

Under the Influence: A Sectarian Railway Worker, the Bolsheviks, and the 1905 Russian Revolution

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Bearing in mind that in many of its aspects the sectarian movement in Russia represents one of the most democratic trends in Russia, the Second Congress calls the attention of all Party members to the necessity of working among members of sects so as to bring them under Social-Democratic influence.

--V.I. Lenin, "Draft Resolution," Second Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (1903).

Considering that the sectarian movement in Russia constitutes in many of its manifestations one of the democratic trends directed against the existing order of things, the Second Congress calls the attention of all Party members to work among the sectaries with a view to attracting them towards Social Democracy.

--G. V. Plekhanov, "Resolution on Work among the Sectaries," Second Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (1903).¹

Long a multi-confessional empire, Russia saw its minority religious population increase dramatically during the second half of the nineteenth century and attract the attention of opposing forces: the Orthodox Church, dedicated to preserving the absolute authority of the tsar; and the intelligentsia,² determined to

1. "Draft Resolution on the Publication of a Periodical for Members of Religious Sects," in *V. I. Lenin: Collected Works*, ed. Clemens Dutt and Julius Katzer (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1961), 6: 473, and subsequently revised and published as a "Principal Resolution" of the Second Congress. See Brian Pierce, transl., *Second Ordinary Congress of the RSDLP, 1903: Complete Text of the Minutes* (1904; London: New Park, 1978), 18. Alexander I. Klibanov, *History of Religious Sectarianism in Russia, (1860s-1917)*, ed. Stephen P. Dunn, transl. Ethel Dunn (London: Pergamon, 1982), 6, states that Lenin wrote the draft resolution based on a report on sectarians by V.D. Bonch-Bruевич, and Plekhanov accepted it with minor corrections. Ethel Dunn translates the latter part of Klibanov's quotation of the accepted resolution as: "calls the attention of all Party members . . . to the aim of winning [sectarians'] support."

2. Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, "The Groups Between: *Raznochinsty*, Intelligentsia, Professionals," in *The Cambridge History of Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 251-52, discusses the difficulty of arriving at a single collective definition of "intelligentsia" and argues that in addition to mental labor, or even simply an education, an *intelligent* had a critical attitude towards conditions in society—and a desire to change those conditions.

find a way to overthrow the autocracy and transform the state.³ From the 1880s to 1905, sectarians⁴—religious dissidents—became a focal point of interest for both groups. The Church sought ways to combat the growth and spread of sectarianism and bring its followers back to the orthodox fold, while the radical intelligentsia hoped to recruit the dissenters into their revolutionary movements. Neither one succeeded: sectarianism continued to grow, and relatively few religious dissidents became political activists. This essay first compares how the Russian Orthodox Church and the Social Democrats who would become the Bolsheviks in 1903 each engaged with sectarians, Stundists in particular,⁵ and then examines more closely the Bolsheviks' failure to bring sectarians under their influence, as Lenin imagined the relationship in the party's draft resolution quoted in our first epigraph. Published in 1900, a little-known work by Leon Trotsky (1879-1940) on the labor movement in Nikolaev, Ukraine, adumbrates the fatal flaw in the Bolsheviks' relationship with sectarians as it would soon be experienced by an exiled Stundist who worked for the Transcaucasian Railway, Khariton Chebanov (1886-1962). Chebanov fled to the United States and created a scattered but valuable record there concerning his radical activity as a Bolshevik⁶ in Russia from 1904 to June, 1907, the last eighteen months of which, Abraham Ascher writes, Soviet historians have neglected as a "'period of decline' when large sectors of the population succumbed to a 'constitutional illusion.'"⁷ Unlike many Russian worker memoirs of this period, Chebanov's published and unpublished statements preserving his thoughts and feelings were produced in the United States free of

3. Heather Coleman, *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution, 1905-1929* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2005), 23-25 and 100-102, discusses the way in which persecution of religious dissidents drew opponents of the autocracy to their cause. Arto Luukkanen, *The Party of Unbelief: The Religious Policy of the Bolshevik Party, 1917-1929* (Helsinki: Studia Historica, 1994), 48, notes that in the early years of the formation of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, the party's advocacy of freedom of religion in *Iskra* attracted support from a moderate priest, although the party opposed a close cooperation between social democracy and the Orthodox religion.

4. We follow the word choice of the final subject of this article, Khariton Chebanov, a Stundist, who refers to fellow religious dissidents specifically by sect (e.g., Stundist, Molokan) and generically as "sectarians" (*sektanty*), e.g., Chebanov, "Letter to Benjamin Zabronsky," ca. 1960-1961 (authors' collection), 3. See also our Note 30 for contemporary, pre-1907 usage of *sektant*.

5. A sect derived from German Protestantism, Stundists took their name from German *stunde*, "hours," referring to the practice of daily, private Gospel study at certain hours.

6. Stephen F. Jones, *Socialism in Georgian Colors: The European Road to Social Democracy, 1883-1917* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005), 283-84, observes that party structure in Transcaucasia was more complex than elsewhere. Georgian social democracy comprised a "third way" independent of Bolshevism and Menshevism and considered the centralized and hierarchical Bolshevik organization "alien to native tradition." Chebanov specifically identified himself as a Bolshevik.

7. Abraham Ascher, "Soviet Historians and the Revolution of 1905," in *1905. La premiere revolution russe*, ed. Francois-Xavier Coquin and Celine Gervais-Francelle (Paris: Sorbonne, 1986), 479.

Soviet “ideological imprint.”⁸ Chebanov would not have been able to say what he did had he remained in Russia. Nor would his entire story have been preserved without the help of his local American newspapers.⁹

Carrots and Sticks, Religious and Revolutionary

Influenced by the German Protestant colonists who had first been invited by Catherine II to settle in Russia with the promise of religious freedom and exemption from military service, Stundists practiced a faith that envisioned establishing the Kingdom of God, salvation on earth, through material means and personal lifestyle. Their German neighbors were barred from proselytizing, but Russian Stundists imitated their clean, industrious, sober, and literate existence centered on daily private reading of the Gospels, a text they viewed as a model for social justice and equality in this life. Stundists repudiated the Orthodox clergy’s acceptance of the poverty and degradation of the peasantry as a condition to be suffered in life and remedied in heaven, and they rejected what they saw as the empty, spiritless rituals administered for profit by an often corrupt and uncaring local priest, who was bound by the state to report their alleged infractions and crimes. As a whole, Stundists were an upwardly mobile sect with a rationalist outlook on religion derived from the European Enlightenment: the faithful used the capacity of reason, rooted in Bible-study, to craft a faith unmediated by clerical rituals and free of Russia’s ubiquitous icon devotion. Unsurprisingly, the Orthodox Church came to view Stundists not as a major threat, but *the* major threat to its authority in the final decades of the nineteenth century.

Whatever acceptance by church and state that Stundists had gained before the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 collapsed during the counter-reform period under the rule of the “tsar persecutor,” Alexander III, and his new chief procurator of the Most Holy Synod, the ruling body of the church, Konstantin Pobedonostsev (1827-1907). Stundism was condemned as the “most pernicious sect” in Russia, not only an offense against the church but the state in that it was viewed as a traitorous non-Russian movement that looked to the German tsar for protection. Heavy-handed measures were taken to stamp out its influence. To contain the spread of Stundism to the Orthodox faithful, dissidents were harassed in their towns and villages, mobs stirred up by the local clergy who were charged with policing the dissidents. The more vocal Stundists were subject to persecution

8. Page Herrlinger, *Working Souls: Russian Orthodoxy and Factory Labor in St. Petersburg, 1881-1917* (Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2007), 20ff., discusses the difficulty of finding unmediated worker memoirs collected by post-1917 Soviet authorities; most bear the obvious “ideological imprint” of the day. See also the concerns about the transparency of Semen Ivanovich Kanatchikov’s autobiography to 1905, first published in the Soviet Union in 1929 and subsequently translated by Reginald E. Zelnik, in reviews by Joseph Bradley, *Slavic Review* 47, no. 1 (1988): 124-25, and Geoffrey Swain, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 65, no. 3 (1987): 474.

9. Victoria I. Zhuravleva, “American Phenomenology of the Russian Revolution: 1905 from the Other Side of the Atlantic,” *Journal of Russian American Studies* 3, no. 1 (2019), 71-72, notes the intense contemporary interest of the American periodical press in the 1905 revolution.

(imprisonment, fines, loss of civil rights) and exile from the core region of the empire to its remote periphery, with return conditioned upon renunciation of their heterodoxy and resumption of orthodoxy.¹⁰ Some of this harsh repression was devised by the Church's new internal anti-sectarian mission, established in 1886.¹¹ Its elite, theologically-trained members recommended policies to discourage Stundism, such as sending children of sectarians to asylums or denying them education in state schools, and, in 1891, banning Stundist meetings.¹² Missionary guides and textbooks instructed the parish priests to view Stundists as dangerous advocates of a western-style, deviant rationalism capable of insidiously infecting the Orthodox.¹³ Adjunct brotherhoods distributed anti-sectarian brochures that popularized the idea of Stundist aberrance. The crude, ten-verse poem, "The Damned Stundist," warning the faithful not to fall into the lair of this "evil-working beast," circulated widely.¹⁴

The professional anti-sectarian missionaries used subtler techniques as well to win back the Church's spiritual renegades. The most popular devotional practices of sectarians were identified, and the special missionary corps, better educated and more dedicated to their task than parish priests, was deployed to incorporate these features into missionary meetings offered in areas with high concentrations of sectarians. In Bessarabia, for instance, the *Kishinev Diocesan Gazette* of 1892

10. Khariton Chebanov, *Memoir*, transl. Ronald D. Leblanc (Freehold, NJ, December 2, 1961; authors' collection), 35, mentions the case of Ivan Liasotky, a Stundist administratively exiled to Bessarabia, where Chebanov's father helped him find housing. (Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich, *Materialy k istorii i izucheniiu ruskago sekstantstva i raskola*, [Christchurch, Eng.: A. Tchertkoff, 1903], 6: 11, records Liasotky's reference to Cheban's aid). Liasotky, who had been driven from province to province, could not bear to watch the suffering that his impoverishment was causing his six children and sent in a declaration that he was returning to the Orthodox Church. By the time Liasotky returned home, two of his children had died, and his position as a *volost* scribe had been taken by another. He petitioned the tsar, but Pobednostsev intervened and exiled Liasotky to Gerusy in the province of Elizavetpol, a destitute Tartar village at 4,000-foot elevation with little opportunity for employment. He was sentenced to five years and then another five years was added. See "Instances of Stundist Persecution," *Baptist Missionary Magazine* 78 (1898): 129. Nicholas B. Breyfogle, *Heretics and Colonizers: Forging Russia's Empire in the South Caucasus* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2005), 51ff., discusses forced exile as punishment for religious heterodoxy.

11. J. Eugene Clay, "Orthodox Missionaries and 'Orthodox Heretics' in Russia, 1886-1917," in *Of Regime and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, ed. Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2018), 41.

12. Heather J. Coleman, "Theology on the Ground: Dmitrii Bogoliubov, the Orthodox Anti-Sectarian Mission, and the Russian Soul," in *Thinking Orthodox in Modern Russia: Culture, History, Context*, ed. Patrick Lally Michelson and Judith Deutsch Cornblatt (Madison: U Wisconsin P, 2014), 68.

13. Albert W. Wardin, Jr., *Evangelical Sectarianism in the Russian Empire and the USSR: A Bibliographical Guide* (Lanham MD: American Theological Library Association, 1995), 357-58, describes anti-Stundist missionary materials, including *Missionerskoe obozrenie*, the chief journal of the Inner Missions of the Russian Orthodox church, a "most valuable source for the study of Stundism" and other sects.

14. Albert W. Wardin, Jr., *On the Edge: Baptists and Other Free Church Evangelicals in Tsarist Russia, 1855-1917* (Eugene OR: WIPF and Stock, 2013), 211-12.

published an article explaining how a missionary priest in Samara forced the Baptist presbyter Pavlov to go elsewhere. Rather than taking the case to court, since Pavlov's guilt might be hard to prove,¹⁵ the missionary fought fire with fire: he introduced the common singing so dear to both sectarians and Russian peasants in general into the Divine Service; he invited his flock to gather with him every day at 6 p.m. for the informal conversation they found so rewarding. "Thus, the Missionary struck down the protestants with their own weapons," the anonymous diocesan author ("S.M.") declared. After all, what especially draws Orthodox people into sectarianism are "meetings at which one can listen to spiritual sermons and read something edifying and discuss [it] in private with your loved ones." There's nothing preventing Orthodox missionaries from using these practices, the diocesan writer said, concluding with the hope that "this honorable mission serve as a role model for all who are involved in dealing with sectarians!"¹⁶

Similar techniques were employed by internal Orthodox missionaries in non-sectarian settings, for example, in St. Petersburg among beleaguered workers for whom atheism and alcohol held increasing appeal. Page Herrlinger notes the use of missionary *besity*, extra-liturgical talks—evening, conversational-style meetings, sometimes with dancing or other entertainment, meant to provide an alternative to the tavern as relaxation from the brutal demands of ten- and twelve-hour workdays in the factories. If the overall missionary campaign in St. Petersburg was not a success, Herrlinger maintains, it did force a change in the local clergy, "who became less extreme in their belief that the Word alone could substitute for Bread."¹⁷ The same might be said for Orthodox missionary attempts to attract Stundists back to the flock—these efforts seem to have succeeded more as exercises that induced self-examination among the clergy than as measures that retrieved errant Stundists. The success rate in 1887, when Pobedonostsev reported only 20 families reclaimed from sectarianism by means of softer persuasion,¹⁸ probably improved little. However, the Church's limited concession to sectarian faith practices dovetailed with the state's decision to loosen its legal grip on dissidents in the year or two before the tsar proclaimed the Edict of Religious Toleration in 1905,¹⁹ followed by the manifesto of 1906 that granted limited religious freedoms to sectarians. The announcement of toleration, adroitly timed for Easter Sunday, was received with "joyous surprise" by religious dissenters in St. Petersburg and elsewhere, who celebrated the edict even though it lacked the

15. Alexander Polunov, "The Problem of Religious Freedom in Late Imperial Russia: The Case of Russian Baptists," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 3, no. 2 (2012): 161-67, discusses the conflicted mechanics of church and government repression of Stundism in the late nineteenth century. The courts were less zealous about prosecuting sectarians than the priests, he argues.

16. S. M., "Benderskie shtundinsty i kratkiya zamechaniya voobshche i bor'be s nim," *Kishinevskie Eparhial'nie Vedomosti* 17 (1892): 397-98.

17. *Working Souls*, 249.

18. Wardin, *On the Edge*, 213.

19. G. P. Camfield, "The Pavlotsky of Khar'kov Province, 1886-1905: Harmless Sectarians or Dangerous Rebels?," *Slavonic and East European Review* 68, no. 4 (1990): 712, notes other ways in which the church supported this decision, e.g., in March, 1905, the Metropolitan of St. Petersburg exonerated Stundists and others of any revolutionary intent.

legal means to enforce it and would be followed by a return to repression.²⁰ In terms of the 1905 revolution, the Russian Orthodox Church's negotiation of the sectarian problem outflanked the desultory, at times self-contradictory, effort by Lenin and the Bolsheviks to recruit dissenters to their party.

In the widespread belief that religious dissent was political protest in disguise, the radical Populists who "went to the people" after the Emancipation of 1861 were directed by ethnographers to seek out both schismatic (Old Believer)²¹ and sectarian peasants, only to be disappointed by their poor reception. The disillusioned Populists went home and turned to terrorism, Alexander Etkind remarks.²² In 1890, Alexander Klibanov asserts, the young Vladimir Lenin, an early follower of Marxism, first developed an interest in Stundists.²³ Lenin mentioned the revolutionary potential of sectarians as Russian citizens in general in *The Tasks of the Russian Social Democrats* (1897) and as members of the peasantry in *Draft of Our Party Program* (1899). But in his more fully formed and better-known position paper, *What Is To Be Done?* (1901-1902), Lenin referred to sectarians only as a useful example of a persecuted group, along with flogged peasants, tortured soldiers, and others, with which to agitate workers into expanding the scope of their opposition beyond the factory owners who exploited them to the autocracy itself, the root evil of all that ailed Russia. Lenin's interest in sectarians as revolutionaries seemed to have flagged, perhaps due to his general belief that their leaders were complacent members of the bourgeoisie and their followers "backward" peasants, neither of which would or could lead a Marxist revolution.

However, the prominent ethnographer of sectarians who would become a Bolshevik ally, Vladimir D. Bonch-Bruевич (1873-1955),²⁴ drew Lenin's

20. Wardin, *On the Edge*, 325, 334-37. Wardin also discusses the lack of actual legislation to enact religious freedom and the Church's return to its repression of sectarians during the era of reaction, 1909-1914, yoked to missionary efforts that seemed trivial compared to earlier outreach, for instance, the distribution of wall calendars with appropriate Orthodox quotations to rival sectarian counterparts.

21. Old Believers were a schismatic Russian Orthodox sect that had split from the Church in the 17th century; they opposed the modernization of rituals.

22. Alexander Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2011), 93-122, discusses how misleading stereotypes of sectarians developed from romantic ethnographers.

23. Aleksei Alexandrovich Beliakov, *Yunost' vozhdia, vospominaniia sovremennika V. I. Lenin* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1958), 57-60, narrates an incident in which Lenin carries on a lengthy interchange with two sectarians about faith, social justice, and change. Klibanov, *History*, 1, identified the sectarians as Stundists and dated the incident in 1890. James D. White, *Lenin: The Practice and Theory of Revolution* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 31, notes that Beliakov (1870-1927) was an early acquaintance of Lenin and suggests the interchange occurred in Samara in 1892. Barry Hollingsworth, "Review of Adam B. Ulam, *Lenin and the Bolsheviks*," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 46, no. 106 (1968): 256, cautions against taking Beliakov's statements about Lenin at face value rather than as Soviet hagiography.

24. Bonch-Bruевич was already a Marxist when he first met Lenin briefly in 1894; see Alexei Zverev and Bruno Coppieters, "V.D. Bonch-Bruевич and the Doukhobors: On the Conscientious Objection Policies of the Bolesheviks," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 27, no. 3 (1995): 3.

attention to the fact that large numbers of these dissidents who were rural peasants were on the verge of becoming urban workers, Paul Gabel observes.²⁵ In fact, Stundism was flourishing among the proletariat in southern Ukraine and St. Petersburg during the 1890s.²⁶ It had not escaped the notice of the chief procurator, Pobedonostsev, that “the Stundists have taken an active part in the socialist and labor movement in the port of Nicolaev”²⁷; Trotsky encountered these workers in his brief stint as labor organizer there in 1897-1898, as we discuss shortly. Bonch-Bruевич may have had his own reservations about the revolutionary potential of sectarians,²⁸ but he argued to Lenin that “close connections with these groups . . . would give the Bolsheviks more influence among the rising proletarian class.”²⁹

At the 1903 Party Congress best known for the organizational split of Social Democrats into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, Lenin proposed the draft resolution endorsing outreach to sectarians, “one of the most democratic trends in Russia,” whom the party should endeavor to bring “under [its] influence.” Georgi V. Plekhanov (1856-1918), the so-called father of Russian Marxism, revised the draft resolution, quoted in our second epigraph, to temper the claim about sectarianism as a democratic trend and to recalibrate the party’s approach as a matter of entreaty—attraction—not domination. The difference in the two versions went to the heart of Plekhanov’s rift with Lenin in 1905 over the issue of democratic centralism, Lenin’s doctrine of a hierarchical, authoritarian party led by professional revolutionaries. It also predicted the failure of the Bolsheviks to retain the loyal services of a sectarian worker in remote Transcaucasia in mid-1907.

In 1904, Bonch-Bruевич was tasked with editing a journal, *Rassvet*, to help persuade sectarians to join the Bolshevik movement.³⁰ The publication’s reports on Social Democrats’ experiences organizing sectarians dealt exclusively with Stundists, Coleman notes.³¹ Bonch-Bruевич tailored the journal’s message to them by assimilating, in effect, subordinating, religion to politics. If the proletariat-sectarian requires the word “devil,” identify this concept with capitalism, Bonch-

25. Paul Gabel, *And God Created Lenin: Marxism vs. Religion in Russia, 1917-1929* (Amherst NY: Prometheus, 2005), 419.

26. Deborah Pearl, *Creating a Culture of Revolution: Workers and the Revolutionary Movement in Late Imperial Russia* (Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2015), 84.

