

Mass mobilisation versus mass participation: the Bolsheviks and the Moscow workers 1921-22

Simon Pirani, University of Essex

Paper for presentation at the convention of the American Association for the
Advancement of Slavonic Studies, December 2004

--

Introduction

This paper discusses the use of mass mobilisation techniques by the Bolshevik party in the first two years of NEP (1921-22), and argues that they emerged as an alternative to participatory forms of democratic organisation that had appeared in 1917 (principally, soviets and factory committees). The development of mass mobilisation was part of the process by which the Bolshevik party appropriated political decision-making power from the working class. The participatory democracy of 1917 had aimed at including the working class (and to a lesser extent the peasants) in creative decision-making. But the mass mobilisation techniques, first developed during the civil war but refined and perfected in 1922, in the campaigns to seize church valuables and to support the trial of the SR leaders, did the opposite: workers were consigned to a supportive, politically passive, role. The research is limited to Moscow.¹

The shift from mass participation to mass mobilisation began during the civil war but was completed after it. After the Kronshtadt crisis (February-March 1921) and the turn towards the new economic policy (March-May 1921), the economy began to recover from the post-war slump and factories began to reopen and/or to re-recruit. Demobilised Red army soldiers, and workers who had drifted to the countryside, started returning to the cities. The greatest hardships were in the past; the new peacetime order was being built. Discussions on how to shape socialist society free of the immediate exigencies of the civil war could, and did, take place. While some Bolsheviks and non-Bolshevik socialists hoped this order would be characterised by wider democratic participation, in fact political space was closed down. In the soviets, attempts to revive 1917-style participation were emasculated. In the trade unions, civil-war measures preventing wider participation in industrial management were reinforced. Trade union bodies were assigned propaganda functions; mechanisms for isolating leaders of both political and economic strikes, usually by expulsion from unions, were refined. The mass mobilisation campaigns were part of an integral process by which the Bolshevik leadership was appropriating political decision-making, not to the working class that was growing stronger as the economy revived, but to itself.

It is hoped that a look at the shift from mass participation to mass mobilisation will shed fresh light on changes both in socialist ideas and in the Soviet state. In the history of socialist ideas, the type of participatory democracy that flourished imperfectly and temporarily in 1917 was favoured by the “socialism-from-below” tradition, represented, in Hal Draper’s description, by Thomas Munzer against Thomas More, Marx against the 19th-century state socialists and

¹ The paper is based on PhD research at the University of Essex, UK, on the changes in party-worker relations in Moscow during, and after, the transition from the civil war to NEP.

William Morris against Sidney Webb.² Mass mobilisation, in which the party defines the parameters and aims of a campaign, calls on the mass of people to support it, and judges mass consciousness by levels of participation, stands clearly in the “socialism-from-above” tradition. It fences off the mass from decision-making, and assigns it a limited role, undertaking activity guided by decision-makers in the party.

In the history of the Soviet state, study of the shift from mass participation to mass mobilisation may add to our understanding of the changes in the relationship between the Bolshevik party and the workers in whose name it claimed to rule, and of the genesis of Stalinist dictatorship. Among historians who question the “totalitarian” view, explanations for the widening gulf between the Bolshevik party and the working class often centre on the civil war: some argue that the human and economic devastation it brought forced the Bolsheviks to retreat from the principles of 1917, others emphasise that military methods and habits acquired during the civil war became part of Bolshevik practice.³ This paper hopes to add to the discussion by focusing on the post-civil-war period, when the Bolsheviks’ room for manoeuvre widened. I will argue that they opted for mass mobilisation rather than mass participation in keeping with the tradition of “socialism-from-above”. More than 40 years ago, Robert Tucker drew attention to this aspect of Bolshevism, calling it a “revolutionary mass-movement regime under single-party auspices” whose claim to be democratic “loses the connotation of effective popular control over the regime (which is, by self-definition, the group that knows best what is in the interests of the people)” and “acquires the connotation of mass popular participation in the continuing revolution of national renewal”.⁴ It may be useful to return to this line of inquiry. Previous studies of mass mobilisation mainly focused on China, where it was much more widespread than in the USSR, and have not dealt with the contrast between mass mobilisation and mass participation. This is unsurprising, because in China mass mobilisation was first used to mediate a relationship from which the working class and its traditions of organisation and participatory

² Draper, Hal, “The Two Souls of Socialism” (1966), <<http://www.sd-il.com/tss/tss.htm>>, and Draper, Hal, *Karl Marx’s Theory of Revolution. Volume II: The Politics of Social Classes* (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1978), pp147-165.

³ A few examples are Fitzpatrick, Sheila, *The Russian Revolution* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982), pp61-109; Fitzpatrick, Sheila, “The Civil War as a Formative Experience”, pp58-75 in Gleason, A., Kenez, P. and Stites, R., *Bolshevik Culture: experiment and order in the Russian revolution* (Bloomington, Ind., Indiana University Press, 1985); Lewin, Moshe, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (New York, The New Press, 1994), pp191-208; Chase, William J., *Workers, Society, and the Soviet State: Labor and Life in Moscow 1918-1929* (Illinois, Illini Books, 1990), pp293-295. Isaac Deutscher’s assessment of the damaging impact of the civil war (Deutscher, Isaac, *The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky, 1921-1929* (New York, 1959), p7) was the starting point for discussion by, among others, Lewis Siegelbaum and Ronald Suny, “Class Backwards: In Search of the Soviet Working Class”, pp1-26 in Siegelbaum, L. and Suny, R. (eds.), *Making Workers Soviet: Power, Class and Identity* (New York, Cornell University Press, 1994).

⁴ Tucker, Robert C., “Towards a Comparative Politics of Movement-Regimes”, *American Political Science Review*, 55(2) June 1961, pp282-285. When Tucker says that the “mass-movement regime”’s claims to be democratic have a connotation of “mass participation in [...] popular renewal”, he is using the word “participation” slightly differently from me. I use “mass participation” to mean participation in political decision-making, as distinct from “mass mobilisation”, which implies a participation limited to campaigns whose political outlines have been decided by a vanguard. Tucker argued that the “movement-regime” owed something to Mazzini’s Young Italy movement. Under such a regime, “a large proportion of the population is [...] drawn into the whirlpool of guided [NB] public life, and many may derive an experience of political participation that was denied them under the old regime.” The emphasis is on the guiding: soviets that “arose before the October revolution and independently of communism” were “reshaped into components of the Bolshevik movement-regime” and became the “foremost non-party organs of controlled participation”, foreshadowing organisations set up in Nasser’s Egypt and Ayub Khan’s Pakistan, for example.

democracy were largely absent, i.e. that between the Maoist party/army and the peasant populations in the Kiangsi soviet republic (1931-34) and the Yen-an period (1940-45).⁵

Background

The development of mass mobilisation went together with the erosion of participatory democracy. Both these processes began during the civil war. The most direct precursor of the 1922 mobilisation campaigns – as centrally co-ordinated mobilisations of civilians in a concerted action with a specific political rationale – was the campaign of “subbotniki” (Saturday work) that began on the Moscow railways in April 1919 and became a national event on 1 May 1920. Alongside these campaigns there were military mobilisations, e.g. the “party week” of October 1919 in which thousands of workers were recruited to the party and sent to the front, the “defence week” that immediately followed, when people were mobilised to build barricades, and the “collection week” in September 1920 to support the Red army’s Polish war offensive. Mobilisations of factory-based food procurement squads into the countryside, borne of necessity during and straight after the civil war, took on some characteristics of mobilisation campaigns. In 1920 there were mobilisations of factory workers to cut peat for fuel and to clean up after the spring thaw, and, in March 1920, a sanitation week (some people called it “bath week”) to tackle hygiene problems and disease.⁶

