This book explores the impact of the 1917 Revolution on factory life  
in the Russian capital. It traces the attempts of workers to take  
control of their working lives from the February Revolution through  
to June 1918, when the Bolsheviks nationalised industry. Although  
not primarily concerned with the political developments of the  
Revolution, the book demonstrates that the sphere of industrial  
production was a crucial arena of political as well as economic  
conflict.

Having discussed the structure and composition of the factory  
workforce in Petrograd prior to 1917 and the wages and conditions  
of workers under the old regime, Dr Smith shows how workers saw  
the overthrow of the autocracy as a signal to democratise factory life  
and to improve their lot. After examining the creation and activities  
of the factory committees, he analyses the relationship of different  
groups of workers to the new labour movement, and assesses the  
extent to which it functioned democratically.

The central theme of the book is the factory committees’  
implementation of workers’ control of production. Dr Smith rejects  
the standard Western interpretation of this movement as  
‘syndicalist’, showing that its ideological perspectives were close to,  
but not identical with, those of the official Bolshevik party.  
Essentially, workers’ control was a practical attempt to maintain  
production and to preserve jobs in a situation of deepening economic  
chaos. On coming to power in October, the Bolsheviks envisaged an  
expansion of workers’ control, and the committees pressed for  
nationalisation and workers’ management. The collapse of industry  
and the reluctance of employers to continue their operations,  
however, convinced the Bolshevik leadership that workers’ control  
was inadequate as a means of restoring order in the economy, and  
they subordinated the committees to the trade unions in 1918.

Dr Smith assesses the extent to which the Bolsheviks’ capacity to  
carry out a genuinely revolutionary programme was limited by their  
own ideology or by the economic and social conditions in which the  
revolution was born. Throughout, he places the struggle in the  
factories in the context of an international and comparative  
perspective. The book will thus appeal not only to historians of  
Russia and the Russian Revolution, but also to students of labour  
history and of revolutionary theory.

S. A. SMITH is Senior Lecturer at the University of Essex. He  
studied at the Universities of Oxford, Birmingham, Moscow and  
Beijing.

RED PETROGRAD

REVOLUTION IN THE FACTORIES

1917-1918

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RED PETROGRAD

REVOLUTION IN THE FACTORIES  
**1917-1918**

S. A. SMITH

Senior Lecturer in History, University of Essex

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To my mother and father

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Introduction

Revolutions are centrally about the breakdown of state power, the  
elimination of old political elites and institutions, and the ultimate  
reconstitution of a new state power and a new elite.1 The history of  
revolutions is thus, intrinsically, a political history, and the history of  
the Russian Revolution of 1917 is no exception. It begins in February  
with the overthrow of the tsarist autocracy, continues with the ‘dual  
power’ of the Provisional Government and Petrograd Soviet, culmin-  
ates in the Bolshevik seizure of power and eventuates in a one-party  
dictatorship. Yet revolutions entail more than the collapse of state  
power: they engender a whole-scale restructuring of social relations.  
Only recently, have historians begun to pay attention to the profound  
changes which took place in the society, culture and economy of  
Russia during the revolutionary years. The manifold transformations  
of social relations were dependent on the collapse of state power, but  
they in turn shaped the processes whereby centralised, bureaucratic  
state power was reconstituted. Power was thus directly at issue in all  
the multiple changes which rent the fabric of tsarist society, and it is  
for this reason that any ‘social history’ of the Russian Revolution  
cannot but also be a political one.

The present study is concerned with the relationships between  
class power as it was manifest in the world of work and the broader  
processes of the Russian Revolution. It seeks to explore the impact of  
the revolution on factory life in Petrograd during 1917 and the early  
part of 1918. Its central theme is the struggle of workers to abolish the  
autocratic order of the tsarist factory, their efforts to establish  
workers’ control of production, and their groping attempts to  
reorganise life in the factory. This study is not primarily concerned  
with tracing the emergence of a revolutionary political consciousness

among Petrograd workers, and thus the events, political parties and  
personalities which dominate other accounts of the revolution recede  
into the background of the present study.2 Nevertheless, in deliber-  
ately foregrounding the activities of workers around work and  
production, it is hoped to shed new light on the wider political  
developments of 1917, in particular, by demonstrating that the sphere  
of production was itself an important arena of political as well as  
economic conflict.

Although the separation of the economy and polity is a particular  
feature of modern capitalist society, the unequal distribution of power  
within production is crucial to the maintenance of class power in  
society at large. If one defines power as the capacity of a group to  
control the physical and social environment and to thus make its  
interests prevail over those of other groups, then it is clear that  
management and workers do not enjoy equal power within the  
production process.3 The two sides of industry do not have equal  
access to and control over resources and sanctions, be they material or  
ideological. In 1917 the unequal distribution of power within  
production was a central concern of Petrograd workers, and their  
struggle for greater power in industry had major implications for the  
balance of class forces in society at large and for the eventual  
consolidation of a new state power.

This perspective has implications for the way in which we analyse  
working-class activity in 1917, for it means that we must jettison any  
simple dichotomy between the ‘economic’ and ‘political’ struggles of  
workers, i.e. between struggles which take place within the sphere of  
production and those which take place on the terrain of the state. In  
Marxist discourse this dichotomy appears in the guise of the Leninist  
distinction between ‘trade-union’ and ‘Social-Democratic’ struggles.  
Although he was not absolutely consistent in this view, Lenin tended  
to argue that the spontaneous struggles of workers for the improve-  
ment of wages and working conditions could only generate a  
‘trade-union’ consciousness, the chief characteristics of which are  
sectionalism and economism, and that only through the intervention  
of a revolutionary party could workers develop a revolutionary  
awareness of capitalist society.4 The experience of 1917 suggests that  
this rigid dichotomy is in need of modification. In that year, in a  
context of economic crisis and acute class conflict, the attempts of  
workers to defend their living standards and to preserve jobs led  
them, to a large extent ‘spontaneously’, to see in the revolutionary

options offered by the Bolsheviks the ‘natural’ solution to their  
immediate problems. Moreover, the Leninist thesis overlooks issues  
of power and control within production. In most work-situations  
there is resistance by workers to the authority of the employer, so that,  
in the words of Carter Goodrich, the ‘frontier of control’ is constantly  
shifting.5 An orthodox Leninist might argue that such conflicts over  
job-control are but a variant of economistic struggles, since they  
encroach on, but do not transcend, managerial authority. Yet even at  
their most defensive, such conflicts testify to the desire of workers to  
impose their definitions upon the work-situation. The experience of  
1917 again suggests that when the power of the state is relatively  
ineffective, defensive struggles by workers to control production can  
quickly become offensive struggles to take power from management,  
and that these struggles have profound implications for the balance of  
power within society as a whole. The present study suggests that it  
was the struggles of workers in the world of work, and the activities of  
work-based organisations, such as the factory committees and trade  
unions, which were of central importance in promoting revolutionary  
consciousness in 1917. This is not to suggest that consciousness  
developed solely on the basis of the experience of work. In 1917  
revolutionary feeling grew in response to the wide range of problems  
that faced the Russian people - problems of war, governmental  
ineptitude and the crisis in the countryside. Nor is it to suggest that  
revolutionary consciousness grew in a purely ‘spontaneous’ fashion.  
Bolshevik agitation played a crucial part in articulating this con-  
sciousness. Nevertheless the Bolsheviks did not themselves create  
revolutionary feeling; it developed primarily out of attempts by  
workers to grapple with problems of survival.

This study concentrates almost exclusively on factory workers in  
Petrograd. It ignores important groups such as railway workers,  
transport workers, workers in public utilities, postal and telegraphic  
workers, shop workers, construction workers, domestic servants,  
small artisans and others. This is not because these workers were  
defined a priori as somehow less ‘proletarian’ than factory workers. It  
was decided to concentrate on factory workers, partly to keep down  
the length of the book, and partly because factory workers did  
constitute the major element within the industrial labour force and  
within the labour movement in Petrograd in 1917. Perhaps something  
should be said to justify the inclusion of printers in the category  
‘factory workers’. It is true that of the sixty-four print works (tipografii)

in Petrograd for which we have information, twenty-seven employed  
less than fifty workers; but even if one excludes the huge State Papers  
print works, which employed 5,784 workers, the average print works  
still employed 136 workers, so it was more of a ‘factory’ than a small  
workshop.6 It should not be supposed that factory workers, in any  
sense, constituted a homogeneous social group. They were divided  
among themselves by industry and trade, degree of proletarian-  
isation, skill, sex, age etc. These divisions are important in under-  
standing the dynamics of the labour movement in 1917, and are  
explored in Chapters 1 and 8.

A word should be said about periodisation. The first two chapters  
discuss the structure of the working class, and life in the tsarist factory  
before February 1917. The main body of the text (Chapters 3 to 8) is  
concerned with developments between February and October, but  
since the main theme of the work - the attempt of workers to take  
control of their working lives - continues beyond October, it was  
decided to pursue the analysis into the middle of 1918, though in a less  
detailed way than for 1917. The account thus stops at the point when  
the Bolsheviks decided to nationalise industry at the end of June 1918,  
but this is more a convenient finishing point, than a real historical  
break, for it was some time before workers’ control of production  
disappeared, and some time before nationalisation was a reality.

The capital of Russia is called by St Petersburg when referring to  
the period before 18 August 1914. On that date the tsarist govern-  
ment, in a fit of anti-German fervour, changed the name of the city to  
the less German-sounding Petrograd. This study follows suit. When  
referring to the period beyond Lenin’s death in 1924, the city is called  
by its modern name of Leningrad. This study uses old-style dates of  
the Julian calendar until 14 February 1918 (i.e. 1 February 1918),  
which was the date when the Bolshevik government changed to the  
Gregorian calendar. All dates thereafter are given in the new style.  
Except in quotations, measures of weight have been translated into  
metric units. The currency of rubles and kopecks is abbreviated to ‘r.’  
and ‘k.’.

1

A profile of the Petrograd working class  
on the eve of **1917**

petrograd: the city and its industry

Petrograd was a city of sharp contrasts. It was the capital of the  
Russian Empire, yet closer culturally to Western Europe than to the  
rest of Russia. It was at once a city of elegant grandeur, lauded by  
Pushkin, and a city of eerie squalor, abhorred by Dostoevsky.  
Petrograd was both symbol of tsarist power and of popular revolt.  
Here the Imperial Court headed an army of 70,000 civil servants; here  
in 1905 the first Soviet had headed a general strike. Along the avenues  
and canals of the city centre stood palaces, splendid emporia, banks  
and company offices. Across the river stood bleak tenements and  
teeming factories. Not a stone’s throw from the University and the  
Academy of Sciences thousands of people lived in appalling ignorance  
and misery. Petrograd was home to rich and poor, to a thriving  
revolutionary underground and to the Holy Synod, to the liberal  
opposition and to the Black Hundreds. Here in February 1917 a  
revolution erupted which was to have world-shattering reverbera-  
tions.

In 1917 Petrograd had a population of 2.4 million, making it the  
fifth largest city in Europe.1 The Russian Empire had about 182  
million inhabitants, less than a fifth of whom lived in towns.2  
Petrograd was by far the largest city in the Empire; between 1897 and  
1914 its population had grown from 1.26 million to 2.21 million — a  
very high rate of growth, compared to the average for the country as a  
whole.3 This growth was largely due to the immigration of peasants  
from the countryside. Every year thousands of peasants flocked to the  
city in search of work — some to stay for a short while, others to settle  
permanently. In 1910, no fewer than 68% of the population had been  
born outside the city.4

The huge scale of peasant migration to St Petersburg gave the city’s  
population a distinctive demographic structure. The birth-rate in the  
capital was low by Russian standards, though high by Western  
European standards.5 The death-rate was lower than the national  
average, but this was deceptive, since in almost every age-group it  
was actually higher than average. Only the preponderance of young  
adults in the population depressed the overall death-rate. Even so,  
mortality in St Petersburg was extremely high by European stan-  
dards. The large proportion of young adults in the city was paralleled  
by very small proportions of children under 10 and of people over 50.  
This reflected the tendency for children to be brought up in the  
countryside, and for older people to retire there. Since greater  
numbers of men than women left the countryside in search of work,  
there was an imbalance in the population in favour of males, though  
the proportion of women grew rapidly after 1900. Finally, a majority  
of both men and women were single. The marriage-rate in St  
Petersburg was low both by Russian and European standards, and  
late marriage was the norm. These distinctive demographic patterns  
suggest that the ‘typical’ inhabitant of St Petersburg on the eve of the  
First World War was, therefore, a single, male peasant in his twenties.

The census of 1910 provides the fullest information on the social  
structure of St Petersburg. This classified the city’s population of

1. by social estate (soslovie), revealing that 7.2% were nobility,
2. 5% clergy, 4.1% honorary citizens, 0.7% merchants, 15.5% ‘lower  
   middle class’ (meshchane) and 68.7% peasants.6 This latter category  
   included most wage-earners. Workers comprised about 27% of the  
   capital’s population, and consisted of 234,000 factory workers; 77,000  
   white-collar workers in commercial and industrial enterprises  
   (sluzhashchie); 52,000 transport workers; 25,000 in the catering trade  
   and 41,000 who worked in public utilities and city organisations. In  
   addition, there were about 260,000 servants in private or public  
   employment and 58,000 artisans. Financial and industrial business-  
   men comprised less than 1 % of the population, and there were about
3. owners of small businesses, including shops and restaurants.7

In 1914 Petrograd was the foremost financial and industrial centre

in a country where two-thirds of the population still engaged in  
agriculture. The city’s banks controlled the metallurgical and coal  
industries of the South, the oil industry of Baku, Urals copper,  
Siberian gold, Ukrainian sugar, Turkestan cotton and Volga  
steamships.8 By 1917 the assets of Petrograd’s private commercial

banks amounted to three-quarters of the entire assets of Russia’s  
commercial banks.9 These banks financed the major industrial  
companies of the capital, most of which were concentrated in the  
metalworking and engineering sector. The Discount and Loan bank,  
for example, financed the Nobel-Lessner engineering group, the  
American-Russian rubber company and the Skorokhod shoe  
company.10 Since two-thirds of the assets of Russian commercial  
banks were foreign-owned, foreign capital played a crucial part in  
Petrograd industry.11 In 1917, however, only fifteen firms in the  
capital were owned outright by foreign companies.12 The industry of  
Petrograd was distinguished not so much by its dependence on  
foreign capital as by its dependence on the state.

Underpinning the economy of the city was a tight nexus of large  
monopolies, finance capital and government orders. From the  
industrial crisis of 1900-3 onwards, companies began to form  
syndicates in order to exercise monopoly control over the market.13  
This process of monopolisation was given a sharp boost by the First  
World War, which made Petrograd the main centre of armaments  
production. By 1917 sixty of the largest firms in the capital were  
organised into syndicates or trusts. During the war, the government  
farmed out orders for ammunition and some types of ordnance to  
these syndicates. The Russian-Asiatic bank organised a War Indus-  
tries syndicate which distributed orders to the Baranovskii engineer-  
ing company, the Russian Optical Company and the Russian  
Company for the Manufacture of Shells and Military Supplies.  
Snaryadosoyuz, a private syndicate comprising six firms, produced  
shells directly for the Artillery Administration. The transport-  
engineering syndicates Prodparovoz and Prodvagon were treated by  
the Ministry of Communications more or less as official government  
contractors. S.N. Vankov headed a state-capitalist organisation  
which produced three-inch shells directly for the Artillery Adminis-  
tration by sub-contracting orders to four large companies in  
Petrograd.14

As well as providing orders for the major private companies, the  
state directly owned several large enterprises in Petrograd. From its  
foundation in 1703, St Petersburg had been a major centre of  
government-sponsored industry. By 1917 there were 31 state-owned  
or state-controlled enterprises in the city and the surrounding region,  
which provided a large part of the cartridges, revolvers, machine-  
guns and other types of ordnance required by the army and navy. Ten

enterprises were run by the Artillery Administration, the largest of  
which were: the Pipe works (Trubochnyi zavod) with a workforce of  
18,942 in January 1917; the Cartridge works (Patronnyi zavod) with  
some 10,000 workers; the Okhta explosives works with 10,200  
workers; the Sestroretsk works, situated 34 km from the capital,  
which had 6,228 workers. In all, 53,000 workers were employed by  
the Artillery Administration. In addition, a further 36,000 workers  
worked in five large factories run by the Naval Ministry. These  
included the Obukhov works, which employed 12,954 workers in  
January 1917; the Izhora works at Kolpino, which had 8,902 workers;  
the Baltic shipbuilding works, which had 7,645 workers. The rest of  
the state enterprises were made up of miscellaneous ports, arsenals  
and railway workshops.15 In 1917 there were also two large com-  
panies which were state-controlled, though not state-owned. These  
were the massive Putilov works, with its workforce of around 30,000,  
and the Nevskii shipbuilding company, which employed more than

1. workers. In 1916 the government sequestered both firms, by  
   appointing new boards of management, although each continued to  
   be privately owned.16

In both state and private sectors, Petrograd industry was remark-  
able for its advanced technology. From the start of industrial  
‘take-off’ in the 1890s, most branches of industry in the capital were  
highly mechanised. This was a response to the high labour-unit costs  
in Russia, which reflected low labour-productivity, the cost of raw  
materials and marketing, and the relatively restricted market for  
sales.17 After 1907 Petrograd was caught up in the ‘Second Industrial  
Revolution’, which saw the emergence of new industries, such as  
chemicals, the rise of mass production, the restructuring of the labour  
process and the invasion of workshops by electric power. By 1914  
Petrograd industry had attained a high level of technological  
sophistication.18 Its largest firms lagged little behind those of  
America and Western Europe. The Putilov works exchanged tech-  
nical information and patents with the Schneider, Armstrong-  
Whitworth, Paul Girault and A.G. Duisberg companies.19 There  
was, however, considerable variation in technological level between  
different factories and different industries: machine-tool construction  
and machine construction, for example, were somewhat archaic,  
compared to the electro-technical and engine-building industries.20

The technical efficiency of Petrograd industry was put to stringent  
test by the war and, on the whole, was not found wanting.21

Enterprises were reorganised and re-equipped, and massive amounts  
of capital were injected into them. Mass-production techniques were  
introduced in the armaments factories and in some machine-  
con truction plants. The conversion of private factories to production  
of shells, hand grenades, detonators and mortars was very successful.  
Production of guns was less successful, but adequate. Most engineer-  
ing industries coped well, but could not always meet demand.  
Production of engines increased and simple machine-tool production  
expanded both quantitatively and qualitatively. Production of auto-  
mobiles and aircraft was established, but production of precision  
instruments remained weakly developed.22

Industrial output in the capital doubled between 1914 and 1917. In  
1916 Petrograd factories fulfilled military orders worth 1.5 million  
rubles. In the metalworking industry, 81% of enterprises and 98% of  
the workforce worked on war orders.23 Until the later part of 1916,  
therefore, in spite of some weaknesses, Petrograd industry managed  
to satisfy the voracious appetite of the Russian war machine.  
Thereafter, it found it increasingly hard to maintain output in the  
teeth of declining supplies of fuel and raw materials and growing  
chaos in the transport system.24

On the eve of the Russian Revolution, the structure of industry  
in Petrograd was altogether remarkable, unparalleled except in  
Germany. Petrograd represented an island of technologically soph-  
isticated state-monopoly capitalism in a country whose mode of  
production still consisted in the main of rudimentary capitalist and  
pre-capitalist forms, albeit under the overall dominance of large  
capital. The economy of the city was being convulsed by a colossal  
boom which was entirely a consequence of the slaughter daily taking  
place at the Front. War, however, could not go on for ever. This was  
an economy living on borrowed time: as soon as the mighty powers  
had glutted themselves with carnage and destruction, the economy of  
Petrograd would deflate like a pricked balloon. No end to the war was  
as yet in sight, but already the signs of imminent collapse were on the  
horizon.

THE SIZE AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE FACTORY WORKFORCE

in 1917

Between 1890 and 1914, the number of factory workers in St  
Petersburg grew from 73,200 to 242,600.25 Between 1914 and 1917, it

grew by 150,000 to reach 392,800 — or 417,000, if one includes the  
factories situated on the outskirts of the city.26 About one-third of the  
workforce of the city and its suburbs, i.e. 134,464 workers, worked in  
state enterprises.27 At the beginning of 1917, the factory workers of  
Petrograd represented about 12% of Russia’s 3.4 million industrial  
workers.28 During the first half of that year, the number of workers in  
the capital continued to grow—possibly by as much as 10%. From the  
summer onwards, however, the workforce began to contract, as  
economic crisis set in.29

The huge expansion of the Petrograd workforce between 1914 and  
1917 took place almost entirely in industries producing for the war  
effort. In the metal industry the workforce grew by 135%; in  
chemicals by 99% and in clothing by 44%. In textiles the workforce  
remained constant in size, and in the food, printing and paper  
industries the workforce shrank.30 By 1917 the distribution of the  
Petrograd workforce by industry was as follows:

Table 1.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Branch of Industry | Number of enterprises | Number of workers | % of total workforce |
| Metalworking | 379 | 237369 | 60.4 |
| Textiles | 100 | 44i 15 | 11.2 |
| Chemicals | 58 | 40087 | 10.2 |
| Printing and Paper | 218 | 26481 | 6.8 |
| Food | 70 | 15773 | 4.0 |
| Woodworking | 81 | 6754 | i-7 |
| Leather and footwear | 50 | 12627 | 3-2 |
| Minerals | 32 | 3900 | 1.0 |
| Miscellaneous | 23 | 5722 | >•5 |
| Total | 1011 | 392828 | 100.0 |

Source: Z. V. Stepanov, Rabochie Petrograda vperiodpodgotovkiprovedeniya oktyabr'  
skogo vooruzhennogo vosstaniya (Moscow, 1965), p.29.

The most astonishing feature of this table is the extraordinary  
predominance of metalworkers. Whereas metalworkers had com-  
prised only one-third of the Petrograd workforce in 1908, nine years  
later they comprised almost two-thirds.31 In the same period  
textileworkers grew in number, but dwindled as a proportion of the  
workforce from 22% to n%.32

Russia was renowned for its large factories. In 1914 54% of workers

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Year | Enterprises of under 50 workers | Enterprises of 51 to 100 workers | Enterprises of 101 to 500 workers | Enterprises of 501 to 1000 workers | Enterprises of over 1000 workers |
| Average for 1901-19051 | 6.7% | 8.1% | 31.8% | i5-5% | 37-9% |
| 19062 | 7.0% | 7.2% | 31 -3°/° | 18.6% | 36-5% |
| 19102 | 6.8% | 7.3% | 31.0% | 19.4% | 35-5°/° |
| I9I42 | 5.6% | 5.6% | 24.8% | 14.8% | 49.2% |
| tJ9r3]3 | [5%] | [5%] | [20%] | [15%] | [55%] |
| I9I74 | 3.0% | 3.2% | i5-9°/° | 10.0% | 67.9% |

1. These figures are based on enterprises under the Factory Inspectorate in the whole of St Petersburg province.

Source: S.N. Semanov, Peterburgskie rabochie nakanune russkoi revolyntsii (Moscow, 1966), p.37.

2. These figures are based on enterprises under the Factory Inspectorate in the whole of St Petersburg province.

Source: A. I. Davidenko, ‘K voprosu o chislennosti i sostave proletariata Peterburga v nachale XX veka’ in Istoriya rabochego  
klassa Leningrada, issue 2 (Leningrad, 1963), pp.98—9.

3. The figures in square brackets are based on private and state enterprises in the city.

Source: E.E. Kruze, Peterburgskie rabochie igi2-i4gg. (Moscow, 1961), p.71.

4. The figures are based on private and state enterprises in the city and its suburbs.

Source: A.G. Rashin, Formirovanie rabochego klassa Rossii (Moscow, 1958), p.105.

in Russia were employed in factories of over 500 workers, compared to  
32.5% in the USA.33 Concentration of production was largely a  
response to the shortage of skills and to low labour productivity. In  
Petrograd in 1917 there was an average of 409 workers per enterprise  
- 40% more than the average for Russian industry as a whole.34 Such  
a high degree of concentration of the workforce made Petrograd quite  
unique in the world. No fewer than 70% of workers were employed in  
factories of over a thousand, and two-thirds of this number worked in  
thirty-eight huge enterprises, each of more than 2,000 workers.35 It is  
apparent from Table 2 that the trend towards concentration of plant  
size was a long-term trend which was merely intensified by the war.  
In the metal industry concentration was especially high, and an  
average of 2,923 workers worked in each of the 72 largest metal works  
of the capital and its suburbs.36 Textile production was somewhat  
smaller in scale, but 78% of textileworkers worked in 25 mills with an  
average workforce of 1,372.37 This suggests that concentration in  
large units cannot have been the key factor promoting the greater  
militancy of metalworkers vis-a-vis textileworkers in 1917, since both  
groups worked in factories which by Western European standards  
were extremely large.

The concentration of factory workers in large units of production  
was paralleled by their concentration in particular areas of the city.  
James Bater has shown that residential mixing rather than residential  
segregation of social classes was the norm in St Petersburg up to  
1914.38 The poor were to be found throughout the city, even in the  
wealthy, central-city districts of Admiralty and Kazan, where they  
tended to live in the cellars and garrets of buildings. In a socially more  
mixed district, such as Vasilevskii Island, the poor inhabitants of the  
Harbour district and of Malyi and Srednyi Prospekts lived cheek-by-  
jowl with the officials and intelligentsia of Bol'shoi Prospekt. Most  
factory workers, however, lived close to their place of work and were  
concentrated in the areas where industry was. In 1917 18% of  
workers lived on Vyborg Side, where the metal factories were located,  
and this figure rises to 25%, if one includes the adjoining suburban  
districts of Lesnoi and Polyustrovo. Some 20% lived in the Narva and  
Peterhof districts, where the giant Putilov works lay; 14% lived on  
Vasilevskii Island; 11% in Nevskii district and 10% on Petrograd  
Side.39 In social terms the proletarian districts were worlds apart  
from the aristocratic districts of the city centre, but in geographical  
terms they were very close to one another. From Vyborg Side one had

only to cross the Alexander II bridge to arrive at the Central Law  
Courts, and from there it was but a stone’s throw to Nevskii Prospekt.  
The contrast in the living conditions of rich and poor was glaringly  
apparent in St Petersburg, because of both social mixing and the  
proximity of working-class and upper-class districts. Class divisions  
were more visible than in Western European cities, where suburba-  
nisation and residential segregation had long been under way. This  
must have been a factor promoting class consciousness among the  
workers of St Petersburg.

The appalling statistics on mortality bear stark testimony to the  
reality of class division in the city. In 1915 the death rate per thousand  
in the working-class areas of Vyborg, Narva and Kolomenskaya was,  
respectively, 24.8, 22.8 and 26.5; in the Admiralty, Kazan and  
Liteinaya districts it was 8.7, 11.2 and 11.7.40 About a quarter of all  
babies born in the capital died before the age of one. For those who  
survived, the biggest killers were tuberculosis, pneumonia, typhoid,  
spotted fever, smallpox, stomach and intestinal diseases.41 In 1908 an  
epidemic of infectious diseases accounted for a staggering 47% of all  
deaths.42 Such epidemics were a constant hazard, owing to the  
contamination of the water supply and the heavy pollution of the river  
Neva.

Living conditions in the proletarian districts were sordid and filthy.  
In 1920 42% of homes were without a water supply or sewage  
system.43 Rubbish in the streets and open cesspools posed a grave  
danger to health. No proper roads or pavements existed in working-  
class areas, which meant that public thoroughfares turned into  
quagmires of mud during the winter. Street lighting was extremely  
bad or non-existent. Open spaces were few. Overcrowding was rife.  
The chairman of the Vyborg duma sanitation committee claimed that  
local residents had less space than those buried in the nearby  
cemetery.44 Throughout the city an average of 3.2 persons lived in  
each room in single-room apartments, and 3.4 persons in each cellar;  
this was double the average for Berlin, Vienna or Paris. Around the  
Putilov works there sprawled a fetid slum; here an average of 4.1  
people lived in each rented room. In the third ward of Aleksandr-  
Nevskaya district the corresponding figure was 4.6.45 The majority of  
workers thus lived in cramped rooms, often damp and inadequately  
ventilated.

Although the standard of rented accommodation was frightful, it  
was by no means cheap. Rents in Petrograd were among the highest

in Europe. In the decade up to 1914 they rose by 30% on average, and  
then doubled or trebled during the war.46 Exorbitant rents reflected  
the desperate shortage of accommodation in the city, which had been  
a problem since the 1860s, owing to the massive influx of immigrants.  
According to S.N. Prokopovich’s survey of 1908, only a quarter of  
workers could afford to rent a flat of one or two rooms, and those who  
could, usually sub-let a part of it. About 70% of single workers and  
40% of workers with families lived in shared rooms. Many single  
workers made do with just a bunk, which they shared with workers on  
other shifts.47 It was common for peasant workers to live as an artel',  
sharing rent and living expenses and organising shopping and  
cooking collectively. In 1912 150,000 people lived in shared rooms,  
and during the war the number increased.48 In Petrograd only a small  
proportion of workers lived in barracks accommodation or on factory  
premises (7% in 1918). This was in contrast to factories in rural areas  
where such accommodation was common.49

THE SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF THE PETROGRAD WORKING CLASS

Peasant workers and ‘cadre’ workers

Since the industrial labour force in Russia was recruited overwhelm-  
ingly from the countryside, the working class had a peculiar ‘peasant’  
character which distinguished it from most Western European  
working classes, whose roots were more urban and artisanal.  
Whether one can even speak of a ‘working class’ in Russia before 1917  
is still a matter of historical controversy, a controversy which goes  
back to the debates in the last quarter of the nineteenth century  
between Russian Narodniks and Marxists.

Crudely speaking, one can discern two groups within the work-  
force. The first consisted of peasants who worked in industry, but who  
still retained strong ties with the countryside. The second consisted of  
workers who lived solely by wage work and who were fully committed  
to factory life. Soviet historians call this latter group ‘cadre’ workers.  
They comprised either peasants, who had settled in the towns and  
severed their ties with the land, or second-generation workers who  
had been born into working-class families. Historical controversy  
revolves around two related problems. The first concerns the relative  
weight of each of these two groups within the labour force, i.e. the  
extent to which peasant workers outnumbered ‘cadres’. The second

concerns the extent to which a process of proletarianisation was under  
way, whereby more and more workers were cutting their links with  
agriculture and coming to identify with the industrial working class.

Between 1910 and 1917 the proportion of immigrants in the  
population of Petrograd rose from 68% to 73.6%.50 The overwhelm-  
ing majority of these were peasants, forced from the land by acute  
land scarcity, indebtedness and chronic poverty, or attracted to the  
big city by the prospect of making a better life for themselves. Many  
peasants came to the city with the intention of staying for only a short  
time, although in 1910 seasonal migrants, i.e. those who came during  
the winter months and returned to their villages in the summer,  
comprised only 10% of peasants in the capital.51 Many more came  
with the intention of staying until they had earned enough money to  
make the family farm once more a viable undertaking.52 Many,  
however, came with the intention of starting a new life and settling in  
the city. In 191025% of peasants had lived in the capital for ten years  
or more, and a further 25% had actually been born there.53 Thus only  
about half the peasant population were recent arrivals to the city.

Peasants who migrated to Petrograd came from provinces distant  
from the capital, whereas in Moscow they came from contiguous  
areas. Most came from the non-black-earth central provinces and  
from the north-western provinces, particularly from Tver', Pskov,  
Vitebsk, Novgorod, Smolensk, Kostroma, Vilna, Yaroslavl' and  
Ryazan'. Only 9% came from Petrograd province itself.54 It was  
common for peasants from the same locality to work in the same  
factory, for it was difficult to get taken on at a factory unless one had  
inside connections. At the Baltic works, for example, many workers  
came from Tver' province, and in the boat shop most came from  
Staritskii uezd within that province, since the foreman was a native of  
the area. At the Triangle works there were large numbers of workers  
from Vasilevskii volost' in Tver' uezd, Tver' province.55. Peasants from  
the same locality {zemlyaki) tended to work together and often lived  
together as an artel'. Zemlyak networks, however, did not necessarily  
insulate the peasants from new cultural pressures, but served instead  
to ease their transition into an urban-industrial environment. These  
networks were sometimes important means of organising labour  
protest, and in 1917 formally-organised zemlyachestva sprang up  
which played an important role in politicising peasant workers and  
soldiers.56

It is difficult to determine the number of workers who had close ties

to peasant society, not just because of the paucity of data, but also  
because the concept of a ‘tie’ to the countryside is a nebulous one.  
Many workers who had worked for years in industry, and who had no  
association with farming, may have felt a vague kinship with the  
peasants, a spiritual ‘tie’ to their place of birth. This, however, would  
hardly warrant our categorising them as ‘peasant workers’. Nor were  
familial ties with peasant society necessary evidence that a worker  
was not fully proletarianised. Many who had dug up their rural roots  
in early life would still have parents or relatives in the countryside.  
Only if workers had immediate family dependants in their native  
village - a wife or child - could they properly be considered ‘peasant  
workers’. Even then, it was only if this familial tie had an economic  
underpinning that such workers were ‘peasant workers’ in the fullest  
sense. For in the last analysis, it was the ownership and cultivation of  
land, either directly or indirectly, which most crucially characterised  
a ‘peasant worker’. In an attempt to estimate the proportion of  
‘peasant workers’ in the factory workforce, therefore, two variables  
have been examined: firstly, the number of workers sending money to  
relatives in the countryside; secondly, and more importantly, the  
number of workers who owned and farmed land.

In 1908 the economist S.N. Prokopovich undertook a survey of 570  
mainly skilled metalworkers in St Petersburg. This revealed that 42%  
of married workers and 67% of single workers sent money to the  
countryside.57 Although a smaller proportion of married workers  
than single workers sent money to relatives, married workers tended  
to send a bigger portion of their earnings than single workers. A  
survey of St Petersburg textileworkers in 1912 showed that single  
women sent home 6.5% and single men 8% of their earnings, whereas  
married workers sent 28%.58 One youth explained that he sent  
money regularly to his family ‘so that my father will not summon me  
back to the countryside’.59 A contemporary worker, P. Timofeev,  
wrote that the unskilled low-paid workers would often starve  
themselves in order to send as much as a fifth or a quarter of their  
earnings back home, but as their earnings were so miserably low,  
these savings could not substantially ease the plight of their rural  
dependants. If an unskilled worker managed to get a better job,  
preferably paid on piece-rates, he would start to find the tie with the  
countryside irksome, since visits home were costly. He would try,  
therefore, to bring his family out of rural poverty to live in the town.  
The skilled, well-paid worker would tend to do likewise.60

Table 3: Proportion of workers in Leningrad who owned and farmed land

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | % of total who owned land | % of total who farmed land | %  with no land |
| 1918 | 16.7% (17.2)1 | 9.5% (10.8) | 83.2% (82.8) |
| 1926 | CN  CO | 4.4% | 88.2% |
| 1929 | 9-8%3 | — | 91.2% |

Sources:

1. Ts.S.U., Trudy, xxvi, no. 2, pp. 118-19. My calculations. The figures in  
   brackets are those in V. Z. Drobizhev et al., Rabochii klass sovetskoi Rossii v  
   pervyi godproletarskoi diktatury (Moscow, 1975), p. 97.
2. S. Krasil'nikov, ‘Svyaz' leningradskogo rabochego s zemlyei’, Statistiches-  
   koe Obozrenie, 4 (1929), pp. 107-8. This is my recalculation of the figures for  
   single and married workers.
3. A. G. Rashin, Sostav fabrichnogo-zavodskogo proletariata (Moscow, 1930),  
   p.25. This is my recalculation of the figures for the proportion of  
   textileworkers and metalworkers with land.

The proportion of workers in 1917 who owned land is difficult to  
estimate. The 1918 industrial census is the source closest to that year,  
but it covers only 107,262 workers in Petrograd - less than a third of  
the 1917 workforce. This was because the census was taken at a time  
when factory closures and the promise of land in the countryside had  
led to a gigantic exodus of workers from the capital. Consequently,  
the figures from the 1918 census (see Table 3) should be treated with  
caution, since it is reasonable to assume that those workers who held  
land in the countryside in 1917 would have gone back to it before the  
census was taken. Those workers surveyed by the census were asked  
not only whether they still owned land, but also whether they had  
owned land prior to the October Revolution. 16.5% of the workers  
said that they had held land prior to October 1917, and 7.9% had  
farmed it.61 This was considerably lower than the national average,  
for the census revealed that 31% of workers, nationally, owned land.  
Despite the fact that the 1918 census almost certainly underesti-  
mates the extent of land-ownership among Petrograd workers in  
1917, especially among single workers (see Table 4), information  
from the 1926 and 1929 censuses suggests that the underestimation  
was only slight.

Using data from Prokopovich’s 1908 survey of metalworkers and  
from the 1918 and 1926 censuses, Table 4 provides further evidence  
that only a small minority of workers owned land, and only a minority

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 18 | Table 4 | Red Petrograd : % of workers who owned land | |  |
|  | % single workers who: | | % married workers who: | |
|  | owned land | farmed land | owned land | farmed land |
| I9081 | 50% | 32% | 33% | 12% |
| I9I82 | 12.5% | 7-3% | 13.7% | 6.6% |
| I9263 | 21.3% | 6.6% | 8.8% | 3-7% |

Sources:

1. S. N. Prokopovich, Byudzhetypeterburgskikh rabochikh (St Petersburg, 1908),  
   P-7-
2. Drobizhev et al., Rabochii klass sovetskoi Rossii, p.95.
3. Krasil'nikov, ‘Svyaz's zemlei’, p. 107.

of these actually farmed it. It shows too that single workers were more  
likely to own land than married workers. This is probably due to the  
fact that the majority of peasant migrants to the capital were single. If  
they married, they would be under pressure to choose either to try to  
make a living on the land, or to sell up and move as a family to the  
town.

The censuses of 1918, 1926 and 1929 give some information on  
land-ownership among metalworkers and textileworkers (see Table5).  
It emerges from this table that metalworkers were no less attached to  
the land than other groups of workers. The 1929 census figures proved  
to be an embarrassment to the Stalin government, since they  
disclosed that there were more land-owners among the ‘vanguard’ of  
the proletariat, the metalworkers, than among the ‘backward’  
textileworkers. An even more interesting finding emerged from this  
census. Figures showed that the proportion of land-owners was  
Table 5 '■ % of total workforce who owned land

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | metalworkers | textileworkers |
| 19181 | 18.7% | 18.6% |
| 19262 | 10.2% | 11.6% |
| 19293 | 12.4% | 4.4% |

Sources:

1. Drobizhev et al., Rabochii klass sovetskoi Rossii, p.98.
2. Krasil'nikov, ‘Svyaz's zemlei’, p. 108.
3. Rashin, Sostav fab. zav. pro!., p.30.

Table 6: % of workers owning land who began work:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Leningrad  textileworkers | Leningrad  metalworkers |
| prior to 1905 | 8.0% | 17.5% |
| between 1906 and 1913 | 4.6% | 14.6% |
| between 1914 and 1917 | 3.6% | 12.3% |

Source: Rashin, Sostavfab. zav. prol., p.30.

highest among groups with the longest service in industry (see Table  
6). It is thus apparent that long service in industry did not necessarily  
erode the tie with the countryside. Yet workers who had worked in  
industry for twenty-five years were obviously ‘proletarian’, regardless  
of the fact that they owned land. This is borne out by a further finding  
of this census, which showed that a quarter of workers who owned  
land had been born into working-class rather than peasant families.62  
This suggests that by itself land-ownership is not an adequate index of  
proletarianisation.

Tables 3, 4, 5 and 6 all attest that the proportion of workers in  
Petrograd who owned land declined significantly over time. Further  
evidence that the working-class was becoming increasingly prole-  
tarianised is found by examining data on the numbers of hereditary  
workers, i.e. workers one or both of whose parents were themselves  
workers, and data on the numbers of settled workers, i.e. on average  
length of service in industry.

According to the 1918 census, 20% of metalworkers and 24.8% of  
textileworkers had one or both parents a worker.63 The 1929 census  
correlated the social origin of Leningrad metalworkers and textile-  
workers with the year of their entry into industry. Whilst these data  
are scanty, they point clearly to an increase over time in the  
proportion of workers in Petrograd born into working-class families  
and a corresponding decline in the proportion born into peasant  
families (see Table 7)

The data on length of service in industry is sparser and more  
difficult to interpret. Soviet historians usually assert that it took about  
five years for a worker new to industry to become a fully-fledged  
proletarian. It is, of course, impossible to estimate with scientific  
precision the length of time which it took a peasant to become  
socialised into factory life. It may have taken as long as ten years for a

Table 7

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Year of entry into industry | Proportion of total sample who entered industry in the period: | | Bom into working class families (%) | Born into peasant families (%) | |
| textile-  workers | metal-  workers | textile- metal- workers workers | textile-  workers | metal-  workers |
| before 1905 | 22% | 22% | 44-5 43-i | 52-7 | 52.0 |
| between 1906 |  |  |  |  |  |
| and 1913 | 18% | 17.9% | 53-8 52.2 | 42.2 | 42.0 |
| between 1914 |  |  |  |  |  |
| and 1917 | 10.4% | 11.8% | 56-2 56-9 | 39-6 | 37-3 |

Source: Rashin, Sostav fab. zav. prol., pp. 19, 21.

peasant to overcome his rustic habits of work, the instinctive rhythm  
of hard and slack work, the dislike of close routine and his longing for  
the freedom of the outdoors.65 For a young worker, however, it  
certainly would have taken far less time. One must therefore be  
cautious in interpreting the data.

In 1908 a survey of 5,720 metalworkers showed that 28% had  
worked less than two years in industry; 34% between two and five  
years and 39% five or more years. In the large factories with a  
workforce of more than a thousand, however, the proportion of  
workers with five or more years of service rose to 53% P6 These figures  
suggest that a majority of workers were new to industry, yet this need  
not mean that the labour force was obviously ‘peasant’ in character.  
We know that it took very little time for some peasants to submit to  
the cultural pressures of town life and factory work. In view of this,  
Soviet historians may well be right to allow only five years as the  
average period it would take a worker to become acculturated to  
industrial and urban life, but the problem is very under-researched.

The preceding review of data on land-ownership and second-  
generation workers clearly reveals that a process of proletarianisation  
was taking place among the workers of St Petersburg. The proportion  
of ‘cadre’ workers in the workforce was increasing, owing to the  
decay of ties with the land and the growing number of hereditary  
workers. It is, however, more difficult to try to quantify the proportion  
of‘cadre’ workers on the eve of the war. The data on land-ownership

and sending money to the countryside suggest that, at most, a third of  
workers had real economic links with peasant society, but these were  
not the sum of‘peasant workers’. In addition, there were peasants  
who had only just arrived in industry and who would soon lose  
contact with the countryside, but who had not yet acclimatised to  
factory life. In the five years up to 1914, nearly 85,000 workers entered  
the factories of the capital, so that on the eve of the war about  
one-third of the total factory workforce had entered industry within  
the previous five years.67 One can perhaps hazard that in 1914,  
‘peasant workers’ and new workers (not all of whom were peasants)  
together comprised nearly half the factory workforce. Cadre workers,  
therefore, i.e. those who had severed their ties with peasant society  
and who had considerable industrial and urban experience, were  
probably in a slight majority.

The war led to a decline in the proportion of‘cadre’ workers in the  
industrial workforce of the capital. This was caused partly by  
conscription, and partly by the massive influx of new workers into the  
factories. Throughout Russian industry about 400,000 to 500,000 (or  
20% to 25% of the 1914 workforce) were conscripted into the army.68  
In Petrograd the proportion was much less, since workers there were  
needed to produce for the war effort. Leiberov and Shkaratan  
estimate that about 40,000 industrial workers in Petrograd were  
conscripted — or 17% of the 1914 workforce.69 Those conscripted were  
mainly young workers without a great deal of experience of industry.  
Fully-proletarianised ‘cadre’ workers usually had some skill and so  
were less affected, since their skills were in desperately short supply.  
In later mobilisations, however, known militants and strike leaders  
were drafted into the army as punishment for participation in  
industrial and political protest. Leiberov and Shkaratan estimate that  
as many as 6,000 workers may have been conscripted on political  
grounds.70 They conclude, nevertheless, that the ‘cadre’ proletariat  
was preserved during the war. The proportion of ‘cadres’ within the  
workforce was reduced not so much by conscription, as by the influx  
of new workers caused by the wartime expansion of production.  
Between 1914 and 1917 the workforce of Petrograd grew by 150,000;  
making allowance for the 40,000 who were conscripted, this means  
that some 190,000 workers must have entered industry. These  
comprised four main groups: male and female peasants; working-  
class women and youth; rural artisans and urban petit-bourgeois  
(meshchane); and evacuees. About 68,200 women came into Petrograd  
industry during the war, bringing the total number of women workers

to 129,800 by 1917. If one assumes that the 31,800 workers who were  
under the age of eighteen in 1917 had entered industry during the  
war, then the total number of female and young recruits was about  
100,000.71 Many of these may have been from working-class families  
where the male breadwinner — husband, father or brother - had been  
sent to the Front, and was thus no longer able to support the family. A  
majority, however, were almost certainly from the countryside.  
Although there are no statistics on the social origin of newcomers to  
industry, it has been estimated that between one-half and three-  
quarters of the newcomers were from the peasantry.72 About 25,000  
to 30,000 recruits to Petrograd industry were drawn from the rural  
and urban petit-bourgeoisie.73 When the war broke out, many small  
traders, shopkeepers, landlords, porters, domestic servants, artists  
and others took jobs in munitions factories in order to escape  
conscription. A check on reservists at the Putilov works in August  
1917 led to the ‘voluntary’ departure of 2,000 workers, described as  
‘book-keepers, shop-owners, tailors, artists, jewellers, corn-  
chandlers, coopers, landlords, and cafe-owners’.74 There were var-  
ious jingles about such workers which were current in the factories  
during the war:

Once he was a yardkeeper

sweeping footpaths,

Now he’s in the factory

making shrapnel.75

Leiberov and Shkaratan estimate that such workers comprised 5% to  
7% of the factory workforce in Petrograd.76

Between 40,000 and 50,000 recruits were workers evacuated from  
the Baltic provinces and Western parts of Russia. Some twenty  
factories were evacuated from Riga — with a combined workforce of  
over 6,000 — and about twenty-five from Lithuania.77 In addition,  
many Polish workers were removed to the capital. There were around

1. Poles at Putilov in 1917. Relatively few Chinese, Korean,  
   Central Asian or Persian workers came to Petrograd, although scores  
   of thousands were drafted into the mines of the Donbass, Urals and  
   Siberia, but there were several hundred in the state enterprises of the  
   capital.78 If the 1918 industrial census is reliable for 1917, then 15.8%  
   of the factory labour force in Petrograd were non-Russians in 1917,  
   though by no means all of these had come to the capital during war.  
   The largest group were Poles (who comprised 5.8% of the total

labour force),followed by Latvians and Lithuanians (2.6%), Finns  
(2.3%), Germans (0.5%), Jews (0.3%) etc.79

Leiberov and Shkaratan conclude that if one subtracts the 190,000  
workers who came into industry during the war from the total factory  
workforce in 1917, one is left with the number of‘cadre’ workers —  
between 200,000 and 220,000 (assuming that most evacuees were  
‘cadre’ workers). This leads them to conclude that a majority of the  
factory workforce in Petrograd in 1917 - 50% to 52% - were ‘cadres’.  
But this assumes that by 1917 all those workers who had been  
working in industry in 1914 were ‘cadres’. This seems an un-  
warranted assumption, in view of the fact that at least 40% of the  
workforce in 1914 had either less than five years’ experience in  
industry or were peasant workers. Making some allowance for this,  
therefore, it is likely that by 1917 ‘cadres’ no longer comprised a slight  
majority of the workforce, as they had done in 1914, but had shrunk to  
perhaps as little as 40% of the total workforce.80

Sexual and age divisions

By January 1917 129,800 women worked in the factories of the  
capital.81 This compared to 83,000 domestic servants, mostly women,  
who worked in dire conditions for shockingly low wages.82 Perhaps

1. women worked in offices and similar establishments, and a  
   similar number worked in shops and in the wholesale and retail  
   trade.83 Other women worked in the clothing trade and in various  
   kinds of workshops and sweatshops. The proportion of women in the  
   factory labour force rose from 20.8% in 1900, to 25.7% in 1913 to  
   33.3% in 1917 (see Table 8). The war thus led to a big increase in the  
   number of women in Petrograd industry, though this was not as large  
   an increase as in Russian industry as a whole, where the proportion of  
   women soared from 26.6% in 1914 to 43.2% in 1917.84

The Petrograd textile industry had the highest proportion of  
women workers. After the 1905 Revolution millowners had deliber-  
ately increased the number of women employees. In 1907 the annual  
report of factory inspectors noted: ‘the increase in the application of  
female labour is particularly sharply reflected in the cottonweaving  
industry, where women weavers have ousted men. The reasons for  
this are as before: their greater industry, attentiveness and abstinence  
(they do not drink or smoke), their compliance and greater reason-

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Table 8: Sexual and age breakdown of Petrograd workforce

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | % | of workers | | % increase |
| Branch of Industry | Year |  |  |  | of women and |
|  | men | women | youths | youths 1913-17 |
| All branches | \*9\*3 | 66.2 | 25-7 | 8.1 | 7.7 |
|  | \*9\*7 | 585 | 33-3 | 8.2 |  |
| Metalworking | \*9\*3  \*9\*7 | 91.2  73\* | 2-7  20.3 | 6.1  6.6 | 18.1 |
| Woodworking | 19\*3  \*9\*7 | 96.9  71.8 | 1.1  20.7 | 2.0  7-5 | 25-1 |
| Textiles and | \*9\*3 | 32.0 | 57-o | 11.0 |  |
| Sewing | \*9\*7 | 18.7 | 68.6 | 12.7 | \*3-3 |
| Food | \*9\*3 | 51.8 | 40.7 | 7-5 | 29.6 |
|  | \*9\*7 | 22.2 | 66.0 | 11.8 |
| Leather and shoes | \*9\*3 | 71.1 | 20.5 | 8.4 | 24.8 |
|  | \*9\*7 | 46.3 | 42.8 | 10.9 |
| Chemicals | \*9\*3 | 56.1 | 41.6 | 2-3 | 9.3 |
|  | \*9\*7 | 46.8 | 46.7 | 6-5 |  |
| Minerals | \*9\*3 | 76.2 | 16.7 | 7-\* | 17.2 |
|  | \*9\*7 | 59-0 | 20.6 | 20.4 |  |

Source: Stepanov, Rabochie Petrograda, p.34.

ableness in respect of pay’.85 The textile workforce was composed  
mainly of young single women. A survey of 7,000 textileworkers in  
Petrograd in 1918 revealed that 18% were aged 17 or under; 17%  
aged 18 to 20; 28% aged 21 to 30; 18% aged 31 to 40; and 19% aged 41  
and over. 69% of women were under the age of 30 compared to 39% of  
men, most of the latter being boys under 17.86 Amongst the male  
textileworkers, who comprised only 13% of the total, 70% were  
married, 2% widowed and 28% single. Amongst the women,  
however, only 33% were married, 11% widowed and 56% single.  
This reflected the large share of young girls in the industry, and also  
the fact that the marriage rate had gone down as a consequence of the  
war. This was particularly striking among women textileworkers  
aged 20 to 30. In 1909, 74% of this group were married, whereas nine  
years later, only 49% were.87

By 1917 more women in Petrograd worked in the metal industries  
than in textiles - approximately 48,000 as against 30,000. The  
proportion of women in the metal industries rocketed from 2.7% in  
1913 to 20.3% (see Table 8). These women worked in mass-

production factories producing cartridges, shells, shrapnel, etc. Some

1. women worked in the ‘chemicals’ industry, of whom over
2. were employed at a single plant — the giant Triangle  
   rubber-works, which produced everything from galoshes to gas  
   masks. A further 10,000 women were employed in the food and  
   tobacco industries. Finally, about 5,000 women worked in the leather  
   industry, including 3,000 at the Skorokhod shoe factory which made  
   boots for soldiers. All these jobs had one thing in common, they were  
   unskilled and badly-paid. The distribution of women in factory jobs  
   thus reflected the fact that the sexual division of labour within the  
   patriarchal peasant household had been transposed into a factory  
   setting.88

Prior to the war, the employment of children was less widespread in  
the capital than in Russian industry generally. In 1914 about 8% of  
the workforce under the Factory Inspectorate in St Petersburg  
consisted of youths aged 15 to 17. In addition, about 2,000 children  
aged 12 to 15 were employed in porcelain and glass factories,  
printshops and other small enterprises.89 In the course of the war the  
number of young workers in Petrograd grew, but less than the  
national average. The number of under-i8s rose from 22,900 to  
31,800, but their proportion within the factory labour force remained  
about the same (see Table 8). Although the proportion of young  
workers was the greatest in the textiles, food and leather industries,  
young workers were most numerous in the metal industries. It was  
this industry which provided a base for the youth movement in  
Petrograd in 1917.

The labour force in Russia was remarkable for the low proportion  
of middle-aged workers and the almost complete absence of elderly  
workers in its ranks. In 1900 23% of St Petersburg factory workers  
were aged 16 to 20; 52% were aged 21 to 40; and only 12% were older  
than 40.90 The First World War dramatically changed this age  
balance. The fullest data on this question are provided by the  
industrial census of 1918, but because of the collapse of industry in the  
first half of that year, these data can be applied to 1917 only with some  
caution. The census showed that among male workers, 4.2% were  
under 15; 6.3% were 16 to 17; 6.5% were 18 to 20; 41.7% were 21 to  
39; 38.4% were 40 to 59 and 2.9% were 60 or more.91 This  
represented an enormous increase in the proportion ofover-40s and a  
significant decline in the proportion of workers aged 21 to 40. This  
was an obvious consequence of conscription. Among women workers,

2.7% were under 15; 7.8% were 16 to 17; 18.4% were 18 to 20; 52.7%  
were 21 to 39; 17% were 40 to 59 and 1.3% were 60 or over. Women  
workers thus had a younger age profile than men in 1918, with a  
bigger proportion of under-2is and a far smaller proportion of  
over-40s.92

In 1918 60% of industrial workers in Russia were married or  
widowed. This compared to 63% of male and 46% of female  
metalworkers in Petrograd in the same year.93 Late marriage was the  
norm: 45% of male and 48% of female workers aged 21 to 30 were  
unmarried in Petrograd in 1918.94 Among the more highly-paid  
groups of workers, the marriage-rate and average family size were  
greatest. A survey of metalworkers in 1908 showed that 46% of those  
earning less than 1,5or. a day were single, compared to 21 % of those  
earning more than 2-50r. a day.95 In 1918 married male workers in  
Petrograd had an average of 2.4 dependants, but skilled metalworkers  
had 3.7.96 Whereas in 1897 only 30% of married metalworkers had  
lived with their families, in 1918 three-quarters of skilled fitters in  
Petrograd did so.97 In that year 71 % of all married workers lived with  
their families - an important indication of the extent to which workers  
had broken ties with the countryside since 1897.

One Soviet anthropologist has suggested that women had a higher  
status in the working-class family than in the peasant family, and that  
there was a more equal division of labour within the former than the  
latter. She cites as evidence the opinion of M. Davidovich, surveyor of  
St Petersburg textileworkers, who wrote in 1909: ‘While the woman  
hurries straight home from the factory to the children, the husband  
goes off to market and to the shops to buy provisions for supper and  
next day’s dinner ... in his spare time the husband must always look  
after the children.’98

Yet there is a good deal of other evidence to suggest that domestic  
labour remained as much the responsibility of the woman in the  
‘proletarian’ family, as it was in its peasant counterpart. A. Il'ina,  
writing in the journal of the textileworkers, Tkach, gives this agonising  
description of the lot of the working mother:

Having finished work at the factory, the woman worker is still not free. While  
the male worker goes off to a meeting, or just takes a walk or plays billiards  
with his mates, she has to cope with the housework — to cook, to wash and so  
on ... she is seldom helped by her husband. Unfortunately, one has to admit  
that male workers are still very prejudiced. They think that it is humiliating  
for a man to do ‘woman’s’ work [bab’yu rabotu]. They would sooner their sick,

worn-out wife did the household chores [barshchinu] by herself. They would  
rather tolerate her remaining completely without leisure - illiterate and  
ignorant - than condescend to help her do the housework. And on top of all  
these yokes and burdens, the woman worker has still the heavy load of  
motherhood ... Today for a working class woman, having a baby is no joy -  
it’s a burden, which at times gets quite unbearable."

For single women who left their families, factory work may have  
brought a measure of economic independence,100 but for married  
women, the burdens of being a housewife and mother, as well as a  
wage-worker, were onerous in the extreme. Low wages, together with  
the obligation to perform unpaid domestic labour, made married  
women economically dependent on the wages of their husbands.

Skill divisions

The definition of‘skill’ is a thorny problem. Skill refers to the quality  
of work: a skilled job demands greater precision, dexterity and mental  
exertion than an unskilled job. Skill differences are rooted in the  
labour process - in the physical and intellectual requirements of  
particular operations within the process of production. Some writers  
have argued that it is possible to measure skill by comparing the  
length of training necessary for different jobs.101 The problem is,  
however, that while skills do have real existence in the requirements  
of a job and in the capabilities of the worker, they are also partially  
determined by class struggle. Workers’ organisations can ‘artificially’  
create skills, by restricting access to particular jobs; they can control  
the institutions and practices whereby skills are acquired, trans-  
mitted and recognised.102 Because skill determination is a site of class  
struggle, the usefulness of criteria such as length of apprenticeship or  
relative wage levels as ‘objective’ measures of skill must be fairly  
limited.

The origins of the St Petersburg metal industry go back to the first  
quarter of the eighteenth century, but the modern metallurgical and  
metalworking industries came into existence only in the 1890s. From  
the first, they were machine-based industries, fairly advanced in  
technology, but still dependent on the manual skills of craftsmen. The  
sociologist, Alain Touraine, has distinguished three phases in the  
organisation of work: the first was the old system which relied on  
craftsmanship and required only universal machines, such as lathes,  
not limited to the production of a single product; the second saw the

break-up of a job into its component parts, the development of  
mechanisation and the feeding of machines by unskilled workers; the  
third phase is the phase of automation, where direct productive work  
by human beings is eliminated.103 One could say that in the decade  
prior to 1917 the metalworking industry of Petrograd was moving  
from the first to the second of Touraine’s phases.

Skilled craftsmen (masterovye) played a crucial role in the labour  
process in the metal industry of Petrograd. Highly-skilled workers,  
such as instrument-makers, pattern-makers, milling-machine oper-  
ators, electricians, platers or engravers, performed complex precision  
work, working independently from technical drawings and using  
sophisticated measuring instruments. Beneath them were many  
skilled workers who were fully trained and who could work from  
technical drawings, but whose work was not especially complex or  
precise. These included most fitters (slesan), turners (tokari), electri-  
cians, mechanics, planers, mortisers, etc.104 These highly-skilled and  
skilled men (there were no women in these trades) were directly  
involved in production: the rapidity of their reflexes, their visual,  
auditory and tactile sensibilities were crucial to the operation of the  
machine or tool. They were deeply knowledgeable of their work, used  
to taking decisions about their work, used to thinking for themselves  
and to exercising control over their jobs. They were respected by  
other workers and by management for their manual and intellectual  
skills. As such, they were not unlike craftsmen at Armstrong-  
Whitworth, the Schwarzkopf works in Berlin or at Fiat-Centro in  
Turin.

One should not imagine, however, that the skilled metalworker in  
St Petersburg was a ‘labour aristocrat’. Some of the most highly-paid  
men did constitute a small ‘aristocracy’, but the average skilled  
man was far removed from the craftsman one might associate with  
the British ‘new model’ unions of the mid-nineteenth century. Firstly,  
Petersburg metalworkers were not organised into exclusive craft  
unions, capable of controlling entry to the trade, of imposing  
standard pay and conditions and of regulating workshop matters  
through ‘custom and practice’.105 Secondly, metalworkers did not  
serve a formal five- or seven-year apprenticeship. A survey of fitters  
at the Putilov works in 1918 showed that 67% had served an appren-  
ticeship, averaging 3.3 years and starting at about the age of 15 or 16;  
32% had trained on the job as assistants to craftsmen (podruchnye), for  
4.5 years on average.106 Thirdly, unlike British engineers in the  
nineteenth century, the metalworkers of St Petersburg did not rely so

exclusively on manual skill: they operated up-to-date drilling  
machines, turret lathes, vertical boring mills, self-acting planing  
machines and horizontal milling machines. There were, of course,  
still turners who were masters of the parallel lathe, but there were  
many who worked automatic lathes which required them only to  
assemble parts, measure their dimensions and sometimes to regulate  
tools. Similarly, there were traditional fitters, who fitted parts with a  
file and scraper, ran the bearings and assembled all the parts  
themselves, but limit-gauges were already dealing a blow to their  
skills. The skilled metalworkers of St Petersburg were thus distant  
from British ‘labour aristocrats’, but neither were they yet the  
‘mass-production’ workers of the modern assembly plant.

The masterovye of the metal trades were distinguished by their  
craft consciousness. Many worker-memoirists remark on this. A.M.  
Buiko, who worked at the Putilov works at the turn of the century,  
recalled:

In those days it was felt that if a worker did not master his trade, did not  
become a good craftsman, then he was not a proper fellow. This point of view  
had its roots in the days of kustarshchina, when old craftsmen regarded  
unskilled workers as a casual element in their midst. A worker who had not  
mastered his trade was scornfully called a ‘master at earning his bread’

If a young man began a conversation with an older skilled fitter or turner he  
would be told: ‘Learn first how to hold a hammer and use a chisel and a knife,  
then you can begin to argue like a man who has something to teach others.’  
For many years we had to put up with this. If you wanted to be an organiser,  
then you had to know your job. If you did, then they would say of you - ‘He’s  
not a bad lad - he works well and he’s got a smart brain when it comes to  
politics.’107

A. Buzinov, who worked at the Nevskii works as a foundryman,  
remembered:

Every branch of production, and even each craft [freAA], infects the worker  
with professional or craft patriotism. He sings the virtues of his own trade  
\remeslo\ and spits on all the rest. Metalworkers felt themselves to be  
aristocrats among the rest of the working class. Their profession demanded  
more training and so they looked down on weavers and others, as though  
they were inferior bumpkins - today they are at the mill, tomorrow they go  
off to plough the land. Everyone recognised the superiority of metalworkers,  
with all the advantages that that implied ... The oddness of textileworkers  
hit me in the eyes. Many of them still wore peasant clothes. They looked as  
though they had wandered into the town by mistake and tomorrow would  
find their way back to their native village. Women predominated among  
them and one never lost an opportunity to pour scorn on them. Alongside the  
textileworkers, the metalworkers appeared to be a race apart, accustomed  
to life in the capital and more independent ... The more I grew into the

factory family [zavodskuyu sem'yu\, the more it became clear just how much  
variety there was even within one factory. Soon I began to feel that the  
workers in the engineering shop - fitters and turners - looked down on me.  
Later I realised that workers in the ‘hot’ shops - the foundry, the rolling-mill  
and the forge - had a low status. Then for the first time I saw that the people  
there were heavy and awkward in speech and gait. In each face, through the  
deep tan of the furnace, coarse features were clearly visible, which seemed to  
say that strength, not wit, was what was required in their work. I soon  
realised that next to the most experienced foundryman, even a poor fitter  
seemed an educated, thinking man.108

In these two passages one sees the classic elements of craft ideology:  
the pride of the craftsmen in the mastery of their trade;109 the esteem  
they enjoy because of their knowledge of processes and materials and  
their manual dexterity; their condescension towards labourers and  
unskilled workers; their disdain for the peasants and their boorish  
way-of-life; their scorn of callow youth; their oppressive attitudes  
towards women; their measuring a person’s moral integrity - indeed  
their political credibility - in terms of their mastery of their trade.  
Such craft pride was to take a knock, as the position of these skilled  
workers was undermined by technological change.

Most skilled workers were to be found in the machine-building and  
engineering sectors of the metal industry. Less skilled workers were to  
be found in metallurgical sectors, and in the so-called ‘hot’ shops of  
the large metal works. In a mammoth enterprise, such as the Putilov  
works, where there were 41 different workshops in 1917, the division  
between ‘hot’ shops, such as the foundries, the ‘Martin’ shop (named  
after the Siemens-Martin process of open-hearth steel-making), the  
crucible shop or rolling mills, and the ‘cold’ shops, such as the pattern  
shop, the machine shops, the gun or gun-carriage shops, was crucial.  
In the ‘hot’ shops the work was extremely arduous and most of the  
workers were peasants. The worker P. Timofeev described the work of  
an unskilled labourer (chemorabochii) in such a shop:

The chief characteristic of the work of a chemorabochii is that it is shockingly  
hard. It is one of the meanest, roughest, heaviest jobs which one finds in the  
factories. Apart from sheer muscle-power, nothing significant is required -  
neither literacy, skill, nor even simple quick-wittedness, since the gang-leader  
or senior chemorabochii will provide this. To carry iron, to load and unload  
wagons, to lift two hundred pudy of cast iron, to fetch and carry all kinds of  
heavy weights, to dig and prop up pits - these are some of the tasks of the  
chemorabochii. But his chief task is to be able to survive on seventy kopecks a  
day, to support a family, or from time to time to send ten or fifteen rubles to  
the countryside.110

The years after 1908 saw the emergence of a new layer of  
semi-skilled workers in the metal industry - mainly machine-  
operators of one kind or another. The appearance of semi-skilled  
workers was bound up with the introduction of new technology and  
the reorganisation of production. After 1909 the economy picked up,  
there was limited introduction of assembly lines, standardised  
calibres and interchangeable parts. At the Putilov works a shipyard  
was built, a new turret shop and gun shop were constructed, the  
factory was fully electrified and cranes began to be used for loading  
furnaces.111 Other factories began to implement F.W. Taylor’s  
techniques of‘scientific management’. By 1917 Russia was, after the  
USA, the country where scientific management was most widely  
applied.112 The outbreak of war in 1914 gave a big boost to the  
transformation of work processes and work organisation. The  
whole-scale introduction of mass-production processes substantially  
changed the skill profile of the metal workforce, greatly expanding the  
ranks of the semi-skilled.

The influx of peasants and women into semi-skilled jobs potentially  
threatened the position of the masterooye. Yu. Milonov, a leader of the  
metalworkers’ union, described the process thus:

The technology of production during the war was characterised by the broad  
application of automatic machines. The whole of war production was done on  
them ... This caused sharp changes in the professional make-up of workers in  
the metal-working industry. Alongside a reduction in the number of skilled,  
specialist masterovye as a result of the numerous mobilisations, the number of  
workers operating machines increased. And so the metalworkers’ unions  
which arose after the February Revolution differed in their occupational  
make-up from the unions in the pre-war period. No longer did masterovye  
predominate in them, but the unqualified workers.113

Petrograd metalworkers were experiencing what in the British  
context was called ‘dilution’, i.e. the introduction of semi-skilled  
workers into jobs formerly done by skilled male workers, but also  
‘dilution’ in the sense of a decrease in the specific weight of fully-  
proletarianised elements within the workforce. James Hinton has  
shown that in the British engineering industry, craftsmen whose  
status and privileges were still intact when the war broke out—mainly  
those on Clydeside and in Sheffield - led a class-wide offensive against  
‘dilution’. C. Goodey has suggested that ‘dilution and de-skilling  
were almost as much at issue in Petrograd as they were on  
Clydeside’.114 Yet what is surprising about the Russian experience is

precisely the absence of any militant opposition from the masterovye.

1. Gordienko, who worked as a moulder at the Lessner works, wrote:

During the time of my short absence, big changes took place. The turning  
shop was filled with machines (mechanical assembly lines and vices) and new  
workers, including many women, youths and the sons of those who could  
afford to buy them out of the army. The mood of the cadre workers was  
indifferent.115

This indifference to ‘dilution’ was probably the result of several  
factors. First, the extent of‘dilution’ should not be exaggerated. Some  
rather doubtful calculations by S.G. Strumilin purport to show that  
the average skill-level in the Petrograd metal industry fell by 17%  
during the war, and by 12% among fitters and turners.116 Secondly,  
it is unlikely that skilled metalworkers were directly displaced by  
semi-skilled women; the latter went into new sectors of production. In  
the short term the opportunities for many craftsmen increased, owing  
to the massive expansion of production. Thirdly, although working  
conditions deteriorated and the intensity of work increased, the  
Petrograd metal industry was one of the few industries in Russia  
where real wages increased between the autumn of 1914 and the  
winter of 1916, owing to the fact that the skills of the metalworkers  
were in critically short supply. Together these factors helped blunt  
opposition to ‘dilution’.

In spite of some wartime de-skilling, the proportion of skilled  
workers in the metal industry remained higher than in other  
industries in 1917. The only data on skill-composition relate to 1918,  
and must thus be treated with caution, in view of the tremendous  
changes which took place in 1918 as a result of the rapid demobilisa-  
tion of the war industries. Classifying the 21,792 metalworkers in  
Petrograd enterprises of more than 500 workers according to the skill  
categories used by the metalworkers’ union. Strumilin calculated that  
22.7% were highly skilled; 23.1% were skilled; 21.1% were semi-  
skilled and 29% unskilled.117 Even after wartime changes, the most  
numerous occupational category in the industry remained that of  
‘fitter’, a relatively unspecialised craftsman, who could turn his hand  
to several jobs.

The skill structure of the textile industry was far less differentiated  
than that of the metal industry. Skilled workers comprised only 6% of  
the workforce. They were nearly all men, who performed fine  
spinning and weaving and specialised carding operations. The  
overlookers and mechanics were also mainly men. Semi-skilled

workers comprised 72% of the workforce. These were mainly women  
who tended jennies and fly-frames or operated power looms. About  
20% of the workforce were classed as unskilled, who comprised  
mainly young girls and boys who worked as ‘piecers’, bobbin-tenders,  
heddlers, twisters, sorters and cleaners of raw wool or cotton.118

In 1917 there were 19,400 workers employed in the different  
branches of the printing industry of Petrograd.119 During the war the  
number of printers had fallen by over 3,000, and the proportion of  
women in the industry had grown from 23% to 35%.120 Although all  
large and many medium-sized print-works were mechanised to some  
extent, the print trade relied predominantly on manual skill.  
Typesetters comprised over a third of the workforce. Their skills and  
wages varied considerably, but as a group they were distinguished  
from other trades, such as paper-feeders, pressmen, machinists,  
lithographers or binders, by their high earnings, by the control which  
they exercised over their jobs, and by the fact that they regarded  
themselves as a cut above other workers in the industry. Newspaper  
compositors and the aktsidentnye, who did specialised and complex  
compositing, were better-paid than the strochnye, who typeset  
books.121 Typesetters often worked in a kompaniya (company) in order  
to expedite a particular job as quickly as possible. They would  
organise the work among themselves and appoint a steward (starosta)  
to supervise discipline, hours and wages. The kompaniya enjoyed a  
high degree of job-con trol and was not subject to close supervision by  
management. The wages which could be earned by a member of a  
kompaniya were extremely high - 150 r. a month in 1916, as opposed to  
the 50 r. earned by an average typesetter — but it was not high wages  
perse which made the typesetters of the kompaniya into an ‘aristocracy’  
so much as their position within the authority-structure of the  
enterprise and the distinct cultural world which they inhabited.  
According to Tikhanov, himself a printer, ‘the kompaniya was a state  
within a state; no one knew what it did, and it did not care to know  
about anybody else’.122 Most typesetters were born in the city. Many  
came to work on bicycles, wore starched shirts, went to the theatre  
and horse-races and generally tried to maintain a ‘good tone’. Others  
drank heavily and sometimes ended up penniless in the doss-  
house.123 The typesetters enjoyed close personal relations with their  
employers, many of whom were themselves former printers. Em-  
ployers addressed their staff as ‘Mister’, and gave long-service medals  
and civic honours to loyal employees. The print trade was thus one of

the few industries in which there was a sizeable ‘labour aristocracy’.

The 1897 census revealed that only 21% of the total population of  
European Russia was literate. This was mainly because of the  
appallingly low level of literacy in the countryside — 17% compared to  
45% in the towns.124 The spread of schooling in the next two decades  
helped boost the rate of literacy, so that by 1920 a third of the  
population was literate, including 42% of men and 25.5% of  
women.125 In St Petersburg the rate of literacy was the highest in the  
country. As early as 1900, 70% of the population aged six or over was  
literate; by 1920 this had risen to at least 80%.126

Working-class literacy was higher than the average for the  
population as a whole. By 1918 89% of male workers and 65% of  
females in Petrograd were literate, compared to 79% and 44%,  
respectively, of workers in the country as a whole.127 Working-class  
literacy was heavily influenced by sex, age and occupation. A survey  
of 3,998 textileworkers in Petrograd in 1918 showed that only 50%  
were literate, but 74% of men were literate compared to 45% of  
women.128 Younger women, however, were more literate than older  
women (see Table g).

A survey of 12,000 metalworkers in Petrograd in the same year  
revealed that overall literacy was 88%: 92% among men and 70%  
among women. 81% of women under 20 could read and write,  
compared to 48% of women aged 40 to 50, and 26% of women over  
50. Only a quarter of metalworkers aged 55 or over were literate.129 A  
survey of 724 skilled fitters at Putilov showed that literacy was as high  
as 94.7%,130 but in the boiler-plate shop at the Baltic shipworks in  
April 1917, no fewer than 12 out of 93 masterovye (13%) marked a  
petition demanding the removal of the shop director with a cross  
instead of their signature, which suggests that literacy among skilled  
fitters at Putilov may have been exceptionally high.131

A majority of workers in Petrograd in 1917 had had some kind of  
schooling. Primary education made great strides in Russia in the  
decades prior to the war, but in 1911 still only a third of Russian boys  
aged 7 to 14 and 14% of girls of the same age were attending school.132  
In St Petersburg primary education was more widespread, and  
between 1906 and 1916 the number of primary school pupils doubled  
to reach 62,418, while the number of secondary school pupils rose to  
10,480.133 Although most working-class boys and some working-class  
girls attended school at some time, only a tiny minority ever  
completed their primary education. In 1914 a mere 22% of children

Table 9: The relationship of age and sex to literacy among textileworkers in

Petrograd in igi8

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Age group | Male | Female | Both |
| under 20 | 83% | 67% | 69% |
| 21-30 | 86% | 45% | 48% |
| 31-40 | 83% | 22% | 33% |
| 4I"5° | 68% | 9% | 31% |
| over 50 | 54% | 1% | 24% |

Source: Vestnik professional'nykh soyuzov, 2 (1918), p.9.

in St Petersburg stayed the full course of primary school.134 Strumilin  
estimated that on average most factory workers had had three to four  
years’ schooling, but most women would have had less.135 Parents  
were under great economic pressure to send their children out to  
work, and once children were set on at the factory, it was difficult for  
them to continue their education. Even where they worked a six-hour  
day, and where some provision was made for evening classes, few  
youngsters had the stamina to begin to study after a hard day’s work.  
In any case, although the ability to read and write was an important  
prerequisite to becoming a skilled worker, length of factory experi-  
ence, rather than length of schooling, counted for more in getting a  
skilled job.136

CONCLUSION

Combined and uneven development of capitalism in Russia left its  
mark on the working-class itself. The economy of Petrograd was an  
articulated system of advanced and rudimentary forms of capitalist  
production under the dominance of state-monopoly capital. A  
majority of wage-earners in the capital worked in factory industry,  
mainly in vast, technologically-sophisticated enterprises, run by  
private capital or by the state. In 1917 the city’s industry was geared  
totally to the war, and the overwhelming majority of its workers  
produced for the war effort. In an economic sense, the city was one of  
the most modern in the world, but in a social and political sense  
Petrograd was decades behind other world cities. It was still a city

of peasants, and the huge scale of peasant migration brought the  
infrastructure of the city to the point of collapse. The city fathers  
proved unable to meet the challenge, since the incubus of tsarist  
absolutism had stifled civic initiative. The result was staggering levels  
of death and disease, massive overcrowding, and appalling squalor  
and poverty.

The workforce was recruited from the peasantry and lacked urban  
and artisanal traditions. The fact that many workers had a peasant  
culture and mentality did not necessarily inhibit their participation in  
labour protest: indeed, their grievances as industrial workers may  
have been fed by deeper peasant discontents.137 Moreover we shall  
see that Russian workers experienced the horrors of early indus-  
trialisation in the particular political context of autocracy. They thus  
grew up acutely aware of the ‘political question’, particularly  
susceptible to radical political ideas, and not so responsive to  
reformist, economistic or craft ideologies.138

Within the industrial workforce there were important social  
divisions, according to degree of proletarianisation, skill, sex and age.  
Social differentiation within the working class was probably greater  
than in the working classes of the West, though wage and skill  
hierarchies may not have been so steep.139 For the working class did  
not yet reproduce itself, and there was thus a crucial cleavage between  
‘cadre’ workers and peasant workers. In Petrograd this cleavage may  
have been losing its significance in the decade prior to the war, but the  
influx of peasants into the workforce during the war reinforced its  
salience. Overlaying this division, however, were other divisions  
between skilled and unskilled, male and female, old and young  
workers. These divisions had their autonomy, and in the specific  
conjunctures of the revolutionary process of 1917, could become  
‘over-determined’.140 Nevertheless, one can think of the working class  
in Petrograd in 1917 as being roughly divided into two: on the one  
hand, were peasant workers, women workers and workers new to  
industry, who comprised around 60% of the workforce; on the other,  
were older, proletarianised, skilled, male workers. We shall see that  
these two groups had a different relationship to the organised labour  
movement and to revolutionary politics in 1917. Chapter 8 explores  
the interaction of these two groups and the modalities of their  
revolutionary development.

