more or less consciously identifying themselves

22 F. Volkhovsky, 'The Meaning of Recent Events', *Free Russia* (1 May 1901).

23 Felix Volkhovsky, 'The Russian Awakening', *Contemporary Review*, 81 (January 1902), 823–35.

24 F. Volkhovsky, 'The Rebellious Peasantry', *Free Russia* (1 June 1902).

25 For competing interpretations of this aspect of Populism, see Richard Pipes, 'Narodnichestvo: A Semantic Inquiry', *Slavic Review*, 23, 3 (1964), 441–58; Andrzej Walicki, *The Controversy over Capitalism: Studies in the Social Philosophy of the Russian Populists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

26 On the question of 'stratification', see Daniel Field, 'Stratification and the Russian Peasant Commune: A Statistical Inquiry', in Roger Bartlett (ed.), *Land Commune and Peasant Community in Russia. Communal Forms in Imperial and Early Soviet Society* (London: Macmillan in Association with School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1990), 143–64.

as heirs to the *narodnik* tradition of a previous generation—recognised that the social and economic changes of the previous twenty years or so demanded new ideas and tactics.<sup>27</sup>

The Union of Socialist Revolutionaries, led by A. A. Argunov, was sceptical about the revolutionary potential of the peasantry given its poverty and lack of education (the Union's programme instead emphasised, in the tradition of Narodnaia volia, the importance of terror in the struggle against the tsarist state).<sup>28</sup> The so-called Southern Party by contrast believed that the peasantry itself had a key role to play in the struggle for political freedom and economic transformation, not least because class divisions in the countryside had created a rural strata eager to bring about the destruction of the existing order.<sup>29</sup> Other smaller groups like the Worker's Party for the Liberation of Russia, established by G. A. Gershuni, focused more on fomenting revolution among urban workers. Although these groups came together in 1901-2 to form the Socialist Revolutionary Party, many ideological and tactical divisions remained, reflecting different perspectives on such questions as the revolutionary potential of the Russian peasantry and the use of terror to bring about political and economic change. One distinguished historian of the Party has suggested that the membership of the Socialist Revolutionary Party was defined by a common 'state of mind' rather than any more tangible agreement.<sup>30</sup> It was a verdict that could be applied to the SRs right down to 1917 and beyond.

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27 For a useful discussion of the various groups that coalesced to form the SR Party, see Manfred Hildermeier, *The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party Before the First World War* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000), 27–42; M. I. Leonov, *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov v 1905–1907 gg.* (Moscow: Rosspen, 1997), 26–38; A. I. Spiridovich, *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov i eia predshestvenniki, 1886–1916* (Petrograd: Voennaia tipografiia, 1918), 47–91. For an examination of the development of the SR Party focusing on its relations with the urban workers, see Christopher Rice, *Russian Workers and the Socialist-Revolutionary Party through the Revolution of 1905–07* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).

28 For Argunov's memoirs of the developments culminating in the creation of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, see A. Argunov, 'Iz proshlago partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov', *Byloe* (October 1907), 94–112.

29 On the Southern Party, see Maureen Perrie, *The Agrarian Policy of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 44–46.

30 Oliver H. Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism: Promise and Default of the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries from February to October 1917* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 47.

The relationship between the nascent socialist revolutionary groups in Russia and the former *narodniki* in exile abroad was uncertain in the years before 1900, reflecting fragmentation on both sides, as well as the practical constraints imposed by police surveillance in Russia and Western Europe. The most important initiative to develop closer ties during the early years of the twentieth century came through the creation of the Agrarian-Socialist League, which was established following the death of Petr Lavrov in Paris at the start of 1900. While Volkhovskii had often disagreed with Lavrov during the previous decade, he recognised his central place in the Russian revolutionary pantheon, writing several poems in his honour including one that was recited at his funeral in Paris. A number of those who attended the funeral, including Volkhovskii, agreed to continue an initiative that Lavrov had set in motion before his death to create a new émigré organisation to support those seeking to foster revolutionary sentiment among the Russian peasantry.<sup>31</sup> The founding members of the Agrarian-Socialist League included a number of former fundists—among them Shishko, Chaikovskii and Lazarev—as well as Volkhovskii himself.<sup>32</sup> Viktor Chernov, who had arrived in Western Europe from Tambov province the previous year, and subsequently became the most important figure in shaping the ideology of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, was also a founding member.<sup>33</sup>

The principal focus of the Agrarian-Socialist League, at least in its early days, was on developing propaganda for circulation in Russia. Its publications were often distributed through the networks built up by the Russian Free Press Fund over the previous decade (although the

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31 Viktor Chernov, *Pered burei* (Moscow: Direct Media, 2016), 200.

32 On the Agrarian League, see Perrie, *Agrarian Policy*, 24–33; Hildermeier, *Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party*, 38–41; Spiridovich, *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov*, 85–87.

33 For Chernov's account of his life before leaving Russia, see Viktor Chernov, *Zapiski sotsialista-revoliutsionera* (Berlin: Izd-vo Z. I. Grzhebina, 1922). For a useful biography of Chernov, see A. I. Avrus, A. A. Goloseeva and A. P. Novikov, *Viktor Chernov: sud'ba russkogo sotsialista* (Moscow: Kliuch-S, 2015). For a valuable discussion of Chernov's career and development, see Hannu Immonen, *Mechty o novoi Rossii. Viktor Chernov (1877–1952)* (St Petersburg: Izd-vo Evropeiskogo universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, 2015). Immonen's earlier work *The Agrarian Programme of the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party, 1900–1914* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1988) argued that Chernov's role as the main architect of SR policy, especially in the countryside, may have been somewhat overstated given the role played by other key figures like N. I. Rakitnikov.

Northern Underground was used less than the route through Ukraine). The first publication to appear was headed an appeal 'To Comrades in Thought and Deed', which was printed together with an essay on 'The Immediate Question of the Revolutionary Cause' (written by Chernov). Volkhovskii was among the five signatories to the appeal, which began by noting that the Agrarian-Socialist League had been created to broaden 'the revolutionary movement in general and the workers's movement in particular by attracting 'the working masses of the countryside'. It went on to list the key tasks of the League as:

1. The publication and distribution of popular revolutionary literature, suitable for the peasants as well as the urban factory and craft workers, especially those who have links to the countryside.
2. Familiarising Russian comrades with methods of socialist propaganda employed in the West among the working peasant masses (*truodoye krest'ianskie massy*), and with the forms of their organisation for the agrarian class struggle; assessing the historical experience of the 'movement to the people' by the Russian revolutionaries; studying all manifestations of social-political unrest among the contemporary peasantry; the theoretical development of general problems of agrarian socialism.
3. Practical and immediate aid of all kinds to Russian comrades whose activity corresponds to the programme of the Agrarian-Socialist League.

Members of the League were expected to acknowledge 'the ability of the working mass of the Russian peasantry to participate in active movement and struggle that will contribute to the evolution of Russian life in the direction indicated by ... the principles of international socialism'. They also had to accept the legitimacy of a revolutionary strategy focused on 'carrying out appropriate social-revolutionary propaganda and agitation' among the peasantry. The two principles taken together in effect recognised that successful revolutionary activity required careful guidance and planning while also needing to build on the energy of

the *narod* itself.<sup>34</sup> Chernov's accompanying essay reinforced the idea that the countryside was an important site of revolution, arguing that propaganda and agitation should take place among the peasantry as well as the urban workers, a position that rejected the traditional Marxist view of the rural population as backward-looking and insular, while still acknowledging the critical role of the proletariat in forging revolution.<sup>35</sup> The League's subsequent publications marked a break with the populism of an earlier generation, acknowledging that economic relations in the countryside were already permeated by capitalism, with the result that the peasant commune was no longer necessarily a place where social relations were characterised by a spirit of egalitarian harmony.<sup>36</sup>

Volkhovskii was determined that the League should attract a broad spectrum of members, reflecting his long-standing impatience with ideological and tactical disputes of the kind that were soon to lead to the division of the Social Democrats into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in 1903 (his daughter Vera noted many years later that her father always sought to maintain good relations with Russian revolutionaries from all parties, regularly meeting them for dinner, and attending the same meetings in London and Switzerland).<sup>37</sup> Volkhovskii was responsible for inviting David Soskice to join the League, even though his views at the time were closer to the Social Democrats, a move opposed by some other members.<sup>38</sup> The League's membership was nevertheless very small. Only fifteen people attended its first Congress at Geneva in 1902, including Lazarev and Shishko, while the total membership was just twenty-one. Volkhovskii was, for some reason, not present. The report of the Congress noted that the League had produced five pamphlets and organised the dispatch of a significant amount of material to Russia,

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34 Spiridovich, *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov*, 85–86. The translation here is taken from Perrie, *Agrarian Policy*, 30. For the composition of the League and a fuller statement of its aims sometime later, see SR Party Archive (Amsterdam), 131 ('Proekt Ustava Agrano-Sotsialisticheskoi Ligi').

35 [V.M. Chernov], *Ocherednoi vopros revoliutsionnago dela* (London: Agrarian League, 1900).

36 For a somewhat different view, arguing that this change only came later after the 1905 Revolution, see Radkey, *Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, 83–84.

