

The Prerevolutionary Strike Movement in Russia, 1912-1916

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ABSTRACT

The prerevolutionary strike movement in Russia from 1912-1916 was one of the most spectacular in world labour history. Because labour historians have tended to focus their attention on the revolutionary years of 1905 and 1917, the strike wave before 1917 remains largely ignored. In terms of the number of participants and political demands, however, the prolonged movement was unprecedented. Examining strikes at the factory level, this essay argues that revolutionaries, particularly the Bolsheviks, acted as catalysts for the movement. The presence or absence of revolutionary agitators, even at the shop level, determined whether workers participated in the strike actions.

KEYWORDS

Russia, 1912-1916, Strike movement, Bolsheviks

The strike movement during the Russian revolutionary era has long been of interest to both socialists and scholars. Rosa Luxemburg famously sought to revise the ambivalent Social Democratic attitude toward the "Mass Strike" based on the experience of the 1905 revolt, "the first historical experience on a very large scale with the means of struggle."¹ The mass strike of February 1917 quickly escalated into a general revolt that overthrew the Tsar Nicholas II and throughout 1917, as in 1905, over two million workers went on strike.²

¹ Luxemburg, Rosa. *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*. 1906. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/mass-strike/index.htm>.

² Burdzhahalov, E.N. *Russia's Second Revolution: The February 1917 Uprising in Petrograd*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987); Koenker, Diane and Rosenberg, William. *Strikes and Revolution in Russia 1917*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

While historians understandably have focused attention on the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, the strike wave during the pre-revolutionary period from 1912 to 1916 was no less spectacular. Two and half million workers participated in more than thirty political strikes from April 1912 to the end of 1916, while another 1.8 million workers engaged in economic strikes.³ The epicenter of this movement was St. Petersburg (later named Petrograd), where 23 large strikes involving 50,000 workers or more occurred for various political causes.⁴ The disproportionate number of strike participants in the capital can be explained by its politically-charged atmosphere and the unusual size and strength of the revolutionary left that focused much of their efforts at building workplace cells in the factories of the capital, particularly in the metal industry. Workers in St. Petersburg responded almost immediately to political events, whereas their numerically weaker Moscow counterparts invariably responded slower, often days later, and in much lower numbers.

Much of the rich historiography of the pre-revolutionary strike movement has focused on quantitative analysis of the strike movement, particularly in St. Petersburg. These works have demonstrated convincingly that political and economic strikes cannot be treated as separate phenomena, that the escalating workers' movement often meant that economic strikes directly impacting workers' confidence to strike over political causes and vice versa. The demographic studies of strike activity have also shown that more literate and urbanized metal workers with weaker ties to the countryside, particularly in St. Petersburg, were proportionally much more likely to engage in strike activity. Such evidence has led to more general, but also more speculative arguments, about the role of literacy and urbanization in the radicalization of the Russian working class.

Several authors of these quantitative studies have frankly admitted the limitations of such an approach, particularly the difficulty of incorporating and assessing the role that ideological influences had on the strike movement.⁵ Leopold Haimson's seminal study of Russian urban unrest noted that the Bolsheviks provided a "significant catalytic role" to the movement.⁶ In the conclusion of his quantitative analysis, Haimson offers a more nuanced appraisal of this Bolshevik influence, suggesting that it was "the participation of Bolshevik militants in ad hoc, amorphous, cellular "committees" at the factory or shop level that provided whatever elements of leadership the Bolshevik underground actively maintained at the grassroots level."⁷ Similarly, in his superlative study of Petrograd, S.A. Smith argues that "factories

³ Haimson, L.H. and Brian, Eric. Labor Unrest in Imperial Russia. In: *Strikes, Social Conflict and the First World War: An International Perspective*. Haimson, Leopold and Sapelli, Giulio, eds. Milan: Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore, 1992, p. 445.

⁴ McKean, Robert. *St. Petersburg Between the Revolutions: Workers and Revolutionaries, June 1907-February 1917*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990, pp. 495-498.

⁵ Haimson, L. H. Labor Unrest in Imperial Russia, p. 507, and Bovykin, Borodkin, and Kiryanov. *Strikes in Imperial Russia*, p. 189, In: *Strikes, Wars, and Revolutions in an International Perspective*. eds. Leopold Haimson and Charles Tilly. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

⁶ Haimson, L.H. .The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905-1917. (part 1) *Slavic Review*. 23, December 1964, pp.619-42; (part 2), 24, March 1965, pp.1-22.

⁷ Haimson, L.H.. Op.Cit. 1989 p. 509.

were more likely to go on strike, firstly, if there was an organized Bolshevik cell in the enterprise and secondly, if there was a core of proletarian men or women with some experience of strikes, sufficiently numerous and cohesive to organize new workers.”⁸

Several historians have taken issue with the emphasis on Bolshevism as the dominant socialist influence in the movement by examining the role of Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), Mensheviks and other smaller socialist groups.⁹ Robert McKean’s study of St. Petersburg argues that there was often cooperation between socialist groups. What was surely the most sustained strike movement in world history, however, is inexplicably described by McKean as a failure because “the Bolsheviks failed to spark a national general political strike movement” or create “a Soviet of Workers’ Deputies.” According to McKean, the only sphere in which the Bolsheviks enjoyed some measure of success was in the legal labor movement of 1912-1914.¹⁰

This assessment is at odds with the archival record and says much more about the mindset of anti-Bolshevik historians than about the strike movement. The Director of the Police Department noted in late 1913 that "The faction of Leninists is always better organized than the others, stronger in singleness of purpose...When during the last two years the labor movement began to grow stronger, Lenin and his followers came closer to the workers than the others."¹¹ Moreover, while the optimist Lenin argued in January 1913 that "the revolutionary upswing is incomparably higher today than it was before the first revolution",¹² the Mensheviks were often less than enthusiastic participants in the movement, raising fears of "strike fever."¹³ Additionally, during the war, the Bolsheviks continued to agitate for political strikes while the defencist (pro-War) Mensheviks and SRs abstained from such actions.¹⁴

This essay focuses on the strike movement in the largest metal factory in Moscow. As both the Bolsheviks and SRs competed for influence in the factory, it provides a useful benchmark to assess the strike movement at the factory and even shop level. Using political police (Okhrana) and management reports, and workers’ petitions and retrospective memoirs, the source base for the study is diverse. The methodology is explicitly Marxist, examining the process of class development, of workers growing sense of class solidarity at the factory level and weighing the factors that shaped this process of overcoming divisions within the workforce.

