

A Forerunner of Lenin: P. N. Tkachev

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I

THE name of Peter Tkachev is virtually unknown outside of Russia. Even in Russia his importance in the history of the Russian revolutionary movement received but belated recognition. During his lifetime, he met with strong opposition on the part of the majority of Russian revolutionaries. A hostile attitude towards his personality and his ideas remained predominant in revolutionary circles for a long time after his death (1886). It was only after the revolution that he began to attract more sympathetic attention.¹

And yet he deserves a serious study from two points of view. First, in connection with the evolution of the revolutionary movement in Russia in the 1870's. Tkachev was among the first to advance the program of a direct assault upon the government by an organized revolutionary minority, in preference to attempts at socialist propaganda among the masses or reliance on a general peasant uprising to be provoked by "agitation". He maintained this position in the face of a strong and widespread negative attitude, and towards the end of his career he was able to state with satisfaction that the main principles of his program had been accepted by the most active group among the Russian revolutionaries even if they did not admit it themselves.²

The other point of view from which Tkachev appears as a significant and interesting figure is that of his historical relationship with Lenin. As I see it, some of his fundamental concepts in the field of revolutionary strategy and tactics anticipate, in a striking fashion, Lenin's design for a revolution in Russia. It is this latter problem that I propose to discuss in the present article.

¹ See in particular B. Kozmin's *P. N. Tkachev i revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie 1860-kh godov.* (Moscow, 1922) and M. Pokrovsky's *Ocherki po istorii revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia v Rossii 19 i 20 vekov* (Moscow 1924). Under Mr. Kozmin's editorship, six volumes of Tkachev's selected writings (*Izbrannye sochineniia*, subsequently cited as *Soch.*) were published in 1932-37.

² Tkachev had in view the members of the People's Will party. Substantially, the validity of Tkachev's claim has been recognized by both Lenin (*Sochineniia*, 3d ed., IV, p. 494) and Plekhanov (*Sochineniia*, II, pp. 147-48).

II

Born in 1844, Tkachev belonged to that generation of Russian radicals who became active in the late 1860's. In the revolutionary milieu, no less than in others, this young generation differed in many respects from that of the "fathers". It was more definite in its views and more determined to act, but also more narrow-minded and more intolerant. One of the chief psychological traits, typical of many of its representatives; was the absence of doubt coupled with an unusually rapid intellectual growth. In the case of Herzen, Bakunin, Lavrov, even Chernyshevsky, one can trace the gradual evolution of political and social convictions, which can be amply documented from the available autobiographical material. No such possibility exists in the case of Tkachev. And this is true not merely because the corresponding material is not extant. One has a definite impression that he, like so many of his contemporaries, had not gone through any such evolution. It looks as if at the very beginning of their intellectual career they were able to receive their general outlook, as it were, all ready-made—partly from some of their predecessors, Chernyshevsky in particular, and partly because "it was in the air".

Tkachev took part in the student disturbances and was arrested for the first time as early as 1861; and seven years later, in 1868, when he was only twenty four years old, he already was a convinced revolutionary socialist. At that time we find him in the extreme left wing of the radical youth of St. Petersburg, a fellow-member with Nechaev of a secret student society out of which issued an ambitious *Program for Revolutionary Action*.³ The authors of the program proclaimed social revolution as their ultimate aim, and a political overturn to be the only means of attaining it. Early in 1869 Tkachev again was arrested, and to the end of 1873 he remained in exile in Russia. Escaping, he settled in Western Europe, and after that time he enjoyed opportunity to express freely his revolutionary ideas. But even before that, he had made repeated attempts to insinuate radical propaganda into the various articles he had contributed to Russian periodicals, and like Chernyshevsky, whom he acknowledged as his teacher and in whom

³ Text published in *Istoriĭo-revolutsionnaia khrestomatiia*, I, (Moscow, 1923). For the activities of the society see S. Svatikov, "Studencheskoe dvizhenie 1869 goda" in *Nasha Strana* (St. Petersburg, 1907).

he saw "the father and founder of the Russian socialist-revolutionary party", Tkachev tried his hand at literary criticism, articles on economics and politics, and historical studies.

