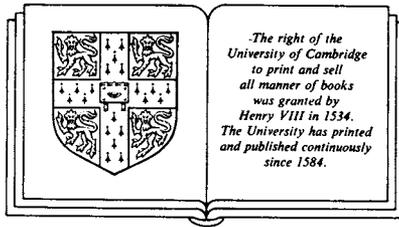


THE WORKERS'
REVOLUTION IN RUSSIA,
1917

THE VIEW FROM BELOW

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

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NEW YORK PORT CHESTER MELBOURNE SYDNEY

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1987

First published 1987
Reprinted 1989, 1990

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The Workers' revolution in Russia.

1. Soviet Union – History – Revolution, 1917–1921 –
Congresses. 2. Labor and laboring classes – Soviet
Union – Congresses. 3. Soviet Union – Social conditions –
1801–1917 – Congresses. I. Kaiser, Daniel H., 1945 –
DK265.A187 1987 947.084'1 87-9320

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

The Workers' revolution in Russia : the view
from below.

1. Soviet Union – History – Revolution,
1917–1921 2. Soviet Union – Politics
and government – 1917–1936
I. Kaiser, Daniel H.
947.084'1 DK265

ISBN 0 521 34166 3 hardback
ISBN 0 521 34971 0 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2002

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1

Revising the old story: the 1917 revolution in light of new sources

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University of Michigan

Issues of interpretation

Studying the Soviet Union is not quite like studying any other country in the world. While historians within the Soviet Union are compelled to portray their nation's past with the requisite degree of heroism and inexorable progress, in the West their colleagues face serious limitations of access to sources, the absence of basic works on aspects of Soviet history, and a variety of personal and political biases that inevitably influence the outcome of their research. Soviet historians write under the "guidance" of a political orthodoxy dictated by the party and colored in the language of Marxism-Leninism. Their Western counterparts attempt a cool objectivity, usually by dismissing the relevance of Marxism as an analytical tool and cloaking themselves in an ostensibly "value-free" social science. International rivalries, conflicting social values, and the more mundane exigencies of forging a professional career in a competitive marketplace determine the political and cultural contexts in which histories of the USSR are written. Nevertheless, many historians on both sides of the barricades seek freedom from bias, and in recent years more and more interesting work has appeared on Russia's history, both in the West and in the Soviet Union, which prompts a reconsideration of significant parts of that experience. After nearly seventy years of studying 1917, is it possible to come to some consensus on the contours and meaning of the 1917 Revolution?

The problem of the Russian Revolution is much more than an academic issue. The very question of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the current Soviet government and its role in the world has been tied to the events of 1917. The eminent Harvard historian, Richard Pipes, has written:

The elite that rules Soviet Russia lacks a legitimate claim to authority. . . . Lenin, Trotsky, and their associates seized power by force, overthrowing an ineffective but democratic government. The government they founded, in other words, derives from a violent act carried out by a tiny minority. Furthermore, this power seizure was carried out under false pretenses. The coup d'état of October 1917 was accomplished not on behalf of the Bolshevik party but on behalf of the soviets. . . . But although the Bolsheviks claimed to overthrow the Provisional Government in order to transfer power to these soviets, in reality they used them from the beginning as a façade behind which to consolidate their own authority, and the transfer was never accomplished.¹

This statement, somewhat extreme in its formulation, nevertheless continues a tradition of historical interpretation that has seen the October seizure of power by the Bolsheviks as either a conspiratorial coup by a small band of adventurers with no real following, or as the result of a fortuitous series of accidents in the midst of the "galloping chaos" of the revolution. Either way the Bolshevik regime's beginnings are artificial and in no way organically linked to the real aspirations of the Russian people. These interpretations attribute Bolshevik success to the dominant and dynamic (sometimes demonic) personality of Lenin, a power-hungry genius who would stop at nothing to control Russia (and eventually the world). Various works have painted the most contradictory portraits of the founder of the Soviet state. Lenin has been portrayed both as sincere *and* as a "compulsive revolutionary," a gambler who understood that his small party had little to lose by risking everything on the October Revolution; at the same time some historians depict Lenin as the man most sensitive to the growing radicalization of the workers and soldiers who rode the wave of social discontent to an easy and nearly inevitable victory. In most cases the emphasis on Lenin (or on the efficient Bolshevik organization) as the key factor in Bolshevik victory has had the effect of downplaying the degree

¹ Richard Pipes, "Why the Russians Act Like Russians," *Air Force Magazine* (June 1970): 51–5, cited in Louis Menasche, "Demystifying the Russian Revolution," *Radical History Review* 18 (Fall 1978):153.

of support his party may have had among the lower classes and of contributing to the notion of the “illegitimacy” of the Soviet government.