⁸ Smith, S.A. *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories 1917-1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 53.

⁹ McKean, Robert. Op.Cit.; Melancon, Michael. *The Socialist Revolutionaries and the Russian Anti-War Movement, 1914-17*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990.

¹⁰ McKean. Op.Cit., p.497.

¹¹ Quoted in Trotsky, Leon. *Stalin*. New York: 1941, p.162.

¹² Lenin, V.I.. *Collected Works*, vol.18. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977, p.471.

¹³ McKean. Op.Cit., p.109.

¹⁴ Cliff, Tony. *Lenin, volume 2: All Power to the Soviets*. London: Pluto Press, 1976, pp. 22-43.

Metal production was at the center of Russia's industrial revolution and the class polarization evident throughout Russia society reverberated powerfully in the massive Moscow Metalworks in the city's eastern Rogozhskii district. By 1900, the factory employed over 2,000 workers in 'hot' shops such as the steel foundry, form casting, and rolled metal shops and also 'cold' shops that produced such products bolts, nails and screws. The owner, Iulii Guzhon, personified both the paternalism and intransigence of Russian corporate liberalism by offering free schooling to his workforce, but also hard-line opposition to the workers' movement. From the Lena massacre in 1912 to the end of 1916, workers in this factory struck nineteen times, with nearly fifteen thousand employees participating. Eight of the strikes were overtly political and included over seven thousand workers.¹⁵

This development of class solidarity is all the more impressive when considering the myriad of divisions within the factory. The partition of the factory grounds into separate production departments fostered shop-loyalty (*tsekhovshchina*) among employees. *Tsekhovshchina* transcended craft divisions because former peasants maintained strong ties between specific shops and particular villages. Ideological, skill, and age differences also divided the workforce. Many workers were sympathetic to the autocracy, embracing an aggressive Russian nationalism, while others were either active revolutionaries or sympathetic to the demands of the left organizations. Twenty-five skill categories ranged from the most skilled metalworkers, lathe operators, smelters, and rolling mill operators to apprentices and unskilled laborers. The workforce was young, with about half under the age of thirty, a third between thirty and forty years old, and a smaller group over forty. Unskilled women workers earned low wages in the lowest of ten categories and suffered abuse in the traditionally male-dominated metal industry.¹⁶ One worker later wrote that conditions in the shops were "particularly difficult for teenage girls" as heavy conditions "messed up hair, tore dresses, and forced many to leave the factory."¹⁷

During the 1905 revolution, the workers' movement in the factory closely mirrored that in Moscow itself with economic and workplace issues dominating grievances until the autumn of 1905 when the movement became more politicized. On 12 January 1905, workers from the nail shop struck and the stoppage quickly spread to other departments, with workers demanding an eight-hour day, wage increases, better work conditions and the removal of abusive managers. Management partially conceded to some of the demands, including reducing work hours to ten hours, ending the strike. In November, workers again demanded the removal of abusive managers and by this time the movement was much more political. Workers struck on 12 November and stayed out through December, elected representatives to the Moscow Soviet and participated in the December Moscow uprising. A handful of workers died in the revolt; many others were jailed or exiled after the rebellion was crushed.¹⁸

¹⁵ Murphy, Kevin. *Revolution and Counter-revolution: Class Struggle in a Moscow Metal Factory*. New York and Oxford: Berghan, 2005, pp.9-36.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.10-12.

¹⁷ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 276, l. 45. P.I. Tarasov memoir.

¹⁸ Murphy, K. *Op.Cit.*, pp.16-18.

The nadir of Russian labor activism came in years of repression after the 1905 Revolution. In 1910, just over 200 strikes took place involving less than fifty thousand workers.¹⁹ Despite repression, workers' memoirs indicate that a handful of Bolsheviks and SRs continued underground agitation in the Metalworks throughout this period. Management blacklisted militant workers: "Revolutionary workers in Guzhon were fired," wrote one worker, "and this was communicated to other factories."²⁰ Other memoirs stress the sense of political isolation and fear that dominated factory life: "For the first three or four years of my work in Guzhon, from 1908 to 1911, all workers were suppressed," recalled one worker, "and it seemed that at that time no kind of revolutionary work was conducted."²¹ A Bolshevik later wrote that he was arrested in 1910 for participating in a strike, but the Leninists were so weak that an SR member recalled being unaware of any Bolshevik presence: "At this time the Socialist Revolutionaries were the only party in the factory," he asserted. "I did not hear or see anything about the Bolsheviks."²²

The reawakening of political activism was led by students. Students demonstrated in the autumn of 1910 in commemoration of the death of the former liberal Duma president Muromtsev; then in memory of Leo Tolstoy; and later against the treatment of political prisoners. These actions helped inspire the workers' movement as radical students started to make contact with workers, including workers at the Moscow Metalworks. Wider political events often intervened in factory life. The death of Tolstoy also spurred demonstration strikes in the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (RSDWP) strongholds of Bromlei, Gustav List, Bari, and other factories. In 1911, a student general strike against state repression spread throughout Russia, and the general ferment created an atmosphere in which newly radicalized students initiated contacts with workers.²³