Like Chernyshevsky, he paid particular attention to political events in Western Europe, and his attitude towards these events differed in no essentials from that of his teacher. Again we have the same decidedly hostile criticism of the French Provisional Government of 1848 for its subservience to the bourgeoisie, its dishonest machinations with the National Workshops, and its ultimate betrayal of the working class. Again we read diatribes against the insincerity and futility of bourgeois liberalism, this time, however, in the form of critical reviews of Emile Girardin's writings. Essentially the same arguments were used. The liberal demand for personal freedom had no real meaning for those who could not enjoy it, so long as they remained in economic servitude. Under existing social conditions the ideal of political liberty was merely utopian. The liberals themselves were not consistent in their political program. On the one hand, the logic of their theory led them to demand universal suffrage, while on the other their fear of the popular masses and of the "tyranny of the majority" paralyzed their political action. One could also see that all over Europe the bourgeoisie itself was losing faith in liberalism, and that it was inclining more and more towards a strong "personal dictatorship".

Liberalism, in other words, did not offer any way out of the intolerable impasse which Europe faced. The only possible solution of the problem lay in a social revolution. Tkachev tried to express the idea as clearly as he could in his editorial notes to the translation of Ernst Becher's *Labor Problem*, published in St. Petersburg in 1869.⁴ The purpose of his comment was to expose the fundamental fallacy of Becher's moderately reformist views. The translator argued that it would be idle on the part of the workers to expect any real improvement in their conditions from the contemporary state, controlled as it was by the capitalists. No satisfaction of their needs could be expected until the establishment of a workers' state. Here, however, one was faced

⁴ The German original appeared in 1868 under the title of *Die Arbeiterfrage in ihrer gegenwärtigen Gestaltung und die Versuche zu ihrer Lösung*. All of Tkachev's caution was not sufficient to allay the suspicion of the censor. The whole Russian edition of the book was seized by the authorities, and the objectionable editorial comment was ordered to be omitted.

with a vicious circle: without political control in their hands the workers could not protect their material interests, and they were equally unable to obtain the necessary political control while remaining in a state of economic dependence. It was obvious therefore that the way of so-called "peaceful progress" was blocked. "Under the *normal order* of things political control belongs to those classes who dominate the economic sphere. . . . But the normal order can be temporarily interrupted, . . . and then the vicious circle can be broken. . . . It is absurd to expect a *natural transition* from the old regime to the new one, because the two are based on diametrically opposed principles. . . . Everybody ought to know that this transition requires a certain jump, and everybody must prepare for it." ⁵

Tkachev attempted to supply a historical basis for his theory of "jumps" in a series of articles on the Peasant Wars of sixteenth-century Germany (1867-1868). Although not a work of historical research, these articles undoubtedly constitute Tkachev's most original achievement during the earlier period of his literary career.⁶ Analyzing the causes of the peasants' defeat, he rejected the theory which ascribed it to the inherent weakness of the movement, and more particularly, to the utopian character of its program. There was nothing premature or unrealizable in the demands of the rebels as expressed, for instance, in the *Twelve Articles*. In general Tkachev was not ready to accept the favorite opinion of the "historian-gradualists" according to which every society had to pass through the lower phase of political and social development before it could reach the higher ones. Such an "historical hierarchy" was to him a pseudo-scientific illusion, "invented by an insipid and self-complacent optimism for its own contentment". It was not the radicalism of the peasants, but on the contrary the indecision of their leaders and the moderation of their burgher allies that brought about their ultimate downfall. In fact, Tkachev was ready to defend a paradox that the radical demands of the peasants were much more

⁵ *Soch.*, I, pp. 410-411.

⁶ For facts Tkachev relied on Wilhelm Zimmerman's *Allgemeine Geschichte des Grossen Bauern Krieges* (1841-43) and on Johannes Scherr's studies in German cultural history, but the interpretation was his own. According to M. Pokrovsky, Kautsky added nothing new to it in his study of the Reformation period (*Istoriĭ Marksist*, 1926, I, p. 4). It can be added that Tkachev anticipated Max Weber in pointing out the intimate connection between Protestantism and Capitalism.