Related to the political values brought to the study of the Soviet Union, and certainly connected to the overemphasis on personality and conspiracy in the history of the revolution, is a preference among many analysts of the USSR to concentrate on political, rather than more broadly social, explanations. In my view the entire history of revolutionary and postrevolutionary Russia has been interpreted to date too narrowly, with the result that political forms and ideas have been exaggerated as causative factors, and the underlying social and economic structures and conflicts in Russian society have been underplayed. The dominant model of interpretation of the Soviet system, the totalitarian model, is precisely this kind of theoretical construct that begins and ends with the political, with the all-encompassing power of the state, to the neglect of consideration of extrapolitical components of the system. For too long Russian history has been written not only from the top down, but with the bottom left out completely. Fortunately, in the last decade particularly, Western and Soviet historians have joined their European and American colleagues in other fields and introduced social historical approaches to the Russian field.

Rather than review in detail the arguments of the political historians versus the social historians, what I intend to do here is present an interpretation of the events of 1917 based on the work of recent social histories, and contrast their findings with the earlier interpretations. I am borrowing here, for reasons of economy and precision, from my own summary of this literature that appeared in the *American Historical Review*.²

Social polarization and the February revolution

The overthrow of the tsar, accomplished by workers and soldiers in Petrograd early in 1917, was the product of largely spontaneous action by thousands of hungry, angry, and war-weary

² Ronald Grigor Suny, “Toward a Social History of the October Revolution,” *American Historical Review* 88(1983):31–52.

women and men who had lost confidence in the government of Nicholas II. But along with the political revolution aimed at autocracy, a deeply rooted social antagonism, particularly on the part of certain groups of workers, against the propertied classes (the so-called *tsenzovoe obshchestvo*, *census society*) was evident. This social cleavage was not simply a product of the years of war but predated that conflict, as Leopold H. Haimson has shown in his seminal articles published two decades ago.³ Haimson argues that a dual polarization had been taking place in urban Russia in the last years before the war. As all but the most conservative strata of society moved away from the bureaucratic absolutist regime, the bottom of society, the working class – more precisely, workers in large firms such as the metalworks – was pulling away from the liberal intelligentsia, from moderates in the Social Democratic party, and from the Duma politicians. Writes Haimson,

By 1914 a dangerous process of polarization appeared to be taking place in Russia's major urban centers between an *obshchestvo* [society] that had now reabsorbed the vast majority of the once alienated elements of its intelligentsia (and which was even beginning to draw to itself many of the workers' own intelligentsia) and a growing discontented and disaffected mass of industrial workers, now left largely exposed to the pleas of an embittered revolutionary minority.⁴

In contrast to the usual picture of the Bolsheviks as an isolated clique among a generally economically oriented working mass, Haimson has demonstrated that a steady radicalization of the workers in the metal industry, and in Petersburg particularly, had resulted in a growth in Bolshevik influence at the expense of the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries. An increasing sense of class unity and separation from the rest of society combined with an awareness that workers themselves could take upon their shoulders the solution to their own problems. Ever more militant and far-reaching demands were put forth, most notably by Petersburg metalworkers, and the high incidence of defeat in their economic strikes only propelled them further toward a revolutionary opposition to the regime and the industrialists. "Given the even more precise correspondence between the image of the state and society that the Bolsheviks advanced and the instinctive

³ Leopold H. Haimson, "The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905–1917," *Slavic Review* 23(1964):619–42; 24(1965):1–22.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 639.

outlook of the laboring masses, the Bolshevik party cadres were now able to play a significant catalytic role. They succeeded . . . in chasing the Menshevik 'Liquidators' out of the existing open labor organizations."⁵ By 1914 the key labor unions were in the hands of the Bolsheviks, and working class discontent exploded in a sharp increase in the number and duration of strikes and political protests.