The Lena Goldfields massacre signaled the rebirth of working-class militancy on a mass scale. Working conditions at the goldfields were particularly harsh, with miners working fifteen hour days for extremely low wages. Workers struck on 29 February when rotten meat was distributed and on 4 March, put forward demands for an eight-hour workday, 30 percent raise in wages, improvement in provisions and the elimination of fines. The tsarist government sent in troops and arrested the entire strike committee. On 4 April, 2,500 workers marched in protest, government troops opened fire upon striking Lena miners, leaving five hundred casualties. Minister of Internal Affairs Makarov's remarks offered a menacing warning to the workers' movement: "So it has been, and so it will be in the future," he declared.²⁴ Across the empire, workers responded with a show of force. During the post-Lena and May Day strikes several weeks later, police estimated that nearly three hundred thousand

¹⁹ Haimson, L.H.. and Brian, E. Op.Cit. p.444.

²⁰ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 275, l. 17. P.V. Lazrenov memoir.

²¹ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 271, l. 35. V.N. Arapov memoir.

²² GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 276, l. 12. I.F. Toptov memoir; d, 273, l. 97. Kochergin memoir.

²³ Murphy, Kevin. Op.Cit. pp.18-19.

²⁴ Melancon, Michael. The Ninth Circle: The Lena Goldfield Workers and the Massacre of 4 April 1912. *Slavic Review*. 53, 3, Fall 1994, pp.786-795.

workers struck in St. Petersburg alone, a figure that exceeded the total number of all strike participants in the entire nation between 1909 and 1911.²⁵

In the Moscow Metalworks, according to the Okhrana, the Bolsheviks participated in “a group that made it their goal to organize a strike at the factory ... against the best interest and wishes of the well-intentioned workers.”²⁶ Participants describe how two hundred mostly young workers struck and met in Vadlinsky Woods, listened to speeches about the massacre, sang the Marseillaise, and raised the red flag.²⁷

The small Moscow Bolshevik organization made the factory a political priority, with almost ten percent of their Moscow membership working in the plant, but Okhrana arrests and firings thwarted these efforts. Okhrana reports and worker's memoirs indicate that almost the entire cell was arrested in repeated raids between April and August. The Moscow Okhrana apprehended socialists throughout 1912; with nineteen RSDWP members arrested on 15 April 1912, another eight in May, fifteen in August, seven in September, and six more in November.²⁸ In October 1912, the Okhrana arrested seventeen SR members for organizing in support of court-martialed sailors.²⁹ A Bolshevik organizer who worked in many cities claimed that Moscow “broke the record for provocateurs,” and that efforts to restore the Moscow Committee “inevitably got entangled with one of these provocateurs.”³⁰ Plans to establish a Bolshevik press in the district collapsed in 1912 because the most active worker turned out to be an Okhrana agent. An attempt to revive the Bolshevik cell in 1913 failed when the secret police arrested five Bolsheviks in the days leading up to May Day.³¹

The Okhrana had also infiltrated the St. Petersburg Bolsheviks but the organization managed to sustain its operations and continued to act as an effective catalyst for the labor movement. Despite three Okhrana agents on the St. Petersburg Central Committee and repeated roundups, the group was able to bounce back, rebuild a center, and agitate for strikes, and by

²⁵ McKean, Robert. Op.Cit. p. 495; Haimson, L.H. and Brian, E. Op.Cit., p.444.

²⁶ GARF, f. 63, op. 32, d. 1497, l. 22. Okhrana report, 12 June 1912.

²⁷ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 265, l. 17. Seruev recollection; d. 271, l. 306. S.S. Gerasimov memoir; d. 274, ll. 40, 103. P.L. Lavrent'ev, I. Lidvanskii memoirs; d. 275, ll. 17, 49. P.V. Lazrenov, S. S. Leshkovtsev memoirs; RGASPI f. 70, op. 3, d. 150, l. 88, F.I. Karpukhin recollections of RSDWP in Rogozhskaia district, 1906-1917.

²⁸ GARF, f. 63, op. 32, d. 934, ll. 1, 7, 8, 13, 16; d. 1019 l. 3, d. 1422, l.1; d. 1573, l.1, 1578, l. 5. Okhrana reports 1912.

²⁹ GARF, f. 63, op. 32, d. 1645, ll. 1-8. Okhrana reports, November 1912.

³⁰ Bobrovskaya, Celila. *Twenty Years in Underground Russia: Memoirs of a Rank and File Bolshevik*. Chicago: Proletarian Publishers, 1978, pp.222-223.

³¹ G.A. Arutiunov, *Rabochie dvizhenie v Rossii v periode novogo revoliutsionnogo pod'ema 1910-1914 godov* (Moscow, 1975), 214.