37 Bertrand Russell Papers (McMaster University), 710.057280, Vera Volkhovskii to Bertrand Russell, 1 November 1920.

38 SR Party Archive (Amsterdam), 131, Volkhovskii to comrades, 21 April 1902.

although much of it had been seized by the tsarist authorities, following receipt of information from an agent who had established friendly relations with one of the League's own members.<sup>39</sup>

The Congress also approved the production of material to train a cadre of 'future leaders', who were to come from the areas where they carried out agitation, ensuring they had an understanding of local (*mestnoe*) conditions that would allow them to take the lead in 'revolutionising all the mass of the peasantry, cultivating in it a warlike spirit and preparation for struggle'.<sup>40</sup> The aim of this struggle was the removal (*ustranenie*) of the tsarist government as the principal obstacle to 'the freedom of the *narod* and the handing over of the land to the working people'. The programme said little about the situation in the towns and cities. Although Volkhovskii was not present at the Congress, he approved of the programme, which was in some ways more conventionally *narodnik* than the informal principles adopted by the Socialist Revolutionary Party the same year.<sup>41</sup>

The Congress also gave a good deal of attention to relations with the Socialist Revolutionary (SR) Party in Russia as well as more general questions of ideology and tactics. The *Okhrana* double agent Evno Azef told his superiors in St Petersburg at the end of 1901 that most of the League's members wanted to merge with the SRs, reporting that there was already an agreement for the League to focus on producing agitational literature, while SR publications like *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* [*Revolutionary Russia*] and *Vestnik russkoi revoliutsii* [*Herald of the Russian Revolution*] would be aimed at the *intelligentsia*.<sup>42</sup> Azef's views were not

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39 SR Party Archive (Amsterdam), 131 ('Pervyi s"ezd Agrarno-Sotsialisticheskoi Ligi', 20 July 1902).

40 N. D. Erofeev (ed.), *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov. Dokumenty i materialy*, 3 vols (Moscow: Rosspen 1996-2001), I, 48-51.

41 For the SR Programme, see 'Nasha programa', in Erofeev (ed.), *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov. Dokumenty i materialy*, I, 51-58. The programme originally appeared in *Vestnik russkoi revoliutsii*, 1 (1902), edited by N. S. Rusanov, the journal which along with *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* provided the most authoritative locus of policy statements at a time when the SR Party lacked a coherent organisational structure. For a useful discussion of the evolution of the SR programme before and after the 1905 Revolution, see Leonov, *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov*, 103-25. For another statement of key SR principles before the 1905 Revolution, see 'Osnovnye voprosy russkoi revoliutsionnoi programmy', *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, 33 (1 October 1903).

42 D. B. Pavlov and Z. I. Peregodova (eds), *Pis'ma Azefa, 1893-1917* (Moscow: Terra, 1994), 64-67 (Azef to Rataev, 26 December 1901). On Azef see Anna Geifman,

altogether accurate. Volkhovskii had doubts about too hasty a union, believing the League should maintain its non-party character, although he also seems to have entertained hopes that it might at some point serve as the kernel of a new peasant socialist party in Russia.<sup>43</sup> Some other *stariki* (party elders) including Shishko shared his views.<sup>44</sup> Chernov was, by contrast, keen on union. His views eventually won out. The League and the SR Party were already cooperating closely in the spring of 1902 while a more formal federation took place a few months later.<sup>45</sup>

Some of the older émigrés may have struggled to accept that a new revolutionary generation had come to the fore in Russia, fearing their own influence was likely to be limited once the Agrarian-Socialist League merged with the SRs. Volkhovskii certainly disagreed with Chernov on various issues during this period. He was adamant that carrying out effective revolutionary work in the Russian countryside required strong direction, which he believed could only come from abroad, in effect asserting the leadership of the émigrés while casting doubt on the ability of those in Russia to conduct an effective campaign of agitation without firm guidance. Chernov was wary of such centralism. He had been in Russia far more recently than Volkhovskii, and his experience in areas like Tambov led him to take a more positive view of the capacity of local groups to develop a well-crafted programme of agitation. He also believed that it was impractical for ‘generals’ living abroad to run a revolutionary campaign from outside the country. The relationship between the two men at one point became very tense (Chernov accused Volkhovskii of using ‘bitter and unpleasant’ words about him). It is difficult to read the correspondence between them without sensing that Volkhovskii was out of touch with the way that things had changed in

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*Entangled in Terror: The Azef Affair and the Russian Revolution* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2000).

43 SR Party Archive (Amsterdam), 131, Volkhovskii to comrades, 21 April 1902. Perrie, *Agrarian Policy*, 43.

44 See, for example, ‘Iz pokazanii S. N. Sletova (Zemliakova) sudebno-sledstvennoi komissii pri Ts. K. PSR po delu Azefa’, in Erofeev (ed.), *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov. Dokumenty i materialy*, I, 139.

45 SR Party Archive (Amsterdam), 131 (‘Federativnyi dogovor mezhdou Partii Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov i Agrarno-Sotsialisticheskoi Ligoj’). A briefer version of the document can be found in Erofeev (ed.), *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov. Dokumenty i materialy*, I, 68–69.

Russia since his flight from Vladivostok a decade earlier.<sup>46</sup> Nor was he alone. The tension between locals and émigrés became a major theme in the development of the SR Party down to 1917.

While the League's members recognised that peasant uprisings might involve violence, if only in response to official repression, the question of using terror as a revolutionary tactic was seldom addressed directly in its publications. The League was particularly cautious about 'agrarian terrorism'—the use of violence against landlords, whether in the form of murder or destruction of property—instead stressing the pivotal role of strikes and boycotts in creating the kind of mass movement needed to bring about change. Nor did its programme say much about questions of political terror. One leading scholar has rightly noted that Chernov's original essay outlining the League's programme owed more to the second *Zemlia i volia* than to *Narodnaia volia*,<sup>47</sup> although Chernov himself later contributed an article to *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* in 1903 endorsing 'the implementation of terror' as one of 'many kinds of weapons' to be used in the 'assault on the government',<sup>48</sup> subsequently becoming the leading SR theorist defending the use of terror to bring about political reform.<sup>49</sup> The question of political terror does not,

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46 Volkhovskii Papers (Houghton Library), MS Russ 51, Folder 87, Chernov (pseud. B. Olenin) to Volkhovskii [no date but probably 1902]. I am indebted to the work of Dr Lara Green for alerting me to the significance of this correspondence which I had previously overlooked. See Lara Green, 'Russian Revolutionary Terrorism in Transnational Perspective: Representations and Networks, 1881–1926' (PhD thesis, Northumbria University, 2019), 144.

47 Hildermeier, *Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party*, 39.

48 Anna Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill. Revolutionary Terrorism in Russia 1894–1917* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 46. A useful series of essays on terrorism in Russia during the years before 1917 can be found in S. V. Deviatov et al. (eds), *Terrorizm v Rossii v nachale XX v., Istoricheskii vestnik*, 149 (Moscow: Runivers, 2012). On attitudes towards terrorism within the SR Party generally, see O. V. Budnitskii, *Terrorizm v rossiiskom osvoboditel'nom dvizhenii: ideologiia, etika, psikhologiia (vtoriaia polovina XIX–nachalo XX v)* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2000), 134–217; Maureen Perrie, 'Political and Economic Terror in the Tactics of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party before 1914', in Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Gerhard Hirschfeld (eds), *Social Protest, Violence and Terror in Nineteenth- & Twentieth-Century Europe* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 63–79; Manfred Hildermeier, 'The Terrorist Strategies of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party in Russia, 1900–1914', in Mommsen and Hirschfeld (eds), *Social Protest*, 80–87.

49 For the clearest programmatic statement of the role of terror for the SRs, see Chernov's 'Terroristicheskii element v nashei programme', which originally appeared in *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, 7 (June 1902), reproduced in *Po voprosom programmy i taktiki. Sbornik statei iz Revoliutsionnoi Rossii* (n.p.: Tip-ia Partii



though, seem to have been a stumbling block in the discussions that led to federation between the League and the SR Party. Any differences were probably ones of degree. Volkhovskii was certainly not opposed to the use of terror against leading figures in the tsarist regime, believing that such attacks could weaken the state apparatus, although he was convinced that real change could only come about in Russia through popular revolution in both the city and the countryside.

The SRs use of terror did create something of a challenge for Volkhovskii when writing for a British audience. Although he had previously joined Stepniak in defending Narodnaia volia, both men repeatedly stressed on the pages of *Free Russia* that the Russian revolutionary movement had largely abandoned terrorism by the early 1890s, a claim that could no longer be made ten years later. The problem was made somewhat easier by the response of many leading British newspapers to the assassinations carried out by the Combat Organisation of the SR Party, which was headed first by Grigorii Gershuni and then, following his arrest, by Evno Azef. When the Minister of the Interior Dmitrii Sipiagin was assassinated in April 1902, the *Times* noted that although such an action was 'regrettable and reprehensible ... the odious system of government which continues in force cannot by any means be exonerated from its share of the blame'.<sup>50</sup> It responded in a similar vein two years later to the murder of Viacheslav Pleve (who had replaced Sipiagin). An editorial in the paper noted that while 'Murder as a political weapon is universally condemned by civilized man and the assassination of M. de Pleve cannot escape reprobation from the point of view of public and private morality', his role in promoting harsh measures to preserve the autocratic system of government represented an 'extreme provocation' and 'an explanation of what can never be ethically justified'.<sup>51</sup> Many other papers took a similar line, suggesting that such actions were understandable, even if they were morally

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sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov, 1903), 71–84. For a discussion of attitudes towards terror within the SRs during this period, see Leonov, *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov*, 125–36. Leonov suggests (126) that Volkhovskii was 'indifferent' on questions of terror which, as will be seen in both this and the following chapter, does not capture his views accurately.

50 *Times* (17 April 1902).