Although the war years demonstrated the fragility of the Bolsheviks' newly conquered positions within the working class and arrests and wartime patriotism ate into their influence, the potential for a renewal of militance remained intact. Much more visible than the exiled Bolshevik leaders were those more moderate socialists who remained in the capital and worked in the legal and semilegal institutions permitted by the autocracy. With the collapse of tsarism, timing and geography propelled even the less prominent Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries into positions of enormous power and influence.⁶ Although in the first month of revolution workers were neither unified around any one program nor tightly tied to any one party, there was a striking consensus among most Petrograd workers on the question of power, both in the state and the economy.⁷ Except for the most militant workers, the metal workers of the Vyborg district, they were not yet anxious either to take state power or run the factories themselves. Thus there was a strategic parallel between their *conditional* support of the Provisional Government and the notion of "workers' control," which at this time meant merely the supervision of the owners' operations by representatives of the workers, not the organization of production directly by the workers.⁸ Both the political and economic policies fa-

⁵ *Ibid.*, 638.

⁶ For a detailed treatment of the revolutionary days of February–March, see Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *The February Revolution: Petrograd 1917* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981).

⁷ On the question of party consciousness outside the capital, see Diane Koenker, "The Evolution of Party Consciousness in 1917: The Case of the Moscow Workers," *Soviet Studies* 30(1978):38–62.

⁸ There has been debate on the exact meaning and dimensions of workers' control in 1917–18. See Chris Goodey, "Factory Committees and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat (1918)," *Critique* 3(1974):27–47; Maurice Brinton, "Factory Committees and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat," *Critique* 4(1975):78–86; Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control* (London: Solidarity, 1970); William G. Rosenberg, "Workers and Workers' Control in the Russian Revolution," *History Workshop* 5(Spring 1978):89–97; Rosenberg, "Workers' Control on the

vored by active workers in the first months of revolution entailed watching over and checking institutions that would continue to be run by members of propertied society.

Yet the social polarization of which Haimson has written was already evident even in the euphoria of February and early March, as the workers and soldiers set up their own class organizations – factory committees, soldiers' committees, their own militia, and most importantly, the soviets – to articulate and defend their interests.⁹ From the beginning of the revolution they registered a degree of suspicion toward the Duma Committee and the Provisional Government, which were seen as the representatives of educated society. Among the rank-and-file soldiers the sense of distance and distrust toward their officers led them to form their own committees and draft the famous Order Number One that both legitimized the committees and placed the Petrograd garrison under the political authority of the soviet. Among the sailors of the Baltic Fleet, a force in which workers were much more heavily represented than in the peasant-based army, the hatred of the crewmen toward the officer elite resulted in an explosion of summary killings.¹⁰ The sailors reflected the genuine suspicions of the lower classes who rejected any notion of a coalition government with the “bourgeoisie” and maintained that the soviet should remain a separate locus of power, critical of but not actively opposing the government. Thus Dual Power – the co-existence of two political authorities, the Provisional Government and the Soviet – was an accurate mirror of the real balance of forces in the city and the mutual suspicions that kept them from full cooperation.

Railroads,” *Journal of Modern History* 49(1977):D1181–D1219; Carmen Sirianni, *Workers' Control and Socialist Democracy: The Soviet Experience* (London: Verso, 1982); and Steve A. Smith, *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories, 1917–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁹ Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, “The Formation of the Militia in the February Revolution: An Aspect of the Origins of Dual Power,” *Slavic Review* 32(1973):303–22; “The Problem of Power in the February Revolution of 1917 in Russia,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 14(1972):611–32; and “The Bolsheviks and the Formation of the Petrograd Soviet in the February Revolution,” *Soviet Studies* 39(1977):86–107.

¹⁰ Norman E. Saul, *Sailors in Revolt: The Russian Baltic Fleet in 1917* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), 15–16. See also Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Revolution and the Baltic Fleet: War and Politics, February 1917–April 1918* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 2–10.