2

The tsarist factory

THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE TSARIST FACTORY

The power of the tsarist autocracy did not rest on its ability to  
maintain ideological hegemony among the Russian people. Although  
it sought to procure the consent of the governed, the government was  
constantly compelled to resort to force. This was nowhere more  
apparent than in the sphere of industrial relations. Although  
working-class unrest exercised the tsarist administration from the  
1870s onwards, it tried to ignore the existence of a ‘labour problem’,  
preferring to promote a strategy of paternalism, judiciously mixed  
with repression.1 Anxious that harsh exploitation of workers might  
push them in a revolutionary direction, the government entreated  
employers to show greater solicitude towards their employees, and  
offered workers a measure of legal protection. In 1882 and 1885 laws  
restricting female and child labour were passed; in 1885 a Factory  
Inspectorate became fully operative, and the following year hiring  
practices were regulated; in 1897 the working hours in private  
factories were limited to eleven-and-a-half hours a day.2 Even the  
experiments in ‘police socialism’, which were radical by the standards  
of the autocracy, especially the Zubatov scheme of 1901, were  
motivated more by paternalism than by commitment to the reform of  
industrial relations.3 The autocracy remained adamant that workers  
should not be permitted to organise collectively in defence of their  
interests. Where labour unrest occurred, it was seen as a deliberate  
subversion of the peace, and was dealt with accordingly by the police  
or troops. Workers had few illusions in the neutrality of the state,  
since police intervention to crush strikes revealed the identity of  
interests between employers and the authorities.4 During the 1905

Revolution, there was a shift towards a more liberal industrial  
relations policy, as witnessed by the limited legalisation of the trade  
unions.5 Thereafter the regime reverted from its unhappy liberal  
mode to the more homely paternalist one. Once more, strikes and  
unions became unlawful, and workers brave enough to participate in  
them risked the knout, jail or exile.

At factory level employers relied mainly on the ‘stick’ rather than  
the ‘carrot’ to run their enterprises. In all countries repressive  
methods of labour discipline were typical of the first phase of  
industrialisation, and Russia was no exception.6 Draconian forms of  
discipline, however, were as much a reflection of the political culture  
of Russia as of capital’s need to socialise labour into the norms of  
factory life. The violent exercise of management power within the  
factory mirrored the violent exercise of power without.

The 1886 law made it obligatory for every factory to have a written  
code of rules which were printed in the wage book of each worker.  
These rules covered every aspect of factory life. Some were designed  
to combat labour turnover, lateness and absenteeism, others to create  
a docile workforce which would not offer collective resistance to  
management. At the Northern Cotton Mill, paragraph 25 of the  
factory rules laid down that workers might not meet together in the  
shops, leave work before time, shout or fight, show disobedience or  
disrespect to management, play games or read newspapers, bring in  
or take out items without the director’s special permission, bring in  
vodka or alcohol, smoke in unauthorised places, go near or touch  
machines in operation, go through the boiler room or engine room,  
send apprentices or other workers to buy things without the  
permission of the manager.7 At the nearby New Cotton-Weaving Mill  
the rules stated: ‘Workers must not express demands whilst in the  
shops nor go in a crowd to complain at the office. Each worker must go  
personally with his complaint to the manager.’8 Infringement of  
factory rules usually entailed a fine deducted from one’s wages and,  
occasionally, a beating or even dismissal.

During the 1905 Revolution the autocratic structure of power  
within the factories was partially dismantled, under the pressure of a  
mass strike movement.9 The beating of workers ceased, and the  
searching of workers as they left the factory — a ritual of degradation  
much resented - virtually disappeared.10 After 1905 these practices  
were revived. Fines once more became ubiquitous, but the great  
majority were now exacted for bad workmanship rather than for

infraction of factory rules.11 In some factories employers sought to  
modify the system of coercion by introducing incentive schemes.  
American bonus systems were in operation in sixteen factories by  
1908 - a sign that the real subordination of workers within the labour  
process was being achieved.12 Right down to 1917, however, despite  
growing interest in scientific management, factory administrations  
ruled by fear rather than by material or moral incentives.

The tsarist enterprise was administered in a strictly hierarchical  
fashion. At the top was a board of directors, which in state enterprises  
consisted of naval and army officers. Below them were section  
managers, followed by shop managers and their assistants, and  
finally by foremen (mastera) and their assistants (podmaster'ya). In  
most factories the system of administration was still a ‘craft’ one, i.e. a  
decentralised system in which the foreman took most decisions.13 The  
foreman had an office in the workshop and was responsible for hiring  
and firing workers, for fixing time and piece-rates and for supervising  
the distribution and execution of work. He ruled the workers’ lives in  
a direct way, and was regarded as occupying the bottom rung of the  
management ladder.14 His assistants were usually promoted from  
among the skilled workers; they helped the foreman carry out his  
tasks and reported any breach of workshop regulations by the  
workers. There was some doubt as to whether they were part of the  
management hierarchy, but in 1910 the metalworkers’ union refused  
them membership on the grounds that they were.15 In large shops in  
the metal works there might be desyatniki or starshie interposed  
between the foreman’s assistants and the workers: the former were in  
charge of a group of ten or so workers; the latter were gang-masters in  
charge of a partiya of perhaps fifteen workers. The starshie formed a  
‘labour aristocracy’, for they earned up to three times as much as the  
average member of the partiya, who was often an apprentice. They  
were, however, considered to be part of the workforce rather than  
management.16 In the years up to the war, the larger enterprises of St  
Petersburg moved towards a more bureaucratic system of adminis-  
tration, characterised by detailed centralised planning, communica-  
tions-processing departments and the proliferation of specialised  
clerical, technical and supervisory personnel.17 This shift was  
registered in a reduction in the functions of the foreman. Where bonus  
systems were introduced, rate-fixers began to fix wage-rates instead of  
foremen. Similarly, draughtsmen and technicians, instructors, in-  
spectors and quality-controllers took over other aspects of the

foreman’s job.18 The foreman’s tasks thus became largely super-  
visory.

Sltizhashchie were an extremely heterogeneous social category. The  
term is best translated as ‘salaried employees’, since it embraced  
clerical and technical staff in industrial and commercial enterprises  
and in government and public institutions; but it also referred to  
non-productive workers in the service sector, such as shopworkers  
and transport workers. Rashin estimated that in 1917 there were

1. clerical and technical staff employed in Russian factory  
   industry,19 and as many as a fifth of these may have worked in the  
   factories of Petrograd.20 They were overwhelmingly concentrated in  
   the metalworking, chemicals and electrical industries, where the ratio  
   of workers to sluzhashchie in 1918 was, respectively, 6.6, 4.3 and 2.4,  
   compared to 25 in the textile industry.21 Sluzhashchie occupied a  
   contradictory class location.22 In many ways they were similar to  
   manual workers, since they sold their labour-power, often for wages  
   below those of skilled workers, and had little real power in the  
   enterprise. Some, such as draughtsmen, were close to the skilled  
   workers by virtue of the work they did. Yet although they may have  
   been ‘objectively’ close to manual workers, subjectively, most  
   sluzhashchie felt separate from them. They were at the bottom of the  
   administrative hierarchy, but they depended on that hierarchy for  
   their livelihood. Although separated by a great distance from senior  
   management, they never lost hope of rising to an exalted position.  
   They preferred to try to improve their lot by seeking promotion,  
   rather than by organised defence of their collective interests, and  
   because they frequently performed semi-administrative functions,  
   they tended to adopt a management viewpoint.23 Management,  
   moreover, actively encouraged sluzhashchie to be antagonistic towards  
   the workforce.

For the workers on the shop floor, it was not so much the tyranny of  
the directors which was resented, as the petty despotism of the lower  
ranks of the management hierarchy. The foremen, supervisors,  
engineers all exercised their power in the same arbitrary way,  
untrammelled by any notions of workers’ rights. It is thus not  
surprising that workers who lacked any broad conception of the social  
system should have identified their main enemy not as the factory  
owner, but as the low-level administrators who were the bane of their  
everyday working lives. Strikes to remove foremen and their assist-  
ants were endemic prior to 1917, and demands for polite

treatment by administrative staff figured prominently in strike  
demands. In January 1905, for example, strikers at the Baltic  
shipworks raised twenty demands, including ones for an eight-hour  
day, a ban on overtime and a review of piece-rates. Three demands  
concerned ‘dignity’ issues: specifically, a demand that management  
deal honestly with workers without resorting to deception; a demand  
that foremen and their assistants treat the workers ‘as people and not  
as things’; and a demand that Mikhail Denisov be fired for being rude  
and insolent when hiring chemorabochie off the street.24 Commenting  
on the importance of ‘dignity’ issues, the worker Timofeev said ‘the  
workers value proper treatment... and if they get it, are often ready to  
put up with many of the darker aspects of their conditions and the  
discomforts of their work’.25

CONDITIONS OF WORK

Conditions of work in Petrograd’s factories before 1917 were  
exceedingly miserable. Employers paid little heed to standards of  
safety and hygiene and provided few facilities for their workforces.  
There were decent factories, such as the foreign-owned Parviainen  
and Siemens-Schukert works, but these exceptions merely underlined  
the general awfulness of conditions elsewhere. Conditions were  
notoriously bad at two factories subject to the Naval Ministry in the  
Okhta district. In December 1912 an explosion occurred at the Okhta  
explosives factory which killed five workers and injured more than  
fifty. The director, General Somov, did his best to prevent the Social  
Democratic deputies in the Duma from undertaking an investigation  
into the accident. ‘Such accidents do happen’, he argued, ‘and will go  
on happening. I for one never enter the factory without first making  
the sign of the cross.’26 He proved to be correct in his forecast, for in  
April 1915 a further explosion occurred in the melinite shop of the  
explosives works, which blew up two workshops and eight houses  
killing 110 people and injuring 220.27 A woman described conditions  
in the melinite shop where 3,000 women worked: ‘In the part where  
they do the washing and spraying, the air is so suffocating and  
poisonous that someone unused to it could not stand it for more than  
five or ten minutes. Your whole body becomes poisoned by it.’28 On  
31 March 1917 yet another explosion occurred at the Okhta  
explosives works which killed four workers and injured two. A few  
days later a worker from the factory told the conference of represen ta-

tives from factories under the Artillery Administration: ‘We are  
working on top of a volcano. The whole factory is overloaded with  
explosives, bombs and shells ... but the administration says it’s not  
their responsibility and refers us to the Artillery Administration.’29  
Conditions at the Okhta works were notoriously bad - women who  
worked there could be identified by their yellow skins — but they were  
not exceptional. At the Putilov works there was no ventilation in the  
gun shop or galvanising shop, where workers handling acid were  
given no protective clothing.30 In the gunpowder department of the  
Admiralty works, noxious fumes, lead and antimony dust caused  
vomiting and pulmonary disease among the workers. The manager of  
the department described conditions thus: ‘great congestion, a mass  
of machines, burning oil, night work, poor diet and the excessive  
intensity of work caused by piece-rates have resulted in general  
exhaustion, acute anaemia and a huge number of lung and heart  
diseases’.31

Petrograd had the highest industrial accident rate of any region in  
Russia. In 1913 there were 14,300 accidents reported to the Factory  
Inspectorate, and rates were highest in the metalworking industry,  
especially in state factories, and in textiles.32 During the war the  
accident rate increased. At the Putilov works, up to September 1914,  
there was an average of fifteen accidents per month; thereafter this  
increased to twenty-one. At the Lessner works there were 180  
accidents in 1914 and 312 in 1915.33 This increase in the rate of  
industrial accidents was linked to a general increase in the rate of  
illness among factory workers caused by more overtime, greater  
utilisation of female and child labour, speed-ups, insanitary condi-  
tions and worsening diet. Between 1913 and 1917 the rate of sickness  
and injury in Petrograd factories increased between one-and-a-half  
and two times.34 In 1914 the number of cases of sickness and injury at  
the Metal works was 60.3 per 100 workers; by 1915 it had risen to  
118.4. At the Putilov works the corresponding figures were 64.3 and  
98.2.35

Insurance provision for workers who were injured at work, or who  
fell sick, was grossly inadequate. Between 1901 and 1904 workers in  
state enterprises secured sickness and injury benefits. In private  
industry individual employers were liable after 1903 to pay similar  
benefits, but it was difficult to prove their liability.36 Up to 1912  
workers in the state sector were better protected than their counter-  
parts in private industry - not least, because they also qualified for

long-service pensions. The Insurance Law of 1912, however, put  
them at a disadvantage vis-a-vis workers in private industry, since it  
did not apply to the state sector.37 This law provided sickness benefit,  
but not invalidity or unemployment benefit, for about a fifth of all  
industrial workers in Russia.38 Workers donated 2% of their wages  
into the fund, and employers paid a sum equal to two-thirds of the  
total contribution made by the workers. The size of benefit paid was  
half to two-thirds of the normal wage of a married man and a quarter  
to a half that of a single worker - not a lot, given soaring inflation.39  
Medical funds (bol'nichnye kassy) were set up to administer the  
distribution of benefits, and were run jointly by workers’ and  
employers’ representatives. By 1917 there were 80 medical funds in  
Petrograd, with a membership of 176,000.40 Nineteen of the better-  
organised funds set up four clinics during the war.41 The Bolsheviks  
played an active part in the funds, using them partly as a front behind  
which to organise working-class resistance.42

As late as 1914 Russian workers still worked significantly longer  
hours than their Western-European counterparts. The 1905 Revolu-  
tion had reduced hours noticeably, in spite of the fact that it had been  
defeated precisely at the moment when the demand was raised for the  
immediate legalisation of the eight-hour day. In 1905-6 the average  
working day in Russia was ten hours, or sixty hours a week, but this  
figure does not include overtime, which was widespread.43 During the  
Years of Reaction, although pressure for a shorter working day  
declined, the average working day appears to have shrunk slightly. By

1. Russian workers worked an average of 9.7 hours a day,  
   excluding overtime; in St Petersburg the average stood at 9.54  
   hours.44 There was considerable variation by industry however.  
   Workers in the food and paper industries tended to work the longest  
   hours — around twelve hours a day — followed by textile workers.45 In
2. most workers in Petrograd worked about ten hours a day and  
   seven hours on Saturdays. In addition, overtime working was  
   widespread, except where shift systems were operative, such as in the  
   metallurgical enterprises. Overtime was frequently compulsory and  
   often paid at the standard rate.46

In 1913, according to Strumilin, 270 days were worked each year in  
Russian industry - twenty to thirty fewer than in Britain, Germany or  
the USA.47 This was due to the large number of religious holidays  
enjoyed by Russian workers. In St Petersburg, however, some 290 or  
more days were worked each year — an index of the ‘modernity’ of the

industry of the capital. This meant that the number of hours worked  
each year, as well as each week, was gruellingly long by Western  
European standards.

During the war working hours increased substantially in Petro-  
grad, owing to its central importance to the war effort. In January  
1917 the average working day in Petrograd was i o. i hours, compared  
to 9.9 hours in Russia’s private industry.48 Overtime working was  
greatly extended in the capital, and in 1915 restrictions on night work  
for women and children were lifted. There was considerable variation  
between industries, with the longest hours in metalworking, textiles  
and leather.49 In the metal industry workers in the ‘hot’ shops worked  
an eight-hour day, since the work was so exhausting; skilled workers  
in the ‘cold’ shops worked ten to eleven hours, and chemorabochie  
worked up to fourteen hours.50

THE STANDARD OF LIVING DURING THE WAR

On the eve of the First World War wages in Russian industry were  
significantly lower than those in Western industry.51 Strumilin  
estimated that in 1913 the average Russian factory-worker earned 283  
rubles per annum, but that when one took into account wages  
received in kind - as welfare provision, housing, etc. - this rose to  
295 r, or about 25 r a month.52 In St Petersburg in the same year, cash  
wages were about 40% higher than the national average, but the cost  
of living in the capital was also considerably higher.53 In human  
terms, these wages spelt chronic poverty. Prokopovich estimated that  
one needed about three times the average annual wage to support a  
family in the city.54 How therefore did workers manage?

The largest portion of a worker’s budget was spent on food. In  
1908,49% of a married worker’s income and 37% of a single worker’s  
income was spent on food. In 1912 in textileworker families where the  
mother worked outside the home, 52% of income was spent on food,  
compared to 60% where the mother worked in the home. In poorer  
textileworker families as much as two-thirds of income was spent on  
food.55 A survey of the budgets of members of the works committee at  
the Baltic shipyard in 1917 showed that 60% of income was spent on  
food and lighting. The second largest item of expenditure for  
working-class families was accommodation. Prokopovich’s survey  
revealed that the majority of workers lived in partitioned rooms.  
Single workers spent 15% of their income on rented accommodation

and married workers 2i%.56 Among textileworkers, single women  
spent 16% of their income on accommodation, compared to only 8%  
spent by single men. Families where the mother was at home spent  
19% of their income on accommodation, compared to 12% spent by  
families where the mother worked outside the home.57 In 1917  
members of the Baltic works committee spent 14% of their income on  
accommodation.58 The third largest item of working-class expendi-  
ture was clothing. Workers dressed shabbily. Men wore a dark shirt  
or blouse, with a standing collar buttoned to the side, a rough woollen  
jacket and trousers tucked inside high boots. In winter they wore very  
heavy, coarse cloth coats, a dark cap with a patent leather visor or a  
fur hat. Shirts and ties were unknown, except among skilled workers  
who wished to look respectable. Women wore a long skirt, a cotton  
blouse, a cotton kerchief, or in winter a woollen one, but no hat.59  
According to Prokopovich’s survey, single workers spent 14% and  
married workers 12% of their income on clothing.60 Single male  
textile workers spent 10% of their income on clothing and single  
females 17%. In textileworker families 15% or 16% of the budget was  
spent on clothing.61 In 1917 the Baltic works committee members  
spent 12% of their income on clothing.62

The outbreak of war unleashed rampant inflation. It is very  
difficult to produce an index of the rise in prices, partly because of  
regional variations, and partly because of the discrepancy between  
official prices and market prices. M.P. Kokhn produced what is  
probably the most conservative national price index for the war years.  
He estimated that if one takes the index of prices in 1913 as being  
equal to 100, then it reached 221 at the end of 1916, and 512 by the end  
of 1917-63 There is no comprehensive price index for Petrograd, but  
patchy data suggest that prices in the capital followed the national  
pattern, starting to rise as soon as war broke out and then rocketing  
from the second half of 1916 right through 1917 and into 1918.64 The  
prices of basic subsistence items were two to three times their pre-war  
level by the end of 1916, and at least four times this level by the middle  
of 1917.65 To compound the problems of survival, in the autumn of  
1915 and again in the winter of 1916, flour, meat, sugar and butter  
vanished from the shops, and people were forced to queue for long  
hours to buy bread.

Wages rose rapidly during the war, partly due to the rise in the cost  
of living, and partly to the fact that more overtime was being worked.  
The national average wage in enterprises subject to the Factory

Inspectorate rose from 257 rubles (1913) to 322 r. (1915) to 478 r.  
(1916). In defence enterprises average annual earnings rose from  
393 r- (\*9I3)»to 594 r- (^S).t0 912 r- (I9l6)-66 According to data  
from the 1918 Industrial Census, average earnings in Petrograd  
doubled between 1914 and 1916, from 405 r. to 809 r. per annum.67  
Given the rising cost of living, what did these wage increases mean in  
real terms?

There seems little doubt that, nationally, real wages fell during the  
war - very slowly during 1914 and 1915, and then increasingly  
rapidly as 1916 wore on. The crucial importance of defence industries  
in the capital meant that Petrograd was probably the only area in  
Russia where overall real wages rose throughout industry until the  
winter of 1916. Thereafter, however, real wages began to fall rapidly,  
and by the time of the February Revolution were probably 15% to  
20% below the level of 1913.68

There were enormous variations in the wage movements of  
different industries. In only two Petrograd industries - metals and  
chemicals - did real wages increase between 1913 and 1916.69 In all  
other industries they fell — a fall that was particularly dramatic in the  
case of printers, formerly the highest-paid industry. This meant that  
compared to other industrial groups, metalworkers were better off in  
1916 than in 1913. In 1913 average earnings in the Petrograd metal  
industry were 63% higher than in textiles, 49% higher than in food  
and 42% higher than in chemicals. In 1917 the ratios were  
respectively 106%, 109% and 51%. This pattern holds true for  
Russian industry as a whole.70 The 30% of the Petrograd labour force  
who worked in textiles, printing, food, woodworking, leather and  
minerals were thus not only worse off in real terms as a result of the  
war, but also worse off relative to the high-wage metal industries.71

It is difficult to determine how the war affected the wages of  
different categories of workers in the metal industry. Firstly, there  
were almost 300 different occupations within industry, and rates for  
the job varied between factories. This variation, combined with the  
different skill-composition of individual factory workforces, meant  
that average wage-levels between factories could vary considerably.  
Average wages in the private sector of Petrograd’s metal industry  
were higher than in the state sector - 12 7 r.50 k. a month compared to  
114 r.27 k. in August 1916.72 Within each sector, however, inter-  
factory variations could be very great. In January 1917 average  
monthly earnings at the Obukhov works and the Baltic works - both

run by the Naval Ministry — were, respectively, 171 r. and 86 r.73 A  
second problem arose from the fact that complex piece-rate systems  
were the norm in the majority of factories. These assigned groups of  
workers a basic hourly rate (tsekhovoe), and then determined a sliding  
scale of bonuses which linked output to time saved. Workers disliked  
these bonus systems, since they were difficult to understand. Piece  
and bonus systems meant that those skilled workers on the highest  
hourly rates did not always earn the highest monthly earnings;  
sometimes semi-skilled machinists might earn as much or more than  
them. A further complication is added by the fact that, in addition to  
standard bonus schemes, a special war-bonus came into operation in  
Petrograd factories in October 1915 for good timekeeping.74

Bearing these problems in mind, one can generalise as follows. For  
a layer of very skilled workers, whose skills were in short supply, it was  
possible to earn extremely high wages during the war. At the Putilov  
works the daily earnings of such groups as caulkers and moulders rose  
dramatically. Other skilled groups, such as metal-rollers and mortise-  
makers, however, experienced a relative decline.75 It is almost  
certainly the case that the differential between the highest and lowest  
earnings in the metal industry widened during the war, but it is more  
difficult to say whether the differential between the earnings of skilled  
and unskilled workers in general increased. Strumilin argued that the  
position of chemorabochie, vis-a-vis skilled workers, improved during the  
war — largely on the basis of a study of wages at the Parviainen works,  
which paid among the highest wages in Petrograd.76 Evidence from  
the Putilov, Obukhov and Metal works, however, suggests that in  
most factories differentials between skilled and unskilled workers  
widened.77 Generalising from the rather exiguous data, it seems that  
the majority of metalworkers improved their real earnings up to the  
winter of 1916—17, but that the unskilled generally failed to keep  
abreast with inflation. From the winter of 1916, a sudden acceleration  
in price rises, brought about by food shortages, led to a sharp fall in  
the real wages of all metalworkers, and this was an important cause of  
the February Revolution.

One final point needs to be made about the wages of women  
workers during the war. Women were concentrated in low-paid jobs,  
and where they did the same jobs as men, rarely got equal pay. The  
print trade was an exception to this, but there few women did the  
same jobs as men. In 1914 adult female wages were on average half  
those of adult males; young boys earned about 40% of the adult male

wage and young girls earned about a third.78 In spite of the increased  
demand for female labour during the war, women’s wages fell in  
relation to those of men. Between 1914 and the beginning of 1917, the  
ratio of men’s wages to women’s wages throughout Russian industry  
increased from 1.96 to 2.34.79 In Petrograd certain women who  
worked in armaments factories on piece-rates may have earned  
tolerable wages, but in 1916 the overall wage of women in the metal  
industry was only 40 r. a month, compared to the average wage of  
105 r.80 In the textile industry a semi-skilled jenny-operator earned  
49.3 r. a month in January 1917, which represented 90% of her real  
wage in July 1914; she now spent 63% of this on food compared to  
57% prior to the war.81 In the printing industry women earned a  
pittance of 20 to 25 r. a month.82 For these women, therefore, the war  
brought them from poverty to the brink of destitution.

To conclude, one can say that from the outbreak of war until the  
winter of 1916—17, the wages of a slight majority of workers in  
Petrograd improved, although this improvement came about largely  
as a result of increased labour-intensity and a deterioration in  
working conditions. For a large minority however — at least a third —  
the already low wages of 1914 failed to keep pace with the rise in  
prices, and by February 1917 they were teetering on the verge of  
starvation.

THE STRIKE MOVEMENT DURING THE WAR

The wartime wage-increases in Petrograd were not granted by the  
employers out of the kindness of their hearts; they had to be fought for.  
Although it is not the purpose of the present work to describe the  
labour movement during the war, a short account of the wartime  
strike movement must be given in order to provide background to the  
preceding analysis of wage movements, and as a preface to the next  
chapter, which describes the response of Petrograd’s factories to the  
February Revolution.

After the outbreak of war the government toyed with the idea of  
‘militarising’ labour by fixing wages, prohibiting strikes and transfer-  
ring workers to sectors where they were required. The Duma and  
employers’ organisations resisted the idea, since they resented state  
interference in industry and were sceptical of its efficacy. Workers  
whose conscription into the army was deferred, so that they might  
work in defence industry, were prevented from changing jobs.83

Soldiers and sailors were sent to the factories to do the most  
unpopular jobs under military discipline, and received rates of pay  
lower than those of civilian workers. It is important to bear in mind  
the military discipline of the defence factories when analysing the  
pattern of wartime strikes.

Table /ois based on work by the Soviet historian, I.P. Leiberov, and  
provides a comprehensive breakdown of the strike movement in  
Petrograd during the war.84 Leiberov follows the Factory Inspector-  
ate and Okhrana in classifying strikes as either ‘economic’ or  
‘political’. This classification should be treated with caution. The  
bulk of strikes in each category are unproblematic: most ‘economic’  
strikes concerned wages, hours or conditions; and ‘political’ strikes  
took place on occasions such as the anniversary of Bloody Sunday, or  
to protest against government plans for the militarisation of labour,  
the threatened execution of Kronstadt sailors or the arrest of the  
Workers Group of the War Industries Committee. Some strikes  
involved both economic and political demands. Leiberov classifies  
these as political, so there is a bias in the table towards overstating the  
number of political strikes. Finally, one should remember that the  
economic/political distinction refers to the demands of the strikers  
rather than to the strikers’ motives. It might have taken a certain level  
of political consciousness to go on any kind of strike during the war, at  
a time when the press, public opinion, and even socialists like  
Plekhanov, considered strike action to be treasonous. One thus  
cannot impute types of consciousness to workers on the basis of this  
table.

The table shows unambiguously that the outbreak of war in  
August 1914 defused the insurrectionary mood which had been  
building up in the working-class areas of Petrograd during the  
preceding six months. A wave of patriotic support for the war,  
combined with repression by the authorities, led to the virtual  
disappearance of strikes until July 1915. The few small, badly-  
organised strikes which did occur were provoked by management  
attempts to cut wage-rates. The few political strikes during the first  
year of the war - to protest against Bloody Sunday and the trial of the  
Bolshevik Duma deputies - were organised by socialists, and involved  
tiny numbers of workers.85 The tide began to turn injuly 1915, when  
a successful wage strike by New Lessner workers prompted similar  
strikes in other metal works on Vyborg Side. News of the massacre of  
striking textileworkers in Ivanovo-Voznesensk led to political strikes

Table 10: *Number of strikes in Petrograd, igi4~igij*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Political Strikes | |  | Economic Strikes | |
| Month | No. of strikes | No. of strikers | No. of working days lost through strikes | No. of strikes | No. of strikers | No. of working days lost through strikes |
| '9'4 | | | | | | |
| July 1—18 | - | 160,099 | - | - | 580 | - |
| >iy 19 | 26 | 27,400 | 48,540 | 16 | 10,942 | 76,914 |
| August | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| September | 1 | 1,400 | 280 | 3 | 905 | 1,180 |
| October | - | - | - | 2 | 160 | 42 |
| November | 2 | 3. \*5° | 1,260 | 3 | 785 | 785 |
| December | - | - | - | 2 | 1,020 | 1,240 |
| '9'5 | | | | | | |
| January | 14 | 2,595 | 2,488.5 | 2 | "5 | 565 |
| February | 6 | 340 | 1835 | 2 | 120 | 85 |
| March | - | - | - | 6 | 461 | 3" |
| April | - | - | - | 7 | 4,064 | 9,988 |
| May | 10 | ',259 | 899 | 7 | 2,57' | 1,607 |
| June | - | - | - | 9 | 1,141 | 53' |
| July | - | - | - | 29 | '7,934 | 33,9655 |
| August | 24 | 23,178 | 24,574-5 | 16 | 11,640 | '5,879 |
| September | 70 | 82,728 | 176,623.5 | >3 | 7,470 | '2,730-5 |
| October | 10 | 11,268 | 34,9 ”-5 | 21 | '3,35° | 69,031.5 |
| November | 5 | 11,020 | 6,280 | 19 | 6,838 | 7,509-5 |
| December | 7 | 8,985 | 5,6245 | 26 | 13,284 | 15,261 |
| 1916 | | | | | | |
| January | 68 | 6i,447 | 64,566 | 35 | 16,418 | 37,749-5 |
| February | 3 | 3,200 | 170 | 55 | 53,723 | 220,026.5 |
| March | 51 | 77,877 | 386,405.5 | 16 | 11,811 | 81,162.5 |
| April | 7 | 14,152 | 87,019 | 48 | 25,112 | 47,758 |
| May | 3 | 8,932 | 2,282 | 42 | 26,756 | 125,496 |
| June | 6 | 3,452 | 3,062.5 | 37 | 15,603 | 72,'9'-5 |
| July | 2 | 5,333 | 60,025 | 27 | 20,326 | 26,004 |
| August | 4 | 1,686 | 2,761 | 18 | 6,259 | '0,934-5 |
| September | 2 | 2,800 | 2,400 | 33 | 24,918 | 84,783-5 |
| October | 177 | 174,592 | 452,158-5 | 12 | '5,'84 | 12,912 |
| November | 6 | 22,95° | 8,283 | 24 | 18,592 | 30,204.5 |
| December | 1 | 1,000 | 25 | 7 | 8,798 | 29,835 |
| I9i7 | | | | | | |
| January | 135 | 151,886 | 144,116 | 34 | 24,869 | 59,024.5 |
| Feb. 1—17 | 85 | 123,953 | 137,5°8 | 14 | '9,809 | 62,647 |
| Total | 1,044 | 826,593 | 1,652,446.5 | 585 | 380,978 | ','48,354 |

I. P. Leiberov, ‘Stachechnaya bor'ba petrogradskogo proletariata v period pervoi  
mirovoivoiny (19 iyulya I9i4g.-i6 fevralya I9i7g.)’, Istoriya rabochego klassa Leningrada,  
issue 2 (Leningrad, 1963), pp.166, 177, 183.

in August, again based on militant metalworking factories on Vyborg  
Side, such as Lessner, Aivaz, Baranovskii, Nobel and Parviainen.  
These strikes, together with protests against rising food-prices, so  
alarmed the police that sweeping arrests of worker-activists were  
made between 29 August and 2 September 1915. This repression  
provoked protest strikes among metalworkers on Vyborg Side, at  
Putilov and in other districts, mostly under leftist slogans, but some  
pledging support to the Duma and calling for the creation of a  
responsible Ministry.86

Between August 1915 and August 1916 there was a big increase in  
the number of strikes. Many workers celebrated the anniversary of  
Bloody Sunday in January 1916, and February witnessed the largest  
number of economic strikes of any month during the war. Unrest  
centred on the Putilov workers, where demands for a 70% wage-  
increase became widespread. In spite of a lockout at the factory, and  
the drafting of 2,000 militants into the army, significant wage-rises  
were achieved. Some 70,000 workers at the beginning of March  
came out in support of the Putilovtsy, and a strong anti-war mood  
developed The crushing of these strikes led to a decline in the  
movement during the summer of 1916.

In the autumn of 1916 the strike movement exploded on a scale  
unprecedented since June 1914. The roots of the unrest lay in acute  
food shortages and rising prices, but three-quarters of the strikes  
between September 1916 and February 1917 voiced political opposi-  
tion to the autocracy and the war. On 17 October workers on Vyborg  
Side marched to the Finland station singing the Marseillaise.  
Significantly, they were joined by soldiers from the 181st infantry  
regiment, who were quartered in the area and who had been the  
target of Left Socialist Revolutionary (SR) and Bolshevik propa-  
ganda. The arrest of the insurgent soldiers spread the strike and  
caused the authorities to bring Cossacks and mounted police into  
the proletarian areas. After news came through of the threat to  
execute revolutionary sailors in Kronstadt, more factories went on  
strike so that by 28 October, 77 factories had stopped work for  
clearly political reasons. A lockout was imposed at fifteen factories  
and 106 militants were arrested, but the interruption of supplies to  
the Front forced the government to climb down for the first time  
since war broke out.87

In the first six weeks of 1917 stoppages, go-slows88 and strikes  
occurred in response to plummeting real wages and shortages of

bread. The increased failure-rate of the economic strikes reflects the  
fact that workers in small enterprises were entering into struggle for  
the first time. On 9 January, 132 enterprises struck to commemorate  
Bloody Sunday. The success of this demonstration encouraged the  
Workers’ Group of the War Industries Committee to redouble its  
efforts to persuade workers to put pressure on the Progressive Bloc in  
the Duma. The authorities reacted by arresting eleven of the sixteen  
members of the Workers’ Group on 27 January. On 14 February, 58  
factories obeyed the summons of the Defencist labour leaders to  
strike. Within the next week a large strike broke out at Putilov in  
support of wage-increases, which provoked a lockout on 22 February.  
This proved to be an important step in the immediate run-up to the  
general strike which precipitated the overthrow of the autocracy.89

If one examines the factories which participated in the wartime  
strike movement, it is possible to group them into three ‘divisions’,  
according to the extent to which they participated in strikes.90 In the  
first, most strike-prone division was a group of private metal works in  
the Vyborg district, making munitions, weapons and engineering  
products. The territorial proximity of these factories, together with  
the fact that they were medium-large rather than vast, facilitated the  
coordination of strikes. The workforce of these factories had grown  
rapidly during the war, often tripling in size; the New Lessner, Nobel  
and Puzyrev works were exceptions to this. Nevertheless, in spite of  
an influx of new workers, a core of skilled, experienced workers  
remained intact. These workers were members or sympathisers of the  
Bolshevik party. This is borne out by the fact that after February  
1917, it was these ‘first division’ factories, such as Aivaz, Baranovskii,  
Vulcan, Nobel, New Lessner, Phoenix and Puzyrev, which were the  
first to swing to the Bolshevik party. Exceptions were the Dinamo,  
Old Lessner, Erikson, New Parviainen and Promet works, which at  
first supported the Mensheviks and SRs, but none of these was slow to  
go Bolshevik in 1917.

The second division of factories consisted, firstly, of private  
metal-works of a rather specialist kind, less engaged in the production  
of munitions. Here the pattern of wartime growth was less uniform  
than in the first division, though all combined an intact core of‘cadre’  
workers with a majority of new workers. Bolshevik activists were less  
in evidence here, and these factories tended to be rather slower in  
coming to support the Bolsheviks in 1917, though they were by no  
means as slow as state enterprises. It has been suggested that young  
workers were important in leading the wartime strike movement,

particularly those of urban origin.91 While the activism of young  
workers in 1917 is not in doubt, an analysis of strike-prone factories  
during the war does not suggest that the presence of young workers  
was a factor of paramount significance. It is true that the two most  
strike-prone state enterprises, the Baltic and Putilov shipyards (both  
in the second division), had high proportions of young workers, as did  
the Metal works. Other factories in the second ‘division’, however,  
such as Renault, Rozenkrantz, Langenzippen, Wagon-Construction  
and Siemens-Schuckert, had very few. The last-named factory is of  
particular interest in this regard, since its sister factory, the Siemens-  
Halske works, had a much higher percentage of young workers (20%  
compared to 7%) but a low level of strike activity during the war. A  
second group within the second ‘division’ consisted of cotton-  
spinning and weaving mills, such as Sampsionevskaya, Leontiev,  
Nevka, Okhta and Pal'. These factories employed mainly women, but  
as they did not expand during the war, the women would have been  
workers with industrial experience. The textile strikes were in pursuit  
of economic demands, and there is no evidence of a Bolshevik  
connection.

The third ‘division’ was more varied, consisting mainly of metal  
works, some textile mills and a few wood or leather factories. State  
enterprises, such as the Nevskii shipbuilding works, the Obukhov  
works, Franco-Russian works and Arsenal, fell into this category.  
Military discipline discouraged strike action in state factories, as did  
the ‘defencist’ Mensheviks and SRs, who were strong in this sector. If  
one compares the state factories which did participate in the strike  
movement with vast state munitions works, such as the Pipe or  
Cartridge works, which did not, then it is clear that in the latter, the  
minority of ‘cadre’ workers was engulfed in a sea of workers new to  
industry, and was thus unable to mobilise them into organised  
activity. Moreover the ‘cadres’ in these vast state enterprises tended  
to be stalwarts of the Workers’ Group of the War Industries  
Committee, and thus ill-disposed to take strike action during  
wartime. This rather cursory analysis of strike-prone factories  
suggests that factories were most likely to go on strike, firstly, if there  
was an organised Bolshevik cell in the enterprise and, secondly, if  
there was a core of proletarianised men or women with some  
experience of strikes, sufficiently numerous and cohesive to organise  
new workers. We shall see that in 1917 new workers were quite  
capable of being militant, without any help from ‘cadre’ workers, but  
during the war this does not seem to have been the case.

3

The February Revolution: a new  
dispensation in the factories

DEMOCRATISING THE FACTORY ORDER

On 23 February 1917 thousands of housewives and factory women,  
angry at the bread shortage, surged onto the streets, ignoring pleas  
from labour leaders to stay calm. By the next day, 200,000 workers in  
Petrograd were on strike. By 25 February, huge armies of demonstra-  
tors were clashing with troops, and a revolution had commenced. On  
27 February, the critical point was reached, when whole regiments of  
soldiers began to desert to the insurgents. The same day, the worthy  
members of the Duma refused to obey an order from the Tsar to  
disperse, and instead set up a Provisional Government. Meanwhile  
the Petrograd Soviet of workers’ and soldiers’ deputies came into  
existence, thereby creating an extraordinary situation of ‘dual  
power’. By 3 March it was all over: the Tsar had abdicated and  
Russia was free.1

The toppling of the Romanov dynasty inspired workers with  
euphoria. They returned to their factories determined that the ancien  
regime would be swept aside in the workplaces, just as it had been  
swept aside in society at large. They resolved to create, in the place of  
the old ‘absolutist’ order, a new ‘constitutional’ order within the  
enterprises. They set to work at once by tearing up the old contracts of  
hire, the old rule books, and the vicious blacklists. Just as the agents of  
the autocracy had been driven from the police stations and govern-  
ment offices, so the workers set about expelling those who had been  
most identified with the repressive administration of the factories.  
Throughout the factories of Petrograd workers clamoured for the  
removal of all members of the management hierarchy who had made  
their lives miserable under the ancien regime, who had behaved

tyrannically, who had abused their authority, who had taken bribes  
or acted as police informers.2 Sometimes administrators were re-  
moved peacefully, sometimes by force. At the Putilov works, the  
director and his aide were killed by workers and their bodies were  
flung in the Obvodnyi canal; some forty members of management  
were expelled during the first three ‘days of freedom’.3 In the  
engine-assembly shop, Puzanov, quondam chief of the factory’s Black  
Hundreds, was tossed in a wheelbarrow, red lead was poured over his  
head, and he was ignominiously carted out of the factory and dumped  
in the street. In the brickyard of the same plant, A.V. Spasskii, the  
foreman, was deprived of his duties by workers for:

1. rude treatment of workers,
2. forced overtime, as a result of which such incidents occurred as when the  
   worker, S. Skinder, having worked overtime, collapsed at midnight of  
   exhaustion and had to be taken to hospital ...4

At the Baltic shipyard at least sixty members of the administration  
were demoted, transferred or carted out of the factory in  
wheelbarrows.5 At the Cartridge works up to 80% of technical staff  
were expelled and the factory committee refused them leave to appeal  
to a conciliation chamber.6 At the Admiralty, New Admiralty and  
Galernyi Island shipyards forty-nine technical employees were  
expelled by general meetings of the workers. Management insisted  
that each employee had the right to appeal to a conciliation chamber,  
but the chamber was forced to accept the fait accompli.1 At the Pipe  
works the director and fourteen senior managers were temporarily  
relieved of their duties by the factory soviet.8

The purge extended to private factories. At the Thornton textile  
mill women workers chased thirty factory police from the premises.9  
At the Baranovskii engineering works twenty-five members of the  
administration were fired by the workers, eighteen of them being  
carted from the factory for having acted like ‘hangmen’ in the past.10  
After long disputes, twelve members of management at the Skor-  
okhod shoe factory and sixteen at the Tentelevskii chemical works  
were dismissed at the insistence of the respective workforces.11 The  
reasons why workers compelled the removal of administration were  
multifarious. At the Triangle works on 5 March, a general meeting of  
shop stewards agreed that ‘all foremen who are disorganising  
production by hiding tools, etc. must not be allowed into work. We  
ask comrades to inform the soviet of workers’ deputies of this.’12

At the Nevskii shipyard a list was drawn up of twenty-five foremen

and their assistants who had abused their authority in the past. The  
Menshevik-dominated factory committee forbade the expulsion of  
these people until their cases had been examined by a conciliation  
chamber. In only one shop - the boiler room - did the workers refuse  
to accept the factory committee decision. On 30 March the factory  
committee allowed those threatened with dismissal to return to the  
factory pending appeal. One case which came before the conciliation  
chamber concerned the manager of the metallurgical section, who  
had come to the Nevskii works in 1908 as a foreman. He had openly  
boasted that he would ‘sweep out of the workshop all the sedition  
remaining from 1905’, he had collected information on the politics of  
the workers, established a network of informers and forced the  
workers to work unpaid overtime. The conciliation committee found  
that there was no case to answer against him, but so great was the  
hatred felt by the workers towards him that the chamber was  
powerless to make them take the foreman back.13 The inability of  
conciliation chambers to settle cases of expulsion by peaceful  
arbitration was a general phenomenon. At the Kersten knitwear  
factory the conciliation committee recommended the reinstatement of  
all but one of the administrators expelled by the workers. On 16  
March, for example, it announced:

We are convinced that V.V. Zhuchaevich is a nervous irascible character  
who cannot restrain himself in the way that moral tact dictates. However we  
consider that the charges made against him of contemptuous cruelty, of  
humiliating workers and, in particular, of giving promotion only to his fellow  
Poles, are totally without foundation.

The chamber found in relation to another worker that ‘the charge of  
rude, shameless abuse of women workers is not supported by the  
testimony of witnesses and therefore we consider it unproven’.14 In  
neither of these cases was the committee able to overcome the  
opposition of workers and secure the reinstatement of the personnel.

Carting administrators out of the factory in a wheelbarrow was a  
well-established form of protest in the Russian labour movement.  
Prior to 1917 the working class had had precious few institutional  
means at its disposal with which to defend its interests. In the absence  
of formal means of defensive organisation, workers devised other,  
informal, ways of defending themselves. One of these was to dump a  
particularly hated administrator in a wheelbarrow and cart him out  
of the factory. To contemporary leaders of the organised labour  
movement this form of action was seen as little more than an

expression of blind rage, but it had a deeper symbolism. ‘Carting out’  
was a symbolic affirmation by workers of their dignity as human  
beings and a ritual humiliation of those who had deprived them of this  
dignity in their day-to-day working lives. Ironically, it was the  
employers’ newspaper, Torgovo-Promyshlennaya Gazeta, which came  
closest to recognising this symbolic dimension when it commented  
that ‘carting out’ had the same significance in the factory as did  
tearing off an army-officer’s badges of rank.15

The expulsion of the old administration was but the negative side of  
democratising factory life. The positive, and far more important side  
consisted in creating factory committees to represent the interests of  
the workforce. Factory committees sprang up mushroom-like in the  
vertiginous days of the revolution. The apparent ‘spontaneity’ with  
which they appeared is something of an optical illusion, for there was  
a strong tradition within the Russian working class of electing  
stewards (starosty) to represent workers before management. This  
tradition had its origins in the countryside, where villagers were  
accustomed to elect a headman to represent them. In the factories, the  
workers elected starosty not only to represent them in conflicts with the  
management but to carry out such apparently trivial activities as  
collecting money to buy oil for the icon lamps in each workshop.16 In  
1903, in a vain attempt to palliate working-class anger at its refusal to  
countenance formal trade-union organisation, the government  
sought to institutionalise the starosty, as a rudimentary form of labour  
representation. The 1903 law permitted workers to propose candi-  
dates for the job of starosta, from whom management would then make  
a final choice. The powers of the starosta were strictly circumscribed,  
for he could not seek to modify the contract of hire and he enjoyed no  
legal protection.17 Workers disliked the law, for starosty were rarely  
able to give decisive leadership in working-class struggles since they  
were too vulnerable to victimisation by employers and by the state.  
The factory-owners of St Petersburg also disliked the law, since they  
saw in it a dangerous precedent.18

It was the 1905 Revolution which signalled the immense possibili-  
ties of shopfloor organisation. As the general strike swept across the  
country, starosty and strike committees developed dramatically as  
organs of working-class self-activity and self-expression. In the  
autumn, ‘factory commissions’ proliferated, which adumbrated the  
factory committees of twelve years later. These commissions began to  
take charge of all matters affecting the internal life of the factory,

drawing up collective wage agreements and overseeing the hiring and  
firing of workers. In the print-trade an astonishing development took  
place in the spring of 1906, when ‘autonomous commissions’ were  
created. Although printshop owners sat on these commissions, they  
comprised a majority of workers elected by the entire workforce, and  
were responsible for drawing up the internal rules of the printshop,  
seeing to their implementation and for the hiring and firing of  
workers.19 After 1907, however, few autonomous commissions,  
factory commissions or starosty survived. During the ‘Years of  
Reaction’, workers found it almost impossible to maintain repre-  
sentative institutions.

The invigorating experience of 1905 was not forgotten by worker  
militants. From time to time after 1910 individual factories tried to  
revive the starosty. At the Phoenix engineering and Sestroretsk arms  
works, starosty existed intermittently right down to 1917.20 During the  
war, the elected members of the medical funds (bol'nichnye kassy) and  
the worker members of the War Industries Committees functioned, to  
some extent, as workers’ representatives. Attempts by the latter to  
revive the starosty came to grief, although they did re-emerge in a  
handful of factories in 1916 (the Aivaz, Erikson and Pipe works).  
Nevertheless class-conscious workers kept alive the memory of  
electing shopfloor delegates to represent their interests during the  
grim years between the two revolutions. Once the police apparatus of  
tsarism had been smashed, they set about building on the starosta  
tradition.

The new factory committees were the offspring of older elective  
institutions. In many enterprises the committees were initially called  
‘sovety starost’, or ‘stewards’ committees’. In some factories, like the  
Pipe works, the Siemens-Halske or New Admiralty works, a stewards’  
committee and a factory committee existed side by side. At the New  
Admiralty works, the committee had the job of overseeing factory  
management, whereas stewards represented the workers in indi-  
vidual shops and settled any conflicts which arose.21 At the Triangle  
rubber works, a ‘soviet of workers’ deputies’ (i.e. factory committee),  
dominated by the SRs, existed in fierce rivalry with a stewards’  
committee, whose executive was led by Bolsheviks.22 In general,  
factory committees were elected by the whole workforce and had  
general responsibilities of ‘control’ (supervision and inspection)  
throughout the enterprise; the stewards’ committees consisted of  
representatives of each workshop and dealt with wages and

workshop-conditions. In many enterprises, stewards’ committees  
changed their name to factory committees in the course of the spring.

Organisations similar to the Russian factory committee arose in  
many countries during the First World War. In the British engineer-  
ing industry, particularly on Clydeside and in Sheffield, a powerful  
shop-stewards’ movement emerged to combat ‘dilution’ and the  
militarisation of industry engendered by the war.23 In Germany, the  
revolutionary shop stewards (Obleute) in the metalworking industries  
of Berlin, Hamburg, Leipzig, Halle and elsewhere, led struggles  
against the class-collaborationist policies of the leaders of the Free  
Unions, which spilled over into anti-war demonstrations, support for  
the Independent Social Democrats (USPD) and, finally, into the  
workers’ and soldiers’ councils (Rate). During the German Revolu-  
tion of 1918—19 it was the young semi-skilled workers in the large  
metal-works of the Ruhr and Halle who were most active, although  
skilled craftsmen in the iron and steel industries of older industrial  
areas, such as Remscheid and Solingen, played a prominent role.24 In  
Italy ‘internal commissions’ (commissioni interne) in the metal and  
engineering industries of Milan and Turin evolved from organs of  
arbitration into defenders of shopfloor autonomy against the reform-  
ist bureaucracy of the metalworkers’ federation (FIOM) and, finally,  
into the mighty workers’ councils which led the factory occupations of  
the ‘Biennio Rosso’ of 1919-20.25

These movements had much in common. They were shopfloor  
movements, based in the metalworking and armaments industries,  
led by skilled workers who were opposing the effects of war-  
mobilisation on their industries. In crucial respects, however, the  
movements were very different from one another. ‘Dilution’ was less  
of an issue in Russia than in Britain, and so it cannot be considered a  
key cause of the emergence of the factory committees. In Germany  
and Italy much of the momentum behind the council movement came  
initially from the struggle by rank-and-file workers against the  
sclerotic trade-union bureaucracy, but in Russia this clearly was not a  
factor, since trade unions were virtually illegal, and since there had  
never existed within tsarist society the economic and political space  
for a successful reformist strategy to be pursued by an oligarchical  
trade union leadership.

In the aftermath of the February Revolution it was in the state  
sector of Petrograd industry that factory committees most firmly  
established themselves. Here, in the first weeks of March, the

committees in effect took over the management of the state enter-  
prises, achieving a degree of power which made factory committees in  
the private sector look weak by comparison. Given the fact that state  
enterprises had not been in the van of labour struggles before  
February 1917 why did they suddenly become such an important  
base of the factory committees?

It has been suggested that the committees developed out of the  
traditions of job-control exercised by skilled craftsmen.26 There is  
much truth in this, for the committees were set up by skilled workers  
who understood how production worked, who were literate and who  
were used to organising themselves. On the eve of the war, however,  
job-control was not as highly developed in Russia as, for example, in  
Britain, partly because modem technology had dispensed with the  
skills of the traditional craftsman, and partly because in the West  
job-control was premissed on forms of craft organisation which were  
illegal in Russia. Nevertheless the process of rationalisation and  
de-skilling which was going on in Petrograd industry, particularly in  
the state sector, had caused skilled workers to feel extremely insecure,  
and the February Revolution allowed them to combat that insecurity  
by forming new organisations.

There was also an important political motive for the establishment  
of the factory committees. Paradoxically, the activities of the  
committees were boldest precisely in those enterprises where Bolshe-  
vik agitation and strike-militancy had been least in evidence during  
the war. The state enterprises were strongholds of defencism, and it  
was, in the main, defencist workers who spearheaded the creation of  
factory committees. The crucial reason why factory committees took  
over the running of state enterprises was to ensure that production for  
the war effort was not jeopardised. Nevertheless it would be wrong to  
conclude that the political motive of those who created the com-  
mittees was simply a conservative, pro-war one. They were also  
motivated by revolutionary ambitions, albeit of a democratic kind.  
For although skilled workers in the state enterprises had been among  
the better-off sections of the working class during the war, they had  
had grievances aplenty. They had suffered greatly as a result of the  
intensification of labour, brought about by the mobilisation of the war  
industries, and they had also been subject to a military discipline  
which their comrades in the private sector had been spared. They  
thus had experienced in a very direct fashion the repressive nature of  
the tsarist state, and when the latter was overturned in February,

militants in the state sector saw this as a signal for a root-and-branch  
overhaul of factory administration. Fearing precisely such an over-  
haul, many of the naval and army officers who ran the state  
enterprises fled during the revolution, and so on their return to work,  
militants faced not only the task of creating a radically new structure  
of administration, but also the urgent task of maintaining production  
for the Front.

In the absence of management, the factory committees took  
responsibility for running the state enterprises by setting up ‘execu-  
tive committees’, comprising workers’ representatives, engineers,  
technicians and, in some cases, members of the old administration. At  
the Cartridge works, the executive appointed Captain V.D. Meshch-  
erinov temporary director, and set up two commissions: one consist-  
ing largely of technical staff, to deal with urgent practical business;  
the other consisting of workers to deal with the formation of  
a new administrative structure and the strengthening of internal  
order.27 At the Sestroretsk arms works the stewards’ committee  
appointed a new director and technical director, and set up a  
revolutionary committee to oversee production.28 At the Pipe works a  
committee, consisting of five members of the factory soviet and four  
members of the former administration, took charge of production,  
wages and the security of the factory.29 At the Okhta explosives works  
the committee simply declared itself the new administration. Later,  
reporting on the early weeks of its activity, the committee noted that:  
‘because of the novelty of things, the committee got lost in its business  
for a time. The immediate tasks of the committee were unclear, so it  
took on not only the task of controlling the factory administration, but  
the duties of the latter.’30 Thus, for a few weeks in March 1917 the  
factory committees found themselves virtually in charge of state  
enterprises. This situation was not to last, but the experience was  
crucial in giving birth to the idea of‘workers’ control of production’.31

On 13 March factories run by the Artillery Administration met to  
discuss what demands they should put on the Administration. They  
resolved to demand an eight-hour day, a minimum wage, and  
payment for the days they had spent toppling the Romanov regime.32  
This proved to be the first of a series of meetings of factory committee  
representatives and officials of the Artillery Administration. An  
Organisation Bureau, consisting of delegates from different enter-  
prises, was set up to coordinate the work of the factory committees in  
the Artillery sector. Its members were moderate Bolsheviks and

radical SRs, in the main.33 At about the same time, the factories run  
by the Naval Ministry also began to organise. On 18 March factory  
committee representatives met to discuss the condition of workers in  
naval enterprises and to demand the democratic reorganisation of the  
council responsible for the industry.34 Regular meetings began to take  
place, to which the directors of the naval enterprises came after 26  
April. The workers’ leaders at these meetings were overwhelmingly  
defencist in their politics.

At the beginning of April, 28 delegates from the naval enterprises  
met to discuss the role of the factory committees. They were  
addressed by a member of the Petrograd Soviet Executive Com-  
mittee, G.E. Breido, a Menshevik and former member of the  
Workers’ Group of the War Industries Committee. He denounced the  
attempts of some factory committees to run the naval enterprises by  
themselves, arguing that the committees should confine themselves to  
‘control’ (i.e. supervision) of the activities of management.35 A heated  
discussion ensued concerning the boundaries of such ‘control’. At the  
Obukhov works, the committee reserved to itself the right to make  
enquiries of management and to inspect accounts. At the Izhora  
works, the workers had elected a new administration, and the  
committee had set up a commission to improve the technical side of  
production. ‘Control’ had gone furthest at the Baltic works, where the  
administration had been elected by the workers, and where the  
committee participated in management to the extent of keeping the  
financial accounts. Breido severely censured the Baltic arrangement,  
expressing a preference for the minimalist programme of the  
Obukhov works.36

On 15 April representatives from factories under the Artillery  
Administration and Naval Ministry met together to discuss further  
the role of the factory committees. Both sectors had already discussed  
this matter, and several important problems had emerged. The first of  
these concerned the desirability of ‘self-management’, i.e. of the  
factory committees actually running the state enterprises lock, stock  
and barrel, as they were doing at the Gun works, Okhta explosives,  
the Cartridge and the Baltic works. At the first meeting of Artillery  
Administration representatives in March, the delegate from the  
Cartridge works had urged ‘self-management by workers on the  
broadest possible scale’.37 The majority of delegates at the confer-  
ence, however, whilst cursing the ‘ancient fetters which have bound  
the workers in state enterprises so tightly to the authorities by means

of military discipline’, rejected the idea of the committees usurping  
the place of the official administration. In their resolution, the  
delegates declared: ‘Until such time as full socialisation of the  
national economy, both state and private, shall occur, workers shall  
not take responsibility for the technical and administrative-economic  
organisation of production, and shall refuse to take part in the  
organisation of production.’38 The first meeting of representatives of  
Artillery Administration enterprises had thus repudiated ‘self-  
management’, and declared for an official administration to be  
responsible for production, complemented by a factory committee to  
be responsible for all other aspects of the internal order (vnutrennyi  
rasporyadok) of the enterprise.

The joint conference of 15 April confirmed that the factory  
committees should take no responsibility for production. It proceeded  
to try to define the responsibilities of the factory committees more  
closely, by drawing up a constitution for the committees. This called  
for ‘collegial management’ in the enterprise, which it defined as  
meaning that: ‘committees of workers’ representatives ... shall direct  
and manage the whole life of the factory’.39 Yet how the committees  
were to exercise ‘directing and managing’ functions, and still abstain  
from actual management, was unclear. The draft constitution  
assigned total responsibility for matters of‘internal order’, such as the  
regulation of wages, hours and hiring and firing, to the committees,  
and complete responsibility for administrative, economic and tech-  
nical matters to the official administration. This apparently simple  
division of labour was complicated, however, by the fact that the  
committees were to have powers of ‘control’ over the  
administration.40 The nature of this ‘control’ was to be ‘information-  
al’ (osvedomitel'nyi), rather than ‘responsible’ (otvetstvennyi), and en-  
tailed the committees having representatives on all administrative  
organs for purposes of information, and access to all official docu-  
ments and accounts, without thereby assuming any responsibility for  
production. This constitution appears to have been a compromise  
designed to satisfy both the radical delegates who, if they could not  
have ‘self-management’, wanted ‘responsible’ control, and those  
moderate elements who would have preferred to drop the idea of  
‘control’ altogether. In the ensuing weeks, particularly after the  
enactment of a law on factory committees on 23 April, the moderate  
workers’ leadership of the naval factories largely succeeded in  
clipping the wings of the committees, confining their activities to

those of a purely ‘trade-union’ type, and jettisoning any notion of  
‘control’.41

A further problem concerned the extent to which the principle of  
election should apply within state enterprises. In almost all factories,  
workers had insisted in the wake of the February Revolution on  
electing their foremen and other members of the shop administration.  
In a few factories, such as the Baltic and Izhora works, all levels of  
administration were elected by the workforce in early March,  
reflecting strong rank-and-file feeling that a completely elected  
administration was necessary if workplace democracy were to be  
meaningful.42 The constitution ratified by the joint conference on 15  
April carefully skirted this issue, but, in effect, came out against a  
fully-elected administration. It spoke of directors, shop-directors and  
engineers being ‘accepted with the agreement of the factory commit-  
tee’, and of the workers’ right to ‘object’ (otvoi) to those who could not  
guarantee normal relations with the workers.43 It was this right to  
‘object’, rather than to elect, which became rooted in factory-  
committee practice.

In the course of March, the councils running the Artillery  
Department and Naval Ministry were democratised. They proceeded  
to appoint new administrations to all state enterprises, and thereupon  
the factory committees ceased to play a direct role in management. In  
most naval enterprises, the factory committees henceforth exercised  
only minimal control over the administration, though more ambi-  
tious control was practised at the Baltic and New Admiralty works. In  
Artillery Department enterprises workers’ control was more system-  
atic, though it varied in scope from modest (Putilov) to far-reaching  
(Military-Horseshoe and Arsenal works). Nevertheless, throughout  
the state sector, a degree of workers’ control continued to exist which  
was not matched by factory committees in the private sector until the  
summer and autumn of 1917.

In the private sector, the factory committees functioned essentially  
as ‘trade-union’ organisations in the spring of 1917. It was several  
months before proper trade unions began to function, and the  
committees were at the forefront of the battles to achieve an  
eight-hour day and to improve wages. Before examining these  
struggles, however, it is worth noting one area in which the factory  
committees transcended the ‘normal’ sphere of trade-union activity  
from the first. This was in the realm of ‘control’ of hiring and firing  
workers.

After the February Revolution, one of the first demands posed by  
workers was to ‘control’ the hiring and firing of workers. At the  
Phoenix engineering works the shop stewards’ committee insisted  
that no worker be hired without the knowledge of the committee ‘in  
view of the fact that undesirable elements may get in, such as looters,  
former servants of the old regime or people convicted of theft and  
other unworthy deeds’.44 At the Okhta explosives works the commit-  
tee established control of hiring and firing ‘so that there’ll be no  
patronage and people will be recruited according to a worked-out  
plan, and not fired at the whim of an individual’45 At the Tentelevskii  
chemical works the committee proposed to management that ‘as a  
general rule, no worker may be hired, dismissed or transferred  
from one job to another without preliminary consultation with the  
factory committee’.46 At the Putilov works, the Baltic, the Admiralty  
works and elsewhere, factory committees managed to reinstate  
workers, fired from their jobs during the war for strike and antiwar  
activity.47

It is probable that the motive behind these demands was as much a  
concern with job-security as a concern with limiting management  
power, but it was regarded by employers as an intolerable challenge  
to their right to manage. To them, the demand to control hiring and  
firing represented the wedge which would crack the unitary authority  
of the employer in the enterprise and open the way to a terrifying form  
of ‘dual power’. They resisted it ferociously, and it is thus not  
accidental that the first of the Minister of Labour’s circulars designed  
to curb the power of the factory committees, issued on 23 August,  
should have aimed to stop committees from interfering in hiring  
policy (see Chapter 7).

THE EIGHT-HOUR DAY

Having failed to achieve an eight-hour day in 1905, the workers  
returned to the factories in the second week of March determined that  
this time things would be different. The demand for the immediate  
introduction of an eight-hour working day was top of the agenda for  
workers at the Putilov works, the Metal works, Cable works, New  
Lessner, Skorokhod and many other factories. Most of these factories  
implemented the eight-hour day immediately, often without the  
formal agreement of the employers. The workers argued that the

eight-hour day was necessary not merely to diminish their exploita-  
tion, but also to create time for trade-union organisation, education  
and involvement in public affairs.48 Many workers expressed doubts  
lest a reduction in the working day adversely affect production for the  
war effort. At the Cartridge works the workers agreed: ‘to recognise  
the eight-hour day as basic ... but in view of the imminent danger, to  
try by all means to support our brothers at the Front and to work more  
than eight hours without question — up to twelve hours or more — if  
necessary’.49 At the Nevskii shipbuilding works the factory ‘soviet of  
workers deputies’, which comprised two Mensheviks, two Bolsheviks  
and one SR, met with the director on 6 March to discuss the  
eight-hour day. The director argued that it was impossible to  
introduce an eight-hour day in the foundries and engineering shops  
for technical reasons, and that it was practicable only for mechanised  
shell production. The soviet agreed that ‘any disruption of the  
existing technical system at the factory will involve a decrease in  
productivity and so we must begin work at the normal time, but take  
the eight-hour day as basic and consider any hours worked over that  
to be overtime’.50 Although the Menshevik-dominated factory com-  
mittee took exception to the ‘tactlessness’ of the factory soviet in  
deciding this question without consulting them, they affirmed its  
correctness.51 Most factories took a similar position at this time: they  
introduced an eight-hour day, but were prepared to work overtime in  
support of the war effort.

Employers were reluctant to agree to the eight-hour day, and in  
some areas put up a good deal of resistance to it. In Petrograd,  
however, most were in a more conciliatory frame of mind, although it  
was the pressure of the workers which pushed them into making this  
concession so speedily. The Menshevik and SR leaders of the Soviet  
believed that the political gains of the revolution should be consoli-  
dated before economic demands were put forward, but they were  
ignored by the workers. As soon as factory committees began to  
implement the eight-hour day unilaterally, the Society of Factory and  
Works Owners (SFWO) entered into negotiations with the Soviet  
regarding a reduction in working hours. On 10 March the two sides  
agreed to the eight-hour day, the recognition of factory committees  
and the establishment of conciliation chambers in the factories.52 On  
14 March the SFWO sent a circular to its members calling on them to  
recognise the eight-hour day as an ‘historically necessary measure’,  
‘capable of ensuring the future spiritual development of the working

class, by providing time for self-education and trade-union organisa-  
tion, and of establishing correct lawful relations between labour and  
capital’.53

The introduction of the eight-hour day led to a diminution of the  
average working day in the Petrograd area from 10.2 hours to 8.4  
hours.54 In the metal industry it decreased from 10.4 hours to 8.6  
hours; in chemicals from 9.6 hours to 9.1 hours; in textiles from 9.5  
hours to 8 hours; in the paper industry from 11.6 to 9.8 hours; in  
woodworking from 9.8 to 8.2 hours and in the food industry from 10.2  
to 8.6 hours.55 In non-factory industries, particularly in shops and  
small workplaces, the standard working day continued to be well in  
excess of nine or ten hours, owing to the poor organisation of the  
employees and to the fact that an eight-hour day was not legally  
binding on employers.56 Overtime working continued to be wide-  
spread after February. In almost all factories, however, labour  
organisations insisted on their right to control the operation of  
overtime working. At the 1886 Electric Light Company the factory  
committee agreed to overtime only in case of accidents, urgent repair  
work or the absence of key personnel.57 Elsewhere factory committees  
pressured management to take on extra workers instead of extending  
overtime working. From the first, there were a few factories which  
refused to work overtime on principle, regardless of the war. At the  
Nevskaya footwear factory the factory agreed at its very first meeting  
to abolish overtime ‘for ever’.58 At the Promet armaments factory the  
Menshevik-dominated factory committee voted 20 against 12 in  
favour of continuing overtime, but a general meeting of 3,000 workers  
overwhelmingly overrode its decision.59 Women workers, in particu-  
lar, were adamant that an eight-hour day meant precisely that. A  
complete ban on overtime was called for by women in Moscow  
district of the capital on 7 March and by laundrywomen on 19  
March.60 At the Vyborg spinning mill the average number of hours  
worked by male workers fell from 11.4 hours in January 1917 to 8.7  
hours in July - including one hour’s overtime. The hours worked by  
women workers, however, fell from 10 hours to 7.8 hours, with almost  
no overtime.61 Women’s refusal to work overtime sprang from the fact  
that domestic labour consumed so large a proportion of the time not  
spent at the factory.

As the first signs of economic crisis appeared later in the year, the  
labour leaders took up the fight against overtime. At the Third  
Conference of Trade Unions in June, the Bolshevik leader of the

metalworkers’ union, V. Schmidt, urged: ‘At the present time, the  
eight-hour day is only a norm of payment and has not actually been  
put into practice. Overtime is done everywhere, but it must be  
allowed only in exceptional circumstances with the agreement of  
the unions.’62 The woodturners’ union tried to limit the amount  
of overtime, but not always without opposition from its low-  
paid members.63 The same was true of the printers’ union which  
took a firm stand against overtime working because of the worrying  
level of unemployment in the print-trade.64 This policy had  
considerable success later in the year as closures and redundancies  
increased. By October there was very little overtime working in  
Petrograd.

WAGE STRUGGLES

In addition to a significant reduction in working hours, workers  
gained large wage increases as a consequence of the February  
Revolution. They returned to the factories in March determined that  
the overthrow of tsarism should signal a dramatic change in their  
working lives. A deputy from the Narva district told the Petrograd  
Soviet on 5 March: ‘Surely political freedoms are meant to help  
workers live like human beings. They should guarantee the minimum  
conditions of human existence - the eight-hour day and the minimum  
wage. Freedoms are useless if the old conditions persist.’65 He was  
undoubtedly expressing a general opinion, for everywhere workers  
began to raise demands for large wage-rises, payment for the days  
spent toppling the Romanov dynasty, and a minimum wage.  
Although the demands raised by different factories tended to be the  
same, the struggle to achieve them was conducted on an extremely  
localised basis. In the absence of trade unions, it was the factory  
committees which led the wages battles, but in some factories there  
was very little organisation - merely a free-for-all, in which workers  
unused to traditions of organised wage negotiation sought to improve  
their wages by the only method they knew - direct action. The result  
was considerable variation between factories in the level of achieve-  
ment of the struggles.

At the Skorokhod shoe factory, which employed 1,508 men, 2,687  
women and 705 young people, workers engaged in a militant, but  
relatively organised, battle for better wages. On 9 March the factory  
committee demanded: management recognition of the committee; an

eight-hour working day; a dinner break of one-and-a-half hours; a  
minimum daily wage of 5 rubles for men, 2 r.50 k. for women and  
2 r. for youths; the continuation of a war bonus introduced in  
1915; the abolition of payment for one’s own materials; double  
pay for overtime; a joint commission to examine wage-rates; pay-  
ment for the February Days; payment for deputies to the Soviet;  
the dismissal of undesirable elements and control of hiring and  
firing. Management refused to countenance a 47-hour week, but  
agreed to 48 hours; it resisted with particular stubbornness the  
demands concerning minimum wages, at first agreeing only to a  
20% increase; it agreed to overtime only at time-and-a-half; it  
refused to abolish fines and insisted on the retention of the system  
whereby workers bought their own ancillary materials; it agreed  
only to the factory committee’s right to be informed of hiring and  
firing and to its right to request the removal of an administrator.  
Management refused to pay members of elected organisations but  
offered 300,000 rubles towards the cost of a canteen.66 Almost  
immediately, it was forced to back down on hours, fines and  
payment of elected representatives, once it became clear what was  
happening in other factories. The wage demands were referred to  
a conciliation chamber, which recommended a 40% increase in  
the minimum wage. The director, A.K. Gartvig, agreed to this,  
and promised 10,000 r. to the renascent leatherworkers’ union.  
The workers’ representatives in the conciliation chamber expressed  
satisfaction with his magnanimity, but they had not reckoned  
with the workers on the shopfloor. On 20 March the latter stop-  
ped work and a crowd began to abuse the director. After some  
ugly negotiations, during which the workers complained that the  
director ‘behaved provocatively and used unprintable language’,67  
Gartvig made some amazing concessions, including a minimum  
wage of ten rubles for men and the abolition of piece-rates.68 This  
did not prevent the workers from forcing Gartvig to resign in  
May, ordering him to clean his apartment before he left!69

In the textile industry the revolution gave vent to a rash of  
wage demands, some of which were pursued through explosive,  
confrontations with management, others through patient, even  
resigned, negotiation. At the two Nevskaya spinning mills women  
comprised 81% and 90%, respectively, of the two workforces. No  
factory committee existed at either mill until the end of March, and  
women drew up extremely moderate lists of‘requests’ which they put

to management on a shop-by-shop basis. The most ambitious  
demands were those drawn up by women in the scutching-room at the  
Koenig mill, who requested of the English director, Harvey, that they  
be not asked to sweep the floor after they had finished work (refused);  
that machines be stopped for an hour each day for cleaning and oiling  
(refused); that new workers be put on the same rate as older ones  
(‘What will the older women say?’); that women be paid six weeks’  
maternity leave (referred to medical fund); that they receive equal  
pay with men on the same job (no reply); that they be entitled to  
retirement and injury pensions (no reply).70 The plaintive tone of the  
Koenig women’s entreaty was not typical of the majority of workers,  
nor was the obtuse intransigence of the English management typical  
of employers as a whole.

The month of March saw a plethora of small-scale, short,  
sometimes sectional struggles for higher wages. The most effective  
were those which were organised by factory committees, but ‘spon-  
taneous’ outbursts of direct action were by no means ineffective in this  
period. Most employers were prepared to make far-reaching conces-  
sions under pressure, so very few disputes developed into strikes  
proper. At the Osipov leather works a strike broke out on 8 March,  
and at the Cable works a strike took place from 16-21 March, a  
comparatively long time by the standards of this period — but such  
strikes were exceptional.71 The result was considerable variation in  
the level of wages between different factories, industries and occupa-  
tional categories. This makes it difficult to generalise about the size of  
the wage rises achieved in the spring of 1917.

During the course of March, monthly earnings rose by between  
35% and 50%, and continued to rise over the next two months.72 In  
the absence of global data, one can only estimate that by July monthly  
earnings were double or treble their January level (see Table 11).73  
Average hourly earnings rose much more than this, in view of the  
change from a ten to an eight-hour day and the reduction in overtime.  
The latter changes meant that by July the unit-costs of employers  
were perhaps as much as four to five times the level of the previous  
year.74 Yet one should not assume that all workers benefited at their  
employers’ expense. In order to keep abreast of inflation, workers had  
to at least double their monthly earnings, and by no means all of them  
managed to do so.

How did the wage-rises of spring 1917 affect the relative positions of  
skilled and unskilled and male and female workers? Table 11 suggests

Sample of metalworkers Skorokhod shoe factory Nevka woollen mill

Monthly % males aged

earnings in % of men % of women 16-18 % of males % of females % of males % of females

rubles Jan. June Jan. June Jan. June Jan. June Jan. June Jan. June Jan. June

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| under 60 rubles | - | - | - | - | 31-7 | 1.6 | 9 | 1.1 | 54-2 | o\*5 | - | - | 83.6 | - |
| 60-89 | 8.8 | 0.7 | 54-2 | 11-9 | 28.0 | 12-5 | 17-7 | \*•5 | 36.5 | i-7 | 62.4 | - | 16.3 | - |
| 90-119 | 10.4 | 3-9 | 37-4 | 3i-9 | 25.6 | 25.0 | 32.6 |  | 7-2 | 7-4 | 18.0 | - | - | - |
| 120—149 | I7-1 | 7-i | 6-9 | 35-6 | 8.5 | 14.1 | 26.8 | 4.6 | 1.0 | 10.3 | 8.8 | - | - | 81.8 |
| i50-i79 | >5-2 | 6.7 | 0.8 | II.I | 6.1 | 6-3 | 9-i | 3-7 | 0.6 | 76.7 | 7-3 | - | - | 17.6 |
| 180-209 | 12.6 | 9-i | 0.8 | 7\*4 | - | 20.3 | 2.8 | 5-5 | 0.1 | 3-o | 2.9 | 49\*o | - | o-5 |
| 210-239 | 8-5 | 10.8 | - | 2.2 | - | 12.5 | 1.0 | 14.8 | 0.04 | o-3 | - | 294 | - | - |
| 240-269 | 7.8 | 12.4 | - | - | - | 4-7 | 0.5 | 51.0 | - | 0.1 | 0.4 | 14.4 | - | - |
| 270-299 | 7.0 | 11-5 | - | - | - | 1.6 | 0.06 | 9-5 | - | 0.04 | - | 3\*7 | - | - |
| 300-329 | 4-3 | 11.4 | - | - | - | 1.6 | - | 2-7 | - | 0.08 | - | 1.4 | - | - |
| 330-359 | 2-5 | 9-5 | - | - | - | — | - | 1.2 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 360-389 | 2-3 | 5-o | - | - | - | - | - | \*•3 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 390-419 | 1.2 | 3-0 | - | - | - | - | - | 0.7 | - | - | - | 0.1 | - | - |
| 420-449 | 1.8 | 7.0 | - | ~ | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 450 or more Total number | 0.4 | 2.0 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| of workers | I3I3 | 1451 | !3I | 135 | 82 | 64 | 1551 | 1628 | 2277 | 2470 | 205 | 214 | 1970 | 2000 |

Table based on:

A.P. Serebrovskii, *Revolyutsiya i zarabotnaya plata metallicheskoi promyshlennosti,* Petrograd, 1917, p.9.

I.A. Baklanova, *Rabochie Petrograda v period mimogo razvitiya revolyutsii, mart-iyun', igiyg-,* Leningrad, 1978, p.3.

that the wages of the low-paid rose proportionately more than did  
those of the better-off. This is borne out by evidence from other  
factories. At the Parviainen works the hourly rate of a turner rose by  
59% between February and May, compared to a 125% rise in the rate  
of an unskilled worker.75 In the thirty paper mills of Petrograd, male  
wages increased by 214% in the first half of 1917, compared to 234%  
for female wages and 261% for young people’s wages.76 The  
diminution in wage-differentials was the result of conscious policy on  
the part of factory committees to try to improve the dire situation of  
unskilled workers, women workers and youth. However, the improve-  
ment in the relative earnings of the low-paid was not true of all  
factories. From Table // it appears that at the Nevka spinning mill  
men’s wages increased more than those of women. And at the Vyborg  
spinning mill the average hourly rates of male workers rose by 368%  
between January and July, compared to 327% for adult women,  
335% for male youths and 321% for female youths. Moreover  
better-paid workers of both sexes achieved proportionately bigger  
increases than the poorer-paid.77 This suggests that in factories where  
workers were not well organised, groups fought for themselves on a  
sectional basis. In the textile industry, where factory committees were  
weakly developed at this stage, attempts to implement a collective  
wages policy, biassed in favour of the low-paid, were few. Women in  
the industry, generally lacking the bargaining power of the minority  
of skilled men, were the inevitable victims of this situation.

