

The Brothers of the Forest: Insurrection in The Urals 1905-1908



A short account of the revolutionary unrest in the Urals in 1905-1908 and the "Lbovschina".

"For the bourgeoisie, bureaucracy, guardians of the Russian regimes and their assorted newspaper and academic stooges.... Lbov and his comrades have been depictedas a gang of expropriators, robbers and thieves." Aleksandr Sergeevich Masyutin.

Little has been written in the West of the extraordinary insurrection in the Urals that took place during the First Russian Revolution of 1905. Among its leading characters were Aleksandr Lbov and the Davydov brothers.

Alexander Mikhailovich Lbov was born on 11th March 1876 in the village of Motovilikha in the Perm district to a peasant family. He worked as a sower and beekeeper. Later he was drafted into a grenadier regiment in 1897-1898 and appears to have become an N.C.O. Less than a year after being drafted, he was demobbed because of the death of his brother Vasily.

Mikhail Lbov and his son were in dispute for a long period with the Perm cannon factory which had been established at Motovilikha over the 5 acres of land that they had cultivated as a family for 106 years. Despite many years of litigation, the land was lost to the family. It appears Alexander lost his faith in legal means at this point. In 1904 he began to associate with revolutionaries.

By this time he was actually working as a turner in the Perm cannon factory. He took an active part in the strikes at the Perm factories in 1905. It should be remarked upon that [Gavril Miasnikov](#) worked in the Perm cannon factory as a sixteen year old and associated with Lbov and his revolutionary agitation. Lbov was sacked in September. He gave speeches at meetings and was the standard bearer at a demonstration. He independently conducted revolutionary propaganda among the peasants of the Okhansk district. He was arrested and spent some time in Okhansk prison. He was detained and spent some time in the Okhansk prison. Later he took part in the events of December

12-13th at Motovilikha. He delivered a speech to workers who had looted revolvers from the Nobel brothers' warehouse. According to some accounts, he instigated the stopping of a train and with involved in the building of barricades.

After trying singlehandedly to disarm three policemen (!) in the streets of Motovilikha on December 15th, he had to go into hiding. He took refuge in the forest with others. He soon gathered others around him there, and took part in illegal meetings. His relatives supplied him with food. In May 1906, together with his relative M. Stolnikov he took part in an armed attack on a police informer, the merchant N. Shiryayev.

During mid-1906 Lbov had formed links with the local fighting squad of the Bolsheviks. After the unit was dissolved in October 1906, those who had wished to continue with armed struggle gravitated towards him.

In January 1907 16 members of an independent armed group led by Dimitri Saveliev (Sibiriak), Maximalists from Petrograd, arrived in the Perm district and united with Lbov. The united group soon became known as The Brothers of the Forest. The Saveliev group shortly broke away and formed the First Perm Revolutionary Partisan Detachment. They organised several actions including a number of expropriations, the most spectacular of which was the robbery of the office of the Polazninsky factory. They attempted to release prisoners from the Perm provincial prison, they attacked fuel and wine stores. It should be pointed out that the Brothers operated a "dry" law within their ranks and that when wine stores were expropriated, all the bottles of drink were smashed. They also imposed a revolutionary tax on local wealthy people.

After the Polazninsky heist they were pursued by the police, in some cases reinforced by dragoons or infantry. Some of the Forest Brothers were captured, including Saveliev. He was hanged on April 4th with three others, the youngest of them only 18 years old.

By the end of April 1907 Lbov had established himself as the main leader of the Brothers. Whilst the main membership of the Brothers was non-party militants, Social-Democrats, Socialist-Revolutionaries and Anarchists also joined their ranks. As a key member of the Urals Combat Union, he coordinated the activities of the various armed groups in the Urals. It should be pointed out that at least a dozen armed revolutionary groups operated in the region. As well as the Saveliev there were The Union of Autonomous Combat Groups of the Party of Social Revolutionaries operated in the Kama region, the Union of Active Struggle in the Yekaterinburg area, the Daydovsschina, a unit led by the Davydov brothers fought in Aleksandrovsk and Lunyevka. In spring and summer 1907 the Brothers conducted a number of spectacular actions, including an expropriation on the steamship Anna Stepanovna Lyubimova and encouragement of unrest in the Bogoslky district.

Lbov began to describe himself as an anarchist communist. He had no faith in any of the revolutionary parties to lead the people, and referred to the "old Social-Democratic nonsense". He believed that it was up to the people themselves to instigate an uprising, and that the Brothers could only supply logistical support.

The Forest Brothers characteristically dressed completely in black so that it would be difficult to spot them during the hours of darkness. Lbov himself was a good shot, and also handy with his fists and with cudgels. Units never usually consisted of more than a hundred, with half consisting of armed combatants and half performing auxiliary duties. When sallying forth for an expropriation a red banner bearing the slogan The War For Freedom and Land was flown. Also before an action, a short rally took place, addressed by Lbov and other militants.

The money expropriated by the Brothers was given to the Bolshevik Centre, the SRS, anarchists, the poor, prisoners and relatives of slain revolutionaries.

There were savage reprisals by the authorities. Lbov's wife Elizaveta Vasilievna, mother of two children, was tortured and abused in prison and many of his close relatives suffered reprisals. The Tsarist authorities put a reward of 5,000 roubles on Lbov's head. Things began to turn bad for the armed detachments from mid-1907 with the loss of many militants from death or arrest. In August the Tsarist forces inflicted two defeats on the Brothers, resulting in many casualties. Eventually, almost all of them were slain or arrested and ended up on the gallows, in prison or exile.

The various revolutionary parties then disowned Lbov and his comrades. In mid-autumn 1907 Lbov dissolved his unit and moved to Vyatka province, where he lived under an alias, all the while preparing for further partisan actions.

Betrayed by a provocateur Lbov was arrested at Nalinsk on February 17th 1908 after a shootout. Two months later on April 22nd, he was tried at Vyatka and hanged at the provincial prison on May 2nd, 1908.

The Davydov brothers, Alexei and Ivan, had been involved in the strikes in Yekaterinburg in 1905. Alexei Ivanovich Davydov was born in on April 10th 1887 at the Alexandrovsk factory at Solikamsk (now Alexandrovsk) and his brother Ivan in 1880.

Both worked as stokers in the Alexandrovsk plant. They amassed a large collection of books and were involved in a revolutionary group. Alexei was the more forceful of the two brothers. In summer 1907, the Davydovs joined Lbov, but then formed their own independent unit, the Ural Forest Brothers Fighting Force. The unit had two red banners, one inscribed with "War for Freedom and Land" and the other with "Death To The Autocracy". Ivan was ambushed on August 22nd 1908 and died of his wounds on September 3rd. Alexei was caught in August 1908 and subsequently hanged on October 1st, 1908.

Several books were written about the Forest Brothers, the most famous being those written by the journalist Arkady Gaidar in 1926, the first a fictionalised account of Lbov and its sequel about the Davydov brothers.

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