In 1918-20, assaults on soviet democracy (including closure or disruption of soviets dominated by opposition parties and arrests of delegates) and workplace democracy (constraints on factory committees, substitution of collegial management by one-man management etc)⁷ were usually publicly attributed to, or justified in terms of, military exigencies. Both dissident Bolsheviks and non-Bolshevik socialists held out hopes that these processes would be reversed after the civil war. The events of 1921-22 did not justify these hopes. A key event in Moscow was the soviet election of April-May 1921, i.e. immediately after the Kronshtadt revolt. The Moscow workers had given little active support to Kronshtadt, but in the weeks prior to the revolt there had been widespread strikes against inequality in the rationing system. At the hustings, the demand for “equal rations” merged with more general discontent at living conditions and some political objections to Bolshevik policy, to produce a majority in the large factories for “non-party” candidates. While repression was targeted at the Mensheviks, SRs, anarchists and some

⁵ Bennett, Gordon, *Yundong: Mass Campaigns in Chinese Communist Leadership* (Berkeley, Centre for Chinese Studies, 1976), especially pp20-32; Cell, Charles P., *Revolution at Work: Mobilization Campaigns in China* (New York, Academic Press, 1977), especially pp8-21, 38-40 and 44-46. The first monograph on Stakhanovism, the most notable fully-fledged Soviet mass mobilisation campaign, Siegelbaum, Lewis, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), concentrates on the context of the 1930s rather than origins of the technique.

⁶ On “subbotniki”, Aleshchenko, N.M., *Moskovskii sovet v 1917-1941 gg.*, (Moscow, Nauka, 1976), pp169-171; Mazaev, A.I., *Prazdnik kak sotsial’no-khudozhestvennoe iavlenie* (Moscow, Nauka, 1968), pp301-304. On the October 1919 mobilisation, Aleshchenko, pp137-140; *Istoriia rabochikh Moskvyy 1917-1945* (Moscow, Nauka, 1983), pp63 and 98-99; Poliakov, Iu.A., *Moskovskie trudiashchiesia v oborone sovetskoi stolitsy v 1919 g.* (Moscow, Izd. Akademii nauk SSSR, 1958), p137. On journeys for bread, *Otchet 7-oi Moskovskoi gubpartkonferentsii RKP(b) (29-31 Oktiabria 1921gg)*, p19; *Tsentral’nyi Arkhiv Obshchestvennykh Dvizhenii Moskvyy (TsAODM) f3 op2 d48, 118, 140, 146, 149 and 1128*. On sanitation week, *Moskovskii sovet rabochikh, krestianskikh i krasnoarmeiskikh deputatov 1917-1927* (Moscow, izd. Moskovskogo soveta, 1927), p91 and *Bez nikh my ne pobedili by: vospominaniia zhenshchin-uchastnits Oktiabr’skoi revoliutsii, grazhdanskoi voiny i sotsialisticheskogo stroitel’sstva* (Moscow, Politizdat, 1975), p26.

⁷ On the soviets, Brovkin, Vladimir, *The Mensheviks after October: socialist opposition and the rise of the Bolshevik dictatorship* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1987), pp126-160 and 220-293. On the factory committees, Smith, S.A., *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983) pp230-252; Mandel, David, *The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power: from the July Days 1917 to July 1918* (London, Macmillan, 1984), pp379-413.

dissidents who had recently quit the Bolshevik party, the “non-party” group’s offers of collaboration in the soviet were met with an arrogant refusal by the Bolsheviks (who maintained a majority on the soviet with support from smaller factories and offices, despite their defeat in most large factories).⁸ A crucial opportunity to revive soviet democracy in the Russian capital was thereby squandered.

The campaign to confiscate church valuables

During 1921, while the party in the urban centres was preoccupied with restarting production and implementing NEP, a famine crisis unfolded on the Volga and some other rural areas.⁹ Towards the end of the year, the campaign to aid famine victims was given increasing prominence in the party press. In January 1922 a proposal by Trotsky, to turn the campaign against the church, was accepted. Articles appeared in party publications condemning the church for retaining its valuables while people were starving, and on 23 February the central soviet executive ordered the confiscation of all church valuables to aid famine victims. The head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Tikhon, responded with a declaration that all non-sacred valuables should be contributed to famine relief, but that confiscations were sacreligious.¹⁰ The campaign marked a move from propaganda and education against religion to an offensive underpinned by state repression: in the countryside, violent conflicts between confiscation detachments and crowds of peasants led by priests culminated in the bloody clash at Shuia, two major trials of priests, executions (which Lenin specifically advocated) and jailings. It was co-ordinated nationally and monitored by the party and the GPU in a way that no previous campaign had been; party organisations presented standard resolutions to workers’ meetings, district party leaders checked that they were doing so, and the results of these meetings were systematically surveyed by GPU agents.¹¹ This co-ordination and monitoring is crucial, because it helped to empty the campaign of any participatory democratic element it might have had.

The campaign in Moscow started in March 1922 with agitation and propaganda, i.e. factory meetings, meetings of believers, and film screenings. Then came actual confiscations, carried out by special detachments (*otriady osobogo naznacheniia*) and Red army units. Available evidence suggests that most Moscow workers supported the campaign, but passively. The Moscow party’s agit-prop commission reported 550 workplace meetings, at about 10% of which

⁸ I have described these events in Pirani, Simon, “The Moscow workers’ movement in 1921 and the role of non-partyism”, *Europe-Asia Studies* 56(1) 2004, pp143-160.

⁹ The famine, a large-scale tragedy that affected areas with a population of more than 30 million, and claimed up to 5 million lives, awaits more historical research. An assessment of the Bolshevik response is made by Charles Edmonson in “The Politics of Hunger: the Soviet Response to Famine, 1921” (*Soviet Studies* vol.29 no.4, October 1977, pp506-518). Unfortunately recent historiographical discussion has been clouded by cold-war-style assertions that the Bolsheviks caused the famine and kept it secret as long as they could (see Pipes, Richard, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime* (London, Harvill, 1994), pp410-419). Patenaude, Bertrand M., *The Big Show in Bololand: The American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002) concentrates on the US relief effort.

¹⁰ On the use of the famine issue in the campaign against the church, see Husband, William, “Godless Communists”: atheism and society in Soviet Russia 1917-1937 (DeKalb, Northern Illinois University Press, 2000), pp 54-59; Luukkanen, Arto, *The Party of Unbelief: the Religious Policy of the Bolshevik Party 1917-1929* (Helsinki, SHS, 1994), pp107-117; Vasil’eva, Ol’ga Iu., “Russkaia pravoslavnaia tserkov’ i sovetskaia vlast’ v 1917-1927 godakh”, *Voprosy Istorii* 1993, no.8, pp40-54. On Trotsky’s role, Luukkanen, pp103-112; Meijer, J. (ed.), *The Trotsky Papers 1917-1922* (The Hague, Mouton, 1964), vol II, pp670-672. On Tikhon, Pokrovskii N.N. and Petrov, S.G., *Arkhiv Kremliia: Politbiuro i tserkov’ 1922-1925gg* (Moscow, Rosspen, 1997), kn.1, pp113-115.

¹¹ On the trials of church leaders, Daly, Jonathan W., “‘Storming the Last Citadel’: The Bolshevik Assault on the Church, 1922” in Brovkin, Vladimir (ed.), *The Bolsheviks in Russian Society: the revolution and civil wars* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997), pp252-259; Husband, pp57-58; Pokrovskii and Petrov, kn. 1, pp42-54. On the GPU-party co-ordination, Pokrovskii and Petrov, kn. 2, pp45-50.

opposition or hesitation was expressed.¹² Even if one factors in probable exaggerations of success in local activists' reports, assumes (as the report suggests) that most opposition was at larger-than-average workplaces, and allows for fear of the repression that was exercised sporadically against workplace opposition, one is still left with a simple headcount in favour. But there is also ample evidence that much support was disgruntled, and that there was opposition to the campaign not only from religious workers¹³ – as one would expect – but also from those who wanted to aid the famine victims but did not trust the Bolsheviks and did not like their campaign methods.