The demand for a minimum wage for the low-paid was valiantly  
fought for by workers’ organisations. At the Metal works negotiations  
between the works committee and management over a minimum  
wage became deadlocked, and a member of the committee proposed  
that skilled workers should supplement the wages of the unskilled  
out of their own pay-packets until the matter was settled: ‘... We  
must show our true mettle. Are we the same as the exploiting  
bourgeois, or are we just a bit more aware and willing to help the  
ckemorabochie? Let us, the masterovye, lend a hand to our starving,  
ragged comrades.’78 At the Putilov shipyard management and  
workers agreed to assign 20% of the annual wages bill to help the  
lowest-paid, pending a settlement of the minimum wage.79 The  
workers’ section of the Soviet took up the pressing question of a  
minimum wage at its meetings of 18 March and 20 March.  
Representatives from fifty of the largest enterprises described the  
sorry plight of the poorly-paid, which had come about as a result of

inflation. The Menshevik, V.O. Bogdanov, complained about the  
number of partial, sectional conflicts in the factories and the  
‘continued misunderstanding’ between capital and labour, to which  
the delegate from the Putilov works retorted angrily:

It is the duty of the Soviet to examine our position, to look at all rates and  
standards, to revise them and create a tolerable existence for us, and not be  
surprised that we raise demands... When the workers arose from their toiling  
slumber, they demanded just wages, they put forward just demands, but the  
employers cried: ‘Guards! They are robbing us!’80

The workers’ deputies in the Soviet agreed that a minimum wage of  
five or six rubles a day should be made legally binding on employers,  
but the SFWO proposed a minimum of 3 r. 20 k. for men and 2 r. 50 k.  
for women.81 The matter was then referred to the Central Concilia-  
tion Chamber, at which the workers’ representatives argued for a  
daily minimum of five rubles for men and four for women. The  
employers’ representatives at first resisted this, but then conceded it,  
recognising that ‘from the political point of view, we are now living  
through a time when strength lies with the workers’.82 This minimum  
was formally announced on 22 April, but the announcement sent few  
workers into raptures. It was clear that this minimum was already  
inadequate in the face of soaring prices.83

A final word should be said about piece-rates. Piece-rates were  
deeply disliked by many workers under the old regime. In 1905 the  
metalworkers had pressed for their abolition, as had the printers in  
1907.84 In the ensuing years, however, piece-rates had become ever  
more widely established as the normal method of payment. After the  
February Revolution workers clamoured to eliminate piece-systems.  
In the metal works of the private sector, factory committees appear to  
have had some success, at least temporarily, in getting piece-rates  
abolished.85 In the state sector, especially in enterprises run by the  
Naval Ministry, there seems to have been less pressure for their  
abolition, and they remained in force.86 In the print-trade, the union  
pressed for an end to the system whereby typesetters were paid  
according to the number of words they set, and called for a  
guaranteed minimum wages.87 They seem to have been fairly  
successful. Once the crisis in labour discipline became apparent,  
however (see Chapter 4), most unions agreed in principle to the  
restoration of piece-rates.

MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AFTER THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION

In the tsarist era the capitalist class in Russia was characterised by  
economic strength and social and political weakness. This arose from  
the fact that large capital achieved dominance in the economy in the  
1890s, not by challenging the political power of the landowning elite,  
but by relying on the economic and political protection of the  
autocratic state. The industrial and commercial bourgeoisie thus  
never really developed into a political force capable of challenging the  
old order. It was to prove a far less dynamic social class than the  
proletariat, and this social weakness was mirrored in its internal  
divisions and in its underdeveloped sense of class identity.

The capitalist class in Russia was not monolithic. Several fractions  
can be distinguished within it, according to industrial and regional  
base, degree of dependence on foreign capital, degree of dependence  
on the state, differences in industrial and commercial policy and  
differences in political outlook. The biggest fraction of the capitalist  
class was also the most genuinely Russian, and consisted of those  
entrepreneurs of the Moscow region whose wealth derived from  
textiles and other light industries, and who were independent of  
foreign and government finance.88 The Moscow entrepreneurs  
tended to pursue a conservative economic policy, but a liberal policy  
in the political arena; they played a minor role in the opposition  
movement of the Third Duma and supported the Progressive Bloc  
during the war.89 This political liberalism sharply distinguished the  
Muscovites from the more reactionary fractions of capital, such as the  
mineowners of the Donbass and Krivoi Rog, the semi-feudal  
bourgeoisie of the Urals metallurgical industry and the oil magnates  
of Baku, all of whom depended heavily on foreign capital.90 In this  
respect, the latter were similar to the strongest fraction of the  
capitalist class - the industrialists and financiers of St Petersburg,  
who derived their wealth from banking and the metalworking  
industries and were heavily dependent on state orders and foreign  
investment. Because of its dependence on the government, the St  
Petersburg bourgeoisie was far less active in the social and political  
arena than its Moscow counterpart.

Although the St Petersburg capitalists were obsequiously servile  
towards the government prior to 1914, the war put their loyalty to  
severe strain. The Moscow industrialists dominated the War Indus-  
tries Committees (set up to take responsibility for military supplies

after the defeat of the army in the summer of 1915), but some  
entrepreneurs in Petrograd became increasingly sympathetic to the  
committees. Alienated by its inept pursuit of the war and by the  
scandalous intrigues of the Rasputin clique, most entrepreneurs in  
Petrograd were not sorry to see the passing of the Imperial  
government in February 1917.

The mood of a majority of industrialists after the February  
Revolution was one of anxious hope. They were confident that the  
Provisional Government could establish a liberal parliamentary  
regime which would represent their interests, but they were also  
acutely aware that the ancien regime had been liquidated by means of a  
popular movement, which, they feared, could easily get out of hand,  
and thus endanger the objective of a liberal capitalist system. The  
paradoxical character of the February Revolution - a ‘bourgeois’  
revolution, undertaken by workers and soldiers — brutally exposed the  
social weakness of the bourgeoisie, once the crutch of the tsarist state  
had been knocked from under it. At a national level, the bourgeoisie  
was weak in numbers, internally divided, lacking in class conscious-  
ness, politically inexperienced and badly organised. The prime task  
for the capitalist class, therefore, was to organise to promote its  
interests more effectively and to exert pressure on the new govern-  
ment.

In Petrograd the main employers’ organisation was the Society of  
Factory and Works Owners (SFWO). This had been founded in 1897  
and represented all the major firms in the capital. By 1917 it  
represented 450 mainly large factories, employing a total workforce of  
280,000. It had seven sections — for metalworking and engineering,  
chemicals, textiles, paper, wood, printing and for miscellaneous  
industries.91 The first number of the SFWO journal in 1917 defined  
the Society’s tasks as ‘to search for new ways to develop Russian  
industry within the framework of capitalism’ and to ensure that ‘free  
citizen industrialists and free citizen workers find a common  
language’.92 In April a new council and presidium were established,  
and city district sections were set up; these did not prove successful,  
and in summer the SFWO was reorganised along industrial lines.93  
The weakness of the SFWO was due not so much to defective  
organisation, as to the inherent difficulties in enforcing a common  
policy on all members. In spite of the fact that firms who went against  
SFWO policy risked heavy fines, there were often good business  
reasons why firms should break ranks. In view of the failure to create a

unified employers’ organisation in Petrograd, it is not surprising that  
attempts to create a national organisation came to grief, and that a  
host of sectional organisations proliferated, each representing  
different fractions of industry and commerce.94

In terms of its industrial relations policy, management in Petro-  
grad factories was faced with a choice of two strategies after the  
February Revolution. On the one hand, lacking moral authority in  
the eyes of the working class and inured to a quasi-feudal system of  
industrial relations, it could attempt to suppress labour unrest and  
restore the status quo ante. This was the strategy chosen by employers in  
the Urals and Donbass. On the other hand, deprived of the support of  
the autocracy and confronted by a labour force in ferment, manage-  
ment could make real concessions in the hope of inaugurating a  
system of Western-style labour relations. In Petrograd they chose the  
latter, and thus committed themselves to dismantling the system of  
industrial relations based on coercion, in favour of one based on  
mutual recognition, negotiation and collective bargaining. A circular  
from the SFWO to its members on 15 March reads:

Relations between employers and workers have changed radically; speedy,  
energetic work is needed to initiate a new order in the factories and to  
re-establish normal work on defence as rapidly as possible.95

In practical terms, this meant making four key concessions: firstly,  
immediate and sizeable wage increases; secondly, the eight-hour day;  
thirdly, recognition of factory committees and trade unions, and,  
fourthly, the establishment of conciliation chambers.

This programme coincided felicitously with that of the Provisional  
Government. The latter set up a Department of Labour within the  
Ministry of Trade and Industry, which was headed by A.I. Konova-  
lov. He declared that the government’s aim was to ‘establish proper  
relations between labour and capital, based on law and justice’. On  
29 March he announced that the priorities of the government in the  
sphere of labour relations were: firstly, the development of trade  
unions; secondly, the creation of conciliation chambers, factory  
committees and labour exchanges; thirdly, legislation on labour  
protection, working hours and social insurance.96 This programme  
had the backing of the SFWO, but it was considered dangerously  
socialistic by the mineowners of the Urals. Later, after opposition  
began to build up, the government’s zeal for reform proved surpri-  
singly half-hearted. It refused, for example, to enact a law on the

eight-hour day, setting up a commission to study the ‘complexity’ of  
the problem instead. This was a portent of the paralysis which was to  
overcome the labour policy of the Provisional Government.

Conciliation chambers were the centrepiece of the system of  
‘constitutional’ industrial relations to which both the SFWO and the  
Provisional Government aspired. Conciliation chambers had first  
appeared in the years 1905—7, particularly in the printing and  
construction industries. They died out during the Years of Reaction  
and did not emerge again until the end of 1915, when they were  
revived by the progressive wing of Moscow industrialists and by the  
Workers’ Group of the War Industries Committee. Conciliation  
chambers were strongly resisted at this time by industrialists in  
Petrograd, who considered them to be fetters on their freedom of  
action.97 The February Revolution soon changed their minds and  
they became staunch advocates of arbitration in disputes.

The Menshevik and SR leaders of the Petrograd Soviet were as  
anxious as the SFWO to set up machinery for arbitration and for the  
avoidance of unofficial action by rank-and-file workers. In the  
agreement between the two bodies of 10 March, it was stated that  
conciliation chambers should be set up ‘for the purpose of settling all  
misunderstandings arising out of labour-management relations’.  
They were to consist of an equal number of elected representatives  
from both workers and management and were to reach decisions by  
joint agreement.98 In the event of agreement not being reached, the  
dispute was to be referred to a Central Conciliation Chamber.  
Izvestiya, the paper of the ‘conciliationist’ leadership of the Petrograd  
Soviet, explained the significance of this agreement on conciliation as  
follows: ‘The wartime situation and the revolution force both sides to  
exercise extreme caution in utilising the sharper weapons of class  
struggle such as strikes and lockouts. These circumstances make it  
necessary to settle all disputes by means of negotiation and agree-  
ment, rather than by open conflict. Conciliation chambers serve this  
purpose.’99

In the early months of the revolution , the conciliation chambers  
were very busy, playing an important role in mediating in wages  
negotiations. As the unions began to consolidate themselves, how-  
ever, the significance of the chambers waned.100 From the first, many  
workers regarded the conciliation chambers with suspicion, since  
they appeared to repress the reality of class struggle and to compete  
with the factory committees. The general situation was not favour-

able to the harmonious resolution of disagreements between workers  
and employers, and where class tension was acute, the conciliation  
chambers tended to be impotent. The most striking example of this  
was the general failure of conciliation committees to achieve the  
reinstatement of managers and foremen expelled from their jobs by  
the workers.101. It is thus not surprising that as early as March,  
dissenting voices should have been heard at a convention of  
factory-owners in Vyborg district, warning that ‘the conciliation  
chambers cannot justify the hopes placed in them, since they do not  
enjoy the necessary confidence of the workers and lack a firm  
foundation’.102

It is now barely possible to understand why employers should have  
conceived the factory committees to be part of their scheme for a  
‘constitutional’ system of industrial relations. At the time, however,  
there seemed good grounds for thinking that factory committees  
would encourage order in the factories, by acting as safety-valves for  
the explosive build-up of shopfloor grievances. It is clear from the  
agreement made between the SFWO and the Soviet on 10 March that  
industrialists saw the factory committees as an updated version of the  
starosty. In a circular interpreting the agreement, the SFWO empha-  
sised the need for workers to make a ‘careful choice of people who are  
able to maintain good relations between the two sides’.103 A week  
later a further circular was sent out informing employers that  
‘working hours spent by these people (i.e. deputies, starosty, members  
of the factory committee, and so on), in fulfilling the duties laid down,  
must be paid at the normal, i.e. average, daily rate’.104 Until the  
autumn most employers financed the factory committees and, in  
return for their support, expected them to operate in a manner that  
was acceptable. The SFWO therefore put pressure on the Provisional  
Government to define the powers of the factory committees by law.

The labour department of the Ministry of Trade and Industry  
agreed to set up a commission under Professor M.V. Bernatskii to  
draft such a law. The commission received submissions from the  
labour department of the Petrograd Soviet and from the SFWO, and  
tried to find a compromise between the two. It resisted pressure from  
the SFWO to give employers the right to remove members of the  
factory committees, specifying that this might only be done by a  
conciliation committee. The final law followed the proposals of the  
Petrograd Soviet fairly closely, though it did not make factory  
committees responsible for safety or deferments of conscription as the

Soviet had suggested.105 On 23 April the law was promulgated by the  
Provisional Government. It provided for the setting up of factory  
committees to represent workers’ interests vis-a-vis management on  
questions such as pay and hours; to settle disputes between workers;  
to represent workers before the government and public institutions  
and to engage in educational and cultural work.106 The law thus  
defined the functions of the factory committees narrowly: it made no  
mention of ‘control’, whether of hiring and firing or of any aspect of  
production. The aim of the government, as in the legislation on  
conciliation committees, was not to stifle the factory committees, but  
to institutionalise them and quell their potential extremism by  
legitimising them as representative organs designed to mediate  
between employers and workers on the shopfloor.107 Some employers  
were disgruntled by what they believed to be the excessive liberalism  
of the legislation, but most tried to put it into operation. Workers,  
however, were not prepared to have their hands tied by the new law.  
Most factory committees in Petrograd were already operating on a  
much broader mandate than that allowed for by the law, and so they  
simply ignored it. In the naval enterprises of the state sector, however,  
the law was used as the excuse for reducing the functions of the factory  
and port committees to those of a ‘trade-union’ type. In many parts of  
Russia, the law proved to be a stimulus to workers to set up factory  
committees for the first time.

It is easy in retrospect to mock the guarded optimism of the  
employers in March and April, but at the time it was not unreason-  
able to hope that with the granting of substantial concessions,  
working-class unrest would subside. For some time in April, things  
did look hopeful.108 By May, however, the omens indicated that the  
policy of compromise, favoured as much by the Soviet Executive  
Committee as by employers, would prove as bankrupt in the sphere of  
industrial relations as it would in the sphere of politics.

4

The structure and functions of the  
factory committees

THE STRUCTURE OF THE FACTORY COMMITTEES

The bigger a factory, the more likely it was to have a factory  
committee.1 The most comprehensive data on this question do not, at  
first sight, appear to bear out this contention, for if one groups the  
delegates to the First Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees  
(30 May-3 June), according to the size of the factory from which they  
came, it emerges that the biggest proportion of delegates came from  
medium-sized factories of 100—500 workers, rather than large ones.2  
If, however, one compares the number of factories of a given size,  
represented at the conference, to the total number of factories of that  
size in Petrograd, then it becomes clear that a direct correlation exists  
between the size of an enterprise and the likelihood of its being  
represented.3 Thus 100% of factories with a workforce of more than

1. (18 in number) were represented at the First Conference,  
   whereas less than 5 % of factories with 50 workers or less were so. 200  
   workers seems to have been the critical size, for over half the factories  
   of that size or larger sent delegates to the conference. In enterprises  
   of less than 200 workers, it seems that workers were either less  
   interested or less able to set up committees. There is evidence that,  
   notwithstanding the fact that factory owners were obliged by law to  
   recognise the committees, some small employers prevented their  
   workers organising such committees. At the tiny Glazer leather  
   workshop, the nineteen workers formed a committee in March, but  
   its members were fired by the boss and, as a result, the committee  
   collapsed.4 Even at the relatively large Kan printworks, with a  
   workforce of 850, committee members were victimised, and the  
   committee survived only because of support from the printers’ union.5

The size of factory committees varied considerably.6 The April  
conference of representatives of state enterprises recommended that  
in a factory of 500—1,000 workers, the committee should comprise  
11—13 members; that in one of 3,000-6,000, it should consist of 13-15  
members, and so on.7 It was envisaged that the committee would be  
supplemented either by a network of shop stewards or by shop  
committees. These norms of representation were ratified by the  
Second Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees (7-12  
August) .8 The size of factory committees seldom conformed to this  
pattern. At the Admiralty shipyard 800 workers elected a committee  
of 24 members. At the Obukhov works, 12,900 workers had a  
committee of 12 members, supplemented by 40 starosty.9 At the Baltic  
shipyard the works committee originally consisted of 103 members,  
but proved so elephantine that it had to be cut down to 40.

In large enterprises, the works committee was supported by a  
structure of workshop committees. The Putilov works was one of the  
first enterprises to set up shop committees, although, interestingly, it  
had been late in establishing a factory committee. This seems to have  
been due to the fact that the giant enterprise so dominated the life of  
the Narva-Peterhof district of Petrograd, that the local soviet of  
workers’ and soldiers’ deputies at first functioned as a committee of  
the Putilov works.10 In addition, it seems that the non-party and  
Menshevik majority of the Narva soviet were hostile to the idea of a  
separate works committee at Putilov, feeling that it might operate as a  
rival centre of power.11 Elections to a works committee were  
eventually held between 10 and 14 April, and six Bolsheviks, six  
non-party persons, one Menshevik-Internationalist, two SRs, one  
anarchist and five whose political affiliation was unknown were  
elected.12 On 24 April, the new works committee issued detailed  
instructions on the setting up of shop committees, prefaced by the  
following remarks:

In view of the fact that the practical business of organising shop committees is  
a new affair, it is necessary that these committees, which look after life at the  
grass roots, should display as much independence and initiative as possible.  
The success of the labour organisations in the factories fully depends on this.  
By becoming accustomed to self-management [samoupravlenie], the workers  
are preparing for that time when private ownership offactories and works will  
be abolished, and the means of production, together with the buildings  
erected by the workers’ hands, will pass into the hands of the working class as  
a whole. Thus, whilst doing the small things, we must constantly bear in mind  
the great overriding objective towards which the working people [rabochii  
narod\ is striving.13

This passage, which is typical of working-class discourse at the time,  
cannot be interpreted as reflecting a spirit of shop sectarianism; it  
rather expresses a commitment to grass-roots democracy and to  
self-activity which is characteristic of 1917. Nor can it be viewed as a  
concession by the works committee to rank-and-file pressure for shop  
autonomy. The rest of the declaration makes clear that the motive for  
setting up shop committees is largely practical, i.e. the works  
committee cannot deal with the huge volume of business facing it, and  
is thus farming out all business concerning individual shops to the  
shop committees. There is no intention of encouraging federalism -  
still less, anarchy: the declaration spells out unequivocally that shop  
committees are subordinate to the works committee.14

Nearly forty shop committees were set up at the Putilov works.  
Their tasks were defined as being to defend the workers of the shop; to  
observe and organise internal order; to see that regulations were  
being followed; to control hiring and firing of workers; to resolve  
conflicts over wage-rates; to keep a close eye on working conditions; to  
check whether the military conscription of individual workers had  
been deferred, etc.15 At the Baltic shipyard, the functions of the shop  
committees were similarly defined. They were to consider all  
socio-economic matters and demands aimed at improving the  
workers’ lot, although final decisions on such matters rested with the  
works committee; they were empowered to warn people, including  
management, if they were violating factory regulations or working  
carelessly or unconscientiously; they were to represent workers before  
management; they were to suggest ways of increasing production and  
improving working conditions; they had the right to request from  
management all memoranda and information concerning their shop;  
they were to settle conflicts between workers or between the workers  
and the shop management; they were to carry out the decisions of the  
labour organisations and ensure that all wage agreements were  
implemented.16

Western historians have placed considerable emphasis on the local,  
decentralised aspect of the factory committee movement, but their  
depiction of a diffuse, centrifugal movement, harnessed after October  
into centralist channels, is in need of qualification. For whilst the  
committees were characterised by greater decentralisation and local  
autonomy than the trade unions, from the first, there were pressures  
towards centralisation and higher-level coordination within the  
movement. Centralisation was not imposed from above by a

triumphant Bolshevik government, it arose from below, at the behest  
of the committees themselves.

As early as the beginning of March the communications and  
organisation commission of the Izhora works committee was estab-  
lished to ‘coordinate the actions of the workers’ committee with the  
actions of other workers’ committees’. Coordination with other  
factories was discussed by workers at the Atlas engineering works on 4  
March, and at San Galli the works committee quickly established  
contact with other works committees.17 In April, the Chief Commit-  
tee of representatives of factory committees in state enterprises was  
inaugurated.18 At the beginning of May factory committees in the  
Nevskaya yarn company set up a body ‘for joint organisation and  
practical work’, and a week later workers at the six textile factories in  
the Voronin, Lyutsh and Cheshire group formed a central committee  
‘for close contact and information about the operations of each  
factory’.19

Simultaneous with this process of inter-factory coordination went a  
process of coordinating factory committee activities in each district of  
the capital. The first district council of factory committees was  
created on Vasilevskii Island on 29 March. Workers at the Arsenal  
and at Old Lessner proposed the setting-up of a district council of  
factory committees on Vyborg Side but nothing seems to have come of  
it, for the council did not get off the ground until 4 September.20 A  
more successful council was set up in Nevskii district in May, which  
represented 34 factory committees. In general, however, the attempt  
to establish a district level of factory committee organisation came up  
against various obstacles, causing the Second Conference of Petrog-  
rad Factory Committees (7th August) to propose that the middle-  
level organisation of factory committees be on the basis of branch of  
industry rather than geographical district. It proved even harder to  
organise on an industrial basis, and the Third Conference of  
Petrograd Factory Committees (5—10 September) once again pro-  
nounced in favour of territorial organisation and urged all districts to  
form district councils of factory committees.21 By October fully  
operational district councils existed in Nevskii, Peterhof and  
Vasilevskii districts and others were beginning to function.22

These district councils gave help to individual factory committees  
in the practical work of workers’ control and in settling disputes.  
Some had control commissions which supervised the administrative,  
financial and technical sides of production; others had commissions

which distributed fuel and raw materials, and others dealt with the  
demobilisation of industry, i.e. the transfer to civilian production.23  
On the whole, however, the district councils of factory committees  
cannot be counted a success. In contrast to the trade unions, where  
city-district organisation was of crucial importance, district organisa-  
tions of the factory committees seem to have been fairly redundant.  
The bulk of factory-committee business related to the individual  
factory, and was of no concern to neighbouring factories. Where  
broader coordination of forces was necessary, this seems to have been  
best achieved at city level, rather than at city-district level.

The supreme expression of the centralising tendency within the  
factory committee movement was the Petrograd Central Council of  
Factory Committees (CCFC), which was set up injune after the First  
Conference. From its inception, the CCFC was a bulkwark of  
Bolshevism, consisting of nineteen Bolsheviks, two Mensheviks, two  
SRs, one Mezhraionets (the so-called Interdistrict Group of Social  
Democrats of which Trotsky became leader after his return from the  
USA in May 1917), and one syndicalist.24 In its early days, the CCFC  
was involved mainly in diverting threatened factory closures and in  
wage disputes. It then settled down to the task of coordinating  
workers’ control of production.25 Its members sat on government  
economic organs - in particular, the supply committees and the  
Factory Convention - but refused payment for their work, on the  
grounds that this would make them state officials.26 By October, the  
CCFC had the following commissions: communications and person-  
nel, economic, finance, literary and editorial, agitation, conflict; the  
following departments: technical-production control and demobilisa-  
tion, administrative-financial control, raw materials and metals  
supplies, fuel supplies, energy; and the following sections: evacuation,  
agricultural equipment for the countryside, cultural-educational,  
instruction. Some 80 people worked in these different commissions,  
departments and sections.27 In view of the enormous scope of its  
work, there are no grounds for saying, as does Solomon Schwarz, that  
the Bolsheviks deliberately obstructed the economic work of the  
CCFC, using it instead for the political ends.28 If the CCFC failed in  
its central aim of restoring order to the economy via workers’ control,  
this was not through lack of trying, but because the odds were stacked  
massively against it.29

At the grass roots, too, factory committees quickly developed an  
enormous volume of business and were forced from the first to create

commissions to deal with specific areas of work. At the 1886 Electric  
Light Company the new committee set up three commissions on 2  
March: a commission of internal order, which received notices from  
management saying what needed to be done, and then organised the  
execution of this work; a food commission and a militia commission.  
On 26 April a further two commissions were created: an education  
commission and a commission of enquiry into disputes between  
workers.30 The works committee at the Nevskii shipyard had six  
commissions, including a militia commission responsible for the  
security of the factory, a food commission, a commission of culture  
and enlightenment, a technical-economic commission responsible for  
wages, safety, first-aid and internal order, a reception commission  
responsible for the hiring and firing of workers, and finally, a special  
commission which dealt with the clerical business of the committee.  
At the Baltic shipyard the works committee had seven commissions,  
and at the Izhora works ten commissions operated.31 At the Metal  
works no less than 28 different commissions existed, involving some  
200 workers, in addition to the sixty shop stewards.32 At the Putilov  
works, some 400 workers were involved in the commissions of the  
works committee.

Factory committees dealt with every aspect of life, as an examina-  
tion of the minutes of any factory committee will reveal. In the first  
two weeks of its existence the committee at the 1886 Electric Light  
Company dealt with matters as diverse as food supplies, the factory  
militia, arbitration of disputes, lunch breaks, overtime and the factory  
club.33 In a typical week the committee of the gun shop at Putilov  
dealt with the hiring of workers, wear-and-tear of machinery, wage-  
fixing, financial help to individual workers and the experiments of  
a worker-inventor trying to invent a new kind of shell.34 Much factory  
committee business was of a fairly trivial kind. On 28 July the Baltic  
works committee discussed what to do with a consignment of rotting  
fish. On 29 September the New Admiralty works committee dis-  
cussed whether or not to buy scented soap for use in the factory.35  
Precisely because of this concern with the detail of everyday life at the  
factory, however, the committees were considered by the workers to  
be ‘their’ institutions — far closer to them than the unions or the  
soviets, and consequently more popular. Workers did not hesitate to  
turn to the committees for help and advice. The wife of a worker at the  
Sestroretsk arms works turned to the works committee when her  
husband threw her out, although the committee was unable to do

much.36 Rather than attempt to describe the work of the committees  
in all its breadth, the rest of this chapter deals with five specific areas  
in which most factory committees were active.

FACTORY COMMITTEES AND THE ORGANISATION OF  
FOOD SUPPLY

One of the most urgent problems facing the factory committees was  
that of food supply. This had become a growing problem during the  
war, for since 1914 the area under seed had shrunk owing to the fact  
that 14 million peasants had been conscripted into the army. In  
addition, peasants were no longer marketing as much grain, since  
there were fewer manufactured goods to buy.37 Moreover the  
distribution of such grain as was marketed, was hampered by growing  
disruption of the transport system. In Petrograd grain shortages  
became particularly acute in the winter of 1916, and this was a major  
cause of the February Revolution. In the spring of 1917 grain supplies  
improved, after the Provisional Government established a grain  
monopoly and set up a State Food Committee and local food  
committees to organise supplies.38 By July, however, the food  
situation in the capital was again grave. By the beginning of August  
there was only two days’ bread supply left in Petrograd. The situation  
improved as the harvest was brought in, but the harvest was not a  
particularly good one, and attempts by the government to induce  
peasants to sell more grain, by doubling fixed prices, had only a  
limited effect. By the beginning of October, grain supplies were lower  
than ever; meat stocks were depleted, and livestock was dying off  
owing to lack of animal-feeds. Sugar, milk and most other staple  
commodities were in dangerously short supply. To make matters  
worse, chaos on the transport system was aggravating the food  
shortages. On 14 October there was only three-and-a-half days’  
supply of grain left in the capital, yet 13,000 tonnes were stranded on  
the railways and canals outside the city limits. The food in 1,200  
wagons at the Nikolaev railway depot had to be thrown away after it  
went rotten while waiting to be unloaded.39

In 1916, according to data collected by Dr Gordon, the average  
worker in Petrograd ate between 800 and 1,200 grams of bread each  
day, 400 grams of potatoes or 200 grams of kasha, a little milk, a few  
onions and no meat.40 In February 1917 citizens of the capital were  
rationed to 500 grams of bread per day, and in summer rationing was

extended to a kilo of sugar, 200 grams of buckwheat, 600 grams of fats,  
800 grams of meat and 20 eggs per month.41 There was not enough  
food in the capital to meet these rations. According to official ration  
estimates, some 4,000 tonnes of meat were required each week in  
Petrograd, but in the monthoiMay only 885 tonnes were delivered. By  
October the bread ration had been reduced to 300 grams per day and  
a further reduction to 200 grams was imminent. These rations  
represented only what people were allowed to buy at official prices,  
but many could no longer afford to buy food even at fixed prices.  
Buying food on the open market was out of the question, since food  
prices had soared into the stratosphere. People were thus competing  
for an ever-diminishing stock of food, the price of which was rising  
ever higher. Queues were to be seen everywhere. The Ministry of  
Internal Affairs noted that queues ‘have in fact turned the eight-hour  
working day into a twelve- or thirteen-hour day, because working-  
class women and men go straight from the factory or workplace to  
stand in queues for four or five hours’.42 The inevitable result was that  
workers were eating far less. Nationally, Strumilin estimated that the  
calorie intake of workers was down by 22% on the 1913 level, but in  
Petrograd things were worse. Binshtok estimated that a worker doing  
medium to hard work needed more than 3,000 calories a day and that  
in Petrograd in the summer of 1917 such a worker consumed about  
half of this amount.43

The democratically-elected central and district food committees  
dealt with the supply of rationed products, but a host of different  
popular organisations threw themselves into the grim business of  
staving off hunger. The consumer cooperative movement was less  
developed in Russia than in western Europe, but it grew rapidly in the  
course of 1917. In February 1917 there were 23 workers’ cooperatives  
in Petrograd, run mainly by Mensheviks. During 1917 membership  
grew from 50,000 to 150,000.44 The worker cooperatives worked  
closely with district soviets, trade unions and factory committees in  
procuring food and in organising its distribution. At the Okhta  
explosives works the committee set up a works canteen to serve 2,500  
cheap meals each day; it also ran two shops and a bakery, looked after  
80 pigs and a fish-pond and grew potatoes.45 At the Cable works the  
food commission of the works committee ran a canteen which  
produced 1,200 dinners a day.46 At the Pipe works no fewer than 110  
workers were actively involved in procuring and distributing food. In  
months of particularly acute food-shortage, such as May, July and

October, some factory committees attempted to buy food indepen-  
dently.47 The Izhora works committee bought fish and potatoes  
from local peasants, and the Putilov works committee sent thirty-nine  
workers into the countryside to try to purchase food.48 At the Putilov  
works, tension ran particularly high. When meat suddenly  
appeared in local restaurants in the Peterhof district, starving  
workers from Putilov attacked members of the district cooperative  
society and sacked food shops. Only prompt action by the works com-  
mittee and district soviet prevented the spread of disturbances.49

Such initiatives by grass-roots organisations were utterly puny  
compared to the colossal scale of the food crisis. This simply got worse  
through the winter of 1917-18, until mass starvation drove hundreds  
and thousands out of the capital. Nevertheless one day’s dinner  
meant a great deal to a hungry worker, and the fact that the factory  
committees did all in their power to provide such meals, immeasur-  
ably enhanced their prestige in the working class.

FACTORY COMMITTEES AND LABOUR DISCIPLINE

The deterioration in the diet of workers was one cause of the decline in  
productivity in industry in the course of 1917. By early summer the  
gross output of Petrograd Factory industry had fallen dramatically.  
This was a consequence largely of the shortages of fuel and raw  
materials, partly of the reduction in working hours and partly of a  
decline in labour productivity. The causes of the latter were a subject  
of sharp dispute. The colossal expansion of output during the war had  
placed acute strains on the infrastructure of industry; machinery was  
worn out, stocks were depleted, organisation within the enterprise  
was breaking down. These were key factors behind the decline in  
labour productivity, but it was also abundantly clear that labour  
intensity had dropped sharply. Workers were making less effort to  
produce, but whether this was because they had less energy, since  
they were eating less, or whether it was because they were less  
disciplined, was unclear.

As early as March, there were signs that the abolition of punitive  
sanctions for infringing workshop regulations was leading to prob-  
lems of indiscipline among the workforce. In the second week of  
March, the ‘soviet of workers’ deputies’ at the Pipe works declared:

We believe that production has declined because many workers, on various  
pretexts, are avoiding work and ignoring the instructions of foremen and  
others responsible for output.

The soviet declares that it will take every measure against those who  
neglect their duties, including dismissal. A council of starosty is being set up to  
watch over the course of work, to resolve questions affecting relations between  
workers and also relations between workers and management... The council  
of starosty in each shop will act in full accord with the administration of the  
shop, on whom lies full responsibility for output.50

A group of anarchist workers promptly reacted to this statement on  
13 March:

The soviet of workers’ deputies of the Pipe works, instead of making concrete  
proposals and raising questions for discussion by the general meeting, issues  
orders and threatens us with punishment, including the sack, if we do not  
carry them out ... Formerly, we were slaves of the government and of the  
bosses, but now there is a new despotic government in the shape of our elected  
representatives, who, in a touching display of unity with the management, are  
executing the police task of supervising the conduct and work of the  
workforce.51

In May the mainly SR shop-stewards’ committee at the Franco-  
Russian works rejected management complaints about a deteriora-  
tion in labour discipline, but promised that its technical-economic  
commission would investigate. The latter came to the unwelcome  
conclusion that ‘the workers have become undisciplined and do not  
want to work’. In consequence, the stewards agreed by 61 votes, with  
none against and four abstentions, to recommend a return to  
piece-rates.52

Absenteeism was a particular problem. A survey by the Ministry of  
Trade and Industry showed that the turn-out of workers to work in  
March 1917 was 6.6% below the January level, and 11.4% below in  
the metal industry.53. In January about 10% of the workforce at  
Putilov were absent for various reasons; by September, this had risen  
to 25% and by November to 40% of the workforce.54 In July a general  
meeting of the gun shop at Putilov condemned certain young workers  
who were deliberately breaking their machines; the shop committee  
began to fine and even dismiss workers for slackness or absenteeism.55  
By September, a crisis of labour discipline extended throughout the  
Putilov works. A Menshevik worker at the plant reported to the  
district committee of his party:

There is not even a shadow of discipline in the working masses. Thanks to the  
replacement of professional guards by soldiers, who are not quite familiar  
with the rules for letting workers in and out of the factory, thefts have become  
more frequent recently. The number of instances of workers being drunk is  
also increasing. But what is most terrible, is the sharp fall in the productivity

**oflabour. Just how low this is, is shown, for example, by the fact that formerly  
200 gun-carriages were produced each month, but now at most there are 50 to  
60. The situation is complicated by purely objective factors, the most  
important of which is the shortage of fuel and materials, and also the fact that  
many people of doubtful qualifications have entered the workforce. The  
Putilov works is in debt to the state to the tune of about 200 million rubles and  
is hurtling towards the abyss. It is already in a catastrophic state.56**

The Menshevik district committee, after discussion, passed the  
following resolution:

1. **Putting aside all party strife, the conscious workers must develop  
   self-discipline in order to give a shining example to the mass of the workforce;**
2. **Measures must be taken, even ofa repressive character, such as imposing  
   fines, in order to eliminate carelessness and an unserious atitude towards  
   work;**
3. **The introduction of piece-rates must be sought. This latter measure,  
   although contradicting the party programme, is necessary, for the time being,  
   as the only radical measure which will raise productivity.57**

Factory committees tried to create a moral climate in which  
workers would voluntarily develop a collective self-discipline at work.  
They issued countless exhortations to work conscientiously, many of  
which were coloured by defencist political sentiments in the spring of  
1917. At the New Parviainen works, at Putilov, the Franco-Russian  
works and the Admiralty works general meetings passed resolutions  
which condemned negligence at work, and called for self-sacrifice in  
the interests of the revolution.58 From the first, however, it was clear  
that ideological exhortation and moral suasion could not by them-  
selves ensure that inexperienced workers, suddenly liberated from  
despotism, would work assiduously. Certain formal sanctions had to  
be enforced.

Factory committees drew up new internal regulations and set  
penalties for infraction of these. Often such penalties were stiff. At the  
1886 Electric Light Company the committee announced on 16 March  
that ‘all abuses and individual actions which undermine organisation  
and disrupt the normal course of work will be punished as follows:  
such workers will be suspended from work for two weeks and their  
names will be made known to the workers of Petrograd through the  
press’.59 The committee, which had seven Bolshevik, two Menshevik  
and two SR members, fired a peasant worker on 23 May for  
absenteeism and drunkenness.60 At the Nevskaya cotton mill the  
largely Menshevik committee warned that any worker stopping work  
before time would be ‘punished without mercy’.61 At the Koenig mill

a general meeting on 25 May agreed that ‘in order to reduce  
absenteeism and carelessness, a worker should receive strict censure  
for a first offence, one ruble fine for a second (the fine to go to a  
workers’ newspaper) and dismissal for a third offence’. After three  
warnings a woman was sacked for ‘bad behaviour’.62 As the year wore  
on, more and more factories tightened up labour discipline. On 15  
September the Voronin, Lyutsch, and Cheshire cloth-print factory  
agreed to reintroduce periodic searching of workers in view of the  
alarming increase in stealing.63 On 3 October the workers’ organisa-  
tions at Izhora decided that ‘every order of the foremen, their  
assistants and senior workers must be unconditionally carried out...  
In all cases of doubt about the validity of an order, you must  
immediately inform the shop committee, without any arbitrary  
opposition or resistance to carrying out the order.’64

There are several comments to be made on the factory committees’  
activities in the sphere of labour discipline. In the first place, these  
activities ill-accord with the image of the committees dominant in the  
Western literature, which projects them as chaotic, anarchic,  
elemental organisations hell-bent on undermining capitalist produc-  
tion. Secondly, although in most cases disciplinary measures were  
agreed by a general meeting of the workforce, and not just by the  
committees, the latter did have responsibility for implementing  
disciplinary measures. The committees were dominated by skilled,  
experienced, relatively well-paid workers who were used to making  
‘effort bargains’ with the employers, even if they were never as  
committed to the notion of a ‘fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay’ as  
were their British counterparts.65 The new wartime recruits, in  
contrast, had no such experience of‘effort bargaining’, and it is thus  
not accidental that problems of indiscipline appear to have been  
particularly common among women and young workers. In their  
efforts to inculcate discipline among the less-experienced workers, the  
committees could easily appear to be a privileged layer of workers  
dominating the less privileged - a new management to replace the  
old.

Finally, it was often asserted by enemies of the Bolshevik party that  
they had ‘poisoned the psychology of workers’ that workers became  
‘corrupted by sheer idleness’.66 In fact, the Bolshevik-dominated  
factory committees seem to have been just as concerned as commit-  
tees dominated by moderate socialists to maintain labour productivity  
- even before October. It is true that in the spring of 1917 some of the

concern to uphold discipline was motivated by a political concern to  
maintain output for the war effort, but Bolshevik opposition to the  
war did not lead them officially to encourage workers to disrupt  
production or refuse to work. The difference between the Bolsheviks  
and the moderate socialists lay in the fact that the Bolsheviks linked  
demands for labour discipline with demands for workers to have a  
greater say in production. As Yu. Larin so eloquently put it in the  
Bolshevik press: ‘Whoever talks of the necessity of labour discipline  
and does not demand workers’ control of capitalist enterprises is a  
hypocrite and a windbag.’67

FACTORY COMMITTEES AND THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST  
DRUNKENNESS

Heavy drinking was deeply rooted in the popular culture of Russia. In  
the towns, especially, working men tended to spend their few leisure  
hours drinking. A survey of 1909 revealed that 92% of workers in St  
Petersburg drank alcohol.68 In 1908 5.4% of the income of a married  
male metalworker was spent on drink and tobacco, and single male  
textile workers spent as much as 11 % of their income in this way.69  
Women workers, however, spent hardly anything on alcohol, and  
married women had to fight hard to prevent their husbands  
squandering their wages on vodka. Several worker-memoirists recall  
how wives would stand outside the factory on pay-day in order to  
catch their husbands before they had a chance to spend their wages at  
the local bar.70 During the 1905 Revolution, women textile workers  
launched the Popular Campaign against Drunkenness in Nevskii  
district. This initially elicited the scorn of male workers, but soon  
factory meetings were passing resolutions against vodka.71 The  
campaign, along with other temperance campaigns by the Church  
and middle-class organisations, had few lasting effects.

Although per capita consumption of alcohol was higher in some  
European countries than in Russia, in the years preceding the First  
World War (1909-13), consumption in Russia rose steadily.72 It was  
partly in response to this, that the government introduced prohibition  
in 1914. The ban on liquor had an immediate effect, in that the  
number of registered cases of alcoholism fell by nearly 40%.73 In  
Petrograd the sale of wine and beer was forbidden in December 1914,  
and in 1915 there was a drop in the number arrested for being drunk  
and disorderly. As the war dragged on, however, and as the diet of

workers deteriorated, so the sale of alcoholic substitutes, particularly  
methylated spirits, increased.74

After the February Revolution, alcohol became more freely  
available. In the first heady months of spring, there seems to have  
been little public concern about alcohol, but from May contem-  
poraries began to warn of a disturbing increase in heavy drinking. In  
that month the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet  
deplored a recent wave of drunkenness.75 At the Okhta explosives  
works, concern was expressed at the incidence of drunkenness in the  
factory, particularly among workers making trotyl.76 At the Atlas  
metal works, the committee of starosty claimed that insobriety was rife:

They drink methylated spirits, varnish and all kinds of other substitutes.  
They come to work drunk, speak at meetings, bawl inappropriate exclama-  
tions, prevent their more class-conscious comrades from speaking, paralyse  
organisational work, and the result is chaos in the workshops. Thanks to  
alcoholism, class-conscious workers are being suffocated; they don’t have the  
strength to work, when every step they take brings them up against some  
obstacle. But what is more shameful is that some class-conscious, advanced  
[peredovye] workers are now taking part in this vile activity.77

Whether there was an objective increase in the scale of drunken-  
ness or simply an increased awareness about the problem is  
unclear. Certainly all workers’ organisations appear to have deve-  
loped a heightened sensitivity to the problem of working-class  
insobriety.

On 23 May the Baltic works committee decided that any elected  
workers’ representatives who were found drunk would immediately  
be relieved of their duties; two promptly were.78 The Sestroretsk  
works committee suspended an adjuster in the box shop for drunken-  
ness, and dismissed two workers in the machine shop for stealing two  
quarts of methylated spirits from the laboratory.79 Factory commit-  
tees elsewhere deprived workers of their wages for being drunk, and in  
serious cases dismissed them.80 On 10 October the Nevskii district  
council of factory committees proposed high fines for drunkenness  
and card-playing, the proceeds of which were to go to orphan  
children.81 Trade unions too fought against drunkenness. The  
conflict commission of the metalworkers’ union upheld a decision at  
the Triangle works to impose fines on workers who appeared drunk at  
work.82 The Petrograd Council of Trade Unions ratified the sacking  
of a worker at the Siemens-Halske works for repeated drunkenness.83  
This tough action by labour organisations cannot have had much

effect, however, for the October uprising set off an orgy of mass  
drunkenness.

The campaigns against drunkenness and labour indiscipline  
within the labour movement were inspired by a passionate belief that  
workers should live in a new way now that the old order had been cast  
aside. At the Nevskaya cotton mill on 20 March, the factory  
committee appealed to the women workers, who comprised 81% of  
the workforce, to cease being rude to one another, to stop fighting and  
quarrelling, stealing and going absent without cause.84 Such aspira-  
tions to live in a new way were fed by the well-springs of the culture of  
the skilled craftsmen, in particular by deep-rooted notions that work  
was an honourable ‘calling’ which conferred dignity and moral value  
on the worker.85 On 23 May, for example, a general meeting of the  
gun shop at the Putilov works decided to dismiss Yakov Smirnov, a  
worker in the militia who had been caught stealing, ‘for bringing into  
disrepute the calling of the honest worker’.86 ‘Courts of honour’ (sudy  
chesti) existed at the Shchetinin aeronautics works and at the State  
Papers print-works.87 At the Triangle works, the conciliation cham-  
ber had the task of investigating disputes concerning ‘honour,  
morality and personal dignity’. This notion of‘honour’ was pivotal to  
the morality of the skilled craftsmen, and since they dominated the  
labour movement, it was their morality which set the tone for the  
working class as a whole. It was partly in an effort to raise the ‘mass’  
to their level, that the leaders of labour organisations established  
commissions for ‘culture and enlightenment’.

FACTORY COMMITTEES AND CULTURAL POLICY

It was axiomatic for all socialists to the right of the Bolshevik party in  
1917 that workers did not possess a level of culture adequate to  
establishing their hegemony throughout society. This was a favourite  
theme of the Menshevik-Internationalist group headed by Maxim  
Gorkii, which published the daily newspaper Novaya Zhizri. Gor-  
dienko, a moulder at the New Lessner works and treasurer of the  
Vyborg district soviet, recalled a visit to Gorkii’s home in 1917 where  
he met Sukhanov and Lopata. Gordienko and his workmates began to  
argue the need for a socialist revolution, at which Lopata pointed out  
of the window to a group of soldiers sitting on the lawn. ‘See how  
they’ve been eating herrings and have thrown the bones into the  
flower-bed. It’s with people like them that the Bolsheviks want to

make a socialist revolution.’88 In 1922, Sukhanov reiterated this  
argument in his Notes on the Revolution. Lenin was incensed by the  
work, commenting:

You say that the creation of socialism demands civilisation. Very well, But  
why should we not at once create such prerequisites of civilisation amongst  
ourselves as the expulsion of the landlords and Russian capitalists and then  
begin the movement towards socialism? In what books have you read that  
such alterations of the usual historical order are inadmissible or impossible?  
Remember that Napoleon wrote: ‘On s’engage et puis on voit’.89

This is precisely the argument which the Bolsheviks put to their  
critics in 1917, although its reiteration by Lenin in 1923 was less than  
ingenuous since, by this time, the Bolsheviks had become deeply  
anxious about the social and political problems posed to the soviet  
regime by the cultural level of the workers and peasants. Lenin  
himself constantly complained of the ‘semi-asiatic lack of culture, out  
of which we have not yet pulled ourselves’ and ‘the piles of work which  
now face us if we are to achieve on the basis of our proletarian gains  
even a slight improvement of our cultural level’.90

The problem of improving the educational and cultural level of the  
working class was already a central concern of the new labour  
organisations in 1917. This concern was expressed in an appeal by the  
Putilov works committee which called on Putilovtsy to enrol in  
evening classes:

Let the idea that knowledge is everything sink deep into our consciousness. It  
is the essence of life and it alone can make sense of life.91

Some time later the committee urged:

Questions of culture and enlightenment are now most vital burning questions  
... Comrades, do not let slip the opportunity of gaining scientific knowledge.  
Do not waste a single hour fruitlessly. Every hour is dear to us. We need not  
only to catch up with the classes with whom we are fighting, but to overtake  
them. That is life’s command, that is where its finger is pointing. We are now  
the masters of our own lives and so we must become masters of all the  
weapons of knowledge.92

The factory committees were quick to set up ‘cultural-enlighten-  
ment commissions’ in March 1917. The activities of these commis-  
sions covered a wide area. At the Admiralty works the commission  
took charge of the factory club, renovating its premises and arranging  
a programme of lectures.93 At the Baltic works the education  
commission sponsored theatrical entertainments; arranged for  
women workers to be given some teaching by women students from

the Bestuzhev courses; gave financial help to the apprentices’ club  
and to a school for soldiers and sailors; oversaw the running of the  
factory club and bought portraits of the pioneers of the labour  
movement in Russia.94 At the Sestroretsk works the commission gave  
the house and garden of the former director to local children as a  
kindergarten, reorganised the technical school and forbade appren-  
tices to leave it before they had completed their technical education.95  
At the New Parviainen works the factory committee sponsored poetry  
readings by Ivan Loginov, an accomplished worker-poet.96 At the  
Metal works the committee sponsored a wind band, a string orchestra  
and a band of folk instruments.97 At Rosenkrantz, management gave  
the committee 10,000 rubles towards the cost of a school; here Olga  
Stetskaya ran a literacy class, where she taught workers to read by  
writing Bolshevik slogans on the blackboard in big letters.98

One of the areas in which factory committees, trade unions and  
political parties were particularly active was in setting up workers’  
clubs. Such clubs had arisen in St Petersburg during the 1905  
Revolution, and about twenty were in sporadic existence between  
1907 and 1914, catering mainly for young, single, skilled and  
reasonably educated men.99 During the war most of these clubs  
closed down. After the February Revolution, managements at the  
Phoenix and Erikson works gave large donations towards re-  
establishing them.100 On 19 March, workers at Putilov founded a  
club with a small library and buffet. Soon it had 2,000 members and a  
management committee, comprising Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and  
SRs. The club defined its aim as to ‘unite and develop the  
working-class public in a socialist spirit, to which end are necessary  
general knowledge and general development, resting on basic literacy  
and culture’.101 On Vasilevskii Island a club named New Dawn was  
founded in March which soon had 800 members. As well as lectures,  
the club organised a geographical expedition to Sablino, a steamer  
excursion to Shlissel'burg for 900 people, a brass band concert and an  
entertainment for workers at the Pipe works.102 The opening  
ceremony to inaugurate the Gun works club consisted of a recital by  
workers of arias from Mussorgsky operas and a performance by the  
works band of the Internationale and the Marseillaise. The club  
housed a library of 4,000 books, a reading room, a small theatre and a  
school. Evening classes were held in literacy, legal affairs, natural  
sciences and mathematics.103 By the end of 1917, there were over  
thirty clubs in Petrograd, including ones for postal-workers, tram-  
workers, Polish workers and Latvian workers.104

Workers’ clubs bad sponsored amateur dramatic societies among  
the workers of St Petersburg prior to 1914. These staged plays by  
Ostrovskii, Tolstoy, Gogol, Hauptmann and lesser-known play-  
wrights. Workers liked realistic plays about everyday life, with which  
they could identify directly. They disliked religious or didactic plays,  
plays about peasant life, fantasy or foreign plays.105. After the  
February Revolution working-class theatre took on a new lease of life.  
At Putilov the works committee took over the factory theatre,  
formerly in the charge of the administration.106 In Sestroretsk local  
workers staged Hamlet, Shaw’s Candida and a play by Maeterlinck,  
but Larissa Reisner, later famous for exploits in the Red Army, lived  
in Sestroretsk at the time and complained about the number of crude,  
tendentious ‘class’ plays which they performed.107

A rather cheerless moralism infected some of the cultural work of  
the labour movement. Such work aspired to the noble purpose of  
developing class consciousness and political awareness, not to  
entertain. The theatre group at the Nobel works, for example, defined  
its aim thus:

We exist not to amuse [razvlechenie\ but to foster spiritual growth, to enrich  
consciousness ... to unite individual personalities into one gigantic class  
personality. All that does not serve the development of Humanity is vain and  
empty. We want theatre to become life, so that in time life will become  
theatre.108

There was a widespread belief within the labour movement that  
education and amusement were mutually exclusive. Within the youth  
movement, for example, there was a fierce battle between the  
non-party Labour and Light group, whose 3,000 members went in for  
dances and shows, interspersed with educational events,109 and the  
Union of Socialist Working Youth, whose zealots scorned the  
Hantsul'kV, and defined their aim as ‘the preparation of developed,  
educated fighters for socialism’.110 A similar conflict occurred in the  
workers’ clubs, which tended to shun frivolous pursuits in favour of  
political meetings and lectures. The Putilov works club held eight  
lectures in the first three months of its existence on such themes as  
‘The Constituent Assembly’, ‘On Socialism’, ‘On Cooperation’ and  
‘The Trade Unions and War’.111 These proved to be very popular,  
attracting an average audience of 710, but more and more complaints  
were heard that workers, especially women, were sick of an unrelieved  
diet of politics, and wanted more entertainment, sporting activities  
and events for children.112 Such murmurings of discontent were  
articulated by Mensheviks at the first proletkult conference, 16-19

October; they were denounced by the proletarian puritans for seeking  
to divert workers from the struggle for power.113

Related to this conflict was a conflict between those who saw  
working-class education as politically neutral — mainly moderate  
socialists — and those who saw education as geared to the objective of  
socialist revolution. On 19 July representatives from 120 factory  
committees met members of the agitation collective of the Petrograd  
Soviet to discuss educational work. A Menshevik member of the  
collective, Dement'ev, criticised political meetings as a means of  
education, arguing that they merely served to inflame the passions of  
workers. Factory committee representatives were furious at this, and  
the resolution passed by the meeting proclaimed that ‘the cultural  
enlightenment activity of the factory committees must be revolution-  
ary-socialist and must be directed towards developing the class  
consciousness of the proletariat’.114 One can perhaps here detect the  
seeds of the later Civil War controversy between those, like Lenin,  
who argued that ‘we must take the entire culture that capitalism has  
left behind and build socialism with it’,115 and the advocates of  
Proletkult, who argued that bourgeois culture could not simply be  
‘adopted’ or ‘acquired’ by the proletariat, but had to be rejected or  
radically reworked as part of the development of new, proletarian  
culture.116

FACTORY MILITIAS AND RED GUARDS

The February Revolution witnessed the whole-scale dismantling of  
the repressive apparatuses of the tsarist state. Police stations and  
prisons were burnt to the ground; up to 40,000 rifles and 30,000  
revolvers were seized.117 The overturned police force was replaced by  
two rival militias — a civil militia, organised into district and sub-  
district commissariats, and a workers’ militia, brought into being by  
groupsoffactoryworkers.Between28Februaryand 1 March workers of  
Rozenkrantz, Metal works, Phoenix, Arsenal and other factories  
formed the first Vyborg commissariat of the workers’ militia.118 In the  
Harbour district of Vasilevskii Island the Cable works committee at its  
first meeting on 1 March agreed to set up a militia, ‘for now the people  
itself must protect the locality’. 11 asked for 270 volunteers over the age of  
i8,includingwomen,toserveinthemilitia.119Throughoutthefactories  
of Petrograd, workers were elected or volunteered to serve in these  
militias in order to maintain law and order in the locality,

protect life and property and register inhabitants.120 The factory  
committees established militia commissions and appointed commis-  
sars to oversee the militiamen. The latter did not leave their jobs  
permanently to serve in the local workers’ militia, but served  
according to a rota drawn up by the factory militia commission. At  
the Metal works 470 workers served in the Vyborg workers’ militia  
between March and July, but only ten served for the whole period.121  
At the Arsenal, Cartridge, Radio-Telegraph, Siemens-Schuckert and  
Siemens-Halske works, factory committees lost no time in demanding  
that management pay workers serving in the militia at the average  
wage.122 Reluctantly, most employers agreed to do so.

From the first, there was rivalry between the workers’ militias and  
the civil militias, which were subject to the municipal dumas. On 7  
March, the Soviet Executive Committee decided that the workers’  
militias should be absorbed into the civil militia.123 Only the  
Bolsheviks denounced this decision, but they echoed the feelings of  
many workers at the grass roots.124 The Cable workers declared:  
‘This attack [on the workers’ militias], begun by the bourgeois  
municipal duma, provokes our deep protest. We suggest that at the  
present time, when the democracy is faced with a struggle for a  
democratic republic and a struggle against the vestiges of tsarism and  
the constitutional-monarchist aspirations of the bourgeoisie, the  
workers’ militia should be placed at the head of the popular civil  
[obyvatel'shot] militia.’125

In areas where strong commissariats of the workers’ militia existed,  
they managed to resist absorption into the civil militia. At the end of  
March some 10,000 militiamen, out of a total of 20,000, were  
organised into specifically workers’ militias.126 As the civil militia  
came to control most districts of Petrograd, however, increasing  
pressure was put on the workers’ militias to dissolve. The city and  
district dumas urged factory owners to stop paying the wages of  
militiamen, in order to force them to become full-time militiamen  
employed by the local authority (at much lower rates of pay than they  
were getting in the factories) or to go back to their jobs in the factories.  
This campaign seems to have had some success, for by the end of May  
there were only 2,000 workers left in exclusively workers’ militias.127  
In the same period, however, the number of civil militia fell from

1. to 6,000, so members of the workers’ militias still comprised  
   about a third of the total.

On 27 May a conference of Petrograd workers’ militias took place

which heaped obloquy on the Soviet Executive Committee and the  
municipal dumas for their efforts to integrate the workers’ militias  
into the civil militia. The conference claimed that they intended to  
impose on the populace ‘a police force of the Western-European type  
which is hated throughout the world by the majority of the people, the  
poorer classes’.128 The conference agreed to Bolshevik proposals for  
the reorganisation of the workers’ militia ‘as a transitional stage  
towards the general arming of the whole population of Petrograd’.129  
Many factory committees came out in support of the decisions of the  
conference, insisting that employers continue to pay the wages of the  
workers’ militias. These included committees consisting mainly of  
Mensheviks and SRs, such as those at the Baltic and Admiralty  
works.130

From the first, there were tiny armed groups of workers, calling  
themselves ‘Red Guards,’ who differed somewhat from the workers’  
militias, in that they saw their function as exclusively to protect the  
gains of the revolution.131 On 17 April a meeting of worker militiamen  
elected a commission, made up of two Bolsheviks and three Menshe-  
viks, to draw up a constitution for a city-wide organisation of Red  
Guards. This commission explained that the Red Guard would be ‘a  
threat to all counter-revolutionary attempts from whatever quarter,  
since only the armed working class can be the real defender of the  
freedom which we have won’.132 Certain factory committees also  
called for the setting-up of factory Red Guards. On 16 April the  
Renault metalworkers, in one of the first resolutions calling for a  
soviet government, demanded ‘the organisation of a Red Guard and  
the arming of the whole people’.133 On 22 April 6,000 workers at the  
Skorokhod shoe factory declared: ‘Dark forces ... threaten to  
encroach on the foundation of free Russia. Since we wish to protect  
the interests of the toiling masses, as well as general state interests  
(which can only be defended by the people themselves), we declare  
that we will call on the Soviet to assist us in obtaining arms to organise  
a Popular Red Guard of 1,000 people.’134 Red Guards were set up at  
the New and Old Lessner, Erikson, Aivaz and New Parviainen works,  
i.e. in that minority of factories where Bolshevik strength was already  
great.

On 26 April the Peterhof district soviet called on workers to enrol in  
the Red Guards, but warned: ‘Only the flower of the working class  
may join. We must have a guarantee that no unworthy or wavering  
people enter its ranks. Everyone wishing to enrol in the Red Guard

must be recommended by the district committee of a socialist  
party.’135 Two days later, the Vyborg district soviet announced that it  
intended to transform the two district workers’ militias into a Red  
Guard, whose tasks would be:

1. to struggle against counter-revolutionary, antipopular intrigues by the  
   ruling class;
2. to defend, with weapons in hand, all the gains of the working class;
3. to protect the life, safety and property of all citizens without distinction of  
   sex, age or nationality.136

On 28 April 156 delegates from 90 factories, most of whom  
belonged to no political party, attended a conference to discuss  
further the creation of a Red Guard.137 The Soviet Executive  
condemned the conference as a ‘direct threat to the unity of the  
revolutionary forces’. The Mensheviks blamed it on agitation by  
‘Leninists’ and said that the attempt to create Red Guards revealed a  
deplorable lack of confidence in the army.138

Although the number of Red Guards may have grown slightly  
during May and June, the Soviet Executive successfully blocked  
plans for the creation of a city-wide network of Red Guards.139  
Because of the political difficulties involved in openly organising Red  
Guards, the radicals appear to have rechannelled their energies into  
the workers’ militias. On 3 June the second conference of workers’  
militias elected a Council of the Petrograd Popular Militia. This  
consisted of eleven members, including an anarchist chairman, seven  
Bolsheviks and at least one Left SR.140 It was this Council, rather  
than the embryonic Red Guards, which played a key role in events  
leading up to the July Days — the attempted uprising against the  
Kerensky government by workers and soldiers. On 21 June the  
Council hastily summoned a meeting of workers’ militias to discuss  
the ejection of anarchists from Durnovo villa, two days previously.  
The meeting fiercely denounced the role played by the civil militia in  
this incident and resolved to ‘defend the elective basis of the popular  
militia of revolutionary workers and soldiers by every means, up to  
and including armed action’.141 Over the next couple of weeks the  
Council whipped up a furore among the workers of Vyborg Side at the  
purportedly anti-democratic and counter-revolutionary activities of  
the municipal dumas, arguing that ‘a blow against the militias is a  
blow against the revolution’. In agitating for an armed demonstration  
against the government at the beginning ofjuly, the Bolsheviks on the  
Council acted quite outside the control of the party Central Com-

mittee. The Red Guards as such kept a low profile during the July  
Days.

The fiasco in which the July Days ended provided the government  
with the opportunity for which it had been waiting. It took action  
against the far left, extirpating not only the Council of the Popular  
Militia, but all the remaining independent workers’ militias. The  
factory committees were compelled to recall all workers serving in  
such militias and force them to choose between going back to their  
benches or enrolling in the civil militia for a paltry salary of 150 r. a  
month.142 The July Days thus spelt the end of the workers’ militias,  
after an adventurous five months’ existence.

The workers’ militias were a major achievement of the February  
Revolution, which guaranteed workers’ power in the factories and in  
society at large. Workers, in general, never accepted that there were  
‘bourgeois’ limitations on the February Revolution. For them it was a  
popular-democratic revolution, which was potentially threatened by  
the bourgeoisie. It was crucial that workers organise independently to  
defend the democratic gains of the revolution, and it was thus  
inconceivable that the workers’ militias should be absorbed into a  
civil militia under the control of the middle classes. The experience of  
the militias illustrates the impossibility of drawing neat distinctions  
between the military, economic or political ‘aspects’ of the workers’  
movement. The militias were closely linked to the factory committees  
and underpinned workers’ power in production. Later, the campaign  
to establish Red Guards became intimately bound with the campaign  
to establish workers’ control of production: the armed workers’  
movement represented not only the defence of workers’ control of  
production, but an attempt to extend workers’ control into the public  
sphere. Fundamentally, it was the experience of trying to impose  
workers’ ‘control’ over the gains of the February Revolution which,  
perhaps more than anything else, served to radicalise the politically  
conscious minority of workers. The shock of seeing the Soviet  
Executive trying to bring an end to the independent existence of the  
workers’ militias shattered their faith in the moderate socialists, for it  
was seen as tantamount to sabotaging the gains of February.  
Conversely, it was the Bolsheviks’ willingness to support the militias  
and workers’ control in production which won them growing support.

5

Trade unions and the betterment  
of wages

CRAFT UNIONISM AND INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM

Trade unionism in Russia was a very different animal from trade  
unionism in the West. There the organised labour movement was  
more powerful than in Russia - in terms of membership, organisa-  
tional resources, industrial muscle and political influence - but a  
by-product of the strength of the Western labour movement had been  
the emergence of a bureaucratic leadership which, to some extent,  
stood as an obstacle to working-class militancy. As early as 1911,  
Robert Michels had analysed the apparently inexorable tendency for  
a conservative oligarchy to emerge in both socialist parties and trade  
unions, as a function of increasing size and organisational complexity,  
but it was only with the outbreak of war in 1914 that the full  
implications of this development were revealed.1 In return for the  
accolade of government recognition, Western European union lead-  
ers abandoned any pretensions to transforming society, and agreed to  
support their government’s policy of Burgfrieden, or civil peace. They  
thereby subordinated the interests of the working class to the higher  
interests of the Union Sacree.

In Russia trade unionism emerged out of the 1905 Revolution. The  
first proper trade union to be founded in Russia was the Moscow  
printers’ union, set up illegally in 1903. Between 1906 and 1907 trade  
unions flourished, but during the ‘Years of Reaction’ they came in for  
considerable persecution. They revived again in the years 1912—14,  
but the outbreak of war again led to their suppression.2 In March 1917,  
therefore, labour leaders faced the enormous task of constructing  
a trade-union movement more or less from scratch; paradoxically,  
this was to work to the advantage of revolutionary socialists. In

Germany and Italy, when semi-revolutionary situations emerged in  
1918-19 and 1919-20, the trade-union and socialist leaders were so  
inured to the gradualist pursuit of improvement within the existing  
system, that they proved constitutionally incapable of heading the  
insurrectionary popular movements, and instead played a crucial role  
in restabilising the bourgeois order.3 In Russia, however, the absence  
of an entrenched labour bureaucracy enormously facilitated the  
development of a revolutionary socialist labour movement.

In February 1917 eleven unions maintained a shadowy existence in  
the Petrograd underground: they were tiny, illegal and much subject  
to the depredations of the police. A further three unions — of printing  
employees, pharmacy employees and shop assistants — existed  
legally, but were as tiny as the illegal unions and almost as  
ineffective.4 After the February Revolution trade unions quickly  
re-established themselves. In the first two weeks of March about  
thirty were refounded. Militants who had been active in the earlier  
periods of union construction of 1905—8 and 1912—14 called meetings  
of workers in different industries to re-form the unions, which were  
advertised in the socialist press. On 11 March a thousand textile-  
workers assembled to elect twenty representatives (half of them  
women) to take on the task of reconstructing the union.5 The next day  
nearly 2,000 metalworkers met to elect an organisation commission,  
to which mainly Mensheviks were elected.6 Workers in small enter-  
prises had to band together in order to form a group large enough to  
elect a deputy to the soviet and, in so doing, they used the occasion to  
resuscitate a trade union. This was one reason why the first unions to  
get off the ground were those in small-workshop industries, such as  
tailoring, hairdressing, gold-, silver- and bronze-smithery and  
joinery.7 In the larger factory industries factory committees initially  
promoted workers’ interests, and it was thus a couple of months  
before the larger industrial unions began to function properly.

The metalworkers’ union was particularly slow to get off the  
ground. It did not function on a city-wide basis until the middle of  
April. Prior to this, metalworkers’ unions functioned at district level.  
The Bolsheviks organised a union in Narva district, which had 11,000  
members by the end of April, and all but one of the district board were  
Bolsheviks. Mensheviks set up the Vyborg district union, which by  
the end of April had 5,000 members, and they were balanced equally  
with the Bolsheviks on the district board. Mensheviks dominated the  
Moscow-district union, which had 7,500 members; SRs dominated

the Nevskii district board. Bolsheviks were instrumental in organis-  
ing unions in Petrograd district, the First and Second City districts,  
Kolpino and Sestroretsk. By the time the different districts amalga-  
mated into a city union they had 50,000 members.8 The slowness of  
the metalworkers to organise at a city level was principally a function  
of size, reflecting the difficulties of organising so vast an industry. It  
seems, however, to have also reflected a certain ‘district patriotism’,  
which had been something of a problem in 1905, when it had taken  
until April 1906 to weld the district unions of metalworkers in St  
Petersburg into a city-wide organisation. This preference for organis-  
ing on a district, rather than city basis, seems to have arisen from a  
distrust of trade-union bureaucracy.9

From the beginning of May the major unions of factory workers in  
Petrograd grew spectacularly. According to figures published in  
1928, which are almost certainly exaggerated,10 the membership of  
the major factory-based unions in Petrograd was as follows:

Table 12

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Union | Membership on 1 July 1917 | Membership on 1 October 1917 |
| Metalworkers | 82,000 | 190,000 (140,000) |
| Textileworkers | 28,000 | 32,000 (32,658) |
| Printers | - | 25,328 (25,100) |
| Paperworkers | - | 6,400 (5,200) |
| Cardboardmakers | - | 2,000 (3,100) |
| Woodworkers | 15,000 | 20,500 (20,500) |
| Leatherworkers | I5>75° | 16,708 (16,708) |
| Food workers | - | 13,000 (13,250) |
| T obaccoworkers | - | 14,000 (14,000) |
| Chemicalworkers | — | - (17.200) |

Source: Professional'noe dvizhenie v Petrograde 0 igijg. (Leningrad, 1928),  
pp.341-3. The figures in brackets in column three are the official Ministry of  
Labour figures for Petrograd membership on 1 October 1917. See Delo  
Naroda, 174, 7 October 1917, p.4 and Professional’nyi Vestnik, 3/4, 15 October  
1917, p.21.1 have not used the table in Stepanov, Rabochie Petrograda, p.50, as  
his figures seem to be altogether too high.

By October there was a total trade-union membership of about

1. in Petrograd, including non-factory workers such as shop-

workers, catering workers, postal and railroad workers. Throughout  
Russia as a whole there were about two million trade-union members  
- about 10% of wage-earners of all kinds.11

In Britain and the USA in the nineteenth century, craft unions had  
proved to be the dominant form of trade-union organisation.12 They  
developed out of the collapse of broader-based unions, such as the  
General National and Consolidated Trade Union in Britain and the  
Knights of Labor in America.13 These craft unions were exclusive  
unions of skilled men, which tended to ignore the needs of the mass of  
factory workers, many of whom were women and children in the  
textile industry. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century  
trade unionism had begun to expand in France and Germany. Here  
industrial unionism proved more resilient. Although the CGT in  
France and the Free Unions in Germany were still dominated by  
coalitions of skilled trades, they were more easily able to incorporate  
factory workers than their Anglo-American counterparts.14 It was  
partly with an eye to this experience, that trade-union leaders in  
Russia chose industrial, rather than craft forms of organisation,  
though in a context where industry was dominated by factory  
production, rather than small-workshop production, industrial  
unionism made obvious sense. Although Russian trade unions  
recruited mainly skilled and artisanal workers in 1905, by 1912—14  
they were beginning to attract broader layers of factory workers.15  
Nevertheless craft unionism was by no means a superannuated force  
in Russia by 1917.

After the February Revolution workers began by building local and  
craft unions. In the metal and allied trades over twenty such unions  
appeared in March, but few lasted very long.16 Many of them were  
based on workers in small enterprises, and were quickly absorbed into  
the metalworkers’ union. Unions of foundryworkers, machinists and  
electricians persisted for several months, but amalgamated with the  
metalworkers’ union before October. Other craft unions resisted  
absorption by the metal union.

In April stokers from the Metal, Rozenkrantz and Phoenix works  
formed a union, on the grounds that ‘we are weaker than other  
masterovye, despite doing one of the most severe, strenuous and  
responsible jobs’.17 On 18 September a meeting was held to discuss a  
merger with the metalworkers’ union, but this proved abortive since  
the stokers’ union would not accept the metalworkers’ collective  
contract. It informed the Petrograd Council of Trade Unions that:

‘The metalworkers’ union mistakenly stands for a narrow production  
principle, which the Society of Factory and Works Owners exploits in  
order to weaken the organisational work of Petrograd trade unions.’18  
The stokers argued that theirs was a growing profession, that many of  
their members were outside manufacturing industry and that to join  
the metalworkers’ union, where there was no independence for each  
craft, would be ‘suicide’. It did not fuse until August 1918.19

On 30 April a union of welders was formed, which had a mere 700  
members by October, but which proved to be a thorn in the side of  
the metalworkers’ union leadership. Writing in the union journal,  
A. Shlyapnikov, the Bolshevik chairman of the union, warned of the  
dangers of craft unionism and cited the example of the Gruntal  
workshop, where eight welders had joined the welders’ union, put  
forward a wage demand, and then left the factory when it had been  
refused; thereupon the owner had fired the rest of the workforce, who  
had never been consulted about the welders’ action.20 The welders’  
union paid scant regard to the veiled threats of Shlyapnikov, not  
joining the metalworkers’ union until 1918. Other unions, such as  
those of gold- and silversmiths (1,300 members in October) and  
watchmakers (360 members) continued in existence until 1918.21

In the first phase of its existence, from 1906-8, the metalworkers’  
union had helped contain pressures towards craft unionism by  
allowing different trades to set up professional sections within the  
union, which met separately, but which were represented on and  
subordinate to the central board of the union.22 At the first city-wide  
meeting of factory delegates, which met on 7 May 1917 to elect a  
central board to the metalworkers’ union, the 535 delegates rejected a  
proposal to set up professional sections within the union.23 This  
suggests that it was not merely the leaders of the union who rejected  
concessions to craft unionism, but that there was at base growing  
sentiment in favour of industrial unionism.24

The Third Trade Union Conference (20-8 June) — the first  
national conference of trade unions in 1917 - declared in favour of  
industrial unions. There was pressure from some quarters for ‘trade’  
unions, but Mensheviks and Bolsheviks united to quash this. The  
resolution accepted by conference declared that unions should be  
constructed according to branch ofindustry, and that all workers who  
worked in the same branch of industry should join the same union,  
regardless of the job they did.25

The only major union to reject the policy of industrial unionism

was the woodturners’ union - a ‘trade union’, rather than a strict craft  
union. By October it had 20,000 members which made it the seventh  
largest union in the capital.26 Only a third of its members worked in  
woodworking factories and joinery enterprises; the rest worked as  
carpenters and joiners in other industries. In spite of its rampant  
Bolshevism, the woodturners’ union refused to allow woodturners to  
join the union of the industry in which they worked. On 8 May a  
delegate council of the union rejected a plea to this effect from the  
metalworkers’ union.27 At the Okhta powder-works woodturners  
refused the tariff category into which the chemical workers tried to  
put them, and at Putilov carpenters and wood machinists objected to  
being placed in category three of the metalworkers’ contract. On 1  
August the woodturners’ union put a wage contract to the SFWO,  
which turned it down.28 Six days later a meeting of 57 factory  
delegates, having denounced the Kerensky government for imprison-  
ing Bolsheviks, passed the following resolution: ‘Every regenerated  
organisation, if it is to establish its work at the necessary level, must  
insist, when working out a contract, that one trade is not competent to  
determine the wages of another.’29 After two months of abortive  
negotiation with the employers, the union decided to prepare for a  
strike. On 12 October it issued a statement saying that a strike would  
begin four days later, since ‘at present the union does not have the  
wherewithal to restrain desperate workers from protests and  
excesses.’30 At the Putilov works woodworkers had already gone on a  
go-slow in protest at the refusal of management to negotiate with  
them separately. The Executive of the Petrograd Council of Trade  
Unions agreed to support the strike on condition that it involve only  
enterprises where woodworkers comprised a majority of the  
workforce.31 A day after the strike had begun, however, an angry  
meeting of 8,000 woodworkers rejected this stipulation, calling on all  
woodworkers to join the strike.32 This call was condemned by  
Shlyapnikov since it disrupted normal working in hundreds of  
factories not connected with the wood industry. The strikers rejected  
charges of causing disorganisation and appear to have won reluctant  
support from other groups of workers. At the Baltic works and the  
Okhta explosives works factory committees refused to allow the  
carrying-out of work normally done by woodturners and called for  
pressure to be put on the employers to compromise.33 The strike was  
still going on when the October Revolution supervened and, on 28  
October, it was called off.34

Craft unionism was therefore by no means a spent force in 1917, but  
its strength was not great, if one compares Russia to other countries.  
By October 1917, Petrograd had one of the highest levels of  
unionisation in the world, and at least 90% of trade unionists in the  
city were members of industrial unions. Measured against this  
achievement, craft unionism must be counted a failure. This failure  
was partly due to the fact that the guild tradition had never been  
powerful in Russia, whereas in Western Europe craft unions were  
heirs to a vital guild ‘tradition’.35 More importantly, however, craft  
unionism and trade unionism were not suited to an industrial  
environment where the majority of wage-earners worked in modern  
factories. Even the skilled craftsmen in these factories were not of the  
same type as those who had formed the ‘new model’ unions in Britain  
after the demise of Chartism. They therefore tended to see their  
interests as being best defended in alliance with less skilled factory  
workers, rather than in isolation from them. We shall see that  
sectional pressures of all kinds existed within the Russian labour  
movement in 1917 and were a force to be reckoned with, but they did  
not seriously endanger the project of industrial unionism.

