Organization as Ideology

Dilemmas of the Russian Anarchists (1903-1914)

Michael Confino

2010

Contents

Michael Confino is Emeritus Professor of History, Tel Aviv University

Abstract

From the first years after 1900, the Russian anarchists debated the "question of the organization," and examined how they should organize the movement so that they may carry on its political activities and secure freedom of expression and of spontaneous action both for its members and for the masses. Opposed as they were to all kind of hierarchic, centralized, and pyramidal types of organization, most of the Russian anarchists preferred the creation of independent and autonomous groups whose members would be linked by a community of ideas and feelings. (The first groups appeared in Russia in 1903.) Under the influence of classical anarchist thinkers like Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Malatesta, some of them saw in anarchism not only an ideology, but a way of life, and tried to create cells in the image of the future society.

Everyday realities compelled many of them to adopt more efficient and practical solutions. The most frequent terms used in their vocabulary (and examined here) reveal their state of mind and ways of action, terms such as self-rule, initiative, autonomous action, independence, creativity, and free activity. Their groups were usually homogenous in terms of their social, educational, and national or ethnic composition. They rejected the practice of collecting members' fees or donations. As a result they faced the problem of how to finance their activities. A major debate ensued whether or not to use "expropriations" (eksy), armed attacks on state institutions or private enterprises, for gathering funds, and how such actions were viewed by the masses. The Revolution of 1905, in which the anarchists participated actively, had important repercussions on their views and ways of organizing.

I Introduction

During most of the long twentieth century, and particularly between 1917 and 1991, the political folklore and the popular representations in Russia and abroad held that the Bolsheviks were the great winners in the struggle of the Russian liberation movement against the tsarist autocracy, whereas the anarchists and the other opposition movements seemed to have been the big losers, thrown, so to say, "in the dustbin of history" by the march of time.

The Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917 reinforced this impression, and one of the reasons (among others) for the image that this event projected was the conviction that the Bolsheviks won because they had a better organization, while the anarchists lost because they had none. Thereafter, thanks to the entrenched ideas and the opaque screen of seventy years of Soviet propaganda, this impression persisted and was boosted by the Spanish Civil War in which many a commentator elaborated on the merry disorder in the anarchists' ranks and the staunch discipline in the Communist organization.

Then came 1991 and the fall of the Soviet Union. The "1917 paradigm" collapsed in historiography. This unpredicted event changed the terms of the equation. If in 1917 the Bolsheviks won, it turned out that their great tactical victory then, led in the long run to their great strategic defeat in 1991. As for the Russian anarchists, they did not lose anything—because they did not hold anything, neither power nor territory except for the shifting limits of the areas controlled at any given moment by Nestor Makhno's anarchist Insurgent Revolutionary Army in the Ukraine and

his "republic on tachanki," which was crushed not "by history" but by a surprise attack of its ally, Trotsky's Red Army, against Makhno's headquarters in Huliai-Pole on 26 November 1920.[1]

Crushed, persecuted, jailed, and again in emigration under the Soviets as under the tsars, the anarchists had a generous ideal and an optimistic political vision, and this invites the question: with what type or organization did they expect to achieve their goals? How did they intend to struggle against the old order and for the realization of the future society of their dreams?

The question of the forms of organization in revolutionary movements is rarely a technical one, generated only by divergent opinions on matters of expediency and efficiency. Quite often it covers the maneuvering by party leaders in order to achieve key positions or enhance their influence within the movement itself. In other instances questions of organization are essentially ideological or closely linked to ideological issues, and the case of the Russian anarchists may be a good illustration in this respect. Indeed, for the anarchists, the question of the forms of organization was a fundamental one since the formation of the first anarchist groups in Russia in 1903 and it became critical under the influence of the 1905 Revolution, as well as during the political repression in the last years of the tsarist empire and the beginning of the Soviet regime. Some of the issues related to the "organization question" had been discussed already by the vibrant and colorful anarchist movement in France in the 1880s and 1890s,[2] (hence their subsequent influence on anarchist groups in other countries), and Peter Kropotkin, at that time an exile in France and England, who actively participated in these debates.[3] These views and terminology included, for instance, the question of the desirable and apposite modes of organization of the anarchists cells, the nature of the links with the other revolutionary and socialist movements, and the attitude of the anarchists toward the workers trade unions and syndicats, and finally the use of terror and of action directe, rendered in Russian as priamoi otpor, priamoe vozdeistvie or priamaia bor'ba.[4] The international anarchist movement, and in particular the groups in Spain, Russia, Italy, South America, Bohemia, and the Balkans, followed closely the exchange of views of the French anarchists in an effort to evaluate what could be relevant and applicable in the specific social, national, and international conditions in which their own movements operated, and within their own popular traditions of rebellion and protest.[5]

[1] Tachanka was a light peasant cart, used to carry a machine gun. See Paul Avrich, The Russian Anarchists (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 209-25; Paul Avrich, "Nestor Makhno: The Man and the Myth," in Anarchist Portraits (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 111-24; Peter Arshinov, History of the Makhnovist Movement (1918-1921) (Detroit and Chicago: Black & Red and Solidarity, 1974; the Russian original was published in Berlin in 1923); Volin [V.M. Eikhenbaumi, The Unknown Revolution, 1917-1921 (New York: Free Life Editions, 1974), 667-710; Frank E. Sysyn, "Nestor Makhno and the Ukrainian Revolution," in Taras Hunczak, ed., The Ukraine 1917-1921: A Study in Revolution (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1977), 271-304; and for a very critical evaluation of Makhno's role, see Felix Schnell, "Tear Them Apart…And Be Done With It!" The Ataman-Leadership of Nestor Makhno as a Culture of Violence." Ab Imperio 3 (2008): 195-221.

[2] See Jean Maitron, Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France (1880-1914) (Paris: Societe Universitaire d'Editions et de Librairie, 1955).

[3] Peter Kropotkin, Memoirs of a Revolutionist, with a preface by George Brandes, 2 vols. (London: Smith, Elder, 1899).

[4] [P Kropotkinl, Khleb i volia 18 (June 1905): 4; Listki Khleb i volia 2 (14 November 1906): 4, 5.

[5] See Cesar M. Lorenzo, Les anarchistes espagnols et le pouvoir, 1868-1969 (Paris: Seuil, 1969); Jean Becarud and Gilles Lapouge, Anarchistes d'Espagne (Paris: Andre Balland, 1970); Iaacov Oved, El anarquismo y el movimiento obrero en Argentina (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno, 1978); Temma Kaplan, Anarchists of Andalusia, 1868-1903 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); Murray Bookchin, The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Years, 1868-1936 (New York: AK Press, 1977); Armando Borghi, Mezzo secolo di anarchia (1898-1945) (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1954); Alessandro Galante Garrone, I Radicali in Italia: 1849-1925 (Milan: Garzanti, 1978); Pier Carlo Masini, Storia degli an-

The purpose of this essay is to examine several ideological and tactical issues in Russian anarchism as reflected in the debates on the movement's organization when the first anarchist groups in the empire were formed, and to do so, whenever possible, from the point of view of the individual anarchists themselves, and by indicating—where appropriate—their own expressions and vocabulary which convey to a certain extent their mindset and mentalities. More precisely, the questions examined here are: How should the anarchists organize themselves so that they may at one and the same time carry on their political activities and secure the freedom of expression and of spontaneous action both of the members of the movement and of the masses? This essay addresses the common core of ideas and attitudes of the main anarchist ideological trends and subcultures in the period from the eve of the 1905 Revolution and its aftermath—Anarchists-Communists, Anarcho-Syndicalists, Novomirtsy, Chernoznamentsy, Beznachal'tsy, Anarkhisty-Obshchinniki—while eventually indicating the differences in their respective views on given issues.[6] Most of these groups had supporters in exile abroad–in France, Switzerland, London, and New York–who participated actively in the ideological debates of the movement and in the preparation and diffusion of printed material, but evidently not in the daily life of the groups which they followed closely at a distance. In terms of their geographical dispersion in the Empire, around 1905 the anarchist groups were to be found mainly in European Russia, roughly west of a line drawn from Riga to Tiflis, and including Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Belorussia, Ukraine, Bessarabia, southern Russia, Georgia, and the Pale of Settlement. From 1905 on, the anarchist movement began to expand eastward to Great Russia (an area of predominant Bolshevik implantation), in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Nizhnii Novgorod, Penza, Ekaterinburg, Tambov, and Zvenigorod.