At the AMO car factory, the “non-party” group that brought together non-party socialists with Menshevik and SR sympathisers, and had until early 1922 controlled the factory committee, argued for “popular control” of the famine relief campaign “to ensure that the valuables really are disposed of as they should be”. A representative, Solov'ev, was elected to check. Vasilii Tikhonov, one of the non-partyists and probably a Menshevik sympathiser, told a mass meeting that the confiscation should have begun earlier, and supported Solov'ev's election by referring to reports of “incorrect confiscations”¹⁴ in Tambov. At other workplaces where non-Bolshevik socialists remained active, Bolshevik resolutions on the confiscation of church valuables were not opposed but amended: at the 1886 power station, a meeting chaired by Epifanov, probably a Menshevik,¹⁵ decided to contribute 500 pud (8.2 tonnes) of excess grain from the station's own stores, supplemented by voluntary donations. At a bakery in the Gorodskoi district Mensheviks raised “the need for control” over confiscations, linking this to the issue of free speech. The confiscation committee in Krasnopresn'ia district was told by a speaker at one meeting: “Many people don't trust [you]. Will what is collected reach the starving? It would be good if we knew exactly to whom it is given, for example by linking a particular village to a workplace here, and how many people the aid is feeding, the region, district, village.” Such measures would increase support for the campaign, the speaker argued.¹⁶

Meetings on the confiscation of church valuables were used by some workers to re-raise the issue of elite privileges, which had been a subject of fierce political discussion both inside and outside the party in Moscow in the summer of 1920. A typical heckler in Krasnopresn'ia shouted: “Comrades, have we really got to the point when we have to take the decorations from the churches? [...] It would be better for you to give the surplus wealth that you've made under soviet rule. Let's take off that bourgeois coat, that was taken from the bourgeoisie, and share it with the starving children. [...] Let the idealistic communists' wives work for the starving.”

¹² Rossiiskiy Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'noi i Politicheskoi Istorii (RGASPI), f17 op60 d336, 1174-82, reproduced in Pokrovskii and Petrov, kn. 2, pp207-216. As well as 550 workplace meetings the report mentions that 180,000 people attended the film screenings.

¹³ Gatherings of believers were organised by the Bolsheviks at churches to attempt to win support for the campaign. Often, these gatherings would resolve to hand over some valuables, but not the most important, e.g. sacred vessels and crosses. Some such gatherings elected representatives to negotiate with the confiscation commission. See TsAODM f3 op3 d34, 153, 158ob, 160ob, 176ob, 178, 178ob and 179. When the confiscations began, crowds gathered at some Moscow churches; on several occasions there were violent clashes between these crowds and the confiscation commissions, but nowhere on the scale reached in the countryside. See Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Moskovskoi Oblasti (TsGAMO) f66 op22 d71, 119, 14, 15 and 145; Pokrovskii and Petrov, kn. 2, p135.

¹⁴ Presumably, those that breached regulations against “excesses” and needless confrontation.

¹⁵ I have assumed Tikhonov's and Epifanov's political affiliations, based on the context and on other actions and speeches.

¹⁶ On AMO, TsAODM f3 op3 d34, 185ob and f433 op1 d14, 110; Tsentralnyi Munitsipal'nyi Arkhiv Moskvy (TsMAM) f415 op16 d318, 137. On the 1886 power station, TsAODM f3 op3 d34, 185. On the bakery, Pokrovskii and Petrov, kn. 2, p210. The speaker at an unidentified workplace in Krasnopresn'ia was quoted in a report compiled by N. Vinogradov, secretary of the district confiscation committee (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi federatsii (GARF) f1235 op140 d59, 168ob, reproduced in Pokrovskii and Petrov, kn. 2, pp110-113).

Similar points were written into resolutions at the Kosa metallurgical works, a stronghold of “non-partyist” organisation, which voted to support the soviet central executive committee decree on confiscation “with an addendum: to confiscate all valuables from citizens [u grazhdan] of the Soviet republic”, and the Varts Makgill foundry, which voted to “confiscate gold first from the communists, their wives, and traders, and then from the church”.¹⁷ Some workers protested at Bolshevik appropriation of decision-making by refusing to give post-facto approval to a decision in which they had not participated. At the Geo-fizika factory in Sokolniki, only 18 votes could be mustered for a resolution supporting confiscation; a representative of the majority called out: “you’ve published the decree, now implement it; there’s nothing to ask us about”. At Mius’ski tram park in Krasnopresn’ia, and three workplaces in Zamoskvorech’e – the Sytin print works, which had a history of both non-partyist and Menshevik organisation, the Gulutvinskaia textile works and the artificial limb factory – the workforce refused to vote on resolutions supporting confiscation for the same reason.¹⁸

The trial of the SRs

The second big mobilisation campaign of 1922, in support of the trial of the SR party leaders,¹⁹ represented a much greater shift in Bolshevik policy away from the traditions of 1917, and as such faced greater opposition from among politically active workers. These workers, many of whom had become both literate and conscious of political issues during the process of urbanisation and revolution, seem not to have been particularly hostile to the anti-church campaign: some had become atheists, and even among those who were believers, there was considerable support for donating valuables for famine relief. But the SR trial posed more complicated issues. Firstly, there was residual support for the SRs, who were seen as bearers of the narodnik tradition. The majority the Bolsheviks won among politically active workers in late 1917 certainly implied opposition to the SR leaders on the issue of “all power to the soviets”. And during the civil war, the participation of many SR leaders in the Komuch government that mounted armed resistance to soviet power, finished them off in the most left-wing workers’ eyes.²⁰ But for others that did not settle the issue. In Moscow, SRs had remained active in the rail workshops and textile mills, and among telegraph and postal workers, and had posed as a socialist alternative to the Bolsheviks during the hardship of 1920-21 and despite the repression of those years. Secondly, the Bolsheviks put at the centre of the campaign the demand for the defendants to be punished by death, which involved renouncing opposition to the death penalty, one of the democratic principles of 1917 to which the Bolsheviks, on paper, still subscribed.²¹

¹⁷ The heckler is one of several similar quoted by Vinogradov, op.cit. On Kosa, TsAODM f3 op3 d34, 178ob. The Kosa workers a few days later voted to send a non-party representative to a regional union conference rather than a Bolshevik (ibid, 180). On Varts Makgill, Pospelovsky, Andrew, “Strikes During the NEP”, *Revolutionary Russia*, vol. 10, no.1, June 1997, pp14-15. Perhaps these workers were unaware that the Moscow party leaders had themselves, in the summer of 1921, called on party members to surrender valuables to aid the famine victims (see TsAODM f3 op2 d28, 192 and f63 op1 d50, 14; or perhaps that decision had not been implemented.

¹⁸ Pokrovskii and Petrov, kn. 2, p209 (Geofizika and Zamoskvorech’e); TsAODM f3op3d3, 170 (Miuski).

¹⁹ I discuss only the campaign to win workers’ support for the trial, not the trial itself. The standard history is Jansen, Marc, *A Show Trial Under Lenin* (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1982). A wide-ranging document collection published recently is *Sudebny Protssess nad sotsialistami-revoliutsionerami* (iun’-avgust 1922 g.) (Moscow, Rosspen, 2002). The “Predislovie” in that volume contains much valuable information.

²⁰ After the Komuch government collapsed, the SR party underwent a series of splits. Its leadership was divided on the question of whether to continue armed resistance to the Bolsheviks or negotiate with them, and on whether to take up arms against the Whites, etc. See, for example, Jansen, pp1-21.