1916 had expanded to three thousand members.³² In Moscow the Bolsheviks had only two hundred members in the spring of 1913 and about six hundred three years later.³³

Despite the political arrests, a seismic shift in workers' confidence had reinvigorated the movement and the divide between economic and political strikes dissipated as workers' confidence quickly grew. Soon after the Lena strike, employees petitioned Guzhon for an eight-hour workday and organized economic strikes in different shops.³⁴ The strike became increasingly bitter when management brought in strikebreakers from southern Russia.³⁵ New workers started at the factory in July, one of whom told the Okhrana that strikers had followed him from the factory and had threatened that "they would deal with him," while another claimed that strikers threatened to "throw him off the bridge."³⁶ The mayor's office sent an order to the Okhrana chief of the district, asking him to "Find the ones at the factory who are the worst scoundrels and who set the tone for others."³⁷ In response, the Okhrana reported that eight workers had played important roles in the strike and that at least three were Bolshevik members or sympathizers, one of whom, according to an undercover Okhrana agent, had worked in the factory for eighteen years and "enjoyed a degree of popularity among the workers in the factory."³⁸

A distinguishing feature of the post-Lena movement was the lack of involvement by working women and younger workers. Though they earned low wages, one worker wrote that "they remained outside the movement and did not participate in strikes."³⁹ Okhrana reports on strikes and subsequent arrests suggest organizers themselves apparently made little effort to involve women, focusing their efforts on traditional socialist strongholds in the metal and printing industries. A wave of strikes in early November in support of court marshaled Sevastopol sailors was overwhelming male, yet women workers, including four hundred from the Bonaker Metalworks, did participate.⁴⁰

The relative weakness of revolutionary influence, however, meant that even older more skilled male workers in the factory refrained from strike activity. Sixty thousand St. Petersburg workers struck in support of the Sevastopol sailors involved in a mutiny, an action supported by fourteen thousand workers in eighty-two factories in Moscow, including nine

³² Shliapnikov, Alexander. *Kanun samnadsatogo goda*. Moscow-Petrograd, 1923, vol.1, pp.10-11, 292.

³³ Arutiunov, G.A. *Rabochie dvizhenie v Rossii v periode novogo revoliutsionnogo pod'ema 1910-1914 godov*. Moscow: Nauka, 1975, p. 214.

³⁴ GARF, f. 63, op. 32, d. 1142, ll. 1-2, 9. Okhrana telephone dispatches, 12, 17, 21 July 1912.

³⁵ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 255, l. 83. Ermolaev recollection.

³⁶ GARF, f. 63, op. 32, d. 1148, ll. 12, 22. Okhrana telephone dispatch, 26 July 1912; Okhrana report, 1 August 1912. Under questioning, the two accused leaders denied intimidating strikebreakers.

³⁷ GARF, f. 63, op. 32, d. 1148, l. 11. Okhrana report, 21 July 1912.

³⁸ GARF, f. 63, op. 32, d. 1148, ll. 18-19; d. 1206, ll. 11, 19-32. Okhrana reports, August and September 1912.

³⁹ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 276, l. 13. I. F. Toptov memoir.

⁴⁰ GARF, f. 63, op. 32 (1912), d. 1645, ll. 74-217.

factories in the district.⁴¹ By the spring of 1913, the Okhrana was confident that it had again managed to obliterate the revolutionary underground in Moscow, anticipating a demonstration-free anniversary of the Lena massacre because, “To have any organized event, appropriate agitation is necessary, which assumes the presence of some kind of underground party organization.” However, “thanks to the most recent arrests, everything has been extracted that was considered more or less capable of even creating a semblance of such activity ... the most conscious carriers of Social Democratic ideals, are terrified...”⁴²

The Okhrana belief that the strike movement could be surgically snuffed out by removing key activists underestimated both the resonance of revolutionary demands among wider groups of workers and the socialists’ resolve to continue the battle while replenishing their ranks. On May Day 1913, four weeks after the secret police claimed that the revolutionary underground had been crushed, thirty-three thousand Moscow workers struck.⁴³ The revival of Moscow’s political strikes continued in June with forty-eight of fifty-seven stoppages overtly political, but only a small minority of Moscow Metalworks employees participated because of the previous rounds of arrests. The largest strikes were in the Social Democratic strongholds of Sytin Printing, Dinamo and Bari. In contrast, workers in Guzhon’s factory did not participate. On 24 June renewed strikes included six factories in the district, but only 198 of 2,759 Moscow Metalworks employees participated three days later.⁴⁴

By July 1913 Guzhon expressed concern to other factory owners that “the strike movement taking place at present in Moscow industrial organizations does not show a clear economic form and the essence of the demands and other characteristics are reminiscent of 1905-1906 with all the qualities of a political demonstration.” Again the industrialists’ response was to call for harsh measures. Metal factories had called for “listing the names of the most zealous strikers,” and requested that members circulate information about the movement’s leaders.⁴⁵ Although Guzhon was justifiably concerned about the reemergence of political strikes, the only other political action during 1913 in his Metalworks occurred during September, when a mere seventy-five employees stopped work to protest against the harassment of the labor press in Moscow.⁴⁶

A comparison with the Bromlei factory, a metalworking plant with a strong Bolshevik cell,⁴⁷ illustrates the degree to which workers responded to shop floor agitation. At Bromlei 900 (of 1,100) workers struck on the anniversary of Lena, while Moscow Metalworks employees continued to work. On May Day 1913, 800 Bromlei workers stopped work, but again the

⁴¹ McKean, 495. GARF, f. 63, op. 32, d. 1645, ll. 7, 8, 74-76, 97, 150-152. Okhrana reports, November 1912.

⁴² GARF, f. 63, op. 33, d. 1399, l. 38. Okhrana report, 3 April 1913.

⁴³ RGIAGM, f. 1076, op. 1, d. 17, l. 31; TsMAM f. 526, op. 1, d. 24, l. 24. Guzhon letter to the Moscow Society of Factory and Mill Owners (MSFMO) 1 May 1914.

⁴⁴ GARF, f. 63, op. 33, d. 1399, ll. 113-115, 171, 209. Okhrana reports, June 1913.

⁴⁵ RGIAGM, f. 1076, op. 1, d. 17, l. 15. Guzhon letter, 12 July 1913.

⁴⁶ . GARF, f. 63, op. 32, d. 191 T2, l. 494. Okhrana report, 2 October 1913.