The anarchists in Russia were a multinational movement with considerable participation of national minorities and a high percentage of Jews and Georgians. Great Russians seem to have represented about one third of the membership (compared to nearly 80 percent in the Bolshevik Party, and 65 percent in the SR Party). It was mostly a movement of workers and artisans, not of lumpen-proletarians and declasses, and among the revolutionary parties it had probably the lowest percentage of intellectuals. It was very neatly a youth movement, and it is roughly estimated that by 1905 about 60 percent of the anarchists were under twenty years of age (compared to 40 percent of the SRs, 20 percent of the Bolsheviks, and 5 percent of the Mensheviks). They were younger, more militant, and on the left of the Bolsheviks in the political spectrum. Other comparisons, such as "rank and file" versus "activists," for instance, are difficult to make because, unlike other parties, every anarchist had to be an activist; this applies also to the level of local leaders, national leaders, or top leadership—because there were none in the anarchist movement. It may be said tentatively that, as a general rule, the greater the activism and militancy of a movement, the lower the age of its membership. The age of the terrorists in each movement may also serve as an indicator: in 1905, two-thirds of those belonging to the SRs were under twenty-five years

archici italiani. Da Bakunin a Malatesta (18621892) (Milan: Rizzoli, 1981); Liliano Faenza, ed., Anarchismo e Socialismo in Italia: 1872-1892 (Rome: Editori riuniti, 1974); Eva Civolani, LAnarchismo dopo la Comune: I casi italiano e spagnolo (Milan: Angeli, 1981); Richard D. Sonn, Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin de Siecle France (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); Georgi Khadjiev, Natsionalnoto osvobozhdenie i bezvlastniyat fideraliz"m (National Liberation and Anarchist Federalism) (Sofia: ARTIZDAT-5, 1992); D. Daskalov, Anarkhizm"t v B"lgaria (The Anarchist Movement in Bulgaria) (Sofia: no publisher,1995).

[6] For a survey of the various groups of Russian anarchists see Paul Avrich, The Russian Anarchists, 40-58, and N. Rogdaev1N.I. "Razlichnye techeniia v russkom anarkhizme," Burevestnik 8 (November 1907): 9-11. I have not discussed here the views of the few Russian anarchists-individualists who were staunchly opposed to any kind of organization, and who followed Hynan Croiset's notorious motto: "Me, me, me…and then the others!"

old, while two-thirds of the anarchists were under twenty-one. The proportion of women in the revolutionary parties, although sizable, has not yet been established with reliability. As for the total number of members in these parties, the estimates vary greatly: in 1905 through 1907 (including Poland), the Russian anarchists counted around 15,000-16,000 followers; the Bolsheviks, between 40,000 and 46,000; the Mensheviks, from 38,000 to 50,000; the Socialist Revolutionaries, 40,000; the Bund, 33,000; the Zionist-Socialist Workers Party (Z.S.), 26,000; Poalei Zion, 16,000; and SERP (Jewish Socialist Workers Party), 13,000.[7] These figures should be viewed against the background of a total population of the Russian Empire in 1900 of 135 million inhabitants (including Finland), with an urban population of approximately 15 million (but, of course, these overall numbers are meaningless for understanding the relatively great scope of the Jewish movements, for instance, which were concentrated in a much more limited geographic area in the Empire [the Northern and the Southern Pale], and with a much lower relevant population of less than 4 million Jews.) In this spectrum of radical and revolutionary movements, some were well organized, some less so. There were also fluctuations in the number of members, due to internal or external factors; thus in 1908, the "Azef Affair" shattered the organization of the Socialist Revolutionaries and their numbers dwindled considerably.[8] It seems that in times of repression the anarchist groups withstood better the police onslaught and showed a greater resilience than the cells of the centralized parties.

What were the specific characteristics of the anarchists with regard to the complex ideological and practical issues that were related to the question of how they should organize themselves in order to carry on their underground political activity (which was illegal in Russia) and to achieve their ideals and their goals in the short run as well as in the distant future? This was an arduous issue in every radical movement, and in a sense it was even more difficult and complicated for the anarchists, because of several ideological presuppositions that distinguished them from the other movements.[9]

[7] Most of these figures were found in scattered sources, dealing with various aspects of this subject. See Avrich, The Russian Anarchists; James Joll, The Anarchists (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964); Maureen Perrie, "The Social Composition and Structure of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party before 1917," Soviet Studies 24, 2 (1972): 223-50; Christopher Rice, Russian Workers and the Socialist-Revolutionary Party through the Revolution of 1905-07 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988); David Lane, The Roots of Russian Communism: A Social and Historical Study of Russian Social Democracy, 1898-1907 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1969); Robert J. Brym, The Jewish Intelligentsia and Russian Marxism: A Sociological Study of Intellectual Radicalism and Ideological Divergence (London: Macmillan, 1978); Henry J. Tobias, The Jewish Bund in Russia (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972); Jonathan Frankel, Prophecy and Politics. Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Richard Pipes, Social Democracy and the St. Petersburg Labor Movement, 1885-1897 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963); Leopold H. Haimson, The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966); Leonard Schapiro, The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (London: Methuen, 1960); R. Abramovich, "The Jewish Socialist Movement in Russia and Poland (1879-1919), in The Jewish People — Past and Present, vol. 2, (New York: 1949); J.L.H. Keep, The Rise of Social Democracy in Russia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963).

[8] On the "Azef Affair" see Vladimir Burtsev, Bor'ba za svobodnuiu Rossiu. Mai vospominaniia (1882-1922) (The Struggle for a Free Russia. Reminiscences, 1882-1922) (Berlin: Gamaiun, 1923); V.K. Agafonov, Zagranichnaia Okhranka (The Okhrana Abroad) (Petrograd: Kniga, 1923); Nurit Schleifman, Undercover Agents in the Russian Revolutionary Movement. The SR Party, 1902-1914 (Oxford: MacMillan, 1988).

[9] The main sources used in this examination are anarchist periodicals printed in Russia or abroad, published and unpublished correspondence and writings of anarchist theoreticians (Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta, Novomirskii, Gogelia) and of local activists, Russian and Western European (mostly French) police reports that quote verbatim utterances and speeches of Russian anarchists, and relevant sections of secondary works on Russian anarchism. The unpublished material used is located in the archives of the Bibliotheque Nationale de France, Paris; the Archives Nationales, Serie F 7 (Police generale), Paris; Okhrana Archives at the Hoover Institution of War, Revolution and Peace,

II. Anarchist criticism of organization

Notwithstanding a widely shared view, most of the anarchists with the exception of the anarchists-individualists did not oppose every kind of organization.[10] First and foremost, they were against all forms of hierarchic organization (ierarkhicheskaia; lestnichnaia organizatsiia). In their view, the prototype and the symbol of the centralized form of organization was the state, the source of all evils and the main cause of the existing illnesses in society such as inequality, exploitation, lack of freedom, submission to authority, and repression of spontaneity. The shadow of the nature of the state—as they saw it—was always present in their discussions on the subject of organization. For instance, when they call their opponents—the Socialist Revolutionaries, the Bund, the Social Democrats (Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, "iskrists or semi-iskrists," iskrovtsy iii poluiskrovtsy)—"statesocialists" or "statist-socialists" (sotsialisty-gosudarstvenniki; socialistes d'Etat),[11] they do so for two main reasons. First, because ideologically these parties tend to create a socialist state; and second, because practically they are organized according to the state-like principles of hierarchy, centralization, and "state Jacobinism" (gosudarstvennoe iakobinstvo.)[12] These two aspects—the ends (the future society) and the means (the organization) to implement it—are closely linked in the anarchists' worldview: the political action and the goals are shaped and determined by the form of organization. As they put it, one could not expect that a centralized and hierarchic party would bring about a socialist society; it could create only a "socialist" centralized and hierarchic state (which for the anarchists was the very negation of socialism, and for that reason they called occasionally the SDs socialists-traitors).[13]

Stanford; the International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam. The periodicals include: Anarkhist. Organ russkikh anarkhistov-kommunistov, 1907-09 (Geneva and Paris); Der Arbayter Fraynd, 1885-1932 (London); Bez rulia, 1908 (Paris); Buntar" Organ russkikh anarkhistov-kommunistov, 1906-09 (Geneva); Buntovshchik, 1909 (St. Petersburg); Burevestnik. Organ russkikh anarkhistov-kommunistov, 1908-1910 (Paris); Chernoe znamia, 1905 (Geneva); Fraye Arbayter Stimme, 1890-1939 (New York); Listki Khleb i volia. Organ kommunistov-anarkhistov, 1906-07 (London); Listok gruppy Beznachalie, 1905 (Paris); Listok rabochei voli, 1901 (Kiev); Nabat. Organ russkikh anarkhistov-kommunistov, 1914-1915 (Paris); Novyi mir, 1905 (Paris); Rabochee znamia. Organ russkikh anarkhistov-kommunistov, 1915-16 (Lausanne, Geneva); Rabochi put" Organ russkikh anarkho-sindikalistov, 1923 (Berlin); Vol rabochei, 1906 (Odessa); Khleb i volia. Organ gruppy anarkhistov-kommunistov "Khleb i volia," 1903-1905 (Geneva).