27. F. Volkhovsky, “The Established Church versus Popular Religion, Part II,” *Free Russia* 12 (November 1, 1901): 94.

28. D. D. Pyzikov, “V. D. Bonch-Bruевич: ‘Professional’ Revolutionary and One of the Founders of the Study of Religion in the Soviet Union,” *Concept: Philosophy, Religious, Culture* 4, no. 1 (2020): 98.

29. Gabel, *And God Created Lenin*, 419.

30. According to Klibanov, *History*, 430, s.v. “Bonch-Bruевич, V.D.,” the journal *Zhizn’* included three articles in 1902 (in issues no. 2, 5, and 6) by Bonch-Bruевич, entitled “Sredi sektantov,” advocating outreach to sectarians. *Zhizn’* ceased publication at the end of 1902, and Lenin effectively inherited its resources; see Jack Conrad, *Fantastic Reality: Marxism and the Politics of Religion* (London: JC Publications and November Publications, 2017), 412.

31. *Russian Baptists*, 131.

Bruevich advised.³² Other revolutionary propaganda aimed at sectarians similarly urged dissidents to interpret their religious dissent as political protest at heart. For instance, “O svobodie viery,” a brochure circulated by the Socialist Revolutionary party ca. 1900,³³ rewrote the life story of Chebanov’s father, Eremai, who was an anti-clerical Stundist, into a tale urging resistance to the military and the autocracy.³⁴ There is no evidence that Eremai opposed either of the latter; in fact, he owed his literacy to the soldiers who taught him to read while billeted in his home on winter maneuvers in Bendery (now Bender, Moldova).³⁵ Lenin did speak specifically to sectarian religious concerns in his continuing advocacy of freedom of conscience, perhaps in acknowledgment of the financial contributions the party solicited—and received—from sectarians.³⁶ But nine months after *Rassvet* began publication, it was discontinued for lack of contributing authors.³⁷ The last statement in support of sectarians that Lenin’s modern apologist, Klibanov, could find during this period is dated 1905.³⁸ By 1907, the Bolsheviks effort to enlist sectarians was abandoned; Lenin had concluded that the proletarian revolution owed nothing to these groups, nor would it gain anything from them.³⁹

Coleman argues that Bonch-Bruevich felt that Baptists or Stundists would never display “collectivist and revolutionary instincts” if Russia became, or seemed to become, a constitutional state.⁴⁰ As petty-bourgeois sectarians, they

32. Bonch-Bruevich was primarily concerned with how to discuss current events in Christian terms familiar and accessible to sectarians, not with how to accommodate their reputation for social equality. See Robert C. Williams, “Orthodoxy and Eschatology in Post-Bolshevik Culture,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, New Series 2 (2001): 82, and Conrad, *Fantastic Reality*, 412.

33. Eremai Cheban, “O svobodie viery” (n.p., n.pub., n.d.). Microfilm. New Haven CT: Research Publications, Inc., 1973. Russian revolutionary literature, Reel 3, item 1 (unpaginated). OCLC no. 24177769.

34. In his autobiography, S. I. Kanatchikov described how revolutionary propagandists reshaped texts to their own ends. Using one of Tolstoy’s works, for instance, they retained the part in which Tolstoy vividly described class contradictions between the pleasure-seeking rich and the suffering poor, but “got rid of the Tolstoyan nonresistance ending and replaced it with [their] own social democratic conclusion.” See Reginald E. Zelnik, ed. and transl., *A Radical Worker in Tsarist Russia: The Autobiography of Semen Ivanovich Kanatchikov* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986), 288.

35. Chebanov, *Memoir*, 6.

36. Etkind, *Internal Colonization*, 211-12, discusses the financial assistance offered to revolutionary parties, including the Bolsheviks, by Moscow Old-Believer merchants, who were anxious to westernize Russia. Among them, Savva T. Morozov (1862-1905) financed a Bolshevik newspaper and contributed heavily to the party. Luukkanen, *The Party of Unbelief*, 50, also comments upon the “peculiar cooperation” between Morozov and Lenin. Jesse Adkins, “Strange Bedfellows: The Bolshevik-Molokanye Relationship,” *The University of Arkansas Undergraduate Research Journal* 6, no. 1 (2005): 4, notes that Bonch-Bruevich also solicited donations from sectarians for the “revolutionary cause.”

37. Klibanov, *History*, 8, notes that Lenin supported the continued publication of *Rassvet* on the grounds that it was funded independent of the party. However, its publication ceased at the end of 1904.

38. *Ibid.*, 9.

39. Gabel, *And God Created Lenin*, 420.

40. *Russian Baptists*, 131-32.

sought religious freedoms that could be gained in the constitutional order promised in the Duma of 1905, he reasoned. However illusory the tsar's Edict of Toleration proved to be, it has typically been used to explain why Bolsheviks failed to bring Stundists under their control.⁴¹ That, at least, is the reason advanced by Klibanov: after 1905, complacent, bourgeois sectarian leaders had no wish to antagonize the autocracy, and they discouraged their more liberal followers from doing so.⁴² But such explanations do not account for the behavior of a Stundist like Chebanov, who remained in the Bolshevik movement until mid-1907 and who remembered the relaxation of state repression of Stundists in 1905 not in terms of religious but secular freedoms. To celebrate the birth of his son Alexei, long-awaited heir to the throne, Nicholas II granted all exiles their freedom and their rights of citizenship, Chebanov wrote. Exercising his right to travel again, Chebanov's father briefly returned to his former home in Bessarabia to visit his younger brother.⁴³ Chebanov's falling out with the Bolsheviks is better understood as a function of Lenin's naively paradoxical draft resolution to bring "one of the most democratic trends in Russia . . . under its influence." Trotsky's "Nikolaev," to which we turn next, foreshadows the undemocratic nature of the demoralizing role a sectarian worker like Chebanov had to assume in order to function as a member of Lenin's party.

Trotsky's "Labor Movement in Nikolaev" (1900)

As Trotsky later explained in *My Life, An Attempt at Autobiography* (1930), it was during his first arrest, while incarcerated in Odessa in 1900, that he "wrote and smuggled out of prison a pamphlet on the labor movement in Nikolaev, which was published soon after that in Geneva."⁴⁴ Trotsky's eleven-page field report was actually published as the second part of the 30-page pamphlet, *On the Labor Movement in Odessa and Nikolaev*, issued by the RSDLP in Geneva in 1900.⁴⁵ The first part, "Labor Movement in Odessa," was written separately by Iuri Mikhailovich Steklov (1873-1941), cover name for Osvii Moiseevich Nakhmiskis,

41. The manifesto is also seen as the "wedge" the tsar drove between liberal and radical camps to regain political initiative in late 1905. See Anthony J. Heywood, *Engineer of Revolutionary Russia: Iurii V. Lomonosov (1876-1952) and the Railways* (London: Routledge, 2010), 79.

42. *History*, 8-10, 407-8.

43. Chebanov, *Memoir*, 10, may have confused this restoration of sectarian rights with the Edict of Toleration; in any event, he recalled secular, not religious freedom. Chebanov did recall the Molokans' celebration in Tiflis in 1905 of Alexander I's manifesto of 1805 allowing them to profess their religion (*Memoir*, 12), a short-lived freedom.

44. Leon Trotsky, *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), 123.

45. Iu. M. Steklov and Leon Trotsky, *Iz rabochago dvizheniia v Odessie i Nikolaevie* (Zheneva: Soiuz, 1900). [Catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001342148](http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001342148). All quotations from this work are cited parenthetically by page number in our text. Also published by the RSDLP in Geneva in 1900, one more such report, on the labor movement in the textile manufacturing center Ivanovo-Voznesensk, the Russian "Manchester," suggests that the Steklov-Trotsky pamphlet was—or was meant to be—part of a longer series. See *Rabochee dvizhenie v Ivanovo-Voznesenskom raione za poslednie 15 liet*.

<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/102370648>

son of a Jewish merchant from Odessa, who spread worker propaganda there.⁴⁶

“Nikolaev” offers Trotsky’s observations on his experience organizing workers at the shipbuilding factory in the town of Nikolaev (now Mykolaiv), Ukraine, when he was 18. It was Trotsky’s first foray into radical politics. The workers, Trotsky noted, were mostly literate Russian religious dissenters, specifically, Stundists. The pamphlet has received scant attention, perhaps because, soon after it was written, the early émigré party historian, Vladimir Akimov (1872-1921), reviewed and dismissed “Nikolaev” as the politically tepid thoughts of a sincere but naïve young man involved in an equally immature labor movement.⁴⁷ A century later, Ian Thatcher found “Nikolaev” to be an “interesting source.”⁴⁸ Our reading of the work, which follows, takes its cue from Thatcher.

Written in an anonymous, third-person voice, “Nikolaev” surveys several related subjects: the history of the new shipbuilding factories and rapidly growing labor organization in the port town, with a characterization of the Stundist factory workers employed there; the development and structure of the Southern Russian Workers’ Union in Nikolaev; the types of propaganda that assisted the growth of the Union until January 21, 1898, when the first arrests, imprisonments, and exiles began,⁴⁹ with recommendations for propaganda that should be developed for the future fight; and the necessity for a specific manual detailing the tsarist “system of searches, arrests, interrogations, prison routines . . .” (29). Trotsky’s report ends with brief mention of two political prisoners who might have avoided their fates-- injury and mental breakdown--had they been prepared in advance to cope with incarceration, and of a third revolutionary who, lacking any alignment with a workers’ movement, committed suicide. At the heart of Trotsky’s report, though, is his respect for the social status and accomplishments of Nikolaev’s Stundist factory workers. Whether Trotsky specifically knew of Lenin’s interest in sectarians is unclear, but he must have been aware of the longstanding attention paid to them by the Russian intelligentsia, as we have discussed earlier.

“Nikolaev”: The “Fertile Ground” of Stundist Workers

In general, Trotsky wrote, Nikolaev proletarians were culturally above the level of the average Russian factory worker; only a small percentage was illiterate, he noted. Although Trotsky did not highlight the obvious connection to literacy, he remarked that many of these workers were “rationalist sectarians”

46. Allan K. Wildman, *The Making of a Workers’ Revolution: Russian Social Democracy, 1891-1903* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1967), 110, notes that the Odessa Social Democrats led by Steklov-Nekhamkes and G. Tysperovich was one of the first organizations to establish extensive ties with workers there. See also Robert Weinberg, *The Revolution of 1905 in Odessa: Blood on the Steps* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993), 63-66.

47. Akimov’s statement is translated in Jonathan Frankel, *Vladimir Akimov on the Dilemmas of Russian Marxism 1895-1903* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969), 290. If Akimov, whose real name was Makhonets, actually knew that Trotsky had authored the anonymous pamphlet, he did not reveal it and simply referred to him as “the author.”

48. *Trotsky* (London: Routledge, 2003), 23-24.

49. Trotsky himself was arrested in 1898, held in prison for two years awaiting trial, a standard length, and then exiled to Siberia.

(Stundists). As Jeffrey Brooks has explored, the demands of city life and factory work increased the voluntary acquisition of literacy in late tsarist Russia,⁵⁰ but the ability to read had become the life blood of the burgeoning “rationalistic” sects, Stundism in particular, because of its practice of private Gospel reading. Trotsky quickly realized that the Stundist proletarians would be receptive to his efforts to organize a union in the Nikolaev factory. “A large part of [Nikolaev’s factory workers] are affected by the rationalistic sectarianism widespread in the south, mainly Stundism, and thanks to that they have a good idea of the ‘fatherly care’ of the administration” (20), Trotsky noted ironically with a muted allusion to the mythic figure of the benevolent Tsar-father and the naïve monarchism that had such a grip on the Russian peasantry.⁵¹ “The persecution of sectarians, which at one time assumed a wide scope, naturally affected the Nikolaev sectarians,” Trotsky continued; they underwent various trials, including religious control at school (forced participation in Orthodox ritual and instruction on threat of expulsion) and dismissal from work at state institutions, as well as internal exile (20). Trotsky also noted that some sectarians were attracted to Social Democracy because they interpreted its ideology according to their own lights as close to democratic Gospel ideals, including a communistic system; in a footnote, either Trotsky or an editor in Geneva commented that this same situation was once observed in Germany. In all, Trotsky concluded, a high literacy rate, the experience of state persecution, and disaffection with tsarism made the Nikolaev Stundists “fertile ground” for agitation (20).

Ivan Mukhin: Destroying the Whole Mechanics of the Class System

In *My Life*, Trotsky was able to expand his earlier remarks on the Nikolaev Stundists to celebrate an incident involving the specific, historic figure of Ivan Andreyevitch Mukhin, an electrician at the shipbuilding factory who was under arrest with Trotsky when the latter wrote “Nikolaev” and whose name and activities therefore could not be revealed in that publication.⁵² A Stundist, Mukhin was the first flesh-and-blood urban proletarian activist whom Trotsky and his small student commune of would-be revolutionaries had met in Nikolaev, and they quickly proclaimed their excitement over him: “Such men! They are the real thing!,” exclaimed Grigory Sokolovsky, the young student around Trotsky’s age

50. Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2003), 22-27.

51. Naïve monarchism or “folk tsarism” was the belief that the tsar was a sympathetic ruler whose benevolent intentions towards his people were constantly undercut by the evil boyars around him. See Daniel Fields, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), and Daniel Beer, “‘To a Dog, a Dog’s Death!’: Naïve Monarchism and Regicide in Imperial Russia, 1878-1884,” *Slavic Review* 80, no. 1 (2021): 112-32.

52. Trotsky’s remarks on Mukhin occur in *My Life*, 105-108. Kirsty McCluskey, “Reading Trotsky, Writing Bronstein: Assessing the Story of Lev Trotsky’s Childhood and Youth, 1879-1902,” *Revolutionary Russia* 19, no. 1 (2006): 1-20, cautions that Trotsky constructed his autobiography as literary artefact not history, yet elsewhere Trotsky had honored the figure of Mukhin as the one above all who made him a Marxist in prison and who remained an experienced Bolshevik fighter. See Dmitri Volkogonov, *Trotsky: The Eternal Revolutionary*, ed. and transl. Harold Shukman (New York: Free Press, 1996), 11.

who had solicited Mukhin to come and talk with them about a workers' union. The next day, Mukhin met Trotsky's group at an inn "where the deafening music of the automatic organ screened [their] conversation" from cocked ears. With a "shrewd, apprehensive look," Mukhin watched young Trotsky through a "half-closed left eye, amiably scanning [his] still beardless face." And then, with "well-calculated pauses," Mukhin illustrated to the young men how they could begin to undermine the naïve monarchism that stymied revolution among the peasants without offending and driving off their audience.

The other day, Mukhin said, he had explained "the whole truth [of the Gospels] to the Stundists with navy beans." From a pile of beans spread out on a table before his audience, Mukhin first arranged the individual beans into hierarchical ranks with the tsar in the center, the ministers, bishops, and generals on one side, the gentry and merchants on another, and the plain people in a separate heap. Asked to identify the tsar, Mukhin's audience easily did so by virtue of his placement in the center. Then, Mukhin continued, he scrambled all the beans together and again asked his audience, where is the tsar, the ministers? They answered, "Who can tell? You can't spot them now." Having made the point to his audience that power and rank were social conventions, not divinely ordained roles, Mukhin then prompted them to create social equality: "All beans should be scrambled." To Trotsky and his colleagues, however, Mukhin further posed the question, "Only how to scramble them, damn them, that's the problem . . . That's not navy beans, is it?"

Trotsky wrote that he was so thrilled by Mukhin's agitational skill that he was "all in a sweat." "This was the real thing," whereas his group of intellectuals "had only been guessing and waiting and subtilizing." With simple navy beans, Mukhin had destroyed "the whole mechanics of the class system," Trotsky declared. It not only underscored the importance of social equality to Stundist workers but modeled how to conduct successful revolutionary agitation and plunged his band of young intellectuals "headlong into the work." Concluding his remarks on Mukhin in *My Life*, Trotsky gave due credit to the workers for their impressive gains in wages, hours, and working conditions before his first contact with them and described their favorable reaction to his group's efforts to recruit them. The Nikolaev workers took the active role to join the union, Trotsky said: they "streamed toward us as if they had been waiting for this. . . We never sought them out; they looked for us."⁵³

In its practical advice, Trotsky's earlier "Nikolaev" bears out his concern to establish a relationship with workers that honored their perspectives and concerns. For instance, on a graduated, progressive scale based on their wages, the Union's workers contributed to a central fund used to finance meetings, to render

53. It was not until the formation of the Northern Union of Russian Workers in St. Petersburg, 1879, that industrial workers were first considered a "new and significant class" destined to play the leading role in the struggle for economic justice and political freedom; see Reginald E. Zelnik, "Populists and Workers: The First Encounter between Populist Students and Industrial Workers in St. Petersburg, 1871-74," *Soviet Studies* 24, no. 2 (1972): 251-69.

mutual aid, and to support the library. While some complained that such mutual assistance “obscured the real purpose of the organization” as a revolutionary force and was merely a “petty-bourgeois means of improving the condition of the workers” (22),⁵⁴ Trotsky argued that it was a powerful way of organizing workers especially during unemployment. As for cash outlay on the library, Trotsky felt it was impossible to require workers to donate a portion of their earnings until they became convinced enough of the value of literature to the movement to request funding it themselves. And he opposed the centralization of the treasury as “nothing but inconvenience.”

“Nikolaev”: Trotsky as Worker

Trotsky’s harmony with workers shone through his discussion of the foiled attempts to discredit the Nikolaev labor movement, which, he claimed, had “already taken on tremendous proportions” by January, 1898. Rumors were spread that it was “the students from St. Petersburg” who had been issuing the proclamations in Nikolaev.⁵⁵ The movement struck back in mid-January with a widely-distributed leaflet to dispel that falsehood: “We are not students but workers, and we are fighting for our workers’ cause,” it read in part. This leaflet, Trotsky claimed, “appeared at exactly the right time and created a sensation not only in the factories but in the city at large thanks to its widespread dissemination” (26). Of course, Trotsky was precisely one of those “students,” albeit not from St. Petersburg, who had been issuing propaganda in Nikolaev, but his rhetorical identification with workers in “Nikolaev” is palpable and deep. In psycho-historical terms, it recalls Trotsky’s often-discussed childhood idol, Ivan Greben, his father’s chief mechanic, who taught the young boy about tools and materials and whom Trotsky named as the main influence in his early life.⁵⁶

What Trotsky later called his “provincial experiment” among the Nikolaev Stundists served as a useful apprenticeship for his participation in the Soviet of Workers’ Delegates in St. Petersburg in 1905.⁵⁷ Trotsky was especially proud of the praise heaped upon him in 1923 by party biographer Anatoly Vasilievich Lunacharsky (1875-1933), who said that Trotsky’s popularity among the St. Petersburg proletariat was very great at the time of his arrest and even more so during his “strikingly effective and heroic behavior” at the trial; he suffered the least from the “narrowness of emigre outlook” of the exiled intelligentsia,

54. Lenin made such arguments against “trade unionism” and “economism” in *What Is To Be Done?* and elsewhere.

55. Daniel R. Brower, *Training the Nihilists: Education and Radicalism in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1975), 107-109, traces the way in which, starting in the 1840s, the expanding Russian educational system had inexplicably become a “school of dissent,” “the chief recruiting area for the radical movement, . . . engaging in socialist political speculation concerning what would or should be rather than analyzing what had been.” By the late 1860s, the schools were the “source of the single largest group of radicals.”

56. Allan Todd, *Trotsky: Passionate Revolutionary* (Philadelphia: Pen and Sword, 2022), 3

57. In *My Life*, 183, Trotsky further wrote that the experiment in Nikolaev “did not go without leaving a trace. Never in my life, it seems, did I come into such intimate contact with the plain workers as in Nikolayev.”

including Lenin.⁵⁸ Nobody had a higher opinion of Trotsky's role in the St. Petersburg Soviet in 1905 than Trotsky himself, Ian D. Thatcher observes. The important matter for Thatcher is not what Trotsky did for the Soviet, but what the Soviet did for Trotsky. Able to witness workers acting spontaneously and independently--indeed the Soviet had formed itself before Trotsky arrived to implement the idea--in a model of self-government that warded off control by either Bolsheviks or Mensheviks, Trotsky formed his idea of "permanent revolution."⁵⁹ In its basic outline, Thatcher explains, Trotsky's theory dispensed with the Marxist premise that the revolution would have to pass through stages, including bourgeois control, before eventually arriving at its goal. The workers would introduce a socialist state directly. If Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution revealed his European Marxist prejudice against the backwardness of Russian peasants, as Thatcher argues,⁶⁰ it also represents the high point of his appreciation of the Russian working class, which the literate, Stundist workers of Nikolaev had nurtured in him. Nevertheless, as "Nikolaev" evidences, evolving side by side with Trotsky's early identification with workers was his promotion of professional revolutionism, the incipient caste system of Bolshevism at odds with the sectarian "whole truth of the Gospels."