realizable than the moderate demands of the burghers. In an ingenious attempt to reconcile the theory of historical "jumps" with that of historical continuity, he argued that the peasants could interrupt the "natural development" precisely because they fought for an entirely new principle of social relations. The burghers, on the other hand, were doomed to failure because they left the old principle intact, and were struggling only against its logical and inevitable consequences. "And so we come to the conclusion. . . that those men whose opinions are generally considered to be utopian actually are much more practical than those timid reformers who enjoy the reputation of wise and far-sighted statesmen." ⁷

Because of censorship Tkachev could not apply those general considerations to the revolutionary problem in Russia, but to an attentive reader the moral of his historical study should have been fairly obvious. In nineteenth-century Russia, as in sixteenth-century Germany, radical revolution was less utopian than moderate reform. Those who merely tried to improve the existing order without touching its "principle" were bound to fail. On the contrary, success was possible were one to attempt to replace this "principle" by a diametrically opposed one. Like their remote German predecessors, the Russian peasants could win in a revolutionary uprising because they were bringing with them a new principle of social relations. All that was needed for their victory was organization and a clear program of action. These, however, they could not supply themselves. Anticipating his later polemics against both Lavrov and Bakunin, Tkachev combatted the two equally dangerous illusions: that of "popular self-education" ("let us wait till the people get wiser"), and that of the "popular genius" ("there is nothing we can teach the people, they know better themselves" ⁸). Again Tkachev could not formulate the practical conclusions, and this work had to be done by his readers. The radical minority should not wait for spontaneous popular initiative. It was their task to organize the revolution, to bring about a temporary interruption in the "normal course of events", to push the people towards making a "historical jump" which alone could open the way to a new process of social development based on a fundamentally different "principle".

⁷ *Soch.*, I, p. 261.

⁸ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 326-327.

III

The Western European period of Tkachev's life opened with an unsuccessful attempt at cooperation with Lavrov, who just shortly before that had become the editor of the *Vpered*. The cooperation could not last, not only because of differences of opinion but also because of a temperamental incompatibility between the two men. In April of 1874 Tkachev published his first attack on Lavrov, in the form of a pamphlet on the tasks of revolutionary propaganda in Russia (*Zadachi revoliutsionnoi propagandy v Rossii*), which was followed a few months later by an "open letter" to Friedrich Engels.⁹ In November of 1875 Tkachev, with a small group of his followers, started the publication of a revolutionary periodical of his own, the *Nabat* (The Tocsin). It was in the pages of this periodical that he offered the fullest statement of his revolutionary views.¹⁰ Unlike Herzen, Bakunin, or Lavrov, Tkachev paid practically no attention to the aims and the essential character of the expected revolution. To him—and this in itself was significant—it was a foregone conclusion that either in Western Europe or in Russia there could be no other revolution than a radical social upheaval. The only question remaining to be solved was that of the most appropriate *time* for the revolutionary attempt, and the *means* by which it could be best achieved. It was here, in the field of tactical problems, that he differed from Lavrov as well as from the other factions among the Russian revolutionaries.¹¹ Tkachev insisted that the revolution should be attempted "not in a remote future, not *some time*, but *now*, at the present juncture". To postpone the attempt would mean to become traitors to the cause. The task of a true revolutionary never could be to *prepare* the revolution, but to *make* it. Because of their

⁹ In his article "Fluechtlingsliteraten" published in the *Volksstaat* in October, 1874, Engels subjected Tkachev's pamphlet against Lavrov to a severe criticism. This called forth Tkachev's *Offener Briefe an Herrn Fr. Engels* (Zurich, 1874), to which Engels in his turn replied in a series of articles in the *Volksstaat* for 1875 (later republished separately as *Soziales aus Russland*).

¹⁰ Tkachev's participation in the *Nabat* continued until March, 1879. The periodical was published (very irregularly) until 1881.