²¹ The Bolsheviks had throughout the civil war repeatedly expressed opposition in principle to the death penalty and insisted that extrajudicial executions by the Cheka were due to military exigencies. The widely-distributed popularisation of the party programme published in 1920 states: “While the civil war continues, abolition of the death penalty is impossible. But a dispassionate comparison of proletarian justice with the justice of the bourgeois counter-revolution shows the marvellous leniency of the workers’ courts in comparison with the executioners of

The Bolshevik central committee first decided to try the SR party leaders in December 1921 and announced this intention publicly in February 1922. The propaganda campaign began with a public dispute with the leaders of the Socialist International, during which Lenin initiated the call for the death penalty. In Moscow the organisational preparations for the campaign were two-sided: the Moscow party committee supervised a campaign of resolutions at workplace meetings during May and June, and co-ordinated their activity with a “technical troika” of GPU officers who in late May 1922 oversaw the arrest of all known active SR party members, starting with those on the Moscow railway network. The party and GPU bodies also co-ordinated the monitoring of workplace responses to the resolutions.²² Street demonstrations started with one at the train station on 25 May to protest at the arrival of the Belgian social democrat Emile Vandervelde, a defence lawyer for the accused. They culminated on 20 June with an enormous demonstration on the fourth anniversary of the assassination of the Bolshevik leader Moisei Volodarskii.²³

In the factories, the Bolsheviks initially found it more difficult to win support for the trial than they had for the campaign against the church. An initial summary of working-class attitudes, compiled by the GPU on 1 June, suggested that only three-fifths were supportive, more than one tenth had a “definitely negative” attitude and the rest were “doubtful” or “passive”.²⁴ The fiercest opposition was provoked by the arrest of SR sympathisers at one of Moscow’s largest textile mills, the Trekhgornaia mill in Krasnopresnia. On 25 May, Anatolii Lunacharskii, the commissar of enlightenment, addressed a meeting there and a resolution was passed condemning the SR “murderers and traitors to the working people” – with one vote against and five abstentions. The GPU resolved to quell this opposition,²⁵ and on 4 June six weavers were arrested for “suspected agitation about the SR trial”. On 6 June the weaving shop’s 600 day-shift workers struck, demanding the release of the six detainees and a wage increase; the

bourgeois justice. The workers pass death sentences in extreme cases only.” (Bukharin, N. and Preobrazhenskii, E., *The ABC of Communism: a popular explanation of the program of the Communist Party of Russia* (London, Communist Party of Great Britain, 1922), p232). This harked back to the position taken by the second congress of soviets in 1917, which as it endorsed the Bolshevik seizure of power also reversed the death penalty at the front imposed by the provisional government. A recent historian of the death penalty writes that this decision was in keeping with the predominant outlook of 1917 that, in the words of a typical soviet resolution, abolition of the death penalty was “one of the most precious gains of our great Russian revolution”. See Zhiltsov, Sergei V., *Smertnaia kazn’ v istorii Rossii* (Moscow, Zertsalo-M, 2002), pp213-227. The 1922 campaign in support of the SR trial asked workers not only to acknowledge that the SR leaders were counter-revolutionaries, but also that they deserved the death sentence.

²² Krasil’nikov and Morozov, “Predislovie”, in *Sudebny Protsess*, pp61-63. The wave of arrests of SRs was preceded in April 1922 by a crackdown on the surviving Menshevik party organisation in Moscow and the arrest of Menshevik activists such as the chemical union official Gonikberg. The GPU officers who oversaw the repression of the SRs were two anarchists-turned-Bolsheviks – Timofei Samsonov, head of the GPU’s secret department, and M. Brenner – and G. Savvat’ev.

²³ Volodarskii was assassinated by Sergeev, an SR party member. The prosecution case at the trial referred both to the SRs’ role in mounting armed resistance to the Bolsheviks during the civil war, but also to claims that leading SRs had conspired to order Volodarskii’s assassination and other terrorist acts against the Bolsheviks. These latter claims relied in crucial respects on the unsafe evidence of informers. Legal procedure was routinely breached and the prosecutor, Nikolai Krylenko, made quite clear that the judgement should be a political one. The SR leaders denounced the court and repudiated all charges. Both the grandiose fabricated conspiracies and the absurd confessions that were a key feature of future show trials were absent.

²⁴ TsAODM f3 op3 d33, 171. The GPU’s survey covered 31 workplace meetings attended by an aggregate total of 10,600 workers. Of these, 6400 were counted as supportive of the trial, 1400 had a “definitely negative attitude”, 2300 had a “doubtful” attitude and 500 had a “passive” attitude. Obviously these figures must be treated with scepticism. I have found no figures collated subsequently, only reports from individual factories.

²⁵ In a copy of a report of the meeting in the GPU archives, Samsonov underlined a reference to the votes against Lunacharskii’s resolution. Krasil’nikov and Morozov, p64.

management threatened to close the shop and sack all its workers; this ended the strike, and work was resumed on the night shift. On 19 June, the day before the big demonstration, another mass meeting was addressed by Lunacharskii, at which the demand for the detainees' release was raised again.²⁶ Other workplaces where support for the SRs was expressed included the Alekseevskaiia water works in Sokolniki, where SRs and non-partyists had in early 1922 clashed with the unpopular Bolshevik cell on account of an egregious "spets-baiting" campaign conducted by the latter. On the SR trial, a standard Bolshevik resolution was voted down by 40 votes to 17; one of its opponents told a mass meeting: "The SRs fought against the monarchists, for socialism. It was they, not the Bolsheviks, who killed ministers and dignitaries. They do not deserve this kind of punishment."²⁷ Bolshevik resolutions on the trial were also defeated at workplaces where the Mensheviks and left SRs remained active, such as the 27th print works in Khamovniki and the Rusalkii tram depot. The left SR K.N. Prokopovich, a delegate to the Krasnopresnia soviet – who, along with the anarchists, had some support at the Ilyin factory – was expelled from the soviet on 1 June after speaking against the trial campaign, while at the factory non-partyists and left SRs called on workers not to join the anti-SR demonstration.²⁸

The above examples illustrate residual support for the opposition socialist parties. More generally, the politically corrosive effect of the Bolsheviks' mass mobilisation techniques, and the extent of opposition to them, is evident from many workers' disquiet at Bolshevik insistence on the death penalty. The GPU noted that workers who "sympathised with, or felt sorry for" the defendants passed "softened" resolutions, i.e. without calls for "severe punishment". At the central telegraph office, a non-party group led by Ikonnikov, which sometimes cooperated with a separate SR group, proposed deleting from a Bolshevik resolution a clause calling for the "highest order of punishment" for the trial defendants. On the 20 June demonstration, there were three groups of people carrying banners declaring opposition to the death penalty. One of these may have come from the Moscow higher technical school, where a meeting on the trial had split three ways: one group supported a Bolshevik resolution, another (presumably sympathetic to the SRs) refused to vote on the trial "since it is being conducted one-sidedly", and a middle group argued that "given the present strength of the Russian soviet republic and the Russian Communist Party, there is no need to subject the SRs to severe punishment".²⁹ Some workers challenged the mass mobilisation campaign on the grounds that it undermined judicial process. At the Tsutran factory in Bauman district, a Bolshevik resolution was rejected after two workers argued that "making decisions about a matter in front of the court is a job not for workers, but for the court itself"; a group of workers at the Podolsk engineering works gave similar reasons for abstaining from voting. At a print shop in Bauman district, and at the Shapov factory, there was "dissatisfaction at the way that the defending counsel for the SRs, Vandervelde and co., had

²⁶ TsAODM f3 op3 d34, 1149, 150 and 166ob; Krasil'nikov and Morozov, pp64 and 67. Golos Rossii 22 September 1922, quoted by Jansen. This latter source claims that Lunacharsky had promised immunity to workers who spoke in opposition to him at the 25 May mass meeting, but that they were then arrested and this provoked rioting.

²⁷ TsAODM f3 op3 d34, 1165, and Pravda, 28 June 1922. The Bolshevik cell, with some support from higher up in the party, pursued a "spets-baiting" campaign against the water works' chief engineer, V.V. Oldenberger, who committed suicide in November 1921. At Lenin's insistence, a public example was made of the "spets-baiters", who were tried at the Supreme Revolutionary Tribunal (see Krylenko, N.V., "Delo o samoubiistve glavnogo inzhenera Moskovskogo vodopovoda Ol'denborgera", in Krylenko, N.V., *Za piat let, 1918-1922 gg.: obvinitel'nye rechi* (Moscow, Gosizdat, 1923), pp431-459, and *Izvestiia*, 9, 12 and 14 March 1922). My archival research shows that the majority of the workforce, influenced by the SRs and non-partyists, opposed the spets-baiting campaign.