"Nikolaev": Trotsky as Professional Revolutionary

In "Nikolaev," Trotsky did not make specific recommendations concerning sectarians as "fertile ground" for agitation. His identification with workers and their issues quickly morphed into his materializing persona as professional revolutionary. Near the end of the report, Trotsky proposed the development of a uniform code of behavior, developed by a Russian Union and adopted by the entire Social Democratic party, for those who have been arrested for revolutionary activity. He also recommended the creation of a booklet to advise such detainees about their rights and inform them that gendarmes' practices of shaming, cursing, mocking, swearing, even beating are illegal. Instruction should be given about interrogations as well. Those convicted or held for long periods needed to know that there is not, and cannot be, a prison where the incarcerated are unable to communicate with each other, by knocking on the door, passing notes, and so forth. Speaking anonymously as a seasoned inmate, Trotsky remarked that usually a prisoner only learns the communication code a considerable time after he has

58. *Revolutionary Silhouettes*, ed. and transl. Michael Glenny (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 60. Reginald E. Zelnik, "Russian Workers and Revolution," in *Cambridge History of Russia*, 633, notes that all the major revolutionary groups were quick to recognize the importance of the new Soviet, but the Bolsheviks, still ambivalent about strikes as opposed to armed uprising, did so more reluctantly than others; it was Trotsky who played "a very prominent role as vice president."

59. Ian D. Thatcher, "Leon Trotsky and 1905," in *The Russian Revolution of 1905: Centenary Perspectives*, ed. Anthony J. Heywood and Jonathan D. Smele (London: Routledge, 2005), 247.

60. *Ibid.*, 255. In the same volume, see Beryl Williams, "1905: the View from the Provinces," 34-54, for a revisionist view of the supposed backwardness of Russian peasants.

been incarcerated; at first, he considers himself completely cut off from his own kind.

In fact, arrested in January 1898, Trotsky had been awaiting trial in prison for his labor activism for at least a year before he wrote “Nikolaev,” the first three months in solitary confinement in a harsh Kherson jail.⁶¹ Arrested with him and unaware of what to expect, Trotsky reported in “Nikolaev,” the soldier Sokolov was intimidated to the point of throwing himself from the first floor. When asked the reason for his suicide attempt, Sokolov said he did it to escape implicit threats from Lieutenant Colonel Dremlyuga. The same gendarme system, Trotsky continued, drove the prisoner Levandovsky to a prolonged psychotic breakdown. Another worker from Nikolaev who suffered from heart disease, Semenov, was so frightened during search and arrest that he died from heart failure, Trotsky had heard. If these people had known beforehand what to anticipate in prison, their rights, and communication strategies, they might have fared better. It was imperative to learn prisoners’ codes of communication when in solitary confinement, a practice discouraged by the penal reform of 1879 (Grot Commission) but still widely used in prisons with adequate space to house inmates separately.⁶² Normally, those in the movement who take up residence in prison “find themselves in a completely unknown world,” cut off from their allies, Trotsky observed. Notably, Trotsky saw jails and prisons as places where revolutionaries could expect to “reside” for longer or shorter periods—and carry on their jobs as political dissidents. Indeed, many *intelligenty* lived by the pen both in prison and in exile.⁶³

Sharing survival advice among Russian political prisoners in the 1890s was hardly new after the widespread incarceration of Narodniks in the previous decades. Such lore passed on to the new generation of Social Democrats. Lenin was first jailed, for a year, in 1895, then exiled for three years. On May 19, 1901, he wrote to his sister, Maria Ilyichna Ulyanova, who had been arrested for revolutionary agitation in March and was beginning her third month of solitary confinement in the Tanganskaya prison, Moscow. Lenin recommended to her a daily regimen of reading, translation, and gymnastics in a matter-of-fact tone, noting that one’s mood changes so easily in prison, usually due to monotony and boredom; “a change of occupation is often enough to bring one back to normal and calm one’s nerves,” Lenin advised. He closed by wishing Maria “good health and vigor.”⁶⁴ Lenin’s light, casual tone was no doubt meant for the censors, but it suggests that he accepted imprisonment as a normal part of the life of a revolutionary, whose oppositional activities continued both inside and outside the

61. Todd, *Trotsky*, 22.

62. Bruce F. Adams, *The Politics of Punishment: Prison Reform in Russia, 1863-1917* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois UP, 1996), 97-120.

63. Jonathan Daly, “Political Crime in Late Imperial Russia,” *The Journal of Modern History* 74, no. 1 (2002): 71, notes that one of the advantages of prerevolutionary Russian prisons was the ability of prisoners to read and write and thus “further their political education.”

64. *Lenin: Collected Works*, transl. George H. Hanna (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 37: 327-28.

walls. Witness Trotsky himself, who wrote “Nikolaev” in the Odessa prison and managed to smuggle it out to Geneva for publication.

Trotsky stated as much in “Nikolaev” when he wrote that the system of searches, arrests, interrogations, and prison routines was the “kind of life” that began for a Russian revolutionary from the moment of the infamous “chime of dawn.” What Trotsky meant was that this kind of life was the beginning of the intellectual revolutionary’s existence. Years later, in his appraisal of Stalin, Trotsky elaborated upon the nature of the “job” of the professional revolutionary: “whoever joined an organization knew that prison followed by exile awaited him within the next few months. The measure of ambition was to last as long as possible on the job prior to arrest; to hold oneself steadfast when facing the gendarmes; to ease, as far as possible, the plight of one’s comrades, to read, while in prison, as many books as possible; to escape as soon as possible from exile abroad; to acquire wisdom there; and then to return to revolutionary activity in Russia.”⁶⁵

In “Nikolaev,” Trotsky had little more to say about professional revolutionism other than to imply its inherently exclusionary nature. The advice to read as much as possible, to learn prison codes of communication, which were based on an alphabetic grid system, and to prepare for extended incarceration obviously assumed literacy and assets, or the ability to earn money in prison, typically by textual work. A young man like Yefimov, a lathe operator who lost his job and lived the life of a beggar, working like a horse as a stevedore at the dock, was not qualified for it, Trotsky observed. Nor was the role available to Nikolaev’s literate Stundist workers, since in most cases they were not likely to be solvent enough to sustain long periods of unemployment and absence from family. The most effective strike breaking tactic used against the Nikolaev workers was a simple economic threat, Trotsky wrote: “You will be arrested . . . you will be in prison, and your children and wives will starve to death” (25-26).

Professional Revolution and the Money Question

Trotsky’s advocacy of survival skills for captive intelligentsia meshed with the larger plan Lenin had begun to espouse at the turn of the century while he was simultaneously assessing how to make use of sectarians: a cadre of elite professional revolutionaries within the Social Democratic party, as outlined in the latter’s *What Is To Be Done?* Robert Mayer argues that Lenin’s concept of party organization has been mischaracterized as derived from the Russian Jacobin ideology that “only an enlightened minority of professional-revolutionary intellectuals, not the ignorant masses, could orient the coming revolution.”⁶⁶ Instead, Mayer maintains, Lenin based his concept on the Fabian socialism of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, whose work on trade unions he undertook to translate for pay in 1901. Lenin hoped to convince workers that they were amateurs

65. Leon Trotsky, *Stalin: An Appraisal of the Man and His Influence* (1941; New York: Stein and Day, 1970), 53-54.

66. Robert Mayer, “Lenin and the Concept of the Professional Revolutionary,” *History of Political Thought* 14, no. 2 (1993): 249.

who needed the help of professionals to solve their problems, which, as Lenin construed them, were only superficially economic; economism by itself could not liberate the working classes. It was simply more efficient for workers to rely on professionals to administer the revolution, Lenin argued.

The Webbs worried that the professionalization of trade union government would open up a social distance between the workers and administrators, to the point that the latter would fail to understand or heed what the masses wanted. In *What Is To Be Done?*, Lenin did not voice similar qualms, nor did he address the implicit question of how the elite cadre of intelligentsia devoted full time to revolution and alternately in prison or exile would support itself and the party apparatus that would soon develop around it. As Dimitry V. Shlapentokh observes, prior to the Bolsheviks, most revolutionary groups were too small to develop a bureaucracy that needed a funding mechanism.⁶⁷ Although some populist groups did engage in robberies of banks and retail stores and received larger donations from wealthy individuals and smaller ones from students, most operated on a shoe-string budget.⁶⁸

This changed with Lenin, who was able to support himself, as was Trotsky, who also lived by the pen,⁶⁹ but Lenin was concerned with funding a larger, hierarchical, professional party operation. Early sources of income for the party included the sale of publications, dues, fund drives, and contributions, some small, some large, from a variety of donors, ranging from wealthy Russians, including Old Believers in Moscow,⁷⁰ to Europeans and American “parlor pinks.” With the collapse of the 1905 Revolution and ensuing chaos, however, support from abroad dwindled.⁷¹ Indeed, the Fifth Party Congress of 1907, held in London, ran out of funds to support the 338 delegates it had brought from Russia and announced it would end three days early. British donors were no longer sympathetic; it took an unlikely American benefactor, the industrialist soap-maker, Joseph Fels, to make a last-minute loan.⁷² By 1907, however, the fund raising focus had already shifted from soliciting legal largesse to criminal activity, expropriation or “ex’es,” ranging from bank and government payroll robbery to extortion of citizens, which swept over the country and became the main source of income for many revolutionary

67. Dimitry V. Shlapentokh, “Revolutionary as a Career,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 29, no. 3 (1996), 335.

68. Deborah L. Pearl, “From Worker to Revolutionary: The Making of Worker Narodovol’tsy,” *Russian History* 23 (1996): 11-26, discusses the scattered professional revolutionaries in the 1880s who formed into “fighting detachments” to rob the post to fund party activities.

69. Trotsky’s bourgeois parents did support his daughter while he was in exile.

70. See our Note 36.

71. After 1905, Shlapentokh, “Revolutionary as a Career,” 342, argues that donations to the Bolsheviks in fact increased, at least in Russia, because of their higher visibility, but the funds were not decisive. Zhuravleva, “American Phenomenology,” analyzes why American enthusiasm for Russian revolutionaries declined after 1905.

72. Arthur P. Dudden and Theodore H. von Laue, “The RSDLP and Joseph Fels: A Study in Intercultural Contact,” *The American Historical Review* 61, no. 1 (1955): 21-47.

groups, including the Bolsheviks.⁷³ The year 1906 was memorable for “ex’es,” the French Marxist Boris Souvarine (1895-1984) recounted; the month of October alone witnessed as many as 362 such robberies, ten per day, to support Russian revolutionary activity.⁷⁴

What Stalin’s first non-party biographer, Souvarine, called the “money question” had become “the invariable corollary of the idea of professional revolutionaries.”⁷⁵ The professional revolutionary “had to live an absolutely parasitic existence,” F. C. Hutley observed.⁷⁶ The story of party fundraising by means of illegal expropriation and terror attacks during the period of reaction, 1906-1907, became “one of the most depressing narratives in the history of the Russian Left,” Paul Kellogg writes.⁷⁷ Rosa Luxemburg decried the “innumerable thefts and robberies on private persons [that] passed like a muddy wave over this period of depression when the revolution was temporarily on the defensive.”⁷⁸ Although the lawless wave of Bolshevik expropriations swept over all of Russia and into the émigré colonies in Europe,⁷⁹ criminal activity in Transcaucasia, a region with a long history of vendetta and brigandage, was especially prominent.⁸⁰ There, Souvarine noted, 1150 acts of terrorism (robberies, bombings, arson, murders) were recorded from 1904 to 1908, approximately one per day. With Lenin’s approval, Stalin took charge of expropriations and “was personally responsible for the supply of funds and in many respects for the [Bolshevik] party’s financial prosperity.”⁸¹ Reported in the *New York Times* the next day, the notorious Erivansky Square payroll wagon robbery in Tiflis (now Tbilisi) of June 26, 1907, killed 40 people, injured another 50, and netted between 250,000 and 350,000 rubles.⁸² Coming on the heels of the Fifth Congress’s condemnation of expropriation, the act incensed the Mensheviks, who were alarmed over both the effect of the “ex’es” on the behavior and morale of their supporters⁸³ and the fact that Lenin was pocketing stolen funds to strengthen the Bolshevik party apparatus against them.

73. Bertrand D. Wolfe, *Three Who Made a Revolution: A Biographical History of Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin* (1948; New York: Cooper Square, 2001), 343.

74. Boris Souvarine, *Stalin: A Critical Survey of Bolshevism*, transl. C. L. R. James (New York: Longmans Green, 1939), 92-93. The work was first published in French in Paris in 1935.

75. *Ibid.*, 105.

76. F. C. Hutley, “Bolshevism: Some Thoughts Suggested by Souvarine’s ‘Stalin,’” *Australian Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1940): 91.

77. Paul Kellogg, *“Truth Behind Bars”: Reflections on the Fate of the Russian Revolution* (Edmonton, Alberta: Athabasca UP, 2021), 210.

78. Souvarine, *Stalin*, 90.

79. Faith Hillis, *Utopia’s Discontents: Russian Emigres and the Quest for Freedom, 1830s-1930s* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2021), 188, mentions a 1907 bank robbery in Montreux that killed four and a 1908 extortion attempt in Montreux.

80. Wolfe, *Three Who Made a Revolution*, 389 ff.

81. *Ibid.*, 344.

82. The bank itself was not certain about the amount; as Wolfe, *Three Who Made a Revolution*, 393, observes, most accounts put the figure at approximately 250,000 rubles whereas Lenin said it was 341,000 rubles.

83. Ronald Grigor Suny, “The Tifis Ex,” in *Stalin: Passage to Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2020), 364.

Demoralization in the Ranks

The burden of executing this criminal activity fell not upon Social Democratic leaders, intelligentsia largely residing in Europe, but upon their followers in Russia. As early as 1906 at the Fourth Party Congress in Stockholm, the Menshevik leader Pavel Axelrod sounded the twin themes of opposition to the mounting “use of terrorist and conspiratorial methods” in the wake of the defeat of the 1905 Revolution.⁸⁴ This activity was “socially and politically contrary” to the party’s aims of a proletarian revolution, Axelrod argued; it would lead to the “dissipation of the proletarian spirit” and the transformation of the party into a “bourgeois revolutionary organization” led by those with undesirable characteristics: common thieves and hooligans.⁸⁵ The Fifth Party Congress of 1907, held in London, sharpened Axelrod’s objection: anarchistic partisan activity, including the increasing number and size of expropriations of state and private property, cause disorganization in the party and demoralization in the ranks of the proletariat. Bandit-style raids and forays disorganized the proletarian effort by “obscuring its class consciousness” and compromised the party in the eyes of the masses, thus causing demoralization in its ranks.⁸⁶ “Ordinary bandits” were now standing side by side with “revolutionary workers” before the courts-martial, Rosa Luxemburg lamented. How could “a community so hurtful to the revolution” have inserted itself into the struggle, she asked.⁸⁷ In essence, Luxemburg questioned how the leaders of a movement dedicated to erasing class difference could have maneuvered proletarians in its ranks into the status of common criminals.

In May, 1907, the Fifth Congress resolved to forbid party members from engaging in partisan activity and expropriation. The measure passed by a vote of 170 to 35 (with 52 abstentions) but it was a nominal victory. Notoriously silent on the resolution, Lenin voted against it⁸⁸; he had decided, Wolfe writes, that a party aiming at nothing less than overthrow of the autocracy could not be choosy about the means it employed to further that goal,⁸⁹ although, of course, it was not the émigré intelligentsia who were tasked with executing those measures.

84. On February 17, 1906, Martov had written to Axelrod that a form of “hooliganism,” including the robbery of banks, had begun to spread with “terrifying speed.” In Martov’s opinion, it threatened “to disorganize and demoralize the proletariat completely.” Quoted in David Allen Newell, “The Russian Marxist Response to Terrorism: 1878-1917,” Ph. D. thesis, Stanford University, 1981, 428.

85. Abraham Ascher, ed., and Paul Stevenson, transl., *The Mensheviks in the Russian Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1976), 68.

86. *Ibid.*, 68

87. Quoted in Wolfe, *Three Who Made a Revolution*, 375. Harold Walter Nelson, “Leon Trotsky and the Art of Insurrection, 1905-1917,” Ph.D. thesis, University of Michigan, 1978, 64, remarks that to the critics of expropriation in the party, the “most sensitive problem was a practical one—how was a revolutionary partisan to be distinguished from a bandit?”

88. D. E. Gollan, “Bolshevik Party Organization in Russia, 1907-1912,” M.A. thesis, Australian National University, 1967, 45, notes that Lenin had stated his position in 1906: guerilla actions in themselves did not demoralize the movement; “disorganization and demoralization occurred when the Party was incapable of controlling them.”

89. *Three Who Made a Revolution*, 389

Lenin continued to defy the will of the party⁹⁰: only a few weeks after the Fifth Congress condemned expropriation, the sensational Erivansky Square robbery that Lenin had secretly approved went ahead as planned.⁹¹ As Isaac Deutscher observed, the records of the Congress do not reveal the course of the controversy over expropriation; it must be reconstructed from fragmentary reminiscences written years later.⁹² Trotsky must have opposed expropriation, but he took no public position against it; his strategy at the Congress was to align with neither Bolsheviks nor Mensheviks, and he was allowed only a “consultative status.”⁹³ His later claim that he attacked expropriation in a German publication in 1910 and it caused a major falling out with Lenin was, at best, exaggerated, and, in any event, irrelevant by then.⁹⁴

Trotsky’s moment to condemn the professional revolution’s class-based exploitation of workers standing side by side in courts martial with common criminals had passed. He remained silent about the first lesson that the Stundist worker Ivan Mukhin had taught him in simple, eloquent terms: social justice, the whole truth of the Gospels, demanded equality throughout the ranks of society. Scramble all the beans. Ignoring that parable, Bolshevism had created its own dystopia: a hierarchical, professional revolution, with its invariable corollary, demoralizing expropriation. The full consequences of this development would play out for decades. The impact on Khariton Chebanov was immediate.

Khariton Chebanov: Telling His Story

Trotsky’s early literary efforts were in the belles lettres tradition. As a boy, he read Dickens alongside Tolstoy, wrote dramas, and started a magazine; later in life, he became “a great master of literary style” in diverse genres, including autobiography, biography, and history.⁹⁵ Albeit with a flair for description, Chebanov was an amateur writer. His first extant written exercise was ethnographic. He later recalled that Bonch-Bruевич, Vladimir G. Chertkov, and I. M. Tregubov, the latter two followers of Leo Tolstoy, were collecting accounts of religious dissenters exiled to Transcaucasia. In 1896, at the age of 10, Chebanov recorded a letter to Chertkov and Tregubov dictated by his father,⁹⁶ who had learned to read but not to write. The rest of Chebanov’s writings and interviews that we cite in this article were produced in the United States after 1907: his unpublished “memoir,” largely the story of his father’s trials as a Stundist, which echoes the earlier ethnographic account but is interspersed with Chebanov’s reminiscences

90. Ascher, *Mensheviks*, 29.

91. Wolfe, *Three Who Made a Revolution*, 375

92. *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879-1921* (1954; New York: Verso, 2003), 149.