THE POLITICAL COMPOSITION OF THE TRADE UNIONS

Soviet historians are fond of depicting political conflict within the  
trade unions in 1917 as a straight fight between reformist, economistic  
Mensheviks and militant, revolutionary Bolsheviks. In reality the  
political history of the Petrograd trade unions was more complex than  
this manichaean interpretation allows. Before analysing this history  
in detail, it is worth pointing out that the political centre of gravity of  
the Russian labour movement was far to the left of that of most  
Western labour movements. Prior to 1917 attempts to promote  
reformism in the labour movement had been made by intellectuals  
(the ‘Economists’, led by S.N. Prokopovich and E.D. Kuskova), by  
the government (the Zubatov and Gapon unions) and by workers  
themselves (the Workers of Russia’s Manchester in 1899, the Moscow  
printers in 1903, the Workers Voice group in St Petersburg in 1905 and  
the Union of Workers for the Defence of their Rights in Khar'kov in the  
same year). These attempts at home-grown reformism never got very  
far, however, for the simple reason that even the most ‘bread and  
butter’ trade union struggles foundered on the rock of the tsarist state;  
all efforts to separate trade unionism from politics were rendered

nugatory by the action of police and troops.36 In this political climate  
trade unions grew up fully conscious of the fact that the overthrow of  
the autocracy was a basic precondition for the improvement of the  
workers’ lot. It is true that there was a powerful moderating tendency  
in the trade unions, represented by right-wing Mensheviks such as  
those involved in the Workers’ Group of the War Industries  
Committee, but even this tendency was verbally committed to a  
brand of socialist trade unionism which would have seemed danger-  
ously radical to the ‘business’ unionists of the AFL in the USA, or the  
Liberals of the British TUC. It is thus important to bear in mind,  
when analysing the conflict between ‘left’ and ‘right’ in the Russian  
unions in 1917, that even the ‘right’ was fairly radical by Western  
standards, since it was committed to socialism - albeit at some  
indefinite time in the future.

The approach to trade unionism of the two major political parties  
within the unions in 1917 sprang from their respective diagnoses and  
prognoses of the political situation in Russia. The Mensheviks  
believed that Russia was in the throes of a bourgeois revolution, and  
that therefore the unions should raise demands for the maximum  
democratisation of the social and political system.37 They did not  
believe in the political ‘neutrality’ of the unions (they were on the side  
of ‘democracy’ and ‘socialism’) but nor did they believe that the  
unions should take up positions on particular questions, such as the  
demand for all power to the soviets. In contrast, the Bolshevik  
position was summarised in the resolution on the party and trade  
unions, passed by the Sixth Bolshevik party Congress in August:

**The epoch of world war has inevitably become the epoch of sharpening class  
struggles. The working class is entering a terrain with vast social horizons,  
which culminate in world socialist revolution. The trade unions are faced  
with the completely practical task of leading the proletariat in this mighty  
battle. Together with the political organisation of the working class, the trade  
unions must repudiate a neutral stance towards the issues on which the fate of  
the world labour movement now hangs. In the historic quarrel between  
‘internationalism’ and ‘defencism’ the trade-union movement must stand  
decisively and unwaveringly on the side of revolutionary internationalism.38**

In Petrograd a conflict between these two perspectives took place  
on the Petrograd Council of Trade Unions. On 15 March the  
foundations were laid for what became the Central Bureau of the  
Petrograd Council of Trade Unions, when eighteen representatives  
from different unions met together. Five days later, an executive

committee was elected, which comprised four Bolsheviks (V.V.  
Schmidt, Razumov, D. Antoshkin, N.I. Lebedev), four Mensheviks  
(V.D. Rubtsov, I. Volkov, Acheev, G. Gonikberg) and the syndical-  
ist, A. Gastev.39 The Central Bureau subsequently formalised its  
structure, changing its name to the Petrograd Council of Trade  
Unions (PCTU). All unions in Petrograd were invited to send repre-  
sentatives to the Council, according to their size. Until June thirty  
unions were represented. This later rose to fifty and subsequently  
to over seventy. Only ‘working-class’ unions were allowed onto the  
Council, so unions of workers not considered to be proletarian,  
such as musicians, writers and theatre employees, were excluded.40

According to its constitution, drawn up in May, the powers of the  
PCTU were coordinative rather than directive. The Council did not  
have the right to manage or intervene in the affairs of a member  
union, but in practice it sometimes did this, for example, by  
encouraging industrial unionism or by helping consolidate union  
structure. In spite of its self-denying ordinance, the PCTU also  
intervened in specific economic disputes, by giving advice, publicity  
or financial help. The range of issues on which the PCTU gave a lead  
to individual unions is shown by the following statistics. Between  
March and December the Executive Committee of the PCTU  
discussed 21 items of a political nature, 101 concerning organisational  
construction, 26 concerning representation, 10 concerning education,  
8 concerning unemployment and 25 miscellaneous items. The 30  
plenary sessions of the PCTU discussed 29 matters of a political  
nature, 26 concerning organisational construction, 14 concerning  
economic struggles, 4 concerning representation, 3 concerning un-  
employment, 3 concerning education and 5 miscellaneous items.41

The vast bulk of PCTU business was practical and did not incite  
party conflict. Unlike trade unions in the West, however, the Russian  
trade unions were vitally interested in political questions. As politics  
became more polarised in Russian society, so political acrimony  
between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks on the PCTU increased. The  
first sign of this came on 1 May, during discussions on the  
constitution. The Bolsheviks insisted on a sentence about ‘coordinat-  
ing the actions of the unions with the political party of the proletariat’.  
The Mensheviks demanded that the word ‘party’ be in the plural.  
When the matter was put to the vote, they lost by 17 votes to 9.42 By  
May the Bolsheviks could command a majority on the PCTU, by  
getting the support of independents like the Mezhraionets, D.B.

Ryazanov, who joined the party in August, and some of the  
Menshevik Internationalists.43 In the May elections to the Executive  
Committee, the Bolsheviks won a majority and at the end of the  
month the PCTU passed a resolution calling for the transfer of power  
to the Soviets. By the beginning of June the Bolsheviks were the  
strongest party on the PCTU, but they did not wield supremacy on  
this body as they did on the Central Council of Factory Committees,  
for the presence of a strong group of Menshevik Internationalists, on  
whom the Bolsheviks relied for support, together with disagreement  
among the Bolsheviks themselves, meant that the political line of the  
PCTU was not always clear-cut. For example, the PCTU supported  
the demonstration called by the Soviet EC for 18 June, but it was  
taken aback by the Bolshevik success in making this a show of  
opposition to the policies of the Soviet EC. Whereas factory  
committees busily organised contingents from the factories to march  
under Bolshevik banners, only odd unions, such as the needle-  
workers, strove to mobilise their membership. During the July Days  
the PCTU was completely isolated from the abortive insurrection by  
workers and soldiers. On 6 July the PCTU met with the Central  
Council of Factory Committees (CCFC) and the boards of the major  
unions. Trotsky attended this meeting and vigorously castigated the  
Soviet leaders for creating the disillusionment in the masses which  
had issued forth in the July Days; he called on the meeting to refuse  
any kind of support to the Kerensky government. Ryazanov was less  
certain: he argued that the new Coalition government could win back  
the support of the masses if it undertook bold measures. For two days  
no consensus was reached.44 The final resolution, proposed by three  
Bolsheviks (Schmidt, N.A. Skrypnik and N.M. Antselovich),  
Ryazanov and two Mensheviks (Astrov and Volkov), was passed  
unanimously with four abstentions. It was a milk-and-water affair,  
bearing all the hallmarks of compromise and making no mention of a  
transfer of power to the Soviets - the main aim of the July  
demonstrations ,45

During the Kornilov crisis at the end of August, when General  
Kornilov attempted to overthrow Kerensky and crush the soviets, the  
PCTU worked in a more resolute fashion than hitherto. On 26 August  
a joint meeting of the PCTU and the CCFC passed a motion on the  
defence of Petrograd, introduced by A. Lozovskii, which called for a  
workers’ militia, an end to the persecution of political leaders,  
control of military units, public eating places, an end to queueing and

a programme of public works to minimise unemployment.46 The next  
day the joint meeting demanded that the government proclaim a  
republic, institute workers’ control of production and fight the  
counter-revolution. On 29 August the two organisations threw  
themselves into the task of arming workers, organising defences  
around the city centre, and setting up patrols to guard the city centre,  
as news of Kornilov’s advance on the capital filtered through.47 The  
PCTU put 50,000 r. at the disposal of the military centres, and the  
unions of food workers and woodturners also provided help.48

This survey of the political history of the PCTU shows that the  
picture which is sometimes painted of a Menshevik-dominated  
trade-union movement counterposed to a Bolshevik-dominated  
factory-committee movement does not correspond to reality, at least  
in Petrograd. Nationally, and in cities like Moscow, the Mensheviks  
did enjoy more influence than the Bolsheviks inside the unions, but in  
Petrograd this was not so. As early as June the Bolsheviks, with the  
support of Menshevik-Internationalists, could ensure that the politi-  
cal line of the PCTU was considerably to the left of that of the Soviet  
EC. Yet because of this reliance on Menshevik-Internationalists,  
political positions were usually arrived at by a process of compromise.  
On some of the most controversial questions of the day - such as the  
call for a transfer of power to the soviets - the unions were unable to  
adopt a firm stance. Thus Bolshevik influence in the unions was far  
less certain than in the factory committees. The great bulk of  
trade-union business, however, did not involve politics directly, and  
so on a day-to-day basis Bolsheviks and Mensheviks worked together  
quite happily.

On the boards of most major trade unions in Petrograd the  
Bolsheviks held a majority of places. The political make-up of these  
central boards was not necessarily a reflection of the political  
sympathies of the membership, for they were not elected directly by  
the membership, as were factory committees. Nevertheless the  
balance of political forces within the union boards does give an  
indication of the strength of the main political parties within the  
union movement as a whole.

On the board of the Petrograd metalworkers’ union Bolsheviks had  
a slight majority of places but Mensheviks comprised a large  
minority, mainly due to the prestige of the individual Mensheviks  
concerned, rather than because of significant support for their politics  
amongst the rank-and-file.49 On the district boards, directly elected

by factory delegates, Bolsheviks had more influence than their rivals.  
They dominated the boards of the Narva, the Petrograd, the I and II  
City, the Sestroretsk and the Kolpino districts of the capital. In  
Vyborg and Vasilevskii districts they still shared power with a  
Menshevik minority. Mensheviks were strong only in the Moscow  
district (mainly due to their influence at the Dynamo works) and the  
SRs were significant only in Nevskii district. SRs, generally, were a  
minor influence in the metal union, most of their industrial members  
channelling their energies into the factory committees.50 Menshevik  
influence in the union began to wane in the autumn of 1917, and at the  
first national congress of the union in January 1918, 75 delegates were  
Bolsheviks, 51 belonged to no political party, 20 were Mensheviks, 7  
were Left SRs, 5 Right SRs and 3 were anarchists.51

In the textile unions Bolsheviks were the dominant influence. The  
union published a journal, Tkach, which took a strongly revolutionary  
line, and at the first national conference in late September, 48  
delegates were Bolsheviks, 10 Mensheviks, 4 SRs and two belonged to  
no party. The conference called for an energetic struggle to transfer  
power to the soviets.52

Throughout 1917 the woodturners’ union was a fortress of  
Bolshevism, with a Bolshevik chairman, I.F. Zholnerovich, and  
journal packed with articles critical of the conciliationist majority in  
the Soviet. In summer the union sent out a questionnaire to  
woodworking establishments, asking about the political affiliation of  
their workers. About 80 replies were received, of which 38 declared  
themselves for the Bolsheviks, 12 for the SRs and one for the  
Mensheviks. Replies ranged in formulation from ‘we belong to the  
Bolshevik party’, ‘we sympathise with the Bolsheviks’, ‘we’ve secretly  
joined the Bolshevik party’, to ‘we have not joined a party, we are  
members of the workers’ party’, ‘we beg you to explain what is a  
“party” — we do not yet know; we know we are workers’.53 The union  
formed a squad of Red Guards in October, commanded by Zholner-  
ovich, which took part in the storming of the Winter Palace. Yet in  
spite of its vigorous Bolshevism, the woodturners’ union steadfastly  
rejected official party policy on industrial unionism.

The Bolsheviks were strong in the union of food workers. A group of  
them on 5 March founded the union of flour workers, which was one  
of the first unions to publish a journal, Zemo Pravdy. As early as 14  
May over 700 flour workers passed a resolution proposed by the  
Bolshevik leader of the union, Boris Ivanov, calling for a transfer of

power to the soviets. A motion expressing confidence in the Soviet  
Executive Committee gained only six votes.54 In July the union of  
flour workers amalgamated with the unions of confectionary workers  
and butchers to form the food workers’ union. The flour workers had  
recalled their Menshevik deputy to the Soviet in May and elected two  
Bolsheviks and one SR Maximalist instead. The food workers’ union  
came to be represented by a similar mix of deputies. In early  
November a general meeting of food workers elected seven Bolshe-  
viks, two SR Maximalists and one anarchist to the Soviet.55

In the leatherworkers’ union a meeting on 12 March elected a  
board consisting of four Bolsheviks and one sympathiser, five SRs,  
one anarchist and two non-party workers.56 In later months the  
Mensheviks Internationalist, Yuzevich, came to be a leading light in  
the union. By September there were nine Bolsheviks, six SRs, one  
Menshevik-Internationalist, one non-party and a handful of un-  
knowns on the board. The political line of the board thus depended  
upon the way in which non-party members voted, i.e. with the  
Bolsheviks or with the SRs. The contents of the union journal, Golos  
Kozhevnika, were unequivocally Internationalist, which suggests that  
the SRs in the union were on the left wing of the party.

In the union of chemical workers, the union of employees of  
medicine and perfume enterprises and in the union of glass workers,  
Menshevik-Internationalists and Mensheviks were the major politic-  
al force. The Bolsheviks were weak in all these unions (though not in  
Moscow), but in the chemical workers’ union, two members did have  
some influence.57

A bastion of Menshevism was the printers’ union — the oldest and  
best-organised union in Petrograd. The peculiarly ‘aristocratic’  
character of many typesetters predisposed them towards moderation  
in politics and a rejection of extremism. During the war most printers  
supported the defencist wing of Menshevism, and Mensheviks  
continued to dominate the union until the civil war period. In  
Petrograd Bolsheviks were rather more influential in the union than  
elsewhere, but they had only five places on the city board compared to  
the Mensheviks’ fifteen.58 The latter tried to steer the union clear of  
political involvement, though after the Kornilov rebellion - when  
trade unionists everywhere were flocking to the Bolshevik banners —  
they adopted the slogan ‘Unity in Action by all parties represented in  
the Soviet’. In the new elections to the union board in October, 9,000  
printers elected eleven Internationalists and fourteen defencists.59 As

late as 10 April 1918, when the Petrograd board was again re-elected,  
6,145 printers voted for the Menshevik/SR/Unemployed Workers’  
list, 3,416 voted for the Bolshevik list and 138 ballot papers were  
invalid.60

This survey of the main factory unions reveals that the Bolsheviks,  
not the Mensheviks, were the most influential political party within  
the Petrograd trade unions. Nevertheless, as far as the Bolshevik  
leadership was concerned, the trade unions were less reliable allies  
than the factory committees, for the presence of significant numbers  
of non-Bolsheviks in the trade unions meant that their compliance  
with Bolshevik policy could not be guaranteed.

STRIKES AND INFLATION

Although the cost of living had more than tripled between 1914 and  
January 1917, the wartime rate of inflation was as nothing compared  
to the rate for 1917. Strumilin estimates that in the course of that year  
official fixed prices in Petrograd increased 2.3 times, while market  
prices rose a staggering 34 times.61 Stepanov, using budget and price  
data, reckoned that by October 1917 the cost of living in Petrograd  
was 14.3 times higher than the prewar level (mixing fixed and market  
prices).62 In Table 13 are reproduced Stepanov’s calculations of  
monthly real-wage levels in six factories between January and  
October 1917. It is apparent that, despite huge increases in nominal  
wages, by October real wages were down by between 10% and 60%  
on the January level which, of course, was already below the prewar  
level.

Not unexpectedly, spiralling inflation had the effect of pushing  
more and more workers to strike for higher wages. Nationally, the  
monthly number of strikers rose from 35,000 in April, to 175,000 in  
June, to 1.1 million in September, to 1.2 million in October.63 The  
geographical area covered by strikes broadened out from the  
Petrograd and Central Industrial Region in spring, to the whole of  
European Russia by autumn. All the time, strikes became more  
organised, more large-scale and more militant. Strikes were a  
politicising experience for those who took part in them: they saw with  
their own eyes how employers were going on investment strike,  
engaging in lockouts, refusing to accept new contracts or to repair  
plant; how the government was colluding with the employers,  
curbing the factory committees and sending troops to quell disorder

**Obukhov works Parviainen Baltic works Nevskaya cotton**

**real wage real wage real wage real wage**

**Month Price nominal nominal nominal nominal**

**19x7 index wage in in as % wage in in as % wage in in as % wage in in as %**

**(1913=1) rubles rubles Jan 1917 rubles rubles Jan 1917 rubles rubles Jan 1917 rubles rubles Jan 1917**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| January | 3-5 | 160 | 46 | 100 | •44 | 4i | 100 | 86 | 24 | 100 | 63 | 18 | 100 |
| April | 4-5 | 192 | 43 | 93 | 212 | 47.1 | ••5 | •42 | 32 | •33 | 130 | 29 | •5i |
| June | 6.0 | 3i9 | 53 | ”5 | 282 | 27 | 114 | 112 | •9 | 79 | •35 | 23 | 128 |
| August | 10.5 | 326 | 3i | 67 | 3i3 | 30 | 73 | •44 | •4 | 58 | - | - | - |
| September | 11.4 | 345 | 30 | 65 | 303 | 27 | 66 | •9i | •7 | 70 | •27 | 20 | hi |
| October | 14-3 | 464 | 32 | 69 | — | — | — | 141 | 10 | 42 | •93 | •4 | 78 |
| Month |  |  | Kersten mill | | Shaposhnikov tobacco | | |  | Chemorabochie (Labour exchange data) | | | |  |
| January | 3-5 | 33 | 10 | 100 | 47 | •3 | 100 | 97 | 28 | 100 |  |  |  |
| April | 4-5 | 100 | 22 | 220 | - | - | - | 111 | 24 | 86 |  |  |  |
| June | 6.0 | 82 | 14 | 140 | •31 | 22 | 169 | 122 | 20 | 7i |  |  |  |
| August | 10.5 | 95 | 9 | 90 | •33 | •3 | 100 | •47 | •4 | 50 |  |  |  |
| September | 11-4 | 93 | 8 | 80 | 180 | 16 | 123 | 141 | 12 | 43 |  |  |  |
| October | 14-3 | 115 | 9 | 90 | •55 | 11 | 85 | 167 | 12 | 43 |  |  |  |

*Source:* Z.V. Stepanov, *Rabochie Petrograda v periodpodgotovki i provedeniya oktyabr’skogo vooruzhennogo vosstaniya* (Moscow, 1965),  
PP-54-5-

in the Donbass. The strikes were important, therefore, in making  
hundreds and thousands of workers aware of political matters and in  
making the policies of the Bolshevik party attractive to them. Yet  
from a practical point of view, strikes were less and less effective.  
Their chief aim was to achieve wage-increases in line with the  
cost-of-living, but such increases as were achieved merely fuelled  
inflation still further. As the economic crisis deepened, employers  
were no longer either willing or able to concede huge increases, and  
increasingly they preferred the prospect of closure and redundancies  
to that of bankruptcy caused by a high wages bill. In Petrograd strike  
activity did not conform to the national pattern. There was a plethora  
of wage conflicts of a spontaneous, atomised character in the spring,  
at a time when the working class nationally was relatively calm. The  
economic crisis set in early in the capital, however, and it quickly  
became apparent that strikes were no longer an effective weapon for  
defending jobs and living standards. The labour movement, there-  
fore, from early summer onwards turned its attention to two  
alternative modes of struggle: first, a fight for collective wage  
contracts to cover all workers in each branch of industry; secondly,  
the battle for workers’ control of production.

Workers in Petrograd did not stop going on strike after the early  
summer, but those workers who struck were not, generally, in the  
major factory industries. They were workers who formerly had been  
considered ‘backward’ — workers in non-factory industries, women,  
etc. Because the focus of this study is on workers in factory industry,  
these strikes will not be examined, but it is important to mention  
them, in order to situate the struggle for collective wage contracts  
(tariffs) in context. In May and June there was a rash of strikes by  
market-stall tenders and shop assistants, envelope-makers and a  
threatened strike by railway workers.64 In June many of the strikes  
involved extremely low-paid women workers, principally laundry-  
women, catering workers and women dye-workers — who were on  
strike for four months.65 Others who struck over the summer included  
sausage-makers and building workers. All of these strikes were small,  
but in spite of the fact that they involved workers with no traditions of  
struggle, they were militant and fairly well organised - throwing up  
strike committees and trade unions. In September there were three  
bigger strikes, led by unions of pharmacy employees, paperworkers  
and railway workers.66 Finally, as already mentioned, there was an

important strike by woodturners in October. These strikes formed the  
background to the campaign for collective wage contracts.

The strikes which swept Russia in the summer of 1917 had more  
than an economic significance. They were a sign of political  
disillusionment — a reflection of the fact that workers felt cheated of  
the gains which they had made as a result of the February Revolution.  
When the Petrograd woodturners’ union sent out a questionnaire to  
its members in the summer, which asked what they had achieved as a  
result of the February Revolution, only half of the eighty replies  
bothered to answer the question. Of the rest, many factories replied  
‘nothing’, ‘nothing special’, ‘nothing has changed’ or ‘nothing, but  
management is better’. Of those replies which mentioned positive  
gains, most referred to the eight-hour day: ‘we have gone from an  
eleven-hour to an eight-hour day, but have made no improvement in  
wages’. Several said that they had achieved increases of 50% in  
wages. Other factories mentioned the democratisation of the enter-  
prise: ‘partially autonomous management has been introduced’;  
‘hiring and firing is done by the workers’; ‘the management has been  
replaced by a collective of employees in which worker -starosty  
participate’; ‘the foremen have been sacked and are now elected’; ‘a  
conciliation chamber and factory committee with starosty have been  
introduced’.67 It is hard to believe when reading these replies, that  
only three months previously, workers had been euphoric about the  
February Revolution. There was thus widespread disappointment  
among workers at the fact that their economic position had not  
improved, and this played an important part in radicalising them.

THE CAMPAIGN FOR COLLECTIVE WAGE CONTRACTS

Collective bargaining, or formal negotiation between organised  
groups of workers and employers, was almost unknown in Russia. It  
had begun to develop in 1905-6, when some thirty contracts had been  
signed, most notably in the St Petersburg printing and bakery trades,  
but it had subsequently faded away.68 In Western Europe, too,  
collective bargaining, involving more than a single employer and his  
workforce, was slow to develop. By 1914 it was probably most  
advanced in Britain, but even there, bargaining at a regional or  
national level on questions of pay and hours (as opposed to disputes  
procedure) was rare.69 Only after the outbreak of war in 1914 did

national agreements on war bonuses and Whitleyism lead to a big  
expansion of centralised collective bargaining in Britain.70 The big  
lead enjoyed by Britain over other countries in this sphere, however,  
was quickly challenged by Russia in 1917.

The conclusion of collective wage contracts, or ‘tariffs’ as they were  
known, was one of the greatest achievements of the trade unions in  
1917. Petrograd led the way in this field. Twenty-five contracts were  
signed in the capital up to October, and a further twenty-four up to  
July 1918.71 Moscow, Sormovo, Khar'kov and the Donbass slowly  
followed the example of the metropolitan unions, though employers’  
organisations put up stronger resistance to centralised collective  
bargaining in these regions.72

The trade-union leaders of Petrograd were pushed into centralised  
collective bargaining by the spontaneous, atomised wages struggles of  
spring 1917, which had meant that the less well-organised, less  
strategically-placed workers had often been unable to achieve  
increases in wages on a par with those achieved by workers who were  
better organised and whose skills were in demand. It was in order to  
overcome growing unevenness in wage-levels and to help the  
low-paid, that unions began to draw up contracts. A further  
consideration which disposed the unions towards collective bargain-  
ing was the fact that elemental wages struggles stultified efforts to  
create an organised, united labour movement. The board of the  
metalworkers’ union issued a strongly-worded statement in early  
summer which said:

**Instead of organisation we, unfortunately, now see chaos** [stikhiya\; **instead of  
discipline and solidarity - fragmented actions. Today one factory acts,  
tomorrow another and the day after that the first factory strikes again - in  
order to catch up with the second. In individual enterprises, alas, we see not  
even purely mechanical factory actions, but irresponsible actions by indi-  
vidual sections within the factory, such as when one section delivers an  
ultimatum to another. The raising of demands is often done without any prior  
preparation, sometimes by-passing the elected factory committee. The  
metalworkers’ union is informed about factory conflicts only after demands  
have been put to management, and when both sides are already in a state of  
war. The demands themselves are distinguished by lack of consistency and  
uniformity.73**

The contracts, which were drawn up by the unions, were designed  
to overcome such inconsistency. They sought, first, to specify the  
wage rates for all jobs in a particular industry and thus to rationalise  
the pay structure; secondly, to diminish differentials in earnings

between skilled and unskilled workers; thirdly, they aimed to  
standardise working hours, improve working conditions, control  
hiring and firing and to establish a procedure for the arbitration of  
disputes.

Collective bargaining, generally, is a double-edged sword. From  
the point of view of labour, it marks an extension of trade-union power  
in the sphere of wage bargaining and the recognition by employers of  
trade-union legitimacy. From the viewpoint of capital, however,  
collective bargaining can be a means of incorporating unions into an  
established system of industrial relations and of undercutting the  
influence of the union rank-and-file in favour of‘responsible’ officials.  
In Petrograd some sections of employers and some circles of  
government were not unaware of the potential advantages of  
collective bargaining,74 but their hopes were quickly dashed, since  
the balance of power in 1917 was tilted in favour of the unions. The  
SFWO tended to find the wage-rates proposed by the unions  
unacceptable and so negotiations proved protracted. Most unions  
threatened strike action in the course of negotiations, and several  
unions, including the printers’ and paperworkers’, actively engaged  
in strike action. Collective wage contracts were thus not achieved  
without a fight.

THE METALWORKERS’ CONTRACT

The following account of the conflict between the metalworkers’  
union and the metalworking section of the SFWO over the contract is  
interesting not just for what it shows about the relationship between  
organised labour and capital, but also for what it shows about the  
complex and often tense relationship between the labour leadership  
and the rank-and-file. It reveals how a section of the working class,  
considered to be one of the most ‘backward’, i.e. the chemorabochie  
(unskilled labourers) of the metal industry, organised in pursuit of  
their economic welfare and developed a revolutionary political  
consciousness through the experience of this essentially ‘economic’  
struggle. At the same time, the account shows how the militancy of  
the chemorabochie came close to jeopardising the contract being  
negotiated on their behalf by the union leaders.

In May a special rates commission was set up by the board of the  
metal union to collect information about wages in the 200 different  
metal works of Petrograd and to investigate the 166 different claims

which had been made by metalworkers in March and April. The task  
of drawing up a contract was by no means easy, since there were  
about 300 different jobs in the metal industry.75 Nevertheless, after  
nearly two months’ work, the union produced a contract which  
divided metalworkers into four groups - highly skilled, skilled,  
semi-skilled and unskilled. In calculating wage rates for each job, the  
union employed three criteria: firstly, the necessary minimum for  
subsistence; secondly, the skill, training and precision required by  
each job; thirdly, the difficulty, arduousness or danger of the job.  
Each of the four skill groups was sub-divided into three categories to  
take into account differences in length of work experience.76 The  
union hoped to persuade the SFWO to accept the wage rates  
proposed for each of the four categories in return for a promise of no  
further conflict while the contract was in force.

An explosive conflict had been building up among the low-paid  
workers of the metal industry which centred on the Putilov works.  
Accelerating inflation was rendering the situation of the low-paid ever  
more desperate. Recognising that their weak position on the labour  
market was aggravated by lack of organisation, chemorabochie in a few  
factories had begun as early as March to band together, and on 9  
April they met to form a union.77 This existed only for a couple of  
months and then dissolved into the metalworkers’ union in June. It  
was a short-lived but significant development, for it signalled that  
unskilled workers, having taken little part in the labour movement up  
to this time, were beginning to move. It was at the Putilov works,  
where some 10,000 chemorabochie were employed, that the unskilled  
were most active. Wages at Putilov were lower than average and those  
of the unskilled were barely enough to keep body and soul together.  
The works committee was in negotiation with management in April  
and May over a wage rise, which would have given unskilled men a  
wage of six rubles a day and unskilled women five rubles, but no  
agreement could be reached on whether the new rates should be  
backdated.78 On 21 April the works committee appealed to chemo-  
rabochie ‘to refrain from careless and ill-considered actions at the  
present time and peacefully await the solution of the problem by the  
works committee’.79

During May prices began to climb and food shortages became  
acute. By the beginning of June the distress of chemorabochie was  
severe. On 4 June chemorabochie from nine metal-works on Vyborg  
Side met to formulate the demands which they wished the metal-

workers’ union to include in its forthcoming contract. Although they  
feared that the skilled leaders of the union might be unresponsive to  
their plight, they agreed to: ‘recognise the necessity of conducting an  
organised struggle together with all workers in the metalworking  
industry and to decisively repudiate sectional actions except in  
exceptional circumstances’. They voted for a daily wage of twelve  
rubles for heavy labouring and ten rubles for light labouring; equal  
pay for women doing the same jobs as men; a sliding scale of  
wage-increases to keep abreast of inflation, and an end-to overtime.80

At the Putilov works the wage dispute dragged on. At the beginning  
of June several shops announced that they intended to go on strike.  
On 8 June the works committee begged them not to, since they were  
about to refer the wage claim to arbitration by the Ministry of  
Labour. The committee secretly met Gvozdev, who was now in the  
Ministry of Labour, to press for his support. This annoyed the leaders  
of the metal union, who had promised the SFWO to freeze all wage  
negotiations from 1 June, pending settlement of the contract.81 On 19  
June the Ministry of Labour turned down the rates proposed by the  
works committee. In a flash, the Putilovtsy came out on strike.82 The  
works committee called on the charismatic Bolshevik agitator, V.  
Volodarskii, to persuade the workers to return to work. The next day  
he managed to persuade most shops to end their strike, but those with  
high proportions of unskilled workers embarked on a go-slow.

On 20 June the Petersburg Committee of the Bolshevik party held  
an emergency meeting to discuss the situation at Putilov. S.M.  
Gessen described how seething economic discontent at the factory  
was feeding political radicalism:

**The Putilov works has come over decisively to our side. The militant mood of  
the Putilov works has deep economic roots. The question of wage increases is  
an acute one. From the very beginning of the revolution, the workers’  
demands for wage increases were not satisfied. Gvozdev came to the factory  
and promised to satisfy their demands but did not fulfil his promises. On the  
18 June demonstration the Putilovtsy bore a placard saying, ‘They have  
deceived us’ ... We will be able to restrain some Putilovtsy, but if there are  
actions elsewhere, then the Putilov works will not be restrained and will drag  
other factories behind it.83**

This proved to be a remarkably prescient analysis, since it correctly  
forecast the catalytic role which would soon be played by the  
Putilovtsy in bringing about the July Days.

On 21 June a meeting took place at the Putilov works of repre-

sentatives from 73 metal works committees, from the union and from  
the socialist parties, to discuss the contract which the union was to  
begin to negotiate with the SFWO the following day. This meeting  
agreed unanimously to make preparations for joint action in support  
of the contract, including a general strike if necessary; only a Baptist  
worker from the Baltic factory demurred to this proposal.84 The  
meeting passed a fiery resolution by 82 votes to 4, with 12 abstentions,  
pledging support to the Putilovtsy but warning of the dangers of  
trying to go it alone:

**Partial economic action under present economic conditions can only lead to a  
disorganised political struggle by workers in Petrograd. We therefore propose  
that the Putilov workers restrain their justified displeasure at the conduct of  
the ministers who have delayed the solution of the conflict by every means.  
We believe it is necessary to prepare our forces for a speedy and general  
action. Furthermore we propose to the Putilovtsy that they let the metal-  
workers’ union conduct negotiations with the employers and ministers  
concerning their demands ... We believe that even if the wage increases are  
now granted, the uninterrupted rise in the price of commodities and of  
accommodation will render this gain worthless. And so a decisive struggle is  
necessary to establish workers’ control of production and distribution, which,  
in turn, requires the transfer of power into the hands of the soviets.85**

A Putilov worker, reporting on the conference for Pravda explained  
how the three-month struggle for better wages had radicalised his  
fellow-workers: ‘We have seen with our own eyes ... how the present  
Provisional Government refuses to take the resolute measures against  
the capitalists, without which our demands cannot be satisfied. The  
interests of the capitalists are dearer to it than the interests of the  
working class.’86 By the end of June the labour organisations of  
Putilov could not contain the militancy of the low-paid, and found  
themselves in danger of being sucked into the maelstrom of dis-  
content. On 26 June the works committee and the district soviet set up  
a ‘revolutionary committee’ to keep order at the factory. A Bolshevik  
member of the works committee, I.N. Sokolov, reported: ‘The mass of  
workers in the factory ... are in a state of turmoil because of the low  
rates of pay, so that even we, the members of the works committee,  
have been seized by the collar, dragged into the shops and told: “Give  
us money.”’87 By 3 July the labour organisations could restrain the  
workers no longer. Having made contact with revolutionary regi-  
ments, they emptied onto the streets.88

The imbroglio of the July Days seems to have had little effect on the  
movement of the low-paid. On 1 July the first proper delegate

conference of chemorabochiefvaA taken place, with representatives from  
29 of the largest factories. This demanded fixed prices on subsistence  
commodities and voted against action by individual factories.89 On 7  
July the chemorabochie at Putilov met together to declare that they  
could no longer live on 6 r.20 k. a day. They demanded ten rubles and  
a ‘curb on the rapacious appetites of those blood-suckers and pirates  
who speculate in everyday necessities’.90 Three days later the second  
delegate conference of chemorabochie met to discuss the deadlock which  
had overtaken negotiations on the contract.

Negotiations between the metal union and the SFWO had begun  
on 22 June. They almost immediately reached an impasse, because of  
what Shlyapnikov described as ‘the groundless rejection by our  
factory delegates of all the SFWO proposals, particularly the point  
about guaranteed productivity norms’.91 According to Gastev, only  
four out of the 200 delegates voted for the productivity clause on 25  
June.92 Only after the board threatened to resign did a further  
delegate meeting on 2 July agree to accept productivity clauses as a  
way of ‘maintaining production at a proper level’ and of ‘removing  
the necessity for trivial personal supervision by members and organs  
of administration’. The delegates furthermore agreed that the fixing  
of norms of output ‘puts on the agenda the question of workers’  
control of production as the necessary guarantee of both labour  
productivity and the productivity of the enterprise as a whole’.93  
Having gained agreement in principle to a productivity clause in the  
contract, the union went back to the negotiating table on 12 July.

It was only on 8July that the SFWO was told the rates of pay being  
proposed by the metal union. The draft contract recommended  
average hourly earnings of 2 r. to 2 r.20 k. for the highly skilled, 1 r.  
90 k. for skilled workers; 1 r.75 k. for semi-skilled workers and rates of  
between 1 r. and 1 r.50 k. for unskilled male workers, falling to 80 k.  
for unskilled female workers.94 The SFWO did not object to the rates  
proposed for skilled categories, but rejected outright the rates  
proposed for the unskilled, since the relative cost of conceding the  
wage-increases to the low-paid would have been much greater than  
the cost of the increases to the highly-paid. Instead the employers  
proposed an hourly rate of 70 k. to 1 r. for unskilled men, falling to  
60 k. for unskilled women, and between 1 r.30 k. and 1 r.50 k. for  
semi-skilled workers.95 Stalemate ensued and it was agreed on 14July  
to ask the Ministry of Labour to arbitrate.

Against the advice of the Bolshevik Central Committee, which had

not yet recovered from the battering it received at the hands of the  
Kerensky government after the July Days, the leaders of the  
metalworkers’ union began to prepare for a general strike. The  
blockage of the contract negotiations had created a further ground-  
swell of discontent among metalworkers and convinced the union  
leadership of the need for action. At Putilov around 17 July,  
mortisemakers, borers, planers and saddlemakers were all on strike -  
to the annoyance of the shop and works committees - but it was not  
until 22 July that general unrest blew up, with young workers in the  
gun-shop wrecking machinery.96 On that day the government  
arbitration commission announced its decision: chemorabochie were to  
get around 20% less, and semi-skilled workers around 15% less than  
had been proposed by the union, but more than was on offer from the  
SFWO.97 The latter immediately announced that it would not accept  
the decision.

On 24 July a city-wide meeting of union delegates agreed, with one  
vote against and one abstention, to call a general strike. The next day  
152 chemorabochie from 52 factories backed this decision. They also  
passed a political resolution which condemned the government for  
fawning to the capitalists and Kadets and for persecuting the  
Bolsheviks, and called for the transfer of power to the soviets.98 No  
sooner had the commitment to a general strike been made, than the  
Ministry of Labour announced that the settlement would be made  
binding on the employers. On 26 July a further meeting of union  
delegates met to discuss whether or not to go ahead with the strike, in  
view of the government’s decision. The feeling expressed by most  
factory delegates was that it would be very difficult to sustain a strike  
in the existing conditions. The union and all the socialist parties  
recommended acceptance of the arbitration settlement. But whilst  
the delegates agreed to call off the strike, they voted unanimously,  
with ten abstentions, not to accept the 20% reduction in the wage  
rates for chemorabockie." In spite of this, the board of the union  
accepted the reduced offer made by the arbitration commission, and  
managed to cajole a delegate meeting into accepting that the offer was  
the best they could hope to achieve. On 7 August the contract was  
duly signed.100

In the state sector there was strong opposition to the metal  
contract. Workers in enterprises subject to the Artillery Administra-  
tion insisted that the original rates proposed by the union be  
accepted, and the Administration reluctantly agreed on 26

September.101 A conference of workers in Naval Department enter-  
prises accepted the principles of the tariff on 11 September, but again  
argued for the original union rates. This led to wrangles between the  
Naval Department, the works committees and the metalworkers’  
union, and a decision was made to hold a ballot of all workers under  
the Naval Department. At the Baltic works on 16 October the works  
committee discussed whether or not to accept the contract. A  
Bolshevik resolution recommending acceptance was passed by 29  
votes to 15, against an anarchist resolution supporting higher rates  
and smaller differentials.102 The result of the general ballot, however,  
was to reject the final contract by 27,000 votes to 23,000.103 A  
settlement had still not been reached in the enterprises of the Naval  
Department at the time of the October uprising.

The compromise reached between the metal union and the SFWO  
cost the chemorabochie dear. Rocketing inflation meant that by the time  
the contract came into force, the rates for the unskilled barely covered  
subsistence needs. In general, however, the chemorabochie resigned  
themselves to the contract, feeling that even an inadequate increase  
was better than none at all. At the Putilov works the chemorabochie  
initially refused to accept the terms worked out by the arbitration  
commission, but they later changed their minds. A further round of  
e'meutes broke out at the factory, however, after management refused to  
backdate the contract to 9 June — in direct contravention of the  
contract’s terms. Dissatisfaction with the contract, together with  
political frustration caused by the government’s failure to tackle the  
pressing problems afflicting the Russian people, encouraged chemor-  
abochie in the metal industry to continue meeting. During August  
three conferences took place to discuss redundancies, the growing  
counter-revolutionary threat and the crisis of the Kerensky govern-  
ment. After the Bolsheviks came to power the chemorabochie began to  
press for a revision of the rates of the tariff, some even arguing for  
equal pay for all workers.104 In November the chemorabochie refused to  
accept a new minimum of 10 r. a day, insisting on 12 r. Revised rates  
were finally implemented on 19 January 1918, and the least skilled  
were given the biggest percentage increases.105 The intention of the  
metalworkers’ contract was thus finally realised, but it was a pyrrhic  
victory, for by this time thousands of workers were being made  
redundant every day.

To implement the contract, rates commissions were created in the  
factories. These were to distribute workers into skill-categories and to

fix piece-rates. They consisted of equal numbers of worker and  
management representatives. Any unresolved disputes were to be  
referred to a Central Rates Commission, consisting of equal numbers  
from the metal union and the SFWO.106 With inflation soaring  
wildly, it was understandable that workers should have attempted to  
achieve as high a wage classification for themselves as possible. The  
refusal of the rates commissions to capitulate to such sectional  
pressure engendered bitter conflict. At the Putilov works a general  
meeting of planers, borers and mortisemakers called on workers in  
these three crafts in all factories to come to a conference to discuss  
their low categorisation in the contract.107 In the crucible-shop  
workers walked out in mid-September when they learnt the category  
to which they had been assigned. A general meeting of workers in the  
gun-shop called on them to return to work, saying ‘your strike only  
plays into the hands of the employers and disorganises the solid ranks  
of Putilov workers’.108 At the New Parviainen works some 200 fitters  
and turners in the repair department went on strike to protest their  
contract classification at the beginning of October — an action lauded  
by anarchists but deplored by the Bolshevik factory committee.109  
Some time later chemorabochie at the factory demanded an equal wage  
for all workers regardless of skill — a demand turned down by a general  
factory meeting.110 At the Rosenkrantz works contract disputes had  
to be referred to the Central Rates Commission, which finally an-  
nounced its decision in early November. When the decision became  
known, several groups of workers placed in category three appeared  
at the director’s office armed with rifles to demand reclassification.  
When the director pointed out that they were flagrantly con-  
travening the decision of the Commission, the workers retorted: ‘We  
spit on the union and on its rates commission.’111 At the Cable, Anchar  
and Baranovskii works chemorabochie engaged in brief strikes in pro-  
test against the low rates of the contract.112 In a few factories man-  
agement was coerced into paying more than the going rate, but the  
metalworkers’ union strongly opposed this, suggesting to the SFWO  
that it fine any of its members who did not abide by the contract.113

As early as August, Shlyapnikov wrote a stern article in the union  
journal condemning sectional opposition to the contract:

**We propose to comrades dissatisfied with the rates commissions to send  
petitions directly to the union and not to try to settle disputes out of court, so  
as not to bring disorganisation into our ranks ... Our contract does not open  
the gates to the kingdom of socialism ... it is an agreement between two  
warring sides and thus has force only in so far as each side is organised.114**

Three months later Shlyapnikov imputed such sectionalism to  
exclusive groups of craft workers in the industry:

**There cannot be several unions in one enterprise - all trades must unite in one  
family ... Every attempt by individual trades to use the ‘right moment’ to  
raise separate, particularist demands is inadmissible. The conscious layers of  
skilled metalworkers - fitters, turners, etc. - understand this beautifully, and  
refrain from any separate demands. The same position is taken by the very  
unfortunate, badly-paid** chemorabochie. **Despite the severity of their situation,  
separate demands by** chemorabochie **are rare. Particularism is apparent chiefly  
among small trades such as welders, who scarcely exceed a thousand people  
in the whole of Piter, also patternmakers, stokers, draughtsmen, who  
constitute an extremely limited number, but who are imbued with prejudices  
to the effect that their own profession is qualitatively different from any other,  
and that they cannot collaborate with others in the defence of their  
interests.115**

Whilst craft consciousness may have played a part in fostering  
sectional opposition to the metalworkers’ contract, it is clear that  
many of the groups hostile to the contract were those whose earnings  
had fallen in real terms during the war. This was true, for example, of  
the importunate planers, borers and mortisemakers in the Putilov  
works.116. One should thus not exaggerate the extent to which craftist  
sentiment motivated opposition to the contract. The union faced  
considerable sectional opposition to the contract, but its ultimate  
success in implementing it in the majority of factories by October was  
no mean achievement, given the intractability of the industrial crisis.  
This achievement attests the fact that pressures towards class unity  
were, in the last analysis, stronger than those towards craft par-  
ticularism.

THE WAGE CONTRACTS: KEY FEATURES

A central aim of union policy in drawing up contracts was to reduce  
wage-differentials in each industry. The printers’ union was a pioneer  
in this respect. It was the first union in Petrograd to draw up a  
collective wage contract in March and it fought hard against section-  
alism within the print workforce. Printers had been almost unique  
among skilled workers in Petrograd in suffering a sharp decline in real  
wages during the war and in suffering from unemployment.117 There  
was thus a considerable head of pressure behind economic demands  
in March. The union leaders determined to reduce wage-differentials  
by raising the rates of unskilled printers by 90% to 100%, compared  
to an increase of 50% for skilled printers. This provoked opposition

from a minority of typesetters, mainly those in state print-works.  
They set up a liaison committee of state print-works which tried to  
negotiate a separate wage contract, involving vast increases of 75 r. to  
87 r. a month for the highly skilled, compared to 20 r. to 30 r. for the  
unskilled.118 One angry member of this committee wrote to the union  
journal lambasting it for ‘putting the wretched water-carrier’s nag on  
a par with the drayman’s fine mare’.119 The union rode the storm, but  
when it came to renegotiating the contract in June, opposition again  
burst forth. Debate raged in the pages of the union journal as to the  
virtues of a ‘levelling’ tariff. K.P. Tik gave a classic defence of  
wage-differentials, arguing that typesetters were not getting reward  
for their skills and were scarcely better off than ‘bums’ (khamy) who  
spent their time playing cards and getting drunk. A union spokesman  
delivered a vigorous counterblast, asking why typesetters should be  
different from other skilled workers, and why unskilled workers  
should not also live decently.120

The second contract increased wage-differentials slightly, which  
suggests that the printers’ leaders were forced to make some  
concession to craft pressure.121 Negotiation of the contract went less  
smoothly than in March. When the employers refused to backdate the  
contract to 1 August, the union brought out twenty print-works,  
employing 3,000 printers, in a well-organised strike.122 The em-  
ployers agreed to backdate the contract, but were criticised by the  
SFWO for so doing. In return, the union agreed to drop earlier  
demands for formal recognition of the right to control hiring and  
firing and for longer holidays. This concession provoked discontent  
among some radical printers (at the Kan works and elsewhere) and  
among envelope-makers, which the Bolsheviks did not fail to exploit.  
Nevertheless the union had the solid backing of the majority of  
printers - 90% of whom were union members, thus making them the  
most highly unionised group of industrial workers.123

The attempt to reduce differentials was central to the tariff policy of  
all major unions, as Table 14 makes clear. Differentials were highest in  
the glass industry, owing to the very high earnings of an elite of  
glassblowers, but they diminished dramatically after October. In the  
metal industry differentials had increased during the war, and the  
union tried to combat this trend by assigning larger percentage  
increases to the low-paid than to the higher-paid. The diminution in  
wage-differentials which came about was not just the result of tariff  
policy, but of market forces and inflation. The collapse of industry in

Table 14: Wage-differentials among factory workers in Petrograd igij-18  
The daily wage of the highest-paid category of workers expressed as a  
percentage of the daily wage of the lowest-paid category (= 100)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Collective Wage Contract |  | % Difference | | |  |
| 1 June <917 | 1 Oct. I917 | 1 Jan. 1918 | 1 April 1918 | 1 July 1918 |
| Textiles: spinning & weaving |  | 205-9 | 140.7 | 140.7 | 126.3 |
| cloth-printing & dyeing | - | 235-3 | 150.0 | 150.0 | 131.6 |
| sewing | - | 116.7 | 125.0 | 125.0 | 138-9 |
| Paper-makers | - | '94-4 | !94-4 | 157-7 | I38-9 |
| Envelope-makers | 220 | 216.7 | 160.0 | 160.0 | 138-9 |
| Printers | 212.5 | 250 | 250.0 | 250.0 | 187-5 |
| Woodturners | - | 216.7 | 244.4 | 173-1 | 130.6 |
| Metalworkers | - | 244.4 | I73-1 | 173-1 | 138.9 |
| Glass-makers | 333-3 | 333-3 | 192-1 | !92-3 | 1389 |
| Leatherworkers | 209.7 | 173-9 | 173-9 | 156.5 | 138.9 |
| Food workers | 203.1 | 203.1 | 173-1 | 173-1 | I4I-7 |
| T obaccoworkers | 160.0 | 200 | 200 | 200 | 184.2 |
| Chemicalworkers | — | - | 184.6 | 184.6 | 139-8 |

*Source: Materialy po statistike truda,* issue 6, 1919 pp.22-3.

early 1918 produced a reduction in differentials, which was especially  
marked in the wood, glass, leather, print and chemical industries.  
By April 1918 the metal union felt that this ‘spontaneous’ levelling  
had gone too far and, in an effort to create incentives for skilled  
workers, increased differentials from 139 to 175 between July and  
September.124

A second interesting aspect of contracts concerned their policy on  
piece-rates. Before 1917 the labour movement had generally opposed  
piece-rates, seeing them as the neplus ultra of the capitalist work-ethic  
and profoundly inimical to socialism. In 1907, for example, the first  
national conference of printers had urged their abolition.125 After the  
February Revolution piece-rates were abolished in many factories in  
the private sector, and the first contracts sought to formalise this  
abolition. The leather union contract initially demanded an end to  
piece-rates, but on 15 August the union dropped this demand in  
return for the SFWO’s acceptance of the rest of the contract.126 The  
rapid fall in labour-productivity seems to have persuaded other

unions that piece-rates were inevitable. Clause six of the metal-  
workers’ contract declared that: ‘work must be done by piece in all  
cases where factory management finds such a method of work  
possible and technically necessary for the maintenance of produc-  
tion’.127 The rates commissions were to so determine piece-rates as to  
ensure that workers earned the hourly rates proposed by the tariff.128  
In early October a meeting of 217 members of factory rates-  
commissions in the metal industry agreed that piece-rates need not be  
a means of‘wringing sweat’ from the workers.129 The woodturners’  
contract also specified that piece-rates, determined jointly by the  
SFWO and the unions, should be the norm.130 There is no doubt that  
piece-rates were a powerful factor disposing the SFWO to accept  
contracts. In early September the employers’ newspaper opined:  
‘The other extremely important point in our collective wage contracts  
concerns the introduction of piece-rates ... against which the workers  
fought so energetically until recently. This is dictated by the necessity  
of raising labour-productivity, which has fallen so low.’131

One of the most controversial aspects of the contracts was their  
productivity clauses. Employers were implacable in their insistence  
that in return for a guaranteed wage there should be guaranteed  
output. As we have seen, metal union leaders had to overcome strong  
opposition from rank-and-file delegates to get this principle accepted.  
The chemical workers’ contract included a productivity clause almost  
identical in wording to that of the metalworkers’ contract.132 The  
paperworkers’ contract specified that norms of output should be  
agreed jointly by management and workers and that in case of  
non-fulfilment of norms, workers should receive only two-thirds the  
agreed rate.133 In September the Provisional Central Committee of  
the national metalworkers’ union urged local branches to pay greater  
heed to productivity:

**We must be sure that the organised masses bring into the new world which we  
are making a definite level of production, we must be confident that the  
working masses will enter the new system with a culture of production**[proiz.vodstven.naya kul'tura] **which will guarantee them from chaos under the  
new, free forms of economic management.134**

One can here discern the key elements of a discourse of ‘productiv-  
ism’, which was particularly associated with the metal union in  
1917—18. This construed socialism as rooted in production, as  
intimately bound up with the creation of a ‘labour-culture’; it lauded  
the ‘producer’, ‘planning’, ‘expertise’ which derived from large-scale

machine production and welcomed technical innovation.135 It was  
propounded, in particular, by a group of metalworkers around A.  
Gastev, who briefly formed the Platform of Labour Industrialism  
group in 1918.136 Although this group rejected the possibility of an  
immediate advance to socialism in Russia, many of their ideas were  
taken up by the Bolshevik leadership in the spring of 1918 (see  
Chapter 10). Increasingly in 1918, however, the stress on maintaining  
productivity, with its concomitant acceptance ofTaylorism and piece-  
rates, became divorced from a concern with ‘new, free forms of  
economic management’.

One final aspect of the contracts concerns their policy on equal pay  
for women workers. ‘Equal pay for equal work’ was a phrase which  
appeared in most contracts, but it is difficult to assess what it meant in  
practice. The demand for equal pay did not figure much in the  
struggles of women workers prior to 1917.137 The RSDLP, in contrast  
to the German SPD, did not include a demand for equal pay in the  
party programme.138 This may have reflected the fact that very few  
Russian women did jobs identical to those of men. In 1917 women  
began to raise the demand. When the metalworkers’ union drew up  
plans for a contract, a meeting of delegates from the Vyborg district  
warned the leadership not to forget equal pay.139 The metal contract  
included a clause on equal pay but, significantly, the rates for  
unskilled women were lower than those for unskilled men. The same  
was true of the textileworkers’, printers’, woodturners’ and paperwor-  
kers’ contracts; it may also have been true of the leatherworkers’ and  
chemicalworkers’ contracts, although both included equal-pay  
clauses.140 Because the majority of women continued to do jobs  
different from those of men, it appears that the commitment to equal  
pay remained an abstract one. The contracts did little to improve the  
status of women workers, even though they raised their pay.

It is difficult to evaluate the overall success of the contracts. In  
terms of their overriding objective, they were a depressing failure, for  
improvements in wages were devoured by ravaging inflation almost  
before the ink had dried on the contracts. In other respects,  
particularly in the sphere of working-hours and holidays, gains were  
more substantial, but the unions made concessions in return for these  
gains. They agreed to reductions in rates, to ‘no-strike’ clauses and to  
the restoration of piece-rates. The contracts thus in no sense  
represented an unalloyed victory of labour over capital. In other, less  
tangible respects, however, the contracts represented an important

achievement of the labour movement. Firstly, they overcame the  
situation of spring 1917 in which different groups each fought for  
themselves; they introduced an element of rationality into wage-  
determination. Secondly, they succeeded, in spite of considerable  
sectional opposition, in reducing the gap between the highest- and  
lowest-paid workers. Thirdly, they helped to strengthen the unity of  
the working class. This may, at first sight, seem paradoxical, since  
collective bargaining entails particular groups of workers selling their  
labour as advantageously as possible on a given job-market, and thus  
tends to promote sectionalism or ‘job’ consciousness. In 1917,  
however, trade-union negotiators were well aware of the danger of  
institutionalising sectionalism. They consulted with one another and  
negotiated with the objective of improving the position of the working  
class as a whole within the capitalist system. Moreover they sought,  
via the contract-negotiations, to increase union membership and to  
strengthen members’ identification with the union. By consulting  
with their members, union negotiators managed to create a sense that  
the union mattered, and that it was responsive to the needs of the  
members.

RELATIONS BETWEEN WORKERS AND ‘SLUZHASHCHIE’

The period between February and October 1917 saw a surge of  
organisation and militancy among white-collar workers in the  
factories. The February Revolution was crucial in severing some of  
the bonds which bound white-collar workers to management, and in  
encouraging them to form independent organisations of a trade-union  
type. In the honeymoon period of the revolution, i.e. in the months of  
March and April, clerical and technical personnel went to great  
lengths to repair relations with workers on the shop floor, to make a  
fresh start. This was exemplified in some factories by the desire of  
white-collar workers to be represented on the factory committees. In  
early March officeworkers at the Triangle and Rosenkrantz works  
elected delegates to the works committees. At the Arsenal works a  
representative of the foremen sat on the committee.141 At the  
Admiralty works white-collar workers were allowed four representa-  
tives on the committee, but in April it was reported that they were not  
attending meetings.142 Generally speaking, white-collar workers set  
up their own committees independent of the workers’ committees. At  
the Baltic works white-collar workers not only had a works committee

but also committees in each shop.143 At the Nevskii shipyard,  
sluzhashchie refused to sit on the factory committee, challenged its right  
to dismiss administrative and technical staff, and declared themselves  
‘depressed’ by the director’s willingness to attend factory committee  
meetings.144

Both the First and Second Conferences of Factory Committees  
called for the representation of clerical and technical staff on all  
workers’ committees.145 At the Tentelevskii chemical works on i  
August workers and salaried employees did agree to dissolve their  
separate committees.146 At the Triangle works the three committees  
of manual, clerical and technical staff formed a joint executive in  
September.147 At the beginning of October committees of workers  
and salaried employees in factories under the Naval Department  
amalgamated. Yet these were not typical. In most, though by no  
means all factories in the capital, manual and white-collar workers  
continued to have separate organisations at enterprise level right up  
to October.

In the wake of the February Revolution, sluzhashchie, like manual  
workers, began by creating starosta-type organisations rather than  
trade unions. The Central Council of Starosty of Factory Sluzhashchie  
(CCSFS) was founded on 24 March and consisted of stewards elected  
by white-collar workers in each factory. By May white-collar workers  
in over 200 factories were affiliated to the CCSFS, which aspired to  
represent sluzhashchie both inside and outside industry, but in practice  
represented mainly sluzhashchie in industry, since those in commercial  
and governmental institutions tended to organise through their trade  
unions. The leaders of the CCSFS - the Menshevik-defencist,  
Novakovskii, and the Menshevik (but one-time Bolshevik) Yakovlev  
- formulated a series of radical demands at the beginning of April, for  
a six-hour working day, wage-increases, a minimum wage of 150 r. a  
month, equal pay for women, overtime at time-and-a-half, recogni-  
tion of the committees of sluzhashchie and control of hiring and  
firing.148 These demands were put to the SFWO, which took  
exception to the demands for a six-hour day, equal pay and control of  
hiring and firing. After abortive negotiation the CCSFS resolved to  
call a strike on 16 May.149 In the event, a strike was averted by the  
intervention of Gvozdev at the Ministry of Labour, who persuaded  
the SFWO at the end of May to agree to wage rises and the six-hour  
day, although it would not concede the right to control hiring and  
firing.150 Having achieved a partial victory, the CCSFS rapidly went

into decline. It had been held together mainly by the duumvirate of  
Novakovskii and Yakovlev, and when both went to work in the  
Ministry of Labour, the CCSFS fell apart. By October the rocketing  
cost of living was causing individual strikes of white-collar workers at  
the Nevskii shipyard, Tudor, Aivaz and Ippolitov works, but neither  
the CCSFS nor the clerical workers’ union offered much in the way of  
leadership.151

The growth of trade unionism among sluzhashchie was remarkable.  
In the spring and summer of 1917 about thirty unions of sluzhashchie  
sprang to life in Petrograd which, by a process of fusion, decreased in  
number to around fifteen by October. White-collar workers in  
factories were organised into a number of different unions. Some were  
members of the largest union of sluzhashchie, the union of commercial  
and industrial employees (Soyuz Torgovo-promyshlennykh Sluzhashchikh),  
which by October had about 26,000 members. Most of the latter’s  
members were shopworkers, however, which meant that many  
clerical and technical staff felt unhappy about joining this union  
(‘What has an officeworker in common with a sausagemaker?’ being a  
prevalent attitude).152 In addition, the union had a strong Bolshevik  
leadership, which alienated some white-collar workers and encour-  
aged a group of Mensheviks to form a breakaway ‘union of factory  
sluzhashchie’, which had a limited success in the Petrograd Side and  
Vasilevskii districts of the capital.153 The largest of the solely  
white-collar unions was the union of clerical workers, which by  
October had a membership of around 20,000, and included many  
workers in factory offices.154 The union of factory foremen and  
technicians had about 6,000 members by October, and the union of  
draughtsmen about 2,000. A small union of accountants also  
existed.155

It is difficult to generalise about the extent to which workers and  
sluzhashchie supported one another in their struggles. At the Putilov  
works on 2 June the works committee supported the demands raised  
by the CCSFS, but warned white-collar workers at the factory from  
taking any partial action pending the outcome of the Ministry of  
Labour’s arbitration.156 A couple of weeks later clerical and technical  
personnel voted not to take joint action with the workers in support of  
the metalworkers’ tariff, arguing that this would be a ‘stab in the back  
to organised revolutionary democracy and to our valiant revolution-  
ary army which has shed its blood for free Russia’. At the Putilov  
shipyard white-collar workers applauded the June Offensive and

expressed admiration for Kerensky.157 On 19 July a general meeting  
of clerical workers went on strike because they objected to a bonus  
system negotiated by the officeworkers’ union. Over half of the  
clerical staff were still earning a paltry 80 r. to 160 r. a month at this  
time. The works committee condemned the strike as a ‘disorganising’  
move, but the attempt to continue normal working whilst the clerical  
staff were on strike caused disagreement on the committee. Several  
members accused the clerical staff of seeking to set up an ‘office  
republic’, of flaunting class principles and of philistine, petit-  
bourgeois attitudes. The sanguinary Bolshevik, Evdokimov, was all  
for dispersing the strikers at gun-point: ‘Let a thousand perish, for

1. will be saved’, but other Bolsheviks on the committee took a  
   less inflammatory line. A resolution was passed by 14 votes to one,  
   with three abstentions, calling on the clerical staff to end their strike,  
   since it was doomed to failure and would merely encourage similar  
   sectional strikes by other groups of workers.158

A couple of weeks later, after the clerical workers’ strike had  
collapsed, the works committee at Putilov felt it incumbent to issue a  
declaration to the workers, warning amongst other things against:  
‘the erroneous view that people not engaged in physical labour are not  
to be tolerated, that they are basically drones and parasites.  
Comrades who argue thus lose sight of the crucial fact that in  
industry, in technical production, mental labour is as indispensable  
as physical labour.’159 This prejudice against white-collar workers  
was linked to the prevalent attitude within the working class that only  
manual labour was authentic work, conferring dignity and moral  
worth on the worker.

At the Skorokhod shoe factory relations between workers and  
sluzhashchie were better. From the first, junior employees cooperated  
closely with workers, and after the factory committee supported the  
CCSFS struggle, senior employees also swung towards the workers.  
On 18 May they published a declaration which announced: ‘We, the  
sluzhashchie of Skorokhod, do not regard ourselves as sluzhashchie, but  
as mental workers, and we will go hand in hand with our worker  
comrades in other occupations.’160 The practical support given to the  
sluzhashchie by workers at Skorokhod, Petichev cable works and  
elsewhere in their wage campaign alarmed the SFWO.161 In  
September it called on the government to ban joint committees of  
workers and sluzhashchie, though the government took little notice.

On the whole, despite the fears of the SFWO, it does not seem that

the unity of manual and mental workers, which labour leaders sought  
to forge, was making much headway. There were instances of fruitful  
cooperation, but these were outnumbered by instances of visceral  
antagonism. The general situation was probably summed up fairly  
accurately by a draughtsman in September, who wrote: ‘In the  
majority of factories, the workers have their own organisation and the  
sluzhashchie theirs; each side keeps to itself and decides things for itself  
... there is no common understanding, but mutual disregard and  
animosity.’162

6

**The theory and practice of workers’  
control of production**

THE THEORY OF WORKERS’ CONTROL

The whole subject of workers’ control in the Russian Revolution is  
awash in confusion. There is not even an agreed theoretical definition  
of what constitutes ‘workers’ control of production’. Precisely what  
kinds of activities should we conceive as ‘workers’ control’? Can all  
the activities of the factory committees - which included struggles for  
higher wages, shorter hours and for the organisation of food supplies -  
be seen as part of workers’ control? Soviet historians, such as V.I.  
Selitskii and M.L. Itkin, answer in the affirmative.1 Yet if one sees  
workers’ control as relating to struggles over control of the production  
process, rather than struggles over the degree of exploitation, as  
argued in the introduction, then it becomes obvious that not all the  
activities of the factory committees can be subsumed into the category  
of‘workers’ control’. Z.V. Stepanov is correct to define as workers’  
control only those measures, ‘implemented by proletarian organisa-  
tions, and linked directly to intervention in the productive and  
commercial activity of the industrial enterprise, to the organisation of  
multilateral accounting and to control of the whole of production’.2 It  
is difficult to go beyond this rather vague definition. ‘Workers’  
control’ is not a concept which can be determined with great  
theoretical rigour, for in reality it took a plurality of forms, and  
changed radically in character within a short space of time. Not all the  
forms of workers’ control fit neatly into the category of struggles  
around capitalist control of the production process: indeed, the slogan  
raised by workers in 1917 was for workers’ control of production and  
distribution, and factory committee activities in the procurement and  
distribution of food and fuel, for example, related as much to the

sphere of consumption as to production. Nevertheless the advantage  
of this definition is that it excludes from analysis the important  
struggles around wages and hours which were taking place, and  
orients us towards examining the various struggles at the point of  
production, i.e. around the labour-process and the social organisation  
of production in the enterprise. Theory, however, can take us no  
further, for under the impact of revolutionary events workers’ control  
soon ceased merely to operate at the point of production and spilt over  
into a struggle for the abolition of the capitalist system itself.

The second problem of a theoretical nature relates to whether the  
struggle for workers’ control is an ‘economic’ or ‘political’ struggle. In  
What Is To Be Done? (1902),3 Lenin had argued that there is a clear  
disjunction between the spontaneous ‘economic’ struggles, which  
generate ‘trade union consciousness’, and political struggles, which  
are based on Social Democratic ideology introduced ‘from outside’.  
Soviet historians have racked their brains trying to decide whether or  
not the struggle for workers’ control is ‘economic’ or ‘political’. In  
faithfulness to orthodoxy, they conclude that the movement was  
essentially economic, but politicised by the ‘outside’ intervention of  
the Bolshevik party. Western historians appear to be divided on the  
question. Paul Avrich sees the movement for workers’ control as  
essentially political, but sees its politics as syndicalist rather than  
Bolshevik.4 William Rosenberg writes: ‘the movement for workers’  
control throughout the period was primarily a struggle for economic  
security and material betterment rather than a political movement’.5  
A cursory glance at the factory committees, however, shows that  
whilst the initial impulse behind workers’ control may have been  
‘economic’, it engaged with politics from the first. In fact, the  
theoretical argument in the introduction shows the inadequacy of  
Lenin’s economics/politics dichotomy. Lenin may have been right to  
argue that ‘economic’ struggles in general can only generate ‘trade  
union consciousness’, since they do not challenge the status of labour  
as a commodity and express the reality of class society rather than  
challenge it, but he overlooked an entire realm of‘economic’ struggles  
over control of the production process. Such struggles may have been  
motivated by ‘economic’ concerns, but they raised, implicitly or  
explicitly, questions of power. In a context such as that of 1917, where  
state power was paralysed, it was possible for such struggles for  
control to extend into struggles for control of the economy as a whole.  
The struggle for workers’ control of production was thus economic and  
political and can be reduced to neither one nor the other.

Although theoretical confusion abounds in discussions of workers’  
control, historical interpretation of workers’ control in Russia is  
remarkably consistent. Most Western historians portray the move-  
ment as a syndicalist one which sought to oust the bosses and allow  
the workers to run the factories themselves. Paul Avrich sees the  
working class as inspired by a kind of chiliastic syndicalism. ‘As the  
workers’ committees acquired a greater measure of power in the  
factories and mines, the vision of a proletarian paradise seemed to  
grow more distinct and the labouring masses [became] impatient to  
enter their “golden age”.’6 In practice, according to Avrich, ‘the  
factory committees [contributed] to a form of “productive anarchy”  
that might have caused Marx to shudder in his grave’.7 Employers  
desperately tried to erect a breakwater against ‘the syndicalist tide  
[that] was carrying Russia to the brink of economic collapse’,8 but to  
no avail. In the same vein, John Keep discusses the meaning of  
workers’ control: ‘There is little doubt that the majority of delegates  
[at the First All-Russian Conference of Factory Committees] took this  
slogan in its literal sense, as meaning a real transfer of power within  
the enterprise to the men’s chosen representatives, who were to  
exercise the functions of management in the interests of their electors.  
Needless to add, they showed no concern whatever for the effects  
which the full “democratisation” of industrial relations would be  
bound to have on productivity and the national economy as a whole.’9  
Frederick Kaplan goes even further and asserts categorically that  
workers actually took over the factories: ‘... it becomes clear that the  
workers conceived of control as ownership. Having seized the  
factories, the workers instituted “a type of cooperative association, a  
shareholding workers’ society”, in which all the workers and  
employees of a particular factory owned a portion of the enterprise  
and shared in the profits.’10

It will be argued that this dominant interpretation fundamentally  
misreads the reality of workers’ control in Petrograd, where the  
movement was most developed. Whilst it would be idle to deny that  
there were syndicalist elements within the movement, or that there  
were instances of workers taking over their factories, or of factory  
committees exacerbating economic chaos, to put these phenomena at  
the centre of one’s picture is gravely to distort the history of the  
committees and their efforts to control the economy. We shall begin  
this critique, firstly, by briefly examining the extent of syndicalist and  
anarchist influence in the Petrograd labour movement prior to  
October. We shall then go on to examine the practice of workers’

control in its initial stages, before going on finally to survey the  
political debates about workers’ control of production.

ANARCHISM, SYNDICALISM AND THE PETROGRAD LABOUR  
MOVEMENT

The slogan of ‘workers’ control’ arose ‘spontaneously’ among the  
workers of Petrograd in the spring of 1917. The Bolsheviks had  
nothing to do with it and, in so far as it had any ideological progenitor,  
it was an anarcho-syndicalist rather than social-democratic one. The  
idea of workers’ control had its genesis in the writings of early-  
nineteenth-century utopian socialists such as Charles Fourier and  
Robert Owen, who saw small producer-cooperatives as the means of  
escaping the alienation of large-scale industrial society. The same  
theme is echoed later in the nineteenth century by the great Russian  
anarchist Peter Kropotkin especially in his Fields, Factories and  
Workshops of 1898.11 It was in France, however, in the last decade of  
that century that skilled workers, fighting to defend their job-control  
against attack by the employers, first formulated ‘workers’ control’ as  
a fighting slogan. Out of this experience the revolutionary syndicalists  
developed a revolutionary praxis which rejected political parties and  
political struggle and emphasised the primacy of the industrial class  
struggle, which would be waged through the syndicats and bourses du  
travail to the point where a general strike would bring the state and Big  
Business crashing down. The future society would be organised  
without a central political state on the basis of local economic units  
run by the producers themselves.12 The De Leonite socialists and  
‘Wobblies’ in America and Guild Socialists in Britain were to develop  
the notion of workers’ control further.13 It is difficult to say which of  
these influences was crucial in introducing the notion of workers’  
control into the Russian labour movement, but small bands of  
anarcho-syndicalists emerged during the 1905 Revolution, princi-  
pally in Odessa and St Petersburg.14 Prior to 1917, however, there  
is no evidence that ‘workers’ control’ featured as a demand of  
Russian workers, and when it began to be raised in the spring of  
1917, it was not articulated within a discourse of anarchism or  
syndicalism.

Anarchists and syndicalists have differed remarkably in their  
assessment of the importance of anarchism and syndicalism in the  
Russian Revolution. The syndicalist, G. Maksimov, and the anarch-

ist, A. Berkman, argued in their histories of 1917 that anarchists and  
syndicalists exerted an influence out of all proportion to their  
numbers. Maksimov, who for a short time was a member of the  
Petrograd Central Council of Factory Committees, argued that the  
factory committee movement was under the sway of anarcho-  
syndicalist ideology.15 Other anarchists, however, equally involved  
in the events of 1917, took a very different view. Volin, who became  
editor of the first anarcho-syndicalist newspaper in Petrograd (Golos  
Truda) on his return from the United States in the summer of 1917,  
reports that ‘the anarchists were only a handful of individuals without  
influence’ and recalls with shocked surprise that ‘in the fifth month of  
a great revolution, no anarchist newspaper, no anarchist voice was  
making itself heard in the capital of the country. And that in the face  
of the almost unlimited activity of the Bolsheviks.’16 As late as  
November 1917, an anarchist periodical in Petrograd reported that:  
‘up to now anarchism has had an extremely limited influence on the  
masses, its forces are weak and insignificant, the idea itself is  
subject to corruption and distortion’.17 Whose testimony is one to  
believe?

True to its philosophy perhaps, anarchism as an organised political  
force was extremely weak in Russia.18 By the time of the February  
Revolution, there were only about 200 active members of anarchist  
organisations, though by the end of 1917 there were 33 anarchist  
groups and 21 papers and journals in Russia.19 In Petrograd  
anarchist groups were revived in the Vyborg, Narva and Moscow  
districts during the war, but they were tiny in numbers. In Petrograd  
in 1917—18 there were two main tendencies within the anarchist  
movement. The stronger was an anarcho-communist tendency,  
whose ideology derived from Kropotkin, alongside a somewhat  
less influential anarcho-syndicalist tendency. Both were small and  
had few organisational resources. In the course of 1917, the rising tide  
of economic chaos combined with governmental inertia to strengthen  
the political and emotional appeal of anarchism to some layers of  
workers, and especially to sailors and soldiers. There was much  
admiration of anarchist bravado in organising armed actions, such as  
the seizure of the print works of the right-wing newspaper, Russkaya  
Volya, on 5 June, and the raid on the Kresty jail two weeks later.  
Around this time, too, the expulsion of anarchists from the Durnovo  
villa fostered sympathy for the anarchist cause - and was one of the  
contributing factors behind the July-Days explosion.20 In general,  
crude slogans, such as ‘Rob the robbers!’ or ‘Exterminate the

bourgeoisie and its hangers-on!’ were the source of anarchism’s  
appeal to desperate and frustrated workers. Only rarely did they try  
to put across their ideas in a more developed, coherent form.21 Simple  
anarchism tended to appeal to some of the same workers who were  
attracted to the Bolsheviks, but whereas the official policy of the  
Bolsheviks was to divert the anger and frustration of these workers  
into organised channels, anarchists were generally content to fuel this  
anger, with the aim of triggering off a popular explosion which would  
blow apart the Kerensky Government and the capitalist system.2 At  
the end of June, and again in October, the Bolsheviks almost lost the  
support of these groups of discontented workers, because of their  
policy of caution and restraint, and it was partly the danger of losing  
them to the anarchists which convinced Lenin that a seizure of power  
could no longer be postponed. Nevertheless the appeal of anarchism  
to Petrograd workers was a minority appeal, and within the organised  
labour movement the influence of anarchists was very limited.

At the conferences of Petrograd factory committees anarchists  
always were in a small minority. At the First Conference at the end of  
May a moderate anarchist resolution, presented by I. Zhuk, the  
chairman of the Shlissel'burg works committee, gained 45 votes,  
compared to 290 votes cast for the Bolshevik resolution.23 At the  
Second Conference the Bolshevik resolution, presented by V.P.  
Milyutin, was passed by 213 votes against 26, with 22 abstentions. A  
resolution put forward by the syndicalist Volin got a paltry eight  
votes.24 At the First National Conference in October Milyutin’s  
resolution got 65 votes and Zhuk’s resolution 5 votes, but Milyutin  
found it necessary to refute the anarchist notion of workers taking  
over their factories, which suggests that at factory level anarchist  
influence may have been on the increase.25 This is further suggested  
by one Menshevik source, which claimed that 18,000 workers voted  
for anarchist candidates in Petrograd factory committee elections in  
October although it is not clear what elections are being referred to.26

While there is evidence to suggest that anarchist influence was on  
the increase in the autumn of 1917, there is little to suggest that  
anarchist conceptions were hegemonic within the factory committee  
movement at either central or grass-roots level. Volin defines the  
‘Anarchist idea’ as:

**to transform the economic and social bases of society, without having  
recourse to a political state, to a government or to a dictatorship of any sort.  
That is, to achieve the Revolution and resolve its problems not by political or**

**statist means, but by means of natural and free activity, economic and social,  
of the associations of the workers themselves, after having overthrown the last  
capitalist government.27**

There is no evidence that this was the aspiration of any but a handful  
in the Petrograd labour movement. Almost nothing in the practice of  
the factory committees suggests that they rejected the concepts of  
state power, political struggle or a centrally-planned economy.  
William Rosenberg is surely correct in his judgment that ‘the  
overwhelming mass of Russian workers lacked this [i.e. syndicalist]  
outlook, as well as organisations, literature and activists anxious to  
cultivate it’.28 In what follows it is hoped to demonstrate that the  
movement for workers’ control, far from aiming at an anarchist  
utopia based on factory communes, was, in its initial stages at least,  
concerned with the far more practical aim of limiting economic  
disruption, maintaining production and preserving jobs.

workers’ control as a response to economic chaos

The revolutionary process of 1917 can only be understood in the  
context of a growing crisis of the economy. Western historians have  
been so mesmerised by the astonishing political developments of this  
annus mirabilis, that they have failed to see the extent to which a crisis  
in the economy underpinned the crisis in politics, or the extent to  
which the struggle to secure basic material needs provided the motive  
force behind the radicalisation of the workers and peasants. As early  
as 1916 there were alarming signs that Russia was heading towards  
economic calamity, but it was not until the summer of 1917 that the  
economic crisis fully manifested itself. The chief symptoms of the  
crisis were severe shortages of food, fuel and raw materials. Produc-  
tion of coal, iron and steel had plummeted, and such fuel and raw  
materials as were being produced were failing to reach the centres of  
industrial production owing to the breakdown of the transport  
system. Petrograd was particularly hard hit, since it was isolated on  
the Western seaboard of the Empire, far away from the sources offuel  
and raw materials in the South. By September the output of  
manufactured goods throughout Russia had fallen by 40% since the  
beginning of the year.29 Shortages, spiralling costs, declining labour  
productivity and the heightened tempo of class conflict made  
industrialists reluctant to try to maintain output. Increasingly, they  
faced the stark choice of bankruptcy or closure.