⁴⁷ Arutiunov, G.A. Op.Cit., p.374.

Okhrana found reported no stoppage in Guzhon's factory. At the beginning of the strike in defense of Baltic sailors in June, 600 Bromlei employees went out, but less than 200 Moscow Metalworks employees participated and only on the last day of the action. Bromlei's 1,100 workers led the strike wave in November 1913 in support of arrested St. Petersburg workers while employees in Guzhon's enterprise did not participate.⁴⁸ Thus, in a factory with a strong Bolshevik presence on the shop floor, workers repeatedly struck in large numbers.

The arrest and subsequent collapse of the Bolshevik cell in the Moscow Metalworks meant that the SRs set the tone for political strike action in the factory for the duration of the prerevolutionary period. An SR member wrote that they had attracted fifty young workers, had organized a study circle and a drama group, and apparently led a successful economic strike in the steel foundry shop in April 1913.⁴⁹ One of the few Bolsheviks also acknowledged admitted that the SRs had had more influence in organizing political strike action.⁵⁰

By the eve of the war the sectarian bad blood appears to have subsided as socialists cooperated in an attempt to establish the metalworkers' union in the plant as they did in other Moscow factories.⁵¹ One SR member noted a strengthening of ties among different factories, including a general strike fund established through cooperation between the SRs and Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and the metalworkers' union.⁵² Renewed collaboration probably encouraged several economic strikes, the first of their kind since the spring of 1913. *Pravda* reported a work stoppage in the steel foundry shop in March 1914.⁵³ Workers' memoirs also mention two short one-day strikes: one in the cable shop, which was defeated, and a second in the bolt shop, which resulted in a wage increase.⁵⁴

On 15 March 1914, Guzhon reported to the owners "the latest workers' demonstration in St. Petersburg shows an extremely weak reverberation" in Moscow with only seven hundred workers participating. A few days later four thousand employees were on strike in Moscow but by then the movement in St. Petersburg that had earlier included fifty thousand workers had collapsed.⁵⁵ Yet on May Day 1914, Guzhon informed the Moscow Manufacturer's association that more than twenty thousand workers in seventy-three enterprises had struck in

⁴⁸ GARF, f. 63, op. 33, d. 338, ll. 43-4; d. 1399, l. 141; d. 1400, ll. 210-211. Okhrana reports, 1913.

⁴⁹ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 275, l. 79. M.G. Ob"edkov memoir. GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d.] 256, ll. 47-60, d. 273, l. 97. F.I. Karpukhin recollection and memoir.

⁵⁰ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 265, l. 23. Klimanov recollection.

⁵¹ Bonnell, Victoria. *Roots of Rebellion: Workers' Politics and Organizations in St. Petersburg and Moscow, 1900-1914*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1983, p.415.

⁵² GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 256, ll. 47-60; d. 273, l. 97. F. I. Karpukhin recollection and memoir.

⁵³ *Pravda.*, 18 March 1914.

⁵⁴ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 256, l. 54, d. 275, l. 91, d. 76, l. 59. F. I. Karpukhin recollection; M. G. Ob"edkov, and E. D. Tumanov memoirs.

⁵⁵ RGIAGM, f. 526, op. 1, d. 24, ll. 79, 81. Guzhon reports to MSFMO, 14, 19 March 1914.

Moscow.⁵⁶ Over one million workers struck in the first seven months of 1914, a level of strike activity comparable to that of the 1905 revolt. In July of 1914, after government troops fired on Putilov workers, a general strike developed and workers erected barricades on the streets of St. Petersburg.⁵⁷

Two SR-led political strikes in 1914 illustrate the importance of socialist agitation at the shop level. On 26 April management informed the factory inspector that 1,120 Guzhon workers had struck “because of the expulsion of some members from the State Duma from several meetings.” The strike included all employees in three smaller shops, but the only large shop with a strong showing was the SR stronghold in the steel foundry.⁵⁸ The stoppage in response to the July 1914 general strike of 120,000 in St. Petersburg was larger and better organized. Management informed the factory inspector that 1,500 (of 3,000) Moscow Metalworks employees had struck on 7 July.⁵⁹ Management letters to the factory inspector indicate that this was a well-organized action: workers left in unison at 8 a.m. on 7 July and the next day all workers returned “at the usual time and started work.” Two days later the same workers “after lunch again stopped work in the form of a protest against the imposition of fines for the above-mentioned unauthorized work stoppage.” The SR-dominated steel foundry shop was again the only large shop to participate.⁶⁰ Thus, participation depended on agitators in particular shops--not just factories--to carry the argument for strike action.

World War I brought working-class militancy to a virtual halt. The Factory Inspectorate reported 3,493 stoppages in which 1,327,897 workers participated in the first seven months of the 1914 but only 9,562 workers participated in 41 strikes in the last five months of the year.⁶¹ No strikes were recorded in the Moscow Metalworks for the first seven months of the war.⁶² “At the start of the war,” wrote an SR leader, “there was a complete stoppage of strikes and later, although they happened, they were small and short-lived.”⁶³ The decline in strike activity did not correlate with the deterioration in workers’ living standards as management utilized the patriotic mood to cut the average monthly wage from 48.3 to 34.1 rubles by March 1915.⁶⁴ Another memoir recalled that during the first year of the war “it was tense and you could not say a word against the war ... after the capture of Przemysl, workers were taken to Red Square for a prayer service” and if one did not participate “you were considered an opponent of the war.”⁶⁵

⁵⁶ RGIAGM, f. 1076, op. 1, d. 17, l. 31. Guzhon letter to MSFMO, 1 May 1914.

⁵⁷ McKean, *St. Petersburg Between the Revolutions*, 297-317.