¹¹ There can be little doubt that Tkachev elaborated his tactical views under the strong influence of Blanqui. In 1880 he contributed a few articles to the Blanquist periodical *Ni Dieu ni Maître*, and in January, 1881, he delivered an oration at Blanqui's funeral, in which he called the deceased French revolutionary "our inspiration and our guide in the great art of conspiracy" (Maurice Dommanget, *Blanqui*, Paris, 1924, p. 93). Dommanget describes Tkachev and his faction as representing "un blanquisme russe, à la vérité plus blanquiste que le Vieux lui-même" (*Ibid.*, p. 92).

standing discontent with the established social order, the masses were always potentially ready for an uprising. The paramount duty of the revolutionaries was to "combine the existing revolutionary elements" in such a manner as to make an immediate explosion inevitable. They had no right to wait till the course of events forced them to act. It was for them to choose the moment, and every hour of delay was making their success more problematical. At no time could the revolutionaries be completely assured of victory, but they should not be afraid of taking chances. "If defeated, we shall rise again, and we shall continue to rise and to run the risk of defeat until we are victorious. Eventually victory will be ours if we keep our faith intact."¹²

From that point of view Tkachev attacked Lavrov's idea of a thorough socialist propagandizing. The gradual education of the masses in a socialist spirit was to him a dangerous illusion. That was not the revolutionary way, but the way of the despised "peaceful progress". It was neither possible nor necessary to postpone action till the majority became conscious of their true interests. The very difference between a violent revolution and so-called "gradual evolution" lay precisely in the fact that in the case of the former a revolutionary minority was no longer willing to wait but took it upon itself to "force consciousness" upon the people. For this contention Tkachev supplied a psychological basis. Even in ordinary conditions people were guided more by their feelings than by reason; and the proper element of a revolution was that of an aroused popular passion, "destroying and crushing everything on its way, and always acting unaccountably and unconsciously". Because of that, not theoretical *propaganda*, but *agitation* appealing to the emotional side of their nature, was the surest means of arousing people to an uprising.¹³

No revolution, however, could be achieved without the leadership of an active minority united in a strictly centralized fighting organization. The immediate task was the conquest of power by means of a *coup d' état*. That is the chief point of difference between Tkachev on the one hand, and the rest of the Russian revolutionaries on the other. Not only the Bakunists with their frankly anarchist tendencies, but the

¹² *Soch.*, III, p. 274.

¹³ Here Tkachev was at one with Bakunin and his followers.

followers of Lavrov as well, were profoundly suspicious of strongly centralized power and preferred to rely on spontaneous popular initiative, which to Tkachev was but a "myth". Because of his skeptical attitude he was accused of being a "Jacobin", which in the revolutionary vernacular of the time meant an advocate of a political overturn effected by a revolutionary minority without any participation on the part of the popular masses.¹⁴ It was hardly a justified accusation, as Tkachev repeatedly made it clear that his scheme did not exclude popular support of the revolution. On the contrary, he considered such support an indispensable condition of success. Moreover, the conquest of power was to him not an end in itself but only a means to the realization of his socialist idea. By destroying the existing "conservative state" the revolutionary minority was to put an end to the inertia of obedience among the masses, and to liberate their potential revolutionary energy. The next step was to be the creation of a new revolutionary state, with centralized power remaining in the hands of the minority to enable it to educate the people in a socialist spirit. Then and then only would an effective propaganda become really possible. To reverse the process, to start with propaganda and to postpone the conquest of power until the former could give the desired results, was to indulge in empty dreams, and to "begin from the end".

In other words, Tkachev was preaching the necessity of a centralized fighting organization of professional revolutionaries for the destruction of the old order, and the importance of a revolutionary dictatorship for the construction of the new socialist society.

IV

Such were the general considerations that Tkachev applied to the Russian revolutionary problem. In Russia even more than elsewhere an immediate revolution was a compelling necessity, while Russian conditions made practically impossible any other means of revolutionary struggle than that of conspiracy. We find the first explicit statement of these views in Tkachev's letter to Engels. He accused his correspondent of completely misunderstanding the Russian situation which, in his

¹⁴ One might well question the historical correctness of this interpretation of Jacobinism. Somewhat later a similar use was made of the term "Blanquist" (as in Plekhanov's polemics against Lenin, for instance).