The policy of workers’ control of production was first and foremost  
an attempt by factory committees to stem the tide ofindustrial chaos.  
Throughout its brief life, the workers’-control movement made a  
valiant attempt to maintain production amid mounting economic  
chaos. The impulse behind the movement, far from being ideological,  
was initially practical. It was the works committee at Putilov which  
first took steps to call a conference of factory committees in Petrograd  
in May. It discussed the idea with the bureau of factory committees  
under the Artillery Administration, and since it could not raise  
sufficient funds from the Putilovtsy to finance the conference, secured  
the necessary money from the Bolshevik factory committee at the  
Parviainen works.30 The purpose of the conference was outlined in  
the opening speech by the SR, V.M. Levin:

**All the works and factories of Petrograd are experiencing a crisis, but  
management do not display any activism in supplying their factories with a  
sufficient quantity of raw materials and fuels. As a result, workers may be  
thrown to the mercy of Tsar Hunger, unemployed. Therefore, it is the  
workers themselves who must show activism in this sphere, since the  
industrialist-employers are not showing any. Only the unified organisation of  
factory committees, not only in Petrograd but throughout Russia, can do this.  
It is obvious that to do this, there must everywhere exist workers’  
organisations which must band together to intervene in industrial life in an  
organised manner.31**

The Conference went on to discuss the state of industry in Petrograd;  
control and regulation of production and the flow of production in the  
factories; the tasks of the factory committees; unemployment and the  
demobilisation of industry; the role of the factory committees in the  
trade union movement; their relation to labour exchanges and  
cooperatives and, finally, the creation of a unified economic centre,  
attached to the Central Bureau of Trade Unions.32 The Second  
Conference of Factory Committees (7-12 August) reflected the same  
practical economic concerns although it also discussed politics. On its  
agenda were three key questions: firstly, the economic state of the  
enterprise (fuel, raw materials, food supplies and the state of  
production); secondly, the current situation and the tasks of workers’  
control; thirdly, unemployment, the evacuation of the factories and  
the demobilisation of industry.33

Historians, such as F.I. Kaplan, argue that what was said at  
factory committee conferences was one thing, but that what was done  
by the committees in the enterprise was quite another. In the majority  
of factories, however, the key concern of the committees in the early  
stages was to keep production going rather than to establish workers’

self-management. On 8 November the factory committee at the  
Franco-Russian engineering works sent a letter to the company which  
began: ‘Production and the normal life of the factory are the chief  
work and concern of the committees.’34 And the works committee at  
the Sestroretsk armaments plant claimed: ‘Since the first days of our  
work we have stood by the view that our main aim is the task of  
maintaining production in the factory come what may .. ,’35 In order  
to establish the fact that for most factory committees workers’ control  
was a question of survival, rather than of utopian aspiration, it is  
worth looking in detail at the two areas in which factory committees  
first exercised ‘control’, viz. the utilisation offuel and the utilisation of  
raw materials.

The fuel shortage affected all industrial establishments in Petro-  
grad, but large factories were particularly hard-hit. Both the Second  
Conference of Factory Committees and the First All-Russian Confer-  
ence of Factory Committees in October discussed the critical fuel  
situation, but it was at grass-roots level that the most active work  
went on. As early as March and April factory committees at the  
Vulcan and Putilov works began to search out fuel supplies.36 At the  
Nevskii shipyard management protested at the officious way in which  
the factory committee monitored production, but on 10 May told the  
committee that unless it could find fresh supplies of oil, certain shops  
would have to close. The committee agreed to try to find fuel in order  
to avert closure.37 From early summer onwards, factory committees  
at the Pipe works, the Arsenal, Rozenkrantz and elsewhere began to  
send ‘pushers’ (tolkachi) to the Donbass and other parts of Southern  
Russia in search of fuel.38 At the Putilov works the fuel shortage was  
especially acute; the works committee set up a fuel commission which  
sent ‘pushers’ to the coal and oil-producing areas, but they came back  
empty-handed; by autumn output at the factory had slumped to a  
third of its normal level. The works committee thereupon created a  
technical commission to effect the conversion of some of the furnaces  
from mineral fuel to firewood. On 20 October the committee wrote to  
the Special Commission on Defence, requesting information on fuel  
supplies in Petrograd and offering to take care of deliveries, but the  
Commission could offer them little.39 The Central Council of Factory  
Committees announced that it would requisition fuel from any  
factories which had more than three months supply in order to give it  
to power stations, water-works and flour-mills where it was most  
needed.40

Most factory committees busily monitored stocks of raw materials

and incoming and outgoing supplies. In April the Cartridge works  
committee requested a weigh-scale to check materials coming into the  
factory.41 On 7 April a general meeting at the Kebke tarpaulin factory  
agreed to investigate why management was removing canvas from  
the factory.42 At the Paramonov leather works the committee set up  
control of all goods coming in and out of the factory.43 At the  
Petrograd Carriage-Construction company on 8 April the committee  
forbade management to remove deal boards from the premises.44 At  
Rozenkrantz management denied that it had any spare materials  
when asked by the War Industries Committee, but on 14 July the  
works committee discovered 4,000 puds (65,520 kg) of metal which it  
offered to factories standing idle.45

By summer, factory committees were trying to share what little fuel  
and raw materials there were. The Central Council of Factory  
Committees took part in the various supply committees of the  
government in order to get information on the state of stocks and to  
ensure equitable distribution.46 It was thus able to help factory  
committees share out materials. At the Brenner works the committee  
was refused a loan by the Ministry of Labour to buy raw materials  
and turned to the shop stewards’ committee at Triangle works, who  
agreed to loan the committee 15,000 rubles from its strike fund; the  
Putilov works committee also donated some spare materials.47 The  
workers’ committee at Rozenkrantz donated some brass to the  
Baranovskii and Ekval' factories, and at Sestroretsk works the  
committee received some self-hardening steel from Putilov.48 Factory  
committees by the autumn were on guard against covert attempts by  
management to sabotage production. While factories were being  
forced to close because of metal-shortages, the administrations at the  
Duflon works, the Markov box factory and the Nevskii wood- and  
metal-processing factory were selling off stocks of metal at exorbitant  
prices, with a view to closing down operations. They were stopped  
from doing so by their respective factory committees.49 At the Bezdek  
sweet-factory the committee on 17 September reported its boss to the  
authorities for speculative selling of sugar.50

The activities of the factory committees in ‘controlling’ fuel and  
raw materials in the enterprise were dictated by the practical need to  
maintain production rather than by any desire to take over the  
enterprise. As the economic crisis deepened, however, and as class  
struggle intensified, the forms of workers’ control became ever more  
ambitious, and the movement became more revolutionary and

contestatory. Broadly speaking, in the eight months between the  
February and October, workers’ control went from being reactive,  
defensive and observational to being active, offensive and interven-  
tionist. From being concerned essentially to supervise production,  
workers’ control developed into an attempt to actively intervene in  
production and drastically limit the authority of capital. It is difficult  
to periodise this trajectory precisely, for the tempo at which  
individual factories moved towards a more active, aggressive style of  
workers’ control varied according to the specific conditions of each  
factory; but crudely speaking, workers’ control in Petrograd de-  
veloped through four phases between February and October, each  
linked to the different economic and political conjunctures of the  
revolutionary process. In the first period of March to April, workers’  
control was confined mainly to state enterprises. Factory committees  
everywhere attempted to establish some control of hiring and firing,  
as part of a broader drive to democratise factory relations. Employers  
were optimistic about the future and prepared to make concessions.  
In the second phase from May to June, most factory committees  
began to monitor supplies of raw materials and fuel and to check that  
their factories were being run efficiently. It was in this period that the  
Bolsheviks achieved political hegemony within the movement. In the  
third phase from July to August, economic crisis erupted and class  
struggle deepened. Employers went onto the offensive and attempted  
to curb the powers of the factory committees, some of which set up  
‘control commissions’ to monitor all aspects of production, including  
orders and finances. In the fourth period from September to October,  
these developments were strengthened. There was a severe economic  
and political crisis and class conflict polarised. Some employers tried  
to close their factories and in three cases factory-committees took over  
the running of their enterprises. Factory committees became actively  
involved in the battle to transfer power to the Soviets, and workers’  
control, as a response to economic difficulties, began to mesh with the  
earlier impulses to democratise factory life, so as to produce a  
movement groping towards workers’ self-management.

THE POLITICS OF WORKERS’ CONTROL: FEBRUARY TO  
OCTOBER 191 7

The dominant Western interpretation of workers’ control of pro-  
duction posits a dichotomy between the Bolshevik party and the

factory-committee movement. The party is seen as committed to a  
centralised, statist economy, whilst the committees are portrayed as  
protagonists of a decentralised economy run by the workers them-  
selves. It is argued that the Bolsheviks pursued an opportunist policy  
towards the movement for workers’ control, cynically supporting it  
until October, not because they agreed with its aims, but because it  
was creating disorder in industry and undermining the capitalist  
class. Once they had gained power, however, the Bolsheviks crushed  
the committees, eradicated workers’ control and reorganised the  
economy on hierarchical lines. Thus Paul Avrich tells us: ‘From April  
to November, Lenin had aligned himself with the Anarcho-Syndical-  
ists, who desired the utter annihilation of the old order ... But after  
the Bolshevik Revolution was secured, Lenin abandoned the forces of  
destruction for those of centralisation and order.’51 In a more  
conspiratorial vein, F.I. Kaplan writes: ‘The factory committees ...  
were used by the Bolsheviks as a mask for the seizure of economic  
power. The economy was to be disorganised by means of “workers’  
control” of industry. Workers’ control was to have a dual function; (i)  
to undermine the economy of the country so that the Provisional  
Government could not efficiently function; (2) to establish the basis  
for Bolshevik control over that economy.’52 O. Anweiler repeats the  
charge that the Bolsheviks disingenuously exploited workers’ control  
for their own ends: ‘The Bolsheviks furthered the syndicalist and  
anarchist tendencies emerging in factory committees, whose general  
aim was workers’ rule in the plants, without centralised direction  
from above and without regard to the state of the national  
economy.’53 It seems that such a line of interpretation is funda-  
mentally misguided for a number of reasons. Firstly, as argued above,  
and amplified below, it is inadequate to argue that the aspirations of  
the factory committees were ‘syndicalist’. Secondly, up to October,  
the Bolsheviks generally were not aware of any incompatibiliy  
between the workers’ control of the factory committees and state  
organisation of the economy. Thirdly, to counterpose the factory  
committees to the Bolshevik party is incorrect, since most of the  
leading cadres of the committees were also members of the Bolshevik  
party. Finally, such a counter-position suggests that there was a  
uniformity of views within both the committees and the Bolshevik  
party which did not in fact exist.

What follows is not an attempt to analyse the political debates  
about control in detail, but rather to disclose the problematic of such  
debates and to discuss some of their implications.

*Menshevik, SR and anarchist perspectives on control of the economy*

The Menshevik and SR demand for state control of the economy was  
proffered as a solution to the severe crisis racking Russian industry.  
The left-wing Menshevik economist, F.A. Cherevanin, diagnosed the  
severity of the crisis at the First Conference of Petrograd Factory  
Committees in the following terms: ‘The economic life of Russia has  
reached a terrifying state of collapse. The country is already edging  
towards a catastrophe which threatens destitution and unemploy-  
ment to the mass of the population and renders futile every struggle of  
the working masses to improve their position.’54 He explained this  
chaos in terms of the structural strain imposed on the economy by the  
war, rather than in terms of conscious ‘sabotage’ by the capitalists.55  
The solution which he proposed was:

**Planned intervention by the state in economic life via regulation of the  
distribution of raw materials, fuel and equipment between branches of  
production; via equal distribution of articles of consumption among the  
population; via forced trustification of the basic branches of production; via  
control of the banks, the fixing of prices, profits and wages and increased  
taxation of capitalist incomes.56**

The Mensheviks utterly rejected ‘workers’ control’ as a serious  
strategy for controlling the economy. They believed that the Bolshe-  
viks had popularised the slogan purely as a demagogic device. As a  
strategy for dealing with economic chaos, they considered it to be a  
recipe for disaster. Workers’ control encouraged decentralised,  
spontaneous initiatives by atomised groups of workers in individual  
enterprises and its net effect could only be to exacerbate economic  
chaos.57 What was required was planned, centralised, all-embracing  
control of the economy, and only the state had at its disposal an  
apparatus adequate to this task. It was only through the state that the  
whole of democracy — and not just the working class — could  
participate in a massive public effort at economic control. The  
Mensheviks, supported by the SRs, favoured the representation of all  
popular organisations on government organs of economic regulation.  
They disliked the factory committees for being both parochial and  
narrowly proletarian, and argued that even at factory level control of  
management should involve not just the committees but representa-  
tives of government and ‘revolutionary democracy’.58

The official position of the SR party was very similar to that of the  
Mensheviks. They too believed in state control of the economy rather  
than in workers’ control, but their reasons were somewhat different.

The SRs objected in principle to one class - the working class —  
controlling the economy in its own interests. All popular forces should  
be involved in the business of control and this could best be done via  
the state, ‘because only the state is the representative of the interests  
of both the producers and consumers’.59 The SRs considered that the  
factory committees had the job of controlling hiring and firing, but  
denied them any privileged role in the control of production. They  
believed that workers’ control as practised by the factory committees  
was leading to the atomisation of the economy and to conflict between  
the working class and the peasantry.60 The SRs, however, were a  
profoundly divided party and opinion within the party was as divided  
on the question of workers’ control as on all other major questions of  
the day. The left wing of the party rejected out of hand calls for state  
control of the economy, but was unhappy with the notion of workers’  
control. Some Left SRs, such as V.M. Levin, the most notable SR in  
the Petrograd factory committee movement, propounded a notion of  
workers’ control identical to that of the Bolsheviks, but the Left SR  
newspaper demanded ‘public control’ of the economy - by producers  
and consumers - via the factory committees, trade unions, coopera-  
tives, etc.61 Other Left SRs called for control by the ‘toiling people’.  
The heterodox SR Maximalists called for the socialisation of the  
factories, to be run by elected committees, but control of production  
by the factory committees until this came about.62

The attitude of the anarchists and syndicalists to workers’ control  
of production varied. At the First Factory Committee Conference  
Zhuk presented a mild resolution which called on the ‘toiling people’  
(truzhenik-narod) ‘to take the organisation of their fate into their hands’  
and ‘quickly to create control commissions which will not only strictly  
monitor the running of the enterprise, but regulate the activity of the  
enterprise’.63 Other anarchists, however, demanded the seizure of  
factories by workers as a direct act of expropriation of the bourgeoisie.  
Naturally, they rejected any notion of state organisation of the  
economy — some going so far as to reject any kind of centralised  
coordination. The key concept was that of producers’ communes  
linked into federations. Factory committees were seen as the embryos  
of such communes, whereas trade unions were seen as vestiges of  
capitalist society at best, or ‘living corpses’ at worst.64 Syndicalists,  
unlike their confreres in Western Europe, tended to prefer the factory  
committees to the trade unions, though some toyed with the idea of  
federations of autonomous unions rather than of factory committees.

*The Bolsheviks and workers’ control*

The Bolshevik party had no position on the question of workers’  
control prior to 1917. They began to formulate a position in response  
to deepening turmoil in the economy. Because the party’s ideas were  
in a process of formation, there is no absolute clarity, still less  
uniformity, in its attempts to come to terms with the movement for  
workers’ control. Lenin was the outstanding policy-maker in the  
party and it is largely through his writings that one can chart the  
development of Bolshevik policy, but it should not be assumed that  
party members habitually kow-towed to him. For clarity of argument,  
it will be assumed that Lenin represents official party thinking on  
workers’ control, but later attention will be drawn to differences of  
thinking within the party.

In the period up to October a bitter debate raged around the  
question of control of the economy. This is usually presented as a  
debate between the Menshevik advocates of a statist solution to  
Russia’s economic problems and the Bolshevik supporters of an  
anti-statist, grass-roots movement for workers’ control of production.  
This is misleading, since it suggests that the key point at issue  
between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks was whether control of  
the economy should be implemented by the state or by the workers in  
situ. Yet the Bolsheviks never deviated before or after October from a  
commitment to a statist, centralised solution to economic disorder.  
The disagreement between the two wings of the socialist movement  
was not about state control in the abstract, but about what kind of  
state should coordinate control of the economy: a bourgeois state or a  
workers’ state? In May 1917 Lenin wrote: ‘“State control” — we are  
for it. But by whom? Who is in control? The bureaucrats [chinovniki]?  
Or the Soviets?’65 Unlike the Mensheviks, Lenin and the Bolsheviks  
resolutely refused to support initiatives undertaken by the Provisional  
Government to control economic chaos, not because they preferred  
demotic to governmental initiatives, but because they believed that,  
as a bourgeois government, its initiatives must necessarily be at the  
expense of working people. Even if the government sincerely tried to  
restore economic order, its measures would be either totally ineffec-  
tive or, if more radical, would be sabotaged by capitalist interests.  
The fond hopes of the Mensheviks and SRs for state control of the  
economy in the general interest completely overlooked the class  
dimension of this control. This was the crux of the disagreement

between the two wings of the socialist movement. ‘In essence’, wrote  
Lenin, ‘the whole question of control boils down to who controls  
whom, i.e. which class is controlling and which is being controlled ...  
We must resolutely and irrevocably pass over to control over the  
landowners antj the capitalists by the workers and peasants.’66 This  
was the nub of Bolshevik support for workers’ control of the economy  
against the state control advocated by the Mensheviks and SRs.

The Bolsheviks and Mensheviks did not disagree radically in the  
specific measures which they advocated for control of the economy. In  
a pamphlet written in September 1917, entitled The Impending  
Catastrophe and How to Fight It, Lenin summarised the major measures  
which were necessary. By far the most important, in his eyes, was the  
nationalisation of the banks, since no order could be brought into the  
economy unless the state had a firm hold on the nation’s purse-  
strings. Second in importance, were measures to nationalise the  
largest syndicates in industries such as sugar, oil, coal and metal-  
lurgy. In addition, industrialists and traders should be forced to join  
syndicates in order to facilitate government control. Finally, the  
whole population should be compulsorily organised into consumer  
societies to facilitate the distribution of subsistence commodities.67  
Lenin stressed in this pamphlet that there was absolutely nothing  
original in these concrete proposals: his sole point was to emphasise  
that these very simple measures could only be implemented once the  
working class wielded state power. If Lenin understood these  
measures as measures of‘workers’ control’, it is clear that he is here  
using the term in a very different sense from that of the factory  
committees. The proposals which he is advocating are thoroughly  
statist and centralist in character, whereas the practice of the factory  
committees was essentially local and autonomous. Should we con-  
clude from this that Lenin never believed in workers’ control in any  
sense other than as a counter-slogan to demands for state control?

The factory committees launched the slogan of workers’ control of  
production quite independently of the Bolshevik party. It was not  
until May that the party began to take it up. Lenin had cleared an  
ideological space for the slogan in the April Theses, when he had  
demanded: ‘Such measures as the nationalisation of land, of all banks  
and capitalist syndicates, or at least, the establishment of immediate  
control of them by the Soviets of Workers’ Deputies, etc. - measures  
which do not in any way constitute the ‘introduction’ of socialism.’68  
For a time, the Bolsheviks talked of control by the soviets: a leaflet put

out at the beginning of May by the Lesnovskii subdistrict committee  
of the party, for example, called for the ‘establishment of control by  
soviets of workers’ and soldiers’ deputies over the production and  
distribution of products’.69 As yet little mention was made of the  
factory committees. Only in May did the Bolshevik party begin to pay  
attention to the committees.

It was Lenin, no less, who drafted the resolution on the economic  
crisis and workers’ control which was put to the First Conference of  
Factory Committees by G. Zinov'ev, and passed by 297 votes to 21,  
with 44 abstentions.70 This resolution was the first official formula-  
tion of policy on workers’ control by the factory committees, but it was  
titled ‘resolution on measures to combat disruption in the economy’,  
and in fact had little to say about the factory committees or the  
practice of workers’ control at enterprise level. The resolution  
attacked attempts at bureaucratic regulation of the economy by the  
bourgeois state, and called for a national system of workers’ control of  
production and distribution. Workers’ control was conceived as  
operating principally at national level, in the spheres of banking,  
exchange between town and countryside, labour discipline, labour  
allocation and workers’ defence. Control was to be implemented by  
assigning to workers’ representatives two-thirds (three-quarters, in  
Lenin’s original draft) of the places in all institutions regulating the  
economy, such as the Factory Conventions and the supply-  
committees. Although the wording of the resolution was vague, it  
appears that factory committees and trade unions were to exercise  
control at factory level by investigating company accounts and order  
books, but it was not intended that workers should sit on boards of  
management in the factories.71 One might sum up the perspective of  
Lenin’s resolution as one of‘state workers’ control’, i.e. of workers’  
control operating via worker representation on the official organs of  
economic regulation.

Although Lenin envisaged workers’ control as operating princi-  
pally at the level of central and local government, this did not  
preclude its operation at the grass roots. Up to the beginning of 1918,  
Lenin saw absolutely no contradiction between centralised control  
and the creative initiatives of workers in the factories; indeed, he  
never tired of insisting that local initiatives were the bedrock of  
centralised control. It was precisely the creativity of the masses which  
qualitatively distinguished workers’ control from the reactionary  
bureaucratic control of the bourgeois state:

**Vital creativity of the masses - that is the fundamental factor in the new  
society. Let the workers take on the creation of workers’ control in their works  
and factories, let them supply the countryside with manufactured goods in  
exchange for bread. Not one article, not one** funt **[pound] of bread must  
remain unaccounted for, since socialism is first and foremost accounting.  
Socialism is not created by orders from on high. Its spirit is alien to  
state-bureaucratic automatism. Socialism is vital and creative, it is the  
creation of the popular masses themselves.72**

‘Accounting’ and ‘control’ (uchet i kontrol') were central to Lenin’s  
vision of socialism at this time. Far from regarding working-class  
self-activity as antipathetic to centralised control of the economy, he  
viewed it as its absolute precondition. After October he wrote:

**Let every factory committee feel concerned not only with the affairs of its  
factory but let it also feel that it is an organisational cell for the construction of  
the whole of state life ... There cannot and will not be any concrete plan for  
the organisation of economic life. No one can offer this. The masses can do  
this only from below, by their own experience. There will, of course, be  
instructions given and paths sketched out, but we must begin immediately  
from above and from below.73**

Nevertheless it cannot be said that Lenin satisfactorily theorised the  
relationship between grass-roots workers’ control of production and  
state-wide regulation of the economy. After October the Bolsheviks  
were to learn through bitter experience how difficult it was to  
reconcile the two in practice.

THE FACTORY COMMITTEE CONFERENCE DEBATES ON  
WORKERS’ CONTROL

Five conferences of factory committees took place prior to the  
Bolshevik seizure of power. The First Conference of Petrograd  
Factory Committees took place from 30 May to 3 June; the Second  
from 7 to 12 August; the Third from 5 to 1 o September, and the Fourth  
on 10 October. The First All Russian conference of factory com-  
mittees took place from 17 to 22 October. When one examines the de-  
bates on workers’ control at these conferences an immediate problem  
arises, for it emerges that there is no authentic, spontaneous ‘factory  
committee’ discourse which can be counterposed to official Bolshevik  
discourse. A majority of the delegates were Bolsheviks, and the con-  
ferences voted overwhelmingly for Bolshevik-inspired resolutions. It  
could be argued that the factory committee conferences are not, there-  
fore, a true reflection of opinion within the movement, but rather

occasions for the Bolshevik party to win formal ratification of its  
policies. This is unconvincing on two scores. First, the hundreds of  
delegates who attended these conferences were bona fide representa-  
tives sent from individual factories.74 Secondly, the delegates had to  
choose between the very different policies on workers’ control put  
forward by the three major factions - Bolshevik, Menshevik and  
anarcho-syndicalist. If, as Avrich and others argue, factory commit-  
tees on the ground were ‘syndicalist’, why did their delegates so  
decisively reject the perspective projected at these conferences by  
anarchists and syndicalists such as Zhuk, Volin or Bill Shatov, the  
former Wobbly? The answer can only be that most factory committee  
delegates recognised the need for some degree of centralised coordina-  
tion of control, as the Bolsheviks argued, whereas the anarcho-  
syndicalists decidedly did not. At every conference they voted  
overwhelmingly for the formula of ‘state workers’ control’.

If one examines the debates and resolutions of the factory  
committee conferences it becomes apparent that the emphasis on  
centralised, planned control of the economy became ever more  
pronounced, and that the demand for workers’ control of production  
was increasingly linked to the demand for a transfer of power to the  
soviets. In other words, the debates of the conferences became more  
and more politicised. The proclamation which summoned the First  
All Russian Conference called for: ‘the unification of the activities of  
the working class in the task of regulating the economic life of the  
country, so that once it has power in its hands, the working class can,  
finally, with the support of the poor peasantry, fight the self-interest of  
the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie and bring planning and orga-  
nisation into the sphere of production’.75 At this conference V.P.  
Milyutin, a member of the Bolshevik Central Committee, introduced  
his party’s resolution on workers’ control. It demanded a transfer of  
state power to the soviets, a break with the policies of the moderate  
socialist parties, the transfer of land to the peasants and the  
nationalisation of the major branches of industry. Clause four of the  
resolution proclaimed: ‘The workers’ control being implemented in  
the localities through the factory committees must be organised into a  
state-wide system, for only then will it achieve real, serious results. A  
majority (2/3) of the members of the organs of control must be  
workers, delegated by the factory committees, trade unions and the  
Soviet of workers’ deputies. As well as workers’ representatives, there  
must be scientifically-educated technical personnel (engineers, tech-

nicians, etc.) .’76 The resolution was passed in an amended form by 65  
votes to 8, with one abstention.77

The outstanding support for the perspective of ‘state workers’  
control’ suggests that factory committees on the ground recognised  
that grass-roots activity by itself was not enough and that to be  
effective, ‘control’ must be centrally coordinated. There thus never  
existed a clear-cut antinomy between the Bolshevik party, the  
proponent of state-wide, centralised control, and the factory commit-  
tees, proponents of local initiative. All the major statements from  
factory committee organisations both before and after October bear  
ample testimony to their belief that order could be restored to the  
economy only by the action of a proletarian government. Yet one  
should not infer that there was consonance on the question of workers’  
control between the party leadership and the factory committees.  
Differences did exist, but they were ones of emphasis rather than  
principle. They were not differences between ‘syndicalists’ and  
Bolsheviks, but differences within the Bolshevik party. These  
differences centred, firstly, on the efficacy of grass-roots workers’  
control as a cure for Russia’s economic ills; secondly, on the  
importance of the factory committees as agencies of workers’ control.

Two broad currents of opinion emerged at the factory committee  
conferences with respect to the capacity of workers’ control to resolve  
the economic crisis. The chief exponents of‘state workers’ control’,  
V.P. Milyutin and Yu. Larin, put the main emphasis on central  
planning rather than grass-roots control. In so doing, they were close  
ideologically to important Bolshevik trade-union leaders such as  
Ryazanov, Lozovskii, Shlyapnikov and Schmidt. In contrast, the  
Bolsheviks on the Central Council of Factory Committees, such as  
N.A. Skrypnik, V.Ya. Chubar', N.K. Antipov and P.N. Amosov,  
whilst supporting ‘state workers’ control’, placed heavy emphasis on  
the importance of local initiatives. They were more optimistic than  
leading Bolshevik economists and trade unionists about the potential  
of workers’ control for alleviating economic disorder. This was not  
because they were principled believers in decentralisation, but  
because they shared with many rank-and-file workers a belief that the  
crisis in the economy was caused essentially by the conscious  
sabotage of industrialists, and could thus be halted by determined  
action on the part of factory committees. They tended to ignore the  
complex structural character of the crisis, seeing the economic  
disruption as the direct product of sabotage. Until autumn, at least,

many factory committees rather naively assumed that by combating  
disorganisation in their particular enterprise they would bring order  
into the economy as a whole, and create the conditions for its  
transformation along socialist lines.

The second area in which there was a difference of emphasis related  
to the first, and concerned the precise responsibilities of the factory  
committees. Bolsheviks connected with the factory committees  
assigned responsibility for workers’ control of production chiefly to  
the committees. This never became official Bolshevik party policy.  
Party statements suggested that workers’ control was the responsi-  
bility not only of factory committees, but of all labour organisa-  
tions. Milyutin’s resolution to the Third All-Russian Conference of  
Trade Unions on workers’ control did not mention factory com-  
mittees and spoke of control being the joint responsibility of soviets  
and trade unions.78 Again the Sixth Bolshevik Party Congress spent  
much time discussing the trade unions and the economic crisis, but  
barely mentioned the factory committees.79 To those who believe  
that the Bolsheviks connived to jump on the factory committee  
bandwagon, it must come as a shock to realise how little attention  
leading Bolsheviks paid to the committees. They were, after all,  
probably the most important organisations in the Russian Revolution  
— more important even than the soviets, from the point of view of their  
closeness to the masses and their function of mediating between the  
mass of workers and the Bolshevik party. Yet when Lenin came to  
revise the party programme in the autumn, he did not mention the  
committees or the need for democratic organisation in the factories.80  
This, it seems, was largely because of his total absorption in the  
political question. Whilst he spent the whole summer trying to  
understand the soviets as embryonic forms of the proletarian state, he  
paid scant attention to the factory committees, for he considered that  
the struggle for state power took precedence over the struggle for  
power in production. He believed that there could be no proletarian  
power in the factory before the achievement of proletarian power in  
the state.81 It is true that both Ordzhonikidze and Trotsky claim that  
Lenin toyed with the idea of making state organs of factory  
committees, instead of the soviets, but this was a purely tactical turn,  
reflecting Lenin’s anxieties about the political reliability of the  
soviets.82 It did not represent a worked-out integration of the  
committees into a strategy for the achievement of socialism. This  
neglect of the theoretical and political problems of articulating the

movement for workers’ control with the drive for soviet power was to  
have grave consequences after October, leading to a foreclosure of the  
movement for workers’ self-management.

THE POLITICS OF WORKERS’ CONTROL AT FACTORY LEVEL

In view of the deeply political cast of the discussions of the factory  
committee conferences, it comes as a surprise to see how rarely factory  
committees on the ground discussed political matters. The commit-  
tees concerned themselves overwhelmingly with the practical affairs  
of the workplace, and rarely referred to matters outside. Yet it would  
be false to deduce from this that the committees were apolitical. If  
they did not discuss politics, it was because they felt that general  
meetings of the whole workforce were the proper forum for political  
discussion. General meetings were the sovereign bodies in the  
factories and it was there, rather than in the committees, that the  
general will of the workforce was expressed. Nevertheless, whilst  
abstaining from direct discussion of politics, the committees took a  
deeply political approach to their day-to-day work. The majority of  
members of factory committees were members of socialist parties and  
they were elected on party slates. It was widely felt that the political  
make-up of a factory committee should reflect the political opinion of  
the majority of the workforce. The committees thus changed their  
political complexion in response to the changing political sentiments  
of those whom they represented.

Initially, many factory committee members were self-selected.  
Others were elected because of their personal standing in the factory,  
rather than because of their political affiliation. Party differentiation  
within the factory committees was only weakly developed in the  
spring of 1917. In the textile industry a majority of members of  
factory committees belonged to no political party. At the Pal',  
Leont'ev and Northern weaving-mills almost all factory committee  
members were non-party.83 At the First spinning-mill the chairman  
of the committee was a right-wing SR, but apart from one Menshevik  
woman and a Menshevik joiner, the rest were non-party.84 At  
Kozhevnikov weaving-mill the chairman of the committee was a  
Bolshevik, but the five women and two male scutchers who made up  
the rest of the committee belonged to no political party.85 In other  
industries the political make-up of factory committees in the spring of  
1917 was similar. At the Skorokhod shoe factory most of the 40

committee members belonged to no political party; only one woman  
was a Bolshevik.86 At the Triangle rubber works SRs comprised a  
majority of the 16 members of the committee in March and April; the  
Bolsheviks had two members on the committee.87

In the metalworking industries political parties were more en-  
trenched. Here Mensheviks and SRs tended to dominate the  
committees, just as they dominated the soviets in the spring of 1917.  
At the Pipe works almost all the forty shop stewards were members of  
the SR party, although there were two or three Bolsheviks.88 At the  
Obukhov works only five of the 32 members of the committee were  
Bolsheviks, the rest being SRs or Mensheviks.89 At the Nevskii  
shipyard, elections in early April put three Mensheviks, three SRs  
and one Bolshevik on the factory soviet. Even in factories where  
Bolsheviks were soon to become extremely powerful, the moderate  
socialists tended at first to dominate the committees. Thus at the  
radical Aivaz, Nobel, New Lessner and Langenzippen works the first  
committees comprised mainly Mensheviks and SRs.90 At the New  
Parviainen works Bolsheviks were somewhat better represented,  
comprising three members of the committee, against three non-party  
members and one Menshevik. Factories where Bolsheviks had a  
majority from the first were few. At the Phoenix works the Bolsheviks  
were the largest political grouping; and at the 1886 Electrical Light  
Company on 17 April Bolsheviks won 673 votes and 7 places on the  
committee, whilst Mensheviks and SRs in a joint slate won 506 votes  
and 4 places.91

In the spring of 1917 the election of members of a particular  
political party to a factory committee was not necessarily evidence of  
support for that party within the workforce. Individual reputation  
counted for as much as political affiliation. The fact that Bolsheviks  
such as V.Ya. Chubar', 1.1. Lepse, A.K. Skorokhodov, N.I. Derby-  
shev, A.E. Vasil'ev, Ya. A. Kalinin, V.N. Kozitskii were chairmen of  
their factory committees is more a reflection of their individual  
prestige than of support for Bolshevik policies within the workforce.92  
The Putilov works is a good example in this connection, for the giant  
plant did not swing decisively to the Bolshevik party until after the  
July Days, yet from April the works committee consisted of 12  
Bolsheviks, 7 non-party, 2 SRs and one anarchist.93 Similarly, the fact  
that there were more Mensheviks and SRs than Bolsheviks on the first  
committees may partly be due to the fact that there were more of them  
around in March, since they had lost fewer members than the

Bolsheviks as a result of wartime repression. Nevertheless the  
moderate socialists so decisively outnumbered Bolsheviks on the  
factory committees, especially in the metal industry, that one is  
justified in assuming that they represented prevailing sentiment in  
the working class after the February Revolution. The political  
complexion of the first factory committees, like the political com-  
plexion of the city and city-district soviets, reflected a mood within the  
working class which Lenin termed ‘revolutionary defencism’. This  
was an enthusiasm for the February Revolution and a willingness to  
defend the gains of the revolution against the foreign foe. The  
moderate socialists, rather then Bolsheviks, best responded to this  
mood.

Being the institutions closest to the mass of workers, the factory  
committees were the first to respond to the shift to the left which  
occurred in popular political attitudes. Those moderate socialists on  
the factory committees who refused to swing into line with their  
constituents were soon removed. From the early summer the number  
of Bolsheviks on the factory committees began to increase. In June at  
the Langenzippen works Bolsheviks won a majority of places on the  
committee after new elections.94 After the failure of the June offensive  
and the July Days, the process of‘Bolshevisation’ accelerated. At the  
Skorokhod works Bolsheviks swept the board in new factory commit-  
tee elections at the end of July, winning 64 places, against ten to the  
SRs and five to the anarchists.95 At the Sestroretsk works on 1 August  
Bolsheviks won eight places on the committee, the SRs five and the  
Mensheviks two.96 At the Parviainen works Bolsheviks got 1,800  
votes and the SRs 300 in new elections.97 In the wake of the Kornilov  
rebellion the tempo of Bolshevik success quickened. At the Lessner  
works the Bolsheviks gained 471 votes, non-party candidates 186,  
SRs 155 and the Mensheviks a mere 23 votes.98 At the Dynamo works  
the Bolsheviks received one-and-a-half times as many votes as the  
SRs in new factory committee elections.99 At the Mint five Bolsheviks,  
three non-party candidates and one SR were elected to the  
committee.100

Nowhere was the collapse of moderate socialism in the face of a  
rising tide of popular Bolshevism more evident than at the Pipe  
works, which for long had been a bastion of the SRs. At the beginning  
of June new elections to the factory committee and district soviet were  
held, in which the SRs gained 8,852 votes (56% of the vote), the  
Bolsheviks and Internationalists 5,823 (36%) and the Menshevik

defencists 1,061 (7%). As a result, the SRs got 21 places on the  
committee, the Internationalists 14 places and the defencists two  
places.101 The committee came into increasing conflict with the  
workers after it refused to pay workers who had struck during the July  
Days. On 13 October workers succeeded in getting new elections. Of  
the 15,117 votes cast the Bolsheviks gained 9,388 (62% of the vote),  
the SRs 3,822 (25%), anarchists 640 (4%) and the Mensheviks 552  
votes (3.7%). As a result, the Bolsheviks gained 23 places on the com-  
mittee, the SRs 16, the anarchists two and the Mensheviks one.102

Very few medium or large factories failed to register ‘Bolshevisa-  
tion’ to some degree. Typical exceptions were two textile-mills in the  
bourgeois Aleksandro-Nevskii ward of central Petrograd. At the Pal'  
factory the committee consisted of twelve non-party members, four  
SRs, one Bolshevik and one Menshevik in October. At the Maxwell  
cotton mill the committee comprised five non-party, four SRs and  
three Bolsheviks.103 In many smaller factories political radicalisation  
was not yet apparent among the workers, but only a minority of the  
city workforce were in such factories. In some huge state factories,  
such as the Pipe, Obukhov and Izhora works, the Bolsheviks won  
paramountcy only late, and did not always enjoy an absolute majority  
over all other parties. Nevertheless, even taking into account these  
exceptions, it is apparent that the Bolsheviks had the support of a  
majority of factory workers by October and were much the largest  
political party in the factory committees.

Before going on to analyse how the struggle for workers’ control of  
production was at the heart of ‘Bolshevisation’, it is crucial to note  
that there was no direct correlation between the political radicalism of  
a factory and the scope of workers’ control at the plant. Factories  
which were Bolshevik strongholds were not necessarily under strong  
workers’ control. Bolshevik-dominated factory committees at  
Rozenkrantz, the 1886 Electric Light company, the Sestroretsk arms  
works and the Skorokhod shoe-company did implement organised  
and far-reaching control, but the similarly constituted committees  
at the Baranovskii, Renault and Nobel works operated in a  
very moderate fashion. If one turns to the state sector, a glaring  
paradox emerges, for it becomes clear that it was the SR- and  
Menshevik-dominated factory committees at the Izhora, Baltic,  
New Admiralty, Radio-Telegraph, the Cartridge, the Gun, the  
Arsenal and the Okhta explosive-works which implemented the  
most systematic and radical forms of workers’ control. The

Gun works, for example, was situated in a wealthy area of the city  
centre and employed 3,500 workers. It was a bulwark of moderate  
socialism: in early May the workforce voted overwhelmingly in favour  
of the Coalition government; on 11 July all parties at the factory,  
including the Bolsheviks, condemned the July Days and expressed  
support for Kerensky.104 Only on 5 September did new elections to  
the Soviet return two Bolsheviks and two SRs.105 The factory  
committee consisted overwhelmingly of Mensheviks and SRs,  
although its chairman was the Bolshevik and leading light of the  
factory committee movement, V.Ya. Chubar'. Yet from spring  
onwards, the works and shop committees asserted their right of  
control over all aspects of production and factory life. The manage-  
ment took administrative and technical decisions, but communicated  
them via the control commission of the factory committee. All  
foremen and lower administrative personnel were elected by the  
workers; senior administrative and technical personnel were  
appointed, but the workers had the right to contest an appointment.  
If administrators had complaints against any worker, they had to  
refer them to the committee, and workers, similarly, were required to  
refer their grievances to the shop committees.106 The Mensheviks and  
SRs thus operated in complete violation of the official policy of their  
respective parties in executing such radical forms of workers’ control.  
It seems, however, that they found their parties’ policy - of simple  
rejection of workers’ control — to be of no practical use to them in the  
work situation. Chubar' admitted that ‘they [the moderate socialists]  
quite often deviated from the line of their leaders and went hand in  
hand with us on practical questions’.107 Present-day Soviet historians  
find this fact embarrassing. Stepanov, for example, states that the  
Gun-works committee restricted workers’ control to ‘making re-  
quests’ of management.108 Nevertheless, the evidence is considerable  
that many moderate socialists, particularly in the state sector,  
followed the Bolshevik policy in the sphere of workers’ control: they  
were simply responding to a situation which seemed to call for radical  
measures. At factory level Bolshevik talk of workers’ control made  
more sense to them than their own parties’ talk of state control of the  
economy. It is more than likely that many of those who voted for the  
Bolshevik resolution at the First Conference of Factory Committees  
still identified with the moderate socialist parties. Nevertheless, the  
failure of the moderate socialist parties to respond to what rank-  
and-file workers felt was the pressing need for workers’

control lost them a great deal of support. There is no doubt that the  
notion of workers’ control of production was very popular at the grass  
roots, and it was the willingness of the Bolsheviks to support this  
demand which was a central reason for their growing appeal.

A sense of the popularity of the idea of workers’ control can be  
gained by examining the resolutions passed by general meetings of  
workers in individual factories. One cannot assume that such  
resolutions were the spontaneous utterances of rank-and-file workers,  
for they were sometimes drafted by local party organisations and put  
to general meetings for endorsement. Nevertheless, even where  
workers did not themselves draft their resolutions, several different  
resolutions would usually be put to a meeting for discussion, so the  
choice of a Bolshevik rather than a Menshevik resolution is some  
indication of opinion within the factory.

An analysis of the resolutions passed in the months of August and  
September, which mention control of the economy, reveals an  
overwhelming preference for the Bolshevik formula of ‘workers’  
control of production and distribution’. Resolutions using this  
formula were passed by workers at the Baltic, Triangle, Putilov,  
Kuznetsov and Westinghouse works, at several textile mills and by  
the Vasilevskii district council of factory committees.109 In Septem-  
ber many resolutions use the rather more orthodox Bolshevik formula  
of‘workers’ control of production at a state-wide level’ to distinguish  
workers’ control from any anarchist project of individual factory  
seizures. Resolutions at Aivaz, Langenzippen, the Pipe works and one  
by Lithuanian workers on Vyborg Side use this formula.110 Occa-  
sionally, resolutions were passed which appear to be attempts to  
bridge differences between Bolshevik and Menshevik conceptions of  
control. Resolutions passed at the Stein company, the Baranovskii  
works and elsewhere in July, called for ‘state control with a majority  
of workers’,111 as did a resolution by Obukhov workers in October.112  
A resolution passed by metalworkers’ union delegates on 26 July  
called for ‘the implementation of real control of production and  
distribution of products and state regulation of industry’.113 In  
September the first national textileworkers’ conference, which had a  
big Bolshevik majority, passed a resolution calling for ‘state regula-  
tion of industry on a national scale under workers’ control’.114 In  
contrast to Moscow, however, the Menshevik call for ‘state control of  
the economy’ had little resonance within the Petrograd labour  
movement.115

More common in Petrograd were workers’ resolutions which called  
for control of production by the ‘toiling people’, suggesting Left SR or  
anarchist influence. It is interesting to note, however, that the  
Marxist notion of the ‘working class’ often underwent a populist  
inflection in working-class discourse — apparently spontaneously - to  
become the ‘toiling people’ (trudovoi narod). Resolutions incorporating  
this formula, therefore, may not necessarily have been drafted by Left  
SRs or anarchists. At the beginning of August workers in the  
iron-rolling shop at Putilov passed an earthy resolution which  
demanded:

**... total control of the branches of industry by the toiling people ...**

**From you capitalists, weeping crocodile tears, we demand you stop weeping  
about chaos which you yourselves have created. Your cards are on the table,  
the game is up, your persecution can no longer be successful. Go off and hide.  
Think your own thoughts and don’t dare show your noses, or else you’ll find  
yourselves without a nose, and without a head to boot.116**

On 14 September workers at the Cable works agreed that ‘the normal  
course of life can go on only if there is strict control of enterprises and  
of all products and also a transfer of power into the hands of the toiling  
people’.117 Resolutions which show clear Left-SR influence some-  
times used the ‘workers’ control’ formula, and, in spite of their  
populism, clearly conceived of this control as operating in a  
centralised fashion. One such resolution passed by workers at the  
New Admiralty shipyard on 30 September and published in the Left  
SR newspaper, condemned the Democratic Conference for not  
expressing the ‘people’s will’ (narodnaya volya) and went on to demand:

**the establishment of a genuinely revolutionary government [vlast'],** **a  
government of the soviet of workers’, soldiers’ and peasants’ deputies. This  
must strengthen and deepen the gains of the revolution by immediately  
summoning a Constituent Assembly to resolve economic disorder; by  
instituting workers’ control of production and distribution, taking no account  
of the interests of the handful of pirates; by bringing an end to the war, having  
declared democratic conditions for peace and having torn up the tsarist  
treaties; and by giving land to the peasants and bread to the urban  
democracy.118**

It is difficult to find obviously anarchist or syndicalist resolutions  
on economic questions passed by workers in Petrograd. One clear  
example is the resolution passed by workers in one of the shops at  
Langenzippen in July, which stated that ‘the country can be brought  
out of the chaos in its finances and food supplies only by the

proletariat, in union with the peasantry, organised into pure class-  
autonomous organisations, united on the basis of federalism, which  
will implement full control in all branches of industry without  
exception’.119 A symptom of anarchist influence may have been the  
use of a formula about workers taking the factories ‘into their own  
hands’. Zhuk, the syndicalist Piotrovskii, and the SR Maximalist,  
Vas'ko, all employed this formula at the factory committee confer-  
ences. Other evidence shows that left Bolsheviks also used the phrase,  
as a way of talking about workers’ self-management, though Milyutin  
expressly ruled out this phrase at the national conference.120 The  
resolution which calls most directly for the transfer of factories into  
the hands of the workers was passed by two branches of the  
metalworkers’ union rather than by a factory committee. The  
Kolpino district delegates of the metal union on 10 August and the  
Nevskii district delegates on 25 August, recommended: ‘as the only  
radical method of struggle ... that the metalworkers’ union take all  
factories and works into its own hands ... and liaise closely with the  
CCFC ... so that when the time comes for the factories to be  
transferred into the hands of the workers, there will be cells in the  
localities ready not just to take over but to continue running the  
factories’.121

This impressionistic survey of workers’ resolutions on control of the  
economy can hardly claim to be a scientific analysis of working-class  
attitudes to the question, but it does show that the Bolshevik formula  
of‘workers’ control of production and distribution’ was the one most  
widely supported by workers in Petrograd. Populist formulations  
about control by the ‘toiling people’ figure fairly prominently, but  
Menshevik, anarchist or syndicalist formulations are rare. Despite a  
limited degree of variety in the formulations used, suggesting some  
variation in conceptualisations of control of the economy, the vast  
majority of resolutions share one thing in common. This is a belief  
that economic disruption is primarily the result of wilful ‘sabotage’  
by the employers. ‘Sabotage’ and ‘saboteur’ were key words in  
popular discourse during the revolution and Bolsheviks in the factory  
committees harped constantly on this theme. It was the willingness of  
the Bolsheviks to fight ‘sabotage’, in order to protect jobs and the  
democratic gains of the February Revolution, which was the secret of  
their rapidly growing popularity in the summer and autumn of  
1917-

7

**Deepening economic chaos and the  
intensification of workers’ control**

ECONOMIC CRISIS AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

By midsummer 1917 the crisis in Russian industry was leading to  
factory closures and rising unemployment. Between March and July,  
568 factories - mainly textile and flour mills - employing some

1. workers, shut down operations. The Torgovo-Promyshlennaya  
   Gazeta analysed the chief causes of closure as being: first, shortages of  
   cotton, grain and other raw materials; secondly, the ‘excessive’  
   demands of the workers; thirdly, too few orders; fourthly, lack of fuel;  
   fifthly, declining profitability. The regions worst affected were the  
   Moscow Industrial Region and Southern Russia.1 After July the scale  
   of unemployment increased, as supplies of fuel and raw materials  
   began to dry up. It was mainly small firms which closed down, but  
   larger firms contributed their share to the pool of unemployment.

Up to October Petrograd was not as badly affected by unemploy-  
ment as other regions, although there are no reliable data on the  
number of unemployed in the capital. The number of metalworkers  
who registered with the union as unemployed rose from 37.4 per day  
in July to 71. 3 in October. Skilled metalworkers could still manage to  
find jobs, however, so that only about 3% of members of the metal  
union were unemployed in October.2 Other industries were worse hit:  
the shortage of sugar meant that the Petrograd confectionary industry  
was on the verge of extinction, thus imperilling the livelihood of 4,000  
workers.3 Grain shortages meant that many bakery workers were out  
of work.4 In the print industry unemployment was growing rapidly  
owing to the paper shortage, and by October about 1,000 printers in  
the capital were out of work.5 Other industries, such as textiles,

tailoring and woodworking, were not yet suffering closures and  
redundancies, though their prospects were bleak. In all, there were  
probably about 8,000 registered unemployed in the middle of October,  
and although the real figure was almost certainly much higher, the  
rate of unemployment in the capital was still lower than elsewhere in  
the country. This was due to the success of factory committees and  
trade unions and, to some extent of the Factory Convention, in  
blocking attempts by employers to cut the size of their workforces and  
to begin the transfer to civilian production.

As the economic crisis deepened, so the tempo of class conflict  
accelerated. As the workers became more combative and as profits  
disappeared, so industrialists became less willing to invest in their  
enterprises or to take on new orders. At the beginning of June the  
Minister of Trade and Industry declared that ‘entrepreneurs, not  
feeling themselves on firm ground, have lost the appropriate energy.  
They desire a halt to production or seek to transfer the rocketing costs  
of production onto the broad circles of consumers and onto the  
exchequer by exorbitant increases in commodity prices.’6 In South-  
ern and Central Russia from early summer industrialists began to  
wage war on the working class, seeking to crush its militancy with the  
cudgel of unemployment. In the Urals and the Donbass, and to some  
extent in the industrial region round Moscow, organisations of  
employers launched a coordinated strategy of lockouts, designed to  
demoralise workers and to prove to the public that interference in  
production, excessive wage-increases and the eight-hour day were  
bringing industry to its knees.7

In Petrograd the policy of cutbacks, closures and lockouts was less  
aggressive. The large factories had not yet been pushed into a corner,  
and working-class resistance was too well-organised to be easily  
quashed. By June Petrograd employers were alarmed that they had  
made a terrible miscalculation in plumping for a policy of concession  
rather than repression after the February Revolution. The workers,  
instead of succumbing to the blandishments of a liberal industrial-  
relations policy, were growing ever more ‘immoderate’ in their  
demands. The SFWO complained: ‘Industrialists have made very  
significant concessions, they have made a big sacrifice in the hope of  
restarting work in the factories and mills, but the demands of workers  
and employees have gone beyond what is possible.’8 From June  
onwards, Petrograd employers tried to pursue a much tougher  
labour policy, resisting wage-increases and cutting back production

in the hope that growing unemployment would make the workers ‘see  
sense’.

The shift in the attitude of employers was paralleled by a shift in the  
attitude of the government towards the labour problem. Under the  
first Coalition Government, formed at the beginning of May, a proper  
Ministry of Labour had come into being. This was headed by the  
Menshevik, M.I. Skobelev, assisted by P.N. Kolokol'nikov, an  
experienced trade unionist of right-wing Menshevik persuasion, and  
K. A. Gvozdev, bete noire of the labour left because of his pivotal role in  
the Workers’ Group of the War Industries Committee. These  
Mensheviks came into the new Ministry committed to a programme  
of ‘broad social reforms’.9 Skobelev promised to meet the just  
demands of the masses, to intervene in the economy and to confiscate  
the profits of the captains of industry,10 but these promises stuck in  
the throats of the majority of staunchly conservative government  
ministers. They despatched Skobelev’s reform proposals into the  
labyrinth of government committees from whence few saw the light of  
day. On 11 July labour inspectors were established, as a first step  
towards revamping the system of factory inspection.11 In the same  
month the 1912 insurance legislation was extended to all workers.12  
On 8 August night work was banned for women and minors under 17  
— except in defence enterprises. And on 8 October maternity pay was  
introduced. All other proposals for comprehensive social insurance  
failed to reach the statute book, owing to opposition from within the  
government and from the employers, who accused the Ministry of  
Labour of ‘defending the exclusive interests of the working class ...  
completely ignoring the interests ... of the other side’.13

By June the reforming zeal of the Menshevik ministers was being  
overtaken by a concern to defuse explosive class antagonisms. The  
Ministry of Labour tried to encourage a partnership between capital  
and labour, but although Skobelev still paid lip-service to the plight of  
the working class, he tended increasingly to see low labour-productiv-  
ity as the root of Russia’s economic ills. When visited by a deputation  
ofmineowners from Southern Russia on 13 June, Skobelev reportedly  
promised them help in curtailing working-class demands, which he  
concurred where ‘immoderate’ and ‘in conflict with the general  
well-being’. In an address to workers on 28June Skobelev condemned  
‘arbitrary’ actions by workers which ‘disorganise industry  
and exhaust the exchequer’.14 The need for ‘sacrifice’ became the leit-  
motif of Skobelev’s speeches, one which modulated into appeals for

an end to industrial conflict ‘in the name of strengthening the  
revolution and honouring our ultimate ideals’.15 In spite of extrava-  
gant displays of impartiality, however, Skobelev could not win the  
trust of the Minister ofTrade and Industry, A.I. Konovalov, who led  
an onslaught against further wage-increases, at a time when the  
Ministry of Labour was enmeshed in painful negotiations over union  
wage contracts.16 Efforts to establish cooperation between the two  
sides of industry were thus rendered void not only by bitter class  
conflict in industry, but by resistance from bourgeois ministers within  
the government.

After the July Days the Kerensky government shifted sharply to the  
right, under sustained pressure from industrialists, financiers and the  
General Staff. Demands from employers for the militarisation of  
labour in defence industries and in transport, and for a declaration of  
a state of emergency in the Donbass evoked a favourable response  
from the Ministry of Trade and Industry and from the Special  
Commission on Defence. The position of the Ministry of Labour  
became more and more untenable, as it was torn between the  
irreconcilable forces of capital and labour. It oscillated between  
minor concessions and promises of reform and puny displays of  
strength, such as the Skobelev circulars (see below).

WORKERS RESIST ATTEMPTS TO EVACUATE INDUSTRY

As early as 1916 the tsarist government had discussed the possibility  
of the ‘off-loading’ (razgruzka) from Petrograd of some of its factories,  
in order to ease the fuel shortage.17 On 6 July 1917 a special  
committee was set up to plan the ‘off-loading’ ofindustry. In August it  
recommended that plant and equipment be evacuated from 47 large  
factories in Petrograd, including all state enterprises and the largest  
private engineering and chemical works.18 Only some of the workers  
at these factories were to be evacuated; the rest were to be dismissed  
with two weeks’ pay. The German occupation of Riga on 21 August  
caused the government to expand the scope of its evacuation plans.  
These plans were motivated by a desire to rationalise war production  
and by a fear that the Germans would occupy Petrograd. In  
working-class circles, however, they were seen as a thinly-disguised  
attempt to break the power of the revolutionary movement by the  
simple device of destroying its physical base.

When news first broke in May of plans for the ‘off-loading’ of

industry, workers lost no time in letting the government know their  
views. On 20 May workers in the Putilov gun shop, which was  
dominated politically by Mensheviks, unanimously resolved:

**If the ‘off-loading’ of Petrograd is necessary in the interests of rational  
distribution of food products and rational allocation of fuel, for the benefit of  
all toilers, then Petrograd must be ‘off-loaded’ in the first place of:**

1. **idlers, drones, men and women in monasteries, those who live off their  
   incomes, those who do not work or serve;**
2. **those hired workers brought by force or deception from Asia, who should  
   be sent back;**
3. **The transfer of all luxury items along the rail- and water-ways should be  
   halted and these means of transport should be used to convey fuel, fodder and  
   foodstufTs to wherever they are required. We protest against the slanders that  
   accuse workers of disrupting transport, and point out that it is those who  
   defend the monks and the opponents of the democratic republic who are  
   causing and aggravating chaos in the state, and who should be replaced  
   immediately by elected representatives of the peasants and workers.**

**... We demand control of production, industry and capital, since the  
capitalists and industrialists are deliberately leading the country to ruin.19**

Another resolution passed at Putilov by 700 workers in the boiler  
and steam-boiler shops denounced evacuation plans as a ‘counter-  
revolutionary trick of the bourgeoisie to rid Petersburg of organised  
revolutionary workers and to scatter them to the backwoods [glush.'] of  
Russia’. They called for the city to be ‘off-loaded’ of‘the bourgeois  
idlers who stroll along Nevskii and Morskaya streets stopping off at  
restaurants’.20 Workers in the Putilov forge also denounced the  
evacuation plans as a counter-revolutionary plot and continued:

**We, workers and peasants, will stay put, since we believe that once the right  
balance of conflicting forces is struck, the people will have the opportunity to  
take power into their own hands and then no crisis need occur. We suggest  
that Petrograd be unloaded of its monasteries, infirmaries, asylums, alms-  
houses and many thousands of idle bourgeois. We also propose to find out  
why where is such a great concentration of Chinese in the city.21**

These three resolutions all display a fierce hostility to the parasitic  
bourgeoisie, a strong sense of the workers as a productive class, a deep  
anti-religious feeling, not to say a certain lack of sympathy for  
immigrant workers and the unfortunates of the alms-houses and  
asylums.

The themes encapsulated in the Putilov resolutions were echoed in  
many other protests. Somewhat unusually, workers at Sestroretsk  
blamed the industrial chaos not on deliberate sabotage, but on ‘the

disorganisation and anarchy of the capitalist system’. To the  
standard list of proposed evacuees, they added ‘courtesans, those who  
play the stock-exchange, speculators and other social parasites’.22  
Bolshevik workers at New Lessner added to the list, ‘yellow labour’  
and ‘peasants to be sent back to the fields’; while workers at the Pella  
engineering works had the bright idea of‘ridding Petrograd ... of the  
gentlemen who can only cry “War to Victory!”’23 Resolutions,  
condemning the evacuation plans as a move to disperse the revolu-  
tionary proletariat, were passed by workers at the Russo-Baltic  
works, the Arsenal, the Kebke factory and the Petichev engineering  
works.24 Only occasionally did workers admit that some degree of  
evacuation might be inevitable in view pf the fuel, raw-materials and  
transport crisis, but even then, they stated that it was up to workers to  
decide if and how evacuation should be carried out.25

In the autumn some factory owners began surreptitiously to move  
equipment out of their factories. Factory committees actively  
thwarted these manoeuvres. In September the Putilov administration  
attempted to send machinery by canal to Saratov, but the works  
committee held up the barge for a month until the administration had  
proved to their satisfaction that the machinery was not needed in  
Petrograd.26 At the Pipe works management planned to remove  
operations to Penza, Voronezh and Ekaterinoslav, transferring 4,000  
machines, 20,000 workers and about 40,000 members of their  
families. When the works committee visited these places, however,  
they discovered that none of them was ready to receive the evacuees,  
and that in reality management intended to transfer only 1,281  
workers and fire the rest. Without hesitation, the works committee  
blocked the proposed plans.27 Similar discoveries were made by  
factory committees at the Okhta explosives works and the Optics  
factory when they visited the sites to which their factories were to be  
evacuated.28 At the Arsenal works and the Okhta powder works the  
committees obstructed evacuation plans since they had been in-  
adequately prepared.29

Not all factory committees opposed evacuation in principle. At the  
Parviainen works the Bolshevik-controlled committee on 22 August  
drew up an agreement with management which specified in detail  
the terms of the transfer of operations out of the capital.30 At the  
Baltic works the committee drew up emergency evacuation plans in  
case of German invasion.31 At the Nevskii shipyard the committee  
was fully involved in arrangements to evacuate the plant.32 At

Sestroretsk the committee searched for a place to which the arms  
factory could be evacuated.33

Officially, the factory committees opposed plans for evacuation.  
The Third Conference passed a resolution which argued that the  
practical difficulties of setting up factories in new areas without a  
proper social and industrial infrastructure were enormous; that the  
transport system could not bear the strain of evacuation; that it would  
be too costly, and that it was a counter-revolutionary plot. The  
resolution argued that the way out of the crisis lay in a revolutionary  
popular government bringing the war to a close. The resolution,  
however, did allow for partial evacuation of single enterprises, so long  
as this were done under strict workers’ control, with the full consent of  
the workforce, and so long as three months’ redundancy pay were  
given to those who did not wish to move.34

The attitude of the trade unions was more or less in line with that of  
the factory committees, though there was greater willingness to  
recognise that evacuation might not always be against the interest of  
the working class. In May the Petrograd Council of Trade Unions  
strongly attacked the evacuation plans and persuaded the workers’  
section of the Petrograd Soviet to do likewise.35 Interestingly,  
however, the metalworkers’ union did not share the general antipathy  
to evacuation. At a meeting in May of the union board it was  
unanimously agreed that: ‘we should broaden the partial question (of  
‘off-loading’) to include the general regulation of the whole of our  
national industry. We thus insist on the immediate creation of a  
national centre of regulation, on which the representatives of  
organised labour will have a big say in deciding questions about the  
organisation of the economy’.36 Later the Bolshevik V. Schmidt  
persuaded the union to take a more critical position, but the union  
shifted back to its original position in July, justifying evacuation by  
the argument that ‘the ruin of the national economy would lead to the  
destruction of the revolution’.37 At the beginning of September the  
union managed to persuade the PCTU of the necessity of limited  
evacuation under workers’ control.38 Thus by October the unions  
had a less intransigent position on evacuation than the CCFC.

THE FACTORY COMMITTEES AGAINST REDUNDANCIES

In the autumn of 1917 the factory committees of Petrograd became  
very active in fighting attempts at closure and redundancy. At the

Baranovskii, Parviainen, Vulcan, Pulemet, Metal, Erikson, Siemens-  
Schukert and Dynamo works, management plans for closure were  
blocked by the works committees.39 At the Baranovskii works  
management on 1 August announced 1,500 redundancies owing to  
fuel shortages. The committee responded by cutting working hours  
and transferring workers from one shop to another.40 On 16 August  
management at the Vulcan works fired 633 workers and announced  
the closure of the factory on 7 September. When the factory  
committee discovered that there were stocks of fuel and raw materials  
to last six months, it accused the director of ‘sabotage’ and tried to  
have him removed from his post.41 At the end of August' management  
at Parviainen announced that 1,630 redundancies were in the  
pipeline, but the committee managed to defer them by ensuring a  
more economical use of remaining fuel-supplies.42

At the Putilov works the administration had tried to lay off 1,200  
workers as early as May, but it was not until the end of August that it  
tried in earnest to implement redundancies. It announced that 10,000  
workers would lose their jobs as a consequence of fuel shortages.43  
The works committee declared this unacceptable and began a  
desperate search for fuel. It managed to find some, but the  
administration could not afford to buy it. Workers and managers set  
up a commission to investigate production at the factory and  
concluded that 3,200, not 10,000 workers would have to lose their  
jobs. On 25 September members of the works committee met with the  
vice-president of the Commission on Defence, Pal'chinskii, to discuss  
the fuel crisis and redundancies, He proposed a ‘participation’  
scheme whereby workers would be given places on the new company  
board in return for implementing redundancies. The committee  
rejected this out of hand since ‘workers cannot dismiss workers’, but  
they conceded that some redundancies were necessary, since ‘we  
cannot allow the factory to become an alms-house’.44 On 10 October  
the works committee met with representatives from the Peterhof  
district soviet and from the CCFC to discuss further the question of  
redundancies. Committee members were criticised for agreeing to  
one month’s redundancy pay instead of two. The meeting agreed that  
workers should only leave voluntarily, though some felt that shop  
committees should pressurise the better-off workers into leaving.45

Some factory committees tried to shift the burden of redundancies  
on to women workers, on the grounds that their sojourn in industry  
was a temporary one brought about by the war, and that the wives

of men in work could live off their husbands’ wages. At the Franco-  
Russian, Arsenal, Nevskii, Lessner and Russian-Baltic works, the  
committees took steps to phase out female employment.46 At the  
Baltic works the committee said that every effort would be made to  
find alternative work for women but if this were not available they  
would be dismissed.47 At the Putilov works the shrapnel and other  
shop committees tried to fire married women, but they were  
prevented from doing so by the works committee.48 The Bolshevik  
party, the CCFC and the metalworkers’ union condemned attempts  
by factory committees to make women workers bear the brunt of  
redundancies, arguing that this would fatally divide the ranks of the  
working class.

On the whole, the attempt by factory committees and trade unions  
to prevent redundancies was successful up to October. Only two  
factories, employing more than 500 workers, closed down in Petro-  
grad - the Semenov engineering works and the Precision Engineering  
company.49 The majority that managed to stave off redundancies,  
however, proved after October to have been merely postponing the  
inevitable.

workers’ control becomes more radical

As more and more jobs became threatened, the scope of workers’  
control expanded. Factory committees strengthened their control of  
fuel and raw materials and new forms of control began to appear. One  
of the most important of these was the effort to extend workers’  
control into the sphere of company sales and finances. Until June  
such control was rare.50 Finance sub-committees had been set up in  
March in some factories, such as the Pipe and the Okhta explosives  
works, but they did little but organise the finances of the committees  
themselves. As early as May, however, Major-General Belaev, the  
director of the Izhora works, permitted the works committee to  
monitor financial operations and pricing policy.51 At the Russo-  
Belgian metallurgical company 400 workers, threatened with loss of  
their jobs owing to the financial difficulties of the company, opened  
the company books in June to discover that orders were in a healthy  
state. They offered to guarantee the profitability of the company for  
the rest of 1917 if they were given the right to check company  
accounts, but management refused.52 At the Langenzippen works the  
committee in June attempted to stop the payment of dividends to

shareholders, pending an enquiry.53 The First Conference of Petro-  
grad Factory Committees called for the abolition of commercial  
secrecy, and the Central Council of Factory Committees claimed  
wide powers of checking company accounts, calculating debts and  
credits, costs of production and rates of profit.54 Yet in spite of  
increased activity in this sphere, control of company finances  
remained an aspiration rather than a reality. Much of the crucial  
information which the committees needed, in order to evaluate the  
true financial position of the companies, was in the hands of the  
banks, and the banks were not prepared to part with such informa-  
tion. Even in cases where factory committees gained access to  
company accounts, they were unable to make sense of them without  
the help of a trained accountant, and often the accountants would not  
cooperate with the committees.

In order to forestall closure, the factory committees in a handful of  
enterprises attempted to remove the official board of management  
and to run the factories themselves. At the small Brenner copper-  
smelting and engineering works the owner informed the factory  
committee on 19 May that he had no funds left. He begged it to help  
him expedite outstanding orders as quickly as possible, which the  
committee agreed to do; five days later Brenner announced that he  
was going to shut the factory for two weeks. The committee objected  
to this, since the factory had received advances of 420,000 rubles from  
the War Industries Committee for orders which had not yet been  
completed. The committee therefore decided to dispense with  
Brenner and run the factory themselves. On 6 June they issued an  
appeal to the Ministry of Labour and to the Petrograd Soviet:

**In view of the fact that the owner of the factory has not appeared since 24  
May, and that the factory has been working under the supervision of the  
factory committee, we are seeking your permission to run production, to  
receive and fulfil orders both state and private, and to continue production  
when those state orders begun under Brenner have been finished and  
despatched to the institutions from which they were received. Without your  
permission, the committee will be deprived of the possibility of continuing  
production at the factory and this will make it difficult for the workers to  
receive their wages.55**

On 16 June the Peterhof district soviet agreed to check the accounts  
of the Brenner works and to make an inventory of stock. It later  
agreed to oversee an experiment in Self-management, by putting the  
deputy to the soviet in charge of operations at the factory.56 The

factory was desperately short of capital, so the committee turned to  
other factory committees for help. The Triangle works lent the factory

1. rubles and the Putilov works sent some raw material, but this  
   did not really help. At one stage the committee began negotiations  
   with Brenner about his possible return, but his terms proved  
   unacceptable. By August productivity was sliding fast, workers were  
   not receiving their wages and drunkenness was on the increase. On 24  
   August the commissar of the local militia reported to the Peterhof  
   soviet that he had received an order from the government to eject the  
   workers from the factory.57 The committee then turned to the  
   government to demand sequestration. After pressure from the CCFC,  
   the government agreed in September to place the factory in charge of  
   the Factory Convention.58

At the V.A. Lebedev airplane factory the thousand workers in late  
May demanded a large increase, which management refused to  
countenance. The SRs at the factory called for the wage claim to be  
referred to the conciliation chamber, but they suggested that if  
management persisted in its recalcitrance, the workers should  
demand the removal of the director. Another group of workers,  
however, demanded the immediate expulsion of the director ‘for  
disseminating false rumours aimed at disorganising the workers and  
employees of the factory’. They won the toss and the workers forced  
the removal of the director from the board of the company. On 2 June  
another general meeting was summoned at which a call was made for  
workers to take over the running of the factory themselves. Some  
pointed out that this was impractical, since they did not have any  
capital to continue operations. A worker by the name of Tamsin  
proposed the following resolution: ‘We empower the factory commit-  
tee to take over the running of the factory by itself, to inform the board  
of this step and to invite a government commissar to the factory and  
to inform the metalworkers’ union.’ The SR chairman of the  
factory committee resigned at this point, and the next day the SR  
factory cell called a meeting which the Bolsheviks refused to attend.  
This meeting agreed that ‘the question of transferring the factory into  
the workers’ hands cannot be decided by an open vote, but only by a  
secret ballot of all comrade-workers, so that each worker considers  
himself responsible for the decision’. A member of the City Soviet  
was called to the factory and he eventually dissuaded the workers  
from taking over the factory, leaving it in charge of the board of  
directors.59

In a few instances workers tried to force the government to

‘sequestrate’ their factories, by nominating a new board of manage-  
ment to run the enterprise, or by appointing a government official to  
oversee the running of the enterprise. In general, the government was  
not keen to do this and it resisted demands from workers at the  
Slyusarenko airplane, the Langenzippen works and elsewhere for it to  
take responsibility for management of their factories.60 In a couple of  
cases, however, the government did agree to sequestration. At the  
Rykatkin engineering works, where twenty-four workers were em-  
ployed, the government provided loans during the war of nearly a  
million rubles for defence orders, but the value of completed orders  
was less than 100,000 rubles. Suspecting peculation, the War  
Industries Committee mounted an investigation. After a conflict with  
the workforce in May, the owner, V.I. Rykatkin, resolved to close his  
factory and began secretly to remove tools and equipment. After he  
was caught one night, the Menshevik-dominated factory committee  
refused him entry to the factory and petitioned the government to  
sequester the enterprise. At first, the Ministry of Labour refused, but  
at the end of July it acceded to the request.61

At the Respirator factory, where 7,000 workers were employed in  
making gas-masks, the administration quit the factory at the end of  
August. The factory committee couched its demand for sequestration  
in unambiguously defencist terms:

**We have made clear our position regarding the sabotage of our factory by the  
administration, which has gone away at this most pressing and critical  
moment. We consider this to be an act of desertion of the home front. In order  
not to disrupt or harm production of gas-masks for the front, and in order that  
the factory can work normally - in spite of the eight-day absence of the  
administration - we unanimously resolve: As circumstances will not permit of  
any delay, to demand the immediate appointment of a commissar to take care  
of the legal side of things and that he be someone neutral. The works  
committee and shop stewards’ committee take responsibility for production  
and maintaining output ...**

**In no circumstances must our factory be subject to the War Industries  
Committee, but to the state. We demand that the administration, which is  
guilty of desertion, be handed over to a democratic court .. ,62**

The government seems to have resisted the demand for sequestration,  
for the factory soon closed down.63

The examples of the Brenner, Lebedev, Rykatkin and Respirator  
works show clearly that efforts by workers to remove the administra-  
tion were not inspired by syndicalist utopianism: they were designed  
to save jobs. The committees behaved in an organised fashion and  
liaised with the soviets and the government. They sought to force the

government into taking responsibility for the factory, and the sheer  
practical difficulties of running a factory seem to have discouraged  
them from attempting to run the factories by themselves. Factory  
seizures, or ‘socialisations’ were almost non-existent in Petrograd,  
although they were beginning to take place in the Ukraine by the  
autumn of 1917.

As workers’ control became more aggressive and expansionist,  
opposition to it from factory owners hardened. Everywhere em-  
ployers began to resist ‘interference’ by factory committees and to  
reassert their ‘right to manage’. Attempts by the Society of Factory  
and Works Owners to confine the activities of the committees to the  
area demarcated by the law of 23 April failed dismally. Employers  
therefore tried to constrain the committees in other ways. They  
attempted to stop them meeting during working hours. They  
threatened to stop paying wages to committee members. They  
deprived committees of premises in which to meet and threatened  
individual members with dismissal or conscription into the army.64  
More significantly, the SFWO put pressure on the Ministry of  
Labour to use its legal powers to curb the ambitions of the  
committees. Anxious to meet objections from employers and to be  
seen to be doing something, the Ministry of Labour took steps to limit  
workers’ control. On 23 August it issued a circular affirming that the  
right of hiring and firing workers belonged exclusively to the  
employers. On 28 August it issued a second circular which forbade  
factory committees from meeting during working hours. The circu-  
lars provoked uproar in the labour movement, not least because they  
appeared at precisely the time when General Kornilov was organising  
to drown the revolutionary movement in blood. Meetings of workers  
at Putilov, the Admiralty works, the Cable works, Nobel and Lebedev  
works heaped obloquy on the Ministry of Labour for capitulating to  
the counter-revolutionary demands of the employers.65 At Langen-  
zippen, the workers passed a resolution which said:

**We reject with indignation the malicious slanders of the Ministry of Labour  
that the work of the factory committee lowers labour-productivity. The  
factory committee declares that ...**

1. **Skobelev’s circular has a purely political character and is counter-  
   revolutionary. It prevents the labour movement from following an organised  
   course and supports the organised march of the counter-revolution, which  
   aims to sabotage industry and reduce the country to famine.**
2. **We are forced to conclude that in the present context [of Kornilov] the  
   Ministry for the ‘protection of labour’ has been converted into the Ministry**

**for the protection of capitalist interests and acts hand in hand with  
Ryabushinskii to reduce the country to famine, so that the ‘bony hand’ may  
strangle the revolution.66**

At the Obukhov works a general meeting declared: ‘We consider the  
existence of the factory committees to be a matter of life and death for  
the working class. We believe that the implementation of Skobelev’s  
circular would mean the destruction of all the gains of the working  
class. We will fight with all our might and by all means, including the  
general strike, for the existence of our factory committees.’67 The  
Third Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees (5-10 Sep-  
tember) was hastily summoned to discuss the circulars. It roundly  
condemned them, jeering at Kolokol'nikov’s pathetic attempts to  
explain away the circulars on behalf of an embarrassed Ministry of  
Labour.68

Some employers saw the circulars as a green light to go ahead and  
bring the factory committees to heel. At the Skorokhod shoe factory  
and the Aivaz engineering works management announced that they  
were going to stop paying members of the factory committee and stop  
their interference in hiring-policy.69 On 1 September the administra-  
tion at Vulcan announced that it intended to halve the wages bill of  
the factory committee. The committee resisted and was fully  
supported by the workers, who, going further in their resistance than  
the committee wished, clamoured for the removal of the director.  
After several weeks’ bitter conflict, the wages of committee members  
were restored to their former level.70 At the Nevskii footwear factory  
management persisted for a week in trying to stop meetings during  
working hours and in refusing to pay workers to guard the factory, but  
it then gave in.71 In general, labour organisations in Petrograd were  
strong enough to thwart efforts by employers to constrain them, and  
in most factories employers do not seem to have thought it worth even  
trying.