51 *Times* (29 July 1904).

dubious.<sup>52</sup> Anti-tsarist feeling in Britain still remained strong enough in the early 1900s to ensure there was at least some level of sympathy for the regime's revolutionary opponents.

The murder of Pleve in July 1904 came just a few weeks after the assassination of the Governor-General of Finland Nikolai Bobrikov by a Finnish nationalist, a killing that also attracted sympathy (or at least understanding) in much of the British press, given his role in suppressing Finnish autonomy within the Tsarist Empire.<sup>53</sup> *Free Russia* was only appearing quarterly by 1904—testimony to the perennial character of the financial challenges it faced—with the result that the shock of the Pleve assassination had faded by the time the July-October edition appeared. An unsigned editorial noted that the killing had been 'as inevitable and natural as the explosion of gunpowder in an overheated oven ... the great masses of the people have everything to lose and nothing to gain by further submission to the tyranny of their oppressors'. It added that autocracy was 'at its last gasp' and that the whole world would become more peaceful once the tsarist government was overthrown.<sup>54</sup> The same edition carried, without any negative comment, a translation of the manifesto released by the SRs explaining that the assassination of Pleve was designed to remove 'the omnipotent tyrant of Russia' who had played a critical role in preserving 'the barbarous mould of despotism'.<sup>55</sup>

The Combat Organisation that carried out the murder of Pleve operated with a high degree of autonomy within the SR Party. Émigrés like Volkhovskii knew little about its activities.<sup>56</sup> He was however closely

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52 See, for example, *The Referee*, 31 July 1904.

53 The liberal *Daily News* without praising the killing noted on 18 June 1904 that Bobrikov had for some years sought 'to destroy all semblance of liberty in Finland'. The conservative *Morning Post* by contrast on the same day referred to the killing as 'The Helsingfors Outrage'. On the killing, see Richard Bach Jensen, 'The 1904 Assassination of Governor-General Bobrikov: Tyrannicide, Anarchism and the Expanding Scope of "Terrorism"', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 30, 5 (2018), 828–43. For a discussion of the worldwide press coverage of the killing, see Mila Oiva et al., 'Spreading News in 1904. The Media Coverage of Nikolay Bobrikov's Killing', *Media History*, 26, 4 (2020), 391–407.

54 'The Events of the Last Three Months', *Free Russia* (1 October 1904). Volkhovskii was out of Britain a good deal in the late summer of 1904, and it is possible that the editorial was penned by David Soskice.

55 'Why M. de Plehve was Assassinated: A Manifesto', *Free Russia* (1 October 1904).

56 A comprehensive history of the Combat Organisation can be found in R. A. Gorodnitskii, *Boevaya organizatsiia partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov v 1901–1911 gg.* (Moscow: Rosspen, 1998). See, too, Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, passim. For

involved with the Foreign Committee of the SR Foreign Organisation (*Zagranichnaia organisatsiia*), which effectively absorbed many of the operations of the Agrarian-Socialist League following its merger with the SRs.<sup>57</sup> The Foreign Organisation was tasked, among other things, with providing support for revolutionary activities in Russia, including the production and transport of revolutionary literature, although since it was made up of a number of national groups it was too unwieldy to operate effectively. As a result, the Foreign Committee was in practice responsible for carrying out much of the work. Volkhovskii himself continued to play a significant role in producing propaganda. He was not a regular contributor to the main SR publications *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* and *Vestnik russkoi revoliutsii*, although he contributed a long piece to the former in 1903, attacking Pleve's policy towards Finland and criticising those in Britain, like William Stead, who were too ready to accept the principle of Russification.<sup>58</sup> He also occasionally published verse in the two journals.<sup>59</sup> He was, though, still active in the years before 1905 in producing other revolutionary literature for illegal circulation in Russia.

Volkhovskii helped to edit the miscellany *Narodnoe delo*, which appeared irregularly in 1902–04 as a publication of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, contributing several pieces under his own name.<sup>60</sup>

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a statement of its organisation and aims dating from 1904, see 'Ustav boevoi organizatsii partii SR, priniaty ee chlenami v Avguste 1904 g.', in Erofeev (ed.), *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov. Dokumenty i materialy*, I, 149–51. For the justification of the murder by the SR leadership, see 'Dve voiny', *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, 50 (1 August 1904).

- 57 Among the limited literature on the Foreign Organisation, see M. I. Leonov, 'Zagranichnaia organizatsiia i Zagranichnyi komitet partii eserov v nachale XX veka (Na putiakh partinoi institutsionalizatsii)', *Vestnik Samarskogo universiteta: istoriia, pedagogika, filologiya*, 27, 2 (2021), 27–36. For a brief useful discussion in English, see Hildermeier, *Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party*, 111–14. The discussion in K. N. Morozov, *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov v 1907–1914 gg.* (Moscow: Rosspen, 1998), 249–65, focuses on the Foreign Organisation after 1907 when its role and organization were very different.
- 58 F. Volkhovskii, 'Inostrannaia kritika teorii Fon-Pleve', *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, 36 (15 November 1903).
- 59 *Vestnik russkoi revoliutsii*, 3 (March 1903) printed one of Volkhovskii's poems dedicated to the memory of Petr Lavrov.
- 60 Lara Green rightly points out that there is little surviving archival material relating to *Narodnoe delo* (see Green, 'Russian Revolutionary Terrorism', 119). It is possible that Volkhovskii was only one of the editors, particularly since he did not formally join the SRs till 1904, although the limited material in the SR Party archive shows

*Narodnoe delo* was aimed at an audience of what the second issue called ‘urban and rural workers’, although the content was quite demanding, and more likely to appeal to a readership of students and *intelligenty*. The opening number contained an article describing how the private ownership of property was the principal cause of poverty among both workers and peasants.<sup>61</sup> The third issue included long articles on urban unemployment and the development of new forms of economic ‘serfdom’ in the countryside.<sup>62</sup> The fourth issue explored the historical and contemporary significance of 1 May for the workers’ movement in Russia and beyond, while the fifth included a long piece on the differences between the attitudes of the Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries towards the peasantry.<sup>63</sup> Most numbers contained short stories and poems, reflecting Volkhovskii’s long-standing policy of including literary content in the journals he edited, while his main editorial role appears to have been the practical one of organising and reviewing submissions rather than setting down a firm ideological line for the journal.

Among the pieces Volkhovskii himself published in *Narodnoe delo* was ‘Pochemu armiane “buntuiut”’ (‘Why the Armenians Are Rebelling’),<sup>64</sup> which was written shortly after violent protests broke out in Russian Armenia against the confiscation of the property of the Armenian Church. He accused the tsarist authorities of deliberately stoking up ethnic tension in the Caucasus, to keep the Armenians in a state of ‘slavish submission’, without ‘their own schools, libraries, newspapers ... clergy and national property’. The Armenians were, Volkhovskii suggested, simply defending ‘their rights not to climb into the wolf’s mouth of the tsarist government’, and far from being the enemies of the

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that he was certainly involved in reviewing and amending articles submitted to the journal.

61 Opening editorial, *Narodnoe delo*, 1 (1902), 1–2.

62 ‘Krizis i bezrabotitsa’, *Narodnoe delo*, 3 (1903), 3–20; ‘Novoe krepostnoe pravo’, *Narodnoe delo*, 3 (1903), 46–71.

63 ‘Sotsializm i 1-oe Maia’, *Narodnoe delo*, 4 (1904), 3–30; ‘Kak smotriat’ sotsialisty-revoliutsionery i sotsial-demokraty na krest’ianstvo i na zemel’nyi vopros’, *Narodnoe delo*, 5 (1904), 1–27 (the title of the piece is curiously listed slightly differently in the contents page).

64 F. Volkhovskii, *Pochemu armiane “buntuiut”* (Geneva: Partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov, 1904). The article first appeared in the fifth number of *Narodnoe delo*.

Russian people, 'are helping us ... to free ourselves from the kulak, the landlord and the bureaucratic yoke. If all the peoples inhabiting Russia strike unanimously at these bloodsuckers, then it will be much easier for them to break the strength of the present ... government'. Volkhovskii's argument echoed his long-standing commitment to fostering greater cultural self-awareness among Ukrainians and Siberians, as well as the SR Party's somewhat hazy commitment to a post-revolutionary federal order that recognised the autonomy of national minorities within a new socialist union.<sup>65</sup> It also reflected his view that the development of nationalist sentiment on the fringes of the Empire could strengthen opposition against the tsarist government.

Volkhovskii also sought to engage with a rather different audience during these years through writing fables and short stories. The ones he wrote for English children, including 'The Story of the Clever Fox' and 'In the Sun',<sup>66</sup> were little more than entertaining pieces leavened with gentle warnings about the importance of cooperation and the pitfalls of deceiving the unwary. He also, though, wrote other stories aimed at a peasant readership in Russia that were far more radical in character. Volkhovskii's experience in producing poems for children and satirical fantasies for adults had long convinced him that skilfully-written tales of magic and mystery could shape popular attitudes towards real social and political questions. In 1902, he published *Skazanie o nespravedlivom tsare* (*The Tale of the Unjust Tsar*), subsequently reprinted as 'The Tale of Tsar Simeon', which began in time-honoured fashion with the words 'Once upon a time there lived an unjust tsar [who] was arrogant and merciless towards his people'.<sup>67</sup> The story tells how a delegation of villagers sought the help of an old magician to ease their plight, who responds by transforming the appearance of the kindest man in the village, one Ivan Krasnoperov, to look exactly like the Tsar himself. The real Tsar, meanwhile, falls from his horse while out hunting, destroying both his finery and his memory, transforming him into a poverty-stricken tramp

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65 See, for example, the sentiments expressed by the anonymous author of 'Natsional'nyi vopros i revoliutsiia', *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, 35 (1 November 1903).