93. Robert Service, *Trotsky: A Biography* (Cambridge MA: Belknap, 2009), 107.

94. John Biggart, “Trotsky at the Copenhagen Congress of the Socialist International (1910),” 2-3. <https://www.academia.edu/44601247>

95. Bertram D. Wolfe, “Leon Trotsky as Historian,” *Slavic Review* 20, no. 3 (1961): 496.

96. “Pochemu ya ostavili pravoslavnyuyu veru,” *Svobodnoe slovo. Parole libre. Svobodnoje*, no. 7 (Christchurch, Eng.: Free Age Press, 1903): col. 8. Catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000519418.

about himself; lengthy, private correspondence; and, starting in 1942, stories published in local English-language newspapers that reveal important details about Chebanov's actions during the 1905 revolution.⁹⁷

In 1942, regional reporters became interested in interviewing Chebanov, by then a New Jersey poultry farmer, when it came to light that he had been acquainted with the Georgian, Stalin--Josef Dzhughashvili--as a fellow Bolshevik in Transcaucasia; they "used to go to jail together," as one staff correspondent phrased it.⁹⁸ At the time, the American government had begun to build a positive relationship with and image of Stalin as a bulwark against the Axis powers; in Operation Barbarossa, Nazi Germany reneged on its non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union and invaded Russia in June, 1941. For the most part, major American media also pulled its punches on Stalin. When Maxim Litvinov, Soviet ambassador to the United States, requested the State Department to prevent circulation of Trotsky's just-printed adverse biography of the Soviet leader in order "to help Stalin,"⁹⁹ Harper & Brothers complied; in late 1941, they delayed sales distribution of the unflattering book until 1946. After calling Stalin and Hitler the most hated men in the world in 1939, *Time* magazine reversed course and named Stalin "Man of the Year" in January, 1942, singling out his "magnificent will to resist" the Nazi war machine and his affable hosting of the American dignitaries who were making their way to Moscow.¹⁰⁰ In September, 1942, *New York Times* editorial writer R. L. Duffus said that maybe Americans "should save our criticisms [of Russia] for after the war."¹⁰¹ For its part, in October, 1942, *Life* magazine published an interview with Stalin by Wendell Willkie, President Roosevelt's personal representative, touting Russia's "power and determination" to repel Hitler's brutal onslaught, with an appreciation of Stalin's amiable reception of him and of the Soviet leader's "gift for clear, straight thinking."¹⁰²

That was not the image presented in Trotsky's posthumously embargoed *Stalin: An Appraisal*, which focused on the Georgian's early years in Transcaucasia, a subject Stalin went to great lengths to minimize if not censor altogether, as Litvinov surely knew. David Brandenburg argues that Stalin wished to shed his "provincial, parochial, grassroots" prerevolutionary experience in Transcaucasia

97. Chebanov himself read the Russian-American daily newspaper published in New York City, *Novoe Russkoe Slovo*.

98. "Freehold Man Knew Stalin Well—They Used to Go to Jail Together," *Asbury Park Evening Press* (Asbury Park, NJ, March 26, 1942): 1.

99. Albert Goldman, "Trotsky's Book 'Edited,' Then Suppressed," *The Militant* 6, no. 5 (January 31, 1942): 2. See also "Trotsky Book Suppressed," *Socialist Appeal: Organ of the Revolutionary Communist Party, Fourth International* 6, no. 4 (August 1944): 3, and Rob Sewell, "Background to Trotsky's *Stalin*," in *Stalin: Leon Trotsky*, ed. Alan Wood and Rob Sewell (2016; Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2019), xv-xxx.

100. "Die, But Do Not Retreat," *Time* (Jan. 4, 1943). *Time* had also named Stalin "Man of the Year" for 1939, but in that year called him, along with Hitler, the "world's most hated man" for signing a non-aggression pact with Germany.

101. "'It Is History That Makes Men'—Stalin," *New York Times*, Sept. 27, 1942, p. BR4.

102. *Life* 13, no. 14 (1942): 29, 35.

and reinvent himself in Lenin's more elite, erudite, urban image.¹⁰³ Trotsky had a harsh opinion of Stalin: he was neither a thinker, writer, nor initiator but an underhanded, devious, unpopular youth who grew into a ruthless tyrant. When local American reporters went to interview Chebanov about Stalin, it was an echo of Trotsky's view they heard as well as a reminder of Stalin's parochial past in the remote Caucasus.¹⁰⁴ Chebanov remembered the Stalin he knew in 1905 as a thin young man, of short stature, with a scraggly goatee, age 24 or 25, a minor figure in the Bolshevik party who was a mere bandit, just a horse thief; Chebanov had argued with him in committee meetings, was not impressed by him, and had forgotten about him altogether until Dzhugashvili's 1905 photo, identified as Stalin, appeared in a Russian American newspaper that Chebanov saw in 1940. Intertwined with the unflattering opinion of Stalin that Chebanov related to reporters, he narrated details of his own Bolshevik activities that are not recorded anywhere else. Even though Chebanov's view of Stalin ran counter to the prevailing wartime public relations campaign underway,¹⁰⁵ small-town reporters who believed in the American free press printed Chebanov's dismissive remarks and, in the process, related much of what we factually know about his actions between 1904 and 1907.

Revolutionary Potential Realized

In his memoir, Chebanov recounts the history of his father, Eremai Vasilievich Cheban (1858-c. 1930), who renounced the Orthodox Church to become a Stundist in the 1880s. Descended from Ukrainian and Bessarabian serfs, in the town of Bender (now Bendery, Moldova), Cheban lived under Russian rule among the German colonists who would later educate Trotsky at the Realschule attached to a Lutheran church in Odessa. Cheban respected their clean, sober, prosperous lives and their rationalist faith, which he imitated, rejecting the drunken, chaotic life of his Orthodox peasant father that had led to his early death and Cheban's orphanhood at a young age. As an adult, Cheban acquired the ability to read in order to study the Gospels in Russian translations. He became increasingly detached from and hostile to the Orthodox clergy, who offended his sense of ethics and failed to respond to his spiritual needs. His formerly devout attendance at church trailed off, and Cheban began holding Stundist meetings in his house. In the later 1880s, he provoked the enmity of his local Orthodox priest, Sebastien Doruk, who instigated his first, administrative exile to Kherson province for a year. In 1892, Doruk's further accusations led to arrest and trial in Kishinev (now

103. David Brandenberger, "Stalin and the Silences of the Official History of His Role in the Prerevolutionary Bolshevik Underground," *Revolutionary Russia* 35, no. 1 (2022): 26-27.

104. "Local Chicken Framer Knew Stalin, Russian Dictator," *The Freehold Transcript* (Freehold, NJ, March 27, 1942): 1. (Khariton Chebanov's name had been anglicized to "Harry Schibanoff.")

105. In his survey of images of Russia in American, English-language mass media during this period, Melvin Small, "How We Learned to Love the Russians: American Media and the Soviet Union during World War II," *The Historian* 36, no. 3 (1974): 466, concludes that favorable presentations "overshadowed critical views."

Chisinau) and Cheban's permanent exile to Transcaucasia. Deprived of all civil rights, his head half shaved in convict style, wearing shackles and prison garb, Cheban was transported to the town of Elizavetpol (now Ganja, Azerbaijan) in the Russian province of the same name. His wife and three children, including 6-year-old Khariton, followed later that year.¹⁰⁶

Before his permanent exile in 1892, Cheban had risen to petty-bourgeois status as an artisan.¹⁰⁷ He apprenticed as a bootmaker, soon opened his own business, which thrived, and branched into viniculture, acquiring his own vineyards and eventually processing the grapes of neighboring farmers. He was entrepreneurial enough that, after a few years in exile, he reestablished himself as a bootmaker, rented land to start a residential settlement (sloboda) for other religious exiles arriving mainly from southern Ukraine and the St. Petersburg area, and opened a sauna (public bath facility). His son Khariton set his sights higher. Supported by his father, who had him privately tutored in basic literacy skills by the age of 10, Khariton developed careerist ambitions for a white-collar job: his lifelong dream was to become a teacher. The increasingly repressive anti-Stundist legislation of the 1890s, however, barred him from obtaining the advanced, state education required for a teaching position. In 1900, at the age of 14, he started working at the Elizavetpol depot of the Transcaucasian Railway. In 1902, Chebanov completed two years of education at the Slavianka primary school,¹⁰⁸ then embarked on coursework to qualify himself for railroad work. In the summer of 1905, he earned a railroad training certificate and then a machinist's assistant certificate, which included further literacy instruction.¹⁰⁹ In a group photo at the Elizavetpol depot of the Transcaucasian Railway, Chebanov holds a ball peen hammer, symbolic tool of the machinist (Figure 1).

106. This and other biographical background on Cheban is discussed in Susan Schibanoff and James M. Schibanoff, "Religion and Revolution in a Sectarian Family in Late Tsarist Russia," *Russian History* 49 (2022): 90-122.

107. Extract from the first part of the metrical book of the first district of Bendery, Preobrazhensky district, the Cathedral Church, for 1883, lists Eremei as "Bender bourgeois." Authors' collection.

108. Certificate dated May 20, 1902, Village of Slavyanka, Elizavetpol Province. Authors' collection.

109. Examination Program, July 29, 1905, and Machinist's Assistant Certificate, August 20, 1905. Authors' collection.



Figure 1. Railway workers, Elizavetpol depot, Transcaucasian Railway, ca. 1905-1906. Chebanov, reclining and holding a ball peen hammer, first row, fifth from right. (Authors' collection.)

After marriage in 1905 to another sectarian, a Molokan, Chebanov lived with his wife in railroad housing in the workers' district. Despite what might have been a promising future in Russia's fastest-growing industry, the railroad, he never got over the course his life had taken because of tsarist persecution. Thinking back on his exclusion from a teaching career, at the age of 75, Chebanov wrote that he "still could not forgive this injury inflicted upon [him] by the tsarist regime." "Even now," he said, "I recall this with a feeling of bitterness."¹¹⁰ His potential for revolution lay in that emotion.¹¹¹

Chebanov's disaffection with tsarism found an outlet in the labor movement he joined as an employee of the Transcaucasian Railway. While the pay for machinists was relatively high, it had still declined from the 1890s and working conditions were abysmal in this most dangerous occupation: "at the start of 1905 the Russian railroads were ripe for revolutionary unrest," Henry Reichman observes.¹¹² Chebanov's lifelong anger at tsarist discrimination against him as a Stundist dovetailed with railway workers' protests against unjust labor practices

110. *Memoir*, 42

111. Liliana Riga, *The Bolsheviks and the Russian Empire* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2012), 20, writes that rather than class alienation exclusively, "blocked mobility" played a role in the radicalization of a Bolshevik. See also the review of Riga by Ronald Grigor Suny in *American Journal of Sociology* 119, no. 3 (2013): 863-64.

112. *Railwaymen and Revolution: Russia, 1905* (Berkeley: U California P, 1987), 118.

and the rough-handed treatment of workers by tsarist police. Late in life, Chebanov still recalled instances of such police brutality, for which he felt responsible. After Chebanov sounded the horn that sent workers out on one strike in 1905, he saw a gendarme arrive, pull aside a young Georgian stoker, and beat him unconscious for it. The innocent young man had suffered for him, Chebanov said. Failing to notice a passing gendarme, an old man named “Kudimov” in the worker district did not stand and doff his cap.¹¹³ The gendarme struck Kudimov across the face with his whip and blinded him in one eye. Chebanov felt guilty for this as well because he thought he had distracted the old man, but he also knew that disrespect and cruelty like this was part of the tsarist system of social oppression. As a young boy, he had seen and would remember all his life the insults and indignities his father had suffered in jail and during transport into exile. In widening his father’s hostility to the Orthodox Church into opposition to the autocratic state and becoming a labor activist, Chebanov was following the trajectory to revolution along which the radical intelligentsia had long tried to lead sectarians.

“Their Movement”

Nevertheless, when Chebanov reminisced in a 1942 newspaper article about this earlier period of his life, he recalled co-option by the intelligentsia, not a common goal: it was, he said, “the terrorist movement [that] originated with the country’s intellectuals, principally its university students, who got me and others into their movement by promising us shorter working hours and more money [emphasis added].”¹¹⁴ Chebanov’s statement was correct in the sense that “their movement”—the intelligentsia’s—had established educational workers’ circles (*kruzhki*) in the Transcaucasian railway depots before 1900.¹¹⁵ The Tiflis station had gone on strike in 1887 and 1889. In the 1890s, these railway activists attracted the attention of the workers, students (intellectuals), and others who had been exiled to Transcaucasia during the decade and brought Marxism into the region with them. The commune set up by the deported intellectuals at the Land Surveyors Institute in Tiflis instigated the first *kruzhok* in the Transcaucasian Railroad’s main depot and craft shops in November, 1894.¹¹⁶ From Tiflis, Marxist influence spread to neighboring depots. At the time that Chebanov first became involved in the labor movement, c. 1904, however, he had little if any grasp of Marxist theory, and he would never come to view the gentry and the proletariat as immutable class enemies.

113. Nicholas A. Vodnevsky, “Kak Dobyvayut Svobodu,” *Sinie dali [rasskazy]* (St. Petersburg: Light in the East, 2003), 212-14. (ISBN 3-935435-46-0.) Vodnevsky interviewed Chebanov in Sacramento, Calif., in 1961, and first published the interview under the title “Krutoy Povоротnyy Moment,” in a Baptist journal, *Vera i Zhizn’* (authors’ collection).

114. “Freehold Man Knew Stalin Well—They Used to Go to Jail Together,” *Asbury Park Evening Press* (Asbury Park, NJ, March 26, 1942): 1.

115. Jones, *Socialism*, 94.

116. *Ibid.*, 94.

Class Conflict: Marxism v. Empiricism

Throughout his life, Chebanov remained reticent about revealing the full details of his revolutionary involvement, but what has emerged supports the basic outline that he was arrested and imprisoned at least four times between 1904 and 1907, on the first three occasions for increasingly strident labor activism, and on the fourth for an unspecified offense. Most likely, it was Andre Kondratievich Chumak, head machinist at the Elizavetpol depot, who drafted Chebanov onto the railway strike committee. A Ukrainian from the Poltava region, after five years of elementary school, Chumak had gone to work at the Ilovaisky Brothers' metallurgical plant in Makiivka, Donetsk province, and then trained to become an assistant driver on the Catherine (Donbass) railway. In 1900, Chumak joined a Marxist circle in Gorlovka where he read the earliest writings by Lenin to workers in his home. By 1903, Chumak was working on the Transcaucasian Railway and had joined the RSDLP; originally Orthodox, he was probably an atheist by this time.¹¹⁷ Chumak was in contact with Prokofy Aprasionovich Dzhaparidze, an ethnic Georgian who became a prominent Bolshevik in the Caucasus; Chumak visited him in Baku and helped to smuggle illegal literature from the printing press there back to Elizavetpol. By the summer of 1903, Chumak had become "one of the most active members" of the Bolshevik party organization in Elizavetpol, according to his son.¹¹⁸ Although born in Bessarabia, Chebanov was Ukrainian on his mother's side and always thought of himself as such. His language was as much Ukrainian as it was Russian, and he would have been able to converse with Chumak, who probably invited Chebanov to join the workers' reading circle that he began to attend around 1904. Chebanov did not need to be educated by the *kruzhki* to reject tsar worship, but whatever Marxist theory he may have picked up there did not alter his empirical, egalitarian approach to social class, as an episode during his third arrest illustrates.

At age 18, Chebanov was first arrested in Elizavetpol in 1904 for reading aloud an illegal strike leaflet to his machine shop mates at the depot; he was held for two days in the local jail and released. His next arrest occurred in January, 1905 for strike activity in Elizavetpol as Russia exploded in response to the events of Bloody Sunday in St. Petersburg. Chebanov was sentenced and released from Metekhi prison in Tiflis sometime during 1905. While turmoil continued to rock the country, 19-year-old Chebanov became an assistant member of the strike committee of railway workers in Elizavetpol that led to his third arrest. Strikes occurred on the Tiflis-Baku line, which passed through Elizavetpol, from April 4-12, October 15-29, and December 12-26, 1905. The 25-member strike bureau, a mixture of Russians, Georgians, and others, included the engineer of the railways, Roman Kulanda; engineer Sergei Kamyshkirtsev; assistant station commander

117. Deborah L. Pearl, "Tsar and Religion in Russian Revolutionary Propaganda," *Russian History* 20, no. 1 (1993): 97, remarks upon the tendency of revolutionary workers to lose their religion, although this may apply more to the Orthodox than to sectarians. See also Pearl, *Creating a Culture of Revolution*, 84-85.

118. Alexander A. Chumak, *Andrey Chumak* (Khabarovsk: Khabarovskoye Knizhnoye Izdatel'stvo, 1974), 16.

Vasily Panchanidze; station chief Jason Kaloyani; machinists Andre Chumak, Leonid and Vladimir Rymkevich, Yakov Chernikov, Vladimir Shenhelium, Gerantiy Chlaidze; and the station medic Platona Klimnev. Their active assistants were the machinists Chebanov, Grigoli, Labauri, and others.¹¹⁹ Elsewhere, we have discussed the details of the “Elizavetpol affair,” the railway workers’ violent siege of the rail line, December 12-26, and its repercussions: on his third arrest, Chebanov was apprehended as one of the strike leaders, transported in an overloaded penal rail car to trial in Tiflis, and sentenced to one year of hard labor in the stockade at Metekhi prison during 1906.¹²⁰

In pre-trial detention in Tiflis, Chebanov was held in overcrowded conditions with some 300 other protestors who had been arrested in Elizavetpol.¹²¹ The mixed group of workers and gentry, Georgian and Russian, later occasioned him to expound upon his view of the struggle underway in Russia. Unlike doctrinaire Marxists, who clearly opposed the bourgeoisie, owners of wealth, property, and production, to the proletariat, whose alienated labor was exploited for their profit, Chebanov “scrambled the beans” into a more complex social structure true to his sectarian upbringing and his empirical experience. He started by noting that there was a progressive and a decaying gentry in Russia. Analogously, he observed, there were good and bad priests. While his father had been abusively treated by an Orthodox priest, Chebanov did not believe that all Orthodox priests were corrupt. The uprising of 1825 failed because the progressive gentry, the small group of Decembrists, members of the upper class and military, were outnumbered by the decaying gentry.¹²² The decaying gentry had “outlived its time and should have faded into non-existence,” he continued. These gentry, aristocratic landowners who clung to their power despite their failure to manage their holdings productively after the Emancipation of 1861 had removed the working corps of serfs from them, were the stock in trade of contemporary literary satire. Chekhov’s *Cherry Orchard* (1904), for instance, tells the story of a newly rich businessman, son of an emancipated serf, who buys a famous but now overgrown cherry orchard from a debt-ridden aristocrat, cuts down the trees, and builds a cottage development on it. To Chebanov, the decaying gentry represented Russia’s past. The progressive wing of the gentry had emerged; it “resented and refused the privileges” of its predecessors, he observed.¹²³

119. *Ibid.*, 19, and B. P. Malyshev, “Andrey Chumak: Bol’shevik Internatsionalist, Narodnyy Geroy,” *Nauchne Trudy* 129 (1969): 245-61.

120. See Schibanoff and Schibanoff, “Religion and Revolution,” 115-17.

121. Chebanov, *Memoir*; 41, notes that only 10 were convicted, including himself since he had signed his name on self-incriminating papers, the remaining 290 unjustly arrested and later released. Daly, “Police and Revolutionaries,” 648, discusses the police tactic of arresting large numbers of people not on the basis of probable political wrongdoing, but in order to discover evidence of it.

122. *Memoir*, 38 ff.

123 The nineteenth-century Russian “progressive gentry” rejected the autocracy in favor of some form of constitutionalism, but the intelligentsia had more far-reaching goals, according to Eugene Pyziur, “Bismarck’s Appraisal of Russian Liberalism as Prussian Envoy in St. Petersburg,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 10, no. 3 (1968): 301. On the related figure of the “repentant nobleman,” see Mary Raber, *Ministries of Compassion among Russian Evangelicals, 1905-1929* (Eugene OR: Pickwick, 2016), 33.

A case in point is Chebanov's story of those being held with him at Metekhi Castle Prison in Tiflis. As was typical in Russian prisons, the upper classes were granted better accommodations, more lenient rules; the discrimination extended into the conditions of exile for political offenders, with aristocrats like Vladimir Chertkov, son of a countess and a military aide to the tsar as well as Leo Tolstoy's colleague, allowed to choose England as his destination. To relieve the overcrowding in Metekhi prison after some 300 Elizavetpol detainees arrived, the warden declared that he had to identify the gentry and send them to the gentry cells on the third floor, which were not locked during the day and provided considerably better food and living conditions. Excess workers would be sent to the nearby inhospitable provincial prison, Ortachala.¹²⁴ The warden ordered three people, two Georgians and one Russian, from Chebanov's group to appear before him, and he gave them a list of the 300 names. They were to mark a little cross above the names of the gentry. The warden then entered the general holding area with the list. He approached the first member of the gentry, whom he identified by his priest's robes, and said to him: "I am granting you, as a priest and as a member of the gentry, one of the best cells in this prison. It is close by and during the day it will not be locked." The priest refused; he would submit only by force, he said. His parishioners had called upon him to counter the anti-religious propaganda spread among them in the factories, and he would remain housed with them in prison.