The irony of the February Revolution was that the workers and soldiers had effectively overthrown the old government, but neither they nor their leaders were yet confident enough of their abilities to form their own government or prevent a counter-revolutionary challenge if they excluded the propertied classes. While they were reluctant to accept rule by their old class enemies, they realized that without agreement with the Temporary Duma Committee the loyalty of the army at the front was problematic.¹¹ The Duma leadership, on the other hand, understood that real power – the power to call people into the streets, defend the city, make things work or fall apart – was in the hands of the soviet, not the government. Both they and the moderate leaders were willing to play down the conflict within society in the face of a possible reaction from the right. The memory of 1905, when the army was used to reaffirm the power of the upper classes, was still vivid in many minds. Realism and caution through March and early April allowed a brief period of cooperation and conciliation that at first convinced many of the possibility of collaboration between the top and bottom of society, but ultimately created in its failure a bitter and divisive aftermath.

As early as March 10 the Soviet and the Petrograd Society of Factory and Works Owners came to an agreement to introduce an eight-hour working day in factories. This victory for the workers on an issue that had caused deep hostility in the prewar period was achieved with surprising ease, and the conciliatory attitude of industrialists like A. I. Konovalov seemed to predict further concessions. Employers also met demands for higher wages, and during the first three months of the revolution nominal wages rose on the average of fifty percent in Russia.¹² There was greater resistance to the idea of a minimum wage, but industrialists finally approved it too on April 24. Despite the fact that workers were trespassing on prerogatives traditionally held by capitalists when they demanded the removal of unpopular

¹¹ Allan K. Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army: The Old Army and the Soldiers' Revolt (March–April 1917)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 172.

¹² Ziva Galili y Garcia, "The Menshevik Revolutionary Defensists and the Workers in the Russian Revolution of 1917" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1979), chap. 2, p. 16.

administrative personnel, even some of these desires were satisfied.

As Ziva Galili y Garcia shows convincingly, even though there was a significant decline in workers' suspicion toward the "bourgeoisie" in March, important groups among the industrialist class now expressed their opposition to the "excessive demands" of the workers.¹³ Even Konovalov, an advocate of cooperation with the workers and the Minister of Trade and Industry in the Provisional Government, held that the overthrow of tsarism should rightly result in the establishment of the commercial-industrial bourgeoisie as the dominant force in Russia's social and economic life. Although this notion seems superficially to agree with the Menshevik conception of the revolution as "bourgeois-democratic," there were serious tactical differences between middle-class leaders like Konovalov and the Menshevik Revolutionary Defensists on the left. Whereas the first Congress of Trade and Industry called for restoration of "free trade" and the placing of food supply in the hands of the "experienced commercial-industrial class," Menshevik economists favored price regulation and state control of the economy. But the issue that brought down the fragile Dual Power arrangement was not the emerging economic issue but the conflict between the upper and lower classes on the war.

Initially the soldiers were suspicious of Dual Power and even of the Soviet to some extent, but Allan K. Wildman demonstrates that soldiers began to perceive the Provisional Government as a "class" rather than a "national" institution.¹⁴ One by one, the soldiers' congresses held at the various fronts came out in support of soviet control over the government and for a "democratic peace without annexations or contributions." In April soldiers and workers poured into the streets to protest the government's continued support for the war aims of the deposed tsarist regime. The April crisis marked the end of the futile attempt by Minister of Foreign Affairs P. N. Miliukov and his closest associates to maintain a foreign policy independent of the Soviet. The same cleavage that was visible in Petrograd between the lower classes and propertied society on questions of power,

¹³ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁴ Wildman, *End of the Russian Imperial Army*, 320.

economy, and the war was also reflected within the army between the soldiers and their officers.

The dependence of the Provisional Government on the Soviet, clear from the first days of their coexistence, required in the view of the members of the government the formation of a coalition. At first resistant to joining a government of the bourgeoisie, the Mensheviks reluctantly agreed in order to bolster the government's authority. For I. G. Tsereteli, the most influential Menshevik who joined the government, coalition meant the unification of the workers with other "vital forces of the nation" in an effort to end the war and fight social disintegration. As Galili y Garcia points out, the successful collaboration between the bourgeoisie and the Soviet in the first months of the revolution had lulled the Mensheviks into believing that class hostility could be overcome. But just as the coalition was being formed, the economic situation grew worse. Inflation forced more demands for wages, but industrialists who had recently been so cooperative now were resistant to further raises. In May and June workers began to suspect that factory shutdowns were deliberate attempts at sabotage by the owners. Economic difficulties, so intimately tied to the war, turned workers against the industrialists and the government.¹⁵ Though some workers supported coalition, the great bulk of Petrograd's factory workers grew increasingly suspicious, both of the government and of those socialists who collaborated with the bourgeoisie. The beneficiary of this suspicion and disgust was the party that opposed the coalition and advocated a government made up of the representatives of the working people – the Bolsheviks.¹⁶

The association of the Menshevik and Socialist Revolutionary (SR) leaders of the Soviet with the coalition government, and consequently with the renewed war effort in June, placed a stark

¹⁵ Galili y Garcia, "Menshevik Revolutionary Defensists," chap. 6, pp. 3–17.