After the failure of attempts to curb workers’ control by legal  
means, employers were thrown onto the defensive. By September  
workers’ control had been transmogrified from an essentially defen-  
sive tactic of maintaining production into an offensive means of  
forcing employers to keep open their factories come what may. The  
dominant feeling amongst employers was aptly summed up in the  
Torgovo-Promyshlennaya Gazeta: ‘The sole dream of the industrialist has  
become to give up business and to close his enterprise, if only  
for a short time. If cases of closure are not so numerous, it is only

because the threat of mob law, sequestration and unrest hangs over  
him.’72

Although the main impulse behind the workers’ control movement  
was a practical concern to save jobs, the movement also reflected the  
continuing concern of workers to realise the democratic gains of the  
February Revolution. The expanding scope of workers’ control was  
seen as further limiting the arbitrary authority of management and  
fortifying the power of workers in production. Indeed the concern  
with maintaining output and the concern with democracy were  
mutually reinforcing: the effort to combat potential sabotage by the  
employer necessitated a curtailment of his authority. This is made  
clear by the preamble to the resolution on workers’ control, passed by  
the First All-Russian National Conference of Factory Committees,  
which stated: ‘Having overthrown autocracy in the political sphere,  
the working class will aspire to achieve the triumph of the democratic  
system in the sphere of production. The idea of workers’ control,  
which arose naturally in the circumstances of economic ruin created  
by the criminal policy of the ruling classes, is the expression of this  
aspiration.’73

The concern with workplace-democracy continued to be more vital  
in the state sector than in the private sector up to October. At the  
beginning of July the first national congress of factory and port  
committees subject to the Naval Ministry discussed the possibility of  
workers’ self-management. Kafieman, a delegate from the Izhora  
works, and probably an SR, introduced a resolution which called for  
naval enterprises to be run solely by the factory committees.74 It was  
envisaged that the latter would elect a director and administrative  
staff, and that the Naval Ministry would send representatives to the  
factories for purposes of‘control’. An opposing resolution introduced  
by a Menshevik, Nabokov, from the Okhta shell shop, said that  
factory committees should not run the naval enterprises, for this was  
the job of the official administration, but that they should have rights  
of information and inspection. Nabokov’s resolution was passed by 48  
votes to ten, with seven abstentions.75 It is ironic that the  
Mensheviks Nabokov and Solomon Schwarz should have proposed  
workers’ control instead of workers’ self-management at the confer-  
ence, for their party officially rejected even workers’ control, but  
clearly it was seen as a lesser evil to full-blown self-management.  
The same conference, however, initially overrode attempts by the

Mensheviks to stop workers electing the administration, as they  
already did at the Baltic and Izhora works. A resolution was passed  
proposing that a list of candidates for the posts of director and chief  
technician be drawn up by the Naval Ministry, factory committees  
and technicians’ union, from which the workers would then make a  
choice. The chosen director would then draw up a list of candidates  
for administrative jobs at departmental and shop level, from which  
the workers again would choose. They would, however, still retain the  
right to raise objections (otvod) to particular administrators or  
technicians. Engineers, who generally sat on the naval factory  
committees in Petrograd, strongly condemned this resolution,  
arguing that modern production required planning and expertise,  
and that an elected administration would mean that popularity with  
the workers would count for more than scientific training. In view of  
this condemnation, the conference, two weeks later, overturned the  
resolution by 37 votes to 29, though it upheld the right of workers to  
object to administrative and technical personnel.76 The conference  
also reaffirmed that the factory committees should only exercise  
‘informational’ or ‘preliminary’ control, not ‘responsible’ control.

In the autumn of 1917, as workers intervened more deeply into the  
sphere of management, the distinction between the two types of  
control seemed to grow more specious, for it was difficult for workers  
to ‘control’ production on a broad scale, without taking some  
responsibility for it. This problem greatly exercised the committee at  
the Putilov works. As early as June the committee had gone to the  
Ministry of Labour to demand a new administration, and discussions  
had taken place within the committee as to the number of workers’  
representatives that should sit on the new company board. Most of  
the committee held that workers should demand a two-thirds  
majority of the eighteen places on the board but the Bolshevik  
chairman, Vasil'ev, believed that this would vest workers with  
responsibility for production willy-nilly.77 On 25 September mem-  
bers of the works committee met with the vice-chairman of the  
Defence Commission, Pal'chinskii, to discuss the state of production  
at Putilov. He proposed that a joint commission of workers and  
management be established to supervise the running of the factory  
and to take charge of cutting the workforce and raising productivity.  
The majority of Bolsheviks and Menshevik-Internationalists on the  
works committee rejected this proposal, since they were unwilling to  
take responsibility for sackings and redundancies; instead they called

for strict ‘control’ of the administration.78 As Vasil'ev pointed out,  
however, it was becoming difficult to prevent ‘control’ from entailing  
‘responsibility’: ‘Assuming the functions of control, we will be drawn  
unwillingly, but quite naturally, into the sphere of operations and of  
factory productivity, into a sphere which is very ticklish from the  
point of view of preserving the principles of revolutionary democracy  
and observing the principles of class struggle.’79

A conference of metalworkers on 15 October pondered further the  
contradictions of workers’ control. The syndicalist, A.K. Gastev,  
opened the discussion, arguing forcefully that the factory committees  
were fooling themselves if they thought that ‘control’ could avoid  
entailing responsibility. Speakers debated the relative merits of  
‘informational’ versus ‘responsible’ control and a clear majority  
spoke up for the latter. Although the conference took place only a  
week before the October uprising, the expectation of the delegates  
was that capitalism would continue for an indefinite time, but that the  
state would regulate production on an increasing scale.80 The next  
day, however, a conference of works committees under the Artillery  
Administration reaffirmed the orthodox position: ‘responsibility  
for production lies exclusively with the administration ... but the  
works committees have the right of control, which means that the  
works committee, in the shape of its control commission, has the  
right to attend all board meetings and to demand exhaustive  
information’.81

Three days later, the First National Conference of Factory  
Committees continued the debate. The Bolshevik Larin proposed  
that the factory committees send one member to sit on each organ of  
administration, though only with an advisory voice. Chubar' rejected  
this, arguing that the committee representatives would be cast in the  
role of‘adjutants to the generals’, that they would become embroiled  
in paper work, that they would be used by management as ‘pushers’,  
and that they would become targets of rank-and-file hostility. He  
proposed that the factory committees control commission should  
oversee the work of the administrative organs, but refuse to sit on  
them.82 The resolution of the conference insisted that manage-  
ment keep the committees fully informed of its decisions and of the  
state of production, and allow it full access to correspondence and  
accounts.83

The debates about workers’ control in the autumn of 1917 arose  
from the fact that the movement for workers’ control had a

relentlessly forward-moving dynamic. The demand for workers’  
control was, in Trotsky’s parlance, a ‘transitional’ demand, which  
stemmed from the immediate practical needs of workers, but which  
pushed them ever forward into battle with the capitalism itself.  
Workers’ control implied a kind of‘dual power’ in the factory which,  
like ‘dual power’ at state level, was intrinsically unstable and  
necessitated resolution at the expense of one class or another.

By October the movement for workers’ control had become a mass  
movement. The Soviet historian, M.L. Itkin, estimates that 289,000  
workers, or 74% of the city’s industrial workforce, worked in  
enterprises under some form of workers’ control.84 Yet this should be  
kept in perspective, for Itkin calculates that workers’ control operated  
in only 96 enterprises. Since there were 1,011 enterprises of all sizes in  
the city and its suburbs85, this means that 90% of enterprises,  
predominantly small or medium-sized factories, were not touched by  
workers’ control, Moreover only a minority of factory committees  
practised workers’ control. It has been calculated that there were 244  
factory committees in Petrograd province by October86, so if Itkin is  
correct, only 39% operated workers’ control. Workers’ control thus  
affected only large factories and left the majority of smaller enter-  
prises untouched.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE FACTORY COMMITTEES TO THE  
TRADE UNIONS

The coexistence of factory committees and trade unions raised  
problems about their respective spheres of competence. The factory  
committees in the private sector had initially pursued activities of a  
conventional trade-union type. After the re-establishment of trade  
unions, the factory committees withdrew from the sphere of collective  
bargaining and began to concentrate on workers’ control of produc-  
tion. It was not clear, however, whether the committees should  
operate independently of the trade unions, or whether they should  
merge into them. At the First Conference of Factory Committees a  
majority of delegates spoke in favour of the committees being separate  
from the trade unions, on the grounds that their job - that of  
controlling production - was different from that of the trade unions,  
as conventionally understood. The minority of trade-union spokes-  
men at the conference, principally the Mefhraionets, D. Ryazanov, and  
the Menshevik, V.D. Rubtsov, argued that there was not room for

two labour organisations, and that the factory committees should  
become the primary cells of the trade unions.87 The trade-union  
leaders seem to have been particularly worried by the proposal to set  
up a Central Council of Factory Committees. Initially, the propo-  
nents of a CCFC had envisaged that it would be attached to the  
Petrograd Council of Trade Unions,88 but in the course of the  
conference, they seem to have decided in favour of an autonomous  
body. Replying, on behalf of the majority, to trade-union objections,  
the Bolshevik delegate from the New Parviainen works said: ‘At  
present to turn the factory committees into departments of the trade  
unions in the factories, as Comrade Ryazanov proposes, seems  
impossible, in view of the fact that the factory committees have the  
special task of bringing order to the economic life of the factories and  
of implementing control — tasks with which the unions are not and  
cannot be concerned.’89 An anodyne resolution was carried which  
bypassed the issues at stake and called merely for close liaison  
between the new CCFC and the PCTU.90

A week later, on 11 June, the central board of the Petrograd  
metalworkers’ union issued a statement on the relationship of the  
factory committees to the trade unions. It called unequivocally for the  
strict subordination of the factory committees to the unions:

**The union is the highest and only organisation responsible for the conduct of  
workers in a particular branch of production. It alone has the right to put  
demands on the organisations of capitalists and on the state on behalf of the  
whole profession. It alone has the right to conduct either general or partial  
disputes. It alone may put demands on the state concerning social security. It  
alone can express the will of the whole profession on questions concerning the  
forms of regulation and control of production ... Local factory committees  
occupy a position of subordination to the trade union, within the general  
framework of organisation of the branch of production ... but the overall  
structure of the union must be made more complex by involving the factory  
committees, so that the union combines within itself the organisation of its  
members by branch of production and... by enterprise. However, the central  
organisation of the whole trade union must be constituted so that the  
preponderance of union representatives over individual factory representa-  
tives is guaranteed. The strength offactory committee representation must be  
broadest where the union is acting as regulator and controller of production,  
and narrowest where the union is pursuing purely militant aims.91**

This was a scarcely-veiled attack on the newly-created CCFC,  
opposing the factory committees’ setting-up a centralised structure  
alongside that of the unions. It is interesting to note that the  
metal-union proposals concerning the relationship of the two

organisations, prefigured with uncanny accuracy the relationship  
which was to be established after October.

The unwillingess of the metal-union leadership to accept a division  
of labour between the factory committees and trade unions sprang  
from their ‘productivist’ ideology. A significant group on the central  
board believed that the trade unions should no longer concern  
themselves merely with the defence of workers’ interests, but should  
prepare to take up the tasks of regulating the economy as a whole.  
They were sceptical of the efforts of the factory committees to organise  
production at a local level. On 21 July the Provisional Central  
Committee of the union passed a resolution, influenced by the  
thinking of the Austro-Marxist, Rudolf Hilferding, which argued that  
a new phase of state capitalism was coming into being which would  
entail far-reaching trustification of production and distribution by the  
state. It demanded the active participation of unions in the Economic  
Council which was to be set up by the government.92 The aspiration  
of the metal union that trade unions should be involved in state  
regulation of the economy became a reality after October but, at this  
stage, was not widely shared within the trade-union movement.

On 20 June the Third All-Russian Conference of Trade Unions  
opened in Petrograd - the first national conference of trade unions  
since the February Revolution. The 211 delegates comprised 73  
Bolsheviks, 36 Mensheviks, 6 Menshevik-Internationalists, 11 Bund-  
ists, 31 non-fractional Social Democrats, 25 SRs, 7 members of no  
political party (others unknown).93 The moderate socialists comman-  
ded a majority. The Menshevik, V.P. Grinevich, introduced the  
discussion on the tasks of the trade unions. He argued that the basic  
task of the unions was to conduct the economic struggle of the working  
class, whose chief weapon within the framework of capitalism was the  
strike. He insisted that unions should not involve themselves in the  
regulation of production, as this was the job of the government.94 The  
Internationalists excoriated the Mensheviks for their support of state  
control of the economy rather than workers’ control. The Bolshevik  
spokesman, N. Glebov-Avilov, in effect, argued that the job of  
workers’ control was too important to be left to the factory commit-  
tees, that it should be taken over by the trade unions and that the  
factory committees should be subordinated to the trade unions: ‘The  
factory committees must be the primary cells of the unions. Their  
activities in the localities must be made dependent on the economic-  
control commissions of the unions.’95 This adumbrates the position

adopted by the Bolsheviks after October, but is at variance with the  
line taken by the First Conference of Factory Committees. The  
position adopted by the Mensheviks, which was accepted by  
Conference by 76 votes to 63 votes, was also inconsistent. The  
Mensheviks disliked workers’ control, but so opposed were they to the  
trade unions becoming involved in the work of controlling produc-  
tion, that they insisted that the factory committees take sole  
responsibility for this. At the same time, they called on the unions to  
turn the factory committees into their supports (opomye punkty) in the  
localities and to execute their policies through them.96

A full discussion of the relationship of the factory committees to the  
trade unions took place at the Second Conference of Petrograd  
Factory Committees (7—12 August). Lozovskii, later a key advocate  
of the organisational subordination of the factory committees to the  
unions, put forward a position which was designed to bridge the  
divide between the two organisations. He argued that they both had  
different spheres of interest: trade unions had to defend the wages and  
conditions of labour and oversee the implementation of labour-  
protection legislation; factory committees had the task of regulating  
production. He argued that the committees should be subordinate to  
the unions, insofar as they should be obliged to implement union  
decisions at factory level, and should not strike without union  
permission.97 This position was fiercely denounced by the anarcho-  
syndicalist, Volin, who lauded the factory committees as the only  
revolutionary organisations capable of pursuing the struggle of  
labour against capital, and dismissed the trade unions as being  
eternally condemned to mediate between capital and labour.98 He, in  
turn, was attacked by Voskov, the Bolshevik delegate from the  
Sestroretsk arms works, who argued that the factory committees:

**cannot unite workers in the same way as the unions do. The whole  
fragmented mass of workers in a particular factory is included in the factory  
organisation and if the factory closes, this organisation dissolves. The factory  
committee hangs by a thread, it can be replaced on the slightest pretext. The  
union unites the truly conscious, organised workers; it remains constant; the  
closure of individual factories does not undermine it.99**

Lozovskii’s resolution, proposing a division of labour between the  
unions and the factory committees, won the day. Volin’s resolution  
gained a mere eight votes.100

On 20 October the All Russian Conference of Factory Committees  
discussed once more the relationship of the factory committees to

the trade unions. The Bolshevik, Ryazanov, and the Menshevik,  
Lin'kov, on behalf of the trade unions, accused the factory commit-  
tees of separatism and called for their organisational subordination.  
They were particularly unhappy about the existence of the CCFC  
alongside the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions, and  
called for the disbandment of the former. They were bitterly opposed  
by the anarcho-syndicalist Piotrovskii, from Odessa, and by the Left  
SR Levin, from the CCFC, both of whom contrasted the vitality of the  
committees to the lassitude of the unions.101 The Bolshevik V.  
Schmidt, from the metalworkers’ union, conceded that the factory  
committees had a particular role to play in the sphere of control of  
production but wished to see them working under the auspices of the  
unions.102 The Bolshevik Skrypnik, from the CCFC, emphasised that  
there could at this stage be no question of making the committees the  
executive organs of the unions, but went some way towards placating  
the trade unionists by agreeing that the CCFC should collaborate  
with the city organisations of trade unions in the realm of control of  
production.103

There is some evidence that by October opinion within the labour  
movement was beginning to shift towards acceptance of the idea of a  
merger of the trade unions and factory committees. A commission of  
the All-Russian Conference of Factory Committees went some way  
towards recognising trade-union primacy. Whilst stressing the  
independence of the two organisations and the right of the factory  
committees to organise into a national structure, the commission  
called for the CCFC to include trade-union representatives and for it  
to be given the status of a department of workers’ control of the  
All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions. In addition, it called  
for councils of factory committees to be established in each branch of  
industry, which would become the sections for workers’ control of the  
respective industrial unions.104 Nevertheless the issue remained  
unresolved on the eve of October. It was to take several months for the  
Bolsheviks to resolve, since the party was divided by the institutional  
loyalties of its members.

8

**The social structure of the labour  
movement**

THE SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF LABOUR PROTEST AND LABOUR  
ORGANISATION

In Chapter i it was argued that two broad groups can be discerned  
within the Petrograd working class in 1917: the proletarianised,  
skilled, mainly male workers, and the new, younger peasant and  
women workers. It was the former group of‘cadre’ workers who built  
the factory committees and trade unions after the February Revolu-  
tion. Quantitative data to bear out this contention are lacking,  
although a survey of fitters at the Putilov works in 1918, conducted by  
Strumilin, showed that skilled workers dominated all labour orga-  
nisations and had been the first to join the metal union in 1917.1 This  
is borne out by a complaint in the industrialists’ newspaper in the  
spring of 1917 that ‘ it is usually the most skilled workers, they being  
the most conscious, who participate in the different committees — the  
factory committees, soviets etc.’.2 The same sentiment was voiced by  
A. Gastev at the first national congress of metalworkers: ‘in the unions  
we operate by basing ourselves on the skilled element of the  
workforce, for example, the turners and fitters ... this is the most  
active section of the working class. The unskilled workers are, of  
course, less active.’3 Skilled, experienced workers had a greater  
capacity than new workers to initiate a social movement and to carry  
out consciously-willed social change.4 They had more ‘resources’ for  
organisation: they were better-paid and had more money and time at  
their disposal; they were at home in the factory and understood how  
production worked; they had experience of organising strikes and  
trade unions, of informal shop-floor organisation and of job-control;  
they were more literate and thus better-placed to participate in

political discourse. The shift in the balance of class forces which  
resulted from the February Revolution created opportunities for  
‘cadre’ workers to mobilise these ‘resources’ in order to create an  
organised labour movement.5

The ‘cadre’ workers who built the labour movement, of whatever  
political persuasion, tended to see the new, inexperienced workers as  
the ‘dark’ or ‘backward’ masses, who had brought ‘disorder’ and  
‘anarchy’ into the labour movement. As early as 1916 the Workers’  
Group of the War Industries Committee noted that:

**During the war the composition of the working class has changed; many  
alien, undisciplined elements have come into the workforce. In addition, the  
intensification of work, the broad application of female and child labour,  
uninterrupted overtime and holiday work ... have increased the number of  
grounds for conflict of all kinds and these often arise spontaneously. Instead  
of organised defence of their interests, workers engage in elemental outbursts  
and anarchic methods.6**

A Latvian Bolshevik on the CCFC, A. Kaktyn', made a similar point  
in 1917, blaming ‘anarchic disorders’ on the ‘not yet fully proletaria-  
nised mass of workers consisting of refugees, people from the  
countryside and others temporarily swept into industry by the war’.7  
Employers too ascribed disorders to what they called the ‘alien  
element’ (prishlyi element). At the Franco-Russian works management  
complained that those who had come to the factory during the war  
had had a bad effect on the discipline of the workforce as a whole.8  
One must treat the accounts of ‘disorders’ by workers new to industry  
with a certain caution, for the sources reflect the perceptions and  
values of the ‘organisation builders’, not those of the new workers  
themselves. We shall see that while the former were by no means  
unsympathetic to their less experienced comrades, they often under-  
estimated the capacity of new workers for self-activity and political  
understanding, because the forms of their activity did not fit the  
leaders’ own model of appropriate action.

The ‘backward masses’ (otstalye massy) were counterposed to the  
more ‘conscious’ (soznatel'nye) workers. The new workers were  
perceived as ‘backward’, either because they were apathetic and  
indifferent to the labour movement and to politics, or because they  
indulged in uncontrolled militancy (stikhiinost'). These characteris-  
tics, which at first sight appear mutually exclusive, typified the  
traditional pattern of behaviour of the Russian peasants: long periods  
of quiescence punctuated by bouts of rebelliousness (buntarstvo). The

major task facing ‘cadre’ workers was to convince the new workers of  
the need for organisation: to break them from their apathy or  
persuade them of the advantages of planned, sustained pursuit of  
their goals over sudden bursts of militancy, born of anger and  
emotion, rather than of calculation. This was not so easy in the spring  
of 1917, for direct action proved fairly effective in removing hated  
administrators (‘carting out’) or in extracting concessions from the  
employers. As the economic crisis worsened, however, the limitations  
of sectional, spontaneous actions became more and more apparent.  
The promotion of the interests of labour as a whole against capital  
required durable organisation and clearly-formulated goals and  
strategies. Volatile militancy tended to get in the way of this, and was  
thus disliked by labour leaders. They sought to channel the militancy  
of the new workers into organisation or, alternatively, to rouse  
interest in organisation if workers were bogged down in apathy.

*Women workers*

In its first issue, the Menshevik party newspaper did not fail to note  
that whilst women had courageously faced the bullets of the police  
during the revolution, not one woman had as yet been elected to the  
Petrograd Soviet.9 Observations that working women were not  
participating in the nascent labour movement were commonplace. A  
report on the Svetlana factory at the end of March noted that ‘it is  
almost exclusively women who work there. They but dimly perceive  
the importance of the current situation and the significance of labour  
organisation and proletarian discipline. For this reason, and because  
of low pay, a certain disorder in production is noticeable.’10 On 22  
April fifty women from state factories, including twenty-two from the  
Pipe works, met to discuss how to organise women. They agreed that  
‘women workers everywhere are yearning to take part in existing  
labour organisations, but up to now have joined them only in small  
numbers, on nothing like the same scale as men’.11 As late as June, a  
woman from the Pipe works described the situation in shop number  
four, where 2,000 women were employed on automatic machines  
which cut out and processed fuses:

**Sometimes you see how the women will read something, and from their  
conversation it emerges that a desire to step forward has been kindled in their  
hearts. But to our great regret, there is at present very little organisation  
among the women of the Pipe works. There are no women comrades among**

**us to fan the spark of consciousness or point out to us the path to truth. We  
really need a comrade who can speak on the tribune in front of a sea of faces  
and tell us where to go, whom to listen to and what to read.12**

If women workers did act to defend their interests, it was often by  
means of elemental bouts of direct action. This is apparent from the  
example of two notoriously ‘backward’ textile-mills on Vyborg Side,  
where at the end of June two spectacular examples of‘carting out’  
took place. After the textile union began contract negotiations with  
the textile section of the SFWO, the latter called a halt to further  
wage-increases in the industry, pending the settlement of the  
contract.13 When the director of the Vyborg spinning-mill tried to  
explain to a general meeting of workers that he was unable to consider  
their demand for a wage-increase, the women seized him, shoved him  
in a wheelbarrow and carted him to the canal where, poised perilously  
on the edge of the bank, he shakily signed a piece of paper agreeing to  
an increase.14 When L.G. Miller, the redoubtable chairman of the  
textile section of the SFWO, heard of this he demanded that the  
textile union send an official to the mill to sort out the women, but the  
women refused to listen to the official. The director, therefore, agreed  
to pay the increase and was fined 30,000 r. by the SFWO for so  
doing.15 Only days later, women at the neighbouring Sampsionevs-  
kaya mill, where Miller himself was director, demanded a similar  
increase. When Miller rejected their demand at a general meeting,  
women workers — who comprised 91% of the workforce — seized him  
and called for a wheelbarrow (‘ Vmeshok i na tachkuP [‘Tie him in a sack  
and shove him on a barrow!’]). Male apprentices tried to dissuade  
them, but Miller climbed quietly into the barrow, asking only that the  
women should not put a sack over his head. Instead they tied it to his  
feet and, with raucous shouts, wheeled him around Vyborg Side,  
urging him to agree to a wage-rise. Miller might have been thrown off  
the Grenadier bridge had not a group of off-duty soldiers intervened.  
Thoroughly shaken by his ordeal, Miller had to be carried back to the  
factory, but he remained obdurate, and the women did not receive a  
wage-rise.16

One should not assume from this that women remained outside the  
orbit of the labour movement. Thanks to the efforts of small numbers  
of socialist women, working women rapidly began to join the trade  
unions and to engage in more organised forms of struggle. There are  
no data on the number of women in the trade unions, but it does not  
appear that the industries with the highest proportions of women

workers were necessarily those with low densities of trade-union  
membership. In the food and textile industries women comprised  
66% and 69% of the workforce, respectively, but trade-union  
membership stood at about 80% and 70%.17 Trade-union mem-  
bership was lowest in the chemical industry - at about 48% - which  
does seem to have been linked to the fact that the skilled men joined  
the metal and woodturners’ unions, leaving the peasant women  
machine-operators, who comprised 47% of the workforce, to fend for  
themselves.18 In the metal industry, however, men encouraged  
women workers to join the union, and it is probable that a majority of  
working women joined trade unions in the course of 1917, although  
the evidence does not suggest that they participated actively in union  
life. Women were poorly represented in leadership positions in the  
unions, even in industries where they comprised a majority of the  
workforce. Eleven out of twenty members of the first board of the  
textile union were women, but only two remained after its reorganisa-  
tion — alongside thirteen men.19 The Petrograd boards of the metal,  
leather and needleworkers’ unions were equally unrepresentative -  
each having a solitary woman member.20

In the factory committees a similar situation existed. Women  
comprised a third of the factory workforce, but only 4% of the  
delegates to the First Conference of Factory Committees.21 At the  
Triangle rubber works 68% of the workforce was female, but only two  
of the twenty-five members of the factory ‘soviet’ were women.22 At  
the Nevskaya footwear factory 45% of the workforce was female, but  
none of the starosty was a woman.23 At the Pechatkin paper-mill 45%  
of the workforce was female, but only two out of thirteen starosty were  
women. At the Sampsionevskaya cotton-mill, where 85% of the  
workforce were women, representation was rather better, for four out  
of seven members of the committee were women.25 This suggests that  
in industries where women were in the majority, they may have  
tended to be less dependent on men - and more self-reliant.

Those socialist women who devoted so much effort to organising  
working women accused the labour leaders of not paying enough  
attention to the special needs of women. In June A. Kollontai  
reproached the delegates to the Third Trade-Union Conference for  
not taking up questions of maternity provision and equal pay.26 In  
September she wrote an article for the journal of the Petrograd  
Council ofTrade Unions, which urged union leaders to treat women

‘not as appendages to men, but as independent, responsible members  
of the working class, having the same rights and also the same  
responsibilities to the collective’.27 In October she spoke to the First  
All-Russian Conference of Factory Committees warning of the  
political danger of their remaining indifferent to the plight of women  
workers.28 At none of the conferences of the labour movement in 1917,  
however, was there a full discussion of the problems of working  
women and of their relationship to the organised labour movement.

At factory level women workers often met with active discrimina-  
tion from men in their attempts to organise. At the Pipe works a  
woman complained. ‘It happens, not infrequently even now, that the  
backward workers, who lack consciousness, cannot imagine that a  
woman can be as capable as a man of organising the broad masses,  
and so they make fun of the elected representatives of the women  
workers, pointing their fingers as though at a savage, and saying with  
a sneer: “there go our elected representatives”.’29 M. Tsvetkova  
wrote to the leatherworkers’ journal, complaining about the  
behaviour of her male colleagues:

**Instead of supporting, organising and going hand-in-hand with the women,  
they behave as though we are not equal members of the working family and  
sometimes do not bother with us at all. When the question of unemployment  
and redundancies arises, they try to ensure that the men stay and that the  
women go, hoping that the women will be unable to resist because of their  
poor organisation and feebleness. When women attempt to speak, in order to  
point out that the men are behaving wrongly and that we must jointly find a  
solution, the men will not allow us to speak and will not listen. It is difficult  
even for the more conscious women to fight against this, the more so since  
often the mass of women do not understand and do not wish to listen to us.30**

Labour leaders, generally, opposed active discrimination against  
working women (for example, over redundancies). They encouraged  
them to organise, and the struggles of working women began to  
assume a more disciplined character, although ‘spontaneous’ mili-  
tancy by no means disappeared. Labour leaders were genuinely  
solicitous of the needs of working women as low-paid workers, but less  
solicitous of their needs as women. They spurned any idea of specific  
policies for working women, believing that this would be a deviation  
towards bourgeois feminism. The result was that women joined the  
labour movement, but played a passive role within it. After October  
this was to result once more in women becoming apathetic and  
indifferent.

Like women workers, peasant and unskilled workers displayed a  
preference for direct action over formal organisation, and a certain  
distrust of labour leaders. At the Metal works a carpenter described  
the attitude of new workers to the trade unions as follows:

**A majority of workers ... in essence do not belong to the category of true  
proletarians. These people have come to the factory from the countryside in  
order to avoid military service and the war, or to assist the rural household  
with a good factory wage. This element... will move only when it feels that it  
is directly defending its own interests, but it has not grasped the principle of  
organising the working masses into unions for permanent, day-to-day  
struggle. They reduce this principle merely to paying subscriptions, and  
argue that they do not need this extra expense, or frankly admit that they are  
going to leave the factory as soon as the war is over and return to the  
countryside.31**

He also blamed the ‘cadre’ workers for ‘neglecting the organisation of  
their less conscious comrades’. When the union tried to implement  
the metalworkers’ contract in autumn, over half the workers in the  
Metal works refused the wage category into which they were placed  
by the rates commission, inundating the factory committee with  
demands to be upgraded. In November unskilled painters beat up a  
representative of the metalworkers’ union and refused to release him  
until he agreed to sign an order granting all workers a wage of twelve  
rubles a day, backdated to 5 June.32

At the Pipe works the Bolsheviks, whose fortunes were in the  
ascendant, agitated for new elections to the Vasilevskii district soviet,  
which were fixed for 17 May. The Petrograd Soviet Executive,  
however, arranged a meeting at the factory for that day, so the shop  
stewards agreed to postpone elections. The peasant workers in the  
foundry were outraged and resolved to press ahead with the elections.  
Kapanitskii, a shop steward and an SR deputy to the Soviet, was sent  
to persuade the foundryworkers to change their minds. The official  
protocol of a general factory meeting describes what happened: ‘The  
foundryworkers sat comrade Kapanitskii in a wheelbarrow, beat him  
and threatened to throw him in the furnace, but then decided to save  
the furnace for other people. They confined themselves to wheeling  
him out into the factory yard and then to the river. It was only thanks  
to the intervention of comrades in shops numbers eight and four that  
he was released.’33 A few Bolsheviks seem to have provoked or  
connived in this action. The shop steward of the foundry blamed the

violence on a handful of workers, when he made a public apology to  
the general meeting.34

Like women workers, unskilled and peasant workers did begin to  
organise in 1917. Chemorabochie set up a trade union in April, which  
later merged with the metal union, and Chapter 5 described how they  
became organised and politicised during the course of the protracted  
contract negotiations of the metal union. Similarly, peasant workers  
and soldiers formed some seventy zemlyachestva in the capitals to bring  
together migrants from the same area and to undertake political  
agitation among the peasantry. The total membership of the  
zemlyachestva may have been as high as 30,000, and by September the  
major ones had swung from the SRs to the Bolsheviks.35

*Young Workers*

Workers under the age of eighteen showed a far greater capacity for  
self-organisation than women or peasant workers, though girls were  
far less active than boys. They built a youth movement - which  
acquired a strongly Bolshevik character - in the shape of the Socialist  
Union of Working Youth (SUWY).36 Through this, they played a  
leading role in the political events of 1917 (the July Days and the  
October seizure of power). Many young workers joined the Bolshevik  
party and the Red Guards: it has been estimated that 19% of those  
joining the Petrograd Bolshevik party were under twenty-one, and no  
fewer than 28% of Red Guards were of this age.37 Working youth  
played a less prominent part in the organised labour movement,  
however, which seems to have been connected to the fact that workers  
under eighteen were in a relationship of dependence on adult workers  
in the workplace.38

In the wake of the February Revolution, young workers began to  
set up committees in the factories, first in the metal works of Vyborg,  
Narva and Vasilevskii districts, and then spreading to other indus-  
tries and areas.39 Out of these factory youth groups there developed  
district youth organisations and, subsequently, the city-wide youth  
movement. From the first, these factory youth groups demanded  
representation on the factory committees. At some of the more  
politically radical enterprises this demand was conceded. At the  
Phoenix, Aivaz and Renault works the factory committees allowed  
young workers two representatives.40 At the Cable works the  
committee supported the young workers’ demand for the vote at

eighteen and called on the Provisional Government to withdraw  
eighteen-year-olds from the Front if it would not enfranchise them.41  
A majority of factory committees, however, were more reluctant to  
allow young workers special representation and to take up their  
demands.42 Under pressure, committees at the Baltic, Putilov and  
Gun works allowed youth representatives to sit on the committees but  
not to vote.43 Young workers at the Gun works condemned the  
committee’s refusal to allow their representatives voting rights: ‘We  
protest because the father-proletariat, in spurning his children,  
makes it harder for us to become, in the future, experienced, hardened  
fighters for right, honour and the triumph of the world proletariat  
and, of course, in the first place, of our own proletariat.’44 At the  
Kersten knitting mill the factory committee - which was the first in  
the textile industry to implement workers’ control — also refused  
voting rights to the two representatives of the 660 girls at the mill. The  
youth committee condemned this policy, but argued that ‘your  
representative on our committee may only have an advisory voice  
since no organisation may interfere in the affairs of youth’.45 In May a  
conference of factory committees on Vyborg Side agreed that young  
workers should have voting rights on the committees, but only on  
matters affecting their economic position.46

The trade unions supported the demands for improved wages for  
young workers and came out in support of a six-hour day for young  
workers.47 They were slower to take up demands for the overhauling  
of the system of apprenticeship and for the vote at eighteen, although  
Bolshevik-dominated unions supported them. There are no statistics  
on the age structure of union membership. Young workers seem to  
have joined the unions, but many officially debarred workers under  
the age of sixteen from membership.48 For obvious reasons of age and  
inexperience, workers under 18 were not represented at leadership  
level in the unions, but union leaders were by no means old. At the  
first national congress of metalworkers in January 1918 the average  
age of delegates was twenty-nine, and at the first congress of  
leatherworkers, at around the same time, 54% of delegates were  
under thirty, although only 15% were under twenty-five.49

It is clear that the forms of collective action engaged in by most  
women, peasant and unskilled workers were different from those of  
‘cadre’ workers. In general, the former lacked ‘resources’ for sus-  
tained, institutionalised pursuit of goals, and turned most easily to

forms of ‘direct action’, such as ‘carting out’, wildcat strikes,  
go-slows. These forms of action were often violent and always  
sectional, but they were not as irrational as they may seem. ‘Carting  
out’, for example, entailed a level of communication and coordina-  
tion, and a conception of appropriate action, though not necessarily a  
specific plan of action.50 It was a symbolic action, born of anger and  
emotion rather than calculation, but it had a certain rationality as a  
type of‘collective bargaining by riot’.51 The evidence suggests that as  
the economic crisis grew worse, such forms of ‘direct action’ became  
increasingly less effective — a sign of desperation and weakness, rather  
than of confidence and strength.

To the leaders of the factory committees and trade unions,  
spontaneous forms of militancy on the part of the new workers were a  
threat to the project of building an organised labour movement, and  
were thus condemned as ‘backward’. The labour leaders sought to  
direct ‘spontaneity’ into organised channels, for they believed that the  
pursuit of the interests of workers as a class, and the achievement of  
far-reaching social and political changes on their behalf required  
effective organisation and clearly-formulated goals. Whilst spon-  
taneous militancy might be effective in securing the aims of a section  
of workers in the short term, it could not secure the ends of the  
working class as a whole. They recognised, moreover, that only  
formal organisation and planned action could achieve maximum  
gains at minimum cost. They thus sought to ‘tame’ the volatile,  
explosive militancy of the new workers, and aspired to bring them  
within the orbit of the organised labour movement: to teach them  
habits of negotiation, formulation of demands, the practices of  
committees and meetings. They seem to have had some success,  
nothwithstanding the unpropitious economic circumstances, in sub-  
ordinating buntarstvo to bargaining.

The labour leaders were sincerely anxious to promote the welfare of  
those workers less fortunate than themselves. They believed that both  
new and experienced workers shared the same class interests and  
could best pursue these through united organisation and struggle.  
They were, however, unwilling to recognise that there might be  
contradictions of interest between women and men, youths and  
adults, or unskilled and skilled. They thus would not give special  
treatment to any of these groups, for example, by setting up  
organisations within the unions for women workers or by allowing  
young workers special representation on the factory committees.

Although they justified their position in political terms - the working  
class is a unity in which there are no diversities of interest - this  
attitude reflected the social position of the leaders themselves. For  
within the craft tradition of the ‘organisation-builders’, skill was  
closely bound up with masculinity and a degree of condescension  
towards women and youth. Thus in spite of their very best intentions  
— their determination to involve all workers in the labour movement -  
the efforts of the labour leaders were stymied by an unconscious  
paternalism towards those whom they were trying to organise.

DEMOCRACY AND BUREAUCRACY IN THE TRADE UNIONS  
AND FACTORY COMMITTEES

*Democracy in the trade unions*

One usually thinks of ‘democratic centralism’ as the organisational  
principle espoused by the Bolshevik party, but the principle was  
accepted by the labour movement as a whole. The Third Trade-  
Union Conference resolved that ‘democratic centralism’ should  
underpin the organisational construction of the trade-union move-  
ment, in order to ensure ‘the participation of every member in the  
affairs of the union and, at the same time, unity in the leadership of the  
struggle’.52 ‘Democratic centralism’ did not represent a coherent set  
of organisational rules; it was rather a vague principle of democratic  
decision-making, combined with centralised execution of decisions  
taken. The balance between ‘democracy’ and ‘centralism’ was thus  
not fixed with any precision, and within the trade unions, in the  
course of 1917, the balance tended to shift away from democracy  
towards centralism.

The great majority of Petrograd factory workers joined trade  
unions in 1917, but the data on membership are unreliable, and so  
one cannot determine the percentage of members in each branch of  
industry. Rough calculations suggest that the percentage was highest  
in printing (over 90%); that in the leather, wood and metal industries  
it was 80% or more; that in the textiles it was around 70%, but that in  
chemicals it was as low as 48% (compare Tables 1 and 12). In many  
metal-works general meetings of workers voted to join the union en  
bloc, though in a minority of factories, such as the Metal works, the  
factory committees resisted this ‘closed shop’ policy.53 In other  
industries, too, with the exception of chemicals, workers tended to

make the decision to join the union collectively rather than indi-  
vidually. On 8 May delegates of the woodturners’ union threatened to  
expel from the factories any worker who refused to join the union.54

Union subscriptions were designed to attract all workers, including  
the low-paid, into the union. Initial membership of the metal union  
cost one ruble, and monthly dues were graduated according to  
earnings. Workers earning more than ten rubles a day paid two rubles  
a month; those earning between six and ten rubles a day paid i r.  
40 k.; those earning less than six rubles, paid 80 k. a month, and  
apprentices paid 50 k.55 Union delegates would stand outside the  
finance-office on pay day to ensure that all workers paid their dues.  
Initially, most union members seem to have paid their dues: in the  
metal union the monthly sum of subscriptions rose from 94,335 r. in  
June to 133,540 r. in July;56 in the textile union it rose from 4,800 r. in  
May to 10,000 r. in July.57 As the economic crisis set in, however,  
non-payment of union dues became a major problem. In the leather  
union the monthly sum of dues fell from 18,093 r- 'n May to 15,167 r.  
in July.58 The glass union reported in September that ‘subscriptions  
are being paid promptly’, but in December reported that only 326 out  
of 807 members in Petrograd had paid their dues that month.59

The collection of monthly dues, the distribution of union publica-  
tions, the convening of union meetings and the liaison between the  
individual enterprise and the union hierarchy devolved on factory  
delegates. These delegates were elected by all the union members in a  
particular enterprise: in the textile industry delegates were elected on  
the basis of one delegate for every twenty union members; in the metal  
industry on the basis of one delegate for every hundred union  
members.60 In some of the larger factories union delegates formed  
councils within the factory, but the main job of delegates was to liaise  
with other factories in the same industry and district of Petrograd. In  
the print industry the delegates (upolnomochennye) had a similar job to  
factory delegates in other industries, except that they also formed the  
workshop committee. The division between the trade union and the  
factory committee thus did not exist in the print industry. Union  
delegates from each enterprise met at city-district level at least once a  
month to discuss union business, to oversee the activities of the union  
board and to discuss problems in individual enterprises. In many  
unions, including the metal, print and leather unions, the delegates  
elected district boards of the union, which were responsible for  
liaising between the city board of the union and the individual

enterprise and for organising recruitment and the collection of  
subscriptions. In the metal and print unions some delegates defended  
the autonomy of the district boards from the city board, fearing that  
too much centralisation at city level would lead to bureaucratisation  
of the union.

In principle, if not always in practice, power was vested in the city  
boards, not the district boards, of the unions. The city boards were  
elected by city-wide meetings of union delegates (comprising either  
representatives of city-district delegate meetings or all district  
delegates en masse). On 7 May 535 delegates elected the Petrograd  
board of the metal union.61 On 4 June 300 delegates from twenty-six  
textile mills elected sixteen members to the city board of the textile  
union.62 The city board was responsible for coordinating economic  
struggles, dispensing strike funds, publishing the union journal and  
for negotiation with the SFWO and the government.63 In those  
unions, such as the print, leather and food unions, where professional  
sections representing individual crafts existed, these were subordin-  
ate to the city board. Where district boards existed, these too were  
subordinate to the city board, though resistance to central control by  
the district boards was by no means unknown - particularly in the  
sphere of finance. The members of the city boards — and often the  
secretaries and treasurers of the district boards — were usually  
employed full-time by the union.

**By the summer of 1917, the Petrograd metal union had almost a  
hundred full-time officials.64 Clearly, ‘bureaucratisation’ was under  
way, although it would be wrong to exaggerate the extent of this. The  
powers of the city boards were strictly circumscribed, and in all  
unions the boards in theory were strictly subordinate to the city-wide  
meetings of union delegates. It was these meetings, rather than the  
boards themselves, which decided all major policy issues. The boards  
reported to city delegate meetings at least once a month and members  
of the boards could be recalled by the delegates. Conflicts arose  
between the boards and the delegates, as the discussion of the  
metalworkers’ contract in Chapter** 5 **showed, which reflected the  
ambitions of the boards to extend their power, and the determination  
of the delegates to resist this process. The extent of democracy in the  
unions thus depended on the activism and enthusiasm of the  
delegates. Where they were remiss in their duties, then not only did  
the union board develop into an oligarchy but the ordinary members  
of the union tended to lapse into apathy. This seems to have been an**

increasing problem in the metal union by the later months of 1917. A  
worker wrote to the union journal complaining of the behaviour of  
many factory delegates:

**If the central and district boards [of the union] are responsible to the meetings  
of [factory] delegates, then the delegates themselves are responsible to  
nobody. The majority of delegates, once elected, do not fulfil their duties, they  
do not recruit members, they do not collect subscriptions and do not even  
appear at delegate meetings ... All the time we observe a host of instances  
where the majority of our members are not aware of the policies and decisions  
of the central organs ... Naturally such ignorance at times causes apathy in  
the membership. Often one feels that the central organs of the union are  
totally cut offfrom the mass of the members. This threatens to turn the central  
organisation into a bureaucracy.’65**

By the end of 1917 there is growing evidence that power within the  
union was passing away from the rank-and-file to the full-time  
officials of the unions. This should not, however, blind us to the fact  
that before October a significant degree of membership participation  
in the affairs of the union existed.

DEMOCRACY IN THE FACTORY COMMITTEES

Factory committees were much closer to ordinary workers than trade  
unions. They embraced all the workers in a single enterprise, whereas  
the trade unions embraced workers in a branch of industry. The  
committees represented all workers in a factory regardless of their job,  
whereas workers in the same factory might be members of different  
trade unions, despite the principle of industrial unionism. The factory  
committee represented everyone gratis, whereas one had to pay to be a  
member of a trade union. The committee usually met in working  
hours on the factory premises, whereas trade unions usually did not.  
For all these reasons, therefore, factory committees tended to be the  
more popular organisation. The SR, I. Prizhelaev, wrote: ‘The  
factory committees have the crucial merit of being close to the worker,  
accessible, comprehensible to everybody - even the least conscious.  
They are involved in all the minutiae of factory life and so are a  
wonderful form of mass organisation ... The trade unions are less  
accessible because they appear to stand further away from the  
rank-and-file worker.’66 7,000 workers at the Respirator factory on 3  
September described the factory committees as ‘the best mouthpieces  
of the working class and the only real and true reflection of the moods  
of the toiling people’.67

Every worker could vote in the election of a factory committee,  
regardless of job, sex or age. Any worker might stand for election, so  
long as he or she did not perform any managerial function.68 Some  
factories, such as the Putilov works, stipulated that workers under the  
age of twenty might not stand for election.69 Elections were supposed  
to be by secret ballot, according to the constitution drawn up by the  
conference of representatives of state enterprises (15 April), the  
statutes published by the labour department of the Petrograd Soviet  
and the model constitution passed by the Second Conference of  
Factory Committees.70 Initially, factory committees were elected for  
one year, but the Second Conference specified that they should be  
elected for six months only. Factory committees could be recalled at  
any time by general meetings,71 and they were required to report on  
their activities to general meetings at least once a month.72

The extent to which the working-class movement was permeated  
by a commitment to direct democracy is reflected in the fact that it  
was not the factory committee perse which was the sovereign organ in  
the factory, but the general meeting of all workers in the factory or  
section. It was this general assembly which passed resolutions on the  
pressing political questions of the day or decided important matters  
affecting the individual enterprise. This Rousseauesque concept of  
sovereignty was established in practice from the first. At the  
conference of representatives from state enterprises on 15 April it was  
decided that general meetings of the factory workforce should take  
place at least once a month and should be called by either the factory  
committee or by one-third of the workforce.73 The Second Conference  
lowered this requirement, by stipulating that one-fifth of the work-  
force might summon a general meeting, which should be attended by  
at least one-third of the workers in order to be quorate. The  
Conference laid down that authority was vested in the workforce as a  
whole rather than in the committee.74

Marc Ferro has argued recently that we should not allow ourselves  
to be bewitched by the far-reaching democracy of the paper  
constitutions of the popular organisations of the Russian Revolution:  
reality was a very different matter. He argues that long before  
October the popular organisations were undergoing a process of  
bureaucratisation ‘from above’ and ‘from below’. In the case of the  
factory committees, Ferro argues that the leadership of the movement  
became more entrenched and less accountable to the member-  
ship. Bureaucratisation ‘from above’ was manifest in a decline in

the proportion of delegates at factory-committee conferences elected  
from the factories and in an increase in the proportion of ‘bureau-  
cratically appointed’ delegates.75 Bureaucratisation ‘from below’ was  
evident in the refusal of factory committee members on the ground to  
submit to re-election, and in the growing practice of inquorate  
meetings taking decisions.76 It is not the present purpose to criticise  
Ferro’s work in detail,77 although scrutiny of his evidence suggests  
neither that the proportion of‘bureaucratically appointed’ delegates  
at the factory committee conferences was on the increase in 1917, nor  
that they were in a position to influence conference decisions, since  
many of them did not have voting rights. What is pertinent to the  
concerns of this chapter is the extent to which factory committees on  
the ground were subject to re-election prior to October.

Re-elections took place at the Putilov, Electric Light, Pipe,  
Dinamo, Langenzippen, Skorokhod, Parviainen, Lessner, the Mint,  
Promet and Okhta shell-works. In other factories individual mem-  
bers of the committees were replaced. At the Baltic works the first  
committee was self-selected, but it was properly elected in the second  
half of April.78 At the end of July a general meeting expressed no  
confidence in the committee, but the committee did not immediately  
resign.79 Only when a further general meeting on 15 September voted  
for its immediate recall, did it step down.80 Any party or non-party  
group was allowed to put up a slate of candidates in the new election,  
providing it could muster fifty signatures. The slates were then  
published and voting took place on 18 September by secret ballot.  
The Bolsheviks won a majority of the forty places.81 Even if the  
committees in a majority of factories did not submit for re-election  
(and it is not clear that this was the case), it was not necessarily a sign  
of their bureaucratisation, for many had not completed their  
six-month term of office by October.

Data on the proportion of workers who took part in factory  
committee elections are exiguous, but they suggest that in most  
factories a majority of workers took part. At the Pechatkin paper mill  
in March 57% of workers voted in elections.82 At the Sestroretsk arms  
works the committee declared soviet elections void when only  
half the electorate bothered to vote. It urged workers that: ‘In view of  
the seriousness of the present moment, general factory meetings must  
be well-attended. It is the duty of every worker, as an honest citizen,  
to attend discussions of all questions concerning both the factory itself  
and the government in general.’83 On 1 August, when the Sestroretsk

works committee was re-elected, 72% of the workers voted.84 In the  
same month 88% of workers at Parviainen voted in factory committee  
elections.85 In September 69% of workers at New Lessner took part in  
elections, and in October 74% of workers at the Pipe works.86

Surveying the available evidence, it becomes clear that the degree  
of democracy in operation varied between factories, and that  
undemocratic practices were by no means unknown. Yet what strikes  
one about the period prior to October is not the growing bureaucra-  
tisation of the factory committees in Petrograd, but the extent to  
which they managed to realise an astonishing combination of direct  
and representational democracy.

This is not to dispose of the problem of‘bureaucracy’, however,for  
‘bureaucracy’ and ‘democracy’ need not be polar opposites. It  
depends in part how one understands ‘bureaucracy’. Max Weber  
emphasised the inter-relationship of bureaucracy, rationality and  
legitimate authority (Herrschaft), and the factory committees were, to  
an extent, ‘bureaucratic’ in the Weberian sense. Far from being  
anarchic, protozoan bodies, the committees were solid, structurally-  
ramified organisations which functioned in a regular routinised  
manner.87 The duties of the committees and their sub-commissions  
were fixed by rules and administrative dispositions; their activities  
were spelt out in written records; to a point, the committees followed  
‘general rules which are more or less stable, more or less exhaustive  
and which can be learned’.88 In other respects, the committees  
operated in marked contrast to the Weberian model. There was no  
strict hierarchical system of authority, such that the lower levels of the  
factory committee movement were subordinate to the higher levels,  
though this was, arguably, the aspiration of the CCFC. The members  
of the committees in no way saw themselves as functionaries  
operating according to fixed rules. They were policy-makers in their  
own right who viewed their ‘office’ as a means of effecting economic  
and social change. They were not trained for office and enjoyed no  
stability of tenure. Finally, they were not appointed by some  
impersonal organisation, but elected by and accountable to the  
workers. Nevertheless, in order to implement the goals of workers’  
control, the committees had begun to develop a degree of bureaucracy  
and autonomy from the rank-and-file to ensure that spheres of  
day-to-day, practical activity were left to their discretion.89 Herein  
lay a potential for the factory-committee leaders to become a  
bureaucratic stratum separate from, rather than organically linked to

their worker constituency. Moreover, within labour organisations  
this potential for bureaucratisation existed in a different form, which  
has been succinctly analysed by Richard Hyman in relationship to  
trade unionism:

**There is an important sense in which the problem of ‘bureaucracy’ denotes  
not so much a distinct** stratum of personnel **as a** relationship **which permeates the  
whole practice of trade unionism. ‘Bureaucracy’ is in large measure a  
question of the differential distribution of expertise and activism: of the**dependence **of the mass of union membership on the initiative and strategic  
experience of a relatively small cadre of leadership - both ‘official’ and  
‘unofficial’ ... the ‘bad side ofleadership’ still constitutes a problem even in  
the case of a cadre of militant lay activists sensitive to the need to encourage  
the autonomy and initiative of the membership.90**

In the Russian labour movement the dependence of the rank-and-  
file on the initiative and experience of the leadership was particularly  
acute, in view of the fact that the rank-and-file comprised unskilled or  
semi-skilled women and peasant workers unused to organisation. The  
skilled, proletarianised male leaders of the labour movement sought  
to bind these inexperienced workers into a disciplined unity, so that  
they might realise their democratic potential and exercise power on  
their own behalf. In so doing, they ran the constant danger of  
dominating the rank-and-file. As early as autumn, a woman from the  
Nevka cotton-spinning mill, where 92% of the workforce were  
women, complained of the behaviour of the overwhelmingly male  
factory committee: ‘They have done a lot to organise the dark mass,  
but now reveal a desire to concentrate all power in their hands. They  
are beginning to boss their backward comrades, to act without  
accountability ... They deal with the workers roughly, haughtily,  
using expressions like “To the devil’s mother with you!”’91 Later  
a leatherworker from the Osipov saddle factory wrote to the  
leatherworkers’ newspaper:

**... Often members of the committees gradually become cut off from the  
masses, they become alienated from them and lose their confidence. Quite  
often the masses blame them for becoming autocrats, for taking no account of  
the mood of the majority of workers, for being too conciliatory. This, it is true,  
is explained by the peculiar conditions of the present time, by the acerbity of  
the masses, by their low level of culture; but sometimes the factory committee  
members themselves provoke such a reaction by their behaviour. They get on  
their high horse and pay scant attention to the voice of the workers.  
Sometimes they show little enthusiasm or do very little and this causes  
discontent among the masses.92**

The balance between democracy and bureaucracy in the labour  
movement depended on the economic and political conditions in  
society at large. So long as these conditions were favourable to the  
revolutionary goals which the labour leaders had set themselves, then  
democratic elements overrode bureaucratic elements, i.e. the condi-  
tions were such that the popular forces could check the effectivity of  
bureaucratic forces. Once these conditions changed radically, as they  
did after October, bureaucratic elements came to the fore, which  
fostered the emergence of a bureaucratic stratum dominating the  
whole of society. After October the Bolshevik leaders of the factory  
committees, sincerely committed to workers’ democracy, but losing  
their working-class base, began to concentrate power in their hands,  
excluded the masses from information and decision-making and set  
up a hierarchy of functions. The trade unions, too, became less  
accountable to their members, since they were now accountable to the  
government, and soon turned primarily into economic apparatuses of  
the state. This may all suggest that bureaucratisation was inscribed in  
the revolutionary process in 1917, but if so, it was inscribed as a  
possibility only: one cannot pessimistically invoke some ‘iron law of  
oligarchy’. Democratic and bureaucratic elements existed in a  
determinate relationship in all popular organisations - a relationship  
which was basically determined by the goals of the organisations and  
the degree to which those goals were facilitated by political and  
economic circumstances. These circumstances were to change dra-  
matically in the autumn of 1917, and it was this change which shifted  
the balance between the forces of democracy and bureaucracy in  
favour of the latter.

9

**The October revolution and the  
organisation of industry**

THE DECREE ON WORKERS’ CONTROL

The Bolshevik seizure of power on 24—5 October was welcomed by a  
big majority of workers in Petrograd, who had tired of Kerensky’s  
‘government of swindlers’. The Bolshevik action was seen as inau-  
gurating a revolutionary government by the people, though the  
precise shape which this government should take was a matter of  
dispute. For industrial workers, one of the most important of the  
initial measures passed by the new government was the Decree on  
Workers’ Control, published on 14 November.1 This Decree legalised  
the de facto control which had been established in the factories of  
Petrograd since the February Revolution.

The All-Russian Council of Factory Committees (ARCFC), set up  
after the First All-Russian Conference, drafted a decree on workers’  
control, which they discussed with Lenin and representatives from  
the All-Russian Council of Trade Unions as early as 26 October.  
Astonishingly, their decree was entirely about the creation of a central  
apparatus to regulate the economy, i.e. what subsequently was to be  
established as the Supreme Council of National Economy (VSNKh).  
It said nothing about workers’ control, i.e. about the activities of  
workers at the grass roots, and for this reason it was criticised by  
Lenin. He therefore proceeded to draft an alternative decree.2 This  
decree breathes a spirit of libertarianism which reflects Lenin’s  
profound faith at this time in the creativity of the masses. It  
recognised the right of workers in all industrial enterprises of  
whatever size to control all aspects of production, to have complete  
access to all spheres of administration, including the financial, and,  
finally, the right of the lower organs of workers’ control to bind

employers by their decisions.3 It was Lenin’s draft which was taken as  
the basis for the decree on workers’ control. This awkward fact makes  
nonsense of the claim in Western historiography that, once power was  
in his grasp, Lenin, the stop-at-nothing centraliser, proceeded to  
crush the ‘syndicalist’ factory committees. In fact, the reverse is true.  
At this stage the ARCFC was more concerned with centralised  
regulation of the economy, whilst Lenin was more concerned with  
legalising grass-roots control.

On 8 November the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of  
the Soviets (VTsIK) set up a five-person commission, which included  
Milyutin, Lozovskii and two left SRs, Kamkov and Zaks, to scrutinise  
Lenin’s draft and to amend it in accordance with proposals from the  
factory committees and trade unions.4 On 14 November Milyutin  
introduced the Decree to VTsIK for discussion. He explained that  
three broad objections to the Decree had been made whilst it was  
being amended by the commission. First, critics had objected that  
workers’ control could only be discussed in the context of a planned  
economy but, Milyutin countered, ‘we have been overtaken by events  
... we have had to coordinate the [work of] control [organs] set up in  
the localities, and to draw them into a single, streamlined state  
apparatus, even at the cost of proceeding in an unsystematic fashion’.  
Secondly, critics had objected that ‘the commission was extending  
powers of control too far [downwards] and that these powers should  
be limited’. Milyutin countered: ‘we proceeded from the principle of  
control from below. We based the control apparatus on the local  
factory committees, so that the higher instances of control will consist  
of their central bodies, filled out by representatives of trade unions  
and soviets.’ The third point that gave rise to objections was the  
question of whether or not employers should be bound by the  
decisions of the control organs. Critics felt that to make decisions  
mandatory would endanger the interest of the general economic plan;  
but the commission, whilst agreeing that employers should have three  
days in which to object to decisions, felt that workers’ control would  
be unworkable if the decisions of the control organs were not  
binding.5 VTsIK proceeded to ratify the Decree, which gave workers  
full rights of control over production, distribution, finance and sales.  
The chief difference between Lenin’s draft and the final Decree lay in  
the fact that a hierarchy of central organs was established by the  
latter, so that organs of control in the enterprise were subject to  
regional councils of control which, in turn, were subject to an  
All-Russian Council of Workers’ Control.6

On 16 November the Fifth Conference of Petrograd Factory  
Committees met to discuss the Decree. It was attended by 96  
Bolsheviks, 24 SRs, 13 anarchists, 7 Mensheviks, 6 miscellaneous  
and 21 whose party affiliation was unknown or non-existent.7 The  
Decree was opposed by Kotlov, chairman of the technical commis-  
sion of the Ministry of Labour, who felt that it unduly restricted  
workers’ self-activity. Taking their cue from him, the anarcho-  
syndicalists called for factories to pass into the hands of the  
workers. Bolsheviks on the CCFC urged active, wide-ranging con-  
trol in the localities, but stressed that this was but one aspect of  
regulating production, directed mainly against sabotage by factory  
owners. Skrypnik put the Decree to the vote and it was passed with  
only one vote against and twenty abstentions.8 The conference  
resolution, however, suggests that the delegates ascribed a more  
far-reaching significance to workers’ control than did the drafters of  
the Decree. Whereas the Decree spoke of workers’ control being ‘in  
the interests of planned regulation of the economy’, the conference  
resolution said that ‘the decree lays a firm foundation for the  
further regulation of production and distribution, for the compul-  
sory amalgamation of banks and enterprises and for other mea-  
sures aimed at the organisation of the country’s economy in the  
direction of a socialist system’.9

The importance of the Decree was more symbolic than real. As it  
existed, it was unworkable, for it envisaged a hierarchy of control  
organs at enterprise, district, city and national level, which would  
have proved too cumbersome. Further problems arose from the fact  
that the Decree did not spell out in concrete detail how workers’  
control was to be implemented. A number of local soviets, trade  
unions and provincial conferences of factory committees worked out  
sets of instructions on the execution of the Decree, by far the most  
important of which were the Instructions issued by the CCFC in  
Petrograd, and those issued by the All-Russian Council of Workers’  
Control. It is worth examining these Instructions in detail, since they  
reveal clearly what was at issue in the debate about workers’ control  
which soon erupted.

The Instructions of the CCFC, first published in Izvestiya on 7  
December, are remarkable for the radicalism with which they tackle  
the question of workers’ control. They represent a bold advance on  
the positions taken by factory committee conferences before October,  
no longer seeing control as ‘inspection’ but as active intervention in  
production:

**Workers’ control of industry, as an integral part of control over the whole of  
economic life, must be understood not in the narrow sense of simple  
inspection** [revizii], **but, on the contrary, in the broad sense of intervening in  
the employer’s disposal of capital, stocks, raw materials and finished goods in  
the factory; in the sense of actively supervising the proper and expedient  
fulfilment of orders and utilisation of energy and labour power; in the sense of  
participating in the organisation of production on rational lines, etc. Control  
will only achieve its end and justify the hopes pinned on it, if it is, firstly,  
implemented by workers’ organisations at both central and local level in the  
most energetic and vigorous manner, not stopping short of active measures to  
restrain employers who are clearly approaching the fulfilment of their duties  
in a negligent or harmful fashion; and secondly, if it is closely coordinated  
with and firmly tied to the general regulation and organisation of production,  
both in the individual enterprise and in the branch of industry as a whole.  
Control must be seen precisely as a transitional stage towards organising the  
whole economic life of the country on social lines, as the first step in this  
direction taken from below, parallel with work at the top in the central organs  
of the economy.10**

The Instructions then proceed to specify the tasks of workers’ control  
in a very broad fashion. They envisage active interference in  
management, without clarifying precisely what powers and responsi-  
bilities remain with management. The decisions of the control organs  
are made binding on management. The factory committees, orga-  
nised into a national hierarchy, are vested with sole responsibility for  
workers’ control; trade union activity is confined to the area of wages.  
Didier L. Limon argues that these Instructions, in effect, are about  
workers’ self-management rather than workers’ control.11 This is  
undoubtedly true, insofar as the Instructions were drawn up against a  
background assumption that there was to be a rapid transition to  
socialism, in which workers’ control would be transmogrified into  
workers’ self-management. Yet these Instructions in no sense repre-  
sent a syndicalist effort to decentralise the running of the economy. At  
the Sixth Conference of Factory Committees, 22-7 January 1918, the  
anarchist, Bleikhman, criticised the CCFC Instructions for their  
‘centralism’, though he conceded that this was a ‘democratic’ type of  
centralism.12 Control was envisaged as taking place at both state level  
and factory level and local initiatives were to be organised into a  
hierarchy of local and regional Councils of National Economy  
(sovmrkhozy), topped by the Supreme Council of National Economy  
(VSNKh). This was not an anarcho-syndicalist schema but a plan for  
the democratic socialisation of production, which had the support of  
perhaps a majority of Bolsheviks at this stage, including, for a short

period, Lenin himself. It is for this reason that the Secretariat of the  
Bolshevik Central Committee sent these Instructions, rather than  
those of the All-Russian Council of Workers’ Control, to provincial  
bodies who requested information on how to implement the Decree  
on Workers’ Control.13

The All-Russian Council of Workers’ Control (ARCWC) was  
brought into being by the Decree on Workers’ Control, but it was  
virtually stillborn. It met but twice before it was absorbed into  
VSNKh (established on 1 December).14 The ARCWC included only  
five representatives from the factory committees, out of more than  
forty members. The rest comprised representatives from the soviets,  
the Petrograd Council of Trade Unions, the cooperatives, and  
included some Mensheviks and SRs. It was chaired by the Bolshevik  
leader of the metal union, V.V. Schmidt. The Council’s one act of  
significance was to produce an alternative set of Instructions on  
workers’ control, more moderate than those of the CCFC. The  
ARCWC Instructions emphasised the necessity of a centralised  
system of control in which individual factory control commissions  
would be subordinated to the control-distribution commission of the  
trade union of the particular branch of industry. This has led some  
Soviet historians to argue that these Instructions were an attempt by  
Menshevik trade-union leaders to subordinate the control organs to  
the trade unions rather than to the state. That they represent an  
attempt to assert trade-union suzerainty over the factory committees  
is beyond dispute, but this was an aspiration shared as much by  
Bolshevik trade-union leaders as by Menshevik. The Instructions  
cannot be interpreted as an effort to diminish the role of the  
government, since the trade-union control commissions were to be  
subject to regional councils of workers’ control which, in turn, were to  
be subject to VSNKh. The second significant feature of the ARCWC  
Instructions is that they laid down that management functions should  
remain in the hands of the employer: ‘Administrative

(raspoiyaditel’nye) rights to manage the enterprise and its operations  
and activities remain with the owner. The control commission does  
not take part in the management of the enterprise and does not bear  
any responsibility for its operations and activity.’15 This was merely a  
restatement of the position of successive factory committee confer-  
ences prior to the October Revolution. It offered no solution to the  
problem, outlined in Chapter 7, of how factory committees were to  
avoid responsibility for the enterprise if they had more de facto power

than the official administration in the areas of supplies, output,  
equipment, labour discipline, purchasing or demobilisation.

The two sets of Instructions on the implementation of the Decree  
on Workers’ Control were at the centre of the debate between the  
factory committees and trade-union leaders at the end of 1917. The  
Instructions of the CCFC were seen by both trade-union leaders and  
factory committee militants as giving carte blanche to individual factory  
committees to implement the most far-reaching schemes of grass-  
roots ‘control’. It was at these Instructions, therefore, that much of  
the fire of the trade-union opposition was directed. The most  
devastating critique of the Instructions was undoubtedly that  
mounted by the Bolshevik trade-union leader, A. Lozovskii, in a  
pamphlet published on 8 January 1918.16

According to Lozovskii, ‘the basic defect of the projected law is that  
it makes no connection with the planned regulation of the economy  
and disperses control of production instead of centralising it’.17  
Lozovskii and the other trade-union leaders believed that: ‘the lower  
control organ must act within limits which are strictly defined by the  
higher organs of control and regulation, whereas the comrades who  
stand for decentralisation and workers’ control uphold the independ-  
ence and autonomy of the lower organs, suggesting that the masses  
themselves will imbue the proclaimed principle of workers’ control  
with concrete content’.18 Lozovskii argued that the Instructions of the  
CCFC were completely illogical, for whilst they talked of the  
employer and of profit, they effectively abolished the old management  
by totally subordinating it to the factory control organ. In reality the  
Instructions did not aspire to workers’ control at all, but to the  
complete reorganisation of the economy along socialist lines and to  
workers’ self-management: ‘The notion of workers’ control thus no  
longer represents a transitional measure but rather the immediate  
realisation of a new mode of production.’19

There is much truth in Lozovskii’s strictures. The Bolshevik  
seizure of power, together with ever-deeper economic chaos, had  
caused the leaders of the CCFC to develop a more ambitious concept  
of workers’ control than they had entertained prior to October. The  
Bolshevik, Kaktyn', explained in the CCFC journal, Novyi Put', how  
the nature of workers’ control was changing now that socialism was  
on the agenda: no longer was it merely a question of controlling the  
activities of capital in order to maintain production - workers’  
self-management was now a possibility. ‘We are living through the

greatest socialist revolution, not only in the political, but more  
fundamentally, in the economic sphere ... A most cruel war ... has  
unavoidably brought the toilers of all countries, firstly, to an  
ideological revolution - to the overthrow of the prejudices of  
bourgeois society ingrained by the centuries — and, secondly, to a  
social revolution, which has begun in Russia, the country most  
exhausted by the war — a revolution which is rolling in a mighty wave  
through all countries of the world, breaking out in mass uprisings,  
first here, then there.’20 For Kaktyn', as for the other CCFC leaders,  
the actuality of permanent revolution completely transformed the  
nature of workers’ control, as he went on to explain in the same  
article:

**It is clear that in our situation there can no longer be any talk of the old  
method of passive control of production and distribution so cherished by our  
spineless intelligentsia. Even if individual comrades in the Bolshevik party,  
along with** Novaya Zhizn', **defend the idea, and try to extend it through the  
higher economic organs and cast it in a form which totally distorts the original  
Decree on Workers’ Control, and even if all those seize on it, who fear the  
dictatorship of the proletariat and socialism more than death (the trade-  
union elite, the union of engineers and technicians and others, not to mention  
the employers), then it only serves to emphasise their feebleness.21**

Lozovskii correctly linked the debate on workers’ control to the  
fundamental question of the Russian Revolution: was socialism on  
the immediate agenda?:

**It is absolutely essential to counterpose the** organisation **of production to the**regulation **of production. For in these two terms are encapsulated two systems  
and two views on the next tasks of the proletariat in the Russian Revolution. If  
one thinks that Russia can pass to the immediate realisation of a socialist  
system, if one thinks that socialism in Russia is a practical task of the day,  
then one must speak of the organisation of production, and not only speak of  
it, but execute it in practice. One must socialise all enterprises and hand the  
whole apparatus into the hands of the workers.22**

Lozovskii himself took up what was in essence a Menshevik-  
Internationalist, rather than a Bolshevik, position:

**There can be no doubt that the immediate socialisation of the means of  
production and exchange is not on the agenda of the Russian Revolution. We  
are faced, and not only we but the whole of Western Europe, with living  
through a rather lengthy transitional period of state capitalism or state  
socialism, under which the working class will act against the state-employer  
in selling its labour power... Workers’ control is a transitional revolutionary  
measure ... [it] does not affect the foundations of the capitalist system. It**

**leaves intact the private property in the means of production and the whole  
private trading apparatus - not because this is better from the point of view of  
proletarian interests, but because at the present historical moment the  
proletariat does not have the power to do more, given its lack of organisation-  
al experience, and in the absence of a socialist revolution in the economically  
advanced countries of Western Europe. The proletariat can lay hands on the  
whole productive apparatus, can move close to the whole process of  
production, can take an active part in carrying out the state-wide plan of  
regulation, can reduce the appetites of the ruling classes with a rough hand  
and force them to submit to its control - but more than this it cannot do.23**

The majority of Bolsheviks were not impressed by the cogency of  
Lozovskii’s economic views, merely shocked at what seemed to be his  
political pusillanimity. To men like Kaktyn' or Skrypnik, the  
prospect of resigning themselves to a whole historic epoch of state  
capitalism was anathema. Nor were they prepared to sit back and  
await a revolution in Western Europe. They were determined rather  
to push the revolution in Russia as far in a socialist direction as it  
would go, in the hope of stimulating international revolution. To such  
men nothing looked easier than the abolition of capitalism in a  
country in the throes of revolution, war and economic crisis.  
Capitalism was tearing itself apart and it was the duty of revolu-  
tionaries to ensure that socialism was established in its place.

Although in Petrograd a majority of metalworkers seem to have  
supported the radical interpretation of workers’ control,24 in other  
regions and industries there was considerable support for the  
moderate interpretation of Lozovskii. The unions of textileworkers  
and needleworkers, sovnarkhozy in Kostroma, Moscow etc. followed  
the ARCWC Instructions in implementing workers’ control.25

THE ROLE OF THE TRADE UNIONS

The Third Conference ofTrade Unions injune had defined the main  
function of the trade unions as the conduct of the economic struggle in  
defence of workers’ living standards, and had rejected the notion of  
unions controlling or intervening in production. As early as the  
summer, however, the Petrograd metal union had begun to argue that  
a historically new task now faced the union movement — that of  
participating in the regulation of the economy. The installation of a  
workers’ and peasants’ government caused Bolshevik trade-union  
leaders to dramatically reassess the role of unions. G. Veinberg argued  
in Metallist that the job of the trade unions was no longer to promote

workers’ economic interests, since the government could be relied  
upon to do this, but the far more important one of ‘participating in the  
organs regulating and controlling production and the economy’.26  
The resolution on the role of the trade unions passed by the First  
All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions, 7-14 January 1918, declared  
that ‘the centre of gravity of trade-union work must now shift to the  
organisational-economic sphere. The unions, as class organisations of  
the proletariat ... must take on the major work of organising  
production and reviving the disrupted productive forces of the  
country.’27

This redefinition of the tasks of the trade unions threw into relief the  
problem of their relation to the state. If the task of defending workers’  
economic interests were to pass from the unions to the state, and if the  
unions were to become organs of economic regulation directed by the  
state, could they any longer be said to have functions separate from  
those of the state? Should they not logically cease their independent  
organisational existence, and merge into the state apparatus? This  
was one of the questions which were to dominate the proceedings of  
the First All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions.

Some 500 delegates attended the congress, of whom 428 had voting  
rights. Nineteen national unions were represented with a total  
membership of 2.5 million, including 600,000 from the metal union,

1. from the textile union, 200,000 from the leather union.28 Of  
   the voting delegates 281 were Bolsheviks, 67 Mensheviks, 21 Left  
   SRs, 10 Right SRs, 6 SR Maximalists, 6 anarcho-syndicalists and 37  
   belonged to no political party.29 Interestingly, the right-wing minor-  
   ity consisted of proportionately more national executive members  
   than rank-and-file delegates. 43% of national executive members  
   were Mensheviks and Right SRs, compared to 13% of local delegates.  
   Only 37% of national executive members were Bolsheviks, Left SRs,  
   SR Maximalists or anarcho-syndicalists, compared to 79% of local  
   delegates.30

The debate about the role of the unions and their relationship to the  
state took place in a highly charged political atmosphere. Zinoviev  
argued on behalf of the Bolsheviks that: ‘The political victory of  
workers and poor peasants over the imperialists and their petit-  
bourgeois agents in Russia is bringing us to the threshold of  
international socialist revolution and to victory over the capitalist  
mode of production. The Soviets of workers’, soldiers’ and peasants’  
deputies have become the organs of government and the policy of the

workers’ and peasants’ government is a policy of socialist reconstruc-  
tion of society.’31 In an early draft of his resolution, Zinoviev did not  
hesitate to draw the conclusion that the congress should ‘proclaim the  
trade unions state organisations’, but the Moscow party organisation  
objected to this.32 The final resolution stated that ‘the trade unions  
will inevitably become transformed into organs of the socialist state,  
membership of which will be a civic duty for all those employed in a  
particular branch of industry’.33 This compromise formula merely  
said that ‘statisation’ of the unions would not come about at once; it  
was not a recognition of qualified trade-union independence. The  
right to strike, for example, was explicitly rejected by Zinoviev (‘the  
strike would be directed against the workers themselves’) and the  
Bolshevik resolution on workers’ control in its final version deleted a  
clause recognising the right to strike.

Martov led the Menshevik opposition which, in spite of profound  
internal schisms, operated on a common platform of ‘unity and  
independence of the trade-union movement’.34 He began by remind-  
ing the congress that in 1906 Lenin had stated that it was impossible  
to jump from autocracy to socialism, since the preconditions for  
socialism were lacking. The proletariat was neither sufficiently  
homogeneous to see in socialism the sole solution to its problems,  
nor sufficiently experienced to manage the economy. Concentration  
of production had not yet reached a level where it governed the  
dynamic of the whole economy since small-scale production was still  
preponderant. The present revolution was thus still objectively a  
bourgeois one. Replying to Zinoviev, Martov cried: ‘To say that the  
very fact of existence of soviets is proof of a new era in the life of  
mankind — the era of socialism — is vacuous rubbish.’ If the  
Bolsheviks continued their socialist experiments, he maintained, not  
only would they destroy the economy, they would disenchant the  
workers and pave the way for a capitalist restoration. So long as  
workers continued to sell their labour power, he concluded, free and  
independent unions were necessary to defend workers’ interests.  
This did not mean, however, that unions should not take part in the  
business of economic regulation; rather they should inject into it  
‘realism, Marxism and scientific socialism’. Martov’s resolution  
received 84 votes against 182 cast for Zinoviev’s.35

As it turned out, the trade unions continued to enjoy considerable  
independence from the government during the next couple of years,  
owing to the fact that energies were channelled into winning the civil

war. In 1920— 1, however, the issue of the relationship of the trade  
unions to the state flared up once again.36

THE SUBORDINATION OF THE FACTORY COMMITTEES TO THE  
TRADE UNIONS

We saw in Chapter 9 that there had been growing acceptance within  
the factory committees of the idea of a merger with the trade unions.  
The redefinition of the tasks of the unions after October meant that  
the division of labour between the two organisations, which had been  
established in the summer of 1917, broke down. Trade unions now  
sought to enter the sphere of activity formerly reserved to the factory  
committees. Two different organisations were thus seeking to do the  
same job of regulating production — yet another example of the  
mnogovlastie (‘multiplicity of powers’) which was so much a feature of  
the revolution at this time. Writing in Metallist, G. Veinberg com-  
plained that: ‘as soon as the Petrograd union of metalworkers took  
steps in this direction [that of regulating industry], it unfortunately  
clashed with another organisation - the CCFC. Questionnaires on  
the state of the metal industry, sent out by the union to each factory,  
were matched by questionnaires sent out by the CCFC. Two labour  
organisations were doing the same work, completely separately,  
wasting limited energies and expending double the resources.’37  
Trade-union leaders harshly criticised the factory committees for  
being unsuitable vehicles for regulating the economy. The charge of  
‘parochialism’ was one that had long been made against the  
committees, and it was one which they themselves in part accepted.  
At the Second Conference of Factory Committees Skrypnik had  
condemned the ‘patriotism of one’s parish [kolokol'nyaf .38 Increas-  
ingly, the charge of parochialism was a stick used by trade unionists to  
beat the committees. At the metal union contract conference on 15  
October, A. Gastev argued:

**The committees are frequently buried in the narrow shell of local factory  
problems ... Such a narrow ‘local’ politics goes hand in hand with a ‘broad’  
understanding of immediate tasks ... In general one must say that it’s  
completely inadequate to control a single industrial enterprise; one must also  
control the highest organs of finance and management. One must remember  
that large-scale speculation and the major levers of production are found  
outside the factory, and under the present system of ‘control’, the factory  
committees sanction speculative operations suggested by financial dealers  
who are unknown to them.39**

In one of the most rancorous polemics against the committees, Ya.  
Boyarkov, a Bolshevik from the Khar'kov metal union, asserted that:  
‘workers’ control by itself is an anarchist attempt to establish  
socialism in one enterprise and leads in practice to clashes between  
groups of workers’.40 On 29 December at a conference of factory  
committee and union representatives from the Petrograd metal  
industry, G. Veinberg again attacked the committees for their  
localism and selfishness, and called for a centralised system of  
workers’ control. He argued that only the trade unions - organisa-  
tions which embraced whole industries - could tackle the problems of  
the economy. Committee representatives, led by the S.R. Voronkov,  
sharply rebutted Veinberg’s charges and upheld the CCFC Instruc-  
tions on the Decree on Workers’ Control. The Bolshevik Commissar  
of Labour, A. Shlyapnikov, repeated the charge of parochialism,  
accusing the committees of collaborating with the employers in order  
to squeeze financial aid from the government.41

We shall see that there was a reluctance on the part of the CCFC to  
merge with the trade unions - not so much on principle, but because  
the terms were unacceptable. In the localities, however, the harsh  
facts of economic life were forcing the factory committees and trade  
unions together. On Vasilevskii Island shortages of fuel and raw  
materials, unemployment and the threat of closures forced the unions  
and committees to form an Economic Council of Workers of  
Vasilevskii District on 9 December.42 On 15 January the Vyborg  
district council of factory committees called for an immediate  
amalgamation of the committees and trade unions.43 At the end of  
November a conference of committee and union representatives in the  
textile industry set up a central control commission.44 In the leather,  
paper and chemical industries cooperation between the two organisa-  
tions was well advanced by the end of 1917. Only in the metal  
industry was conflict as to the terms of amalgamation rife.

