

# Sergey Nechayev

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Sergey Gennadiyevich Nechayev

**Born** October 2, 1847  
[Ivanovo](#), Vladimir Governorate, [Imperial Russia](#)

**Died** 21 November or 3 December 1882  
[St. Petersburg](#), Imperial Russia

**Nationality** [Russian](#)

**Other names** Nechaev

**Known for** [Terrorism](#)

**Sergey Nechayev** <sup>[1]</sup> (2 October 1847 – 21 November or 3 December 1882) was a [Russian revolutionary terrorist](#).<sup>[2]</sup>

He was a leader in the [Nihilist movement](#) and known for his single-minded pursuit of revolution by any means necessary, including [murder](#).<sup>[3]</sup>

## *Catechism of a Revolutionary*

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Nechayev was the author or main author of a famous revolutionary pamphlet, called the *Catechism of a Revolutionary*. The pamphlet bears the name of [Mikhail Bakunin](#), a well-known [anarchist](#), but it is thought all or most of it is by Nechayev.<sup>[4]</sup> The work called for total devotion to a revolutionary lifestyle.<sup>[5]</sup> *The Catechism of a Revolutionary* argued that any means (including [blackmail](#) and murder) could be used to advance the cause of [revolution](#).

It was published in the *Government Herald* in July 1871 as the manifesto of a secret society.<sup>[6][7]</sup>

*Catechism of a Revolutionary* was a program for the "merciless destruction" of society and the state. The main principle was "[the ends justify the means](#)". This became Nechayev's [slogan](#) throughout his revolutionary career.

A revolutionary is a doomed man. He has no private interests, no affairs, sentiments, ties, property nor even a name of his own. His entire being is devoured by one purpose, one thought, one passion - the revolution. Heart and soul, not merely by word but by deed, he has severed every link with the social order and with the entire civilized world; with the laws, good manners, conventions, and morality of that world. He is its merciless enemy and continues to inhabit it with only one purpose - to destroy it.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Bakunin

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Nechayev and [Bakunin](#) knew each other, and Bakunin called him "my boy". All the same, Nechayev was dangerous, and Bakunin was somewhat afraid of him.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Dostoyevsky

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Nechayev's ideas were the basis for [Dostoyevsky](#)'s *The Demons* (aka *The Possessed*). Dostoyevsky had himself been a young nihilist, and spent ten years in a [Siberian](#) labour camp as a result. He came back a determined enemy of everything Nechayev believed. *The Demons* is a "dark [comedy](#), cruelly funny in its depiction of high-minded intellectuals toying with revolutionary notions without understanding anything of what revolution means in practice".<sup>[10]</sup>

## Nechayev's fate

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Nechayev planned to [kill](#) a student, Ivanov, who questioned his ideas.<sup>[10][11]</sup> On 21 November 1869, Nechayev and several comrades beat, strangled and shot Ivanov, hiding the body in a lake through a hole in the ice. The student's body was found and Nechayev fled the country before he could be arrested.

In August 1872, Nechayev was arrested in [Zurich](#) and handed over to the Russian police. He was found guilty on 8 January 1873, and sentenced to 20 years of hard labor for killing Ivanov. He died in his prison cell in 1882.

## Assessments

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It has been said of Nechayev: "His personality and ideas portray, as if in a crooked mirror, the lust for revolution reaching even beyond political fanaticism into insanity. With Nechayev we are already beyond [Lenin](#), [and] so criminal as to forecast the darkest incidents of [Stalin](#)".<sup>[12]</sup>

Biographers of Lenin have said that Lenin put into practice what Nechayev had taught. There is clear evidence in Lenin's own writing that this is so.<sup>[13]</sup>  
<sup>[14][15]</sup>

## References

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4. <sup>↑</sup> Leier, Mark (2006). *Bakunin: The Creative Passion*. Seven Stories Press. p. 232. ISBN 978-1-58322-894-4.
5. <sup>↑</sup> Wesson, Robert (1978). *Lenin's Legacy*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University. pp. 9. ISBN 0-8179-6922-5.
6. <sup>↑</sup> Heller, Mikhail (1988). *Cogs in the Wheel*. New York: Knopf. pp. 12. ISBN 0-394-56926-1. "The Catechism of a Revolutionary, a chilling blueprint for the ideal "New Man," was the manifesto of a secret society called The People's Revenge (Narodnaya Rasprava)..."
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14. <sup>↑</sup> Prawdin, Michael 1961. *The unmentionable Nechaev: a key to Bolshevism*. London, George Allen & Unwin. Argues that Nechaev was one of the greatest influences on Lenin.
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