opinion, was radically different from that prevailing in Western countries. In Russia there was no urban proletariat on whom the socialists could rely, and they could not use a representative assembly or a free press for the purpose of their propaganda. From this it did not follow, however, that the victory of social revolution was more problematic in Russia than in the West. On the contrary, she possessed some advantages which more than compensated for the handicaps. If she had no proletariat, neither had she a bourgeoisie which could offer resistance to her advance towards socialism. Because of the peasant commune, the Russian people, uneducated as they were, were communists by instinct and tradition.¹⁵ The Russian revolutionary party was numerically small, but it was thoroughly imbued with socialist ideals, to the realization of which it owed an undivided allegiance. Its strength lay also in the weakness of its enemies. Neither the nobility, the merchants, nor the clergy possessed any real force, economic or political. Equally feeble was the power of the Russian government, which looked imposing at a distance, but which in reality was "hanging up in the air", having no roots in the economic life of the country or in the vital interests of any social class. Consequently, the task of the Russian revolutionaries was an easier one than that of their Western comrades. All they had to do was to destroy the existing state organization, while in the West it was necessary to combat the whole bourgeois order based on an alliance between the state and capital.

So far Tkachev was merely repeating Herzen in his emphasis upon the distinctness of the Russian situation and the advantages she could derive from her very backwardness.¹⁶ But to that was added another motive which in a large measure was peculiar to his own revolutionary conception. According to Tkachev Russia's advantages were of a temporary nature, and they were threatened with a speedy extinction. In the Russian life of his day he saw some unmistakable signs of the birth of a bourgeois order, and he deemed its further growth inevitable unless it was cut short by a timely revolution. Once entrenched, it

¹⁵ Subsequently, Tkachev introduced an important reservation in this assertion. See below.

¹⁶ There are also some obvious points of contact with Bakunin, such as the assertion that the Russian peasant is a "communist by instinct and tradition," or the reference to the "mechanical" nature of state power in Russia. The letter to Engels contains a spirited defense of Bakunin against the attacks of the Marxists.

would make the task of the revolutionaries immensely more difficult, perhaps even impossible. Therefore, in Russia especially it was dangerous to postpone the revolutionary attempt. This idea of a *preventive* revolution was merely hinted at in the letter to Engels. It found a much fuller expression in the leading article of the first number of the *Nabat* (November, 1875) in which Tkachev formulated the guiding principles of his publication. Its purpose was to arouse the Russian revolutionaries to immediate action before it was too late (hence the very name of *The Tocsin*). It exhorted them to watch the march of "economic progress" under the influence of which the village commune was beginning to disintegrate while the forces of economic individualism were gradually coming to the forefront. The spreading fire of this economic progress was threatening to infuse a new life even into the decrepit body of the Russian state. "Today it is a mere fiction, an empty tradition which has no roots in popular life. . . . It is feared only because it has some material force on its side, and were it to lose that force not a single arm would be raised for its defence. . . . But tomorrow it will represent the interests of the kulaks and the other exploiters, the interests of private property, of trade and industry, of the growing bourgeois world. Today it is absolutely absurd and absurdly absolute. Tomorrow it might become moderately constitutional, prudent and sensible. So hurry! Do not let this moment pass. . . . That would mean to postpone the revolution for a long time, perhaps forever. Do not procrastinate!"¹⁷

Tkachev differed from the majority of the contemporary Russian revolutionaries in still another respect. He was almost entirely free from that tendency to idealize the Russian peasant which was so typical of the whole Populist movement. He invited his fellow-revolutionaries "once and for all to drop from their vocabulary all the trite and senseless references to a mysterious *popular genius*, a conception borrowed from the reactionary Slavophiles".¹⁸ There was no need for raising the peasantry on a pedestal and worshipping at its feet. Yes, the peasants were a potential revolutionary force because of their permanent discontent with the existing social order. But, to begin with, the Russian

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, III, pp. 219-221. See also *ibid.*, III, p. 238 "To-day we are holding in our hands Russia's historical fate. We can change it if we will."

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, III, p. 267.

people were a pre-eminently "phlegmatic race", and one could not count on a spontaneous outburst of their passions. They had to be constantly prompted and aroused. Above all, they should be freed from the overpowering feeling of fear which had been nurtured in them by centuries of oppression. Only when they saw the dreaded government defeated and humiliated would they dare to give vent to their revolutionary urges. It was in that limited sense only that they could be called "instinctive revolutionaries". Moreover their revolutionary passion was likely to express itself in a purely destructive fashion. In all probability it would become exhausted in the first phase of the revolution. After getting rid of their oppressors the popular masses, essentially conservative, could not be expected to go beyond their customary ideas and ways of living. Unaided and by their own initiative, they were incapable of building a new society on the ruins of the old. Like his revolutionary instinct, the "natural communism" of the Russian peasant was of a very limited and undependable nature. And that meant that in the constructive phase of the revolution, even more than in the destructive one, the people had to be led and guided by the active revolutionary minority. It was up to that minority to carry the revolutionary principles into the very depths of peasant life, trying to eliminate from it all its traditional backward features inimical to socialism.