[10] Several articles (most of them unsigned) in the anarchist periodicals examine more specifically this question: see, for instance [Peter Kropotkin], "Organizatsiia iii vol'noe soglashenie," Khleb i volia 18 (June 1905): 1-5; "Revoliutsionnaia organizatsiia," Burevestnik 2 (20 August 1906): 14-16; ibid., "Ob organizatsii" 3 (30 September 1906): 2-5; Burevestnik 3 (30 September 1906): 1-2; "Vopros ob organizatsii," Listki Khleb i volia 1 (30 October 1906): 8; "013 organizatsii," Listki Khleb i volia 5 (28 December 1906): 2-5; "K voprosam prakticheskoi raboty," Buntar' 1 (October 1908): 6-13; V.V. "Voprosy organizatsii," Buntar' 2-3 (June-July 1908): 19-23; idem, "Otvet redaktsii," 24-25; K. Orgeiani [Georg' Gogelia], "Organizatsionnyi print-sip revoliutsionnago sindikalizma i anarkhizm," Burevestnik 14 (January 1909): 2-7; "Itogi russkoi revoliutsii — k voprosu ob organizatsii," Nabat 1 (July 1914): 16-19. See also Rudolf Rocker, Anarchismus and Organisation (Berlin: Libertad, 1978); and Malatesta's polemic with anarchists-individualists who opposed any kind of organization: "Organizzatori e antiorganizzatori," L'agitazione (Ancona) 13 (4 June 1897); "Necessity dell'organizzazione," L'agitazione (Ancona) 14 (11 June 1897); a similar position was adopted by the French anarchist Jean Grave, Quarante ans de propagande anarchiste (Paris: Flammarion, 1973): 25; see also Luigi Fabbri, Malatesta. L'uomo e it pensiero (Naples: Edizioni RL, 1951), chap. 15 ("Organizzazione anarchica"): 197-210, and Gino Cerrito, 11 mot° della organizzazione anarchica (Naples: Edizioni RL, 1973).

[11] Khleb i volia 12-13 (October-November 1904): 2. In addition to "socialistes d'Etat," the French anarchists used to the same effect "socialistes gouvernementalistes" or "socialistes autoritaires" (see Les Temps nouveaux, IV, 4, [21-27 May 1898]: 3; L'Insurge, 2 [1985].)

[12] Khleb i volia 18 (June 1905): 1-5.

[13] Anarkhist 1 (10 October): 6.

Such a party is already a state in miniature because its structure mirrors the hierarchic structure of the state and there is no hope or possibility that such a party could create an egalitarian society of free individuals. Addicts to the opium of vertical organizing cannot lead to horizontal types of association and communities.[14] And centralization breeds inevitably "revolutionary bureaucratism."[15]

Moreover, according to the anarchists, those referred to as "state socialists," particularly the Social Democrats, needed this kind of hierarchic and centralized party structure for the achievement of their goals, and more precisely because what they wanted and were planning to do was a vast state putsch (gosudarsvennyi perevorot), a coup d'etat. To that effect, they needed their members to be organized according to the rules of discipline and obedience to the tenets of the "orthodox church of Marxism" (pravoslavnaia tserkov' marksizma) or of the "Marxist bible" (marksistkaia bibliia).[16] They did not want a membership in which the spirit of rebellion (buntovskii dukh) was alive, as they did not want members who would act spontaneously and on their own initiative (lichnyi pochin); they actually hated spontaneity and were afraid of it. They needed discipline because it offered them the possibility to direct and control the party from above (sverkhu), on orders from the party bosses, that is the Social Democratic chiefs (sotsial-demokraticheskoe nacharstvo). "Bossism" (general'shchina; verkhovodstvo), not spontaneity, was their most praised rule of conduct, and the cult of the personalities (kul't lichnostei) was the means to ensure it.[17]

In the anarchists' view, the state-socialist parties needed discipline and a strong organization (which they derided at times with expressions like organizatsionnaia organizovannost': "organized organization)[18] because their most important task, and a very difficult one at that (because of the spirit of rebellion of the masses), was to procrastinate and postpone the coming of the revolution. They wished, till then, to keep their membership (whom the anarchists called edinovertsy: "coreligionists") and the workers waiting patiently: discipline and keeping them under control were the means for preventing the revolution. The Social Democratic chiefs were always waiting: they waited for "the right time" and for "the proper moment." And they affirmed that "the proper time" would be reached gradually; till then, they had to prepare themselves, organize their followers, and get ready–which also required a lot of time. For this reason the anarchists called the Social Democrats "gradualists" (postepenovtsy), and their tactics, " postepenovshchina" (the French anarchists used the derisive and ungrammatical term 7volutionnards" and "endormeurs du progressisme'). For the Social Democrats it was always too soon (prezhdevremenno) for revolutionary action; for these opportunists (prezhdevrementsy) real action was always inopportune, "the time not yet ripe," and the "necessary conditions" not yet in store. As for the anarchists, they did not hold that in order to act one had to wait for the emergence of a "revolutionary situation"; their voluntaristic vision assumed (wrongly) that the time was always ripe for revolutionary action.[19] The SDs' and SRs' debates on their respective long term programs of action (programma maksimum) and programs for the immediate future (programma minimum) were considered by

[14] Khleb i volia 6 (January 1904): 2; Burevestnik 3 (30 September 1906): 2.

[15] Burevestnik 15 (March 1909): 13.

[16] Khleb i volia 18 (June 1905): 3; Khleb i volia 6 (January 1904): 2.

[17] Burevestnik 15 (March 1909): 13.

[18] S-sky, "K teorii terrora," Buntar' 4 (January 1909): 7.

[19] Vetrov, "Otnoshenie kom.-anar. k sushchestvuiushchim v Rossii politicheskim partiiam," Listki Khleb i volia 6 (January 1907): 3-4.

the anarchists (wrongly, again) as a device to conceal these parties' opportunism, and as such they were often derided with untranslatable expressions as "maksimal'nyi minimum and minimal'nyi maksimum."[20] Similarly, the SDs and the SRs were accused for turning the program of "minimal demands" into their "programma maksimum," and for this reason, they were considered by the anarchists as "minimalists" in revolutionary militancy.[21] Peter Kropotkin believed that "Social Democracy represented a compromise between workers socialism and bourgeois individualism."[22]

To be sure, the anarchists were not always right in their criticism and suspicions of the SDs and the SRs. Neither was the Bolsheviks' summary dismissal and contempt of the anarchists' theories and program just or accurate.[23] However, there was a big difference in this doctrinal rivalry and mutual rejection, which Leszek Kolakowski succinctly formulated: "Anarchists indeed are strongest when they criticize Marxism as an infallible prescription for despotism. Marxists are strongest when they attack anarchism as a puerile Utopia. Both are right, alas… but a big difference between the Marxist and the anarchist blueprint for universal hilarity is that the former is feasible and the latter is not."[24]

The Social Democrats' program required strong discipline and control, which could be achieved by a centralized and hierarchic party, in which every member gives orders, fulfills orders, or both, and for that reason the anarchists called such parties "autocratic" (samoderzhtsy).[25] Eric Hobsbawm writes: "The theoretical attitude with which bolshevism approached anarchist and anarchosyndicalist movements after 1917, was quite clear. Marx, Engels and Lenin had all written on the subject, and in general there seemed to be no ambiguity or mutual inconsistency about their views." One of these views stipulated that

"in addition to the characteristic readiness of Marxists to see the power of a revolutionary state used for revolutionary purposes, Marxism was actively committed to a firm belief in the superiority of centralization to decentralization or federalism and (especially in the Leninist version) to a belief in the indispensability of leadership, organization and discipline and the inadequacy of any movement based on mere 'spontaneity'."