⁵⁸ RGIAGM, f. 498, op. 1, d. 211, l. 5. Management letter to factory inspector, 26 April 1914.

⁵⁹ RGIAGM, f. 498, op. 1, d. 211, l. 10. Management letter to factory inspector, 8 July 1915.

⁶⁰ . RGIAGM, f. 498, op. 1, d. 195, ll. 251-253; d. 211, ll. 10-12. Factory management letters to factory inspector 8, 9, 10 July 1914.

⁶¹ Haimson, L.H. and Brian, E. *Op.Cit.* p.444,445.

⁶² GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 209, l. 24. Factory list of wartime strikes.

⁶³ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 271, l. 38. V.N. Arapov memoir.

⁶⁴ RGIAGM, f. 2322, op. 1, d. 3, l. 246. Report of monthly wages, 8 May 1916.

⁶⁵ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 276, l. 117. E.D. Tumanov memoir.

Economic actions started to revive in the first seven months of 1915, with 231,794 workers involved in 523 strikes. Political strikes remained weak as only 18,008 workers throughout the empire participated in 42 much smaller stoppages in the first year of the war, the largest in Moscow (3,098 workers total) in March 1915 in support of Bolshevik Duma deputies on trial.⁶⁶ The first wartime strike on 15 April 1915 shows how far solidarity had slipped. The Okhrana reported that eighty workers in the rolled metal shop nightshift had turned down management's offer of a 10 to 30 percent raise and then struck, demanding a piece-rate increase of 50 to 100 percent.⁶⁷ Guzhon's strategy for defeating this strike involved a combination of compromise and intimidation. On the same day, management informed the factory director, "because of the rise in prices of goods, all workers in the factory would receive an increase of ten kopecks an hour."⁶⁸ The average monthly wage jumped from 34.1 to 52.5 rubles—the largest wartime wage increase in the factory.⁶⁹ Management also fired thirty-four strikers.⁷⁰ Additionally, management apparently victimized the remaining rolling mill operators as their real wages fell to half their 1913 level.⁷¹ An activist admitted that "things went badly" during the strike because "other shops would not support it." Significantly, the sectional divisions between older skilled workers and younger workers were strengthened at the start of the war: "We had many young workers and at that time it was impossible to raise the issue of equality in the shop."⁷²

Nationalist sentiment at the start of the war helped set the stage for anti-German riots after Russian troops withdrew from Przemyśl in May 1915. Tens of thousands of Moscow workers, including employees from the Moscow Metalworks, looted and pillaged German owned businesses and factories. Yet continued war losses, workers' deteriorating economic position, and their perception that gendarmes had led the riots and then arrested other participants all undermined the patriotic mood.⁷³

Workers' memoirs indicate that after the riots the political mood began to change. "Soon after the pogroms in May 1915 were over," one activist recalled, "workers began to express their dissatisfaction with the war."⁷⁴ A Bolshevik activist wrote that "comrades again renewed work that had been interrupted" after the upheavals.⁷⁵ Another Guzhon worker described the deteriorating living standards and growing political anger against the regime: "Our skilled workers began discussions about political events ... that the Tsar was a fool incapable of governing and that Rasputin ruled Russia." The revolutionary underground

⁶⁶ . Haimson, L.H. and Brian, E. Op.Cit., p.446.

⁶⁷ GARF, f. 63, op. 35, d. 25 T1, l. 88. Okhrana report 15 April 1915.

⁶⁸ 148. RGIAGM, f. 498, op. 1, d. 229, l. 20. Management letter to factory inspector, 15 April 1915.

⁶⁹ RGIAGM, f. 2322, op. 1, d. 3, l. 246. Monthly wages reported on 8 May 1916.

⁷⁰ RGIAGM, f. 1076, op. 1, d. 17, l. 62. MSFMO vice president letter to MSFMO, 20 April 1915.

⁷¹ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 209, l. 24. Factory statistics collected after Revolution.

⁷² GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 265, l. 81. Kochergin recollection.

⁷³ Murphy, 29-31.

⁷⁴ 187. GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 275, l. 19. P.V. Lazrenov memoir.

⁷⁵ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 276, l. 14. I.F. Toptov memoir.

became bolder, putting up political leaflets in the general lavatory near the sheet metal shop calling for “the overthrow of the Tsar, for arming workers. Frequently these included quotes from the speeches from the meetings of the State Duma by the Bolshevik deputies...”⁷⁶

By the summer’s end, the patriotic fervor had dissipated, giving way to a new round of militancy. Six hundred and fifty workers in the rolled metal shop struck for seven days in August 1915 and prevailed in the first substantial wartime economic stoppage, securing a small wage increase.⁷⁷ In a meeting of the Russian Council of Ministers on 2 September 1915, Minister of Internal Affairs N.B. Shcherbatov warned that, “The testimony of all agents is unanimous ... the labor movement will develop to an extent which will threaten the safety of the state.”⁷⁸ In Moscow the sentiment was “violently anti-government” and “workers and the population as a whole are gripped by some sort of madness and are like gunpowder.” He complained that “authorities in Moscow have virtually no forces,” and that those at their disposal were “far from reliable.” Moreover, Moscow had a “wild band” of thirty thousand convalescent soldiers who clashed with police and freed prisoners. In the event of disorders, Shcherbatov feared, “this whole horde will be on the side of the crowd.”⁷⁹

On the following day, Tsar Nicholas prorogued the Duma and triggered the largest wartime political strike wave in Moscow. Alexander Shliapnikov wrote that in Moscow during the late summer of 1915, rising prices and the dismissing of the State Duma led to “meetings and rallies everywhere.”⁸⁰ Guzhon reported to the Moscow factory owners that on 4 September 31,166 workers in sixty-one enterprises struck.⁸¹ SR agitation again placed the Moscow Metalworks at the head of the movement as the entire factory struck in unison. On 5 September 1915, “workers in all departments appeared at work at the prescribed time, but then did not start work and without permission left the factory without issuing any kind of demands.”⁸² The Okhrana reported that three thousand Guzhon workers had “stopped work for two days in the form of a protest about the incident of interrupting the activity of the State Duma.”⁸³

This brief SR militancy during the war was exceptional, as their members in Moscow tended to be more conservative than in Petrograd. On 19 August 1914, the SRs resolved that, because of “the liberationist character of the war,” no attempt should be made to hinder it. Nevertheless, responding to the growth of antigovernment sentiment following the dismissal of the Duma, Moscow SRs briefly shifted to the left, playing an important role in the

⁷⁶ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 273, l. 39. F.I. Karpukhin memoir.