V

It would be idle to deny the substantial difference between the respective social philosophies of Tkachev and Lenin. An attempt to make of Tkachev an early Russian Marxist would be doomed to failure. In spite of the fact that he was one of the first Russian radicals to become fairly well acquainted with some of Marx's works, that, as we have seen, he clearly discerned the growth of capitalism in Russian life, and that in some of his writings there were elements of the economic interpretation of history, the limited nature of his "Marxism" is quite obvious. Suffice it to say that he never spoke of the industrial proletariat as a potential revolutionary force in Russia.¹⁹ On the other

¹⁹ Cf. B. Kozmin's introduction to Vol. I of Tkachev's *Sochineniia*, his *P. N. Tkachev i revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie 1860-40 godov*, ch. III, and M. Pokrovsky's *Ocherki po istorii revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia v Rossii*, p. 62.

hand, however, Lenin's Marxism was *sui generis*, and while this is not the place to enter into a discussion of this highly interesting and important problem, I shall venture to express the opinion that the peculiarity of Lenin's Marxism lay precisely in grafting on to it certain concepts borrowed from the pre-Marxian Russian revolutionary tradition. And among these concepts were those first fully formulated by Tkachev.

It is hardly necessary to remind the reader of the paramount importance which Lenin, like Tkachev, attached to the part played in the revolutionary movement by a well-organized, closely knit and determined group of professional revolutionaries—that revolutionary minority with the help of which, as he expressed it early in his career, he was prepared to “turn Russia upside down”. When some of his Menshevik critics accused Lenin of going back to the conspiratorial methods of the terrorists of the 1870's, he accepted the challenge and boldly asserted that what was needed was a “Social Democratic Zheliabov”.²⁰ With an equal right he could have spoken of a “Social Democratic Tkachev”.

In Lenin's scheme, as in Tkachev's, this organized revolutionary minority was to play a leading role both before, during, and after the revolution. We have seen that Tkachev, while not denying the necessity of popular support, still ascribed to it a subordinate position, being profoundly skeptical of the ability of the masses (in this case the peasant masses) to achieve a revolution and to build up a new socialist state, upon their own initiative and by their own efforts. Lenin expressed a similar skepticism not only with regard to the peasants, but with regard to the industrial workers as well. Even this revolutionary class *par excellence*, if left to its own devices, was not able, in his opinion, to reach above the level of mere trade-unionism. For the achievement of long-range revolutionary objectives, intervention from outside—on the part of the organized revolutionary minority—was absolutely necessary. To use Tkachev's expression, one had to “force consciousness” upon the working class.

To Tkachev the decisive moment in a revolution was the conquest of power by means of a *coup d'état* led by an organized minority.

²⁰ Zheliabov was one of the leaders of the People's Will party.

The first thing that the revolutionaries had to do was to seize power. Once in power, they would be able to achieve their other aims, including that of reeducating the people in accordance with their own faith. Note Lenin's admonition to the members of the Bolshevik Central Committee on the eve of the final assault upon the Provisional Government in November 1917: "Seizure of power is the point of the uprising. *Its political task will be clarified after the seizure*".²¹ Tkachev derided Lavrov and his adherents for their attempts to prepare the revolution by thorough propaganda, and for their inclination to wait until the majority would become conscious of their true interests. Lenin heaped abuse and contempt on hesitating comrades of the Central Committee who dared to point out that the Bolsheviks had no majority among the people, "and without this condition the uprising was hopeless". Virtually repeating Tkachev, Lenin asserted that "such a guarantee (i.e., the guarantee of a clear majority on the Bolshevik side) history has never proffered, and is absolutely in no position to proffer in any revolution".²²