(In the French version of the article this last sentence is rendered ironically, as: "[Lenind stigmatisait l'inefficacite du 'spontaneisme' anarchiste.")[26]

And there was another reason why the SDs needed such a party: their goal was to seize power and to rule, and this kind of organization permitted to train and prepare the personnel of the future government. The Central Committee was a sort of government in anticipation, a kind of "shadow cabinet" fascinated by the "mirage of power" (mirazh vlasti). This is

[20] Khleb i volia 6 (January 1904): 2; see also "Doloi programma-minimum," Khleb i volia 4 (November 1903): 6, and "Pochemu u nas net programmy-minimum?" Khleb i volia 11 (September 1904): 1-3.

[21] Khleb i Volia 8 (March 1904): 2.

[22] Peter Kropotkin, "Sotsializm i sotsial-demokratiia," Burevestnik 13 (October 1908): 6-8.

[23] On the origins of the debate between Marxists and anarchists see Paul Thomas, Karl Marx and the Anarchists (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980); and David Miller, Anarchism (London: J.M. Dent, 1984).

[24] Leszek Kolakowski, "For Brotherhood or for Destruction," The Times Literary Supplement, 4 January 1985 (a book review of David Miller's Anarchism). (I checked carefully the original issue of the TLS, and found that "hilarity" is exactly the word used by Kolakowski.)

[25] Anarkhist 1 (10 October 1907): 32; in this case this referred to the Bund and "the adepts of Iskra", that is the Bolsheviks, in Cherkasy (Kiev guberniia).

[26] Eric J. Hobsbawm, "Bolshevism and the Anarchists," in Revolutionaries. Contemporary Essays (New York: New American Library,): 57, 58; ibid. "Bolchevisme et anarchisme", Politique aujourd'hui, (September-October 1970): 70.

why the anarchists kept asserting that the Social Democrats' program to replace the capitalist state by a socialist one amounted to replacing the Russian autocratic tsars by Social Democratic tsars. For the anarchists, the very existence of such an institution as the Central Committee, the party's holy of holies (sviatia sviatykh partii) was in itself a disgrace.[27] They derided the belief that the Central Committee was omnipotent and omniscient, and that it was capable to decide when and where action should be taken, and they called its members by a variety of untranslatable derogatory expressions meaning "intellectuals' party centers," "intellectual leaders addicted to committee-meetings," (such as " komitetchiki," "intelligentskoe iadro komitetchikov," "intelligentskie tsentry," "general'stvuiushchaia intelligentsiia [partii]," "gospoda zanimaiushchiesiia bumagomaraniem"), and their activity "igra v nachal'stvo." (playing the big bosses).[28] That is why, they argued, revolutions begin when the parties' central committees do not expect them at all. They found a confirmation of this view when the revolutionary crisis of October 1905 occurred while the delegates of the Sixth Congress of the Jewish Bund were travelling abroad to attend the Congress' sessions in Zurich.[29] The Central Committee was conceived as an instrument in the struggle for state power, but in the meantime the focus of the struggle for power was within the party: this deplorable outcome seemed inevitable in hierarchic organizations.

Another public body whose terminology the anarchists often borrowed in describing their opponents and particularly the SDs was the Church. Thus, when they spoke about exclusion from the party, they said "otluchenie of tserkvi" (excommunication from the Church). They said also "sladkorechivie uveshchaniia popov ortodoksal'nogo sotsializma" (the sweet exhortations of the priests of orthodox socialism), "iezuitizm s.-d." (the Jesuitism of the SDs), and c, nepogreshimykh pap revoliutsii" (the infallible popes of the revolution).[30]

The anarchists' attitude toward the shortcomings and weaknesses of hierarchic and centralized parties may, therefore, be summarized as follows. The hierarchic and centralized parties destroy the revolutionary cause and action, and they kill the spirit of rebellion and spontaneity. The Center decides everything and does not leave any initiative to individual members and local groups. Centralism transforms the worker into a tool in the hands of a force that acts as a preceptor or tutor (opekun; nastavnik) and under the tutorship of a party of intellectuals (partiino-intelligentskaia opeka),[31] a force that stands outside and above the worker's will, and deprives him of any initiative and independence (samovol'naia deiatel'nost'). Such parties destroy any audacity of thought, and breed extreme caution and circumspection in their central committees; their structure and, in particular, the principle of centralization, generate inevitably the formation of a party bureaucracy. Finally, in spite of their most praised quality—unity of action—they rather provoke splits and scissions instead of avoiding them, because, as a rule, decisions are arrived at by majority vote which implies the submission of the minority to this kind of decisions.

[27] Burevestnik 15 (March 1909): 13.

[28] Raevskii, "Vserossiiskii rabochii s"ezd i sotsial demokratiia," Burevestnik 6-7 (September-October 1907): 6.

[29] See Tobias, The Jewish Bund, 331-32.

[30] Anarkhist 1 (10 October 1907): 18; Burevestnik 15 (March 1909): 13; Khleb i volia 10 (July 1904): 2; Listki khleb i volia 1 (30 October 1906): 11.

[31] Raevskii, "Vserossiiskii rabochii s"ezd," Burevestnik 6-7 (September-October 1907): 6.

III. Principles of anarchist organizing

If this was the anarchists' criticism of other revolutionary organizations, what was their own program in this respect? With regard to the theoretical approach, their reasoning was a consistent extension of the principles they used towards others. With respect to the practical forms of organization, theirs amounted to turning upside down the principles of the "state socialists," although, as we will see, the implementation of the anarchists' blueprint was quite difficult in real life.

Anarchists were not organized in political parties but in independent and autonomous groups linked by a community of ideas and attitudes and not by an obligatory organizational discipline. From the theoretical point of view, they posited that if the centralized and hierarchic organization is state-like, theirs should be in the image of the future stateless society. Thus, the anarchists established a link between their ideal regarding the future society and the form of their organization in the present. In this perspective, the organization should entail no subordination, no hierarchy, no centralization, no elective systems, no executive bodies, and no impediments to spontaneity and free action of its members. It should be based on the "libertarian principle of organization" (svobodnicheski i printsip organizatsii),[32] and should represent, in sum, a mosaic of free and autonomous groups, freely organized by their members. Consequently, this form of organization would be also a prefiguration of the future society, and by the same token it would participate in the creation of new forms of social life before the revolution. Anarchosyndicalists sought to create even under capitalism "free associations of free producers" that would engage in militant struggle and prepare to take over the organization of production on a democratic basis. These associations would serve as "a practical school of anarchism."[33] This view of the form of organization carries the imprint of the thought of the classical anarchist thinkers—Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, and Errico Malatesta—on anarchism as "a way of life." Indeed, Bakunin often asserted that "the workers' organizations create not only the ideas, but also the facts of the future itself in the prerevolutionary period, and that they embody in themselves the structure of the future society."[34] Implicit in this view was a belief in "natural man" as more fundamental and historically superior to "political man," as well as the belief that a social ideal implied obligations here and now; because people with consistent views should avoid an ambivalent attitude such as "on the one hand—the ideal, on the other hand—the exact opposite in practice."

A good example of this attitude was the doctrinal faith in the withering away of the state. Both anarchists and Social Democrats professed a belief in a future stateless society, but their means to achieve it differed. The Social Democrats—or so affirmed the anarchists—were making every effort for strengthening the principle of the state. The anarchists did not rely on the marvels of dialectical magic (dialekticheskoe volshebstvo) and tried to create already the cells of the future society. Lenin's usual reply to this view was that the revolutionary party had to devise its action not according to the ideal toward which it aspired, but according to the present situation in which it was acting. In addition, Lenin invariably asserted that all attempts to create cells of the future society within capitalism were doomed and were motivated by petty bourgeois impatience to skip over the hardships of the struggle against capitalism.

[32] Burevestnik 14 (January 1909): 3.

[33] See Fernand Pelloutier, "Uanarchisme et les syndicats ouvriers," Les Temps nouveaux 2-8 November 1895.

[34] Michel Bakounine (1869), OEuvres 4 (Paris: Stock, 1910): 135.