66 Felix Volkhovskii, 'In the Sun', *Little Folks* (1 June 1900); Felix Volkhovskii, 'The Story of the Clever Fox', *Little Folks* (1 July 1900).

67 Feliks Volkhovskii, *Skazanie o nespravedlivom tsare i kak on v razum voshel i kakoi sovet liudiam dal* (London: Izd-vo. Partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov i Agrarno-sotsialisticheskoi ligi, 1902).

forced to beg for food and shelter. Five years pass, during which time Krasnoperov starts to behave like a ruthless and suspicious autocrat, flattered and deceived by his courtiers, while the true Tsar is chastened by witnessing the injustice and poverty that scar his kingdom. When the two men are changed back into their former selves, the Tsar refuses to return to his old role, while Krasnoperov slips away into the crowd and vanishes. The villagers are at first unsure what to do in the absence of a ruler, until they hear the wind whispering in the trees, telling them that 'You are people not cattle. Help yourselves for nobody else will'. The moral of the *skazka* was clear. The failings of an autocratic system of government were not simply rooted in the character of the Tsar but were instead an inevitable consequence of giving unlimited power to any single person. A 'good' tsar would not, as many peasants still hoped, take action to end their poverty and improve their place in society.

Volkhovskii published a second story in *Narodnoe delo*, in 1904, that was reprinted a year later at the height of the 1905 Revolution. 'Kak muzhik u vseh v dolgu ostalsia' ('How the Peasant Owes Everyone') tells how the devil created a kulak, a nobleman and a priest to trick an honest peasant out of his possessions.<sup>68</sup> When the peasant refuses to hand over his land, the devil and his accomplices seek the advice of the mythical Baba Yaga, who tells them to find a magic egg in the forest and sit on it until it hatches out a tsar. The tsar then carves an army of soldiers and police from the nearby trees, who arrest the luckless peasant and seize his possessions, forcing him to survive by labouring in the kulak's factory and working in the fields of the nobleman. The priest blesses the arrangement, in return for payment, with the result that 'the *muzhik* from that time has been in debt with everyone: the kulak, the priest, the nobleman, and the tsar'. The fable offered no happy ending. It was instead designed to show how the existing social and political order was not 'natural' or divinely ordered. The figures of authority—tsar, nobleman, priest, kulak—were all rapacious exploiters rather than the protectors of the *muzhik*.

Volkhovskii's stories were crafted to echo the motifs of a Russian folk-tale tradition that itself often challenged social and political

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68 F. Volkhovskii, 'Kak muzhik u vseh v dolgu ostalsia. Skazka', *Narodnoe delo*, 5 (1904), 28–48.

hierarchies.<sup>69</sup> His approach was apparently successful. Both stories were reprinted many times, including in the wake of the 1917 February Revolution, when the SRs published 100,000 copies of the 'The Tale of Tsar Simeon' and 30,000 copies of 'How the Peasant Owes Everyone'.<sup>70</sup> A significant number were also smuggled into Russia during the unrest of 1905 as part of the SR Foreign Organisation's efforts to foment peasant uprisings. 'The Tale of the Unjust Tsar' was translated into Ukrainian in 1903, by the poet Lesia Ukrainka, and circulated widely in the south-western provinces of the Tsarist Empire. Ukrainka was the niece of the Ukrainian nationalist writer and historian Mykhailo Drahomanov, who had himself known Volkhovskii for many years, and been an important source of information for the fundists during the 1890s. While Ukrainka's political sympathies lay with the Marxist Social Democrats rather than the Socialist Revolutionaries, she was astute enough to realise that the SRs were more positive about the cause of national self-determination, corresponding regularly with Volkhovskii in 1902–03 about how to promote political change that would allow Ukrainian culture to flourish.<sup>71</sup>

Volkhovskii also continued to write poetry throughout the years leading up to the 1905 Revolution, although the lyrical-pastoral turn that characterised his work in the 1880s was largely abandoned in favour of a return to the more overtly political verse he penned in the 1870s. He wrote several poems in homage to leading figures in the revolutionary movement, including a new 1902 poem praising the memory of Petr Lavrov, whose 'grave is not silent' but rather 'a living source of inspiration' for all those struggling for freedom.<sup>72</sup> Two years

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69 For a lucid analysis of the Russian folktale tradition, see Jack V. Haney, *An Introduction to the Russian Folktale* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1999).

70 Elizabeth Jones Hemenway, 'Telling Stories: Russian Political Culture and Narratives of Revolution, 1917–1921' (PhD thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1998), 51. See, too, the same author's article 'Nicholas in Hell: Rewriting the Tsarist Narrative in the Revolutionary *Skazki* of 1917', *Russian Review*, 60, 2 (2001), 185–204.

71 On Ukrainka (born Larysa Petrivna Kosach), including material on her relations with Volkhovskii, see George S. N. Luckyj, *Seven Lives: Vignettes of Ukrainian Writers in the Nineteenth Century, The Annals of the Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the US*, 20, 47–48 (1998–99), 161–87. The correspondence between Ukrainka and Volkhovskii can be found in Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 3, Folder 39.

72 F. Volkhovskoi (*sic*), 'Dorogaia mogila (Pamiati P. L. Lavrova)', in F. Volkhovskoi, *Sluchainyia pesni* (Moscow: Knigoizdatel'stvo L. I. Kolevatova, 1907), 65. The poem first appeared in *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, 9 (July 1902).

earlier, in 1900, he had published a poem, 'Maiak' ('The Lighthouse'), in honour of the *narodnik* theorist Nikolai Mikhailovskii, complete with laden metaphors of how words could be used to illuminate the world as light cut through fog.<sup>73</sup> Volkhovskii also reworked some of his old poems, including 'Duda', originally published in the 1870s, in order to attract a wider audience, adding some scathing lines about money-grubbing priests ('long-haired Satans') who exploited the peasantry under the guise of holiness.<sup>74</sup> The new version was intended to be sung to the well-known tune 'Zdrastvui, milaia, khoroshaia moia' ('Greetings My Sweet Girl'). 'Voina' ('War')—which described the plight of soldiers sent thousands of miles from home—was set to music traditionally used to train soldiers to march in time (the poem was clearly designed to strike a chord with troops during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05).<sup>75</sup> Whether such 'song-poems' circulated widely is difficult to say. Nor is it clear, as with the *skazki*, what lasting impact they had. Yet the time Volkhovskii spent on instilling radical motifs into poems and short stories designed to ape familiar forms of popular culture reflected a thoroughly *narodnik* desire to shape the political consciousness of peasants and workers by engaging with them in their own vernacular.

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Volkhovskii's contribution to the neo-*narodnik* revival before 1905 was not limited to journalism and propaganda. In the early years of the twentieth century, he also became involved in procuring false passports for individuals wanting to travel to and from Russia illegally (he had indeed sought advice about how to get passports under a false name as early as 1895).<sup>76</sup> The Fabian Socialist and Quaker Samuel Hobson recalled many years later that 'It was the mild and persuasive Volkhovsky who lured me into evil ways' by asking him to obtain English passports to help Russian exiles flee Siberia. It was a practice that continued 'off and on for years ... Then a personal friend in the Foreign Office sent for me.

73 F. Volkhovskoi, 'Maiak', in *Sluchainyia pesni*, 61.

74 For this variant, see N. A. Alikina and L. S. Kashikhin (eds), *Pesni revoliutsionnogo podpol'ia* (Perm: Permskoe Knizhnoe Izd-vo, 1977), <http://a-pesni.org/starrev/duda.htm>.

75 F. Volkhovskoi, 'Voina', in *Sluchainyia pesni*, 81–82.

76 Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 17, Folder 11, Letter to Volkhovskii dated 31 May 1895.



“Sorry old chap, but we know about it. It must stop”.<sup>77</sup> Hobson believed the passports were destined for those fleeing Russia, but there was a more sinister side to the trade as well. Volkhovskii was almost certainly involved in 1904 in helping the journalist H. N. Brailsford procure passports for three Russians seeking to return to their country. One of the passports was later found on the body of a terrorist who died while planting a bomb in a St Petersburg hotel, leading the Russian government to make a formal protest to London, which in turn prompted an inquiry that resulted in Brailsford being tried and convicted for obtaining a passport under false pretences. Brailsford claimed that he obtained the passports at the request of someone ‘on the continent’ with close ties to the Russian revolutionary movement, who told him that they would be used to facilitate smuggling illegal literature into Russia,<sup>78</sup> but declined to name his interlocutor. Despite the best efforts of his defence counsel—the future Liberal MP and Minister Sir John Simon—he was found guilty and fined £100. Volkhovskii for his part seems to have been unrepentant and continued his efforts to obtain passports for use by revolutionaries seeking to enter and leave Russia.<sup>79</sup>

Volkhovskii was also involved in several other attempts to support the opposition movement in Russia. He was by the early 1900s confident that fomenting revolution in areas on the periphery of the Empire could help to weaken the tsarist government (a conviction that had shaped his response to the unrest in Armenia and prompted his collaboration with Lesia Ukrainka to translate radical material into Ukrainian). Volkhovskii’s sympathy for Ukrainian nationalist aspirations also

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77 S. G. Hobson, *Pilgrim to the Left: Memoirs of a Modern Revolutionist* (London: Edward Arnold, 1938), 126.