²⁸ TsAODM f3 op3 d34, 1148 (print works), f3 op3 d33, 181 (Rusalkii depot). TsAODM f3 op3 d34, 1147 and Krasil'nikov and Morozov, p65 (Prokopovich). K.N. Prokopovich was a left SR active in Moscow in the early 1920s, not to be confused with "economist" Menshevik-turned-Kadet S.N. Prokopovich, who left Russia during the civil war. Pravda, 30 June 1922 (on the Ilyin works).

²⁹ TsAODM f3 op3 d34, 1214 (telegraph office); 1166 (students); Krasil'nikov and Morozov, p66 (students); *Sotsialisticheskii Vestnik* 1922, no.15, pp7-9 (demonstration).

been greeted”, suggesting that workers were concerned that the trial was damaging the reputation of the soviet state in Europe.³⁰

Working-class unease at the changing format of mass meetings, away from participatory democracy and towards the approval of standard resolutions, resulted in mass abstentions. Deprived by procedure of decision-making power, workers stayed silent and gave their views only when pressed. So when a standard Bolshevik resolution was put to a 150-strong mass meeting at the Varts MakGill foundry, it received 40 votes for and two abstentions, with a large majority declining even to register an abstention. Asked to explain his stance, one of the majority replied: “why are we judging the SRs, and not those who shot at, beat and robbed the masses when we went for potatoes and bread [during the civil war]?” At a print shop in Bauman district, a party resolution attracted 25 votes and more than 800 abstentions; at the Uvarov tram park in Khamovniki a party resolution was passed at a meeting of 100 workers by 35 to 18, with the rest abstaining.³¹ Another mass mobilisation technique that provoked resistance was that of asking workers individually to sign resolutions supporting the death penalty. At the Oktiabr factory in Bauman, 130 workers voted unanimously for a party resolution supporting the death penalty, but when it was circulated for signing, six workers refused, on the grounds that “they did not want to shoot people”. At the Miusky tram park in Krasnopresniia, 600 workers voted for a resolution supporting the trial, but only 50 would sign it.³²

Finally, there was opposition to the conduct of the Bolshevik campaign within the party itself. At the Sverdlov communist university, where the student body predominantly comprised rank-and-file Bolsheviks, a delegation had attended the demonstration against Vandervelde, but subsequently the mood of “hostility” to the SRs had been replaced by one of “repentance”, according to a GPU agent at the university. The students had during June begun “to take a judgmental view of their own demonstration” and, having read letters in the press from imprisoned SRs, had become “critical of the campaign being waged in our press”. At a Moscow district party conference on 25-26 June the former Menshevik and persistent dissenter David Riazanov argued that the party should not have urged the physical death penalty against specific SR leaders. The Moscow party leader, Kamenev, responded with a tirade the like of which had not been heard since the defeat of the workers’ opposition. The CC accepted Kamenev’s proposal to “take measures” against Riazanov, who was assigned to work abroad, on literary tasks only, for a year.³³

20 June and other demonstrations

Notwithstanding all the forms of opposition expressed above, a huge number of people – probably between 200,000 and 300,000 from a total city population of about 1.28 million –

³⁰ TsAODM f3 op3 d34, 1161 (Tsutran factory); Pravda, 23 June 1922 (Podolsk); TsAODM f3 op3 d34, 1147 (Bauman print shop and Shapov factory).

³¹ TsAODM f3 op3 d34, 1147ob, Krasil’nikov and Morozov, p66 (Varts MakGill); TsAODM ibid, 1161 and 161ob (print shop and bus park). Meetings such as these were publicly reported as supportive of the Bolshevik campaign.

³² TsAODM f3 op3 d34, 1161. Sotsialisticheskii vestnik 1922, no.15, pp7-8, reproduced 19 reports from Moscow factories on the trial campaign. In most of these cases, opposition was expressed to the campaign, resulting in standard Bolshevik resolutions being passed with large numbers of abstentions, or in workers staying away from the 20 June demonstration.

³³ TsAODM f3 op3 d34, 1148 (on Sverdlov university); Sudebnii protsess, pp494-499 (Riazanov and Kamenev speeches); RGASPI f17 op3 d1394, 111-2, quoted in Sudebnii protsess, pp756-757. Kamenev said that Riazanov “had no right [...] to defend or cultivate a mood against the death penalty”; Rokitianskii, Iakov and Muller, Reinhard, Krasnyi dissident: akademik Riazanov – opponent Lenina, zhertva Stalina (Moscow, Akademiia, 1996), pp202-204.

turned out on the 20 June demonstration.³⁴ This was a triumph of mass mobilisation over participatory democracy, and in that sense the Menshevik Boris Dvinov was right that the spectacle of workers marching under red banners calling for the death penalty was “a turning point” for the Russian revolution. Dvinov argued that “fear of death from [unemployment, and the resulting] hunger moved the hand of the worker, when he voted for the party cell’s resolution and when he signed a petition for punishment, and brought him willy-nilly to the demonstration”.³⁵ This, though, seems an insufficient explanation for the large turn-out. The nadir in terms of shortages had been passed in the spring of 1921, and thereafter things improved, albeit slowly and with interruptions. Dismissal might have brought the imminent prospect of death from hunger in 1919-1920, but by 1922, the possibility of return to the countryside and the rudimentary welfare benefits system ensured survival. One of the SR trial defendants, Mikhail Gendel’man, referred in court to the arrests at the Trekhgornaia mill and claimed that the demonstrators had been driven onto the streets by GPU threats.³⁶ This is also difficult to accept as more than a partial explanation: very small numbers were arrested, and while fears of repression, and of a return to the horrors and hardships of the civil war, were surely aroused by the assault on the SRs, these can not alone explain such a huge mobilisation. Nor, to be sure, can the formulaic, set-piece speeches by worker delegates to the revolutionary tribunal. In Pravda’s report, among the repetitive calls for the defendants to be executed, only two moments of reality stand out. The first is an emotional denunciation of the SRs by a mother of three children as the murderers of her husband, who was killed at the front. The second is a speech by a representative of the Moscow post and telegraph offices, where SR influence remained strong in 1922, who said he had switched allegiance to the Bolsheviks for the most prosaic and materialistic of reasons: “Soviet power gives us everything that it can. [...] It has given us the Vysotskii mansion [for workers’ families to live in]. [...] If Gots and co. were in power, I am sure they would drive us out of there.” These are the two ends of the scale: at one, demonstrators moved by fear, and at the other, those who genuinely saw the SRs as enemies of the revolution and its gains. Many more were probably taking the line of least resistance: here was a chance to leave the factory for half a day on a warm summer afternoon, most likely with full pay, and with the permission, or even encouragement, of management.³⁷

In the background of both the campaign against the SRs and the disquiet it caused was a newly emerging aspect of the Bolsheviks’ relationship with the working class: while repressing clearly-articulated opposition, the party offered what could be described as a “social contract” to the majority of workers. Workers would maintain discipline, improve labour productivity and cede real decision-making power to the party – which in return would ensure a consistent improvement in living standards, including, for example, the possibility of moving from disease-ridden slums to expropriated mansions. This in turn required a redefinition of politics. Mass participation had to be severely restricted, and the limited participation had to be presented as working-class power. So while the fora for working class political activity, the soviets and unions, were allocated restricted functions that involved implementing, rather than making, decisions (see below), workers were discouraged even from speaking their minds at “their” mass

³⁴ Pravda, 22 June 1922. Opposition socialists and journalists concurred with the official figures; see Jansen, pp146 and 208. Proportionately, the turnout is comparable to that on the recent demonstration in London against the Iraq war (1.5 million from a total population of 7.6 million), the largest in London in modern times.