The main features, then, of the anarchist organization were its being a cell of the future society, based on self-rule (samoorganizatsiia) and on the equality of all its members, while each group enjoyed complete freedom with no externally imposed discipline. The major ideas that informed this view were conveyed by a set of terms frequently found in anarchist writings and everyday speech, like "initiative" (initsiativa), "autonomous activity" (samodeiatel'nost'), "independence" (nezavisimost'), "creativity" (tvorchestvo), "free activity" (samovol'naia deiatel'nost). How were these theoretical principles implemented in the practical activity of the anarchists?

IV. Internal rules of anarchist organizations

The typical anarchist organization, in theory as well as in practice, was a relatively small and intimate group of people who knew each other well, wanted to belong to that group, be together with these particular members of the group, and participate in their activities. This rule was followed practically always, and if some members decided not to belong to the group, it would either dissolve or these members would leave it without ceasing to be anarchists and without ceasing to be considered as such by the group's fellow members. The anarchist groups were based on the principle of Gemeinschafr,[35] and were in a way a kind of love affair between their members. Indeed, one of the most important features, and the one most often mentioned, was that the groups were based on a community of ideas and feelings (obshchnost' osnovnykh idei i chuvstv). It is interesting to note that their terms of reference were, in addition to the future society, the Chaikovskii Circle and the underground groups of the 1870s, which were mostly populist-oriented, and were also well known from personal experience by such "old- timers" like Peter Kropotkin and Varlaam Cherkezov who had participated in them and were now influential members of the anarchist movement.

A conference of Russian anarchists-communists in exile held in London in September 1906 discussed, among other subjects, "the organization question."[36] It adopted the following resolution: "The Russian anarchists reject any form of hierarchic organization, which suits the parties of the state-socialists (sotsialistoy gosudarstvennikov), and work to create for themselves another type of organization based on the free agreement (svobodnoe soglashenie; libre entente) between independent and autonomous groups." It was also stipulated that a necessary condition for the lasting stability and success of this type of organization was the close links between all the members of each group, and, therefore, that it was better to have—in the cities and towns—several small groups rather than a big one.[37] The International Anarchist Congress held in Amsterdam the following year on August 26-31 dealt during four sessions with the topic "Anarchism and Or-

[35] On the relationship between members of political parties in terms of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft see R. Heberle, "Ferdinand Tunnies' Contribution to the Sociology of Political Parties," American Journal of Sociology 61 (1955-56): 213; Maurice Duverger, Les partis politiques (Paris: Armand Colin, 1954): 149-53.

[36] In this "little preliminary conference," as Marie Goldsmith wrote later, participated Ivan Knizhnik-Vetrov, Alexander Schapiro, Marie Goldsmith, Vladimir Zabrezhnev (Fedorov) and his spouse, Peter Kropotkin and his wife, Sof'ia Grigor'evna, Daniil Novomirskii (Iankel Kirillovski0, 0. Kushnir (Kushniaroft), and L. F. Nagel'; see Peter Kropotkin, ed., Russkaia revoliutsiia i anarkhizm. Doklady, chitannye na s"ezde kommunistov-anarkhistov v oktiabre 1906 g. (London, 1907); M. Korn [Marie Goldmsith], "K godovshchine smerti P.A. Kropotkina," Galas truzhenika 17 (March 1926): 41; I. Knizhnik [I. Vetrov], "Vospominaniia o P.A. Kropotkine i ob odnoi anarkhistkoi emigrantskoi gruppe. (Stranitsa iz istorii nashego revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia), Krasnaia letopis'4 (1922): 34.

[37] "Rezoliutsii s"ezda," Listki Khleb i volia 1 (30 October 1906): 1-2, 3-6.

ganization," and adopted a resolution quite similar to that of the Russian anarchists' conference in London. Drafted by Amedee Dunois, it read:

"The anarchist meeting in Amsterdam, 27 August 1907,

"Considering that the ideas of anarchy and organization, far from being incompatible as is often stated, complement and clarify each other, as the very principle of anarchy lies in the free organization of producers;

"Considering that individual [action], important as it may be, cannot make up for the lack of collective action of a combined movement, to the same degree that collective action cannot make up for the lack of individual action;

"Considering that the organization of militant forces would ensure new development of propaganda and could only accelerate the penetration of the ideas of federalism and revolution into the working class;

"Considering that workers' organization, based on common interests, does not exclude an organization based on shared aspirations and ideas;

"Are [sic] of the opinion that comrades from every country should proceed to form anarchist groups and federate the groups once they have been formed."

This motion was completed by an addendum proposed by Errico Malatesta and Karel Vohruzek (a representative of the anarchist movement in Bohemia):

"The Anarchist Federation is an association of groups and individuals in which no one can impose his will nor belittle the initiative of others. Its goal with regard to the present society is to change all the moral and economic conditions and accordingly it supports the struggle with all appropriate means. "[38]

The Russian anarchists usually preferred the existence of small and intimate groups; the admission of a new member in the group was done only by agreement of all its members. In the group itself all the members were equal, with no subordination, no committees and no delegation of powers, and all matters were discussed by the entire group in its assembly (skhod; skhodka). At the end of the discussion, decisions were not arrived at by majority vote, but by attempts to convince each other. According to the anarchist view, decisions taken by majority vote, or opinions held by a majority, were not necessarily correct, right, or just. "We, as members of the revolutionary movement," they wrote, "which represents such a tiny minority of the people, we should be the first to understand the fallacy of majority rule, so dear to the Social Democrats in general and the Bolsheviks in particular."[39] Thus, the opinion of the majority was never binding for the minority, but only for those who freely agreed with it. Usually the group would try to arrive at unanimous decisions and reach a consensus. Only in cases of issues of principle and if consensus turned out to be impossible, would some members separate and create a new anarchist group. Cases like that appear not to have been exceptional, and occurred without excommunications and vituperations.

[38] The International Anarchist Congress, Amsterdam 1907, http://www.anarkismo.netnewswire.php?story_id=6632, p. 12-3 (visited August 14, 2009); see also N. Rogdaev [N.I. Internatsional'nyi kongress anarkhistov v Amsterdame, n.p., n.d. [but Paris, 1907]. Nikolai Muzil' was one of the Russian delegates to the Congress in Amsterdam; the others were Vladimir Zabrezhnev and, according to the minutes of the Congress in French, Emilie Wetkoff (probably: "Vetrov," the wife of Ivan Vetrov), and two names which I was unable to identify: Sophie Wodneff, and Vladneff, which may have been occasional pseudonyms and not the real names of the persons.

[39] Liskti Khleb i volia 5 (28 December 1906): 3-4; see also Burevestnik3 (30 September 1906): 1; ibid., 14 (January 1909): 2.

By and large, this internal system worked well because there was also a strict selection in the admission of new members. In fact, the groups were not open to everyone. In addition to the subjective considerations that may have been influential in each case of a new application, there were also objective criteria such as the rule that groups should be composed of homogeneous elements (odnorodnye elementy), and even "homogeneous social elements" (odnorodnye sotsial'nye element)) and common social origin (obshchnost' sotsiarnogo polozhenia). The groups were formed according to the rule that it is better to break down a group in several smaller ones than to include in it diverse and heterogeneous elements (raznorodnye element)). The purpose of this approach was to secure the best conditions for close links among the members, create strong group-solidarity, avoid internal tensions and personal conflicts, secure mutual trust, and ensure unity of action and spontaneity.

What the anarchists aimed at and what they obtained in reality was the formation of groups according to social origin, education, age, and nationality. With regard to the socio-economic situation, there were, for instance, different groups and separate skhodki of workers, artisans, peasants, intellectuals, and soldiers.[40]

The groups were also strictly age groups, with the inner structure and behavior of youth gangs. A most interesting characteristic concerned the homogeneous formation of groups by nationality. Thus, in multinational cities like Baku there were groups whose membership was respectively almost entirely Tatar, Armenian, Russian, or Persian. The anarchist paper. Buntar' reported in 1906 that in Bialystok, "some time ago the Polish comrades in the three existing groups left them and created a new, fourth one."[41] In Odessa, Bialystok, Warsaw and other cities, Jewish groups almost invariably did not have members of other nationalities, and this tradition continued abroad in emigration, such as, for instance, the Jewish anarchist group in Whitechapel and the London Federation of Jewish Anarchists.[42] This differentiation of the groups along national lines was considered normal, and did not represent an issue or a problem.[43]

As for the relations among the anarchist groups, they usually established links of cooperation and exchange of information, while each of them remained free and autonomous within a federation-like structure. The relations among the groups were based on the principle of a free consensus (svobodnoe soglashenie) arrived at by exchange of views (soveshchaniia) in a voluntary association among a certain number of groups (assotsiatsiia grupp) or sometimes, among the groups and regional or national federations that each group was free to join. These principles applied to the groups in Russia as well as to those in emigration. Loose federative ties and a flat horizontal juxtaposition of autonomous independent cells were considered more congenial than any kind of pyramidal structure. As Peter Kropotkin put it in a letter to a fellow-anarchist: "We [an-

[40] Thus, in Pereslav (Poltava guberniia) the beginning of the anarchist activity in July 1907 was initiated with two separate skhodki, one of intellectuals (intelligentskaia) and another of workers and peasants (Anarkhist I [10 October 19071: 34).