Sensing that the rest of the gentry would also refuse privileges, the warden had a desk moved into the room and called in three clerks. He stood in the middle of the room and looked around to see who was "a little bit younger and had a worker's physiognomy." He selected some of these detainees, about half the total, put together a stage of convicts, and sent them to Ortachala. But the 25 or 30 members of the gentry who remained still refused to go to the gentry cells. "Such was the extent of their negative feelings towards gentry privileges," Chebanov concluded. He never adopted the Marxist view of the gentry as generically the class enemy of workers, nor, despite his father's persecution by Father Doruk, did he, with Lenin, generalize that all priests were gendarmes in cassocks. In his own mind, at least, Chebanov had reached some sort of accommodation between his empirical approach to life and the theoretical approach of Marxism that the Bolshevik intelligentsia espoused. It was not until the Bolsheviks made different demands upon him in 1907 that he could no longer bridge their differences.

Answering the Call from the Professional Revolution

After the repressive tsarist backlash to the events of 1905, Abraham Ascher writes, the role of industrial workers in the opposition movement dwindled: "they had cooled toward the revolutionaries and were far less willing to answer calls for new offensives against the old order."¹²⁵ Thrown out of work and blacklisted,

124. Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Young Stalin* (2007; New York: Vintage, 2008), 124, notes that Stalin was confined in Ortachala Prison in 1904 but escaped.

125. Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Authority Restored* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1992), 5.

sometimes replaced on the railroad by soldiers,¹²⁶ unemployed workers were preoccupied with supporting themselves and their families. The Stolypin coup d'état of 1907 further suppressed worker opposition; unions were closed and “less vulnerable forms of organization” such as clubs and cultural-education societies kept the labor movement alive.¹²⁷ In 1907, Chebanov was still employed by the Transcaucasian Railroad. He appears in a group photo of railway workers traditionally posed on and in front of a steam locomotive in Elizavetpol that year,¹²⁸ which also serves as evidence that he had not decamped as a professional revolutionary.¹²⁹ He remained active in the Bolshevik party, yet the demands made upon him by the organization had taken on a different character. He was swept up in the terrorism that professional revolutionism had initiated in Transcaucasia. It started with the murder of a police captain in Elizavetpol sometime after Chebanov had married in 1905.¹³⁰ As Erik Van Ree discusses, violence continued in Transcaucasia longer than in the central Empire, with planned, “self-defensive” assassinations of those whom workers perceived as enemies—spies, provocateurs, police, factory and railway officials, even other workers deemed too cooperative with management—occurring on a daily basis in 1904 and 1905.¹³¹ Chebanov was not the “actual murderer” of the police chief in question, he said, but “the authorities had many grounds to believe that [he] knew something or other about this matter.” The police searched for him intensively. He initially hid in the region around Tiflis, then returned to Elizavetpol, but avoided his own home to shield his wife and stayed in a “clandestine apartment.” There he was warned that he could not return home safely and should go into hiding elsewhere. “They gave me an address in Gerusy,” Chebanov said, the remote and desolate town south of Elizavetpol where he had gone with his father as a boy to visit Ivan Liasotsky and other exiled Stundists. Chebanov spent some time in Gerusy, searching for old family acquaintances in vain, and, when he was no longer being hunted, returned to Elizavetpol. “They,” Chebanov’s tipsters, were most likely the Bolshevik party, which he had joined by then and which soon called on him again.

126. Reichman, *Railwaymen*, 303.

127. E. Anthony Swift, “Workers’ Theater and ‘Proletarian Culture’ in Prerevolutionary Russia, 1905-17,” in *Workers and Intelligentsia in Late Imperial Russia: Realities: Representations, Reflections*, ed. Reginald E. Zelnik (Berkeley: U California P, 1998), 267.

128. Photo is at <https://ru-railway.livejournal.com/175308.html>; accessed May 22, 2023. This was most likely a company photo with the subliminal message that order had been restored on the railroad. On company photos as propaganda, see Larry Peterson, “Producing Visual Traditions among Workers: The Uses of Photography at Pullman, 1880-1990,” *International Labor and Working Class History* 42 (1992): 40-69.

129. Kanatchikov, *Radical Worker*, 384, narrates how he was blacklisted, refused work as a pattern maker everywhere he went in Saratov, so he packed up some addresses and references and left for Moscow on the eve of the 1905 revolution to become a “professional revolutionary.”

130. *Memoir*, 23 ff.

131. Erik Van Ree, “Reluctant Terrorists? Transcaucasian Social-Democracy, 1901-1909,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 1 (2008): 127-54. Van Ree rejects the idea that Transcaucasian terrorism resulted from the “disturbed personality structure” of the perpetrators, seeing assassination rather as claimed “self-defense” against targeted enemies of workers. He does not discuss expropriation.

Expropriation and Spiritual Crisis

On his fourth arrest, in April 1907, Chebanov was detained in Metekhi prison a second known time for an unspecified offense¹³²; at the considerable expense of 2,000 rubles, his father bailed him out until trial.¹³³ As Chebanov related the story to a local news reporter in 1942, while on bail, he and five companions “got orders to seize the railroad government funds and use it for party purposes.”¹³⁴ The conspirators were rehearsing the robbery in Chebanov’s apartment, owned by the railroad, when a gun went off and accidentally killed one of them, Alexander (Sasha) Zabronsky, a fellow sectarian exile who also worked in the Elizavetpol depot and whom Chebanov had known since childhood. The family upstairs heard the shot, and Chebanov was compelled to report the death to the police. The five men agreed to call it a suicide, and, if that story failed to convince the police, Chebanov volunteered to take the blame and tell them that he had shot the deceased man for annoying his wife while in their apartment. He was questioned and then held all night locked behind an iron door in the basement of the building. The next day, the police released him, saying “they were satisfied the suicide story was correct.” It was a ruse. Since any public gatherings during this period were potentially volatile, the police wanted Chebanov to attend Zabronsky’s funeral the next day to “prevent fellow workers from raising a demonstration.”¹³⁵ In a contemporary photograph of the event, Chebanov walks along the right side of the open coffin while mounted tsarist police watch over the crowd from the rear (Figure 2).¹³⁶ After the funeral ended peacefully, Chebanov was tipped off that the police were after him again and would rearrest him for Zabronsky’s murder. The party had decided it was time for him to leave Russia even though it meant that his father would have to forfeit the large bond he held for his son and that his young wife would remain behind. By late May or early June, Chebanov had made his way to Poti on the Black Sea to wait for a steam ship on which to escape to America as a stowaway.

132. Entry pass of Khariton Eremeev Chaban, a prisoner of the Tiflis Metekhi Prison Castle, April 12, 1907. Authors’ collection.

133. Paul Thead, “Ex-DPs in Jersey Haven,” *Newark Sunday News* (Newark NJ, Oct. 10, 1954): 18-20.

134. “Freehold Man Knew Stalin Well,” *Asbury Park Evening Press* (Asbury Park, NJ, March 26, 1942): 1.

135. “Man Jailed with Stalin Now Farms at Freehold,” *Daily Record* (Long Beach, NJ, March 26, 1942): 1.

136. Chebanov’s mother brought the photograph to America when she emigrated in 1910. Authors’ collection.



Figure 2. Funeral of Alexander Zabronsky, Elizavetpol, May, 1907. (Authors' collection.)

Chebanov narrated this story dispassionately to local reporters in 1942, but he revealed his still agonized feelings about his involvement in the party-ordered armed robbery of railroad government funds that resulted in the death of his friend 19 years later in private correspondence with Alexander Zabronsky's younger brother, Veniamin Mikhailovich (1888-1968).¹³⁷ A sectarian from the Odessa area who had also been exiled to Elizavetpol as a child, Veniamin was later taken to Germany as forced labor in World War II and eventually made his way to the United States in 1949. When he came across the name of his old friend and neighbor Chebanov in the émigré newspaper published in San Francisco, "New Dawn," he got in touch with him. Before then, Chebanov had never spoken publicly or written about his religion in regard to his revolutionary activity. In this instance, however, he told Veniamin that Alexander's death had provoked a psychological and spiritual crisis in him.

In the ensuing correspondence between the two men, Veniamin wrote that the police interviewed him about who he thought had killed his brother while Chebanov was detained in the basement. The younger Zabronsky had heard from some workers that it was Chebanov, from others that it was a Georgian named Davitashvili.¹³⁸ But what flashed through Zabronsky's mind, he said, was that since he did not know who had done it and naming either party would not bring

137. This correspondence consists of three letters written in Russian: Zabronsky to Chebanov, March 28, 1961; Chebanov to Zabronsky, April 1, 1961; Chebanov to Zabronsky, undated. Translated by Ronald D. Leblanc. Authors' collection.

138. Whether this is Mikhail (Mikha or Misho) Davitashvili, Stalin's childhood friend and former roommate who joined Stalin in Tiflis after bloody Sunday in January, 1905, is unknown. See Suny, *Passage to Revolution*, 239.

his brother back to life, it was better to forgive his enemy than to implicate either man. Had not their parents taught them the virtue of forgiveness since childhood, Zabronsky asked Chebanov rhetorically. "Your father, after all, had been sent into exile in shackles for his Christian faith." Zabronsky told the police that he did not know who killed Sasha, and that he suspected no one. The gendarme and doctor (coroner) asked him to sign his name, and the inquiry was concluded, or so Zabronsky thought.

For his part, Chebanov wrote back to Zabronsky that he had undergone a psychological and spiritual crisis the night he was held in isolation in a basement beneath his apartment, in which "the corpse of a murdered man" lay. Paralyzing terror and sorrow gripped Chebanov, who feared that "a painful death under torture awaited [him] the next day" if the police were to continue interrogating him. Zabronsky agreed that Chebanov's belief that he would "die under torture . . . might actually have happened at that time."¹³⁹ Repenting his sins, Chebanov appealed to the Lord, he told Zabronsky, to save him from a painful death, and when he found himself at liberty the next morning, he "believed with his entire being" that God had extricated him from "that basement into which [his] philosophizing had led [him]." This was his conversion, his "baptism by fire," Chebanov declared. Even if he had known at the time that it was actually Veniamin Zabronsky or the police themselves who had spared his immediate arrest, Chebanov was ready to interpret the incident in spiritual terms and to renounce his "philosophizing"—and his Bolshevik terrorism.

Free at Last: A Rite of Passage to America

On June 7, 1907, a few weeks at most after the Fifth Party Congress had taken its hollow vote against expropriation in London as disorganizing and demoralizing, Trotsky remaining silent on the issue, and 19 days before the notorious Erivansky Square robbery engineered by Lenin and Stalin, Chebanov fled Russia as a stowaway to America. The party ordered and was to arrange and fund his escape.¹⁴⁰ He had to leave his 18-year-old wife Alexandra behind; unbeknownst to the couple, she was newly pregnant with their first child, Nicolai. Given the party's involvement in Chebanov's departure, the expectation was that he would return to Russia at some point, but in the meanwhile become in America, in effect, an emigre professional revolutionary. This was the path taken by Chebanov's Bolshevik colleague, Andre Chumak, whom the party smuggled out of Russia to England and then to America several months earlier with his

139. Jonathan Daly, "Police and Revolutionaries," 648, notes the belief within officialdom at the beginning of 1906 that only a harshly authoritarian state using punitive expeditions and military courts could restore order to Russia. 308 alleged political criminals had faced military judges in 1905; 4,698 did so in 1906. Some 6,000 people were executed between 1905 and 1907, 4600 by court sentence, 1400 without trial. Elizavetpol and Tiflis had been put under military control in 1905.

140. Malyshev, "Chumak," 246, incorrectly states that the party organized the illegal sending abroad of the leaders of the strike movement, including Chumak and Chebanov, at the beginning of 1907. Chebanov was not sent abroad until after Zabronsky's death in May, 1907.

family. In Chicago, Chumak became active in the Socialist Party of America, accompanying the prominent Bolshevik Alexandra Kollantai when she toured the United States, meeting with Jack London, and speaking at American conferences against the war and in defense of Lenin. In 1917, Chumak tried to return to Russia to continue the socialist struggle, but the Kerensky government denied his entry; he went to China to start an underground Bolshevik organization in Harbin, Manchuria, and lost his life in the conflict there.¹⁴¹ When Chebanov reached the high seas during his escape, he made the decision never to return to Russia.

The three “stowaway” letters that Chebanov sent home from America in September and October, 1907, record in vivid and precise detail his experiences from the day he parted from his wife and mother in Batum to his arrival in the town of Oregon, Illinois, where he thought his older brother, Nikita, had emigrated in 1904 to work in the Schiller piano factory.¹⁴² His passage was both literal and figurative: during the voyage, Chebanov quit the revolution, deciding he would never return to Russia. His opening description of the three-week search for a boat that started on June 7 first in Batum and then in Poti reveals his growing distrust of the party for which he had become involved in expropriation. On June 8, Chebanov and the revolutionary colleague escaping with him, Ivan Rozhkov, waited for three days on their own in Batum to learn from their party contacts, Andrei and Leonid, what the “conditions and circumstances of the trip would be”: “the Party stated that it did not have anyone who could arrange to get us on board the steamer, but it did suggest a Greek smuggler, who could arrange things for us. Only we would have to pay him for this service, and then they would contribute.” Chebanov and Rozhkov bargained with the Greek, arriving at the sum of 35 rubles, and gave him 15 rubles earnest money. But the party men, Leonid and Andrei, protested to the Greek that these terms were not agreeable to them. Chebanov knew that they had received 100 rubles to fund his departure and questioned them about it. Leonid flippantly said that he had spent the money on cherries. Between them, Chebanov and Rozhkov had 214 rubles of their own, approximately \$4,300 USD in today’s value, which they used for bribes and other services and supplies on their 8,000-mile voyage to the United States.

When both the Greek smuggler and the second person the party recommended failed to get them on board, Chebanov and Rozhkov began “to get fed up with the organization, seeing that it was starting to deceive us shamelessly.” They were then taken in hand by a young Georgian, apparently a manganese loader because he was so smudged with coal dust that only his teeth and eyes were visible, Chebanov noted. At first, he and Rozhkov feared that the Georgian was

141. Malyshev, “Chumak,” and Chumak, *Chumak*.

142. We term these “stowaway” letters because they largely describe Chebanov’s experiences during his escape from Russia and detainment on Ellis Island; all three were written shortly after he had cleared quarantine and special inquiry there. The first letter is dated September 17, 1907; the third, October 5, 1907. The undated intervening letter flashes back to describe events between August 3 and September 5. Authors’ collection. See James M. Schibanoff and Susan Schibanoff, ed. and intro., “‘Free At Last’: Khariton Chebanov’s Stowaway Letters (September 17, 1907-October 5, 1917),” which follows this essay, for an English translation of the letters.

a plain clothes detective, but whatever he said to them, he earned their trust. The Georgian arranged their passage and put them up in his apartment, refusing any payment. On June 28, with ten to fifteen other men who were being smuggled on board a steamship to Constantinople and then Rotterdam, Chebanov and Rozhkov set sail on the first leg of their journey thanks to the efforts of a nameless Good Samaritan from Georgia.

The prolonged trip was fraught with “physical hardships and misfortunes,” which Chebanov detailed in his letters. During the three-month ordeal, however, he both clarified the future course of his own life and rekindled the camaraderie he had enjoyed with fellow workers in his early days in the railway depot. He decided that it would be better for him “to remain somewhere on the waves of the sea than to go back to Russia in shame and dishonor,” that is, as a common criminal implicated in robbery and murder, not a glorious revolutionary warrior. Chebanov knew that he would not be joining the colonies of political exiles waiting out the reactionary period in the British Library or in European cafes and reading rooms; he would be sentenced along with murderers, robbers, and other violent criminals to *katorga*, penal servitude.¹⁴³ The prospect so demoralized that he decided to “go to any lengths not to fall into the hands of the Russian government.”

The escape restored Chebanov’s sense of community with other Russian revolutionaries. In Rotterdam, he and Rozhkov were joined by three more stowaways, also escaping revolutionaries, and together they formed a band that made joint decisions about how to negotiate the rest of their voyage with the Russian crew and captain of the SS Korea, who discovered them mid-way across the Atlantic Ocean. The sailors were in sympathy with Russian revolutionaries even though the captain could be fined by the steamship company for those who arrived at Ellis Island without having paid passage. Once they landed, the five men were quarantined together on Hoffman Island for two weeks where “they soon became acquainted with everyone . . . and even became friends with them.” The wife of the captain of the island, Chebanov noted with pride, would avoid walking past them only “so that she wouldn’t have to greet everyone,” and the captain himself and other inhabitants would often inquire about them. When the captain heard the men singing, he asked what the songs were and learned they were “Russian revolutionary songs,” which interested him very much. The captain wondered if they were anarchists, but the men explained that they were “revolutionaries, which for [them] was decidedly preferable.” Anarchists, including violent expropriators, were excluded by law from entering the United States while revolutionaries, especially younger men able to meet American labor needs, were still admitted.

On September 17, 1907, when 20-year-old Chebanov wrote his first letter home to his parents, he said, “Hurray! Hurray! . . . I have become free at last.” Nominally, he was referring to his release from Ellis Island after a month’s

143. Jonathan Daly, “Criminal Punishment and Europeanization in Late Imperial Russia,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 48 (2000): 353, notes that in 1908 between 9,000 and 11,000 Russians received sentences of *katorga*, typically a period of some years of hard labor or harsh prison existence followed by penal exile in a more relaxed regime.

detention for quarantine and the Special Inquiry procedure used to interrogate stowaways.¹⁴⁴ But he was also free from the life-long oppression of a tsarist regime and from the Bolshevik party that had swept him into criminal activity to finance its bureaucratic structure. Chebanov's sentiment was not unlike that of a presumably non-sectarian railway worker in Tiflis who heckled a Lenin supporter in 1905, "Why do we listen to the Bolsheviks? They are against workers being in the party. The Bolsheviks want to command us like [Tsar] Nicholas."¹⁴⁵ The difference was that Chebanov's status as a sectarian more clearly illuminated the paradox of a revolutionary leadership that had decided to subordinate to its own terrorist agenda a group of people whom it lauded as one of the most democratic trends in Russia.

Russian Labor History: Religion and Revolution

Beginning with Wildman's *Making of a Workers' Revolution* (1967),¹⁴⁶ a dominant strain of Russian labor history has explored the tensions and conflicts inherent in a revolutionary movement that tried to combine the intelligentsia with the working class, and it has examined laborers by specific profession and place as well as individually.¹⁴⁷ Our essay is intended to contribute to this dual effort. Chebanov's experience cannot be generalized to all Russian sectarian workers; his story is a function of time, place, and background, with blocked career mobility and his location in the traditionally violent culture of Transcaucasia perhaps determinative. But his history does serve to challenge stereotypes rooted in the early Soviet era that westernized Russian dissidents were too religiously conservative, preoccupied with their own concerns, or complacently bourgeois to join the cataclysmic opposition to the tsarist regime.

Chebanov forged an individual relationship as a sectarian worker to the Bolshevik party. There were limits to his voluntary submission to the party's demoralizing control during the period of expropriation, and he turned to his religious faith, "baptism by fire," to see him through the crisis it provoked. Trotsky had written of prisoners in Nikolaev who broke down mentally or died of fright under such stress. Pearl believes that the majority of radical workers lost their faith and became atheists during the 1905 Revolution; disillusionment with religion was an important turning point between an inherited outlook and a new, socialist one, she writes.¹⁴⁸ Yet Herrlinger has discovered workers in St. Petersburg who synthesized their Orthodox faith with socialist politics.¹⁴⁹ Chebanov appears to have reached his own accommodation of conventionally opposed forces. So too did Kanatchikov bridge the gap between his early hostility, as a worker, to the

144. Chebanov admitted that "without turning around, [he] began to tell lies" to the Board of Special Inquiry; necessity required it, he said. Undated "stowaway" letter. Authors' collection.

145. Quoted by Jones, *Socialism*, 124.

146. Referenced in our Note 46.

147. For instance, respectively, Reichman, *Railwaymen*; Herrlinger, *Working Souls*; and Zelnik, *Autobiography of Semen Ivanovich Kanatchikov*.

148. *Creating a Culture of Revolution*, 84.

149. *Working Souls*, 252.

radical intelligentsia and his later decision to become a Bolshevik professional revolutionary.