¹⁶ The predominant Western image of the Bolshevik Party as a party of *intelligenty* divorced from the working class has been challenged by quantitative studies by William Chase and J. Arch Getty on the Moscow Bolsheviks. They have concluded that the party, while "primarily composed of and dominated by intelligenty" up to 1905, "so radically altered its social composition [after 1905] that, by 1917, the Bolsheviks could honestly claim to represent a large section of the working population." Chase and Getty, "The Moscow Bolshevik Cadres of 1917: A Prosopographic Analysis," *Russian History* 5, pt. 1 (1978):95.

choice before the workers and soldiers: either cooperation and collaboration with the upper classes, who were increasingly perceived as enemies of the revolution, or going it alone in an all-socialist soviet government. The first efforts of the lower classes were directed at convincing the Soviet leaders of the need to take power into their own hands. The erosion of lower-class support for the government was already quite clear on May 31 when the workers' section of the Petrograd Soviet voted for the Bolshevik resolution calling for "All Power to the Soviets!" Even more dramatic was the demonstration of June 18 in which hundreds of thousands of workers marched carrying slogans such as "Down with the Ten Capitalist Ministers!" By early July, with the distressing news of the failure of the June offensive filtering into the city, the more militant soldiers, sailors, and workers attempted through an armed rising to force the Soviet to take power. Emblematic of the paradox of the situation is the famous scene when sailors surrounded V. M. Chernov, SR Minister of Agriculture in the coalition government, and yelled at him: "Take power, you son-of-a-bitch, when it is given to you."¹⁷

Radicalization of the workers

But, as is well known, the Soviet did not take power, and a series of weak coalition governments followed the July crisis until their forcible overthrow in October. The rise of the Bolsheviks from isolation and persecution in July to state power in October has been the object of enormous historical study, but in the search for an explanation historians have tended to overemphasize the role of political actors, like Lenin and Trotsky, and to underestimate the independent activity of workers and soldiers. More recently, the workers have returned to center stage. Diane Koenker, Steve Smith, David Mandel, and others, have investigated the process that radicalized the workers. Their research suggests that the workers came to feel that the Provisional Government, even in its coalition variant, was not particularly re-

¹⁷ Alexander Rabinowitch, *Prelude to Revolution: The Petrograd Bolsheviks and the July 1917 Uprising* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), 188. The source for this scene is P. N. Miliukov, *Istoriia vtoroi russkoi revoliutsii*, vol. 1 (Sofia, 1921), 244.

sponsive to worker needs, and that factory owners were hostile to the gains made by workers in the February Revolution. Workers' frustration with the hostile middle and upper classes was both a revival of prewar attitudes of the most militant workers and a reaction to perceived counterrevolutionary attitudes and actions of industrialists, intellectuals (both liberal and socialist), and, in time, the government.

Historians who have looked most closely at workers' activities have replaced the superficial impression of chaos and anarchy with a view that describes workers' actions in 1917 as a "cautious and painful development of consciousness," part of "an essentially rational process."¹⁸ The contours of worker activity are complex, but not chaotic. One analyst of Petrograd labor, David Mandel, distinguishes three principal strata of workers – the politically aware skilled workers (primarily the metalworkers of the Vyborg district), the unskilled workers (largely women textile workers), and the "worker aristocracy" (characterized best by the pro-Menshevik printers). Mandel shows that the metalworkers were most radical in the political sphere, calling for the early establishment of soviet power, while the unskilled workers, who tended to be more moderate in political questions, exhibited the greatest militancy in the wage struggle.¹⁹ Steve Smith breaks down the metalworkers into shops and carefully delineates between "hot" shops, such as foundries, where newly arrived peasant-workers could be found, and "cold" shops, such as machine shops, where the highly skilled and literate workers proved to be most receptive to Social Democratic activists.²⁰ Looking at the Putilov works, Smith notes that in this giant enterprise workers moved more slowly toward the Bolsheviks than in other metalworking plants and that "shopism" (loyalty to and identification with one's

¹⁸ David Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Regime: From the February Revolution to the July Days, 1917* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, chap. 3; David Mandel, *Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power (July 1917–June 1918)* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 246–7.