³⁵ Dvinov, a delegate to the Moscow soviet, was in Moscow throughout this period, by which time many of the other Menshevik memoirists had already emigrated. See Dvinov, B., *Ot legal’nosti k pod’poliu (1921-1922)*, (Stanford, Hoover Institution, 1968), pp136-137.

³⁶ Pravda, 24 June 1922; Jansen, p147.

³⁷ Workplace contingents assembled in the districts at 2pm, in fine weather. The single detailed description of a factory delegation said it was “headed by management”, and given that communist managers would have had to attend, and urge others to do so, as a matter of party policy, it is reasonable to assume that that was widespread. See Pravda, 22 June 1922.

meetings, but encouraged to participate in marshalled public displays of support for the new order. It seems likely that when doing so, most of them felt neither unequivocal support for the regime nor simple fear of it, but a wide range of emotions and ideas. Politically-active workers who didn't accept this form of "social contract", such as the non-partyists on the Moscow soviet, were marginalised. Those who actively resisted it, i.e. the Mensheviks, left SRs, anarchists, and, increasingly, dissident Bolsheviks who quit the party, were silenced by repression.

The 20 June demonstration must also be placed in the context of the systemisation, within the Bolshevik agitation and propaganda programme, of a range of demonstrations marking May Day, the anniversary of the October revolution, etc. Several historians have observed that such occasions, notable for spontaneity and inventiveness during the civil war, subsequently became official and formulaic.³⁸ More research is needed on the relative weight in achieving large turnouts on such occasions of threats, paternalistic arm-twisting, the distribution of extra rations, worker sympathy with the regime and hopes of upholding the traditions of 1917. The SR V.F. Klement'ev, who in 1920 left prison and took an office job in a soviet institution, describes how in June 1920 the party cell secretary ordered staff to demonstrate in support of the third congress of the Comintern, threatening absentees with Cheka attention ... and rewarding attendees with substantial extra rations. Archival evidence is patchy; it becomes fuller in respect of the 5th anniversary of the October revolution in 1922, when celebrations began to be tightly centrally directed. There was a high turnout (more than 250,000) and many factories were renamed in honour of Bolshevik leaders. At a frank, behind-closed-doors meeting in Krasnopresnia, Bolshevik organisers referred to workers' high spirits: so elevated, as one organiser, Shapiro, put it, "that even the late payment of wages did not stop people turning out". Vasilii Likhachev made the telling remark that "this time, the demonstration was not officially contrived [ne byla kazennoj]" – implicitly acknowledging that others had been.³⁹

Soviets and unions

Were demonstrations such as that of 20 June 1922 to be interpreted as unforced expressions of working-class support for the new political order, an explanation would have to be found for the contemporaneous trend in the party to repress dissident working class opinion and to strip the fora designated for working-class political activity, the soviets and trade unions, of real decision-making power. I have suggested above that the evolution of a "social contract", under which the party appropriated decision-making power in exchange for assuring increasing living standards, is a more logical interpretation of events. In 1921-22 the role of soviets and unions – which in the civil war years had been fiercely contested between the party leadership, non-

³⁸ V. Glebkin writes that before 1922, demonstrations and theatrical events were not "subordinated to a strict structure" and that there was no "unifying algorithm" by which they were conducted; "in 1922 the canon was put in place", which remained unchanged for decades afterwards (Glebkin, V.V., *Ritual v sovetskom kul'ture* (Moscow, Inus-K, 1998), pp98-99); Richard Stites writes that revolutionary content was replaced by "heavy instrumentalism" (Stites, Richard, *Revolutionary Dreams: utopian vision and experimental life in the Russian revolution* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1989), p50; Viktoriia Tiazhel'nikova writes that in the Moscow factories such occasions were marked in a "social, family" spirit, but were later stifled by officialdom (Tiazhel'nikova, V., "Povsednevnost' i revoliutsionnye preobrazovaniia sovetskoi vlasti", in Sokolov, A.K. and Koz'menko, V.M. (eds), *Rossia v XX-om veke: reformy i revoliutsiia* (Moscow, Nauka, 2002), pp84-100).

³⁹ Klement'ev, V.F., *V Bol'shevistskoi Moskve (1918-1920)* (Moscow, Russkii put', 1998), pp429-433; Krasnopresnia meeting, TsAODM f69 op1 d93, 1130. I have found little in the records of factory party and trade union organisations for 1920-23 about the organisation of demonstrations, apart from brief minutes of decisions that efforts should be made to achieve a good turnout. The AMO car works, where a comparatively full set of minutes is available, first recorded plans to supply to demonstrators a lavish meal at the factory's expense on the sixth anniversary of the revolution in November 1923 (see TsMAM f415 op16 d317, 1142-43).

Bolshevik socialists and Bolshevik oppositionists – was now recast, in NEP conditions, and they became bodies responsible for policy implementation in, respectively, local government and industrial relations, while decision-making power resided with the party. (That begs the question, which is beyond the subject matter of this paper: who was really making decisions in the party? In 1922 the party elite, concerned with building a state and nation under its own control, was taking shape. It clashed both with working-class Bolshevik rank-and-filers and leadership intellectuals who were loyal in various ways to socialist traditions. Uneasy as many of these socialists were about the party's appropriation of decision-making power, they did not mount significant resistance to it.)

In the case of the Moscow soviet, as I mentioned above, hopes of reviving 1917-style participatory democracy were raised in May 1921, by the non-partyists who were elected from most of the large factories in a fiercely-fought campaign, and then dashed, by the Bolsheviks' refusal to work with this group. Thenceforth the soviet declined: political decisions were now taken by party bodies and the soviet was recast as a body responsible for municipal administration. Any idea that it might act as a vehicle for popular participation in broader political decision-making was forgotten. The practical consequence was that in the plenary sessions debate was replaced by demagogic, lecture-style reports and delegates stopped showing up. There were new elections in January 1922, after the Moscow party committee warned that they could not be postponed further, since a "significant proportion" of delegates had quit and 200 of the 1543-strong Bolshevik fraction had been excluded in the 1921 purge. Few seats were contested; the number of non-party delegates was cut by more than half, to 251, plus three Mensheviks and one left SR; and the Mensheviks circulated a leaflet enumerating instances of Cheka harassment of opposition parties.⁴⁰

By 1922 the soviet had completed its transformation from a participatory democratic body to a lifeless course of lectures, and workers responded at election times either by attending meetings in silence and declining to vote, as they had done during the anti-SR campaign, or not turning up at all. During the December 1922 soviet elections, a leaflet issued by the (virtually underground) left SR-maximalist group in Moscow, commenting on the easy Bolshevik successes, pointed out that unanimous support for Bolshevik candidates often came from meetings at which there was not a word of discussion: "first prize [...] should probably go to the workers of the Moscow Consumer Association [a retail trading house]", 2500 of whom listened for an hour to a report on the domestic and international situation and voted "without a murmur" for a list of delegates headed by Lenin. The leaflet argued that, given the level of GPU surveillance, the obligatory use of open voting rather than secret ballots usurped democracy. Examples it gave of mass abstentions include that of the Guzhon steelworks, where a list of Bolshevik candidates was elected to the soviet by 100 votes against 2 with about 1900 abstentions.⁴¹ By the time of the next soviet elections, in November 1923, the abstentions had become an epidemic. The GPU reported turnouts of between 10% and 50% in the Moscow factories; in the textile town of Orekhovo-Zuev the turnouts were all below 10% and many elections were cancelled.⁴²

⁴⁰ On the decline of the soviet, minutes of meetings at TsGAMO f66 op12; Dvinov, Boris, *Moskovskii soviet rabochikh deputatov, 1917-1922: vospominaniia* (New York, 1961), p107; TsAODM f3 op3 d5, 11; Galili, Z., and Nenarokov, N., *Mensheviki v 1921-1922 gg.* (Moscow, Rosspen, 2002), pp433-435.