We do not know the rest of Kanatchikov's story as he would tell it; his autobiography ends at the moment of his decision to devote himself to Bolshevism in 1905.¹⁵⁰ With Chebanov, we know that his reconciliation of apparent opposites persisted throughout his life: in 1918, he helped organize the Russian-American Baptist church in his community and remained a lifelong member,¹⁵¹ while in 1961, the year before he died, Chebanov wrote that "regardless of what we might say about them and no matter how much we might criticize them . . . the Ul'yanov [Lenin] family was necessary for Russia. Life itself called them forth."¹⁵² As both Pearl and Herrlinger have demonstrated, the long-silenced voices of marginalized "backward workers" in Russia, including sectarians, have much to tell us about religion and revolution in 1905.¹⁵³ So does the voice of Khariton Chebanov, relayed to us in his own writing and in the American small-town newspaper.

About the authors

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150. Reginald E. Zelnik, "Russian Bebel: An Introduction to the Memoirs of the Russian Workers Semen Kanatchikov and Matvei Fisher, Part II," *The Russian Review* 35, no. 4 (1976): 444-47, traces Kanatchikov's life from 1905 to his death in 1940. The publication of his autobiography in 1929 implies that he remained in good standing politically, but the absence of any evidence of his activities after that suggests *ex silentio* that "something may have gone awry" during the years of purges for this "Old Bolshevik" of first lineage, Zelnik writes.

151. "Harry Schibanoff Still Helping Russian DPs," *Freehold Transcript* (Freehold, NJ, Oct. 5, 1950): 1.

152. *Memoir*, 37. In referring to the Ul'yanov family in the plural ("them"), Chebanov included not only Vladimir and Maria, but their older brother Alexander, a Populist who was executed in 1887 for his attempted assassination of Tsar Alexander III.

153. Herrlinger, *Working Souls*, 7.

Supplemental Materials

“Free at Last”: Khariton Chebanov’s Stowaway Letters (September 17, 1907-October 5, 1907)

James M. Schibanoff and Susan Schibanoff, ed. and intro.

Introduction

On June 6, 1907,¹⁵⁴ 20-year-old Khariton Chebanov bid farewell to his wife and mother in Elizavetpol, Transcaucasia (now Ganja, Azerbaijan) and headed for the Black Sea port of Batumi to secure passage to America as a stowaway. He had embraced the violent life of a Bolshevik revolutionary in the turmoil surrounding the Revolution of 1905, was imprisoned in the infamous Metekhi Prison in Tiflis (now Tbilisi, Georgia) on April 12, 1907, and was released on bail of 2,000 rubles. His father furnished the substantial bail money that would be forfeited. Chebanov could not be aware that he was attempting to enter the U. S. in the peak year of immigration. There were 1,285,349 immigrants in 1907, of which 80 percent passed through Ellis Island. With the arrival of the restrictionist Ellis Island commissioner, William Williams, in mid-1909, followed by the onset of World War I, the immigration door was closing; by 1918, the number had fallen by more than 90 percent to 110,618.¹⁵⁵

Having completed his momentous journey to the small town of Oregon, Illinois, on September 5, 1907, Chebanov found employment and temporary shelter in the Schiller Piano Factory. He had anticipated joining his brother Nikita and family in Oregon, unaware that they had returned to New York City. Beginning on September 17, Chebanov recounted his trip in exceptional detail in three letters, largely devoted to the intricacies of the stowaway experience. The letters are especially interesting because Chebanov expresses his thoughts, feelings, fears, plans, and options, yielding rare insight into the mindset of a desperate revolutionary escaping to freedom. In the opening sentence of the first letter, we share his elation as he proclaims “Hurray! Hurray! Here I am in America at last! Here I have become free at last!” (see Figure 1). In Russia, as an internally exiled religious dissident turned revolutionary, Chebanov had spent his life under the controlling influences of tsarism, the Orthodox Church, and Bolshevism. In America, he was free to begin again.

154. The old-style Julian calendar was used in Russia until 1917. It ran thirteen days behind the Gregorian calendar in use in the West, although, on occasion, Chebanov calculated a 14-day difference.

155. Henry P. Guzda, “Ellis Island a Welcome Site? Only After Years of Reform,” *Monthly Labor Review* 109 (July, 1986): 30-36.

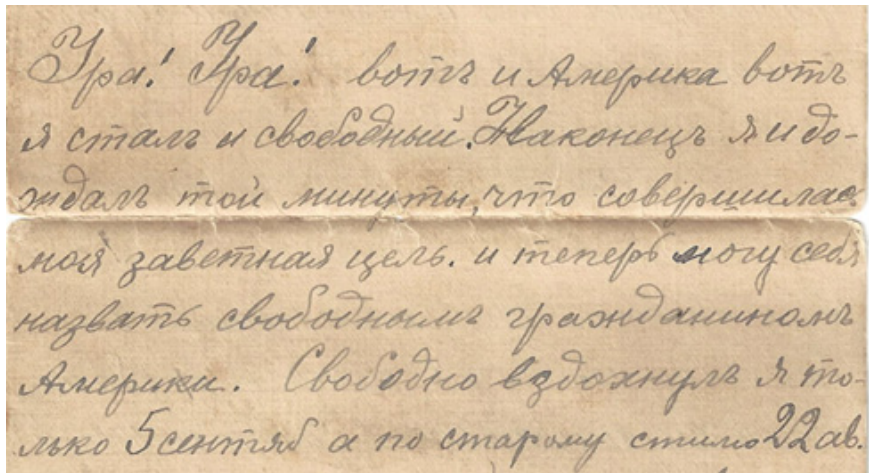


Figure S1. Opening sentences of Khariton Chebanov's first stowaway letter, September 17, 1907, Oregon, Illinois. (Authors' collection)

Sent to Khariton's parents, Ereimei and Juliana Cheban in Elizavetpol, the handwritten letters, along with family photos, were brought back to the U.S. by Juliana when she immigrated in 1910. She kept them concealed; they were found in her belongings after her death in 1935 in Freehold NJ. The letters were returned to Chebanov (now known as Harry Schibanoff) and, after his death in 1962, his daughter Katherine held them. Upon her death in 2000, the letters were lost until resurfacing in 2016 in the possession of a grandson, Harry A. Schibanoff, at which time they were translated into English.¹⁵⁶ In this introduction, we provide context for understanding Chebanov's experience as a stowaway in 1907 followed by the text of the translated letters.¹⁵⁷

Impressions of stowaways range from the romance of the literary stowaway and the tales of adventurous youth to "the nuisance of the sea"¹⁵⁸ and even to violence and death. A 1906 observer lamented that the "sentimental side of the stowaway has ceased to exist, and he is now a distinct source of annoyance, trouble, and expense to all concerned."¹⁵⁹ Stowaways generally fell into two categories: those with insufficient funds to afford the fare and those found to be ineligible for admission to the U.S. at the embarkation port. With the assistance of the ship's crew, the latter group endeavored to remain undiscovered, and upon

156. Transl. Ronald D. LeBlanc.

157. In Letter 2, following, Chebanov mentions having written and sent off other letters while in the custody of U.S. Immigration. They have not survived; presumably, they were less candid than those translated here, which were composed after Chebanov had been admitted to the U.S.

158. "2392 Stowaways Reached US Ports During Last Fiscal Year," *The Nautical Gazette: An International Weekly Chronicle of Shipping* 100 no. 2 (January 8, 1921): 37-38.

159. Minna Irving, "A Human Derelict – The Stowaway," *New Age Magazine* 4, no. 3 (March 1906): 216-221.

arrival to be smuggled ashore, evading inspection by immigration officials.¹⁶⁰ Sometimes, desperate stowaways resorted to violence,¹⁶¹ as Chebanov himself contemplated a violent escape from the ship after reaching port in New York.

The question of why Chebanov chose to stow away instead of conventional travel is not addressed directly in the letters, undoubtedly because it was so obvious to all intended readers. Citizens of the Russian Empire could not leave the country without documents that included identity papers, proof of completion of military service and military reserve service, and permission to travel. The penalties for ordinary citizens caught leaving without permission included banishment and forfeiture of Russian property.¹⁶² When Chebanov's older brother Nikita fled conscription for the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, he traveled more conspicuously to a European port in order to include his wife and infant daughter; the couple illegally crossed a snowy frontier under fire from border guards, muffling the cries of their two-month-old child. As a criminal fleeing imprisonment, Chebanov could not risk discovery at a border crossing or boarding a ship as a ticketed passenger because of the inevitable return to prison or worse; he departed as a stowaway from a Russian port without his wife, who remained in Elizavetpol until 1908.

When Chebanov reached Ellis Island in 1907, the Commissioner was Robert Watchorn, an immigrant himself and very supportive of immigration. To improve management of the thousands of arrivals, he instituted a system that held the immigrant steamship companies accountable for passengers who failed to gain entry at Ellis Island. In addition to a fine, the steamship company was required to provide passage back to the original port and to pay for maintenance while in the United States awaiting transport, hence the steamship companies conducted the most intense screening of immigrants at the ports of embarkation. Investigation by the Dillingham Commission in 1907 found that medical examination at ports of embarkation rejected five times as many immigrants as at Ellis Island.¹⁶³ Watchorn described the benefits of this approach:

The refusal of steamship companies to carry undesirable immigrants is one of the greatest checks upon pernicious immigration that I know of. Last year, for instance, the various steamship companies refused to bring 20,000 aliens to this country, not through any deep regard for our laws, of course, but simply for their own interests, knowing that we would have sent them back even if they had brought them here. This action on the part of the steamship companies has eliminated much of the distress and suffering we used to see on this island—the tearing apart

160. United States Immigration Commission, *Abstracts of Reports of the Immigration Commission* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1911) 2: 363.

161. "Stowaways Rout Crew with Knives," *New York Daily Tribune*, Tuesday, March 6, 1906; "Fight with Stowaways," *New York Times*, Thursday, November 22, 1906.

162. V. V. Obolensky-Ossinsky, "Emigration from and Immigration into Russia," *International Migrations*, ed. Walter F. Willcox (Cambridge MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1931) 2: 521.

163. A. E. Birn, "Six Seconds Per Eyelid: The Medical Inspection of Immigrants at Ellis Island, 1892-1914," *Dynamis* 17 (1997): 312.

of wives and husbands and mothers and children and the like. When a husband or mother or child is refused passage at some foreign port the rest of the family refused to sail, too. If the steamship company allows a family passage, ailing members and all, then we have send the ailing one back. Of course the family cannot go back with this ailing member free of charge, so they go on to their destination while the undesirable member is deported. All of this is, of course, pathetically disagreeable, all around.¹⁶⁴

The medical examination of arriving immigrants enforced the U.S. immigration law that excluded persons afflicted with tuberculosis or with a loathsome or dangerous contagious disease and persons with a mental or physical defect that might affect the ability to earn a living.¹⁶⁵

The examination began as the immigrants climbed the double staircase from the general reception room to the Registry Room carrying their baggage and often young children. Upon reaching the second floor, the first medical officer visually inspected the fully clothed subjects from the front, side, and back as they walked past him to a second physician whose sole duty was to inspect the eyes for trachoma.¹⁶⁶ As late as 1914, it was believed that, while acknowledging “certain limitations,” one can “safely state that almost no serious organic disease can have a hold on an individual without stamping some evidence of its presence upon the patient’s appearance evident to the eye or hand of the trained observer.”¹⁶⁷ Notwithstanding contemporary belief, such cursory examinations of as many as 5,000 subjects per day could detect only the most advanced stages of most diseases. The most common diseases detected were trachoma and favus, jointly accounting for 97 percent of the contagious diseases. Trachoma, a destructive eye disease, and favus, a scalp disease, were diagnosed by direct observation, while other serious diseases generally escaped detection because they required additional diagnostic measures that were impractical or unavailable. Particularly noteworthy is the case of tuberculosis. While tuberculosis accounted for 10 percent of the U.S. mortality, “tuberculosis of the lungs is rarely found among immigrants on arrival.”¹⁶⁸ It was found in only 0.015 percent of immigrants.¹⁶⁹

The Ellis Island Board of Special Inquiry scrutinized immigrants who, after legal and medical inspection, required further review. Approximately 10 percent of the immigrants underwent the Special Inquiry process on the second floor of

164. “Immigration Record Will Be Broken This Year,” *New York Times*, Sunday, March 11, 1906.

165. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, *Immigration Laws and Regulations of July 1, 1907*, Fourth Edition (February 15, 1908), (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1908), Section 2, page 5.

166. Albert C. Reed, “The Medical Side of Immigration,” *Popular Science Monthly* 80 (April 1912): 383-92.

167. J. Nute, “Medical Inspection of Immigrants at the Port of Boston,” *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 170 (1914): 644.

168. Allan McLaughlin, “Immigration and the Public Health,” *Public Opinion* 39, no. 13 (September 23, 1905): 391-95.

169. Alfred C. Reed, “Immigration and the Public Health,” *Popular Science Monthly* 83 (October, 1913): 313-338.

the Ellis Island immigration building. Three to five boards, composed of three inspectors and an interpreter, stenographer, and messenger, each processed 50 to 100 cases daily. The commonest reason for referral to a Board of Special Inquiry was the designation of being “liable to become a public charge” (abbreviated “LPC”), i.e., likely to need the support of private charities or government poorhouses or asylums. The ill-defined classification was based on the suspicion that the immigrant might become a public charge but did not fit into any of the more precise reasons for exclusion. It was not based on medical diagnoses, as those individuals were placed in another category. As a subjective judgment, it was criticized for being used too frequently or infrequently. A special commission¹⁷⁰ appointed by the President found that in 1903 of the 631,885 aliens inspected at Ellis Island, 10 percent were referred to the Board of Special Inquiry. 6,839 immigrants were excluded and returned to Europe at the expense of the steamship companies that brought them to the U.S. The relative frequency of the causes for deportation were:

Liable to become public charges	69.2 percent
On account of contract labor	12.9
On medical certificates	11.1
Deported after having been landed	5.9
Convicts	0.7
Insane	0.3

Chebanov and his four stowaway colleagues were placed in the LPC category. The Bolshevik party, which sponsored Chebanov’s escape, likely knew that as of June, 1907, stowing away in itself was not a category for exclusion from legal entry to the U.S. Stowaways were treated in the same manner as regular passengers in the immigration screening and inspection procedures.¹⁷¹ That rule would soon change to refuse admission to all stowaways and return them without examination to the ports from which they had come,¹⁷² yet even the earlier law had one important—restrictive—exception. Invariably, stowaways were held for additional scrutiny at the Board of Special Inquiry. This extra layer of inspection was likely the product of the large percentage of excludable conditions found in the stowaway population. While only about 1 percent of all immigrants were deported from Ellis Island (in 1905, 7,078 steerage passengers were deported from a group of 722,741¹⁷³), in the stowaway group it was nearly 50 percent. In

170. United States. Commission Appointed by the President to Investigate the Condition of the Immigrant Station at Ellis Island, *Report of the Commission appointed by the President on September 16, 1903, to investigate the condition of the Immigrant Station at Ellis Island* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1904), as reported in *The Sun*, Monday, February 19, 1904.

171. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, *Immigration Laws and Regulations* of July 1, 1907, (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1907), Rule 23, page 48.

172. *Abstracts of Reports of the Immigration Commission* (1911) 2: 365.

173. “Immigration Record Will Be Broken This Year.”

the third quarter of 1907 when Chebanov reached Ellis Island, of the reported 113 stowaways, 55 were deported.¹⁷⁴

The situation was even worse for Russian stowaways in mid-1907. Three Russian immigrants who had arrived on the SS Estonia on July 3 were found in Grand Central Station. Each had trachoma and had evaded inspection at Ellis Island with extensive bribery; they had paid \$25 apiece to an agent in the departure port of Libau, \$35 to a crew member, and \$12.50 for shore-leave passes in Brooklyn. About forty such stowaways were apparently smuggled ashore from the same ship, none of whom was registered as a passenger on the ship's manifest. It was suspected that this immigrant smuggling scheme was tolerated by Russian authorities as a means of unburdening undesirable subjects.¹⁷⁵ Next came the SS Saratov from Libau and Rotterdam; its Russian stowaways included the celebrated Paulina Flaks, who dressed as a man until she was apprehended by a suspicious inspector and deported (see Figure 2).¹⁷⁶



Dropped Plumb Into the Arms of an Immigrant Inspector.

Figure 2. Apprehending an escaping stowaway from the SS Saratov on July 14, 1907.¹⁷⁷

Finally, within two weeks of Chebanov's arrival, two Russia East Asiatic Line ships, the SS Arconia and SS Petersburg, reached New York sheltering the large number of 20 stowaways, further angering Robert Watchorn, who complained that the word of the Russia East Asiatic Line could not be trusted and threatened prosecution by the U. S. Attorney. He believed that there was a conspiracy in Russia to violate U. S. immigration law.¹⁷⁸ A newspaper editorialized that "paupers, diseased, and criminals—in short any riff-raff of Europe who can't qualify under the immigration laws... are sneaked into New York right past the noses of the inspectors."¹⁷⁹ Fifteen of the 20 stowaways were deported after hearings at the Board of Special

174. *Abstracts of Reports of the Immigration Commission* (1911) 2: 364.

175. "Smuggling Immigrants In," *The Sun*, July 17, 1907.

176. "Pretty Russian Girl Stowaway Held at Ellis Island," *New York Times*, July 17, 1907

177. "Fair Stowaway in Male Attire," *Grand Rapids Chronicle*, Thursday, August 22, 1907.

178. "More Stowaways Found," *New York Times*, Friday, August 9, 1907.

179. "The Stowaway's Innings," *Buffalo Evening Times*, Monday, August 12, 1907.

Inquiry.¹⁸⁰ As a stowaway on a Russia-East Asiatic Line steamship, Chebanov's anxiety about rejection at Ellis Island was well-founded.

Fearing that the authorities would discover "who [they] really were" and expel them, Chebanov resolved that "they would not send [him] back to Russia . . . even if it meant that [he] had to pay for it with [his] life."¹⁸¹ Other stowaways shared Chebanov's determination to defy deportation to Russia, some resorting to life-threatening tactics. Two ill-fated stowaways on the SS Arconia shared Chebanov's sense of desperation as they were deported aboard the Arconia on August 10, 1907. Edward Kripch (or "Krisch"), 18 years-old, and Herman Kirpshe (or "Kupsz"), 19 years-old, were among the eleven stowaways who had aroused the anger of Commissioner Watchorn. Kripch suffered from a mutilated left hand with complete loss of two fingers and partial loss of one. Both were Social Democrats who had been arrested in Russia for revolutionary activity. In Rotterdam, the stowaways would be turned over to the Russian Consul and returned to Russia for conscription into the Russian Army or more severe punishment. Like Chebanov, they vowed to risk death rather than return to Russia. When the Arconia reached the English Channel, eight miles off Start Point on the Devon coast at 2 AM on the night of August 24, Kripch and Kirpshe put on cork lifebelts and slipped into the 60–65-degree F. water.¹⁸² They believed that they could swim to shore or be rescued by a passing ship in the heavily-traveled English Channel. Three-and-one-half hours later, more dead than alive, they were rescued by the Greek freighter Ecaterina Couppa, and taken to port at Cardiff, Wales. In Cardiff, they were designated as political refugees and, with the assistance of the Welsh Friends of the Russian Freedom Society, were allowed to remain in the country. While in quarantine on Hoffman Island awaiting the Board of Special Inquiry hearing, Chebanov's stowaway group was to contemplate a similar water-borne escape on almost the same day as Kripch and Kirpshe.

If Chebanov were deported, he vowed to "head back to America." In fact, recurrent stowaways were not unknown. Benjamin Axelrod, "the champion of all stowaways,"¹⁸³ was an impoverished Ukrainian teenager. By the time he had achieved widespread recognition in December 1907, he had made seven trips to the U.S. as a stowaway, at least two of which were aboard the stowaway-friendly

180. "May Prosecute Steamship Company," *New York Daily Tribune*, Tuesday, August 6, 1907; "More Stowaways Found." See also *New York, Arriving Passengers and Crew Lists, 1820-1977*, "Records of Aliens Held for Special Inquiry, SS Arconia, Arrived Ellis Island August 5, 1907," images 84-85, s.v. "Edward Krisch" (b. ca. 1889), Ancestry.com, <https://ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/4012792341:7488>, accessed August 12, 2023; and *New York, Arriving Passengers and Crew Lists, 1820-1977*, "Records of Aliens Held for Special Inquiry, SS Petersburg, Arrived Ellis Island, August 8, 1907," image 198, s.v. "Schloime Friedman" (b. ca. 1892, arrival 8 Aug 1907), Ancestry.com, <https://ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/4012801411:7488>, accessed August 12, 2023.