78 F. M. Leventhal, *The Last Dissenter: H. N. Brailsford and his World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 52–54. Leventhal speculates that Soskice rather than Volkhovskii may have been instrumental in helping Brailsford, but Volkhovskii had returned to Britain from the continent for some weeks at this time, and the whole affair bears his hallmark. The two men were certainly regular correspondents, as can be seen in Volkhovskii Papers (Houghton Library), MS Russ 51, Folder 266 (letters from Brailsford to Volkhovskii). For a report of the trial, which took place in 1905, see the *Times* (24 May 1905).

79 For example, Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 17, Folder 11 contains a passport for an American woman Ida Rauh dated 1906 to be used for any purpose ‘so long as it is not terrorism’. The same folder contains a letter by Volkhovskii asking for advice about how to organise quick marriages, presumably designed to allow foreign nationals to obtain British passports.

reflected something more than simple revolutionary pragmatism, given his long-standing interest in Ukrainian history and culture (during his later years he collected numerous photographs of Ukrainian villages and noted in one unpublished piece that 'my thoughts ... are Ukrainian').<sup>80</sup> Yet despite his Ukrainophilism, Volkhovskii believed that it was in Finland that nationalism was most likely to fuel revolutionary sentiment, given popular resentment against the Russification programme set in motion by Governor-General Bobrikov. Not all his contacts agreed. The Swedish journalist N. C. Frederickson, who in August 1903 interviewed Pleve about the government's policies, warned Volkhovskii a few weeks later 'that revolutionary movements as in Russia are and always will be impossible in Finland'. In another letter, Frederickson noted that moderate nationalists in Finland, like the jurist and academic Leo Mechelin, looked at the Russian revolutionary movement with considerable wariness.<sup>81</sup> A rather different view of the Finnish opposition movement was taken by Konrad (Konni) Zilliacus, a charismatic Swedish-speaking Finnish nationalist and journalist, who had since the late 1890s been involved in smuggling literature into the Russian Empire through Scandinavia.<sup>82</sup>

Volkhovskii and Zilliacus probably first came into contact in the spring of 1899 at a time when they were both seeking to rally opinion in Sweden against the tsarist government.<sup>83</sup> They certainly began to correspond regularly from the summer of 1902, initially discussing ways of preventing Swedish customs from seizing revolutionary literature sent from London for onward dispatch to Russia.<sup>84</sup> Volkhovskii became

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80 Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 22, Folder 4 (Selection of photographs of Ukrainian villages). The unpublished article quoted from here is unsigned but appears to be in Volkhovskii's handwriting. See Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 11, Folder 7 (Untitled and undated fragment).

81 Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 3, Folder 24, Frederickson to Volkhovskii, 18 September 1903; 26 October 1903.

82 For a useful brief discussion of Zilliacus' career, see Ira Jänis-Isokongas, 'Konrad (Konni) Zilliacus and Revolutionary Russia', *Nordic and Baltic Studies Review*, 3 (2018), 366–79. Also of value is Zilliacus' own admittedly unreliable autobiography *Sortovuosilta. Poliittisia muistelmia* (Porvoo: WSOY, 1920) which has not yet been translated into English. I would like to thank staff at the Slavonic Library at Helsinki who helped me read the relevant pages of the book.

83 Copeland, *Uneasy Alliance*, 96–98.

84 Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 3, Folder 36, Zilliacus to Volkhovskii, 13 November 1902.

a regular contributor to publications edited by Zilliacus in Stockholm, including *Fria Ord* (*Free Word*), submitting pieces on subjects ranging from his revolutionary experiences through to the challenges facing Russian women.<sup>85</sup> The two men quickly came to trust one another. There were also some striking similarities in their views, even though Zilliacus was first and foremost a nationalist and Volkhovskii a socialist. In 1902, Zilliacus published in Swedish a book describing the development of the Russian revolutionary movement,<sup>86</sup> subsequently telling Volkhovskii that it was designed to do what *Free Russia* had done over the previous decade,<sup>87</sup> presenting revolutionary opponents of the tsarist regime as reasonable people who only turned to violence in the face of oppression and cruelty. Volkhovskii was impressed enough to work with Zilliacus on producing an English version.<sup>88</sup> He also shared Zilliacus' view that opponents of the tsarist regime needed to set aside their ideological differences and cooperate more effectively. Zilliacus struggled, though, to persuade moderate figures in the Finnish opposition, like Mechelen, that their best hope for securing greater independence rested on cooperating with revolutionary groups across the Russian Empire.<sup>89</sup> Despite his frustrations, he nevertheless told Volkhovskii in the spring of 1903 that he planned to launch an ambitious personal initiative 'to come to an understanding about a concerted plan of action ... with all the various elements of the Russian opposition', including the Finns.<sup>90</sup>

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85 Volkhovskii Papers (Houghton Library), MS Russ 51, Folder 372, Zilliacus to Volkhovskii, 6 January 1903. Volkhovskii's contributions to the journal appeared under a pseudonym.

86 Konni Zilliacus, *Det revolutionära Ryssland: en skildring af den revolutionära rörelsens i Ryssland uppkomst och utveckling* (Stockholm: K. P. Boströms Forlag 1902). The book was updated and translated into English three years later including further material provided by Volkhovskii. See Konni Zilliacus, *The Russian Revolutionary Movement* (London: E. P. Dutton, 1905).

87 Volkhovskii Papers (Houghton Library), MS Russ 51, Folder 372, Zilliacus to Volkhovskii, 6 January 1903.

88 See the positive draft review of Zilliacus, *Det revolutionära Ryssland*, which appears to be in Volkhovskii's handwriting, in Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 8, Folder 12.

89 On relations between the Finnish constitutionalists and revolutionaries both in Finland and Russia, see Antti Kujala, 'Finnish Radicals and the Russian Revolutionary Movement, 1899–1907', *Revolutionary Russia*, 5, 2 (1992), 172–192. See, too, Steven Duncan Huxley, *Constitutionalist Insurgency in Finland. Finnish "Passive Resistance" against Russification as a Case of Nonmilitary Struggle in the European Resistance Tradition* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1990).

90 Volkhovskii Papers (Houghton Library), MS Russ 51, Folder 372, Zilliacus to Volkhovskii, 21 April 1903.

Zilliacus had, by the autumn of 1903, convinced at least some representatives of the Finnish constitutionalist movement to support the establishment of a news agency that would coordinate the propaganda activities of all groups that were critical of the tsarist autocracy (although he carefully downplayed the role of Russian revolutionary organisations). At the start of December, he told Volkhovskii that he was about to depart on 'a pilgrimage through Europe to personally meet and become acquainted with representatives of all the [various] groups of the opposition against the present government in Russia', in the hope of getting them to pull together 'to overthrow the ruling order'.<sup>91</sup> Two weeks later, Zilliacus was in Paris, meeting with the SRs Evno Azef and Ilia Rubanovich (a former member of Narodnaia volia who had worked closely with Lavrov during his final years). He followed this up with a trip to London where he met Volkhovskii, Chaikovskii and Kropotkin. The outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War a few weeks later made his task more timely than ever,<sup>92</sup> since the conflict promised to exacerbate the social and political tensions that had been building up for many years, providing fresh hope to opponents of the tsarist government.<sup>93</sup> In the early March of 1904, Zilliacus told Volkhovskii that the time was ripe for revolutionary groups to submit a joint manifesto to the Tsar demanding concessions including freedom of speech and constitutional reform.<sup>94</sup> Volkhovskii was sceptical about the wisdom of such a proposal, fearing that Zilliacus was too sensitive to the concerns of Russian and Finnish liberals, and wrote a detailed response arguing that Nicholas would never agree to such reforms. Zilliacus, in turn, replied that he had not meant to suggest that the course of action he proposed would be effective without holding out the possibility of more direct forms of

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91 Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 3, Folder 36, Zilliacus to Volkhovskii, 7 December 1903. For a discussion of Zilliacus' activities over the next few months, with a particular focus on his efforts to reassure Finnish constitutionalists about his discussions with Russian revolutionaries, see Copeland, *Uneasy Alliance*, 147–60.

92 For the diplomatic and military history of the Russo-Japanese War, see John W. Steinberg et al. (eds), *Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero*, 2 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2005–07); Ian Nish, *The Origins of the Russo-Japanese War* (London: Longman, 1985).

93 The war with Japan and its potential to increase the prospects of revolution was the subject of a special column, 'Voina', in almost all editions of *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* during 1904 and into 1905.

94 Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 3, Folder 36, Zilliacus to Volkhovskii, 1 March 1904.

action.<sup>95</sup> The two men had previously discussed how best to provoke armed uprisings in the countryside, as a way of putting pressure on the Government, and Volkhovskii was convinced that only such radical action would bring about change.