[41] Buntar 1 (December 1906): 26.

[42] See Rudolf Rocker, The London Years (London: Robert Anscombe & Co., 1956); William J. Fishman, East End Jewish Radicals, 1875-1914 (London: Duckworth, 1975); see also Hermia Oliver, The International Anarchist Movement in Late Victorian London (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983); Amedeo Bertolo, ed., L'anarchico e l'ebreo. Storia di un incontro (Milan: Eleuthera, 2001).

[43] An interesting exception to this rule in the early twentieth century was the Macedonian-Bulgarian Anarchist Federation, due partly to the fact that in those years the Macedonians considered themselves Bulgarians, and maybe also they joined forces for tactical reasons, because they brought a long experience of armed resistance and partisan warfare.

archists] will never participate in the creation of any kind of pyramidal organization—economic, political or educational—even if it is a revolutionary one."[44] According to the anarchists, theirs was also a good system for activities in underground conditions, and a less vulnerable one to the infiltration of agents-provocateurs and of police informants. This was correct, since for lack of a center, there was no possibility for an Azef-type affair at the center of the movement, which the anarchists called tsentrarnaia provokatsiia, to occur.

Kropotkin wrote: "All the parties [except the anarchists' are led by their Azefs; and we owe this perversion to Social-Democracy, because it is its political perversion that has generated the wider one."[45] Nevertheless, some groups were infiltrated by police informants at the local level.[46]

All in all, the best kind of inter-group organization was considered to be a free federation voluntarily arrived at and not through the election of permanent committees. Such committees always tended to become, and finally were, like any government, an obstacle to the free and harmonious development of the movement. The best way to proceed was by consultation between the groups on given specific issues; the decisions of these consultations were not obligatory for the groups. The historical experience indicated, in the anarchists' view, that in spite of the absence of formal discipline and compulsion, agreement and unity of action were easily achieved by way of consultation. In addition, this method preserved among the anarchists what they considered to be the most valuable element during a revolutionary situation: spontaneity and the capability for spontaneous action (sposobnost' lichnogo pochina). The outcome of the anarchist type of organization was freedom from party discipline (and this was a factor of attraction for members of the Social Democratic and the Socialist Revolutionary parties); there was a lack of tension between the rank and file and the leadership (for lack of a leadership), and a great flexibility in the groups which could always disband and reappear again. On the other hand, this flexibility led also to a greater instability (which, incidentally, renders the study of this topic and the gathering of statistical data more difficult). It was around 1905, when these principles of organization had to prove the efficiency of the groups' activity in a revolutionary situation, that the debate on this organizational question became more and more intensive, and the search for better modes of organizing an imperative one.

The activities of the groups included usually organizing the workers, propaganda among the peasants, periodical publications, leaflets, setting up printing presses and laboratories for preparing explosives, buying arms, smuggling to Russia anarchist publications printed abroad, smuggling anarchist activists from Russia across the border, giving financial support to workers on strike, and (depending on the group's tactical beliefs) terrorist actions. The question is, of course, where was the money coming from to support these activities? Where and how did the groups find the funds to carry on these tasks and implement their program of action?

[44] Peter Kropotkin to Marie Goldsmith, 11 May 1897 in Michael Confino, Anarchistes en exit. Correspondance inedite de Pierre Kropotkine a Marie Goldsmith, 1897-1917 (Paris: Institut d'Etudes Slaves, 1995): 80.

[45] Peter Kropotkin to Marie Goldsmith, 22 February 1909, Confino, Anarchistes en exil, 355.

[46] See Khleb i volia 12-13 (October-November 1904): 2; see also the letter of Peter Kropotkin to Marie Goldsmith, 22 February 1909, Anarchistes en exit, 355, and for an examination of the anarchists' positions toward the secret police activity see Michael Confino, "Pierre Kropotkine et les agents de l'Okhrana," Cahiers du monde russe et sovietique 24, 1-2 (January-June 1983): 108-10.

V. Nervos belli pecuniam[47]

The ways of financing the groups' activities is perhaps one of the most interesting chapters of anarchist organizational theory and practice. As a matter of principle, the groups did not require fees from their members, and they were also opposed to asking contributions (sbory) from the workers. This practice stemmed from several considerations. First, the anarchists posited that their members' and the workers' earnings were so low that it was improper to reduce even more their starvation wages by collecting fees or contributions. Moreover, since the anarchists were protesting against the workers' exploitation, they could not contradict themselves and put an additional burden on the masses. Besides, such a source of financial support seemed of very little value because the money that could be raised would not amount to considerable sums (due to the poverty of the anarchist followers). In short, such a way of money-raising was neither fair, nor moral, nor efficient. In their words: "It is obvious that with this kind of funding no revolutionary organization could exist, and as a matter of fact none exists."[48] To illustrate this train of thought, let us see how the anarchists viewed the Social Democratic Party's way of financing its activities.

As a rule, the anarchists were convinced (with or without proofs) that the SDs had plenty of money. As the author of a bulletin article put it: "The socialists-democrats are always well provided with funds. For them the question how to survive and with what financial means to carry on their activities—this question does not exist." (Note that the author does not use the name "Social Democrats," but intentionally and systematically "socialists-democrats" with a pejorative connotation.)[49] Second, the anarchists were convinced that an informal alliance existed between the Social Democrats and wide circles of the bourgeoisie. For them this was apparently consistent logically and ideologically: the Social Democratic Party received substantial amounts of money from the bourgeoisie because it was a reformist party, it wanted a bourgeois revolution, and it entered in temporary or permanent "blocs" with various groups of the bourgeoisie.[50] From the ideological point of view the anarchists were wrong. With regard to the facts, they were right, for the Social Democrats did receive indeed substantial amounts of money from wealthy people, some of them "bourgeois," some others—being anonymous—may have belonged to all walks of society (except the poor and the proletarians). Thus according to a research carried out by David Lane, seven eighths (87.5%) of the Social Democrats' funds around 1905 through 1906 came from such sources.[51] The anarchists did not know probably the particulars of these donations, but they knew that there was no lack of funds in the SDs organizations, according to the information they received from SD defectors who joined the anarchists' ranks. They used to say: Nothing of that kind happens to us anarchists; the bourgeois do not give money to anarchists; had they done so, they would have required concessions and compromises that would amount to selling our soul to the devil.[52] The anarchists did not believe in God, as for the devil, in this case they were wrong for he had no influence whatsoever on this matter. But they believed that non-anarchist organizations usually subsist thanks, in part, to donations (pozhertvovaniia; dobrokhotnye daiania) from the bourgeoisie. "For us, anarchists, such a method is unthinkable.

[47] Cicero, Filippics, V, 5 (Money forms the sinews of war).
[48] Burevestnik 1 (20 July 1906): 9-10.
[49] Anarkhist 1 (10 October 1907): 14-15.
[50] Ibid.
[51] See Lane, Roots of Russian Communism,105-9;
[52] Buntar'2-3 (June-July 1908): 24-5.