⁴¹ TsAODM f3 op11 d76. The leaflet also criticised the inferior representation in the soviets of the "employees" ("sluzhashchie") category, which included not only high officials but also domestic servants, teachers and the lowest-level clerks. They were entitled to one delegate per 500, as opposed to one per 100 from industrial workers.

⁴² TsGAMO f19 op1 d62, l293ob (Orekhovo-Zuev); *ibid*, l294, l294ob, l295ob, l1296-298 and l1312-312ob (city of Moscow). Further research is needed to reconcile these reported abstentions with official statistics showing that in May 1921, 340,000 of 671,927 eligible voters participated in the soviet elections; in January 1922, 334,931 of 460,413 (the fall in numbers eligible was supposedly due to people being recategorised as ineligible NEP-men); in December 1922, 339,515 out of 481,147; and in November 1923, 594,401 out of 698,884 (Aleshchenko, p251). It

Just as the soviet's function was redefined in 1921-22 as an organ of municipal administration, so the unions – which during the revolution and civil war had had pretensions to participation in political and economic decision-making – were allocated a new, subordinate role, implementing policies elaborated and supervised by party bodies. The 11th party congress in March-April 1922 passed a resolution, based on a draft by Lenin,⁴³ that once and for all quashed any suggestion that the unions might participate in industrial administration and defined their role as to “defend workers’ interests”. But this was hedged with important qualifications in the case of state-owned enterprises (which in Moscow accounted for the overwhelming bulk of industrial production⁴⁴) – that care had to be taken “not to prejudice the [...] development of the workers’ state as a whole”. The resolution permitted activity that “corrects blunders and excesses [in state-owned industry] resulting from the bureaucratic distortions of the state apparatus”, but in the next breath specified that the unions had to “act as mediators” between workers and industrial administrators. This put Bolshevik trade union leaders in an impossible position.⁴⁵ As the secretary of the Moscow trade union organisation, Grigorii Mel’ nichanskii, explained at a meeting of the party’s Moscow committee in August 1922, leaders such as himself were “bound hand and foot” by their belief in their responsibilities to the soviet system; they saw strikes and the threat of strikes as “politically inexpedient” and were therefore “de facto if not de jure entirely dependent on the party” to resolve such conflicts. Negotiations were conducted between Bolsheviks assigned to represent workers and Bolsheviks assigned to industrial management, who both accepted that the prime task was to improve production and discussed labour issues only from that standpoint. Konstantin Struevskii of the metalworkers’ union reported to the meeting the impact of this relationship on the unions’ spring 1922 campaign to sign collective agreements with industrial managers: “You practically have to drag [the industrial managers] forcefully to negotiations. You phone once, phone twice, it has no effect. They won’t turn up to sign agreements.”⁴⁶

The template for worker-management relations under NEP was established during 1922, and the unions’ political dependence on the party manifested itself in two linked respects. The first concerned strikes. Once production had begun to stabilise and the first fruits of the “social contract” appeared in the form of the collective agreements, workers reacted quickly to any signs of a return to the supply problems of 1920-21, and began to try to improve on the modest gains in wages and conditions. There were short, sharp strikes, during which the unions almost invariably acted as, and were perceived by workers as, allies of the industrial managers. Two disputes in the textile towns in the Moscow region provide examples. The first, at the Voskresenskaia mill in Narofominsk, flared in mid-January 1922 among weavers, when a dispute on time off for celebrating the Orthodox New Year merged with alarm triggered by an announcement that rations were to be replaced entirely by wages payments, which were erratic.

appears possible that, having held a mass meeting to elect soviet delegates, workplace organisations submitted voting figures including those who had attended but abstained and/or those who were absent.

⁴³ Odinnadtsati s’ezd RKP(b): protokoly (Moscow, Gos. izdatel’stvo, 1963), pp528-537.

⁴⁴ Privately owned industry in Moscow was insignificant: a statistical guide put its share of total output in the financial year 1922-23 at 3.4%. In addition there were leased enterprises, which employed about 11,000 of the 250,000 industrial workers in the city (see Gorinov, M.M., “Moskva v 20-kh godov”, Otechestvennaia istoriia 1996, no.5, pp3-17, quoting *Fabrichno-zavodskaiia promyshlennost’ g. Moskvy i Moskovskoi gubernii, 1917-1927 gg* (Moscow 1928).)

⁴⁵ By this time all union leaders at city level in Moscow were Bolsheviks and sympathisers. The Menshevik leadership of the city’s chemical workers’ union was removed at a conference in November 1921. Menshevik activity in the printers’ union, and activity by the left SRs and anarchists in the food workers’ union, continued sporadically. Strong SR representation on the railways was weakened by arrests in early 1922. Thenceforth there was significant non-Bolshevik activity in the unions only at enterprise level.

⁴⁶ TsAODM f3 op3 d5, ll55-59.

There was a brief strike. The weavers' anger was directed primarily at a particularly unpopular manager, Sergei Sel'diakov. He received unwavering support from the district trade union bureau, which was in turn denounced by the strikers for its "vulgar attitude to people [gruboe otnoshenie s narodom]". In June, the dispute flared again: spinners at the mill struck, demanding a 50% pay increase and Sel'diakov's dismissal. The regional union leadership responded by proposing, to the factory committee's alarm, that the entire mill be closed for two months.⁴⁷ The pattern of official union aggression against strikers was repeated in the largest strike recorded in the Moscow region in 1922, in August at the textile mills in Orekhovo-Zuev. The strike, for an across-the-board wage increase, lasted several days and had 19,000 participants at its height. The union responded by expelling the weavers who had initiated the action, while management said their bread rations would be stopped and they would be permanently sacked. When other workers joined the strike, they elected a delegation of rank-and-file workers to negotiate with the union's regional leadership.⁴⁸ During 1922-23, the use by union officials of expulsion and other sanctions against strike organisers became widespread, and served not only to enforce wage restraint but also to isolate and drive from the factories industrial militants who dissented from it.⁴⁹

The second respect in which unions were dependent on the state was financial-organisational. In 1921, the unions had been financed almost entirely via the labour commissariat, and in 1922, in line with "cost accounting" that was introduced throughout the state apparatus, a wave of cutbacks and rationalisations began. There was a simultaneous drive to centralise and standardise structures: some unions were merged and others reorganised to conform to a uniform pattern. Both before and after the cutbacks, the unions were predominantly staffed by the ubiquitous party "cadres" who moved freely to and from other branches of the state. And at all levels, these unelected officials outnumbered elected ones. Under "cost accounting" principles, direct state aid to trade unions' central committees stopped, but some regional departments continued to receive such aid, and all received free accommodation, electricity and food supplies.⁵⁰ The unions also received vital support from industrial managers via the deduction of subscriptions from wages prior to payment. In March-May 1922 the unions undertook a campaign to reregister membership and, in accordance with the 11th congress resolution, to move from compulsory to voluntary membership. But at the vast majority of enterprises this transition was accomplished by means of a single decision at a mass meeting to take up voluntary membership collectively, which was followed by the continued deduction of subscriptions at source. The failure of the voluntary membership campaign to revitalise

⁴⁷ TsAODM f3 op3 d34, ll, 112, 117, 1147, 1164ob and 1165.

⁴⁸ It was common in 1921-23 for workers to elect rank-and-file delegates to negotiate with "their" unions, and even with factory committees, which they often felt were not representative. TsAODM f3 op3 d34, 1218, 1225ob, 1226ob, 1229ob, 1230, 1233ob, 1242ob and 1244.

⁴⁹ In a significant pay strike by teachers across the Moscow region in March 1922, the regional trade union organisation recommended the sacking of a district trade union leader, and the dissolution of a district trade union committee that had supported the wages demands (see TsAODM f3 op3 d33, 1174-75, and TsAODM f3 op3 d34, 155, 156 and 161). Among the strikers who faced expulsion from their trade union as well as the sack were some of the Moscow region peat workers who in June 1923 mounted one of that year's largest strikes, with more than 13,000 participants (see TsAODM f3op4d49, 1199-101 and Trud, 12 July 1923.)