181. See Chebanov's Stowaway Letters 1 and 2, following.

182. "To Be Given Up? Russian Seaman's Bid for Freedom," *Evening Express and Evening Mail* (Cardiff Wales), Monday, August 26, 1907.

183. "Champion of All Stowaways," *Semi-Weekly World* (Vancouver, B. C.), March 30, 1909.

SS Arconia.¹⁸⁴ By early 1909, newspapers claimed that he had stowed away as many as seventeen times. In the earlier attempts, he was deported as likely to become a public charge because of his status as an unsponsored minor. He was widely known not only to ship captains and crews, but also to pier workers who maintained a constant vigilance for him. Ultimately, he remained in the U.S., achieved citizenship, and operated a successful dishware business. A great-grandson argued and won a case before the U. S. Supreme Court.¹⁸⁵

The stowaway problem was addressed in the Immigration Act of February 20, 1907. Bringing an alien to any location other than as designated by immigration officials was punishable by a fine of between \$100 and \$1,000 and one year in prison in addition to the expenses of transporting the alien to the embarkation port.¹⁸⁶ Stowaways could be much more than mere “nuisances” to shipowners.

In spite of his irritation with the Russian East Asiatic Line, Watchorn saw the new immigrants as “bright, ambitious men and women, the brawn and backbone of any country.” Responding to the immigration restrictionists, Watchorn argued that, “the Immigration Problem is only a problem in the minds of those who are pessimistic. The immigrants are a wealth of good for those to whom they come. Our forefathers who came here on the Mayflower were nothing more than immigrants themselves.”¹⁸⁷ “I believe that the immigrant has done as much for this country as the country has for him,” he continued; “the children of the immigrants who landed here twenty-five years ago are just like the children of those whose forefathers came over a hundred years ago, and the child of the immigrant who comes in to-day will be just as loyal as any of the others, no matter how long ago their parents came over.”¹⁸⁸ Watchorn anticipated the paths of Khariton and Nikita Chebanov and other Russian Baptist immigrants who benefited the country by settling in the “open spaces” away from cities:

In New York State at the present time, there are 12,000 vacant farms. This is the case to a greater or less extent in other states. Why? Because the native-born youth is hurrying to the cities; and foreigners are taking their places out on the farmlands and open spaces. Can you detect anything save an economic advantage in this arrangement? An advantage that cannot but fall to accrue to the national welfare.¹⁸⁹

Watchorn had similar beliefs about financial requirements for immigrants, stating that “an alien who arrives without money may be excluded on the ground that he is likely to become a public charge, but in my opinion, it is absurd to bar him for

184. “7-Time Stowaway May Land,” *New York Times*, Tuesday, December 3, 1907.

185. “The Stowaway,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Sunday, July 13, 2014.

186. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, *Immigration Laws and Regulations* of July 1, 1907, (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1907), Section 18, page 19.

187. “Watchorn Defends Immigrants,” *New York Daily Tribune*, Friday, March 22, 1907.

188. “Immigration is Wealth,” *New York Times*, Monday, November 19, 1906.

189. “Immigration Record Will Be Broken This Year.”

lack of money alone.”¹⁹⁰

The tide had begun to turn against immigrants, however.¹⁹¹ On June 28, 1909, Watchorn was replaced by William Williams, who attempted to require that all immigrants possess \$25 and railroad tickets to their destinations to gain admittance to the country, but the requirement was soon withdrawn. Williams held the belief that “the wildest enthusiast on the subject of unrestricted immigration would hardly claim that the United States could be socially, politically, or industrially what it is to-day, had it been peopled exclusively by the races of Russia, Austria, and Southern Italy.” In his opinion there was an undesirable minority of at least 25 percent of current immigrants who were of no benefit to the country.¹⁹² Williams was not alone in his aversion to the newcomers. In 1894, three Harvard-educated, Boston Brahmins led by Prescott Farnsworth Hall had established the Immigration Restriction League (IRL) that exercised great influence on U.S. immigration policy. Hall claimed that “the concentration of these large bodies of ignorant foreigners in the slums of our Eastern cities is a serious matter”: “Foreigners furnish 1½ times as many criminals, 2 times as many insane, and 3 times as many paupers as natives.”¹⁹³ Hall’s seminal 1906 monograph, *Immigration and Its Effects Upon the United States*, was based on the premise that:

[i]n the early days of this country the majority of the great men were produced in the two states of Massachusetts and Virginia, which, more than any other others, were homogeneous in race, religion, and civic and social ideals. It is said that taking history as a whole, the nations which have left the greatest mark in religion, in art and in literature, such as Judaea, Greece, Rome, France, Germany, and England, were at the time of their greatness essentially homogeneous; and that decadence has in general followed the dispersal or mixture of races.¹⁹⁴

Hall seemed oblivious to fact that Judaea, Greece, and Rome were not situated in the “sturdy” Northern Europe. Hall, although sickly himself, had a fixation on the physical superiority of the Northern Europeans. Without evidence, he asserted that

[g]ood physique was much more general among immigrants a quarter century ago than among immigrants of to-day. The bulk of immigrants previous to 1880 came from the sturdy races of Northern and Western Europe, and not only was good physique the rule, but loathsome,

190. J. Herbert Welch, “Robert Watchorn—The Man Who Climbed Out,” *Success Magazine* 8, no. 133 (June, 1905): 386-88.

191. Katherine Benton-Cohen, *Inventing the Immigration Problem: The Dillingham Commission and Its Legacy* (Cambridge MA: Harvard UP, 2018), traces the way in which the Dillingham Commission, formed in 1907, shaped immigration into a “problem” that required “federal power to solve.”

192. William Williams, “The Sifting of Immigrants,” *Journal of Social Science* 44 (September 1906): 29-43.

193. Prescott F. Hall, “Selection of Immigration,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 24 (1904): 177.

194. Prescott F. Hall, *Immigration and Its Effects Upon the United States* (New York: Henry Holt, 1906), 172.

communicable or contagious disease was extremely rare....With the change in the racial character of immigration, most marked in the past decade, a pronounced deterioration in the general physique of the immigrants, and much higher per cent of loathsome and dangerous disease is noticeable...The immigrant recorded as having a poor physique is usually admitted.¹⁹⁵

Hall overlooked immigrants like Chebanov, who withstood withering heat and dehydration while shoveling coal into steamship furnaces to reach Ellis Island, possessing a physique undoubtedly far superior to that of any of the delicate Harvard fellows. Nevertheless, the IRL was very influential and set the stage for the draconian immigration restrictions after World War I.

Sometime in late 1907, Chebanov found his brother in New York City and gained employment, along with a small circle of Russian Baptists, in one of the city's 144 piano factories. Chebanov's wife and young son joined him there in 1908. After two tragic infant deaths, the family moved to Freehold NJ in 1911, where he established a poultry farm that barely survived the Great Depression to reach prosperity during World War II. In 1948, now known as Harry Schibanoff, he played a central role helping Mikhail Samarin and his family defect from the Soviet Consulate in New York City. Chebanov then collaborated with Alexandra Tolstoy (1884-1979), youngest daughter of the novelist Leo Tolstoy and founder of the Tolstoy Foundation, to sponsor the immigration of more than 100 displaced persons who feared repatriation to the Soviet Union after the war. Free at last in America, which he had entered in 1907 despite suspicion about a Russian stowaway conspiracy and on a rising tide of anti-immigration policy, Chebanov spent the final decades of his life holding the door open for others.

Letter 1 (September 17, 1907)

Hurray! Hurray! Here I am in America at last! Here I have become free at last! Finally, I have lived to see that moment when my cherished goal has been reached, and now I can call myself a free citizen of America.

I could breathe freely only on September 5th, August 22nd Old Style, when my unbearable penal life in Russia came to an end and so, too, did my nearly 3-month-long trip. I suffered many hardships and misfortunes during my prolonged journey. I re-examined a lot of things and made up my mind about all of them. I decided that it would be better for me to remain somewhere on the waves of the sea than to go back to Russia in shame and dishonor . . . I had remained alone in Batumi¹⁹⁶ after accompanying Sasha and mother home. At first I was very sad, so much so that for two days I did not eat anything. I did a great deal of thinking, and I decided that it would be better for me to die somewhere than to remain in Russia or wait until they would twist and turn inside it.

I decided to try to reach this goal,... that is, to get to America, by doing

195. *Ibid.*, 88.

196. Batumi (or Batum) is the Georgian port city on the Black Sea where Stalin organized strikes by workers at the Rothschild oil refinery in 1901-1902.

everything possible: that is, through a petition or else through impertinence and a threat. If that didn't help, then even by force. I would rather do that, even if it meant that I had to pay for it with my life, than to be transported back to Russia and again suffer penal confinement.

The following day, when I still remained alone (this was June 7th), I met Rozhkov¹⁹⁷ and Andrei¹⁹⁸ around noon. They had been looking for us since 5 o'clock that morning. When we found out in Batumi that the steamship on which we could depart had already left and that it would sail a second time on the 25th or 26th of June, we left that same day for Poti¹⁹⁹ at 2 o'clock in the morning.

We arrived in Poti on June 8th at around 6 or 7 o'clock in the morning. After stopping at a hotel, we separated into two groups: two of us went to find the addresses of the people we needed, while Rozhkov and I set off for the train station to find our acquaintances. Since we couldn't stay in the hotel, in order to survive during our time there, we found our acquaintances and brought our things over to the place where one of them lived.

For the first three days /June 8, 9, 10/ we sat there in complete uncertainty and obscurity. The only things we knew for certain was that it was raining heavily outside and that the people we needed were not home, that is, they were not in Poti.

On June 11th we learned, already in some detail, what the conditions and circumstances of the trip would be. The Party stated that it did not have anyone expressly who could arrange to get us on board the steamer, but it did suggest a Greek smuggler who could arrange things for us. Only we would have to pay him for this service, and then they would contribute. The Greek told us that it would cost us 25 rubles²⁰⁰ for each man, justifying this by saying that the mechanics take 20 rubles, but he takes only 5 rubles for himself, just enough to cover the cost of his labor and his expenses. We started to bargain with him, and he agreed on 35

197. Ivan Rozhkov was a fellow revolutionary who participated in the uprising at the Elizavetpol train station in 1905. He was 26 years old and originally from Podolsk in western Russia. He stowed away with Chebanov, and, four days after leaving Constantinople, he developed a skin rash (dry acne on face, body, palms, and soles) for which he was quarantined. By the time he reached New York, he was covered in scabs and was isolated on Swinburne Island in New York Harbor. Like Chebanov, his declared destination was Oregon, Illinois. There is no indication that he reached Oregon; he may have remained in Chicago, but he otherwise disappeared.

198. "Andrei" is probably Andrei Chumak, the leader of the Elizavetpol Bolsheviks. He was jailed with Chebanov at Metekhi Prison in 1906 and in 1907 was awaiting trial for another offense. He jumped his bail of 5,000 rubles and escaped to America with his wife and son, Alexander. He later returned to Russia and died fighting in the Russian Civil War in the Far East in 1917. (See Alexander A. Chumak, *Andrey Chumak* [Khabarovsk: Khabarovskoye Knizhnoye Izdatel'stvo, 1974].)

199. Poti is the other major Georgian port city on the Black Sea in the region of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti in the western part of the country. Built near the site of the ancient Greek colony of Phasis and deriving its name from the same, the city had become an important port city and industrial center by the early 20th century.

200. In 1907, the ruble to dollar exchange rate was approximately 2 to 1. When Chebanov presented his 60 rubles to the Money Exchange at Ellis Island, he received \$28.07 USD.

rubles for every two people. Rozhkov and I agreed to these terms, and we gave him 15 rubles as earnest money. Leonid and Andrei started to twist the Greek around their little finger, saying that these conditions were not profitable for them. The fact of the matter, however, was that Leonid had 100 rubles, which he had received for our departure. For example, the day before Andrei arrived, he told me that he had received 50 rubles from one source and 35 rubles from another. But when we decided to pool all our cash together into a common fund, they kept silent about these 85 rubles. When I asked him about this, he told me that he had spent them on cherries. Our funds consisted of 435 rubles; we spent a part of those funds, and the rest we divided up among ourselves. Rozhkov and I received 212 rubles and 70 kopecks; I had another 2 rubles on me, so that in all we had 214 rubles and 70 kopecks between us.

On June 12th, at 4 o'clock in the morning, we said good-bye and parted company. And on June 13th, at eight o'clock in the evening, the steamer, on which we were supposed to depart, was scheduled to leave.²⁰¹ I don't know the reasons why, but our things had not been loaded onto the steamer. When we told the Greek smuggler to seat us on board without our things, he said that he couldn't do that. The steamer left. We had to wait for the next one, which was going to leave in a week.

We couldn't stay at this man's place, for one thing because we were fed up with him, and for another thing because he was fed up with our host and with the kind of people we were. The organization determined that we would stay with some workers – stevedores – in a barracks. During the day, we would roam about the city, but we would spend our nights at the barracks. I fell ill and lay in bed for about four days. Finally, this next steamer left. Now 2 other steamers, which would be leaving in a week and a half or two weeks, were being loaded. We started to see that this Greek smuggler was making little sense, so we started to ask him for our money back. He promised that he would get us seated on the first or second of the steamers that were presently being loaded. We started to get fed up with the organization, seeing that it was starting to deceive us shamelessly.

So the organization has some foreigner come by to see us and he says, "This mechanic is taking you." But then we find out not only that he's not a mechanic, but that he doesn't even work on the steamer that he said he worked on.

One day we were sitting on the pier, when a young man approached us. He was obviously a manganese loader, since he was dirty all over, only his teeth and eyes could be seen.²⁰² From our conversation with him, we could tell that he was a Georgian. He asked us whether we would like to go abroad. At first, we

201. Although Chebanov had been planning a robbery immediately before fleeing to the Black Sea coast in the first week of June, the famous robbery in Erivansky Square, Tiflis, which netted an estimated 250,000 to 341,000 rubles (approximately \$3-4 million USD in today's value) and left some 40 people dead occurred on June 13 while Chebanov was in the port of Poti clandestinely attempting to board a ship.

202. The region of Chiatura in the mountains of western Georgia was one of the largest producers of manganese in the world. It was exported in large amounts to Western countries for use in steel production. Exposure to manganese causes a deep purple discoloration of the skin that turns brown.

thought that perhaps he was some kind of plain clothes detective. But after he explained to us who he was, what his purpose was in asking us whether we were interested in going abroad, and how and from where he had learned about us, we confessed that we were indeed interested. He explained that the Greek smuggler could seat us on a steamer, and he offered us his services. He said that the next day he would explain to us all the conditions and circumstances under which he could seat us, because it was dangerous to get seated on the steamer without the captain's permission. He said /by the way, the day was Saturday/ that he would be at the home of some bigwig and it would be enough to tell him and the captain would agree. He needed to be there to attend to some work-related matters, and he would ask him.

The next day, Sunday, he told us that he had spoken with the bigwig, who told him to go ahead and seat us on the steamer. He would tell the captain that if there do turn out to be some people on board the steamer, he should not hand them over in Constantinople, for the captain definitely would not agree to take them.

He took us to live at his apartment, where we stayed until Thursday, June 28th. Just prior to our departure, when we started to pay him for his labor and his expenses, since we had been fed for two days while we stayed at his place, he renounced everything and promised to retrieve the earnest money from the Greek smuggler and to send it to us. To this end, we gave him our address. I don't know whether he ever managed to do this.

Finally, the fateful day arrived: Thursday, June 28th. He gathered together the workers – about 10 to 15 men – and they began to transfer things. It was easy to get us seated on board, but it was very difficult to load our things. I went on board first. I fidgeted on the deck, since it was forbidden for unauthorized people to walk on the deck while the loading was being done. Then I jumped into the manganese, and right after me my things followed. Then Rozhkov likewise jumped down.

At around eight o'clock in the morning, everything was already prepared. We gave the workers 5 rubles, and they brought us half a *pood*²⁰³ of bread, two dozen cucumbers, three pounds of cheese, and various trifles: candles, matches, and so on. They also brought us a small jug of water, since they couldn't manage to get us anything bigger: there were no dishes at hand. Then he himself stopped by. He explained that the steamer was leaving at 8 o'clock in the evening and that it would be better for us if we were to stay below deck in the cargo hold while the steamer was passing through Constantinople. To do this, we would have to sit there for 4 or 5 days. If we couldn't do that, then we should crawl out earlier. Then he said that we should dig out a passageway just in case, so that the customs officials wouldn't drop by. We said good-bye and he left. They threw us a shovel so that later there would be something to dig a passageway with. After a half-hour, we said good-bye to the light. It was dark, there were no chinks to look through. And it was terribly hot in the cargo hold.

203. A *pood* was a unit of mass equal to 16.38 kilograms (36.11 pounds). It was used in Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine.

We sat there for a day. It was already 8 o'clock. At last, it was 10 o'clock and then 11 o'clock. The steamer still hadn't departed. At 2 o'clock in the morning we sat down and had a bite to eat. We ran out of water, no matter how much we had tried to preserve it.

The next day we happened to notice a small ray of light. We shoveled away the manganese. There was an air vent in the lower level of the cargo hold and a small opening in the upper level. We sat still and started to strain our ears. We heard a Russian voice say: "When the customs officials come down, remove the departure flag." After several minutes, there were alarm horns that were sounded and then a single departure horn. The hoisting crane started to knock. Apparently, the anchor was being retracted. After a half hour, a second departure horn was sounded, and then a third one. And the knocking of a machine could be heard. Apparently, we were moving.

The steamer departed at about 9 o'clock in the morning on Friday, the 29th of June. We sat down to have a little snack, but there wasn't any water and we wanted to drink something. By 12 o'clock noon we were once again hot beyond all measure. Together with the rats, we started to scour about in the dark, searching for a place where we could escape the intense heat. Finally, we found a broken-off board. We crawled through the adjacent cargo hold and there we found a hatch that led to the lower level. We tore off the board and used it to descend there. Then we dragged our things there as well and we sat down beneath an air vent. We were really dying for something to drink. We started to assuage our hunger with cucumbers, but there were few of them left. We decided to remain seated, however, until we had passed Constantinople.

We roughed it that night and on Saturday we started to feel ill from the lack of water: our mouths had become so dry that we couldn't speak . . . And yet another misfortune befell us: they closed the air vent and it now became exceedingly hot down below as well.

By evening, there were only two cucumbers left, and by our calculations we needed to remain seated for another two and half days. Rozhkov had become completely enervated and was reduced to a pulp, so he decided to crawl out. I didn't want to do that. I decided that I would either collapse from hunger or make the passage through Constantinople. But I hated to desert my comrade. I shoveled out a passage beneath the roof of the cargo hold and started to knock. People started running around on deck, then we heard how some boards were being broken off. We threw away our board, dragged our things out, and we ourselves crawled out. Some Englishmen were mumbling and laughing. Finally, we heard a Russian voice say: "You've made a mistake, my friends, we still haven't passed Constantinople." We asked for some water, and they brought us some right away. They brought us to the captain. Through the Russian, the captain asked us who we were and how it was that we had ended up on the steamer. Then he said that he would hand us over to the Russian government in Constantinople. And he went back to sleep, since it was already 9 o'clock in the evening.

We didn't sleep all night long. I made the decision that I would go to any lengths not to fall into the hands of the Russian government.

Sunday, July 1st, arrived. We were waiting there like men who are condemned to death await the execution of their sentence. In the morning, that same Russian came to see us again. He explained who he was and how he had ended up on the steamer. He said that the boatswain promised to ask for clemency and that the captain would no doubt listen to him. During this conversation, we were approached by the first mate, that is, the first assistant to the captain. Through the Russian, he started to inquire about who we were, how we had ended up on the steamer, and what had led us to do this. We explained our situation and we said that it would be bad for us if they were to hand us over to the Russian government. He replied: "Don't worry!" After about 20 minutes, he brought us some soap and water, and he gestured with his hands that we were to wash ourselves up. We washed up, and we had a bite to eat. It had been so long since we had last eaten anything. We had a lot of bread.