The conflict was settled in brusque fashion at the First All- -  
RussianCongress ofTrade Unions. Introducing the Bolshevik resolu-  
tion, Ryazanov called on the factory committees ‘to choose that form  
of suicide which would be most useful to the labour movement as a  
whole’.45 His resolution argued that ‘the parallel existence of two  
forms of economic organisation in the working class with overlapping  
functions can only complicate the process of concentrating the forces  
of the proletariat’, and he called for the committees to become the  
basic cells of the unions in the workplace.46 The anarcho-syndicalists

were furious. Bill Shatov fulminated against the trade unions, calling  
them ‘living corpses’, whilst Maksimov hailed the factory committees  
as ‘children of the revolution, the direct offspring of the workers  
themselves ... manifesting all the intelligence, power and energy of  
the working class in the localities’.47 But they were fighting a  
rearguard action: the anarcho-syndicalist resolution gained a mere  
six votes. Mensheviks for once voted with Bolsheviks in support of  
Ryazanov’s resolution.

It is probable that the CCFC would have accepted the subordina-  
tion of the committees to the unions more enthusiastically, had the  
congress not passed another resolution which considerably narrowed  
the scope of workers’ control, and shifted responsibility for control  
from local organs to central ones. It was, ironically, Lozovskii, the  
fiercest critic of the CCFC Instructions, who introduced the official  
resolution on workers’ control to the trade-union congress — even  
though he had recently been expelled from the Bolshevik party. His  
resolution defined workers’ control as involving stock-taking of fuel  
and raw materials, investigation of finances, the determination of  
output and productivity, inspection of accounts and supervision of  
the general running of the factory. The resolution emphasised,  
however, that such control was part of a general system of planned  
economic regulation, and that ‘it is necessary to repudiate in the most  
unequivocal fashion all notions of dispersing workers’ control, by  
giving workers in each enterprise the right to take final decisions on  
matters affecting the very existence of the enterprise’. The resolution  
vested responsibility for control in the trade unions and exhorted  
them to preach the virtues of centralised control. It specified that  
factory control-commissions should be subject to the control-commis-  
sions of the unions and should include union representatives not  
working at the factory. In turn, the union control-commissions should  
include factory committee representatives, as well as technicians,  
accountants and statisticians. The resolution, finally, endorsed the  
much-maligned Instructions on workers’ control which had been  
worked out by the All-Russian Council of Workers’ Control.48

The CCFC attacked what it termed the ‘discrepancy between the  
verbal revolutionism of the (trade-union) congress and its actual  
conservatism’.49 It criticised the unions for their ‘unrelenting tactic of  
subordinating the factory committees to themselves and of absorbing  
all their functions, without examining whether the immense and  
unorganised apparatus of the unions can execute even one of these

functions’; instead of planning a smooth merger, the unions were  
content merely to attack the alleged parochialism of the committees:  
‘one detects a total unwillingness to deal with this new revolutionary  
organisation as a worthy collaborator in common work. Instead there  
is a stubborn striving to put the committees at a lower level — to equate  
them with anarchic, unconscious, mass elementalism’.50

The sixth and final conference of Petrograd factory committees was  
held from 22 to 27 January. It recognised that the time had come for  
the committees to become the workplace cells of the unions, but it  
called for the boards of the unions to be elected by conferences of  
factory committees within the branch of industry.51 It would thus be  
wrong to interpret the resolution as a gracious admission of defeat by  
the committees. As Zhivotov is reported to have said: ‘if they [the  
unions] want to refashion us, they won’t succeed. By going into the  
unions, we are going to refashion them.’52 As if to underline the  
seriousness of this intent, the conference reaffirmed its support for the  
CCFC Instructions on Workers’ Control, in spite of the fact that the  
trade union congress had ratified the ARCWC Instruction only days  
previously. The Sixth Conference thus genuflected to the notion of  
trade-union supremacy, but at root the will of the factory committees  
to be independent remained unbowed.

The central board of the metal union agreed to the replacement of  
the delegate councils of metalworkers at district and city level by  
conferences of factory committees, but on 1 February this concession  
met with considerable opposition from the city delegate-council of the  
metal union. Eventually, the delegates approved it by 159 votes to  
59.53 On 1 April trade unions and factory committees in the  
Petrograd metal industry finally fused. At the fusion conference  
Zhivotov emphasised the necessity of strong factory committees in  
each enterprise as the foundation stones of the union, but wisely  
avoided saying too much about the precise functions of the commit-  
tees. Subsequent events were to prove that these were as much in  
dispute as ever.

Had the six months since the October seizure of power witnessed  
the triumph of the unions over the committees? In one sense it clearly  
had, for the factory committees, which had been far more influential  
than the unions in 1917, were now absorbed into the union apparatus.  
At a deeper level, however, the ‘victory’ of the unions was far more  
ambiguous. As G. Binshtok wrote in the journal set up by the  
Mensheviks to defend trade-union autonomy against the Bolshevik

state: ‘with complete justice the trade unions can say to the factory  
committees “Thou hast conquered, O Galilean!”, since the trade  
unions, having taken on the organisation of production, have in fact  
been transformed into unified factory committees’.54 In other words,  
even if the factory committees, as an institutional form, were now  
subordinate to the unions, it was the committees’ definition of tasks -  
the regulation of production - which had prevailed.

In practice, the institutional subordination of the committees to the  
trade unions proved to be more aspiration than reality, just as did the  
‘statisation’ of the trade unions. Civil-war developments, including  
the nationalisation of industrial enterprises and the attempted  
restoration of one-man management, merely raised again - in a new  
form — the old problems about the scope of workers’ control and the  
relationship of the factory committees to the trade unions. As late as  
April 1920 - two years after he had helped promote the fusion of the  
factory committees and the trade unions — Lozovskii could report to  
the Third All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions: ‘We must sub-  
ordinate the work of the factory committees and collectives to  
complete control and to the complete influence of the trade unions.  
Y ou know from the experience of the last two years, particularly of the  
last year, that very often the factory committees or collegial boards  
consider themselves absolutely independent of the unions.’55 It is  
clear from this that long after the formal integration of the committees  
into the union apparatus, factory committees still displayed that  
spirited independence and concern for self-management which had  
been a hallmark of their activity in 1917. They refused, in other  
words, to ‘commit suicide’, as Ryazanov had urged at the First  
Congress of Trade Unions.

TOWARDS A SOCIALIST ECONOMY

On coming to power the Bolsheviks had little sense of the form or  
tempo of the transition to socialism. The party was agreed on the need  
to nationalise the banks and a number of syndicates in the oil, coal,  
sugar, metallurgy and transport sectors,56 but beyond this, there was  
little agreement about the extent of the socialist measures which could  
be undertaken. Lenin seems to have envisaged an economic system  
combining state ownership of key sectors with extensive private  
ownership of industry under government direction and workers’  
control - what he termed ‘state capitalism’. On the left of the party,

however, Bukharin dubbed the notion of ‘state capitalism’ a ‘non-  
sense, a half-baked idea’; he and his co-thinkers argued that ‘a  
proletarian-peasant dictatorship which does not entail the expropria-  
tion of the expropriators, which does not eliminate the power of  
capital in the mines and factories can only be a temporary  
phenomenon’.57 On the right of the party, meanwhile, many felt that  
nationalisation was inopportune and that only private capital could  
rebuild the battered productive forces of the country.58 In the event,  
the government’s policy developed rapidly in a socialist direction, but  
this was due less to political calculation than to the exigencies of class  
conflict and economic chaos.

The CCFC was a strong force actively pushing the government in  
the direction of a planned socialist economy during the first months of  
soviet power. As early as 26-7 October, the CCFC had proposed the  
setting-up of a Supreme Council of National Economy (VSNKh),  
which was duly established on 1 December. The task of VSNKh was  
defined as ‘the organisation of the economy and state finances by  
means of a plan for the regulation of the economic life of the country  
and the coordination and unification of the activity of the central and  
local organs of regulation’.59 On 23 December a decree provided for  
the creation of regional councils of national economy (sovnarkhozy)  
and in February the Sovnarkhoz of the Northern Region (SNKh S.R.)  
began to function in the Petrograd area. Until that time, the CCFC  
effectively ran the economy of the capital.61 It was then absorbed into  
SNKh S.R. The latter had the comprehensive task of planning and  
regulating all aspects of the regional economy, including industry,  
transport, agriculture, supplies, finance and labour power.62 The  
SNKh S.R. was headed by a presidium, and divided into industrial  
sections. By April there were eleven branch-of-industry sections, plus  
two for transport and one for trade.63 Each section was divided into  
departments of organisation, supply and distribution, labour, and  
statistics.64 The department of organisation had the job of running  
nationalised enterprises, of directing the organs of workers’ control in  
private enterprises and of settling conflicts between workers and  
management.65 Each industrial section was headed by a collegium  
which consisted of workers, elected at industrial-branch conferences  
of factory committees and trade unions, delegates from the soviets  
and cooperatives, and technical and commercial experts.66

VSNKh was vested with the power to ‘confiscate, requisition,  
sequester or compulsorily syndicate different branches of trade and

industry’, but it was not envisaged in December that it should embark  
on whole-scale nationalisation. Pressure for nationalisation began to  
well up from the localities (see next chapter), and local sovnarkhogy  
were increasingly compelled to take enterprises into state ownership.  
The factory committees spearheaded a campaign to press the  
government into adopting a more vigorous policy of nationalisation.  
The Sixth Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees, for example,  
passed a resolution which demanded the transfer of all factories and  
mines into the hands of the state.67 At first the government resisted  
this pressure, but it increasingly succumbed during the spring of  
1918, by endeavouring to centrally coordinate the wave of local  
‘nationalisations’. Finally, on 28 June it announced the whole-scale  
nationalisation of all major branches of industry.68

As active proponents of nationalisation, this decision marked a  
‘victory’ for the factory committees: yet it was a qualified one. For the  
committees had linked the demand for nationalisation to the demand  
for workers’ management of the enterprises which passed into state  
ownership. The Sixth Conference of Factory Committees, in its  
resolution calling for nationalisation, argued that ‘the political power  
[zdast'] of the proletariat can only be real power under conditions of its  
economic rule \gospodstvo\. It went on to demand that:

**In view of the fact that the supreme government organs have no special  
organisations capable of running the enterprises transferred into ownership  
of the republic, and in view of the fact that the government of workers, soldiers  
and peasants is strong only so long as it enjoys the confidence of the toilers and  
their organisations, in all cases of nationalisation, the workers’ committees  
should be put in charge of the enterprises in the localities and should work  
under the direction of VSNKh.69**

As we shall see in the next chapter, nationalisation issued not in  
workers’ self-management, but in a more centralised structure of  
industrial management, which undercut the power of the factory  
committees.

LENIN, THE BOLSHEVIKS AND WORKERS’ CONTROL AFTER  
OCTOBER

We have seen that Lenin’s draft decree on workers’ control empha-  
sised the activity of workers in situ rather than ‘state workers’ control’.  
This reflected his faith in the creativity of the masses - so much a  
feature of his thinking during the first three months of soviet power.

He was intoxicated by the spectacle of workers, soldiers and peasants  
taking power into their own hands, and profoundly optimistic about  
the potential inherent in such self-activity. In an article of late  
December entitled ‘How to Organise Competition’, Lenin wrote:

**One of the most crucial tasks at present, if not the most crucial, is to develop  
the independent initiatives of the workers and toilers and exploited generally  
in the sphere of creative, organisational work. At all costs, we must destroy  
that old, absurd, savage, vile and loathsome prejudice that only the so-called  
‘upper classes’ can run the state.70**

Nevertheless even when Lenin’s thinking was its most libertarian, he  
did not abandon his belief in the necessity of complementing the  
independent initiatives of the masses with action at state level. In  
early October he had reminded his Menshevik critics that: ‘We are for  
centralism and for a plan by the proletarian state: proletarian  
regulation of production and distribution in the interests of the poor,  
the toilers and the exploited - against the exploiters.’71 As winter set  
in, the honeymoon period of the revolution began to draw to a close,  
and the Bolsheviks became more and more aware of the appalling  
economic and social difficulties facing them. To Lenin the existence of  
proletarian state power seemed to be the one beacon in the enveloping  
gloom. Increasingly, the theme of state initiative assumed precedence  
in his discourse over the theme of mass initiative. With regard to  
workers’ control, Lenin qualified his initial optimism about the  
capacity of workers and peasants to resolve the economic crisis  
through their own efforts. More and more, he insisted that only  
centralised, planned intervention by the state on a national scale  
could begin to tackle the anarchy induced in the economy by three  
years of war. At first, Lenin does not appear to have had any definite  
position on whether the trade unions should supersede the factory  
committees as organs of economic regulation. The increasingly  
radical practice of workers’ control in the winter of 1917, however,  
seems to have persuaded him and other leading Bolsheviks of the  
correctness of the arguments of those trade-union leaders who  
castigated the factory committees for their parochial, tunnel-visioned  
approach to economic problems. As Lenin’s commitment to central-  
ised state regulation of the economy increased, he appears to have  
come round to the idea that the trade unions were better suited than  
the committees to the task of economic regulation, since they had  
their base not in the individual enterprise but in the branch of  
industry as a whole.

The leaders of the factory committees were not at all ill-disposed to  
centralised state regulation of the economy: indeed they were a major  
force pressing the government in this direction. Having successfully  
campaigned for the establishment of VSNKh, the committees in the  
early months of 1918 began to pressure the government to nationalise  
the whole of industry, to end private ownership of the means of  
production. Lenin was less keen than the committee leaders to  
undertake rapid nationalisation, but this was not the main point at  
issue between them. It was rather that the committees linked the  
question of state ownership of industry to that of workers’ manage-  
ment of the enterprise, and on this matter Lenin had increasingly  
authoritarian views.

Throughout 1917 workers’ control of industry had aimed, princi-  
pally, to minimise capitalist disruption of industry, but it had never  
been concerned exclusively with that: it had also aimed to democra-  
tise relations of authority within the enterprise and to create new  
relations of production in which workers could display maximum  
initiative, responsibility and creativity. Out of this, there emerged a  
concern for workers’ self-management, which became particularly  
apparent after October. Although explicit references to ‘self-manage-  
ment’ (samoupravlenie) are fairly rare in the discourse of the factory  
committees, the concept was at the very heart of their practice. When  
workers talked of the ‘democratic’ factory, or of taking the factory  
‘into their own hands’, they were talking about self-management.  
After October, although the factory committees pressed for a  
planned, state-owned economy, this did not mean that they believed  
that the transfer of legal ownership of the factories to the proletarian  
state would by itself bring an end to the subordination and oppression  
of workers. In a vague, incoherent way the committee leaders  
recognised that unless the transfer of power to workers at the level of  
the state were accompanied by a transfer of power at the level of  
production, then the emancipation of labour would remain a  
chimera. During the winter of 1917—18 the committees emphasised in  
their discourse, and above all in their practice, the initiative of the  
direct producers in transforming the process of production. What  
appears to be accelerating ‘anarchism’ in the movement for workers’  
control after October is, in large part, a recognition that the  
hierarchical relations of domination and authority within the enter-  
prise would have to be contested, if capitalist relations of production  
as a whole were to be overcome. This recognition, however, remained

confused and was never articulated into a perspective for socialist  
transition alternative to that of Lenin and the majority of the  
Bolshevik leadership.

Lenin never developed a conception of workers’ self-management.  
Even after October, workers’ control remained for him fundament-  
ally a matter of‘inspection’ and ‘accounting’. Although he constantly  
drove home the importance of grass-roots initiatives by workers, he  
regarded these as having the function of limiting chaos in the  
economy and countering tendencies to bureaucratisation, rather than  
as being necessary to the transformation of the process of production  
by the direct producers. For Lenin, the transformation of capitalist  
relations of production was achieved at central-state level, rather  
than at enterprise level. Progress to socialism was guaranteed by the  
character of the state and achieved through policies by the central  
state - not by the degree of power exercised by workers on the shop  
floor. As galloping chaos overtook the economy, workers’ autonomy  
faded as a theme in Lenin’s discourse, and increasingly he came to  
stress the need for strict discipline and centralism. From March 1918  
he began to call for the restoration of one-man management in the  
factories. In ‘The Current Tasks of Soviet Power’, he wrote:

**Any large-scale machine industry, and this is precisely the material  
productive source and foundation of socialism - calls for unconditional and  
strict unity of will, in order to coordinate the simultaneous work of hundreds,  
thousands and tens of thousands of people ... Unqualified submission to a  
single will is unconditionally necessary in the success of the labour processes,  
organised on the lines of large-scale machine industry.72**

The slow and uneven restoration of one-man management during the  
Civil War had no bearing for Lenin on the question of the socialist  
character of the soviet state, for this was guaranteed by its ostensibly  
proletarian character, rather than by the degree of dissolution of  
capitalist relations at the point of production. Because a state  
representing the interests of workers and poor peasants now presided  
over Russia, it was possible to organise production in any manner  
which would ensure maximum productivity: ‘there is ... absolutely no  
contradiction in principle between Soviet (that is, socialist) democ-  
racy and the existence of dictatorial powers by individuals’.73

The factory committee leaders had an inchoate awareness that  
socialism would remain a mere formality unless the direct producers —  
and not just the state on their behalf - took over and radically  
reconstructed relations of production within the enterprise, but they  
never really formulated this awareness in theoretical terms. Only the

Left Communist faction of the Bolshevik party came near to  
registering at a theoretical level the importance of overcoming the  
separation of workers from the means of production during the  
transition to socialism. V.V. Osinskii (V.V. Obolenskii) was chair-  
man of VSNKh until March 1918, when he resigned because of his  
opposition to the Treaty of Brest Litovsk. In a brilliant article in the  
first number of the Left Communist journal in April 1918, entitled  
‘On Socialist Construction’, he loosed a far-reaching critique of the  
official Bolshevik policy of socialist transition, central to which was  
the following insight:

**... Although the transition to socialism is signalled by the nationalisation of  
enterprises, nationalisation of itself — i.e. the transfer of enterprises and  
state-ownership - is not, in any sense, equivalent to socialism. In order for  
nationalisation to have that significance, i.e. for it to become socialisation, it is  
necessary (a) that the system of management of enterprises be constructed  
along socialist lines, so that capital’s power of command is destroyed and so  
that in the arrangement of the enterprise there are no longer bases on which  
this command might be restored; (b) it is necessary that the public authority  
into whose hands property in the means of production is transferred, is a  
proletarian authority ... Is it possible for the proletarian elite** \verkhushka\**,  
which will sit with the capitalists on the boards of the trusts, to guarantee  
that real proletarian power is in command in production? I very much  
doubt it, since the proletariat as a class will become a passive element,  
the object, rather than the subject of the organisation of labour in  
production.74**

He argued that unless the proletariat were actively involved in  
reorganising the process of production, then state capitalism, not  
socialism, would be the end-product of the government’s policies.  
Although the practical proposals for workers’ self-management  
which Osinskii outlined in the second part of this article were  
disappointingly sketchy, the article is noteworthy for marking the  
limit-point to which any Bolshevik went in formally recognising the  
crucial importance of workers’ self-management in a strategy of  
socialist transition. One should not, however, exaggerate the signi-  
ficance of Osinskii’s article. The Left Communists never really posed  
self-management as a central aim, their Theses of April 1918 merely  
mentioning the need for ‘the complete removal of capitalist and feudal  
survivals in the relations of production’.75 The factory committees  
strove in practice to transform relations of authority at enterprise  
level, but their failure to theorise this practice into an alternative  
strategy of transition helped to bring about their own ultimate demise  
and that of workers’ self-management.

10

**The economic crisis and the fate of workers’  
control: October 1917 to June 1918**

FROM WORKERS’ CONTROL TO WORKERS’ SELF-MANAGEMENT

The October seizure of power was a workers’ revolution in the simple  
sense that it transferred state power to a government which enjoyed  
the support of a majority of the working class. As an essentially  
political act, it had little immediate effect on the daily lives of workers.  
The economic crisis, rapidly getting worse, was a far more important  
influence on their position than the change in political regime.  
Nevertheless at a subjective level, the coming to power of a soviet  
government had a profound effect on the way that workers perceived  
the deteriorating situation in the factories. The ease with which the  
Bolsheviks had toppled the Kerensky government persuaded many  
workers that the time was ripe to follow up the political dispossession  
of the capitalist class with their economic dispossession. The  
inauguration of a government of workers and peasants, coupled with  
the breakup of the economy, seemed to many to toll the death-knell of  
capitalism. The Decree on Workers’ Control, in particular, was seen  
as a signal to advance to socialist society without delay. Speaking to  
the national congress of trade unions in January 1918, the Menshevik,  
Maiskii, remarked: ‘According to my observations, the majority of  
the proletariat, particularly in Petrograd, looks on workers’ control as  
an entry into the kingdom of socialism. It’s precisely this psy-  
chology which creates huge dangers for the whole socialist move-  
ment in Russia in the future, because ... if workers’ control suffers  
defeat, then the masses will become disillusioned with the very idea of  
socialism.’1 Most militant workers despised such jeremiads: they had  
won state power, what else was left to do except go forward to  
socialism?

In many provincial areas the Decree on Workers’ Control initiated  
workers’ control of production for the first time, but in Petrograd it  
legitimated the already-existing forms of workers’ control and  
extended their scope. The factory committees now set up special  
control-commissions charged with overseeing and intervening in the  
running of the factories. Such commissions already existed in the  
largest factories of the capital, but they now sprang up elsewhere. By  
the autumn of 1918, 212 factories in Petrograd province had  
control-commissions: 24% of these had been established before  
November 1917; 51% had been established between November and  
March 1918, and 25% after March 1918.2 These commissions not  
only monitored stocks of fuel and raw materials, they also checked  
orders and company finances and intervened in the technical side of  
production. They left employers in no doubt that they were now in  
charge. Not surprisingly, the employers hit back.

On 22 November the Petrograd SFWO announced: ‘We categor-  
ically reject non-state, class control by workers over the country’s  
industrial life (as decreed by the government) since it does not, in  
practice, pursue national ends and is not recognised by the majority of  
the Russian population.’3 Three days later an unofficial meeting of  
the biggest commercial and industrial organisations in Petrograd  
decided on a tough line: ‘In the event of demands for workers’ control  
being put forward ... the enterprise must be closed.’ It claimed that  
‘the government, by completely handing over management of the  
factories into the hands of the working class is erecting a barrier to the  
further participation of capital in industrial life’.4 Opposition to  
workers’ control was fiercest amongst the owners of metal-plants,  
who were already in a perilous situation owing to the critical  
shortages of fuel and raw materials. In the leather and textile  
industries, where things were less tight, the employers proved more  
conciliatory. In January 1918 the Petrograd leather manufacturers  
agreed to a supervisory mode of workers’ control, such as had been  
elaborated in the Instructions of the ARCWC.5

In some factories sharp conflicts between management and the  
factory committees were provoked by attempts to implement the  
Decree on Workers’ Control. At the Triangle rubber-works the  
director, Pasternak, told the control commission: ‘If you establish  
control, then I’ll close the factory. I cannot work under control.’6 At  
the Langenzippen works the owner stormed out of the factory when  
the control commission imposed far-reaching control. The factory

committee refused to allow him back, and in June was criticised by  
the metal section of SNKh S.R. for misinterpreting control over  
production as meaning control over the individual capitalist.7 At the  
Nevskii footwear factory, management politely informed the control-  
commission: ‘In answer to your memorandum of 9 December, we  
consider it our duty to inform you that nowhere in the regulations on  
workers’ control is anything said about the commission having the  
right to “direct” management to do something, and we consider that  
such a form of “direction” - without any appeal — is utterly  
inadmissible under a democratic system.’8

A good insight into the industrial disputes which arose over  
attempts to institute far-reaching control can be gained by examining  
one enterprise in detail. At the Nevskii shipyard fuel shortages had,  
by October, drastically cut back production. After the Bolsheviks  
seized power, management waited, believing that the government  
could not hold power for long. The financial position in the enterprise  
was grave, and management decided that as soon as war orders  
stopped, they would have to dismiss 2,476 workers.9 On 16 Novem-  
ber, in response to the Decree on Workers’ Control, the factory  
committee set about extending its sphere of influence, but met with  
strong resistance from management. A week later, it demanded to  
have two representatives with voting rights on the board of the  
company, but management refused. The factory committee then  
demanded that no payments be made without its approval. Manage-  
ment pointed out that ‘to recognise your demand for actual control  
over the finances of the factory would not be in accordance with the  
Decree on Workers’ Control, which does not envisage the right of  
workers to interfere in the management functions of the factory  
administration’.10 On 27 November the factory committee tried to  
occupy the finance office. On 3 December they requested the  
Military-Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet to send a  
commission of experienced people to look into the affairs of the  
company. The next day the government declared the factory under  
workers’ control. On 8 December the factory committee insisted that  
all papers from management be countersigned by the factory  
committee. A few days later it announced that the present director of  
the shipyard would be replaced by the engineer, A.A. Ustitskii. The  
control commission was effectively in charge from then on. On 23  
December the board of this state enterprise announced: ‘The  
company board of the Nevskii works is not the representative of

capital, but the representative of the government, appointed by it not  
to exploit the enterprise in order to make shareholders rich, but to see  
that the enterprise functions properly from the government’s point of  
view.’11 But the workers were in no mood to compromise. The old  
board of management was ousted on 17 January when the shipyard  
was nationalised.12

The newer, radical style of workers’ control tended to create  
conflict not only between workers and management, but between  
workers and technical and clerical staff. The Decree on Workers’  
Control made provision for the latter to sit on the control commis-  
sions, but the professional organisations of technical and clerical  
personnel objected to the terms of the Decree. At the beginning of  
November the union of engineers, which represented senior industrial  
engineers, warned: ‘we will firmly protect the personal and profes-  
sional dignity of our members and will give a firm rebuff to any  
attempt by any commissar or agent of the usurping government to  
give directions to the engineers, to interfere in their affairs or force  
them to do anything by threat’.13 More junior technical personnel,  
represented by the union of foremen and technicians, were also hostile  
to the government but to a lesser extent. On 17 November a delegate  
meeting of the Petrograd branch of the union declared:

**We have always regarded ourselves as an integral part of the proletariat, and  
have always been interested in strengthening the gains of labour over capital  
... And so we call on our members in the union to join with the workers and  
support them in their creative work by every means, without yielding to their  
political views, and to be respectful towards those organisations in the factory  
which receive the sanction of the proletariat. In cases of insult, abuse or  
infringement of your rights, the union will powerfully defend you, but our best  
defence will be tact and sincere love for the proletariat ... Concerning the  
question of workers’ control, we support the idea of workers’ control on a  
broad state basis, but consider the Decree of the People’s Commissars  
completely incompatible with present productive and economic relations,  
and, not wishing to take responsibility for the ruinous consequence of putting  
it into practice, we as an organisation will fight in the central organs of control  
to change that part of the draft which concerns the powers of the local control  
organs, so as to coordinate the operations of all enterprises.14**

The All-Russian Congress of Clerical workers, which met from 3—8  
December, took a similar position towards workers’ control:

**Congress considers the immediate and urgent task of the moment to be the  
rapid organisation of central, regional and local organs of control and  
regulation of industrial life. Such organisations, invested with authority,  
power and stability, can be created only by a central, democratic state power**

**enjoying the popular recognition of a Constituent Assembly ... Employees  
are recommended to take active part in the control of production ... only in  
those circumstances where a purely defensive control is being instituted for  
protection against possible sabotage.15**

In general, the factory committees were anxious to win the  
cooperation of technical and clerical staff in the implementation of  
control, since they needed their expertise if the control were to be  
effective. The political opposition of such staff towards the Bolshevik  
regime, however, led to bitter clashes between blue-collar and  
white-collar workers. At the Robert Krug engineering works the  
committee asked technical personnel to sign a pledge to abide by the  
decisions of the workers’ organisations and to recognise the govern-  
ment of People’s Commissars. The technicians refused to sign it and  
the committee threatened to hand them over to a military-revolution-  
ary tribunal for counter-revolutionary activity.16 At the Aivaz works  
engineers went on strike in November and were arrested by the  
factory committee and Red Guards. On 19 February the CCFC  
warned the committee to take a ‘cautious approach’ to the  
engineers.17 At the Putilov works on 31 October, office staff voted by  
315 votes to 18, with 14 abstentions, against the Bolshevik seizure of  
power and called for a socialist coalition government.18 They agreed  
not to strike, however, as the stafT of government ministries were  
doing. A couple of days later, draughtsmen at the factory passed an  
almost identical resolution, by 97 votes to 11, with 12 abstentions.19  
The works committee took a dim view of these resolutions. It elected  
N. Grigor'ev - a worker in the turret shop - commissar of the Putilov  
works, and his appointment was confirmed by the Military-  
Revolutionary Committee. On 9 November Grigor'ev sent a worker  
to supervise the work of clerical staff in their offices; they were  
enraged, and demanded a meeting with the works committee. On  
arriving for the meeting at the works theatre, they found it sur-  
rounded by armed Red Guards. The 429 sluzhashchie refused to take  
part in a meeting under these conditions, pointing out that the  
Military-Revolutionary Committee had forbidden armed persons to  
attend public meetings. They then proceded to break off relations  
with the works committee.20 A meeting of all the shop committees  
reprimanded the sluzhashchie for having ‘abandoned the toiling family  
of workers’ and insisted that a ‘refusal to submit to the commissar is a  
refusal to submit to the government’.21

As the economy collapsed around them, and as the factory

committees became more obstreperous, employers often lost the will  
to carry on. Some began to run down their operations, refusing new  
orders and selling off stock, fuel and raw materials. Some began to  
squander their capital, others to transfer their assets abroad. Some  
stopped paying wages, claiming that this was now the responsibility  
of the government. Others simply abandoned the sinking ship: ‘the  
owner has vanished’ was the plaintive cry of a few factory committees  
in December. At the Bromley Mill, for instance, almost all the  
members of the board fled to England. At the First Yarn Mill, when  
the factory committee announced that it would henceforth pay  
management their salaries, the English directors, who had been at the  
factory for twenty-five years, decided that it was time to pack their  
bags and go abroad.22

It is often suggested that the intense class conflict of the post-  
October period engendered widespread anarchist sentiment within  
the working class. It is certainly the case that anarchists began to step  
up their campaign for factory seizures. Golos Truda, the anarcho-  
syndicalist journal, ran an article on 3 November which said: ‘We  
affirm that it is not state power which needs to be seized, but  
production, because with the seizure of production we destroy both  
capitalism and the state at one blow and we will replace both of them  
with a genuinely socialist society, resting on real freedom, equality  
and brotherhood.’23 At the Fifth Factory Committee Conference on  
15-16 November, at which about 8% of the delegates were anarch-  
ists, the anarchist Terent'ev declared: ‘We must take over both works  
and factories ... control is possible only when everything is ours and  
this is impossible so long as there are factory owners. The first thing  
we must do is requisition the factories.’24 Renev, an anarchist from  
the Baltic shipyard, continued in the same vein: ‘The Decree on  
Workers’ Control is slowing down the movement. To go forward we  
must remember that the Decree is not our idol.’25

These notions proved attractive to some groups of workers. In the  
textile factories of Petrograd, for instance, several attempts were  
made by workers to take over the running of their factories. Popular  
anarchist militants like Troshin, a worker at the Kozhevnikov textile  
mill, Kotov and Kolovich went about calling on workers to seize the  
factories for themselves.26 At the Kersten knitwear factory, where  
women comprised three-quarters of the workforce, the factory  
committee arrested the manager because of his refusal to recognise  
their spokesman, the mechanic Tseitlin. The clerical workers went on

strike in protest at this. On 22 November an anarchist proposed to a  
general meeting that the workers divide up the factory property  
among themselves. Alexandra Kollontai, who had been sent to speak  
on behalf of the Bolsheviks, managed to dissuade the women from  
this, but she was unable to dissuade the committee from trying to run  
the factory by itself. It had no money, and though it tried to raise  
capital out of wage deductions and received a small loan from the  
Vulcan works, it was soon forced to abandon its experiment because  
of financial difficulties. The committee called on the Ministry of  
Labour to sequester the factory, but at that point the textileworkers’  
union intervened to bring about a reconciliation between the  
committee and management, who agreed to recognise Tseitlin.27

Despite such incidents, what is remarkable about Petrograd is the  
very limited influence which anarchists had on the factory commit-  
tees. Factory seizures were extremely rare in the capital, though they  
were now more common in provincial areas, such as the Middle and  
Lower Volga, Vyatka, the Western provinces, and the Central  
black-earth region, where workers took over many small light-  
industrial enterprises, especially food-processing plants.28 According  
to the judicious calculations of V.Z. Drobizhev, only twenty-seven  
factories in Petrograd province were taken from their owners between  
November 1917 and March 1918, and none of these takeovers turns  
out to have been inspired by an anarchist desire to get rid of the boss  
on principle.29

At the Metal works in mid-November the works committee set up a  
workers’ directorate, consisting of nine workers elected by the  
workforce, to achieve ‘direct, active participation in the management  
of production and of the factory, and liaison with government and  
private institutions and personnel on an equal basis with the  
company directors’.30 These directors were to sit on all boards in  
order to ‘supervise and direct’ their work. Management lost no time  
in informing the directorate that it would not tolerate such ‘interfer-  
ence in management by outsiders, not responsible for their actions’.  
On 1 December it closed the factory, whereupon the directorate took  
over the running of the Metal works until the government agreed to its  
nationalisation on 16 January. By March, however, there were only  
276 workers left at the factory.31 At the Franco-Russian works on 8  
November the works committee wrote to the company as follows: ‘the  
factory is financed by money from the state treasury... so the workers  
and the factory committee must have a full assurance that this money  
is not going to enrich a handful of exploiters at the expense of labour,

but is going to meet the needs of all who work in the factory.  
Productive work and a conscientious attitude to our duties will only  
come about once the board is headed by an elected group who enjoy  
the confidence of all who toil in the factory. Such a supreme organ  
should consist of workers, sluzhashchie and toilers.’32 Pending a  
decision to nationalise the Franco-Russian works, VSNKh agreed on  
20 F ebruary to the establishment of a temporary board along the lines  
suggested by the committee, which comprised one representative  
from VSNKh, one from the metal union, an engineer, a white-collar  
worker and three elected workers.33

At the Aivaz works in December a control commission, consisting  
of seven workers and four sluzhashchie, was set up to counterpose to  
‘the uncontrolled, unorganised conduct of the economy by the  
capitalists ... the idea of public control, organisation and regulation  
of economic life in the interests of the exploited class’.34 It declared  
that ‘the directors have no right to enter any commitments or to  
conclude contracts without the sanction of the control-commission;  
the latter shall examine all aspects of management and shall ratify all  
management decisions; moreover it shall ensure that health and  
safety aspects of the enterprise are at the proper level’.35 Management  
refused to work under the control-commission, and on 23 December it  
announced the closure of the factory. The control commission then  
endeavoured to keep production going by itself, until the factory was  
nationalised in August 1918.36 At the Robert Krug engineering  
works, where 190 workers were employed, a general meeting issued  
the following statement on 12 December:

**Having heard a report from the control-commission about the conflict which  
took place between the commission and management at a meeting on 11  
December, when management stated clearly and unambiguously that it did  
not recognise the works committee, the control commission or the Instruc-  
tions on Workers’ Control, and when a management representative, [citizen]  
Lerkhe, clearly hinted at stopping production at the factory ... the general  
meeting of workers and** sluzhashchie **has decided:**

1. **not to allow such sabotage**
2. **to avert the final closure of the factory, and the unemployment which  
   would ensue from this**
3. **to take the factory into its own hands.37**

This was no wild seizure, for the workers requested that the Factory  
Convention supervise the running of the factory. Self-management  
could not negate economic realities, however, and on 9 March 1918  
the factory closed.38

These examples show that even in the small number of cases where

workers took over the running of their factories, they were not in the  
grip of some anarchist delirium. They were determined to exercise  
far-reaching control over management, in order to prevent ‘sabotage’  
or closure, and it was the attempt by management to close down the  
enterprise which prompted a workers’ takeover. In only a tiny  
number of small factories, such as Kan paper mill and Berthold print  
works, did a workers’ takeover prove viable.39 In all larger enter-  
prises, workers’ management proved incapable of dealing with the  
immense problems affecting production. In these instances, however,  
it seems clear that the workers took over their enterprises without any  
intention of taking sole charge of production. The takeovers were  
temporary measures, designed not merely to forestall closure, but to  
force the government to take responsibility for the factory by taking it  
into state ownership or control. At the Nobel works, for example, a  
meeting of the workforce on 19 January heard a report which showed  
that the factory was bankrupt and that management could not afford  
to pay their wages. The meeting resolved ‘to declare the factory the  
property of the Russian Republic and to entrust the factory commit-  
tee to organise and regulate production in liaison with the Commis-  
sariat of Labour’. A delegation of four was sent to VSNKh to ask for  
money to pay wages and to request nationalisation of the factory, but  
VSNKh seems to have refused.40 At the Northern Iron-Construction  
Company the factory committee had been inactive up to October.41  
Having been re-elected, it began to resist management more actively.  
On 6 March 1918 it reported to the metal section of SNKh S.R. that:  
‘The factory committee regards itself as an organ of state control, and  
as such cannot allow management to spend the people’s money as it  
likes ... In view of the fact that the board has no money to carry out  
demobilisation or to transfer the factory to civilian production, and  
that it is greatly in debt to the state, the committee requests SNKh  
S.R. to confiscate the factory along with all its property and  
remaining money ... for the benefit of the All-Russian republic.’42 A  
few days later the committee wrote again to SNKh S.R., informing it  
that the workers had elected a directorate to take charge of the  
factory, but it was at pains to explain that ‘we do not wish to engage in  
a separatist action such as the seizure of the factory, and so we are  
transferring the factory to the charge of VSNKh’.43 At the Soikin  
print works the autonomous commission justified its takeover as  
follows: ‘the only way of preserving the enterprise from ruin and  
disaster ... lies in temporarily taking matters into our own

hands, until such time as the government will take over from us’.44 At  
the Vulcan works on 23 March the committee called on SNKh S.R. to  
nationalise the factory: ‘the whole policy of management is to close  
down the factory. If it has not already closed down, this is solely  
because the energies of the factory committee have sustained the life  
of the factory... The kind of control which management will accept is  
purely token, for it will remain boss of the factory, whilst responsi-  
bility for running the factory will rest entirely with the control-  
commission. Thus dual power will not be eliminated.’45 It requested  
that SNKh S.R. sequestrate the Vulcan works, which was duly  
effected on 30 March.

Pressure to nationalise individual enterprises came from the  
factory committees, who saw in state ownership or state control the  
sole alternative to closure. V.P. Milyutin wrote that: ‘the process of  
nationalisation went on from below, and the soviet leaders could not  
keep up with it, could not take things in hand, in spite of the fact that  
many orders were issued which forbade local organisations to enact  
nationalisations by themselves’.46 He remarked that many of these  
local ‘nationalisations’ had a punitive character. This sentiment was  
echoed by A.I. Rykov at the first congress of sovnarkhozy in May:  
‘Nationalisation was carried out for not implementing the rules of  
workers’ control, and because the owner or the administration had

fled, or simply for not fulfilling the decrees of soviet power, etc The

nationalisation of enterprises had a straightforwardly punitive rather  
than economic character.’47 Data collated by V.Z. Drobizhev seem to  
bear out this interpretation.48 Of 836 warrants issued to dispossess  
factory owners between November and December, 77% were issued  
by local bodies — a sure sign that pressure to nationalise came from  
below. On 19 January the Council of People’s Commissars forbade  
‘nationalisations’ without the permission of VSNKh, and the ban was  
repeated on 16 February. On 27 April VSNKh again informed local  
soviets and local sovnarkhozy that they would receive no funds for any  
enterprise which they had confiscated without permission.49 Never-  
theless, between November and March, only 5.8% of nationalisa-  
tions, sequestrations, confiscations or socialisations in the country as  
a whole were carried out by the Council of People’s Commissars or  
the central organs of VSNKh.50

In Petrograd ‘nationalisations from below’ were not as common as  
elsewhere. All state-owned factories were, of course, nationalised as a  
matter of course, and a further sixteen private factories (beginning

with the Putilov works on 27 December) were formally nationalised  
up to 1 April. These included a few large factories, but were mainly  
small or medium-sized enterprises such as the Military-Horseshoe  
works.51 By April about forty enterprises in the city were officially  
nationalised, including former state enterprises, and a further 61 were  
being run temporarily by factory committees.52 The latter factories  
had been ‘sequestrated’ or ‘confiscated’ with the permission of SNKh  
S.R. or the local soviet, but no clear distinction existed between  
‘sequestration’ and ‘nationalisation’.53 Between April and June a  
further score of enterprises in what was by now the former capital  
passed into formal state ownership.

To what extent had workers’ control developed into workers’  
self-management by the time that the government nationalised the  
whole of industry at the end ofjune? It is difficult to answer this, since  
it is impossible to draw neat distinctions between workers’ control  
and workers’ management. Workers’ management seems to have  
been confined to a minority of enterprises in Petrograd. The Soviet  
historian, M.N. Potekhin, calculates that, on 1 April, 40 enterprises  
were nationalised; 61 were being temporarily run by factory commit-  
tees; 270 were under workers’ control and 402 were still being run by  
their owners, although these were overwhelmingly small workshops.54  
In the major factories, therefore, workers’ control was still the norm.  
In practice this meant that the official management existed alongside  
the factory committee, but that its orders could not be effective  
without the ratification of the factory committee or its control  
commission. Most organs of control saw to the execution of various  
jobs to be done, investigated the state of equipment, finances, order  
books, accounts, fuel and raw material, and, in addition, the factory  
committee was responsible for laying off workers, for internal order,  
productivity and working conditions.55 In those enterprises where the  
factory committees were in complete charge, this was not, generally,  
considered to be a permanent arrangement, but a makeshift arrange-  
ment until such time as the government formally nationalised the  
enterprise and appointed a new board of management. Finally, the  
management of factories which had been officially nationalised varied  
a great deal. At former state enterprises the boards of management  
were gradually reorganised. Thus a new board was appointed at the  
Obukhov works on 20 January, which consisted of eight workers, two  
technical personnel, the chief engineer and a representative of the  
sluzhashchie,56 In some nationalised private factories the boards of

management consisted of workers and technicians, trade-union and  
sovnarkhoz representatives. Often, however, the control-commission  
remained in charge, the only change being that a commissar,  
responsible to VSNKh, was appointed to keep a strict eye on  
production at the factory. In some instances, the old board of  
management remained in charge of a nationalised factory, but now  
worked under a VSNKh commissar. Overall, therefore, there was  
considerable variation in the structure of management ofPetrograd’s  
factories, although since October there had been a significant move in  
the direction of worker participation in management.

In Chapter 9 we saw that at their final conference in January 1918,  
the Petrograd factory committees had demanded that nationalised  
enterprises be run by workers’ committees. In March, however,  
Lenin made the first of a series of appeals for a return to one-man  
management. The controversy about workers’ collegial management  
came to a head at the First Congress of sovnarkhozy from 25 May to 4  
June 1918. The commission of the congress which drew up the  
resolution on enterprise management, strictly circumscribed the right  
of VSNKh to influence the make-up of the boards of nationalised  
enterprises, by proposing that two-thirds of the board be elected by  
workers at the enterprise. When Lenin heard of this he was outraged,  
and he, together with Rykov and Veinberg, drafted an alternative  
resolution.57 This was, eventually, passed by the conference. It  
specified that nationalised enterprises should be run by a collegial  
board of management, one-third of whose members should be  
nominated by the oblast' sovnarkhoz\ one-third nominated by either  
VSNKh or the oblast' or national trade union; and the other third by  
the workers of the enterprise. The board was then to elect a director  
responsible to VSNKh. N.K. Antipov, formerly of the CCFC,  
Andronnikov, from the Urals oblast' sovnarkhoz, and Kostelovskaya,  
from the textile union, argued for full workers’ management and were  
opposed by Veinberg, Lozovskii and others, who called for virtually  
complete control of the enterprise by VSNKh.58 The resolution  
passed was a compromise between these two positions, but it marked  
a strengthening of centralism, since it subordinated management  
boards to the sovnarkhoz■ This form of collegial management thus  
considerably modified the concept of workers’ management which  
had been advocated by the factory committees a few months earlier.  
Later during the Civil War, the committees were to strenuously  
defend this compromise against the advocates of one-

man management. In 1919 only 10.8% of enterprises in Russia were  
under one-man management, though this percentage rose dramati-  
cally during 1919-20.59 In Petrograd the resistance to one-man  
management was especially strong, particularly in large factories. In  
March 1920 69% of factories employing more than 200 workers were  
still run by a collegial board.60 Petrograd workers, therefore, the most  
enthusiastic exponents of the ‘democratic’ factory in 1917, proved  
most resistant to recentralisation of management authority during  
the Civil War.

ECONOMIC CATASTROPHE AND THE DISSOLUTION OF THE  
WORKING CLASS

The expansion of workers’ control is usually considered to be a major  
cause of the accelerating chaos in the economy. In fact it was less a  
cause and more a response to that chaos, which had its roots in the  
whole system of war capitalism. During the war the output of  
Petrograd’s industry had doubled, and by 1917 it was meeting  
two-thirds of the nation’s defence requirements. The crisis in the war  
industries, which began to build up during the summer of 1917, came  
to a head in the winter of that year. As soon as the Bolsheviks sued for  
peace, the bottom fell out of the capital’s economy.

The People’s Commissariat of Labour (Narkomtrud) began in  
December to draw up plans for the orderly demobilisation of the war  
industries and for the evacuation of both factories and workers. On 20  
December it ordered the closure of factories for up to a month, so that  
the transfer to civilian production could be carried out.61 It was  
envisaged that the experienced, skilled workers would remain in the  
demobilised factories, and that the majority of less experienced  
workers would be encouraged to leave Petrograd, the Labour  
Exchange paying their travelling expenses. Factory committees  
began to draw up detailed plans for redundancies within their  
enterprises. At the Okhta explosive works the factory committee  
agreed that workers should be made redundant in the following order:  
first to go would be volunteers; second, merchants, traders, yard-  
keepers, caretakers and others who had entered the factory in order to  
avoid conscription; third, those who had refused tojoin a trade union;  
fourth, members of families in which more than one member worked  
at the factory; fifth, youths under the age of eighteen, unless they had  
dependants or were without families; sixth, those with some property

or element of fixed income; seventh, those from families  
in which other members were still employed, though not at the  
factory; eighth, single people with no dependants; ninth, and last to  
go, would be workers with dependants, according to the number of  
dependants they had.62 Similar redundancy plans were drawn up at  
the Old Parviainen works and at Putilov.63

In the event, little came of the plans for an organised demobilisa-  
tion of Petrograd industry. In the New Year, the plight of thousands  
of workers, facing the loss of their jobs, was suddenly compounded by  
the prospect of a German occupation of the city and a cut in the bread  
ration. On 27 January the bread ration was reduced to 150 grams per  
day; on 14 February to 100 grams (one-quarter of a funt), and on 28  
February it reached its lowest level of 50 grams.64 Mass starvation  
loomed ahead, and this, together with the imagined horrors of a  
German occupation, induced panic in the population and an exodus  
from the capital. Four months after ‘demobilisation’, the metal  
section ofSNKh S.R. reported: ‘there was not even any discussion of a  
full, detailed survey of enterprises, there was neither the technical  
means nor the time for this, since any delay in dismissing workers  
threatened to cost colossal sums. The workers, too, hurried to leave in  
order to get out of Petrograd as quickly as possible, to escape  
starvation and the threat of invasion.’65 Those who had ties with the  
countryside hurried back to their native villages, in the hope of  
qualifying for some of the land that was being distributed. Others,  
dismissed from their jobs, set out from the capital in the hope of  
finding food. In the first six months of 1918 over a million people left  
Petrograd.66

Within a matter of months, the proletariat of Red Petrograd,  
renowned throughout Russia for its outstanding role in the revolu-  
tion, had been decimated (see Table if). By April 1918 the factory  
workforce of the capital had plummeted to about 40% of its January  
1917 level, and it shrank still further thereafter. The branches of  
industry worst affected were those producing directly for the war  
effort — metalworking and engineering, shipbuilding, chemicals and  
woodworking. In the metal factories of Petrograd province, em-  
ploying more than a hundred workers, the total workforce slumped  
from 197,686 on 1 January to 57,995 on 1 May.67 Less severely  
affected were light industries such as textiles, food, paper and  
printing. Big factories suffered more than small factories; private  
factories more than state-owned ones. Those factories which had

expanded most dramatically during the war, contracted most  
dramatically when the war ended.68 On 28 February 1918 the huge  
Triangle rubber works closed down: within a matter of months only  
756 of its 15,000 staff remained.69 Despite the flight of workers from  
the city, there were still 60,000 registered unemployed at the  
beginning of May.70

The Soviet historians, Drobizhev and Vdovin, argue that it was the  
less experienced wartime recruits to industry who left Petrograd,  
leaving a nucleus of ‘cadre’ workers more or less intact.71 This  
picture, however, is in need of qualification. It was to be expected that  
workers with close ties to the countryside should have left the capital,  
given the availability of food and land in their native villages.  
Similarly, it was to be expected that the shutdown of war production  
should have made large numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled war  
recruits jobless. This is borne out by data from the Central  
Commission for the Evacuation of Petrograd (and later from the city  
Labour Exchange) which show that no less than 53% of those who  
applied for travelling expenses were chemorabochie.72 However, since  
only a minority of those who left the city claimed travelling expenses,  
those who did so, were more likely to have been the worst-off workers,  
i.e. the unskilled. Other evidence suggests that the process of  
demobilisation was so cataclysmic that it made skilled, as well as  
unskilled workers, redundant.73 Even if experienced workers were not  
as badly affected as their less experienced comrades, it was among the  
former group that the Bolsheviks had their most committed suppor-  
ters, and so many of them decided to leave the factories in order to  
serve the new soviet government. They enlisted in the Red Army,  
assumed posts of responsibility within the government and party  
apparatuses, or joined the food detachments. O.I. Shkaratan esti-  
mates that about 6,000 workers left Petrograd to join the Red Army  
prior to April.74 Young workers, fired by revolutionary elan and  
without family commitments, were especially eager to quit the  
factories in order to defend soviet power. Over half of those who  
claimed evacuation expenses were single men, and by April the  
proportion of youths in the factory workforce was only half that of the  
previous year.75 In October 1917 there had been about 43,000  
Bolsheviks in the capital - of whom two-thirds were workers.76 By  
June 1918 only 13,472 were left.77 It would seem, therefore, that at  
least the keener Bolsheviks among the ‘cadre’ workers left the  
factories of Petrograd in the early months of 1918.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Branch of Industry | Number of enterprises | Number of enterprises which had closed by 1 April 1918 | Number of workers at 1 January 1917 | Number of workers at 1 April 1918 |
| Textiles | 45 | 10 | 37.478 | 31,855 |
| Cloth | 26 | 8 | 5.238 | 1,781 |
| Paper | 30 | 7 | 4,829 | 3,784 |
| Printing | 147 | 6 | 14,508 | 20,432 |
| Woodworking | 52 | 21 | 4,956 | 2,293 |
| Metals | 213 | 109 | 167,192 | 43,129 |
| Minerals | 18 | 8 | 2,323 | 645 |
| Leather | 35 | 8 | 11,181 | 7,680 |
| Food | 47 | 12 | 13,000 | 10,075 |
| Chemicals | 55 | 17 | 22,535 | 5,691 |
| Electrotechnical | 28 | 6 | •3,371 | 5,095 |
| Power Stations | 11 | - | 1,831 | 1,778 |
| Ships, carriages, automobiles and aeroplanes | 39 | 11 | 29,850 | 8,024 |
| Optical and surgical instruments | 25 | 6 | 5,490 | 3,807 |
| Rubber goods | 2 | 2 | 17,228 | 2,641 |
| Total | 773 | 231 | 35i,°io | 148,710 |

Source. M. N. Potekhin, Pervyi Sovet proletarskoi diktatury, (Leningrad, 1966), p.253.

THE LABOUR ORGANISATIONS AND THE CRISIS OF  
LABOUR DISCIPLINE

The exalted hopes unleashed by the October insurrection lasted until  
the beginning of 1918. Then signs of working-class disillusionment  
with the regime began to grow. This was not so much a response to the  
political policies of the new government, as to its failure to stem the  
chaos in the economy. Bolshevik actions such as the dissolution of the  
Constituent Assembly and the conclusion of the Treaty of Brest  
Litovsk caused murmurs of disquiet, but rocketing unemployment  
and the chronic dearth of food caused open disaffection in some  
quarters. The moderate socialists sought to give political shape to  
these grievances. It is not the purpose of the present work, however, to  
examine the character and scope of this anti-Bolshevik reaction in the  
Petrograd working class, but rather to examine how the chaos in the  
economy affected the situation in the workplace.

The chaos which engulfed industry gave rise to violent, destructive  
moods among a minority of workers. Calls from anarchists to ‘smash’,  
‘bring down’ or ‘occupy’ evoked a definite response. In February the  
government warned factory committees to be ready to dismantle  
machinery in the event of a German advance. In one or two factories  
this led to an orgy of machine-breaking, even though the Germans got  
no nearer the capital than Pskov.78 Negative feelings were manifest in  
conflicts between unemployed and employed workers. At the Sie-  
mens-Schukert works 7,000 workers were made redundant, and some  
of them threatened violence to those whose jobs had been spared. In  
April groups of the unemployed picketed the Obukhov works as the  
morning shift went into work.79 The unemployed began to organise,  
but in a manner which socialists could not condone. A meeting of the  
unemployed in Vyborg, Lesnyi and Novoderevenskii districts issued  
a statement, under the signature of the ‘Party of the Unemployed’,  
which declaimed: ‘The people have come to understand the dirty  
deeds of the Yids. Jews have settled on all the committees. We suggest  
that they leave Petrograd within the next three days.’80 The  
proto-fascist Union of the Russian People seems to have come out of  
hiding at this time and may bear some responsibility for this revival of  
antisemitism. Such ugly moods, however, were characteristic of only  
a minority.

The Mensheviks sought to channel the discontent of the un-  
employed in an anti-Bolshevik direction. A Committee for Struggle

Against Unemployment was set up, which organised a demonstration  
of the unemployed on 24 March. This voiced harsh criticism of the  
government and, in particular, of the redundancy terms fixed by the  
trade unions.81 Fearing the political mileage which the Mensheviks  
might make out of unemployment, the Bolsheviks convened an  
official conference of the unemployed on 2 April. A wide range of  
issues was discussed, and demands were raised for state unemploy-  
ment benefit. The Bolshevik, Medvedev, said that the government  
could simply not afford this at present. Some scepticism was  
expressed at the idea of setting up a union of the unemployed, but the  
general feeling was that this would be a good idea. The conference  
called for an end to compulsory work on public projects (which led to  
one losing one’s place in the queue at the Labour Exchange), and for  
the creation of artels and cooperative workshops. The government was  
asked to ‘tax the propertied classes unmercifully’, to deduct contribu-  
tions to a fund for the unemployed from the wages of those in work,  
and to issue extra rations cards to the unemployed.82 In spite of the  
initiatives of both Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, however, the success  
of organisations of the unemployed appears to have been linited.

Among those workers who remained in work, the problem of  
labour-discipline grew ever worse. From their inception, the factory  
committees and trade unions had taken an active interest in  
labour-discipline, and the problem now became of acute concern to  
them, as discipline broke down under the impact of unemployment  
and starvation. At Putilov the works committee issued a warning to  
the workforce immediately after the seizure of power: ‘Regrettably,  
there are some comrades (not many, it is true) who understand  
freedom as licence for their desires, as unruliness, and this always  
harms the general affairs of the working class. So it is the duty of every  
comrade to curb and prevent the emergence of licentiousness and  
unruliness.’83 Some 12,000 Putilovtsy stayed away from work during  
November because there was nothing for them to do. When the works  
committee managed to procure sixty wagonloads of coal through a  
‘pusher’, it called on the absentee workers to return to the factory to  
unload the coal. Only two workers turned up for work. The rest did  
not bother, since they were receiving two-thirds their normal pay  
whilst they were laid off. The committee decided to take drastic  
measures by sacking persistent absentees and by cutting off the pay of  
skilled workers who refused to do unskilled jobs.84 In spite of these  
harsh measures, labour discipline at Putilov continued to be poor

throughout 1918. On 10 May the Petrograd Soviet called on  
Putilovtsy to improve productivity, and the works committee prom-  
ised to do so.85 On 17 May SNKh S.R. informed the factory that:  
‘whoever wastes even one pud of coal, whoever causes the factory  
chimney to smoke in vain for even five minutes is a criminal’.86 Three  
days later the works committee promised: ‘we shall strain every  
nerve; we shall drive the lazy and those with little consciousness;  
working hours shall be devoted solely to work’. It ended its resolution  
with the twin slogans ‘Long live labour-discipline!’ and ‘Long live the  
world revolution!’87

Pressure for tough measures to counter labour indiscipline arose as  
much from the grass roots as from government authorities. On 24  
January the workers at the Nevka cotton mill met to discuss how to  
combat deteriorating labour-discipline at the factory. Their resolu-  
tion said: ‘Having discussed the anarchy which holds sway in  
production, which is beneficial only to our enemies, the capitalists,  
who seek to profit from falling labour-productivity by increasing the  
price of goods, we now realise the seriousness of the situation in the  
country and will not allow our enemies to gloat at us. We must show  
that we are not the old, browbeaten workers of tsarism, and that the  
capitalist stick is now totally unnecessary. Their interests are alien to  
us, it is our own interests which matter, and the best defence of our  
power is to uphold the country’s industry. We shall start along the  
path of creative, constructive work and none of us has the right to  
leave a machine five minutes before finishing time. Whoever finishes  
before time and leaves the workshop, will be sacked immediately or  
brought before a court and then dismissed.’88

Some labour leaders were opposed to the use of punitive sanctions,  
such as dismissal, to restore productivity. Larin, for example, argued  
that even the most draconian measures could not halt the decline in  
labour-productivity, since this was due to starvation rather than  
indiscipline. He called for higher wages, greater workers’ control and  
moral suasion.89 A survey by Strumilin of twenty-seven factories in  
Petrograd lent support to Larin’s diagnosis. He calculated that nearly  
half the fall in labour-productivity was due to sheer physical  
exhaustion of workers, and only 21% to the decay of discipline and  
motivation.90 Most trade-union leaders, however, felt that the  
breakdown of labour-discipline reflected a change for the worse in  
workers’ attitudes.

In a speech to VTsIK (the All-Russian Central Executive

Committee) on 20 March 1918, A. Shlyapnikov, the Commissar of  
Labour, painted a gloomy picture of the Moscow railways and  
Petrograd factories where, he claimed, efforts by factory committees,  
to improve productivity had led to their members being recalled and  
replaced by representatives more compliant with the wishes of the  
rank-and-file. He argued that the only solution to the crisis of  
labour-discipline was the abolition of the guaranteed wage and the  
revival of piece-rates. This speech marked a turning-point, for it  
announced a decree which centralised management on the railways,  
restored the power of individual administrators and granted ‘dictato-  
rial’ powers to the Commissariat of Communications.91

On 2 April the All-Russian Council of Trade Unions declared that  
‘one of the major causes of the fall in labour-productivity is... the lack  
of any kind of production discipline’. It proposed the reintroduction  
of piece-rates, guaranteed norms of output, bonuses and work books,  
in which workers would record their individual productivity. Work-  
ers who did not fulfil output norms for three days in a row would be  
transferred to a lower category, and if they continued to work below  
par would be dismissed. The ARCTU also proposed sanctions  
against lateness for work and opposed workers meeting during  
working hours; it called on factory committees to enforce these  
decisions.92

The most contentious of the proposals designed to improve  
productivity proved to be the revival of piece-rates.

Although the unions had agreed to piece-rates in their contracts of  
1917, little progress had been made in restoring them in practice. In  
January 1918 the Petrograd board of the metal union reaffirmed its  
support for piece-rates,93 but the Petrograd Council of Trade Unions  
appears to have been less happy with the idea. This seems to have  
been due to the influence of D. Ryazanov on the PCTU, who saw  
piece-rates as incompatible with socialism.94 On 25 May the metal  
union persuaded a conference of Petrograd metalworkers to accept  
piece-rates, but only as a temporary measure, and only on condition  
that a worker did not earn more than 25% or 50% above the basic  
rate of the contract. The conference declared: ‘The working class,  
which fought against piece-rates during the years when it had no  
rights, because they were a means of deepening exploitation in the  
hands of the employers, must now agree to their reintroduction under  
strict and effective control, so that, having stripped this method of its  
other features, we can use that which is valuable in it to help

restore industry.’95 In fact, the attempt to revive piece-rates did not  
meet with widespread success.96 On n October 1918 a second  
conference of Petrograd metalworkers voted to abolish piece-rates  
except in exceptional circumstances. The metal section of SNKh S.R.  
pressed for the reversal of this decision, but many factories continued  
to reject piece-rates during the next two years.97

Other measures designed to restore productivity were more  
successfully implemented. The summer of 1918 saw the widespread  
introduction of guaranteed norms ofoutput, bonus incentives and the  
forty-eight-hour week. More controversially, the guaranteed wage  
was abolished and wage-differentials were widened. In a few  
factories, production was reorganised along Taylorist lines.

Finally, the months of May and June 1918 saw the labour  
organisations of Petrograd begin to take a tough line against strikes. A  
strike by the ‘aristocratic’ electricians of the Putilov works was  
roundly condemned by a plenary session of the Petrograd Soviet on 29  
May.98 At the Nevskii shipyard a threatened strike was denounced by  
the Petrograd Council ofTrade Unions, which accused the workers of  
demanding lay-off terms which would ‘turn factories into simple tools  
for extracting money from the national exchequer, to the detriment of  
the whole people’.99 In June a go-slow at the Obukhov works caused  
the Petrograd board of the metal union to take the unprecedented step  
of locking out the workers and declaring the factory closed. The  
decision was taken with five votes against and three abstentions, and  
was confirmed by SNKh S.R.100 Two months later, after the old  
factory committee had been dissolved, the Obukhov works was  
reopened.101 In spite of the strict measures which were being adopted  
towards strikes, however, stoppages, like poor labour-productivity,  
continued to occur throughout the Civil War.

Although the trade unions led the drive to increase labour-  
discipline and productivity, the factory committees also played a part  
in the battle to increase output. This had always been a concern of the  
committees, but it now took precedence over their other concerns.  
During 1918 the desire to transform relations of authority within the  
enterprise gave way to the drive for greater productivity. Workers’  
control was no longer seen in terms of the transformation of the  
relations of workers to production, but in terms of the passive  
supervision of production and, above all, in terms of upholding  
labour-discipline.102 Yet one cannot see in this a triumph of the  
Bolshevik party over the factory committees. From the first, the

committees had been committed both to maintaining production and  
to democratising factory life, but the condition of industry was such  
that these two objectives now conflicted with one another. The factory  
committees, in general, consented to the prioritisation of produc-  
tivity: they acquiesced in, and even initiated, impulses towards  
stricter labour-discipline. Nevertheless, they and the organised  
rank-and-file resisted impulses towards authoritarianism which they  
disliked. In spite of the great respect and affection in which Lenin was  
held, for example, his views on one-man management were quietly  
ignored. Similarly, while most organised workers agreed to the  
priority of restoring productivity, they were not prepared to counte-  
nance the unconditional reintroduction of piece-rates. Party leaders  
and trade-union officials were thus not able to ‘impose’ their policies  
on the factory committees. In any case, there was no need to do so, for  
they could count on the support of the factory committees, who could  
see no alternative to the unpleasant policies being advocated.

After October labour organisations were no longer accountable  
only to their members: they were also accountable to the Bolshevik  
government. There thus began the process whereby these organisa-  
tions lost their independent character and became incorporated into  
the new state apparatus. Already by early 1918 the relationship of  
labour organisations to their members was distinctly less democratic  
than in the preceding year. Most factory committee activists believed  
that the policies of the government were in the interests of the working  
class, but it was not always easy to persuade the workers that this was  
so. Efforts by the committees to strengthen labour-discipline at a time  
when redundancies and starvation were ravaging working-class life  
proved particularly unpopular. ‘Bureaucratic’ tendencies, which had  
existed within the committees from the start, now began to come to  
the fore. There were complaints that factory committees at the Pipe,  
Nobel, Old Lessner, Langenzippen and the Cartridge works had  
ignored demands from general meetings that they submit for  
re-election.103 The Mensheviks saw in this, a ‘system of terror,  
violence and tyranny in which one section of the workers has become  
a tool at the service of the government, bringing discord and  
demoralisation into the ranks of the working class and ultimately  
disorganising and weakening it’.104 One need not concur with this  
judgement, to recognise that the committees were beginning to  
exploit the degree of autonomy which they enjoyed as representative  
organs, in order to resist what they regarded as dangerous demands

from the shop floor, threatening the security of the revolution. From  
the beginning of 1918, they began to bypass democratic practices  
when these seemed to conflict with higher goals. The triumph of  
bureaucratic tendencies over democratic ones was by no means a  
foregone conclusion at the point at which we break off our story, but  
since 1917 the balance between the two had shifted decisively in  
favour of the former.

**Conclusion**

The labour movements of Western Europe were dominated by skilled  
artisans for most of the nineteenth century. Trades, such as tailors,  
shoemakers, cabinet-makers, carpenters and the building trades,  
spearheaded the radical and labour movements.1 In contrast, the  
factory proletariat, which consisted to a large extent of women and  
children, was, with certain exceptions, badly organised and political-  
ly quiescent.2 Only in the last quarter of the nineteenth century did  
trade unionism begin to expand beyond the ranks of an elite of  
artisans and skilled factory craftsmen. The evolution of the Petrograd  
labour movement was far more telescoped that its counterparts in the  
countries of Western Europe. Although the number of strikes and  
informal labour organisations grew rapidly during the last quarter of  
the nineteenth century, it was not until the 1905 Revolution that a  
formal labour movement was inaugurated. Although artisans played  
an important part in creating trade unions and socialist  
organisations,3 by 1917 the labour movement of the Russian capital  
was based predominantly on workers in factory industry, workers  
employed in huge enterprises which were among the most modern in  
the world. Whilst this working class corresponded in some respects to  
the Marxian model of the modern working class, since it was  
employed in large-scale machine industry, in other respects, it was  
not yet a fully-developed proletariat. Within its ranks, urbanised,  
hereditary proletarians were still outnumbered by newcomers to  
industry, who retained strong ties to the countryside. The labour  
movement which was re-established in Petrograd after the February  
Revolution, therefore, had a hybrid character. Based on the modern  
factory rather than the artisanal workshop, it embraced a gamut of  
types of workers from the traditional artisan, to the skilled worker of

the modern assembly plant, to the peasant migrant worker, so  
familiar in the Third World today.

The factory workforce of Petrograd was highly differentiated by  
degree of proletarianisation, by skill and wage-level, by gender, age  
and education. Each of these variables had its own effectivity within  
the struggles of the working class in 1917, and, in particular  
circumstances, could become ‘overdetermined’, as for instance, in the  
conflict between male and female workers over redundancies, or the  
conflict between skilled and unskilled workers during the metal-union  
contract negotiations. Nevertheless, one can crudely generalise, and  
say that within the workforce in 1917 there were two broad groups of  
workers: the first, consisting of proletarianised, skilled, literate, male  
workers, who comprised around 40% of the total factory workforce;  
the second, consisting of workers new to industry - mainly rural  
migrants, women and youth. The first group - sometimes called by  
contemporaries ‘cadre’ workers — should not, as a whole, be  
considered a ‘labour aristocracy’, for although there were aristocratic  
strata within it — the best-paid type-setters in the print trade, the  
starshie in the armaments factories or the glass-blowers of the glass  
industry — the majority of skilled men, whilst earning higher wages  
and being culturally distinct from the new workers, lacked the strong  
craft traditions on which the power of the ‘labour aristocracy’ in  
nineteenth-century Britain had been based. Moreover, their skills  
were not the all-round skills of the artisanal workshop, but the more  
specialised skills of the modern factory. The widespread introduction  
of the new technology of mass production during the First World War  
facilitated the big increase in numbers of the second group of new  
workers. The expansion of mass production in the metal and chemical  
industries allowed the rapid absorption of new workers into semi-  
skilled and unskilled jobs. The working-class women, the peasant  
youths and the urban petit-bourgeois who poured into the factories of  
the capital had little prior experience of wage-work in modern  
industry, but it did not take long to train them to operate automatic  
machinery or tend assembly lines. They quickly adapted to the  
fevered tempo of work in the war industries and to the discipline of the  
piece-rate system. The young, in particular, were soon at home in the  
factory and the city. Nevertheless, in 1917 the new workers were still  
culturally distinct from the ‘cadre’ workers, who tended to regard  
them as the ‘backward masses’.

The existence of two broad social groups within the workforce was

by no means a new phenomenon brought about by the war. As far  
back as the 1880s, contemporaries had noted the phenomenon and  
had speculated on the revolutionary propensities of each group.  
Kropotkin, one of the fathers of Russian anarchism, predicted that it  
would be the spontaneous militancy of the fabrichnie, the down-  
trodden peasants and women of the textile mills, which would spark  
off the social revolution.4 In contrast, Plekhanov, the father of  
Russian Marxism, envisaged that the zavodskie, or skilled workers of  
the metal plants, would provide the basis of the revolutionary  
movement, because of their greater proletarianisation, literacy and  
leisure time.5 The experience of 1917 suggests that the two groups  
played different, but largely complementary roles in the revolution-  
ary process. Those who built the labour movement were the ‘cadre’  
workers, especially metalworkers, for they had more time and money  
at their disposal, were at home in the factory, were more literate, had  
experience of informal shop-floor organisation and a degree of  
job-control, and were thus better placed to participate in labour and  
political activities. The new workers, on the other hand, were often  
more turbulent than the ‘cadre’ workers because they combined the  
manifold discontents of the low-paid worker with the grievances of the  
poor peasants and the specific oppressions of women and youth.  
Their militancy, however, was often of an explosive, sectional and  
volatile kind, and tended to threaten the attempts of the factory  
committee and trade-union leaders to build sustained, formal  
organisations. The labour leaders were not unsympathetic to the  
plight of the new workers, but they sought to direct their militancy  
into organised channels. They had some success in this, for women  
and peasant workers began in 1917 to engage in organised pursuit of  
their goals and to join trade unions. Young workers in particular,  
displayed a remarkable propensity for self-organisation. In this sense,  
working-class unity became a reality after February, in spite of  
profound divisions within the factory workforce. Yet contradictions of  
interest - between skilled and unskilled, men and women, young and  
old — remained: contradictions which labour leaders were reluctant to  
recognise. For while they aspired to bring the inexperienced and  
badly-off groups of workers into the orbit of the labour movement,  
they were unwilling to make special provision for the particular needs  
of the unskilled, the peasant migrants, working women or of youths.  
As a result, the participation of the latter in labour organisations and  
in revolutionary politics more generally, remained fairly tenuous. As

**the economy collapsed in early 1918, contradictions of interest  
between different groups of workers came to the fore, with the result  
that the unity of the previous year began to fall apart.**

The tsarist factory was, in certain respects, a microcosm of the wider  
society. The structure of authority, the conditions of work, the low  
wages placed workers in a semi-servile position, and they welcomed  
the February Revolution as emancipation from this ‘serfdom’.  
Workers saw the overthrow of the Romanov dynasty as the signal to  
create a democratic, or ‘constitutional’ factory order: firstly, by  
expelling the most unpopular administrators and, secondly, by  
establishing representative institutions to promote their interests as  
wage-earners within both the factory and society at large. In a very  
short time, workers won the eight-hour day and big wage-increases to  
compensate for wartime inflation. The Petrograd employers’ associa-  
tion, having long resisted a more liberal industrial-relations policy,  
quickly reconciled itself to the ‘constitutional’ order in the factories,  
and conceded the greater part of the workers’ demands.

The factory committees were the greatest gain made by workers as  
a result of the February Revolution. They had their roots in the  
tradition of the starosty, and perhaps, too, in the informal job control of  
skilled workers, which was increasingly threatened by rationalisation  
and de-skilling. The committees were strongest in the state sector,  
where skilled workers of a defencist persuasion temporarily took over  
the running of their enterprises, in order to ensure that production for  
the war effort was not put in jeopardy. It was out of this experience  
that the ideas of workers’ control of production and collegial  
management were born. In the private sector the factory committees  
at first had largely trade-union functions, for it took some time for the  
unions to re-establish themselves, but everywhere the committees  
took on a wide range of tasks within and without the workplace. They  
asserted their right to monitor hiring and firing, to supervise the  
general running of the factory, and they intervened in areas as diverse  
as food-supply, education and law and order. Because state power  
was relatively ineffective, the committees became a central part of  
that ‘counter-state’ which was built up by workers between February  
and October, and in whose name the Bolsheviks seized power.6

The trade unions took some time to get off the ground, especially in  
the metal industry, where the factory committees were strongest.  
Throughout 1917 the unions were less influential than the commit-

tees, for the latter were more popular, more democratic and more  
powerful than the unions. It would be wrong, however, to minimise  
the importance of the unions, for they grew at a remarkable rate,  
becoming genuine mass organisations, and playing a crucial part in  
the revolutionary process. Craft unionism proved relatively weak in  
Petrograd, guild traditions never having been as strongly rooted in  
Russia as in Western Europe. The ‘modern’ character of the factory  
workforce seemed to call for industrial unionism, and the socialists  
who led the union movement found this more politically appealing  
than craft unionism. Although the reformist socialists were a powerful  
influence in the unions at a national level, in Petrograd the Bolsheviks  
and Mensheviks were fairly evenly balanced, with the influence of the  
former growing rapidly. Given their large size and the inhospitable  
conditions in which they began to operate, the unions proved  
themselves surprisingly effective as organisations representing the  
interests of workers as a whole. It was only after October, when the  
unions became subject to the Bolshevik government, that bureaucra-  
tisation developed on a significant scale.

Accelerating inflation rapidly undermined the wage-gains which  
workers had made in the spring, largely by means of small-scale,  
localised struggles. The unions sought to restore the real wages of  
workers by negotiating city-wide contracts covering all workers in  
each branch of industry. The contracts aimed to improve the position  
of the low-paid, in part by diminishing wage-differentials, and so  
many low-paid workers joined the unions in the summer of 1917.  
Negotiations of the contracts were often protracted, however, and as  
the position of the low-paid grew progressively worse, they turned  
increasingly to unofficial direct action in an effort to defend them-  
selves against rocketing inflation. This brought some sections of the  
rank-and-file into conflict with union leaders - conflict which was  
exacerbated when the compromises made between union negotiators  
and the employers became known. There was considerable opposi-  
tion to the final terms of the metal contract, for example, because  
ferocious inflation had eaten away the value of the wage increases by  
the time the contract was signed. Given the intractability of the  
economic crisis, it was probably an achievement for the unions to  
have succeeded in implementing the contracts at all. The contracts,  
by rationalising the pay structure, by setting-up rates commissions  
and, above all, by linking wages to productivity, prefigured aspects of  
Bolshevik labour-policy after 1917. And within the metal union a

‘productivist’ current, which celebrated efficiency, planning and the  
‘culture of production’, adumbrated the movement for the ‘scientific  
organisation of labour’ which was to develop in the 1920s.