²⁰ Steve A. Smith, "Craft Consciousness, Class Consciousness: Petrograd 1917," *History Workshop* 11 (Spring 1981):36. The central argument of Smith's article coincides with Mandel's view of growing worker militancy and class consciousness. He points out that "shopism" and "factory patriotism" did not preclude labor militancy or inhibit "the development of a broader sense of belonging to a class of working people whose interests were antagonistic to those of the employers" (p. 51).

place of work, rather than the class of workers as a whole) and conciliationism remained stronger here than elsewhere.²¹

Two recent studies of factory committees in the Russian Revolution, by Carmen Sirianni and Steve Smith, significantly revise the generally accepted view of the activities of these committees.²² Formerly scholars and other writers had argued that the plant-level organizations of workers were marked by a decentralized, anarcho-syndicalist approach to economic activity, that they were in large part responsible for the decline in productivity during the revolution and civil war, and that they contributed far more to the chaos of the revolution than to any solution of the economic collapse. Smith and Sirianni persuasively demonstrate that the committees were far more interested in keeping the factories running than had previously been assumed, and that much of their activity was directed at preventing what they considered to be "sabotage." When owners tried to maintain their own authority in factories and sometimes resorted to abandoning the factory or closing it down, workers' committees attempted to keep factories running, even in the absence of owners and without the cooperation of white-collar workers, engineers, and technicians.

Rather than some visceral hostility to the bosses or an anarchist appetite for overturning authority, the actual practice of factory committees was to restructure the organization of the factory regime more democratically. This might involve the expulsion of particularly hated foremen or police spies. It might also mean the institution of "workers' control," usually the supervision by workers' committees of the activities of the bosses and managers who still ran the plant. In extreme cases, particularly after the October Revolution, it might mean the complete takeover of an enterprise by the workers. But as Smith shows most conclusively, these "nationalizations from below" were almost invariably defensive and designed only to keep the factories running. Russian workers were as interested (perhaps even more interested) as any other social class in keeping the plants running as well as possible. As the economic situation worsened in the summer of 1917, workers' suspicion of the upper levels of society was translated into struggles for greater control within

²¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

²² Sirianni, *Workers Control*; Smith, *Red Petrograd*.

the factories and increased opposition to those moderate socialists who backed the coalition government.

Although the rapidity of labor radicalization in Petrograd is certainly distinctive, similar processes, marked by growing class cohesion and consciousness, were evident in other parts of the country, as my own work on Baku and Donald Raleigh's on Saratov demonstrate.²³ By engaging in a detailed and quantitative study of the dynamics of labor activity in Moscow, Diane Koenker has also concluded that:

one must . . . reject the image of the Russian working class as uniformly irrational, poorly educated, and incapable of independent participation in the political process. One must reject in particular the myth that the revolution in the cities was carried out by dark semi-peasant masses "who did not understand the real meaning of the slogans they loudly repeated." Yes, of course, many Moscow workers were more rural than urban; but when one looks at the participation levels of different segments of the urban labor force, the fact that skilled urban cadres, not the unskilled peasant mass, were the leading political actors can be seen over and over again. These workers possessed experience, political connections, and the degree of economic security which enabled them to function freely and easily in the political life of 1917.²⁴

The radicalization of workers in the first year of the revolution was an "incremental process, which took place in response to specific economic and political pressures."²⁵ Other studies bear out the same conclusion. When Galili y Garcia explains the delayed radicalization of the less politically conscious unskilled workers in the second quarter of 1917, she observes that these less well organized workers had not benefited from the initial round of wage raises in March and April. By the time they made their bid for higher pay, the industrialists had adopted a more intransigent attitude.²⁶ By mid-May the number of unemployed workers in Petrograd and other industrial cities was rising conspicuously, and as real wages continued to plummet and mass dismissals accelerated, more and more less-skilled workers joined

²³ See the chapter, "From Economics to Politics," in Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Baku Commune, 1917-1918: Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 102-46. Donald J. Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga: 1917 in Saratov* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

²⁴ Diane Koenker, *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 360.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 363-4.