Lenin was not prepared to wait either for the Constituent Assembly or for the All-Russian Congress of the Soviets, as was advocated by his opponents in the Central Committee. "To wait for the Constituent Assembly, which will obviously not be for us, is senseless. . . ." And again: "With all my power I wish to persuade the comrades that now everything hangs on a hair, that on the order of the day are questions that are not solved by conferences, by congresses (even by Congresses of Soviets), but. . . by the struggle of armed masses".²³

It can be objected that, after all, Lenin spoke of the armed struggle of the *masses*, but from the context of his pronouncements (as well as from the context of the events themselves!) it must be clear that this was a euphemism for a revolutionary *coup d' état*, the purpose of which was to put the masses before an accomplished fact—that of the seizure of power. It is significant that Lenin himself found it necessary to

²¹ Lenin, *Toward the Seizure of Power* (New York, 1932), II, 145. Italics are mine.

²² *Ibid.*, II, 112.

²³ *Ibid.*, II, 327; 144. I do not think that anyone ever has pointed out the striking similarity between the last of these statements and the famous "blood and iron policy" pronouncement of Bismarck.

underline the difference between his "military conspiracy" and that which could be termed "Blanquist", by enumerating a series of conditions which made his venture legitimate, as it were. But in striking contrast with this seeming reliance on "objective conditions" were his own frantic appeals to his followers to act at once lest, by missing this unique opportunity, they should ruin the revolution once for all. "Delaying the uprising *now* really means death. . . . *Now* everything hangs on a hair. . . . We must not wait! We may lose everything! . . ." etc. This is the same "now or never" attitude which over forty years before had been so forcibly expressed by Tkachev.

Fundamentally, to both men revolution was a gigantic gamble in which one had to play for the highest stakes, undeterred by the cost involved and the risk of defeat. And essentially, both had the same *voluntaristic* approach. As Tkachev expressed it: "Today we are holding in our hands Russia's historical fate. *We can change it if we will.*"

We know that in Tkachev's mind the necessity to act at once was connected with the idea of a *preventive* revolution—a revolution that would destroy the existing regime and establish a socialist society in Russia *before* capitalism would have a chance to take firm roots in Russian soil and to transform the country into a bourgeois democracy. Lenin's Marxist conscience would not allow him to subscribe openly to such a heretical theory, but to a large extent it was implied in his general approach to the Russian revolutionary problem. Space does not permit me to develop this point, but let me merely indicate some of the elements in Lenin's revolutionary theory which have a direct bearing on it. Lenin repeatedly emphasized the relative weakness of the Russian bourgeoisie in which he saw one of the conditions that would permit in Russia an immediate transition from a bourgeois (political) to a proletarian (social) revolution. Another condition which, in his opinion, made such a transition possible was the revolutionary discontent among the peasantry suffering from the "survivals of feudalism" in Russian agrarian relationships. As both these conditions were bound to be modified by the further development of capitalism in Russia, with the bourgeoisie growing stronger and the peasants gradually getting rid of the "survivals of feudalism", it follows logically that with time the chances for the success of the revolution—of the kind that Lenin envisaged—would

diminish rather than increase. In this connection, it is significant that Lenin viewed with alarm the possibility of a successful completion of Stolypin's agrarian reforms. Equally significant is the fact that Lenin welcomed the war of 1914 as creating an opportunity for attempting the revolution—an opportunity that otherwise would not be there. In fact, he admitted after the event that his revolution could not have triumphed had it not been for the war. And perhaps most significant of all was his admission, made several years after the conquest of power, that so long as Russia remained predominantly a country of small peasant proprietors, capitalism had a firmer social base in the country than socialism.

Stalin used this last statement of Lenin to justify his program of rural collectivization. We are faced here with a highly interesting case of the primacy of politics over economics, in direct contradiction to the orthodox Marxian theory. What really happened in the process of the realization of Lenin's design for revolution was this: *first*, by means of a political *coup d' état* a proletarian dictatorship (i.e. the dictatorship of the Communist Party) was established in Russia; *then*, by the forcible use of state power, an attempt was made to create in the country an appropriate social and economic base for that political superstructure.

After all, there does not seem to be such a wide difference between the revolutionary strategy of the "Marxist" Lenin and that of the "Populist" Tkachev!