It would be a terrible stupidity to go to the bourgeoisie and beg for donations for a cause whose aim is to liberate the working masses from that same bourgeoisie"; and as one activist put it:

"If we were to solicit from the bourgeoisie and go to visit these gentlemen, we would have to wear black suits, hats, and white gloves, we'll have also to make up our anarchism, which cannot be done without making up a little our souls. And all that would lead not only to a vast masquerade party, but also (as we know) to things that it is a shame to write about."[53]

They believed that such a practice

"would also have a demoralizing influence on ourselves since it would have forced us to compromise with the bourgeoisie (as it is done by would-be revolutionary parties), and would have had a corrupting effect on the masses. In such a case the masses would not be educated in the anarchist spirit of insubordination and rebellion, but on the contrary, in a spirit of peaceful agreements with, and concessions to, the bourgeoisie. In addition, the bourgeoisie is not so stupid as to finance a truly revolutionary organization, and for that reason will not donate to an organization like ours. 'Therefore, there is only one way left open: the way of armed seizure (zakiniat [of funds]). And willy-nilly, whether we like it or not, we will have to use this method."[54]

"Expropriations"

Some of the anarchist groups, indeed, adopted this method or "armed seizure" for the funding of their activity, while some others opposed it. In revolutionary lingo these seizures were called "expropriations," or eksy," for short, a stump word which as a verb meant also "to confiscate."" Expropriations were linked to terrorism and were practiced both by groups that endorsed and carried out terrorist acts, as well as by those who rejected them and used eksy only as a source of funding their non-violent activity (such as propaganda, printing material, or mutual aid). The standard definition stipulated that an eks was a compulsory appropriation of a private property (that is, a robbery) which belonged to the state (kazennaia ekspropriatisiia), to a private company or to a private person (chastnaia ekspropriatsiia).[55] In this respect the eks was an explicit or implicit twisted extension of Proudhon's well-known saying "La propriete c'est le vol." The eks had two basic goals: first, it was a source of funds for organizational purposes; and second, it was a symbolic educational act of great importance and deep significance intended to instruct the workers how to relate to the bourgeois and the capitalists. Moreover, it was believed that the death of comrades killed in expropriations attracted the workers' sympathy for the anarchist cause. But according to all evidence, in most cases (with the notable exception of Georgia) this was hardly so. In fact, in many places the expropriations entangled the anarchists in serious troubles for three main reasons. First, because of abuses by members of the groups; second, because many robberies and acts of brigandage were perpetrated by people who pretended to be anarchists although they had nothing in common with them; and third, because of the propaganda exploitation of this situation by the opponents

of anarchism in the government as well as in the other revolutionary movements. By July 1906 most of the anarchist groups agreed that the expropriations (which increased in 1905 through 1906) were a subject that had created a lot of "misunderstandings," an expression which was a dramatic understatement.

[53] Anarkhist 1 (10 October 1907): 14.

[54] Burevestnik 1 (20 July 1906): 9.

[55] Anarkhist 1 (10 October 1907): 15, 16.

These developments led to a large discussion of questions such as: What is an expropriation? What are its goals? What are its forms? With regard to the forms, a distinction was made between three sort of cases: a "personal (lichnaia) expropriation" signified "the transfer of capital from one person to another" (perekhod kapitala of odnogo k odnomu zhe) and had to be rejected;[56] a "mass (massovaia) expropriation" was "the transfer of capital from one person to a group of people or to a crowd" and was acceptable in cases of strikes, unemployment, and similar events; and an "organizational (organizatsionnaia) expropriation" was "the transfer of capital to a revolutionary group for organizational purposes"; the latter was the only possibility that should be accepted by anarchists. This classification did not reflect the opinions of numerous anarchists who, like Peter Kropotkin, the Khleb i Volia group, the anarchists-communists and the anarcho-syndicalists, were against all and any kind of expropriations.

In order to avoid "misunderstandings" and to distance themselves from ordinary thieves and bandits, one of the devices adopted by the expropriating groups was to spread leaflets and declarations (in some cases up to several thousands) each and every time that they made an expropriation, explaining to the public why it was done and by whom.[57] A typical declaration of that kind would point out that the anarchist expropriations are directed only against the state and wealthy bourgeois, and executed only to serve the needs of the revolution, and only by way of armed attacks, that is, not by using blackmail (vymogatel'stvo) against individual bourgeois, or by extortion, or bargaining (torgashestvo; eks s peretorzhkami).[58] Extortions like that were done, for instance, in Odessa in 1906 by the "Group ofAnarchists-Blackmailers" (gruppa anarkhistov-shantazhistov), and by the groups "Black Raven" (chernyi voron) and "Bomber-Expropriators" (bombisty ekspropriatory); or in Vilno in 1907 by the group of "Combination-makers Anarchists" (anarkhisty-kombinary), and one in Baku that called itself "The Red Hundred" (krasnaia sotnia). The printed declaration would also state that the anarchists do not consider expropriations as a tactic for the overthrow of the capitalist regime, but only as "a technical" means for getting funds for the organization; and the eksy have nothing in common with anarchist methods proper and anarchism's ways of struggle against capitalism. Finally, in order to avoid misunderstanding and false accusations, it was promised that in the future too the anarchists will issue appropriate declarations each time that they make expropriations (disregarding the fact that anybody could issue such a declaration on behalf of anybody else after any expropriation).

However, it seems that this method of publicly explaining the anarchists' view on expropriations did not help very much to avoid "misunderstandings." Toward the end of 1906 and the beginning of 1907, many groups were complaining about the harmful effects of the expropriations, and some called them "the disease of Russian anarchism." This reservation can be deduced also from circumstantial evidence: thus, reports of several groups in 1907 stated that a positive development had taken place in their respective towns thanks to the absence of expropriations during the preceding period of time. The negative reaction of the general public (which led the anarchists eventually to abandon the expropriations method) was due to a recurrent organizational pattern that had indeed an unmistakable negative effect on the anarchist movement in Russia.[59] As some of the anarchists feared from the outset, the propaganda for indiscriminate

[56] Burevestnik 1 (20 July 1906): 10.

[57] One of the reasons of this measure was because there were cases of extortion made by Social Democrats who pretended to be anarchists.

[58] V.V. "Voprosy organizatsii," Buntar' 2-3 (June-July 1908): 19.

[59] Buntar'1 (1 December 1906): 25.

expropriations (bluntly put, for stealing and robberies) had had extremely harmful results for several reasons: first, swindlers and ordinary robbers began to pass themselves off as anarchists; second, every robbery or expropriation was attributed by the public to the anarchists. And third, these acts led to great confusion in the public's mind about what was anarchism: some people could simply not understand what kind of political and revolutionary movement it represented; others began to nourish feelings of animosity and enmity toward it. And indeed, under the circumstances, how could "the masses" understand who were the true anarchists and who were not? At a certain point, various circles in society and political parties (on the right as well as on the left) that were opposed to anarchism, took advantage of this confusion and began to spread rumors about real or imaginary murders and robberies, and to attribute them to the anarchists. The SDs and the SRs depicted the anarchists as bandits and brigands, interested only in expropriations, bombs, and bomb throwing.[60]

This newly-created situation had also a demoralizing effect on the anarchist groups. Here and there appeared "specialists-expropriators" (spetsialistyekspropriatory; profesionarnye ekspropriatory) whose only task in the group was limited to making expropriations. As a result, these "specialists" began to choose places "of action" where money could be taken at the smallest risk or at no risk at all. In so doing they completely forgot that it was not enough to take money, but above all that the workers should understand the meaning of this act, and should not consider it an ordinary robbery. Many members in the anarchist groups complained that these expropriators did not have a clear idea of their task, and proceeded to make expropriations not from the well-known and wealthy bourgeois but from small merchants and little groceries. Since, during an expropriation, circumstances led sometimes to the killing of shopkeepers or bystanders, there were numerous cases of "senseless and idiotic murders" which were harmful to anarchism and enhanced the animosity of the public. The masses began to think that anarchists were thieves and nothing more. "Thus, this kind of expropriations," wrote an anarchist, "brought about a most despicable result: these comrades felt entitled to put the greatest part of the money in their own pockets, although it was supposed to have been expropriated for the group's needs." This method of raising funds became, then, self-defeating. In practice the group did not gain anything; in essence it was a "transfer of capital" from one pocket to another (perekladivanie kapitala iz karmana v karman).[61] This was the beginning of the end of the expropriations, but while it lasted the reputation of the anarchists as a serious revolutionary movement was greatly damaged.

VI. Lessons from the past and stabilization

The Russian anarchists' organization debate went largely through three main stages: from the creation of the first groups in 1903 through 1905—a time of organizing the movement and attempting to implement its theories; from 1905 to 1907, a period of trial and error; and third from 1908 to 1914, the period of crystallization and stabilization. During the first stage the Russian anarchists tried to establish a framework that would be at one and the same time in accordance with the essence of their ideology and a tool for practical activity based on a rejection of authority. The second stage, 1905 through 1907, provided the test of events in two main respects: it illustrated the remoteness and inapplicability of the aspiration to create in the present cells that

[60] Ibid.