⁷⁷ RGEA f. 9597 op. 1, d. 16, l. 42; M.I. Gil’berg history of Guzhon factory.

⁷⁸ Cherniavsky, Michael ed., *Prologue to Revolution*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967, pp. 234-237.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 234-237.

⁸⁰ Shliapnikov, Alexander. *On the Eve of 1917, Recollections from the Revolutionary Underground*. London: Allison and Busby, 1982, p.101.

⁸¹ RGIAGM, f. 179, op. 21, d. 3391, l. 153; Guzhon letter to MSFMO, n.d. September 1915.

⁸² RGIAGM, f. 498, op. 1, d. 241, l. 4. Management letter to factory inspector, 5 September 1915.

⁸³ GARF, f. 63, op. 32, d. 191 T5, l. 263. Okhrana report, 2 October 1915.

September 1915 strike wave, but retreated again after another round of arrests. Moscow SRs convened to pass resolutions that de-emphasized strikes and demonstrations in favor of building their party organization.⁸⁴

The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, were so weak in the district that in September 1916 their Moscow Committee decided to combine the Lefortovo and Rogozhskii districts that had a combined membership of only thirty-three: ten in Dinamo and smaller cells in Bari, Guzhon, Tsindel', and Postavshchik. Dinamo was the only cell that survived an Okhrana sweep in October, and went on to spark three political strikes in 1916.⁸⁵ The Bolsheviks had a difficult time going it alone in Moscow with only 23,566 participants in political strikes in 1916 while the stronger Bolshevik organization in Petrograd sparked more than ten times that many (256,067), including 138,076 in support of court-martialed Baltic sailors in October.⁸⁶ During the war, the overwhelming number of political strike participants, 348,118 or 74.2%, were found in the politically-charged atmosphere of the capital, with Moscow a distant second with only 39,279 or 8.4%.⁸⁷ Aside from the brief SR cooperation in September 1915, the Okhrana records during the war shows round after round of sweeps in the factories and arrests of Bolsheviks. These were not fictional activists, exaggerated by the Okhrana, but real men and women who paid dearly for keeping the revolutionary movement alive under dire conditions.⁸⁸

Despite the absence of overtly political stoppages in the Moscow Metalworks after the SR participation in the summer of 1915, seven economic strikes demonstrated renewed labour confidence and improved organization in the face of Okhrana and management threats of reprisals. Two strikes in August 1915 involved 400 and 650 workers, extended beyond a single shop, and lasted nine and seven days respectively. A two-day strike in December 1915 involved nearly 500 workers. Strikes in 1916 were even stronger: 3,000 workers participated in a May stoppage, 760 struck in June, and more than 1,000 participated in an eight-day strike in September, with another 489 going out for six days in December.⁸⁹

The May 1916 stoppage was the best organized of the wartime strikes. Plant managers, possibly sensing trouble, issued a factory announcement on 30 April that increased insurance benefits for workers and their dependents.⁹⁰ On 2 May three thousand employees stopped work and demanded a raise in the minimum rate from 2.5 to 4 rubles.⁹¹ On the following day, according to management, some departments began work, but under threats from strikers in

⁸⁴Melancon, Michael. Op.Cit. 1990, pp.67-81

⁸⁵ Karlova, L.A. Istoriiia zavoda "Dinamo". Moscow: Profizdat, 1961, pp.135-137.

⁸⁶ Brian and Haimson. Op.Cit., p. 444. Brian and Haimson do not attribute these strikes to Bolshevik agitation.

⁸⁷ Cliff, T. Op.Cit., p.36.

⁸⁸ GARF, f. 63, op. 34-36. Okhrana reports 1914-1916.

⁸⁹ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 209, l. 24. List of factory economic strikes during the war that omits the May stoppage. GARF, f. 63, op. 33, d. 1403, l. 32, Okhrana report, 2 May 1916.

⁹⁰ RGIAGM, f. 498, op. 1, d. 249, l. 9. Factory announcement, 30 April 1916.

⁹¹ GARF, f. 63, op. 33, d. 1403, l. 32. Okhrana report 2 May 1916.

other shops, the strike soon engulfed the entire factory. At 9:30 a.m., workers from all departments gathered at the main office and handed the factory administration a list of demands. These included: doubling sick pay; minimum wages of fifteen kopecks for apprentices and women, twenty-five kopecks for male workers, and thirty kopecks for skilled workers; ending work at 2:30 on Saturdays and the day before holidays; and issuing wages and bonus pay on Saturday.⁹²

Significantly, the new grievances reflected a demographic shift to a younger and more female workforce that had occurred during the war. Whereas on the eve of the war, teenage workers made up 15.7 percent of the workforce, two years later they constituted 26.6 percent. Similarly, the number of women had steadily increased from 193 in July 1914 to 363 in December 1916, an increase from 5.8 to 13.1 percent of the workforce, with women working in six shops instead of just two as they had earlier.⁹³ Thus, the project of forging unity against management necessitated the drawing up of more inclusive demands that addressed the concerns of an increasingly significant minority. This strengthening of workplace solidarity by taking up the demands and concerns of women and younger workers has previously been largely ignored in the literature of the pre-revolutionary strike movement.