The deepening crisis of the economy provides the backdrop to the  
political radicalisation of Petrograd workers. The inability, or-  
perceived unwillingness, of the Kerensky government to protect the  
gains made by workers after the February Revolution, led to growing  
disillusionment with the moderate socialists who supported the  
government. Workers now began to look to their own organisations  
for protection. It was the movement for workers’ control of produc-  
tion which translated growing economic discontent into sympathy for  
the Bolshevik party. Workers’ control had its roots in the democra-  
tisation of factory life, but the main impulse behind the movement  
sprang from the efforts of the factory committees to maintain  
production and to defend jobs — at a time when massive redundancies  
and the collapse of the war industries loomed on the horizon. Initially,  
the scope of workers’ control was fairly modest: it aimed to supervise  
the activities of management in order to ensure that it did not  
‘sabotage’ production or endanger workers’ jobs. As economic  
disorder and class conflict grew, however, the factory committees  
broadened the scope of control. No longer did they confine themselves  
to procuring fuel and raw materials and to inspecting the process of  
production, they increasingly intervened in every sphere of manage-  
ment decision-making, demanding the right to attend board meetings  
and access to financial accounts and order-books. Although the  
movement aimed to limit the power of management, it cannot be  
considered a ‘syndicalist’ movement, for the determination of the  
committees to combat ‘sabotage’ was motivated more by practical  
than ideological considerations. Within Petrograd, anarchist and  
syndicalist influence was limited, and conceptions of workers’ control  
were not articulated in syndicalist terms at either factory level or on  
the CCFC.7 Whilst the committees rejected Menshevik and SR calls  
for state control of the economy, they endorsed Bolshevik perspectives  
for centralised coordination of the economy by a proletarian state  
power. There were, however, differences of emphasis between the  
leaders of the factory committees, the majority of whom were  
Bolsheviks, and the official party spokesmen. Committee activists  
appear to have had more faith in the capacity of grass-roots control to  
restore order in the economy than did some party leaders. Moreover  
they linked the battle to combat economic disorder to the struggle to

limit the prerogatives of the employers and, consequently, placed  
much greater emphasis than did most party leaders on the necessity of  
transforming authority-relations at enterprise level, as part of the  
transition to socialism.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that the Bolsheviks  
cynically manipulated the factory committees for their own ends. The  
radicalisation of the movement for workers’ control gave the party  
enormous opportunity to win wide support for its policies, but it did  
not control the movement: it responded to it, trying to steer it in the  
direction it believed was proper. It was the organised working class,  
not the Bolshevik party, which was the great power in society — more  
powerful than even the capitalist class, as its success in resisting  
redundancies suggests. The collapse of the system of war capitalism,  
however, in early 1918 destroyed the strength of the working class,  
and it was only at that point that the Bolsheviks were in a position to  
achieve a monopoly of power.

The advent to power of the Bolsheviks in October raised the hopes  
and aspirations of workers in a similar way to the February  
Revolution, yet it made little difference to their working lives, for the  
economic situation continued to get worse. Initially, Lenin supported  
a radical interpretation of the Decree on Workers’ Control, although  
he did not envisage a rapid transition to a socialist economy.  
Gradually, however, he became convinced that workers’ control  
could not cope with the deep structural crisis of the economy, and he  
came to side with the trade-union critics of the factory committees.  
The Bolsheviks on the CCFC favoured a speedy transition to  
socialism, and they were the most vocal section of the party pressing  
for a system of central economic planning and state ownership of  
industry. Under such a system, the factory-committee Bolsheviks  
envisaged that workers’ control would be transmuted into workers’  
management of individual enterprises. At factory level, many com-  
mittee activists saw the Decree on Workers’ Control as opening the  
way to workers’ self-management, but in practice most of the  
control-commissions set up by the Decree confined themselves to  
circumscribing drastically the power of management, whilst not  
displacing it altogether. In the circumstances, this policy did not  
prove workable. Most employers resisted the more ambitious style of  
workers’ control, and preferred to close down their factories rather  
than to submit to it. As a result, in a few instances, the control-  
commissions were forced to take over the actual running of the

factories in a vain effort to save jobs. Such takeovers — although  
occurring in only a minority of Petrograd factories - were crucial in  
pushing the government in the direction of full-scale nationalisation.  
‘Nationalisations from below’, together with escalating chaos in  
industry, persuaded the government finally to nationalise the whole  
of industry in June 1918. This proved, however, not to be the  
realisation of self-management, as the factory-committee activists  
had expected, but the first step in a process which culminated in the  
full restoration of one-man management.

There is some indication that prior to October the factory  
committees were beginning to accept the idea of a merger with the  
trade unions, but after October conflict between the two organisa-  
tions flared up, as both tried to compete in the business of regulating  
the economy. The factory committees were accused by the unions of  
being selfish, parochial organisations, unsuited to the broad tasks of  
restoring order to the economy. Instances of such parochialism were  
in fact few in Petrograd, but there were just enough examples of  
committees refusing to share precious stocks of fuel and raw materials  
(at the Metal, Triangle and Copper-Rolling works)8 to make the  
trade-union charges stick. There is no real evidence that the  
committees were exacerbating the chaos in the economy, as the  
unions claimed, but nor were they managing to cope with it, as they  
claimed they could. As the factories closed down, and as hundreds of  
thousands of workers fled from Petrograd, centralism and firm  
discipline became the order of the day. Only the unions seemed  
capable of achieving these things. Consequently, the government  
decided that the factory committees must be absorbed into the  
apparatus of the trade unions.

By the spring of 1918, Lenin was haunted by the fact that the  
economic infrastructure of socialism did not exist in Russia. The  
political superstructure was there, in the shape of a soviet govern-  
ment, but not the material base. This existed only in the West - above  
all, in Germany. This led him to observe that: ‘History has taken such  
a peculiar course that it has given birth to two unconnected halves of  
socialism, existing side by side like two future chickens in a single shell  
of international imperialism. In 1918 Germany has become the most  
striking embodiment of the material realisation of the economic,  
productive and socio-economic conditions for socialism on the one  
hand, and Russia, the embodiment of the political conditions on the

other.’9 The Treaty of Brest Litovsk signalled the fact that revolution  
would not break out immediately in Germany. Every effort, therefore,  
had to be made to build up the productive forces in Russia. As Lenin  
argued:

**The task of the day is to restore the productive forces destroyed by the war  
and by bourgeois rule; to heal the wounds inflicted by the war and by the  
defeat in the war, by profiteering and the attempts of the bourgeoisie to  
restore the overthrown rule of the exploiters; to achieve economic revival; to  
provide reliable protection of elementary order. It may sound paradoxical,  
but, in fact, considering the objective conditions mentioned, it is absolutely  
certain that at the present moment the Soviet system can secure Russia’s  
transition to socialism only if these very elementary, extremely elementary  
problems of maintaining public life are practically solved.10**

This meant, first and foremost, raising the productivity of labour: ‘the  
Russian worker is a bad worker in comparison with the advanced  
nations ... To learn to work is the task that the Soviet government  
must set the people in all its scope.’11 In turn, this meant the  
restoration of ‘iron discipline’ in the workplace, the revival of  
piece-rates, productivity deals and, above all, one-man management.

Implicit within the movement for workers’ control was a belief that  
capitalist methods cannot be used for socialist ends. In their battle to  
democratise the factory, in their emphasis on the importance of  
collective initiatives by the direct producers in transforming the  
work-situation, the factory committees had become aware — in a  
partial and groping way, to be sure - that factories are not merely sites  
of production, but also of reproduction — the reproduction of a certain  
structure of social relations based on the division between those who  
give orders and those who take them, between those who direct and  
those who execute. The leaders of the factory committees never  
developed these insights into a systematic strategy for socialism,  
alternative to that of Lenin and the majority of the Bolshevik  
leadership; yet inscribed within their practice was a distinctive vision  
of socialism, central to which was workplace democracy.

Lenin believed that socialism could be built only on the basis of  
large-scale industry as developed by capitalism, with its specific types  
of productivity and social organisation of labour. Thus for him,  
capitalist methods of labour-discipline or one-man management were  
not necessarily incompatible with socialism. Indeed, he went so far as  
to consider them to be inherently progressive, failing to recognise that  
such methods undermined workers’ initiatives at the point of  
production. This was because Lenin believed that the transition to

socialism was guaranteed, ultimately, not by the self-activity of  
workers, but by the ‘proletarian’ character of the state power.

Maurice Brinton, the libertarian critic of Bolshevism, has exposed  
the inadequacy of his conception:

**None of them [i.e. the Bolshevik leaders] saw the proletarian nature of the  
Russian regime as primarily and crucially dependent on the exercise of  
workers’ power at the point of production (i.e. on workers’ management of  
production). It should have been obvious to them as Marxists that if the  
working class did not hold economic power, its ‘political’ power would at best  
be insecure and would in fact soon degenerate. The Bolshevik leaders saw the  
capitalist organisation of production as something which, in itself, was  
socially neutral. It could be used indifferently for** bad **purposes (as when the  
bourgeoisie used it with the aim of promoting private accumulation) or** good  
**ones (as when the ‘workers” state used it ‘for the benefit of many’).12**

This critique is absolutely on target. There is no doubt that Lenin did  
conceive proletarian power in terms of the central state and lacked a  
conception of localising such power at the point of production.13

A more far-reaching critique of Bolshevik strategy at this time has  
been developed by writers of Maoist persuasion - principally, the  
French economist Charles Bettelheim. He argues that the Bolsheviks  
were wrong to believe that the possibility of socialist advance is, in  
any sense, determined by the level of productive forces. He follows  
Mao Zedong in arguing that the transformation of relations of  
production clears the way for the development of productive forces  
rather than vice versa.14 He contends that because the Bolsheviks -  
with the heroic exception of Lenin, whom he unwarrantedly excludes  
from his strictures — erroneously believed that the level of productive  
forces dictates the possibilities of socialist advance, they therefore  
subordinated the transformation of capitalist social relations to the  
drive to increase industrial output. The consequent absence of a  
strategy for transforming work-relations meant that output increased  
within a framework of capitalist rather than socialist relations of  
production. The capitalist division of labour and the ideological and  
political relations which are an effect of this division, were thus  
constantly reproduced, paving the way, Bettelheim avers, for the  
ultimate restoration of a ‘state bourgeoisie’.

There is much in Bettelheim’s stimulating critique with which one  
can agree. The Bolshevik strategy of transition did indeed centre on  
building the ‘economic base’ (‘socialism equals electrification plus  
soviet power’), with little attention being paid to transforming social  
relations. But in denying that the level of productive forces exercises

any constraint on the possibilities of socialist advance, Bettelheim is  
guilty of the grossest voluntarism. The implication of his argument is  
that the subsequent development of the Soviet state was the  
consequence of a simple theoretical error (‘economism’). Whilst he  
mentions the intractable economic and social circumstances in which  
the Bolsheviks found themselves, these objective constraints do not  
really function as part of his explanation of the degeneration of the  
revolution.

A satisfactory examination of the theoretical relationship of forces  
of production to relations of production, would take us into rarefied  
spheres well outside the scope of this work. Marx centrally assumed  
that the creation of socialist relations of production was possible only  
on the basis of a certain level of productive forces, but his treatment of  
this question is problematical, because his concept of the ‘productive  
forces’ at times smacks of technological determinism. This led the  
Second International to interpret the question in a way that was  
unambiguously technological-determinist. Theoreticians such as K.  
Kautsky conceived the ‘productive forces’ as technology and the  
ever-growing scale of production. They argued that these, being  
social in character, would come into ever-increasing conflict with the  
constricting mode of appropriation based on private ownership.  
Finally, the productive forces would burst the fetters of private  
ownership, but would provide the material base for a socialist  
reorganisation of society, once a socialist government came to power.  
It is possible, however, to find in Marx’s writings, a broader  
conception of ‘productive forces’, which does not reduce them to  
technology or productive capacity. This conceives productive forces  
as all those capacities and resources which are harnessed to  
producing use-values. These forces, which can never be divorced  
from the social forms in which they are embodied, include not merely  
types of industrial and agricultural production, but modes of social  
cooperation, the application of knowledge and cultural forms.15  
Above all, Marx sees the principal ‘productive force’ as being the  
working class itself.16 In the light of this broader conception, it  
becomes clearer why Marx considered that a developed level of  
productive forces was necessary to the construction of socialism; for  
only a high level of productive forces could make possible the big  
reduction in necessary labour time which would enable the whole  
people to participate in self-government and civilisation. Without an  
adequate level of productive forces, ‘want is merely made general

and, with destitution, the struggle for necessities and all the old filthy  
business is necessarily reproduced’.17 Socialism, in other words,  
would cease to be the entry into freedom, and become a struggle for  
survival instead.

With this in mind, it is possible to understand the cruel dilemma in  
which the Bolsheviks found themselves in 1918. They were intent on  
creating democratic socialism, but their priority had to be the  
reconstruction of the productive forces, especially, the revival of  
labour-discipline. In the short term, the limited use of forms of  
compulsion, in particular, the application of capitalist methods of  
labour-discipline and labour-intensification, was probably unavoid-  
able. Yet most of the Bolshevik leadership seemed unaware of the  
dangers posed to the goal of democratic socialism by the long-term  
use of methods which undermined workers’ self-activity in produc-  
tion. This was largely a consequence of the ideological problematic  
within which they thought through the problems of socialist construc-  
tion. This problematic - still, in large part, that which had been  
inherited from the Second International - construed the productive  
forces in a narrow, technicist fashion and conceived the types of  
productivity and social organisation of labour engendered by capital-  
ist society as being inherently progressive. Moreover within this  
problematic the absence of a notion of workers’ self-activity in the  
realm of production as being a constituent element of socialist  
transition was especially glaring. If the Bolsheviks had been more  
critical of this Second International problematic, it is possible that  
they would have been more alive to the dangers of using coercive  
methods to restore the battered productive forces, except as an  
emergency measure. Whether such an awareness could have pre-  
vented the degeneration of the democratic socialist revolution in the  
long term, however, as Bettelheim suggests - given the persistence of  
war, economic isolation and cultural backwardness - seems doubtful.  
The depressing experience of socialist societies to date suggests that  
the imperatives of economic and social development in under-  
developed societies necessitate types of compulsion which ultimately  
conflict with the creation of free social relations. In other words, even  
if the Bolshevik government had been more percipient concerning the  
dangers to democratic socialism posed by the methods which it was  
forced to adopt, it seems probable that objective circumstances would  
ultimately have conspired to drain socialism of its democratic  
content. As it was, blind to the risks that it was running, the

government was very quickly forced along a path which in October  
1917 it had never dreamed of traversing. Already by 1921, the  
Bolsheviks no longer represented a socialism of liberty, but one of  
scarcity, in which the needs of individual and human liberation were  
firmly subordinate to the exigencies of economic development.

**Notes**

INTRODUCTION

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NOTES TO CHAPTER I

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16. Stepanov, *Rabochie Petrograda,* p.42.
17. **Stepanov,** Rabochie Petrograda, **pp.43-4, concludes that ‘the figure of 50%  
    for new recruits to the working class of Petrograd during the war years can  
    scarcely be considered an underestimate’. L.M. Kleinbort,** Istoriya  
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    citing a source, that at the beginning of 1918 the Commissariat of Labour  
    (Narkomtrud) reckoned that half the workers of Petrograd were either  
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18. **N.D. Karpetskaya,** Rabotnitsy i velikii oktyabr' **(Leningrad, 1974), p ig.**
19. Golos rabotnitsy, **5—6, 17 June 1917, p. 14. A perusal of the job-vacancies  
    column of** Petrogradskaya Gazeta **shows that the type most sought after as a  
    domestic servant was a rural girl with no male acquaintances and  
    prepared to work hard.**
20. **S.G. Strumilin; ‘Sostav proletariata sovetskoi Rossii v I9i7-i9gg.’,** Dva  
    goda diktatury proletariata **(Moscow, 1919), p. 15.**
21. **A. Shlyapnikov,** Semnadtsatyi god, **vol.i (Moscow, 1923), pp.8-11.**
22. **Cited by Rashin,** Formirovanie, **pp.235-6.**
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24. ibid., **p.9.**
25. **J.W. Scott and L.A. Tilly,** Women, work and the family **(New York, 1978).**
26. Kruze, *Peterburgskie rabochie,* p.80.
27. ibid. **p.8o.**
28. **Ts.S.U.,** Trudy, **vol.XXVI, issue 2 (Moscow, 1921), pp.18-23.**
29. *ibid.*
30. Metallist, **6, 18 June 1918, p. 10.**
31. *ibid.*
32. *Materialy ob ekonomicheskom polozhenii i professional'noi organizatsii peterburg-  
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33. **S.G. Strumilin,** Problemy ekonomiki truda **(Moscow, 1964), pp.69-71.**
34. *ibid.;* S. Bernshtein-Kogan, *Chislennost’, sostav i polozhenie peterburgskikh  
    rabochikh* (St Petersburg, 1910), pp.51, 54.
35. **V. Yu. Krupyanskaya, ‘Evolyutsiya semeino-bytovogo uklada  
    rabochikh’,** Rossiiskiiproletariat-oblik, bor'ba,gegemoniya **(Moscow, 1970),  
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36. Tkach, **2 (1917), 7.**
37. **Compare I. Pinchbeck,** Women Workers and The Industrial Revolution  
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    **(London, Pluto, 1973), p.57; T. Dublin, ‘Women, Work and Protest in  
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38. M. Freysinnet, *Le processus de dequalification - surqualifwation de la force de  
    travail* (Paris, 1974), pp.121-2.
39. **A. Gorz, ‘Technology, technicians and class struggle’, in A. Gorz, ed.,**The Division of Labour, **(Brighton, Harvester, 1976). D. Lee, ‘Skill, craft  
    and class: a theoretical critique and a critical case’,** Sociology, **1 (1981);  
    H.A. Turner went so far as to argue that workers are skilled or unskilled  
    ‘according to whether or not entry to their occupations is deliberately  
    restricted and not, in the first place, according to the nature of the  
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    **(London, George, Allen & Unwin, 1962), p.182.**
40. **A. Touraine,** L’evolution du travail ouvrier aux usines Renault **(Paris, 1955);  
    see too H. Braverman,** Labor and Monopoly Capital **(New York, Monthly  
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41. *Rukovodyashchie materialy i postanovleniya tsentral'nogo komiteta vserossiiskogo  
    soyuza rabochikh metallistov,* issue 3 (Moscow, 1924), pp.80-193.
42. **E.J. Hobsbawm,** Labouring Men **(London, 1968); K. Burgess,** The Origins  
    of British Industrial Relations **(London, Croom Helm, 1975), Ch. 1.**
43. **Strumilin,** Problemy, **p.63.**
44. A.M. Buiko, *Put' rabochego: zapiski starogo bol'shevika* (Moscow, 1934),

**p-**3**°.**

1. **A. Buzinov,** Za Nevskoi zastavoi **(Moscow, 1930), pp.20-1.**
2. **The Bolshevik, M.I. Kalinin, recalled in 1940: ‘I remember how in the  
   underground a dispute arose among us: was a worker-revolutionary  
   obliged to work as well as he was able ... Some said: “We cannot, we are**

**organically incapable of letting a bad piece of work out of our hands - it  
would sicken us and demean our dignity.” Others argued against them  
that it was not for us to worry about the quality of our work. It was the  
job of the capitalist. We only worked for them.’ Cited by O.I. Shkaratan  
and A.Z. Vakzer, ‘Razvitie sotsialisticheskogo otnosheniya k trudu:  
rabochie Leningrada v igi7-24gg.’,** Uchenye zapiski Len. gos. ped. in-ta.,  
**165 (1958), p. 108. See also Timofeev,** Chem zhivet, **p.8, for another  
example.**

**no Timofeev,** Chem zhivet, **pp.io-n.**

**in M. Mitel'man, B. Glebov, A. Ul'yanskii,** Istoriya putilovskogo zavoda,  
1901-ij**, 3rd edn. (Moscow, 1961), p.357.**

1. S. Haber, *Efficiency and Uplift: Scientific Management in the Progressive Era,*1890—1920 (Chicago, 1964), p. 120.
2. *Materialy po istoriiprofessional'nogo dvizheniya v Rossii,* 1 (Moscow, 1925),  
   pp. 16-17.
3. **J. Hinton,** The First Shop Stewards Movement **(London, Allen and Unwin,  
   •**973**); C. Goodey, ‘Factory Committees and the Dictatorship of the  
   Proletariat, 1918’,** Critique, **3 (1974), 31.**
4. **I. Gordienko,** Iz boevogoproshlogo, igi4~i8gg. **(Moscow, 1957), p.34. My  
   emphasis. To say that the mood of skilled workers was ‘indifferent’, is not  
   to say that there was not a certain latent hostility to the new wartime  
   recruits. The syndicalist leader of the metalworkers’ union, A. Gastev,  
   wrote: ‘Even in Russia, where craft consciousness** [tsekhovshchina] **has not  
   built as strong a nest for itself as in the West, in the factories among both  
   management and workers there is a suspicion of all newcomers who are  
   not connected with factory professions. Among turners and fitters one  
   still finds a scornful attitude towards the “shoemakers” and “bakers”  
   who are joining the ranks of the factory** chemorabochie **[unskilled workers]  
   in their hundreds.’** Vestnik metallista, **2 (1918), p. 10.**
5. **S.G. Strumilin,** Zarabotnaya plata, **p.15. His method was to examine  
   wage-levels in different industries between June 1914 and June 1916,  
   and to translate the wages of all categories of worker into ratios of the  
   wages of an adult male** chemorabochii **- letting the latter’s wage equal 100.  
   By determining the changes in these ratios during the war, Strumilin  
   obtained an indirect index of de-skilling. It seems to me, however, that  
   there are problems with this method. Firstly, it assumes that the ‘skill’ of  
   a** chemorabochii **is constant across industry and across time. Secondly,  
   wages are not a good indicator of skill, both because of inflation and of  
   inter-factory variation.**
6. **S.G. Strumilin,** Problemy, **p.57. Although international comparisons are  
   treacherous because of the different classifications used, for what it is  
   worth, it was estimated that in Germany the proportion of skilled  
   workers in electrical, machine-construction, car, wire and cable indus-  
   tries was 30% in 1914 and 29% in 1925. In England in the mechanical-  
   engineering industry, 37% of the workforce were skilled in 1913 and  
   35% in 1925. G. Friedmann,** Industrial Society **(Glencoe, Illinois, Free  
   Press, 1955), p.200.**
7. Drobizhev et al., *Rabochii klass sovetskoi Rossii,* p.84.
8. **Rashin,** Formirovanie, **p.83.**
9. *Material'y k uchetu rabochego sostava i rabochego rynka* (Petrograd, 1916),  
   p. 128.
10. *Istoriya leningradskogo soyuza rabochego poligraficheskogo proizvodstva,* vol.i  
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11. **A. Tikhanov, ‘Rabochie-pechatniki v gody voiny’,** Materialy po istorii  
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12. *1st len. soyuza rab. polig.,* p. 15.
13. **A.G. Rashin, ‘Gramotnost' i narodnoe obrazovanie v Rossii v XIXv. i  
    nachale XXv.,** Istoricheskie zapiski, **37 (1951), 37.**
14. **Rashin,** Formirovanie, **p.595.**
15. *Materialy po statistike Petrograda,* issue 4 (1921), p.23.
16. **Stepanov,** Rabochie Petrograda, **p.44.**
17. *Vestnikprofessional’nykh soyuzov,* 2 (1918), p.9.
18. Metallist, **6 (1918), p.8.**
19. **Strumilin,** Problemy, **p.61.**
20. **Leningradskii gos. ist. arkhiv (LGIA), f.416, op.5, d.24, 1.21.**
21. **Rashin,** Formirovanie, **p.583.**
22. *Statisticheskie dannye Petrograda* (1916), p.24.
23. *ibid.*
24. **Strumilin,** Problemy, **p.63.**
25. ibid., **63-9.**
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27. **R. Zelnik, ‘Russian Workers and the Revolutionary Movement’,** Journal  
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28. **At the Putilov works in 1913 the daily earnings of an unskilled woman  
    worker were 36% of those of the highest-paid man. In Germany in the  
    same year the hourly earnings of an unskilled metalworker were 26% of  
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    rabochikh metallicheskoi pronyshlennosti **(Petrograd, 1917), p.8; G. Bry,**Wages in Germany, 1871-1945 **(Princeton, N.J., i960), p.71.**
29. **L. Althusser,** For Marx **(London, Penguin, 1969), Ch.**3**.**

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1. **V.Ya. Laverychev,** Tsarizm i rabochii vopros, i86i—igijgg. **(Moscow, 1972);  
   G. von Rimlinger, ‘Autocracy and factory order in early Russian  
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2. **Laverychev,** Tsarizm i rabochii vopros **(Moscow, 1972).**
3. **J. Schneiderman,** Sergei Zubatov and revolutionary Marxism **(New York,  
   Ithaca, 1976); D. Pospielovsky,** Russian Police Trade Unionism **(London,  
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5. V.E. Bonnell, ‘Trade Unions, Parties and the State in Tsarist Russia’,  
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8. *ibid.*
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11. O. Crisp, ‘Labour and industrialisation in Russia’, Cambridge Economic  
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18. A. Gastev, ‘Novaya industriya’, Vestnik metallista, 2 (1918), 22; V.I.  
    Grinevetskii, Poslevoennyeperspektivy russkoipromyshlennosti (Moscow, 1918),  
    p.151.
19. A.G. Rashin, Formirovanie rabochego klassa Rossii (Moscow, 1958), p.63.
20. S.G. Strumilin, ‘Sostav proletariata sovetskoi Rossii v 1917— i9gg-’, Dva  
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26. A.E. Badaev, *The Bolsheviks in the Tsarist Duma* (London, 1932).
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28. Rabotnitsa, 1-2, 10 May 1917, p.12.
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32. 1st. rab. Len., **pp.348, 407.**
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35. **Stepanov,** Rabochie Petrograda**, p.62.**
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38. Stepanov, *Rabochie Petrograda,* p.62.
39. **I.P. Leiberov,** Na shturm samoderzhaviya **(Moscow, 1979), pp.52-60.**
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42. **S. Milligan, ‘The Petrograd Bolsheviks and Social Insurance, 1914-17’,**Soviet Studies, **20, no.3 (1969), 372.**
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44. *ibid.; Materialy po statistike truda Severnoi oblasti,* issue 2 (Petrograd, 1919),  
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45. **M. Balabanov,** Ot igo^g. k igiyg. **(Moscow, 1927), p.14.**
46. *Materialy ob ekonomicheskom polozhenii i professional'noi organizatsii peter-  
    burgskikh rabochikh po metallu* (St Petersburg, 1909), p.i 19; Timofeev, *Chem  
    zhivet,* pp.38-9.
47. S.G. Strumilin, *Zarabotnaya plata i proizvoditel'nost' truda v promyshlennosti*(Moscow, 1923), p.44.
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49. *ibid.*
50. A. P. Serebrovskii, *Revolyutsiya i zarabotnaya plata rabochikh metallicheskoi  
    promyshlennosti* (Petrograd, 1917) p.8.
51. **M. Gordon,** Workers before and after Lenin **(New York, 1941), p.71 cites a  
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    family income of Russian workers was half that of German workers, 37%  
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52. Strumilin, Problemy, pp.453, 474.
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54. **S.N. Prokopovich,** Byudzhety peterburgskikh rabochikh **(St Petersburg, 1909),  
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55. *ibid.;* M. Davidovich, *Peterburgskii tekstil'nyi rabochii v ego byudzhetakh* (St  
    Petersburg, 1912), p.14.
56. **Prokopovich,** Byudzhety, **p.9.**
57. Davidovich, *Peterburgskii tekstil'nyi rabochii,* p. 10.
58. Rabochaya gazeta, **59, 18 May 1917, p.3.**
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61. Davidovich, *Peterburgskii tekstil'nyi rabochii,* pp.11, 13.
62. Rabochaya gazeta **59, 18 May 1917, p.3.**
63. **M.P. Kokhn,** Russkie indeksy tsen **(Moscow, 1926), p. 18.**
64. Statisticheskie dannye Petrograda **(Petrograd, 1916), p.38; K. Sidorov,  
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    17gg.’ in** Ocherkipo istorii oktyabr'skoi revolyutsii, **ed. M.N. Pokrovskii, vol. 1  
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65. *ibid.*
66. **Strumilin,** Problemy, **p.334.**
67. *1st. rab. Len.,* p.477.
68. ibid., p.471.
69. ibid., **p.470.**
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71. **For a fuller discussion of wages during the war, see my Ph.D. thesis  
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72. *Professional'noe dvizhenie v Petrograde v igfjg.* ed. A. Anskii (Leningrad,  
    1928), p. 13.
73. Stepanov, *Rabochie Petrograda,* p.52.
74. **Payalin,** Zavod imeni Lenina, **p.322.**
75. Serebrovskii, *Revolyutsiya i zarabotnaya plata,* pp.24-5.
76. **Strumilin,** Problemy, **pp.337, 340; Strumilin,** Zarabotnaya plata, **pp.n-12.**
77. Vestnik metallista, **1 (1917), 13; Strumilin,** Problemy, **pp.337, 340.**
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79. **Baklanova,** Rabochie Petrograda, **p.23.**
80. *ibid.*
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83. Laverychev, *Tsarizm i rabochii vopros,* Ch.6.
84. **I.P. Leiberov, ‘Stachechnaya bor'ba petrogradskogo proletariata v  
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    grad, 1963), pp.166, 177, 183. This supersedes M.G. Fleer,** Peterburgskii  
    komitet bol'shevikov v gody imperialisticheskoi voiny, I9i4~i7gg. **(Leningrad,**
85. **and** 1**.**1**. Krylova, ‘K voprosu o statistike stachek petrogradskikh  
    rabochikh v gody pervoi mirovoi voiny’, in** Iz istorii imperializma v Rossii  
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86. **1**st. rab. Len., **p.476.**
87. ibid., **pp.483-5.**
88. ibid., **pp.502-4.**
89. **‘Go-slows’, working-to-rule and other forms of restricting output became  
    very common in Petrograd after 1905. Such practices originated in Britain  
    in 1889, when Glasgow dockers systematically practised ca’ canny. They  
    were popularised by the French anarcho-syndicalist, Emile Pouget, in the  
    1890s and widely applied by the French C.G.T. In Russia these practices**

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**were known as ‘Italian strikes’** {itaiyanskie zabastovkr), **probably after the  
dramatic work-to-rule by Italian railworkers in February 1905. See G.  
Brown,** Sabotage: a study in industrial conflict **(Nottingham, Spokesman,**

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   i8yo~ig2§ **(London, Methuen, 1967), p. 256.**
2. *1st. rab. Len.,* p.511.
3. **It was decided to leave out tables showing the participation of different  
   factories in the wartime strike movement, since similar tables have  
   recently been published in T. Hasegawa,** The February Revolution **-**Petrograd igiy **(Seattle, Washington University Press, 1981), appendix 2.  
   My analysis of these data differs significantly from that of Hasegawa,** ibid.,  
   **pp. 101-2. Sources for the generalisations on the size and composition of  
   the workforces of different factories and on their political complexion in  
   1917 are not cited, in order to avoid burdening the text with footnotes.  
   The data came from my personal factory file which is based on Soviet  
   secondary works, contemporary newspapers and Soviet archival sources.**
4. **D. Koenker, ‘Urban Families, Working-Class Youth Groups and the  
   1917 Revolution in Moscow’, in** The Family in Imperial Russia, **ed. D.L.  
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NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

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2. **Lists of police agents were published in early March in the working-class  
   press, after police stations had been ransacked. See, for example,** Pravda,  
   **7, 12 March 1917, p.4. As late as May, police spies were still being  
   uncovered, cf. the exposure of Roman Berthold, editor of the anarchist  
   newspaper,** Kommuna. Rabochaya Gazeta, **49, 6 May 1917, p.2.**
3. *Krasnaya Letopis',* 3 (1932), 172.
4. M.O. Mitel'man, *lgiy godna Putilovskom zavode* (Leningrad, 1939), P-33;  
   *Rabochii kontrol' v promyshlennykh predpriyatiyakh Petrograda, igiy—i8gg.,*vol.1 (Leningrad, 1947) p.45.
5. **Leningrad State Historical Archive, (LGIA), f.416, op.5, d.30, 1.24.**
6. *Professional'noe dvizhenie v Petrograde v igiyg.,* ed. A. Anskii (Leningrad,
7. **, p.82.**
8. ibid. **p.81.**
9. *Rab. Kontrol’,* p.50.

**V. Perazich,** Tekstili Leningrada v igiyg. **(Leningrad, 1927), p. 19.**Krasnaya Letopis', **5-6 (1932), 189-90.**

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**following figures on the number of cases successfully resolved between  
April and August: at the Baltic works, 12 out of 160 cases heard; at the  
Izhora works, 7 out of 50; at New Admiralty, 3 out of 29; at Obukhov, 3  
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NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

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    them by a long, slow process under the bourgeois order. This explains  
    why in Western Europe the working class - at any rate its superior  
    elements - is so strongly attached to the bourgeois regime, with its  
    democracy, free capitalist press, etc. The belated bourgeois regime in  
    Russia had no time to do any good for the working class and the Russian  
    proletariat broke with the bourgeoisie all the more easily and overthrew  
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4. Novaya Zhizn', **106, 20 Aug. 1917, p.5.**
5. **See the survey of working-class taste in L.M. Kleinbort,** Ocherki rabochego  
   intelligentsii: teatr, zhivopis’, muzika, **vol.2 (Petrograd, 1923), pp.14, 42.**
6. Novaya Zhizn', **70, 9 July 1917, p.5.**
7. Novaya Zhizn', **76, 17 July 1917, p.5;** ibid., **106, 20 Aug. 1917, p.5.**
8. Novaya Zhizn', **82, 23 July 1917, p.5.**
9. Novaya Zhizn', **31, 25 May 1917, p.5.**
10. Novaya Zhizn', **94, 6 Aug. 1917, p.2;** Yunyi Proletarii, **2, 25 Jan. 1918, p.3;**Rabochii, **6, 29 Aug. 1917, p.4.**
11. Novaya Zhizn', **70, 9 July 1917, p.5.**
12. Novaya Zhizn', **128, 15 Sept. 1917, p.7.**
13. **The proceedings of this conference make fascinating reading, fore-  
    shadowing, as they do, the later debates within Proletkult. Luna-  
    charsky, Gorky, Osip Brik and many others took part in discussions  
    about art, education and proletarian culture. The fullest account of the  
    conference proceedings is in P. Gorsen and E. Knodler-Bunte,** Proletkult:  
    System einer Proletarischen Kultur, **Band 1, Dokumentation (Stuttgart,**

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2. **V.I. Lenin,** Collected Works, **4th ed., vol.29 (London, Lawrence and  
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3. **See the excellent discussion of this question by C. Claudin-Urondo,**Lenin and the Cultural Revolution **(Sussex, Harvester, 1977), Ch.3; S.  
   Fitzpatrick,** The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organisation of  
   Education and the Arts under Lunacharsky **(Cambridge, 1970), Ch.5.**
4. **N. Ya. Ivanov,** Velikii oktyabr' v Petrograde **(Leningrad, 1957), p-42.**
5. V.I. Startsev, *Ocherki po istorii Petrogradskoi krasnoi gvardii i rabochei militsii*(Moscow, 1965), pp.44-5.
6. *Revolyutsionnoe dvizhenie posle sverzheniye samoderzhaviya* (Moscow, 1957),  
   p.448.
7. **Startsev,** Ocherki, **p.59.**
8. Ibid., **p.57.**
9. **Tseitlin, ‘Fabrichno-zavodskie komitety’, pp.89-90.**
10. **Startsev,** Ocherki, **p.48.**
11. *Rev. dvizh. posle sverzheniya,* pp.56—8; *Pervyi legal'nyi komitet: sbornik  
    materialov i protokolov zasedanii Peterburgskogo komiteta RSDRP (b.)* (Mos-  
    cow, 1927), p.36.
12. **‘Iz istorii krasnoi gvardii’,** Istoricheskii Arkhiv **5, (1957), 122-3.**
13. **Startsev,** Ocherki, **p.52.**
14. Ibid. **pp.66—9; V. Vinogradov, ‘Krasnaya gvardiya Petrogradskogo  
    metallicheskogo zavoda’,** Krasnaya Letopis', **2 (23) (1927)5 166.**
15. **Startsev,** Ocherki, **p.74.**
16. Ibid., **p.64.**
17. Fab. zav. kom., **pp.71, 451.**
18. **Startsev,** Ocherki, **pp.104-7.**
19. **‘Iz istorii krasnoi gvardii’, p.124.**
20. *Leningradskie rabochie v bor'be za vlast' sovetov* (Leningrad, 1924), p.24.
21. Ibid., **p.23.**
22. **‘Iz istorii krasnoi gvardii’, p. 125.**
23. Pravda, **44, 29 April 1917, p.4.**
24. Novaya Zhizn', **10, 29 April, p.4.**
25. Rabochaya Gazeta, **43, 29 April, p.i;** lzvestiya, **29 April, p.i.**
26. **Startsev estimates that by the end of June as many as 52 factories had  
    contingents of Red Guards, numbering more than 5,000 members  
    (Startsev,** Ocherki, **p. 129). Many of these, however, must have been units  
    of workers’ militia rather than the more politicised Red Guards. An  
    earlier Soviet historian is surely correct to say that ‘down to the Kornilov  
    rebellion, the Red Guard was not a broad mass organisation’. E.  
    Pinezhskii,** Krasnaya goardiya, **2nd ed. (Moscow, 1933), p.33.**
27. **Startsev,** Ocherki, **pp.82-3.**
28. Ibid., **p.86.**
29. Fab. zav. kom., **pp. 144, 284, 458-9.**

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

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2. **V.E. Bonnell, ‘Trade Unions, Parties and the State in Tsarist Russia’,**Politics and Society, **9, no.3 (1980).**
3. Revolutionary Situations in Europe, igiy-22: Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary,  
   **ed. C. Bertrand (Montreal, Inter-University Centre for European  
   Studies,** 1977); **C. Maier,** Recasting Bourgeois Europe **(Princeton Univer-  
   sity Press,** 1975).
4. **I.P. Leiberov,** Na shturm samoderzhaviya **(Moscow, 1979), p.61.**
5. Pravda, **12, 18 March 1917, p.4;** Tkach, **1, Nov.1917, p.28.**
6. Pravda, **9, 15 March 1917, p.4;** Metallist, **12 (1922), 63.**
7. **A. Shlyapnikov,** Semnadtsatyi God, **vol.2 (Moscow, 1925), p.133.**
8. *Professional'noe dvizhenie v Petrograde v rgiyg.,* ed. A. Anskii (Leningrad,
9. **, p.i 19;** Rabochaya Gazeta, **42, 28 April 1917, p.4.**
10. F.A. Bulkin, *Na zare profdvizheniya. Istoriya peterburgskogo soyuza metallistov,  
    ig°6~i4gg.* (Leningrad, 1924), pp.290-1.
11. **The membership figures for the paper, print, tobacco, leather and wood  
    unions exceed the total number of workers in the respective industries in  
    Petrograd. This may partly be due to the fact that these unions included  
    workers in the province of Petrograd, and not just the city, but it seems  
    more likely to be due to the fact that the figures represent not current  
    membership in October and July, but the number of enrollments since  
    March, i.e. they make no allowance for dropouts. Compare V. Ya.  
    Grunt’s analysis of the figures for trade-union membership in Moscow in**Istoriya SSSR, **1 (1965), 232.**
12. **Such a level of unionisation - achieved in less than six months - did not  
    compare badly with the levels in the West. In 1912 about 20% of the  
    total occupied labour force in Britain were members of trade unions; in  
    Germany about 25%; in the USA and Italy about 11% and in France**

**only 8%. Yu. I. Kir'yanov, ‘Ob oblike rabochego klassa Rossii’,**Rossiiskii proletariat **—** oblik, bor'ba, gegemoniya **(Moscow, 1970), p.130.**

1. **The term ‘craft union’ is used to denote a narrow, exclusive union of  
   workers of one specific trade; the term ‘trade union’ is used to denote a  
   union of workers in several related trades; the term ‘industrial union’ is  
   used to denote a union which embraces all workers in a branch of  
   industry, regardless of their job.**
2. **E. Schneider,** Industrial Sociology **(New York, McGraw Hill, 1957), Ch.  
   10.** The American Labor Movement, **ed. D. Brody (New York, Harper and  
   Row, 1971). H. Clegg, A. Fox, A.F. Thompson,** A History of British Trade  
   Unionism **(Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1964) Chs.1,4.**
3. **M. Hanagan,** The Logic of Solidarity **(Urbana, University of Illinois Press,**
4. **; B.H. Moss,** The Origins of the French Labor Movement **(Berkeley,  
   University of California Press, 1976); D. Geary, ‘The German Labour  
   Movement, 1848-1919’,** European Studies Review, **6 (1976) 297-330.**
5. Bulkin, *Na zare profdvizheniya,* p.309.
6. Metallist, **12 (1922),** p.66.
7. Pravda, **41, 26 April 1917, p.4.**
8. Professional'nyi Vestnik, **7, 16 Dec. 1917, p.7.**
9. *Prof. dvizh. v igiyg.,* p.125; *Petrogradskaya Pravda,* 167, 6 Aug. 1918, p.4.
10. Metallist, **1-2, 17 Aug. 1917, p. 14.**
11. *Prof dvizh. v igiyg.,* p.341-
12. Bulkin, *Na zare profdvizheniya,* p.226.
13. Pravda, **51, 7 May 1917, p.3;** Pravda, **57, 14 May 1917, p.3.**
14. **Professional sections existed within the printers’, leatherworkers’,  
    woodworkers’ and other unions in 1917.**
15. Tret'ya vserossiiskaya konferentsiyaprofessional'nykh soyuzov igiyg. **(Moscow,  
    192 7). Pankratova is quite wrong to claim that the Bolsheviks believed in  
    revolutionary industrial unions, whereas the Mensheviks believed in  
    neutral trade unions. A. Pankratova,** Fabzavkomy iprofsoyuzy v revolyutsii  
    ig/7g. **(Moscow, 1927), p.56.**
16. Z.V. Stepanov, *Rabochie Petrograda v period podgotovki i provedeniya  
    oktyabr'skogo vooruzhennogo vosstaniya* (Moscow, 1965), p.89.
17. Ekho derevoobdelochnika, **2, 19 Oct. 1917, p.12.**
18. Ibid., **p. 14.**
19. Ekho derevoobdelochnika, **3, 12 Dec. 1917, p.15.**
20. *Revolyutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii nakanune oktyabr'skogo vooruzhennogo vossta-  
    niya* (Moscow, 1962), p.277.
21. Rabochii Put', **36, 14 Oct. 1917, p.4.**
22. *Oktyabr'skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde* (Moscow, 1957), p.277.
23. Stepanov, *Rabochie Petrograda,* p.90.
24. Professional'nyi Vestnik, **7, 10 Dec. 1917, p.6.**
25. **Gilds (**tsekhi**) had been legalised by Peter the Great in 1722 but had never  
    become deeply entrenched. In the 1850s and 1860s there was a campaign  
    to abolish them. On the latter, see R. Zelnik,** Labor and Society in Tsarist  
    Russia **(Stanford University Press, 1971) pp.120-33. For an interesting  
    account of the** tsekh **system in the bakery trade at the beginning of this  
    century see B. Ivanov,** Po stupen'yam bor'by: zapiski starogo bol'shevika  
    **(Moscow, 1934), pp. 167-9.**

**36 R. Zelnik, ‘Russian Workers and the Revolutionary Movement’,**Journal of Social History, **16, no.2 (1972-3); A. Wildman,** The Making of  
a Workers’ Revolution **(Chicago University Press, 1967), pp. 123-6,**

**1**37**-**49**-  
37 See, for example, the article by D. Kol'tsov,** Professional'nyi Vestnik, **3—4,  
15 Oct. 1917, p.6.**

1. *Shestoi s"ezd RSDRP (6): Protokoly* (Moscow, 1958), p.264.
2. *Prof dvizh. v igi7g.,* p.45.
3. Ibid., **pp.57, 63.**
4. Ibid., **pp.58-9.**
5. Ibid., **p.48. At the Third Conference of Trade Unions a row broke out  
   over the same phrase. Conference voted to substitute the word  
   ‘movement’ for ‘party’. See John Keep’s excellent discussion, J.L.H.  
   Keep,** The Russian Revolution: a study in mass mobilisation **(London,  
   Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), p.89.**
6. **The so-called Interdistrict Group ofSocial Democrats, of which Trotsky  
   became leader after his return from the USA in 1917.**
7. *Prof. dvizh. v iQiyg.,* p.50.
8. *Revolyutsionnoe dvizhenie v iyule: iyul'skii krizis* (Moscow, 1959), P-337-
9. *Prof. dvizh. v igi7g.,* p.53.
10. **Stepanov,** Rabochie Petrograda, **p. 172.**
11. Bor'ba, **3, Sept. 1917, p.i;** Rabochii Put', **10 Sept.1917, p.4.**
12. *Prof. dvizh. v I9i7g.,* p. 123.
13. Ibid., **p. 119. The SRs were a significant influence in the leatherworkers’  
    union, the transport union and the union of postal employees.**
14. Metallist, **2, 19 Feb. 1918, p.9.**
15. S. Volin, *Deyatel'nost' men'shevikov v profsoyuzakh pri sovetskoi vlasti* (New  
    York, 1962), p.32.
16. Ekho derevoobdelochnika, **2, 19 Oct. 1917, p.6.**
17. Zerno Pravdy, **1-2, 10 July 1917, pp.11-12.**
18. Nabat, **5, 18 Nov. 1917, p. 10. There was conflict between Bolsheviks and  
    SR Maximalists in the union, with the latter accusing the former of  
    trying to monopolise control of the union, and the former accusing the  
    latter of sabotaging union work in certain bread-factories.** Ibid., **p. 12 and**Rabota soyuza muchnykh izdelii i osnovanie soyuza pishchevikov igi7g. **(Lening-  
    rad, 1927), p.6.**
19. *Prof. dvizh. v igi7g.,* p. 135.
20. T. Shatilova, *Ocherk istorii leningradskogo soyuza khimikov, igog-i8gg.*(Leningrad, 1927), p.64; Volin, *Deyatel’nost’ men'shevikov,* p.29.
21. Volin, *Deyatel'nost' men'shevikov,* p.23.
22. Pechatnoe Delo, **13, 8 Dec. 1917, pp. 10-11.**
23. Novyi Den, **26, 11 April 1918, p.4.**
24. S.G. Strumilin, *Zarabotnaya plata i proizvoditel'nost' truda v promyshlennosti*(Moscow, 1923), p.25.
25. Stepanov, *Rabochie Petrograda,* p.53.
26. **L.S. Gaponenko,** Rabochii klass Rossii v igiyg. **(Moscow, 1970), pp.378,  
    384-** 436**.**
27. Bor'ba, **i,Sept. 1917, pp.9-12;** Bor’ba, **3, Sept.1917, pp.13-14;** Bor’ba, **4,  
    Sept. 1917, pp. 14-15.**
28. *Nashe Slovo,* 1, 12 Oct. 1917, p. 13; *Rabotnitsa,* 3, 20 May 1917, pp.5-6;  
    *Professional'noe dvizhenie rabochikh khimikov i stekol'shchikov, igog~i8gg.,* ed.  
    Yu. K. Milonov (Moscow, 1928), p.48.
29. **Stepanov,** Rabochie Petrograda, **pp.87~g;** Vestnik aptechnogo truda, **14-15, 15  
    Nov. 1917, pp.8-9;** Pischebumazhnik, **2-3, 21 Oct. 1917, pp. 19-21.**
30. Ekho derevoobdelochnika, **2, 19 Oct. 1917, pp. 7—8.**
31. **L. I. Leskova, ‘Kollektivnye dogovory rabochikh s predprinimatelyami v  
    I**9**°**5**-**788**- >** Rabochii klass i rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii **(Moscow, 1966).**
32. P. Stearns, *Lives of Labor: Work in a Maturing Industrial Society* (New York,  
    Holmes and Meier, 1975)
33. H.A. Clegg, *The System of Industrial Relations in Great Britain* (Oxford,  
    Blackwell, 1970); K. Burgess, *The Challenge of Labour: Shaping British  
    Society, i8yo-iggo* (London, Croom Helm, 1980), pp. 119-21.
34. Materialy po statistike truda, **issue 6 (Petrograd, 1919), 10.**
35. *Vestnik Metallista,* 1 (1917), 18.
36. Za dvadtsat' let, **ed. V. Rabinovich (Leningrad, 1926), pp.98-9.**
37. The Russian Provisional Government, **ed. R.P. Browder and A.F. Kerensky,  
    vol.2 (Stanford University Press, 1961), p.170;** Len. gos. ist. arkhiv  
    **(LGIA), f.1278, op.i, d.113, 1.86.**
38. A.P. Serebrovskii, *Revolyutsiya i zarabotnaya plata rabochikh metallicheskoi  
    promyshlennosti* (Petrograd, 1917), p.22.
39. Metallist, **1-2, 17 Aug. 1917, p.7.**
40. Rabochaya Gazeta, **33, 16 April 1917, p.4;** Len. Gos. ist. arkhiv **(LGIA),  
    f.1296, d. 1, op. 17, 11.12-13.**
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42. Mid., **p.329.**
43. Pravda, **77, 9 June 1917, p.4;** Zemlya i Volya, **63, 9june 1917, p.3.**
44. Rab. Gazeta, **89, 24 June 1917, p.4.**
45. *Putilovets v trekh rev.,* p.334.
46. Ibid., **pp.346-7.**
47. **I.I. Gaza,** Putilovets na putyakh k oktyabr'yu **(Moscow, 1933) p. 106.**
48. Rab. Gazeta, **89, 24 June 1917, p.4.**
49. *Putilovets na trekh rev.,* pp.349-50.
50. Gaza, *Putilovets na putyakh,* p. 109.
51. **For an excellent account of the July Days see A. Rabinowitch,** Prelude to  
    Revolution **(Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1968).**
52. Gaza, *Putilovets na putyakh,* p. no.
53. Ibid., **p.i 12.**
54. Metallist, **1-2, 17 Aug. 1917, p.4.**
55. *Trudy pervogo vserossiiskogo s"ezda sovetov narodnogo khozyaistva* (Moscow,  
    1918), p.380.
56. Metallist, **1-2, p.20.**
57. Vestnik Metallista, **1, 1917, p. 16.**
58. Pravda, **93, 28 June 1917, p.4;** Za dvadtsat' let, **pp.105, 112.**
59. *Fabrichno-zavodskie komitety Petrograda v igiyg.* (Moscow, 1979), p-459;  
    *Rab. Gazeta,* 14, 23 July 1917, p.4.
60. Rab. Gazeta, **117, 27 July 1917, p.3.**
61. Gaza, *Putilovets na putyakh,* p. 129.

**99** Za dvadtsat' let, **pp.117-18;** Len. gos. ist. arkhiv, **f.1477, op.3, d.i, 1.66.**

1. **Vestnik Metallista, 1, pp. 1-6. The SFWO signed reluctantly. At a meeting  
   of the Petrograd district section of the city SFWO on 3 August A.G.  
   Berger urged colleagues to accept the contract, since, although its  
   wage-rates were high, it would bring uniformity and, made provision for  
   piece-rates and productivity deals. Len. gos. ist. arkhiv (LGIA), f.1278,  
   op.i, d.183, 1.127.**
2. **Rab. Gazeta, 171, 27 Sept. 1917, p.4.**
3. Fab. zav. kom., **pp.395—6.**
4. **Ibid., p.404.**
5. **See the speech by Konovalenko at the first national metalworkers’  
   tariff-conference on 17 October. Vserossiiskaya tarifnaya konferentsiya  
   soyuzov metallistov (Petrograd, 1918), p.58.**
6. Natsionalizatsiya promyshlennosti v SSSR, igij-sogg., **ed. I.A. Gladkov  
   (Moscow, 1954), pp.250-6.**
7. Metallist, **12 (1922) 43;** Vestnik Metallista, **1, p.47.**
8. **Gaza,** Putilovets na putyakh, **p.128.**
9. **Stepanov,** Rabochie Petrograda, **p.82.**
10. **Novaya Zhizn’**, **148, 6 Oct. 1917, p.4; Rab. Put', 35, 13 Oct. 1917, p.4.**
11. **V ogne revolyutsionnykh boev, vol.2 (Moscow, 197 r), p.43.**
12. Tarifnaya konferentsiya, **p. 136.**
13. **Rab. Put', 46, 30 Oct. 1917, p.4; Novyi Put', 1-2, 15 Oct. 1917, p.15;  
    Tarifnaya konferentsiya, p. 137.**
14. Vestnik Metallista, **1, p.48.**
15. **Metallist, 1-2, p.6.**
16. **Metallist, 5, 9 Nov. 1917, p.2.**
17. **Serebrovskii, Rev. i zar. plata, pp.24-5.**
18. **A. Tikhanov, ‘Rabochie-pechatniki v gody voiny’, Materialy po istorii  
    professional'nogo dvizheniya v Rossii, vol.3 (Moscow, 1925), 114.**
19. **Pechatnoe Delo, 4, 10 July 1917, pp.7, 13.**
20. **A. Tikhanov, ‘Rabochie-pechatniki v 191**7**g-’, Mat. po ist. prof. dvizh.,  
    vol.4 (1925), p. 166.**
21. **Pechatnoe Delo, 5, 22 July 1917, pp.9-10.**
22. **Materialy po statistike truda, issue 6 (Petrograd, 1919), 52-3.**
23. **Pechatnoe Delo, 8, 1 Sept. 1917, p.3; Delo Naroda, 118, 4 Aug. 1917, p.4;  
    ibid., 126, 13 Aug., p.4.**
24. **Tikhanov, ‘Rabochie-pechatniki v 1917g-’, p.162.**
25. **Strumilin, Zarabotnaya plata, pp.35-6.**
26. Istoriya leningradskogo soyuza rabochego poligraftcheskogo proizvodstva, **vol. 1  
    (Leningrad, 1923), p.345.**
27. Rev. dvizh. v iyule, **341;** Golos Kozhemika, **4—5, 1 Dec. 1917, p.21.**
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29. Ibid.
30. **Metallist, 4, 18 Oct. 1917, pp.8-9.**
31. **Ekho derev., 2, p.14.**
32. Torgovo-promyshlennaya Gazeta, **195, 8 Sept. 1917, p.2.**
33. Prof. dvizh. v *191*7g., **pp. 164-5.**
34. Pischebumazhnik, **2-3, p. 19.**
35. **Metallist, 12 (1922), 22.**
36. **M. Clark, Antonio Gramsci and the Revolution that Failed (New Haven, Conn.  
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37. **Professional'nyi Soyuz, 2, 1 May 1918, p.10; ‘Alexei Gastev and the Soviet  
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3. Vestnikprofessional'nykh soyuzov, **1, 20 May 1917, p.13;** Tkach, **1, pp.21-2;**Delo Naroda, **172, 5 Oct. 1917, p.4;** Ekhoderev. **2, p.14;** Prof. dvizh. v igijg.,  
   **P-I**54**-**
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   **(Leningrad, 1978), pp.94-5.**
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6. **Ibid., p.344.**
7. **N.P. Payalin, Zavod im. Lenina (Moscow, 1933), pp.364, 378.**
8. **Oktyabr’skaya revolyutsiya ifabzavkomy, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1927), pp. 117,238.**
9. **Ibid., p.260.**
10. **Stepanov,** Rabochie Petrograda, **p.m.**
11. **Delo Naroda, 55, 19 May 1917, p.4.**
12. **Revolyutsiya igi7g.: khronika sobytii, vol.2, ed. N. Avdeev (Moscow, 1923),  
    PP-I**73**-**4**, 180.**
13. **Delo Naroda, 125, 12 Aug. 1917, p.i.**
14. **Kontorskii Trud, 2, Nov. 1917, p. 12.**
15. **Bor'ba, 1, pp. 7-9.**
16. **D. Antoshkin,** Ocherk dvizheniya sluzhashchikh v Rossii **(Moscow, 1921),  
    P-**7**°-**
17. Prof. dvizh. v I9i7g., **pp.346-7.**
18. **Ibid., pp.347,** 349**-  
    156 Fab. zav. kom. pp.446—7.**
19. **Gaza,** Putilovets na putyakh, **p. 106.**
20. Fab. zav. kom., **pp.460-4.**
21. Rabochii kontrol' v promyshlennykh predpriyatiyakh Petrograda, 1917—i8gg.  
    **(Leningrad, 1947), p. 138.**
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23. Rab. kontrol', **p.72.**
24. **Golos Chertezhnika, 3, 1 Oct. 1917, p.5.**

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

**i V.I. Selitskii, ‘Nekotorye voprosy bor'by petrogradskikh rabochikh za  
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Istoriya rabochego klassa Leningrada, issue 2 (Leningrad, 1963); M.L. Itkin,  
‘Nekotorye funktsii rabochego kontrolya v period podgotovki  
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'(P**7**g-**

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15. **Voline, The Unknown Revolution, 1917—21 (Detroit, Black and Red, 1974).**
16. **Golos anarkhista, 1, 21 Nov. 1917. An anarchist, Gorelik, wrote that  
    ‘anarchist workers were too weak in ideas and numbers to have much  
    effect’, cited by V.V. Komin, Anarkhizm v Rossii (Kalinin, 1969), p. 145.**
17. **One should note that in Spain the success of anarchism derived entirely  
    from its organisational strength. In Andalusia in the last third of the  
    nineteenth century the anarchists successfully merged trade-union  
    organisation with communal organisation in order to pit the power of the  
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1. Ibid., **p. 73.**
2. **B.I. Gorev, Anarkhizm v Rossii (Moscow, 1930), p.124.**
3. **This was not true of anarcho-syndicalists. At the Izhora works they ‘took  
   every measure to ensure that actions by workers have an organised and  
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4. Oktyabr'skaya revolyutsiya ifabzavkomy, **vol.i (Moscow, 1927), pp.70-1.**
5. Ibid., **pp.215, 233.**
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7. Novaya Zhizn', **6 Jan. 1918, p.4.**
8. **Voline,** Unknown Revolution, **p. 175.**
9. **Rosenberg, ‘Workers’ Control’, p.95.**
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11. **D.A. Kovalenko, ‘Bor'ba fabrichno-zavodskikh komitetov Petrograda  
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15. Natsionalizatsiya promyshlennosti i organizatsiya sotsialisticheskogo proizvodstva  
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16. **Ibid., p.266.**
17. **V.I. Selitskii, Massy v bor'be za rabochii kontrol' (Moscow, 1971), p.42.**
18. **N.P. Payalin, Zavod imeni Lenina, i8gy-igi8 (Moscow, 1933), pp.378-9.**
19. **Z.V. Stepanov,** Rabochie Petrograda v period podgotovki i provedeniya  
    oktyabr’skogo vooruzhennogo vosstaniya **(Moscow, 1965), pp. 114—5.**
20. **M.I. Mitel'man, igiy god na Putilovskom zavode (Leningrad, 1939), p. 141.**
21. **Novyi Put'**, **3-4, 1 Dec. 1917, p-25-**
22. **Selitskii, Massy v bor'be, p.43.**
23. Rabochii kontrol' v promyshlennykh predpriyatii Petrograde, **vol.i (Leningrad,**

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1. **Ibid., p.43.**
2. **Krasnyi Arkhiv, 103 (1940), 108.**
3. Revolyutsionnoe dvizhenie v iyule: iyul'skii krizis **(Moscow,** 1959), P-352.
4. **Okt. rev. i fab., vol.2, pp. 76-80.**
5. **Trudorezina, 15, 29 July 1917, p.i.**
6. **Stepanov, Rabochie Petrograda, p. 116.**
7. *Ibid.*
8. **Ibid., p. 117.**
9. **Avrich, ‘Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control’, p.62.**
10. Kaplan, *Bolshevik Ideology,* p.97.
11. O. Anweiler, *The Soviets: The Russian Workers’, Peasants’ and Soldiers’  
    Councils, igog-21* (New York, Random House, 1974), p. 127.
12. Okt. rev. i fab., **vol.i, p.95.**
13. **The left-wing Menshevik D. Dallin admitted to the conference that  
    industrialists were deliberately cutting back production. Ibid., p. 106.**
14. Ibid., **p.95.**
15. **The much-depleted Menshevik cell at the Aivaz works in November  
    bewailed the ‘pernicious delusion that it is possible for workers to  
    alleviate the economic chaos and protect the working masses from the  
    effects of the rising cost of living and imminent unemployment simply by  
    their own efforts’. Plamya, 1, 24 November 1917, p.4.**
16. **See Cherevanin’s resolution to the Third Trade-Union Conference,**

Tret'ya vserossiiskaya konferentsiyaprofessional’nykh soyuzov **(Moscow, 1927),  
pp.450-2.**

1. **‘Tezisy dlya agitatorov i propagandistov’, Central Committee of SR  
   party, no.9, 1918 (n.p.).**
2. **See resolution on factory committees passed by the third congress of the  
   SRs. Delo Naroda, 64, 2 June 1917, p.2.**
3. **Znamya Truda, 13, 6 Sept. 1917, p.4.**
4. **Volya Truda, 2, 12 Sept. 1917, pp.2-3.**
5. Okt. rev. i fab., **vol.i, p.94.**
6. **Bill Shatov’s famous characterisation of the trade unions at the First  
   National Congress of Trade Unions in January 1918. Pervyi vserossiiskii  
   s"ezdprofessional'nykh soyuzov (Moscow, 1918), p.101.**
7. **V.I. Lenin, Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii, 5th ed., vol.32 (Moscow, 1962),  
   P-**438**-**
8. **Lenin, Pol. sob. soch., vol.34 (Moscow, 1962), p.175.**
9. **Ibid., p. 161.**
10. **Lenin, Pol. sob. soch., vol.31 (Moscow, 1962), p.168.**
11. Listovki petrogradskikh bol'shevikov, igiy-20gg., **vol.3 (Leningrad, 1957),  
    p.40.**
12. Okt. rev. i fab., **vol.i, p.70.**
13. **Ibid., pp. 107-9.**
14. **Lenin, Pol. sob. soch., vol.35 (Moscow, 1962), p.63.**
15. **Ibid., p. 148.**
16. **Okt. rev. i fab., vol.2, pp.217-63.**
17. **Ibid., p. 124.**
18. **Ibid., pp. 170-1.**
19. **Ibid., p. 186.**
20. Tret'ya konferentsiya, **pp.482—4.**
21. **Shestoi s"ezd RSDRP(6) (Moscow, 1958), pp.261-3.**
22. **Lenin, Pol. sob. soch., vol.32, pp. 139-62; compare Larin’s critique of the  
    draft programme Rabochii Put'**, **31, 8 Oct. 1917, p.2.**
23. **In this belief, Lenin was at odds with Gramsci, theorist of the Italian  
    factory councils, who envisaged proletarian state power growing up on  
    the basis of workers’ power in the factories, and who saw the struggle for  
    workers’ control as growing naturally into a contestation for state power.  
    On this point, as on many others, it was Bordiga, not Gramsci, who was  
    closer to Lenin. It is also worth noting in this connection that Gramsci  
    saw the Italian councils as the (potential) equivalent of the Russian  
    soviets. He believed that the forms of the proletarian state must be  
    councils based on production. In Russia, however, it was the factory  
    committees which were based on production, whereas the soviets were  
    organised on a territorial basis (though largely elected on a production**

**basis). Gramsci rejected Bordiga’s call for territorially-based organisa-  
tion, since he believed that it was as producers, that the working class  
would make communism. See A. Gramsci, Political Writings, igio-20,  
(London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1977).**

1. **Vospominaniya 0 Lenine, vol.2 (Moscow, 1969), p.416; L. Trotsky, History  
   of the Russian Revolution, vol.2 (London, Sphere, 1967), p.303.**
2. **V. Perazich, Tekstili Leningrada v igijg. (Leningrad, 1927), pp.28—9.**
3. Leningradskie tekstilya, **6-7 (1927), 9.**
4. **Perazich,** Tekstili Leningrada, **p.28.**
5. Istoriya Leningradskoi obuvnoi fabriki Skorokhod **(Leningrad, 1969), p. 134.**
6. **B. Shabalin, Krasnyi Treugol’nik, 1860-iggg (Leningrad, 1938), p. 158.**
7. Professional’noe dvizhenie v Petrograde v igiyg., **ed. A. Anskii (Leningrad,  
   1928), p.271.**
8. Petrogradskie bol'sheviki v oktyabr'skoi revolyutsii **(Leningrad, 1957), pp.**

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90 Ibid., p.55); I.G. Tomkevich, Znamya oktyabrya (Leningrad 1972), p.33.**

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2. **They were chairmen, respectively, of the factory committees at the Gun,  
   Langenzippen, Duflon, Soikin, Putilov, Skorokhod and Siemens-Halske  
   works.**
3. 1**.**1**. Gaza, Putilovets na putyakh k oktyabryu (Moscow, 1933), p.85.**
4. Izvestiya raionnogo komiteta Petrogradskoi Storony, **1, July 1917, p.3.**
5. Istoriya fabriki Skorokhod, **p. 172.**
6. Fabrichno-zavodskie komitety Petrograda, **ed. I. Mints (Moscow, 1979),**

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1. **Rabochii, 6, 29 Aug. 1917, p.4.**
2. **Rabochii Put'**, **22, 28 Sept. 1917, p.4.**
3. **Rab. Put', 20, 26 Sept. 1917, p.4.**
4. **B.M. Freidlin,** Ocherki istorii rabochego dvizheniya v igijg. **(Moscow, 1967),  
   p.158.**
5. **Pravda, 79, 11 June 1917, p.4.**
6. Oktyabr'skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde **(Moscow, 1957), p.i 18.**
7. **Perazich,** Tekstili Leningrada, **p.92.**
8. **Rab. Gazeta, 54, 12 May 1917, p.4; Delo Naroda, 99, 13 July, 1917, p.4.**
9. **Rab. Put', 14, 19 Sept. 1917, p.4.**
10. **See the constitutions of the Gun works committee of July and August:  
    Rab. kontrol' vprom, pred., vol. 1, pp. 124-5; Okt. rev. i fab. vol.i, pp.67—8.**
11. Narodnoe khozyaistvo, **11 (1918), 7.**
12. **Stepanov, Rabochie Petrograda, p. 113.**
13. Okt. voor. vosst. v Pet., **pp.92, 103-4, 110, 135;** Revolyutsionnoe dvizhenie v  
    sentyabre **(Moscow, 1961), pp.259, 292, 311.**

**no Okt. voor. vosst. v Pet., pp.92, 96, 99, 125, 133.**

1. Rev. dvizh. v iyule, **pp.352—3.**
2. **Pravda, 178, 3 Nov. 1917, p.4.**
3. **Len. gos. ist. arkhiv (LGIA), f.1477, op.3, d.i, 1.66.**
4. Rev. dvizh. v sentyabre, **pp.329-30.**
5. **Pankratova, Fabzavkomy v bor'be, pp.226-7. The first conference of  
   factory committees in Moscow called for ‘democratic’ control of the**

**factory committees, though the second in October called for workers’  
control. Most of the resolutions which called for state control in  
Petrograd were passed before the autumn. See, for example, the  
resolution of the seventh district of the Putilov works which, as late as the  
end of July, expressed support for the Coalition government and called  
for state control of the economy. Zemlya i Volya, 103, 30 July 1917, p.3.**

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2. Okt. voor. vosst. v Pet., **p.91.**
3. **Znamya Truda, 32, 30 Sept. 1917, p.3.**
4. **Golos Truda, 3, 25 Aug. 1917, p.3.**
5. **Okt. rev. i fab., vol.2, pp.179—81.**
6. **Golos Truda, 4, 1 Sept. 1917, p.4; Proletarii, 9, 23 Sept. 1917, p.4.**

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   Z.V. Stepanov,** Rabochie Petrograda v period podgotovki i provedeniya  
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3. **Delo Naroda, 160, 21 Sept. 1917, p.4; Rab. Put’, 18, 23 Sept. 1917, p.4.**
4. Rabota soyuza muchnykh izdelii i osnovanie soyuza pishchevikov igiy god  
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5. **Stepanov,** Rabochie Petrograda, **p. 144.**
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7. **P.V. Volobuev, Proletariat i burzhuaziya Rossii v igiyg. (Moscow, 1964),  
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8. **Ekon, pol., part 1, p. 166.**
9. **Izvestiya, 63, n May 1917, p.i.**
10. **Izvestiya, 65, 13 May 1917; Izvestiya, 68, 17 May 1917.**
11. **R.P. Browder and A.F. Kerensky, The Russian Provisional Government,  
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14. **Cited by Volobuev, Proletariat i burzhuaziya, p.205.**
15. Ibid.
16. **Ibid., pp.294-5.**
17. Materialy po statistike truda Sevemoi oblasti, **issue 1 (Petrograd, 1918),  
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23. **Pravda, 64, 24 May 1917, p.4.**
24. **Pravda, 65, 25 May 1917, p.4; Pravda, 68, 28 May 1917, p.4; Pravda, 93, 29  
    June 1917, p.4; Delo Naroda, 66, 4 June 1917, p.4.**
25. **See the resolution from the Aivaz workers, Pravda, 92, 27june 1917, p.4.**
26. **Stepanov,** Rabochie Petrograda, **p.99.**
27. **Ibid.; Rab. Put’**, **7, 10 Sept. 1917, p.3.**
28. **Stepanov, Rabochie Petrograda, p. 100.**
29. Ibid.
30. **Metallist, 3, 1 Oct. 1917, p. 16.**
31. Fabrichno-zavodskie komitety Petrograda: Protokoly, **ed.** 1**.**1**. Mints (Moscow,**

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6. **Metallist, 4, 18 Oct. 1917, p. 10.**
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9. **Ibid., p. 143.**
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13. **Gaza, Putilovets v trekh rev., pp.386—91; Rab.Put'**, **32, 10 Oct. 1917, p.4.**
14. Fab. zav. kom., **pp.490—3.**
15. **Stepanov, Rabochie Petrograda, p. 146.**
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19. **V.I. Selitskii, Massy v bor'be za rabochii kontrol' (Moscow, 1971), P-I95-**
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22. Rab. kontrol' v prom, pred., **p. 108.**
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30. **‘Iz istorii bor'by za rabochii kontrol', Krasnyi Arkhiv, 69—70 (1935),  
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31. Revolyutsionnoe dvizhenie v sentyabre **(Moscow, 1961), pp.284-5.**
32. **Stepanov, Rabochie Petrograda, p. 136.**
33. **Volobuev,** Proletariat i burzhuaziya, **pp.266, 269.**
34. Rab. kontrol v prom, pred., **pp.179, 181-3, >**9**°; Stepanov,** Rabochie  
    Petrograda, **p. 151.**
35. **Browder and Kerensky, The Provisional Government, vol.i, p.723. The  
    allusion is to a speech by P.P. Ryabushinskii, the textile magnate, who**

**warned the Congress of Trade and Industry that ‘the bony hand of**

**hunger and national destitution will seize by the throat the friends of the  
people’.**

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3. **Stepanov, Rabochie Petrograda, p. 152.**
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7. Okt. rev. i fab., **vol.i, p. 186.**
8. Trudy pervogo vserossiiskogo s"ezda delegatov rabochikh zavodov, portov i  
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9. Ibid.
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11. **M. Fleer, ‘Putilovskii zavod v igi7-i8gg.’, Bor'ba Klassov, 1-2 (1924),  
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13. **Ibid., p.398.**
14. Vserossiiskaya tarifnaya konferentsiya soyuzov metallistov **(Petrograd, 1918),  
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18. **M.L. Itkin, ‘Tsentral'nyi sovet fabzavkomov Petrograda v 1917g.’,  
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29. Ibid-y **PP-**4**8**4**~**5**-**
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32. **Ibid., p.233.**
33. **Ibid., p. 231.**
34. **Ibid., p.233.**
35. **Ibid., vol.2. pp.189-93.**
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37. **Ibid., pp. 189, 193.**
38. **Ibid., p. 193.**

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9. **Rab. Gazeta, 1, 6 March 1917, p.2.**
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26. **See the decree of the Council of Trade Unions of the Northern oblast' of  
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    should not be assumed that the more radical style of control died in 1918.  
    Attempts continued during the Civil War to resurrect it, not only by the  
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28. Novyi Den', **16, 12 April 1918, p.4.**

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   1970s, where the self-management bodies take, in theory at least, a wide  
   range of decisions concerning what will be produced, and how revenue  
   will be spent, the aspirations of the Petrograd committees were far more  
   centralist and state-oriented. Similarly, one has only to compare the  
   limited experiment in workers’ self-management in Petrograd to the  
   genuinely syndicalist collectivisation of industry by the CNT in Catalonia  
   in October 1936, to see how different it was. There ownership of the  
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9. **V.I. Lenin,** Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, **vol.36 (Moscow, 1962), p.300. The  
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   Soviet mechanism of the collective will of the workers, and not at all in the  
   form in which economic enterprises are administered’ [my emphasis].**
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guberniya  
Company Accounts of the Cable Works  
Petrograd Metal Works  
Kersten knitwear factory  
Baltic works: proceedings of concilia-  
tion committee  
Baltic works: works committee  
1835 Gas Light Company  
Nevskaya footwear factory  
Pechatkin paper mill  
Petrograd Arsenal**

1. NEWSPAPERS

Name

Delo naroda  
Den'

Edinstvo

Golos anarkhista

Golos bunda

Golos rabotnitsy

Golos sotsial-demokrata

Golos truda

Izvestiya

Izvestiya raionnogo komiteta  
Petrogradskoi Storony  
Kommuna  
Kommunist

i. The Petrograd Socialist Press, igij-18

Organ of

**Central Committee of SR party  
Right-wing Mensheviks  
Plekhanov’s supporters  
Anarchists**

**Central Committee of the Jewish Bund**

**Menshevik paper for working women  
SD Internationalists  
Anarcho-syndicalists  
EC of Petrograd Soviet  
Menshevik party committee of  
Petrogradskaya district  
Anarchists  
Left Communists**

Narodnoe slovo  
Novyi den'

Partiinye Izvestiya  
Petrogradskaya pravda

Petrogradskii rabochii

Plamya

Pravda

Rabochaya gazeta  
Rabotnitsa  
Shchit  
Trud i volya  
Volya naroda  
Volya Truda  
Yunii proletarii  
Zemlya i volya  
Znamya Truda

**Popular Socialists  
Right-wing Mensheviks  
Menshevik internal organ  
North-West oblast' bureau of Central  
Committee and Petrograd guberniya  
committee of Bolshevik party  
SR (centre)**

**Menshevik**

**Central Committee of Bolshevik party  
Central Committee of Menshevik party  
Bolshevik paper for working women  
Central Committee of Menshevik party  
Trudoviks  
Right SR’s  
SR Maximalists**

**Socialist Union of Young Workers  
Petrograd oblast' committee of SRs  
Left SR’s**

The Petrograd Trade-Union Press, igiy-18

Name

Bor'ba

Ekho derevoobdelochnika  
Golos chertezhnika  
Golos kozhevnika  
Gudok

Kontorskii trud  
Metallist

Mysli zheleznodorozhnika  
Nabat  
Nashe slovo  
Novyi put'

Pechatnik  
Pischebumazhnik  
Pochtovo-Telegrafnyi tribun  
Professional 'nyi Soyuz  
Professional'nyi Vestnik  
Proletarii igiy  
Proletarskii prizyv  
Rabochii kooperator  
Rabotnik vodnogo transporta  
Revolyutsionnyi pechatnik  
Stroitel'

Tkach

Trud

Trudorezina

Organ of

**Industrial and commercial sluzhashchie**

**Wood workers**

**Draughtsmen**

**Leatherworkers**

**Railway workers of Petrograd—Moscow  
junction  
Clerical workers  
Metalworkers**

**Railway workers of Nikolaev line  
Food workers  
Catering workers**

**Central Council of Factory Committees**

**Printers**

**Paperworkers**

**Post-Office employees**

**Menshevik trade-union journal**

**All-Russian Council of Trade Unions**

**Needleworkers**

**Glassworkers**

**Workers’ consumer-cooperatives  
Waterway employees  
Internationalist printers  
Construction workers  
Textile workers**

**Predecessor to Rabochii kooperator  
Rubber workers (mainly the Triangle  
Works)**

*Vestnik aptechnogo truda  
Vestnik kustamoi promyshlennosti*

*Vestnik metallista*

*Vestnik professional' nykh soyuzov  
Zerno pravdy  
Zhizn' farmatsevta*

**Pharmacy employees  
Bureau of All-Russian Congresses of  
Artisans**

**Provisional Central Committee of  
national metalworkers’ union  
Petrograd Council of Trade Unions  
Predecessor to** Nabat  
**Predecessor to** Vestnik aptechnogo truda

*iii. Miscellaneous*

*Gazeta vremennogo rabochego i krest'yanskogo pravitel'stvo*

*Izvestiya soveta s"ezdov predstavitelei promyshlennosti i torgovli*

*Malen'kaya gazeta/Narodnaya gazeta* (extreme right wing)

*Petrogradskaya gazeta*

*Torgovo-promyshlennaya gazeta*

Vestnik petrogradskikh obshchestva Zavodchikov i fabrikantov

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