Although he had been ill for some weeks, Zilliacus once again met with Volkhovskii and Chaikovskii in London, in April 1904, to discuss plans for a possible conference that would bring together revolutionaries, nationalists and liberals to discuss ways of overthrowing the tsarist regime.<sup>96</sup> Volkhovskii was ready to consider any strategy that could weaken the government, although past experience made him fearful that divisions among Russian liberals made them unreliable collaborators.<sup>97</sup> The two most prominent figures among the liberals—Petr Struve and Pavel Miliukov—were both ready to cooperate with more radical groups, but as Zilliacus quickly discovered, others were uncertain about how far they should go in cooperating with the revolutionary parties. Zilliacus' correspondence with Volkhovskii over the following months was full of

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- 95 The gist of Volkhovskii's letter can be determined from the reply by Zilliacus found in Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 3, Folder 36, Zilliacus to Volkhovskii, 31 March 1904.
- 96 While there was, by the early summer of 1904, a growing recognition within the SR Party of the potential significance of growing unrest in Finland, the main Party publications still tended to see it more as an expression of growing radicalism rather than nationalism, at least until later in the year. See, for example, 'Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Finliandii', *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, 48 (15 June 1904).
- 97 For the multi-faceted character of Russian liberalism in this period see, for example, the relevant sections of Anton A. Fedyashin, *Liberals under Autocracy. Modernization and Civil Society in Russia, 1866–1904* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012); Klaus Frolich, *The Emergence of Russian Constitutionalism 1900–1904: The Relationship between Social Mobilization and Political Group Formation in Pre-Revolutionary Russia* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981); Shmuel Galai, *The Liberation Movement in Russia, 1900–1905* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); 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); Konstantin I. Shneider, *Mezhdu 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). Useful biographies of key figures in this period include Richard Pipes, *Struve: Liberal on the Left* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970); Melissa Kirschke Stockdale, *Paul Miliukov and the Quest for a Liberal Russia, 1880–1918* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

irritation that he could not 'bring them [the liberals] into line'.<sup>98</sup> Among the points at issue was whether decisions by the planned conference would be binding on all the parties represented there (particularly any proposal to support an armed uprising). Miliukov was in principle happy to cooperate with revolutionary groups as part of his emerging 'no enemies on the left' strategy, while Struve acknowledged that the terror attacks mounted by the SRs were not 'melodramatic whims', but rather 'the logical development of a dying autocracy'.<sup>99</sup> Many other liberals were by contrast reluctant to support an armed uprising, a sentiment rooted both in ethical unease about the use of violence, as well as recognition that it would make them vulnerable to harsh repression by the authorities.

Zilliacus also struggled to win support among the Social Democrats for a conference (although Plekhanov in Geneva was unusually amenable to the proposal).<sup>100</sup> The recent split of the Party into Mensheviks and Bolsheviks complicated discussions, while many Social Democrats were suspicious of claims for national autonomy made by the Finns and other minorities. Volkhovskii and Zilliacus corresponded over the summer of 1904 about the challenges involved in organizing a conference. The two men probably met in Geneva in the early summer of 1904. They certainly met in August at the sixth Congress of the Second International, in Amsterdam, where delegates from several European countries put pressure on their Russian colleagues to overcome their divisions.<sup>101</sup> Zilliacus recalled that questions of political violence and terrorism loomed large in discussion with the various Socialist Revolutionaries present in Amsterdam.<sup>102</sup> The subsequent report in *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* suggests that although many SR delegates were concerned about

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98 Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 3, Folder 36, Zilliacus to Volkhovskii, 1 July 1904.

99 Pipes, *Struve, Liberal on the Left*, 357.

100 Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 3, Folder 36, Zilliacus to Volkhovskii, 5 April 1904.

101 For the SR's articulation and defence of their programme at Amsterdam, see *Report of the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party to the International Socialist Congress, Amsterdam, 1904* (London: Twentieth Century Press, 1904). For a discussion of Russian questions at the Amsterdam Congress, including the build-up, see Bruno Naarden, *Socialist Europe and Revolutionary Russia: Perception and Prejudice, 1848–1923* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 145–56.

102 For Zilliacus' memories of the Conference, see Zilliacus, *Sortovuosilta*, 42–47. Both Shishko and Lazarev were also members of the SR delegation and presumably took part in the discussions (Shishko in particular corresponded in some detail with Zilliacus in the summer of 1904).

the principle of working with non-revolutionary opposition groups, most were ready to endorse such a strategy if it could advance the revolutionary cause.<sup>103</sup>

The 'Conference of Oppositional and Revolutionary Organisations' finally took place in the autumn of 1904 at the Hotel d'Orleans in Paris. Eight organizations sent delegations.<sup>104</sup> The Social Democrats did not attend. Miliukov and Struve were among the representatives of the Union of Liberation (whose members sought various reforms including the establishment of a constitutional monarchy). Azef, Chernov and Natanson represented the SRs. The remaining six delegations were made up of representatives from the various nationalist parties. The Conference agreed a common program that committed participants to work for the overthrow of autocracy, the adoption of a new form of government based on full adult suffrage, and the principle of national self-determination.<sup>105</sup> Articles in *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* noted that any agreement between revolutionaries and liberals could never be more than a temporary accommodation of convenience.<sup>106</sup> Volkhovskii was not a delegate for reasons that are not entirely clear. He had already effectively handed over the editorship of *Free Russia* to David Soskice, in part so he could move to Switzerland for medical treatment, although

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103 'Mezhdunarodnyi sotsialisticheskii kongress v Amsterdame', *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, 51 (25 August 1904). The report in the paper noted that the SR delegation generally took an 'extreme' left position on the range of issues discussed at the Congress.

104 The fullest discussion of the conference, including the negotiations leading up to it, can be found in Antti Kujala, 'March Separately – Strike Together', in Olavi K. Fält and Antti Kujala (eds), *Rakka ryūsui: Colonel Akashi's Report on his Secret Cooperation with the Russian Revolutionary Parties during the Russo-Japanese War* (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1998), 85-168.

105 Galai, *Liberation Movement in Russia*, 214–19; Pipes, *Struve: Liberal on the Left*, 365–66; P. N. Miliukov, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Izd-vo Politicheskoi literatury, 1991), 168–71. Useful material can also be found in D. B. Pavlov, *Khroniki tainoi voiny. Iaponskie den'gi dlia pervoi russkoi revoliutsii* (Moscow: Veche, 2011), 67–97, discussing how agreement at the Conference was made conditional by the Japanese government in return for providing funding to the opposition in an effort to undermine the Russian war effort in the Far East. The resolutions agreed at the Conference can be found in Erofeev (ed.), *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov. Dokumenty i materialy*, I, 158–61.

106 See, for example, 'Na dva fronta', *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, 53 (30 September 1904). The paper returned regularly to the subject in the following months. See 'Sotsialisty-revoliutsionery i nesotsialisticheskaia demokratiia', *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, 56 (5 December 1904).

he continued to travel quite extensively in the final months of 1904.<sup>107</sup> While he was one of the main confidantes of Zilliacus, Volkhovskii had been hesitant in supporting the merger of the Agrarian-Socialist League with the Socialist Revolutionaries, which may have ruled him out as a Party delegate at the Paris Conference.<sup>108</sup>

There was a further dimension to Volkhovskii's relationship with Zilliacus. Soon after the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war at the start of 1904, Zilliacus established close links with the former Japanese Military Attaché in St Petersburg, Col. Akashi Motojiro, who had moved to Stockholm after the start of hostilities (Zilliacus himself had lived in Japan for two years in the 1890s which helped him to win Akashi's trust). Over the next eighteen months or so, Akashi became a key figure in channelling funds from the Japanese government to the Russian opposition through Zilliacus, designed to foster popular unrest that could weaken the Russian war effort.<sup>109</sup> The money that was eventually provided by the government in Tokyo was used to buy weapons for use in uprisings in St Petersburg and other major cities. Zilliacus for his part went to great lengths to conceal his links with Akashi, recognising that they would alienate some of the opposition parties he was trying to bring together, particularly members of the Union of Liberation. He was however ready to discuss the issue openly with Volkhovskii as early as March 1904, when he told his friend that although he could not say anything definite about procuring weapons for use by the SRs and other revolutionary parties in Russia, he would shortly meet 'a man' in Stockholm, presumably Akashi, after which he would be able to say

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107 Useful material relating to Soskice's time editing *Free Russia*, and more particularly his role in shaping the response of the SFRF to the 1905 Revolution, can be found in the Stow Hill Papers. Soskice devoted considerable effort to promoting greater cooperation between the myriad groups and individuals committed to supporting change in Russia.

108 Some sources suggest that Volkhovskii—along with Chaikovskii—only formally joined the SRs in 1904, although the incomplete records of the Party make it difficult to determine the precise date.

109 For a detailed discussion of relations between Akashi and Zilliacus, including some material relating to Volkhovskii, see Fält and Kujala (eds), *Rakka ryūsui*, passim. A great deal of useful material looking at Akashi's activities through the prism of Russian police files, rounding out the story, can be found in Pavlov, *Khroniki tainoi voiny*.



more when he met Volkhovskii in April in London.<sup>110</sup> There is no record of this latter meeting—where they were joined by Chaikovskii—but over the following weeks Zilliacus continued to liaise with Akashi to obtain money for purchasing weapons.

Zilliacus' role was not an easy one, not least because the Japanese government was reluctant to make any money available until it was confident there was some degree of unity among the opposition (one of the reasons that Zilliacus was so anxious to secure agreement among potential participants at the planned Paris Conference). The Russian government was in any case well-aware of Akashi's activities through the reports of Azef (Zilliacus himself was under almost constant observation by the *Okhrana*).<sup>111</sup> Still more complex was the actual procurement and distribution of weapons. A letter that appears to be from Volkhovskii, written in Geneva in July 1904, gives an insight both into his own views and those of other SR comrades. He told Zilliacus that the situation in Russia was particularly febrile since the Government was calling out the reserves 'at a time when agriculture work is most urgent', adding that 'This creates such a tension among the peasantry that there would be no difficulty in starting a successful agitation in terms of refusing to pay taxes as well as supplying recruits'. He went on to note that the situation in the towns was equally tense and that 'Our party acknowledges the necessity of at once starting and pushing forward such an agitation in both towns & the country'. Volkhovskii told Zilliacus that the SRs were ready to

organise a number of armed attacks on single representatives of the *regime*, as well as—where possible—on certain governmental institutions (police stations, etc) ... The carrying out of this programme and its success will among other things depend on our possessing the necessary means, among which are adequate amounts of proper arms ...