⁵⁰ On union organisation and apparatus, Shedrov, S.V. et al. (editors), Profsoiuzy Moskvy: Ocherki istorii (Moscow, Profizdat, 1975), pp148-149; MGSPS, Rezoliutsii i postanovleniia IV-ogo Moskovskogo gubernskogo s"ezda profsoiuzov (5-8 sent. 1922) (Moscow 1922), p4; Sotsialisticheskii vestnik 1922 no.19, p12. Figures on the proportions of elected and appointed officials are available in Otchet o deiatel'nosti Moskovskogo gubprofsoveta (Moscow 1922), pp 60-61. On the use of party cadres in staffing, Mel'nichanskii, G., Moskovskie professional'nye soiuzy (Moscow 1923), p14 (he reports that in the first half of May 1922, for example, the party organisation department unilaterally relocated 385 cadres into trade unions, party work and industrial management) and p16 (on indirect financial aid).

enterprise-level organisation was widely acknowledged in trade union journals, and from 1923 largely unsuccessful attempts were made to increase the proportion of subscriptions collected by the unions independently of factory managements.⁵¹ By then, the political dependence of the unions was an accomplished fact.

Conclusions

The campaigns for the confiscation of church valuables, and in support of the trial of the SR leaders, brought mass mobilisation methods to the centre of political life in a form that was more centrally directed and systematically monitored than ever before. Together with the emasculation of the soviets and unions as organs of mass participation, these campaigns comprised an important step in the political appropriation of the working class by the Bolshevik party. This step was taken at a time when the new party elite was fast overshadowing many of the socialist trends in the party, who increasingly found themselves in opposition to aspects of Bolshevik policy. But the most senior party leaders, including those who were themselves at odds with the rising elite in important ways, provided the ideological rationale for politically appropriating the working class, i.e. a form of vanguardism for a party in power. These leaders argued that the economic “retreat” implied by NEP had to be accompanied by a political offensive: in his well-known speech to the 11th congress, Lenin spelled out that this meant the repression of political opponents and harsh measures against Bolshevik dissidents. Significantly, Lenin specifically ruled out a possible revival, in post-civil-war conditions, of mass working-class participation in the political process. In support of his belief that party membership had to be restricted more tightly than ever, to prevent the entry of petty-bourgeois elements, he rebuked those Bolsheviks who claimed that the economic recovery, and the consequent return of many workers to the factories, provided a new reservoir of working-class activists, and opportunities for a renaissance of working-class consciousness, of which the party should make use. Lenin argued that the Russian working class in its current guise could not be regarded as properly proletarian. “Often when people say ‘workers’, they think that that means the factory proletariat. It certainly doesn’t,” he told the congress. The working class that Marx had written about did not exist in Russia, Lenin claimed; “wherever you look, those in the factories are not the proletariat but casual elements of all kinds.”⁵² Lenin’s practical conclusion was that political decision-making had to be concentrated in the party, and it had to teach the working class why it was superior to its political enemies. The place of the campaigns on the church and the SRs in this thinking is clear.

The metalworkers’ union leader Aleksandr Shliapnikov, who in 1920-21 had headed the Workers Opposition, considered Lenin’s redefinition of the working class as a more serious threat to the party’s socialist ideology than any of the arguments used against the WO the previous year. The 1920 discussion had concerned “tactical” issues, but Lenin’s rejection of the

⁵¹ As a consequence of the reregistration drive, which was supposed to exclude “semi-proletarian elements” such as handicraftsmen and seasonal workers, and those who had lost their jobs in the first round of NEP redundancies, the membership of the Moscow regional union organisation fell from 728,906 to 653,274 between January and December 1922. “Voluntary membership” was accepted by more than 95% of members, but almost all by way of a single decision of a mass meeting. See Tomskii, M., “Pervye rezul’taty novoi soiuznoi politiki”, *Vestnik truda* 1922, no.8-9, pp3-11; TsAODM f3 op3 d5, l30; Briskin, M., “Perekhod k individualnomu chlenstvu”, *Vestnik truda* 1923, no.1, pp3-14; Gurevich, A., “Dobrovol’noe chlenstvo v soiuzakh”, *Vestnik truda* 1922, no.2, pp38-40; *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik* 1922, no.11, pp10-11; no.16, pp8-9. The campaign for individual collection of subscriptions by trade union activists, as opposed to deduction at source by the employer, had made almost no progress by November 1923, when it was reported to the 5th Moscow trade union conference that the level of individual collection was “not high, about 10%”, and that it was hardest to increase in the larger enterprises (*Piatyi gubernskii s’ezd moskovskikh profsoiuzov. Itogi, rezoliutsiia, postanovleniia* (Moscow, Mosgublit, 1923), p13).

⁵² *Odinnadtsatyi s’ezd*, pp10-44.

now-reurbanising working class “threatens us with the manifestations of a principled difference”, he told the congress. Party leaders were deceiving themselves, for example by blaming on “monarchists” strikes that were triggered by economic hardship. Shliapnikov feared that “by painting the proletariat in false colours, comrades are seeking justification for political manoeuvres and their search for support in other social forces. [...] Remember, once and for all, that we will never have a different or ‘better’ working class, and we need to be satisfied with the one we have.”⁵³ With hindsight it can be asserted that the “other social forces” that Shliapnikov saw lurking behind Lenin’s arguments were those being drawn together by the new party elite.

The impact of the vanguardism that underpinned the shift from mass participation to mass mobilisation was clear to the politically active workers who were marginalised and silenced by it. As evidence of this we have, for example, the minutes of an open meeting (i.e. one to which non-members were welcome) of the party cell at the Krasnyi proletarii (former Bromlei) engineering works in Moscow in January 1923. Stolentsev, a party member criticised for insufficiently conscientious educational work among non-party workers, set the discussion ablaze when he blurted out: “All these workers are conscious. They were at the front during the civil war. There is no [educational] work I can do among them. I don’t understand any more than they do.” This argument, which contradicted standard Bolshevik assumptions that consciousness was determined above all by one’s relationship with the party, was developed by Velichenko, a non-party communist. He said that the party disparaged workers’ intelligence. Picking up Stolentsev’s theme, Velichenko declared with some irony that non-party workers like himself were “politically lazy; we spend our time on domestic trifles and are too lazy to attend meetings. If there are Whites to be fought, we’ll all go to the front. [...] we are all communists at heart, but politically lazy by nature and therefore not in the party.” Beliakov, apparently a left SR sympathiser,⁵⁴ snapped back that Velichenko was wrong to say that conscious workers are politically lazy. The problem was the Bolsheviks’ false policy; the party was “a usurper of the socialist parties and of workers’ freedoms. [...] It’s our country’s shame that, even now, socialists are sitting in prison.” Beliakov said that “the communists took power and wield it without taking any notice of workers”. Another non-party worker, Aleksandrov, argued that the Bolsheviks could not have taken and held on to power without the support of the working class. Beliakov replied that in 1917 workers had had no idea what the communists wanted. “Every day we slide further and further from what we gained in October. In Russia there’s no communism. The communists aren’t even in power: they sign the decrees, but non-communists write them. The decrees are aimed against workers.”⁵⁵ The effect of Bolshevik policy was to marginalise, and then silence, this type of discussion among worker socialists – discussion which could only have helped to revive the democratic and socialist elements of the Russian revolution.

(ends)

Correspondence to the author welcome at smpirani@hotmail.com

⁵³ Odinnadtsati s”ezd, pp101-109.

⁵⁴ Velichenko, a Ukrainian, specified that he was a non-party communist. Beliakov did not state any allegiance, I have assumed from the context that he was sympathetic to the left SRs, who in 1921 had a strong presence at the factory.

⁵⁵ GARF f7952 op3 d76, ll177-183.