The Okhrana reported on 3 May that after lunch, all workers with the exception of seven hundred workers in the rolled metal and repair shops, returned to work.⁹⁴ Some workers expressed dissatisfaction with the results, and a subsequent 22-day strike by 760 workers in June was the longest of the prerevolutionary period. One memoir describes the difficulties of maintaining such a long action because in “the third week of the strike, the morale of many workers suffered. Many were forced to sell their things to somehow survive.” By the fifth week, many workers secretly returned to work, and by the sixth week “almost all” workers returned. Management managed to break the strike with “some comrades” not returning to work as they were “subject to repression.”⁹⁵

In the context of the rising working-class movement, such management tactics only encouraged more effective labor organization. The eight-day strike of more than a thousand workers in September and October 1916 shows the increased level of workers’ solidarity, organization, and confidence. The Okhrana reported that this was the only strike in the district for the month.⁹⁶ To avoid victimization, shops elected delegates to meet with Guzhon and workers did not leave the plant.⁹⁷ The strike started in the form casting and steel foundry shops on 26 September and spread to the bolt and cable shops the next day. Employment figures show that the strike included all employees in the four shops, including 123 women in three shops and 33 teenage laborers. This was also a well-timed strike, as management

⁹² GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 210, l. 93. RGIAGM, f. 498, op. 1, d. 249, l. 7. Management report to factory inspector, 3 May 1916.

⁹³ TsGAMO, f. 186, op. 3, d. 3, ll. 14-17. Factory employment statistics.

⁹⁴ GARF, f. 63, op. 33, d. 1403, l. 34. Okhrana report, 3 May 1916.

⁹⁵ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 275, ll. 19-20. P.V. Lazrenov memoir.

⁹⁶ GARF, f. 63, op. 12, d. 191 T5, l. 578. Okhrana report for September 1916.

⁹⁷ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 275, ll. 92-93. M.G. Ob”edkov memoir.

complained it caused delays in “orders for various items needed for state defense.” Management was compelled to ask the inspector to certify that the strike had caused the holdup, reporting that on 5 October the strike had been “liquidated,” but provided no details of the result.⁹⁸

A six-day strike by almost five hundred workers in December was the last action of the prerevolutionary period, and again showed a high level of organization with the solid participation of the entire form-casting shop and elected delegates to avoid victimization.⁹⁹ Workers demanded pay for days when it was impossible to work because the machines were frozen, and despite the threat of sending military reservists to the front, almost all workers in several shops struck.¹⁰⁰ The strike ended in a partial victory for the workers, as management conceded to some of the workers’ demands.¹⁰¹

The strike movement in the Moscow Metalworks illustrates several features of the prerevolutionary strike movement. First, the radicalization of workers at the factory level cannot be viewed in separation from wider political events. The student movement of 1910-11, the Lena massacre, the war, the proroguing of the Duma, etc., all impacted workers’ consciousness and their willingness (or unwillingness at the start of the war) to strike. Second, there was clearly cooperation between socialist groups in the pre-War years. All contemporary sources indicate that revolutionaries—both Bolshevik and SRs—played a significant role in organizing strikes, particularly political stoppages. Strikes did not organize workers, workers organized strikes and these efforts often depended on the presence or absence of worker agitation at the shop level. When the larger SR cell participated and cooperated with the Bolsheviks, the strike actions were the largest in Moscow, though this SR influence in the factory was exceptional rather than the norm in the city. Rather than mandated by directives from a party center, political strikes were the result of local initiatives by shop militants supporting the larger movement in the capital. Evidence at the shop level suggests that Haimson and Smith were correct, that a wider milieu of experienced activists collaborated in organizing economic strikes. Third, Okhrana repression in Moscow was particularly harsh and, unlike Petrograd, the Bolsheviks had a more difficult time organizing political strikes by themselves when other socialists retreated from strike action. While political strikes continued in a few Bolshevik strong-holds during the war, the movement was much less effective than it was in Petrograd. The Bolsheviks paid a heavy price for their principled tenacity while pro-War socialists temporarily benefited numerically—a factor usually overlooked in explaining the contours of 1917. The Mensheviks and SR strength in early 1917 was based in part on their pro-War anti-strike pledge of the previous years which allowed them to avoid the repeated Okhrana sweeps of the factories. It was hardly coincidental that the cowards of October 1917 were also the cowards of the Great War.

⁹⁸ TsGAMO, f. 186, op. 3, d. 3, l. 16. Monthly employment statistics; RGIAGM, f. 498, op.1, d. 272, l. 1. Management report to factory inspector, 11 October 1916.

⁹⁹ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 209, l. 24.

¹⁰⁰ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 257, ll. 1-2. P.N. Klimanov recollection.

¹⁰¹ GARF, f. 7952, op. 3, d. 274, l. 20. P.V. Lazrenov memoir.

Fourth, workers learned through class conflict. Their collective experience refutes the notion that workers were mere victims incapable of challenging a “strong state”, while also confirming the Marxist notion of the working class as a powerful “universal class” capable of reshaping society. The long-term tendency was for workers to become better organized and more inclusive in their demands in attempting to combat both the employers and the Okhrana. Significantly, by the eve of 1917, the grievances of women and younger workers were included in strike demands, strengthening intra- and inter-shop solidarity. This protracted radicalization and development of class consciousness would directly impact events in 1917— the culmination of years of bitter class conflict in the factories.