He went on to suggest that importing weapons would 'cost us far more' than obtaining them within the Russian Empire, adding that foreign weapons such as Browning revolvers were of limited value given the

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110 Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 3, Folder 36, Zilliacus to Volkhovskii, 1 March 1904.

111 Pavlov, *Khroniki tainoi voiny*, 53–54.

shortage of ammunition. Volkhovskii believed it would be more helpful to send money which could be used to buy weapons in Russia itself.<sup>112</sup>

Akashi was in the summer of 1904 still struggling to get Tokyo to commit major financial support to the Russian opposition movement, which meant that he was unable to provide Zilliacus with the money needed to buy arms in Russia. The talks between Zilliacus and Akashi did however lay the foundation for a separate scheme, launched several months later, to transport weapons to Russia from Britain in barrels of lard. The architect of the scheme was Chaikovskii, along with J. F. Green of the SFRE, who persuaded Samuel Hobson to set up a 'dummy' company exporting goods to Russia.<sup>113</sup> Volkhovskii does not seem to have been directly involved. He left Geneva in August 1904 to go to Amsterdam, and from there returned for a time to London, but was back in Switzerland by the end of the year. Nor does he seem to have been involved in Zilliacus' most ambitious effort to smuggle weapons into Russia, which took place the following year, when the Finn used a series of intermediaries to hire the steamship *John Grafton* to transport thousands of rifles and millions of cartridges from London to the Baltic (Chaikovskii was once again the main conspirator among the London emigration). The Russian authorities were well-aware of the plot through information supplied by Azef, and the crew were forced to scuttle the ship off the coast of Finland, with the loss of most of its cargo, after failing to *rendez-vous* with the individuals who were meant to collect the weapons.<sup>114</sup> Whether Volkhovskii was aware of the scheme is uncertain,

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112 SR Party Archive (Amsterdam), 161, Volkhovskii to Zilliacus, 3 July 1904. The precise provenance and transmission of this letter is not altogether clear, but Volkhovskii seems to have written it having discussed the issue at length with Chaikovskii, suggesting both men were by now heavily involved in the plans to support armed uprising in Russia.

113 Hobson, *Pilgrim*, 127–29.

114 Antti Kujala, 'The Russian Revolutionary Movement and the Finnish Opposition, 1905. The John Grafton Affair and the Plans for an Uprising in St Petersburg', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 5, 1–4 (1980), 257–75; Pavlov, *Khroniki tainoi voiny*, 135–70. Miliukov noted in his memoirs that plans to smuggle weapons into Russia were discussed at the Paris Conference of opposition parties that opened in October 1904. See Miliukov, *Vospominaniia*, 169. In the wake of the John Grafton affair, Special Branch provided the Russian authorities with information to help them unravel who was behind the plot. See, for example, Okhrana Archive (HIA), Index Vc, Folder 1, Letter by George Edwards, 6 November 1905 (microfilm 69). For further information about subsequent efforts to smuggle arms to Russia, in some cases using British firms and boats, see Okhrana Archive (HIA), Index

but it seems likely that he was, given that it was known to a number of revolutionaries in Switzerland where he was himself living at the time.<sup>115</sup>

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*Free Russia* noted slightly cryptically early in 1905 that its principal editor had 'for a time' stood down 'to devote himself to the work of the Russian liberation movement at another centre'.<sup>116</sup> Volkhovskii had in fact gone to Switzerland for medical treatment, which he had been planning for some months,<sup>117</sup> but the move allowed him to play a bigger role in the SR Foreign Committee.<sup>118</sup> The decision-making structure of the SRs was extraordinarily fluid and ill-defined right down to 1917, resulting in almost constant skirmishing between various committees and editorial boards, with a consequent lack of any clear hierarchy. The Foreign Committee was as noted earlier elected by local groups of the SR Foreign Organization, whose 'statutes' set out its role as the provision of financial and human support for the revolutionary struggle in Russia, but the Committee served in practice as a more general decision-making body of the Party in emigration from 1903 down until the middle of 1905 (it included most senior SRs in exile including Volkhovskii, Chaikovskii, Shishko and Chernov). There were often tensions between the Foreign Committee based in Geneva and SR groups in Russia. Volkhovskii himself

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XIIc(2), Folder 1 and Folders 2 a–e (microfilm 169); Okhrana Archive (HIA), Index VIk, Folder 23, Reports by Farce, 18 October 1905; 9 January 1906; 12 January 1906; 9 February 1906 (all microfilm 108).

115 Among those who seem to have known of the plans was Lenin. See Pavlov, *Khroniki tainoi voiny*, 160.

116 'Report for the Year 1904', *Free Russia* (1 March 1905). David Soskice as acting editor of *Free Russia* was instrumental in encouraging the SFRF to raise money to help striking workers in Russia, although the issue raised familiar tensions, as Robert Spence Watson continue to point out that he could not as President of the Peace Society be associated with efforts 'to buy ammunition and the like'. Stow Hill Papers (Parliamentary Archives), STH/DS/1/WAT/7, Spence Watson to David Soskice, 24 January 1905.

117 Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 12, Folder 4, Vera Volkhovskii to father, 29 April 1904. Some insight into Volkhovskii's daily life in Switzerland can be gleaned from the correspondence with his daughters. Vera's letters focused heavily on personal matters but provided her father with some details about events in Britain. The letters from Sof'ia in Russia, found in Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 14, Folder 1, were also largely personal in character and contained limited information about the turbulent political developments taking place around her.

118 For a valuable analysis of the history and amorphous organizational identity of the Foreign Organisation, see Leonov, *Zagranichnaia organizatsiia*.

was part of a small commission set up in 1904 to examine complaints that representatives sent by the Committee to Russia regularly behaved in an arrogant manner that alienated their 'hosts'. While its report acknowledged the problem, the authors could not identify any positive ways to improve matters, and the gulf between exiles in Western Europe and party members in Russia festered for many years to come.<sup>119</sup>

Perhaps the most vexing question facing the Foreign Committee in 1904 was the issue of 'agrarian terrorism' (a term loosely applied to acts of violence and expropriation aimed against landowners and other symbols of rural authority). Chaikovskii noted at the second Conference of the Foreign Organisation, held in July 1904, that there were sharp differences within the Party about how best to foment unrest in the countryside.<sup>120</sup> Three months later, in October, Chaikovskii and Volkhovskii both attended a meeting of the Geneva Group of the Foreign Organisation, at which they contributed to a draft resolution warning against

The local uncoordinated character of acts of 'agrarian terror', which makes their regulation and control by the party difficult, and, consequently, cannot prevent unwarranted excesses which may be harmful to the moral prestige of the movement; and the danger of the degeneration in the movement if the spread of an 'agrarian-terrorist' mood should outstrip the development of the social-revolutionary consciousness and organisation of the masses and turn the movement from a collective struggle for the socialisation of the land into a guerrilla struggle by individual groups for the immediate improvement of their own economic position.<sup>121</sup>

The fear that encouraging agrarian terror might undermine the long-term cause of revolution echoed the position adopted by the Agrarian-Socialist League at its 1902 Congress, but it was not shared by many of the younger SRs in Western Europe, and a majority of those attending the meeting in Geneva voted for an alternative resolution that endorsed the spontaneous seizure of property as an effective means of radicalising

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119 Hildermeier, *Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party*, 113–14.

120 The full minutes of the Conference, along with other material about the proceedings, can be found in the SR Party Archive (Amsterdam), 199.

121 Quoted in Perrie, *Agrarian Policy*, 95. Perrie's analysis of events in October, which relied heavily on printed sources, is largely borne out by archival material relating to the meeting that can be found in SR Party Archive (Amsterdam), 199.

the peasantry. Volkhovskii was well respected by the new generation of revolutionaries like Vladimir Zenzinov, who later remembered him in Switzerland as 'an old man' with 'a beard that was almost completely white', but there was by 1905 significant resistance among many younger SRs to letting the *stariki* make all the critical decisions about how to conduct the struggle against tsarism.<sup>122</sup> Volkhovskii was frustrated by what he saw as a lack of discipline. In early January 1905, he wrote to Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia, who unlike him supported the young maximalists, lamenting that the supporters of agrarian terrorism wanted to create 'a Party within a Party'.<sup>123</sup> By the time she received the letters, though, the situation in Russia had been transformed by the events of Bloody Sunday, which sparked the 1905 Revolution and threatened for a time to sweep away the tsarist government.

The slaughter of unarmed demonstrators by imperial troops in front of the Winter Palace, in January 1905, shocked opinion both in Russia and abroad. The 'Bloody Sunday' protest was largely peaceful, although it had been infiltrated by revolutionaries, and the demands put forward by its leaders were distinctly radical, even if they were expressed in the conventional language of respect for the Tsar as the father of his people. In the weeks that followed, the government's authority rapidly disintegrated, as waves of strikes brought thousands of workers on to the streets, and a new 'Soviet' was set up that served for a time as a kind of shadow government in the Russian capital. *Zemstvo* liberals demanded a national assembly with real powers, while strikes by middle-class professionals including lawyers and doctors symbolised the growing importance of the 'third element', frustrated by both the banality and brutality of the autocratic government.<sup>124</sup> Tsar Nicholas responded

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122 V. Zenzinov, *Perezhitoe* (New York: Izd-vo im. Chekhova, 1953), 103–04. Zenzinov's memoirs are inaccurate in identifying the time he met Volkhovskii (Zenzinov spent two periods of time in Geneva).