²⁶ Galili y Garcia, "Menshevik Revolutionary Defensists," chap. 5, pp. 43-62.

the "proletarians" in a commitment to soviet power. By June – July a majority of Petrograd workers were already opposed to the coalition government and shared a sense of separate and antagonistic interests between workers and the propertied classes. A greatly heightened sense of class was apparent among the mass of workers by the summer.

The studies of Mandel, Galili y Garcia, Koenker, Smith, and others provide the reader with the specifics of the economic and political stimuli that led to radicalization; for the first time it is possible to understand how individual grievances within the larger context of social polarization combined to create class antagonisms. Given that Russia's workers had long been closely involved with a radical socialist intelligentsia anxious to forge a Marxist political culture within the urban labor force, it is hardly surprising that workers in 1917 should "naturally" come to a "class-oriented viewpoint." Koenker sums up this development in her conclusion, that gives us social history with the politics left in:

That the revolutionary unity of March fell apart along class lines can be attributed to economic conditions in Russia, but also to the fact that the class framework was after all implicit in socialist consciousness. Capitalists began to behave as Marx said they would: no concessions to the workers, no compromise on the rights of factory owners. Mensheviks and SRs tried to straddle both sides of the class split; this appeal can be seen in the mixed social composition of their supporters. The Bolsheviks, however, had offered the most consistent class interpretation of the revolution, and by late summer their interpretation appeared more and more to correspond to reality. . . . By October, the soviets of workers' deputies, as the workers' only class organ, seemed to class-conscious workers to be the only government they could trust to represent their interests.²⁷

While workers increasingly perceived common interests with their fellow workers and shared antagonisms toward the rest of society, the upper levels of society too felt a growing hostility toward the lower classes. William G. Rosenberg has illustrated this shift to the right by the Kadets as the liberals' growing identification with commercial and industrial circles changed them from a party of liberal professionals and intellectuals into Rus-

²⁷ Koenker, *Moscow Workers*, 364.

sia's party of the bourgeoisie.²⁸ Even as they persisted in maintaining their "no-class" ideology, the Kadets emerged as the de facto defenders of a capitalist order and the determined opponents of the approaching social revolution desired by the more militant of the lower classes. Isolation from the socialist workers and soldiers led the liberals to turn to the military as a source of order and power. Rosenberg argues, as had the Left Kadets in 1917, that the only hope for a democratic political outcome in Russia was lost when the Kadets failed to work effectively with the moderate socialists in the coalition government and make significant concessions to the lower classes. "The very coalition with moderate socialists that Miliukov and the new tacticians strove for so persistently in emigration [after the Civil War] was possible in the summer of 1917."²⁹ The failure to form such a liberal-socialist alternative to Bolshevism might be seen as the consequence of the Kadets' lack of "true liberal statesmanship," but Rosenberg's analysis permits us to develop an alternative interpretation.³⁰ With the Kadets evolving into the principal spokesmen of propertied Russia, it was increasingly unlikely that they would compromise the interests of the privileged classes that backed them in order to form a dubious alliance with the lower orders whose ever more radical demands threatened the very existence of privilege and property. The Kadets' claim to stand above class considerations was simply a utopian stance in a Russia that was pulling apart along class lines.

To underestimate the extent of the social polarization and the perceived irreconcilability of the interests of the lower classes and propertied society within the constraints of the February regime would lead one away from a satisfactory explanation of the victory of the Bolsheviks and toward a reliance on accidental factors of will and personality. Only through a synthesis of political and social history, in which the activity and developing polit-

²⁸ William G. Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution: The Constitutional Democratic Party, 1917-1921* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 31, 154-5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 469.

³⁰ For a fuller exposition of my pessimism concerning a liberal-moderate socialist coalition in 1917, see Suny, "Some Thoughts on 1917: In Lieu of a Review of William Rosenberg's *Liberals in the Russian Revolution*," *Sbornik: Papers of the First Conference of the Study Group on the Russian Revolution* (Leeds, 1975), 24-7.