[61] Burevestnik 1 (20 July 1906): 10.

will be a prefiguration of the desired future society. On the other hand the increase of expropriations stirred an internal debate that led eventually to the rejection of this type of fundraising. The heyday of the expropriations coincided with the web and flow of the 1905 Revolution and its aftermath.[62] Thereafter the eksy almost ceased and disappeared from the revolutionary chronicle of events and the police reports. Some anarchists continued to consider them as a just and justified necessity, but most of the groups held that they were a negative offshoot of the revolutionary action. Once the expropriations were gone, in the third stage the anarchist groups underwent a process of stabilization, finding solutions to the problems of organization according to the basic anarchist rules and principles while in the field of revolutionary tactics they had to grapple with another issue: the use or rejection of terrorism.

Terrorism is beyond the scope of this essay because it does not concern the question whether or how to organize the movement, but what kind of methods (such as strikes, street manifestations, or the use of violence) should be used to carry out the political struggle.[63] Suffice it to note that in this respect, too, some anarchists approved the use of terror, while some rejected it, and the position of the latter was well rendered by Peter Kropotkin's lapidary saying: "There are some idiots in our movement who seem to believe that they can change the course of history with a kilogram of dynamite." But there were divergent opinions also among those who favored terrorism as to the reasons, forms, and goals of its use. Inspired by the terrorist legacy of the Narodnaia Volia and by the French practice of "propagande par le fait" (propaganda dela; parlefetizm: par-le-faitisme), the Russian anarchists rejected the notion of terrorist actions directed by a commanding center (tsentralizovannyi terror) and adopted the form of a "decentralized" (detsentralizovannyi terror), dispersed (rassypchatyi) and locally instigated (razlitoi terror). But the big divergences within the pro-terror anarchists was that some of them held that it must be clearly directed against the bourgeoisie or against governmental institutions or personnel (kazennyi terror), and for that reason it was called "motivated terror" (motivnyi terror), whereas others assumed that all terror was justified, that there was no need for a specific motive to perform it (bezmotivnyi terror), and on that account they were called "bezmotivniki." What was a non-motivated terror? It was "an act directed against random and unknown persons from whom the workers did not have any specific demands, or direct conflict relations." Such were, for instance, the throwing of bombs in restaurants, coffee-houses, theatres, and other bourgeois public gathering places. "By throwing a bomb in a coffee-house or a restaurant…, first, we take revenge against the entire bourgeoisie as a class in the name of the other class—the have-nots (obezdolennye); second…such an act shows the workers who is guilty for the existence of the present regime, and teaches them how to fight it.""[64] Among the most notorious applications of this "fighting philosophy" were the "attack" on Hotel Bristol in Warsaw in November 1905, and the one on café Libman in Odessa in December 1905 by the bezmotivniki of the group Chernoe Znamia.

[62] Abraham Ascher, The Revolution of 1905, 2 volumes (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

[63] On terrorism in Russia see Alexandre Spiridovitch, Histoire du terrorisme russe, 1886-1917) (Paris: Payot, 1930); O.V. Budnitskii, Istoriia terrorizma v Rossii (History of Terrorism in Russia) (Rostov on the Don: Phoenix, 1996); Anna Geifman, Thou Shall Kill. Revolutionary Terror in Russia, 1894-1917 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); see also Martin A. Miller, "The Intellectual Origins of Modern Terrorism in Europe," and Philip Pomper, "Russian Revolutionary Terrorism," in Martha Crenshaw, ed., Terrorism in Context (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995): 27-62 and 63-101 respectively.

[64] Burevestnik 1 (20 June 1906): 2.

The expropriations and the terror completed the list of extreme manifestations of the anarchist groups. By the end of 1907 most of them understood the negative effects of these practices, abandoned them, and reverted to the search of the best forms of organization for non-organization. They did that, as in the past, along two lines of thought: a theoretical justification according to the spirit and doctrine of anarchism; and the lessons that could be drawn from the practical action and experience accumulated by the groups. Theoretically, from the outset, the anarchist conception of the organization contained three main ideological assumptions. First, it represented a rejection of externally imposed norms and rules, and at the same time it assumed an internalization of (anarchist) norms and rules to such a degree as to make unnecessary any external constraints. Second, this outlook was an idealization of "natural man" as opposed to "civilized man" (or "political man"), and assumed at the same time the possibility to create "new men" and "new women" within the existing capitalist society. Third, it assumed the possibility to create "cells of the future society," and this meant that their organization would represent the beginning of "natural order" as opposed to the existing "artificial order" of capitalism and exploitation.

The underlying implication of the last two assumptions—creation of "natural man" and of cells of the "natural order"—was that immediate political success was at best secondary. The anarchists acted as if carrying on the struggle was more important than achieving victory here and now, and that success was important but in order to achieve victory they should not abandon the raison d'etre of life, and pervert the very nature of the eventual victory. The corollary of this stance was, in a way, that the role of the organization in the revolution was secondary, since the revolution would anyway be a spontaneous one, and it would be a revolution of the masses and not of a clique of conspirators. In practice the tension between these kinds of assumptions and the day-to-day organizational activity among the workers led to several interesting theoretical and practical results. First, it entailed an implicit rejection (notwithstanding explicit declarations to the contrary) of the reference to the future society in matters of present organization, as being too remote from the realities of everyday activity. Second, the emergence of a clear distinction between spontaneity, which the anarchists cultivated, and elemental drives or elementalness (stikhiinost'), which they viewed with suspicion. Their belief in the spontaneity of the members and of the masses, and in the spontaneous revolution from below, was strengthened by the specific forms of the outbreak of the 1905 Revolution. As for stikhiinost' devoid of class and anarchist consciousness, they considered it as a major danger which might lead to missing the right moment for the overthrow of the existing social and economic order. Although this view appears very un-Bakuninist, for these anarchists the most important lesson in this respect was the attitude of the masses after the October Manifesto in 1905. Amid the general euphoria, the excitement of the public, and the pogroms of the 17 to 25 October in Kiev and Odessa, the anarchists claimed that the tsar's Manifesto was a sham, and that this was not the end of the revolution. But the masses refused to follow them and they found themselves isolated. Paradoxically, this outcome led many of them to conclude that they needed a strong organization, and that they should not rely on stikhiinost'. Nonetheless, as reaction set in, the anarchists refused to be tamed. While the SDs and the SRs were on the defensive and generally quiescent, the anarchists fought back, reinforced by SD and SR defectors. The anarchist movement continued to grow following the mass revolutionary acts of 1905. Okhrana reports of that time noted that after the December uprisings the anarchists were catapulted into a much more influential position in the left.

The final result came around 1907, after the debate on the expropriations. It represented the stabilization of a framework which was shaped at one and the same time according to the essence

of anarchist ideas, and as a tool for practical activity. The anarchist ideas favored small, homogeneous, and autonomous groups, and the rejection of authority and centralization. The single most important event that strengthened their belief in the basic perniciousness of centralization and confirmed their views on the advantages of carrying on activity through autonomous groups was the exposure in 1908 of Azef, the head of the Combat Organization of the SRs, as a police tool: it was a great blow for the Socialist Revolutionary Party, while the anarchists found in it a vindication of their organizational views, due to the fact that their groups withstood relatively well the period of repression, demoralization, and "restoration of authority" that came in the wake of the 1905 revolution. With these conceptions and this mode of organization the Russian anarchists confronted the momentous events that soon thereafter befell the peoples of the Russian empire—the Great War and 1917.

* Michael Confino is Emeritus Professor of History at Tel Aviv University and a member of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities. The most recent of his publications include Russia before the "Radiant Future." Essays in Modern History, Culture, and Society (forthcoming); "The Soslovie (Estate) Paradigm. Reflections on Some Open Questions", Cahiers du monde russe 49, 4 (2008): 681-699; "Questions of Comparability: Russian Serfdom and American Slavery," in Explorations in Comparative History, ed. Benjamin Z. Kedar (2009): 92-112; and "Franco Venturi's Russia," Kritika. Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History 11,1 (2010): 77-105 (mconfino@post.tau.ac.i1).

Michael Confino
Organization as Ideology
Dilemmas of the Russian Anarchists (1903-1914)
2010

Russian History, Vol. 37, No. 3 (2010), pp. 179-207

theanarchistlibrary.org