123 Volkhovskii's views during this time can be seen in the numerous letters and postcards he sent to Breshkovskaia, in SR Party Archive (Amsterdam), 691. Although Volkhovskii and Breshkovskaia disagreed on a range of issues, the relationship between them was still warm. See, for example, the correspondence between them dating from this period in Volkhovskii Papers (HIA), Box 1, Folder 9.

124 Among the large literature on the 1905 Revolution, for a still unrivalled general account see Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905. Russia in Disarray* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988). The same author examines developments in the immediate wake of 1905 in his book *The Revolution of 1905. Authority Restored*

with a characteristic mixture of stubbornness and inconsistency. By the autumn of 1905, he was forced to turn to his former Finance Minister, Sergei Witte, who advised the Tsar to issue a manifesto promising civil liberties and a new assembly elected on a wide franchise. The October Manifesto helped to win over a section of moderate opinion, although working-class unrest continued in the major cities until the end of the year, when an uprising in Moscow was brutally suppressed, while the countryside remained in turmoil throughout 1906. Although order was gradually restored, the political reforms set in motion by the Manifesto, complete with the rhetoric and institutions of a quasi-liberal democratic system, ultimately failed to set the Russian political system on the path to a Western-style government.<sup>125</sup>

Volkhovskii's activities during the 1905 Revolution and its immediate aftermath are hard to trace, in part because of a paucity of personal letters, while the SR archives themselves throw surprisingly little light on the subject.<sup>126</sup> Although his health was poor, he continued to correspond regularly with Zilliacus, seeing him early in 1905 to discuss arrangements for a second conference to coordinate the work of liberal and revolutionary groups, but when it eventually took place

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(Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992). A lively account in English of the 1905 revolution can be found in Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy. The Russian Revolution, 1891–1924* (London: Pimlico, 1996), 157–212.

- 125 On this subject, see Geoffrey Hosking, *The Russian Constitutional Experiment: Government and Duma, 1907–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973). A more sanguine attitude towards democratisation and modernisation in Russia can be found in some other works published during the late 1960s and 1970s, such as Theofanis George Stavrou (ed.), *Russia Under the Last Tsar* (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 1969). See, too, Edith W. Clowes, Samuel D. Kassow and James L. West (eds), *Between Tsar and People. Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991). For a useful if now somewhat dated summary of some of the literature, and more especially on how to think quizzically about the difference between 'optimists' and 'pessimists' when considering the prospects of effective democratisation and modernisation in Russia before 1917, see Christopher Read, 'In Search of Liberal Tsarism: The Historiography of Autocratic Decline', *Historical Journal*, 45, 1 (2002), 195–210.
- 126 For helpful discussions of the SR Party in the 1905 Revolution, see Leonov, *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov*; Michael Melancon, 'The Socialist Revolutionaries from 1902 to 1907. Peasant and Workers' Party', *Russian History*, 12, 1 (1985), 2–47; Rice, *Russian Workers*, esp. 57–70. See, too, Hildermeier, *Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party*, esp. 129–76. The best source for tracing Volkhovskii's views on developments in Russia can be found in the letters he sent back to Vera in England.

in Paris in early spring the meeting did nothing to create a more united opposition.<sup>127</sup> The pace of events heightened still further the schism between SRs abroad and those living in Russia. Volkhovskii helped to oversee the dispatch of SR representatives to Russia on behalf of the Foreign Committee,<sup>128</sup> but many of them failed to report back, with the result that party members in Western Europe found it increasingly difficult to keep up with developments. Members of SR organisations in Russia for their part often complained about lack of central direction, even as they rebelled against the idea of outside control, preferring to act according to their own volition. The Combat Organisation continued to be active, assassinating Grand Duke Sergei in February 1905, but SR terrorism increasingly assumed a spontaneous and chaotic character, sometimes taking the form of semi-criminal enterprises in which the 'expropriators' held on to the money they had liberated.<sup>129</sup> Such activities owed little to the earlier *narodnik* tradition of 'ethical terrorism' and its emphasis on the selfless moral character of those who used violence to promote the welfare of the people.

The anxieties expressed by Volkhovskii and some other SR leaders in exile about agrarian terrorism were not rooted in any rejection of armed revolt *per se*. Nikolai Chaikovskii, whose views were usually close to his old friend, complained in the summer of 1905 that many SR leaders in Western Europe were if anything not *sufficiently* committed to supporting armed uprisings.<sup>130</sup> Volkhovskii himself welcomed attacks on senior bureaucrats, including the murder of the Governor of Ufa in May 1905, along with the killing of tsarist officials in Baku. He also warmly praised Ivan Kaliaev's killing of the Grand Duke Sergei. Volkhovskii had met Kaliaev in Switzerland, subsequently telling Vera back in England that the murder of the Grand Duke had been a work

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127 For details of the second Paris Conference, see Kujala, 'March Separately – Strike Together'. Also see 'Nekotorye itogi Parizhskoi konferentsii', *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, 61 (15 March 1905); 'Dokumenty mezhdupartiinoi konferentsii', *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, 65 (25 April 1905).

128 See, for example, SR Party Archive (Amsterdam), 211 (Minutes of the Foreign Committee, 5 July 1905; 6 August 1905).

129 For a discussion of this seamy 'terrorism of a new type', see Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill*, 123–80. For a rather different view, focusing on the activities of the SR Combat Organisation in the 1905 Revolution and its aftermath, see Gorodnitskii, *Boevnaia organizatsiia*, esp. 87–132.

130 Hildermeier, *Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party*, 132.

of ‘popular justice’, and that ‘an aura of eternal glory’ would forever ‘surround his [Kaliaev’s] blond head’.<sup>131</sup> Yet while the SR newspaper *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* welcomed the first outbreaks of disorder in 1905, as evidence that workers and peasants were interested in something more than economic reform, both Chaikovskii and Volkhovskii feared that spontaneous local uprisings would have little impact unless they were carefully coordinated. The subsequent loss of the *John Grafton* and its cargo symbolised how difficult it was for SR leaders in emigration to provide any real support for the struggle in Russia itself. The debacle also made it harder for leaders abroad to assert their authority. The disorder that shook Russia to its core in 1905 created tensions and divisions within the SR Party, as its leaders attempted to apply existing ideological shibboleths and organisational practices to a rapidly changing landscape.

Volkhovskii continued to contribute to the SR Party’s propaganda work during 1905, although his activities were constrained both by his work for the Foreign Committee and his poor health. He nevertheless periodically made ‘fiery’ speeches at various Party meetings in Geneva,<sup>132</sup> and took a leading role in organising the translation and dispatch of material to the Ukraine.<sup>133</sup> He also contributed two poems to *Krasnoe znamia: sbornik na 1-e Maia 1905* (*Red Banner: A Miscellany for 1 May 1905*) published by the SR Party in Geneva.<sup>134</sup> The first of Volkhovskii’s poems, ‘Pervoe Maia’ (‘The First of May’), was written in the rhythm of a march and proclaimed the day as ‘a festival of work and spring’, when the rays of the sun brought warmth and light like the struggle for ‘holy freedom’. It ended with a rousing declaration that ‘brothers we are many ... / and before us is the whole world! / Justice is with us! Our strength lies in

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131 Volkhovskii Papers (Houghton Library), 66M-197 (miscellaneous material relating to the Volkhovskii family), Feliks Volkhovskii to Vera, 22 May 1905.

132 Leonov, *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov*, 151. Volkhovskii does not seem to have been closely involved in plans to send agitators to work among the Russian peasantry, and among his old colleagues he seems to have sided with Chaikovskii against Shishko in emphasising the importance of establishing links among the urban workers as well as the peasants, something of a change from his position a few years before.

133 For an appeal by Volkhovskii for funds to support such work, printed in Ukrainian, see *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia*, 74 (15 September 1905).

134 *Krasnoe znamia: sbornik na 1-e Maia 1905 goda* (Geneva: Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov, 1905).



hope! / To battle as to a festive banquet'. His second poem, 'Videnie' ('The Vision'), which had probably been written rather earlier, began with a description of the grim fortress of Shlissel'burg, before continuing with a hopeful description of how the political system it represented could soon be swept away ('I hear the sound of the tocsin'). As well as contributing to *Krasnoe znamia*, Volkhovskii probably edited it as well, including in its pages warm tributes to several terrorists who had been executed for their actions, along with other material designed to persuade readers that the chaos that had erupted in Russia would soon mark the end of the tsarist government. The *sbornik* appeared at a time when it seemed that the hopes of those who had for years opposed the tsarist autocracy were about to come to fruition.

The 1905 Revolution transformed the environment in which all the Russian revolutionary groups operated. The reforms set in motion by the October Manifesto, including the creation of a new representative assembly (*Duma*), promised to expand the scope of legitimate political activity. So, too, did the end of censorship. Yet the scale of unrest in both city and countryside indicated that there was potential for more far-reaching social and economic change. In the event, developments in the years after 1905 proved unpredictable and uncertain, as the regime sought to maintain at least some of the traditional pattern of autocratic rule, pushing back on the changes set in motion by the launch of the constitutional experiment. Members of the SR Party in Russia and abroad had to respond to a new world in which familiar questions were raised in new forms. Divisions inevitably emerged in the Party as it sought to respond to the challenges and opportunities posed by a political environment that combined constitutional and autocratic elements in new and unfamiliar ways. The following chapter examines how Volkhovskii responded to these changes, at a time when he developed his role as a leading figure in producing SR propaganda, while continuing his efforts to shape attitudes in Britain towards the Russian government and the Russian revolutionary movement.