Around 10 o'clock in the morning, we were summoned to the captain's quarters. He asked us who we were, how we had ended up on the steamer, what had led us to do this, and where we were heading. When Rozhkov asked him whether they would be talking to him about us on shore, he grew confused and got embarrassed. Then he said that if we were to give him 30 rubles apiece, that is, 60 rubles in all, then he wouldn't hand us over, but otherwise he would. But we told him that we had only 10 rubles between us! For a long time he was capricious, giving us trouble by threatening to hand us over. Then he asked us again who we were: Socialists or Anarchists? We said that we were Socialists. He again thought for a moment and then said: "*Oll rait*" ["All right"], meaning "*Khorosho*" ["Okay"]. He led us to the bridge. There was a senior mechanic standing there. The captain handed me over to this senior mechanic and he handed Rozhkov over to a sailor, telling him that starting the next day he would be working with the sailors. The senior mechanic said to me, "*Kaman!*" ["Come on!"]. By the gesture he made with his hand, I understood that he was calling me to follow him.

He took me to the coal pit and indicated to me where I should shovel the coal. Beginning at 11 o'clock in the morning on July 1st, I started to work on the steamer. I worked hard all that day until the mechanic came and pointed out to me that I needed to go wash up. I met yet another Russian on the steamer: he was a sailor who had escaped from prison. He was likewise trying to make his way to America. He was working /just as we were, only to be able to travel on the steamer/ as a stoker. Through him, the mechanic explained to me that I must work from 6 o'clock in the morning to five o'clock in the afternoon, with an hour off for breakfast and lunch.

On Monday, July 2nd, we had just arrived in Constantinople at 10 o'clock. We stopped and remained off the harbor. They brought us water on a barge, they pumped it out . . . There was no inspection of any sort. The captain made a brief trip to shore on a dinghy, and we were unmoored for 2 hours.

At 12 o'clock the next day, we passed, without stopping, the Turkish citadel of the Dardanelles. All we did was give a signal with a horn that the passage had been paid for. And it was only now that we could crawl out of the cargo hold and that the captain could not hand us over.

Rozhkov worked for four days and then fell ill. When he started to recover from his illness, dry acne broke out on his face and his body, even on the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet. They removed him from the work crew and isolated him from the others. They forbade me from going to see him.

During the whole time that we traveled to Rotterdam, I led a really penal existence. I worked harder than I had ever worked in my life. And another thing was the strong coal dust. But the main thing that hampered me was, while passing through the Greek archipelago, the first Sea of Marmara and the Mediterranean Sea, where there was such horrible heat that the deck was scorchingly hot. You could only walk on it if you were wearing some kind of footwear. For me, who was working in the coal pit, the deck above me was baking from the sun and the floor beneath me was baking from the caldrons. It was really hellish to be working there.

And then a deathly ground swell came. Things grew even worse. As if it were not bad enough that I was being baked by the scorching heat, now I started being tossed first against one wall, then against another. It was dangerous to walk because the waves could throw you overboard – one side of the steamer is catching the water, while the other side is pouring it out, and then it's the other way around. And the food we were given – needless to say – was lousy: it consisted of one serving of stinking corned beef, a small unpeeled potato, the size of a pea, boiled in its jacket, and some hard biscuits, the kind, I recall, that they used to give to soldiers in Russia. There was tea, but there wasn't any sugar, so we had to drink the tea without it.

Somehow or other we managed to reach Rotterdam, having traveled for a little more than 21 days, that is, we arrived there on Friday, July 20th, at 10 o'clock in the morning. We were moored off the harbor, and the steamer was made ready for off-loading. Some workers arrived, and some traders came and went from time to time. I struck up a conversation with a Russian stoker, and a man who was passing by happened to hear us speaking together. When I ran into this man again on the deck, he asked me: "Are you Russian?" I answered him. He gave me his address so that I could stop by to see him and buy what I needed. And when the Englishmen told him that we were escaping from Russia, he offered to provide all sorts of services for us. With that, he left, telling us that when we got off the steamer, we should come by to see him.

At around 2 o'clock in the afternoon, we were told to leave, all three of us. We left, taking with us a runaway sailor who worked as a stoker. He did not have a copper kopeck²⁰⁴ on him, while we still had 90 rubles each as well as 2 rubles, 50 kopecks in change. We went over to see this Jew that I had met. He gave us some bread and some other things in addition; he also exchanged the 2 rubles and 50 fifty kopecks in change for three guildens. The first thing we did was to get all three of us a shave and a haircut. Then he provided us with a man who led us to a doss-house²⁰⁵ where we spent the night, paying 10 centimes per person.

204. A "copper kopeck" is the Russian equivalent of the English expression "a red cent."

205. A cheap lodging house for homeless people and tramps.

The next day we went to see the Jew at his shop, but we did not find him there. I wrote him a letter that I left for him. Then the sailor and I set off to find the English steamer that we had arrived on in order to get a certificate from the mechanic attesting to the fact that we had worked as stokers. Rozhkov remained at the Jew's shop to wait for him to arrive, since he had promised to seat us on some steamer that was going to America.

We met the Jew along the way while walking there, and he said that there was only one steamer going to America and it was a Russian one. There weren't any others, nor were there likely to be any showing up anytime soon. Thus, we would have to wait for another week, because he couldn't seat us on a Russian steamer. He told us: "Go ahead and try, however, maybe a crew would take you."

We were going to head over there, but it suddenly started raining heavily. We stopped by another Russian steamer – the "Saratov" – which had just returned from America.²⁰⁶ The runaway sailor found some of his acquaintances there, and we had a nice dinner with them on board that steamer. Then we went to the steamer that was going to America.²⁰⁷

The runaway sailor and I started to nose around, making inquiries. The stokers said that we could hide ourselves away on board, and that we would be given bread and meat. Then Rozhkov arrived.

The steamer was departing, and we decided to go. There was no time to get our things, so we set off for America in what we were wearing at the time. I remained dressed in a light blue undershirt, work pants, and an old jacket.

The first departure horn sounded. We crawled down to the steam boilers. Although it was scorching hot down there, we sat there for about 40 minutes, until the steamer started moving. Once the engine started getting worked up, we crawled out of there, mixing in with the passengers. Later that same day we got things settled with the cook, arranging for him to feed us for 5 rubles for all three of us. That is what he gave us the next day.

We departed on July 21th at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. This steamer belonged to the "East-Asian Society of Korea," and it followed an itinerary between New York and Liepaja.²⁰⁸ At 8 or 9 o'clock, they again performed an inspection, and we again went into hiding. The next day we received breakfast from the cook and sat down on a cable to eat it. This drew suspicion upon us. I lay down to go to sleep in the cargo hold, when I saw that someone was running along the deck. It was "Black" ("*chernyi*"), as the passengers called him on account of the color of his hair. He was in charge of the third-class accommodations and travelers. I guessed what he was up to, since I knew what kind of bird he was. I wanted to go hide myself, but he was following hot on my heels when he came across me.

206. On the preceding voyage from Rotterdam to New York, the SS Saratov bore the famous Russian stowaway, Paulina Flaks, discussed earlier in our introduction. Undoubtedly, the sailor told Chebanov this story and about the heightened scrutiny brought on by the suspicion of a Russian immigrant smuggling ring.

207. The SS Korea of the Russian-East Asiatic Steamship Company.

208. Liepaja (Libau in Russian) is a city (and an important ice-free port) in western Latvia, located on the Baltic Sea. It is the largest city in the Kurzeme Region and the third largest city in the country after Riga and Daugavpils.

He asked for my guest card, and then he escorted me to the first mate's office. Standing there were the ship doctor, the first mate, and the senior mechanic. The senior mechanic started interrogating me: who was I? where was I from? I gave him a whole pack of lies, saying that I was a sailor-stoker on an English steamer, but I had lagged behind and missed the steamer when it was leaving. I told him that I was returning to New York, returning to my "bardenhauz" /this is a home for sailors/ so that I could enter a second time. The elderly mechanic said to the first mate that we could sort all of this out later, but for now let's go eat lunch. And at 12 o'clock noon, he set out for the guard room. The doctor examined me there, and then I went into the stokers' bunkroom. I looked around and there was my runaway sailor already sitting there. And he said that they had caught him and Rozhkov together and that they had told them about me. I went to go eat lunch, then I left for the guard room to work there as a stoker. From 12 o'clock noon until 4 o'clock in the afternoon and from 12 o'clock midnight until 4 o'clock in the morning, I worked as a stoker. I worked for a week, but then I felt like this was having a bad effect on me, hurting my eyes.²⁰⁹ I started to twirl around, making it look as if I didn't know how to stoke, and I requested that they replace me. A collier replaced me, and I took his place. Rozhkov was taken to the hospital and they started to treat him there for his illness.

Life here was even better: the work was easier, even the grub was very good, but I could feel that something bad lay ahead for us.

From our crew, we learned that there were handcuffs on the steamer and that the captain could leave us on the steamer after the crossing and then take us back with him to Rotterdam if he wanted to. There was one instance with this steamer where many passengers disembarked without understanding why. This time 5 people were caught and he handed them over to the authorities at some port, I forget which one.²¹⁰ One person tried to find a hiding place after he was caught among the passengers, so that they put a set of handcuffs on him.

On the tenth day of the trip they caught yet another two stowaways. We three became the fifth.²¹¹ Here we decided not to use a petition, but rather to use force and a threat. Only Rozhkov alone asked the first mate several times, and he replied that the captain could not allow us to stowaway because he would have to pay a 300 ruble fine for each of us. In reality, the captain would have to pay such a fine to the American government for importing unregistered passengers.

New York appeared at last on the 14th day of the trip, that is, on Saturday,

209. Chebanov would have known that eye inspection was a critical part of the medical examination for entry to the U.S.

210. An unknown port, likely Halifax, Nova Scotia.

211. In addition to Chebanov and Ivan Rozhkov, the three other SS Korea stowaways listed on the Ellis Island manifest were Mikhail Romanovsky, Andrei Teleschnikov, and Grigorie Gowshkin, a runaway sailor. All were Russian. All were admitted to the U.S. See *New York, Arriving Passengers and Crew Lists, 1820-1977*, "List or Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States Immigration Officer at Port of Arrival, SS Korea . . . August 3, 1907," images 87-88, s.v. "Chariton Chibanow," Ancestry.com, <https://ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/4011220761:7488>, accessed August 12, 2023.

the 4th of August at two o'clock in the morning.²¹² The city was shining all over with electric lights. We approached the fortress and stopped off the harbor until morning, in accordance with American rules and regulations. Before setting foot on American soil, however, we passed through a series of adventures that I will describe for you next.

To be continued.

Respectfully yours, Kh. Chebanov
17th or 3rd of September 1907

Letter 2 (undated but between September 17 and October 5, 1907)

On Friday morning, August 3rd, we learned that we would be in New York sometime during the night of the 3rd into the morning of the 4th. All five of us gathered together to discuss what course of action we should undertake. We knew it all – we knew all the entrances and exits, we knew all the power of the steamship's top brass. We knew that there were handcuffs and that there wasn't a location, like a punishment room, where they could lock us up. And if they were to lock us up in a different location, then it would be easy for us to escape, since the crew had promised to employ all its forces to help us out. But we also knew that the crew could hand us over to the authorities . . . Rozhkov started saying that we should go ask for mercy, but the rest of us refused, finding that objectionable. We also found it objectionable to conceal ourselves, reasoning that although there was hope that we could escape by finding cover, we would be betraying 8 other people by our concealing ourselves: the crew was carrying 7 people and one person was concealing himself. This action of ours would also set the crew against us, and we couldn't hide from the crew, nor could we do without them. And if we were to get caught, the top brass of the steamer would behave more boldly toward us, seeing us as cowards. We also rejected the idea of arming ourselves with metal bars from the furnace and not allowing anyone to approach us, knowing that the sailors would not help the top brass and that the top brass by itself would not do anything. We right away conceded that one course of action would be very cruel and that the other – some of us got cold feet, afraid that the sailors would summon the American police.

In the end, when all was said and done, we came to the conclusion that we would stand firm and stick together, accepting the fact they were going to do to us whatever it was that they wanted to do, right down to handcuffing us. And if it did come down to them handcuffing us, then we would arm ourselves and not surrender to them.

212. The Ellis Island manifest lists the trip dates of August 3-17, 1907, from Rotterdam to New York. The Steamer Korea reached the Bar at 11:30 PM, August 16, 1907. The Bar of Sandy Hook at the entrance of New York Harbor is a series of shoals, i.e., mounds or ridges of sand just below the surface of the bay extending from Sandy Hook to the south shore of Long Island, separating the estuary of New York Harbor from the deeper waters of the Atlantic Ocean. For three centuries, pilots have guided ships across the Bar.

At 12 o'clock midnight, on the night from Friday into Saturday, I entered the guard room, and it was in that guard room that I arrived in New York.

We stopped near the fortress before 7 o'clock in the morning, since entry into the port was allowed only between seven o'clock in the morning and six o'clock in the evening. I handed the guard room over to a sailor when he came in at 4 o'clock in the morning. I took a short walk along the deck and then I went to bed. We were all sleeping in a vacant passenger compartment.

I hadn't yet managed to fall asleep when the third mate called us. The three of us were there. The third mate said that the captain wanted to see us. All four of us set off to go see him. It looked like the third mate was taking us to the poop deck and to the cargo hold, from which the final few passengers were already exiting to the deck. He was taking us to the lavatory. They were preparing a bed for us there in the restroom and there was already a sailor there. They had brought him over from the guard room. I was getting ready to start acting up and giving them some trouble, but the third mate said that this arrangement was only going to be temporary, only while the passengers were disembarking. The sailor who was standing there whispered in my ear: "Go ahead. Be quiet. Don't worry. Just sit here for a little while. Otherwise they'll put handcuffs on you. That would be bad – you wouldn't be able to get away." They wanted to lock with benches and placed two sailors to stand guard at the doors.

The first thing we did was look all around the room. We found a nut wrench and a file. We looked at the wall and we started to measure, to see whether we could crawl through the porthole. Two men could crawl through but not 3. It was already seven o'clock. We started to demand insistently that they serve us breakfast, since we had been working all night.

They brought us some fried ham, bread, boiled potatoes, about 5 pounds of butter, coffee, a bowl of sugar as well as some silverware and dinnerware: forks, knives, plates, cups. They brought us enough food to feed 20 men. It was a seigniorial breakfast, served in a lavatory!

The first mate came running in and began asking whether we had been making a row. And almost the entire time one of the mates had been hanging around in the cargo hold.

The steamer started to move and it turned in such a way that the Statue of Liberty²¹³ became visible to us through the porthole. And if it wasn't bad enough that we were being held under arrest, this was happening while we were locked inside a lavatory.

We approached the island of Brooklyn and docked at the pier.²¹⁴ It was a large

213. Chebanov reflects on the irony of his confinement in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty, the symbol of welcome and freedom. Unlike immigrants whose chief motive was economic opportunity, Chebanov was dearly "yearning to be free," as attested by the opening sentence of his first letter.

214. The SS Korea moored at Pier 26, known as "Robinsons Stores," at the foot of Congress Street, Brooklyn. The water was too shallow for the large immigrant steamships to land at Ellis Island. The steerage passengers were transported by steamboats and barges to Ellis Island across the harbor. First and second-class passengers underwent cursory inspection aboard ship and were released directly to Brooklyn.

pier, covered with a roof, and the exits were all packed with American guards so that none of the emigrants could get away.

They put down a ramp and, one by one, they attached numbers and an inscription on the chest of each of the passengers. Everyone was happy. But our hearts were breaking!

At about 11 o'clock the first mate arrived and summoned the runaway sailor. We thought that they were summoning him in order to put handcuffs on him. And we said to him: "Look, if this is what they try to do to you, then cry out and we'll come to help you right away." We looked through a chink in the wall and saw that not far from us someone was asking him questions and measuring his responses. He came back and told us that they were compiling a list of emigrants to be released and they wanted to include the names of the five of us. Another person went out. Something about this did not seem right to me. Finally, I went out as well, and there really was an emigrant list written out in English.

They started questioning me, asking me where I came from, what my first name and my surname were.²¹⁵ I just stood there and remained silent, debating whether I should lie or tell the truth. He said to me: "Tell the truth, don't be afraid." And I answered that they had lured us into the lavatory by means of their truth, telling us that we were being taken to the captain. He said to me: "I give you my word of honor. Don't worry." Although we knew that the second mate was not a bad person, the thought had lodged itself in my head that this was a trap, that they wanted to find out who we really were and where we really were coming from so that it would be easier for them to send us back and not release us. I thought this over for a moment and decided that I would tell them the truth. Either way, they would not send me back to Russia because I would run away. I wouldn't run away here, but I would instead run away in Rotterdam or Copenhagen. Seeing as how the senior mechanic had let me serve on the steamer, I would stay, I thought, I would enter into service again, and on the voyage back I

215. Being a stowaway, per se, was not a reason for exclusion in 1907. Because Chebanov had evaded screening at the embarkation port of Rotterdam, he was required to initiate the process before departing the SS Korea. After much deliberation, he decided not to try to escape ("jump ship"). He cooperated with the immigration inspector who had boarded the SS Korea and answered his questions truthfully (within limits). He gave his correct name, home address, and destination. He was not an anarchist or a polygamist. He was in good health and possessed \$30. He was not sponsored for contract labor. However, he lied that he had never been imprisoned, having been incarcerated on multiple occasions and had just jumped bail. (See "List or Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States Immigration Officer at Port of Arrival, SS Korea, August 17, 1907.") He would not have been fooled by a typical trick question such as "What have you been doing since you came out of prison?" (quoted in "Sifting the Immigrants at Ellis Island," *New York Times*, July 17, 1904). If Chebanov had been truthful, he would have been deported because he was an escaped convict. U. S. law provided that "foreigners, who having been convicted of purely political offences, not involving moral turpitude, will not be excluded if they are otherwise admissible" (Charles A. Beard, *American Government and Politics* [New York: MacMillan, 1911], 387). While Chebanov's earlier incarceration for leading a railroad strike could be considered "a purely political" offence, his later revolutionary activity crossed over to outright criminality.

would remain behind in one of those cities and then head back to America again.

I told them my first name, my surname, the address of where I was going, and who was living there. We sat there for another hour, looking through the porthole, watching as the happy passengers were receiving their belongings.

Finally, they opened the door. The boatswain, who had changed into civilian clothes, was standing there with two sailors, the second mate, the captain, and "Black." The captain said that they were going to take us to get registered since he was releasing us. He said: "Watch that you don't even think about escaping, or else things will be bad for you!" We thought to ourselves that, yes, things would not be very good for us, but they would be especially bad for you: you're going to have to pay 300 rubles. We'll be watching where you're taking us: if you take us to Kisligart Island²¹⁶ together with the passengers, we won't escape because we know that people get registered there and that there isn't a Russian consul there. But if you take us into the city, you won't be able to keep hold of us there, since your convoy will not shoot us. There's no way, therefore, that you'll be able to retain us. And if anyone dares to try to hold us by force, he'll pay for it physically. And that will be that.

Surrounded by sailors, we set out for the bunkroom. The second mate said to us: "Wash up and get dressed. And take your things with you." We washed ourselves up, but we couldn't get dressed because there was nothing for us to wear. A stoker gave me a canvas shirt, and I simply threw my own shirt away since it was badly torn. The others likewise had few clothes to wear.

We climbed down from the steamer and they had us stand on the side, where they had placed two American guards. The doctor on the steamer came up to us when the second mate wasn't around. We started asking him where they were taking us. He answered that he didn't know for sure, but he imagined that they would be taking us to see the consul, who remains on shore until the steamer departs. Then the consul returns to the steamer and goes back to Russia. At this point, the doctor broke into a laugh and said: "So would it be such a big deal for you guys to run away again?"

The launch approached the steamer, and we passengers got into it. The second mate came up and said to us: "Give me your word that you will not try to escape, or else I'll turn you over to the boatswain. Unless you'd prefer to wear handcuffs." We gave him our word, and we thought to ourselves: where are you going to take us, seeing as how everyone there will be able to see?

They seated us on that launch, under lock and key, with guards all around us. We approached Kisligart Island. They sent us in the same convoy to the premises where they register immigrants. They examined us with four eyes, and that was that. They attached a note to my chest and so on. Rozhkov, due to those scabs that had appeared on his skin, was classified as having an infectious illness. We set off to suffer some more, now without any convoy. Suddenly they put us behind bars, all four of us now, seeing as how they had taken Rozhkov to a hospital

216. Almost certainly Castle Garden in Battery Park at the southern tip of Manhattan, the immigrant reception facility from 1855 until 1890. Chebanov appears to have transposed the name to Ellis Island.

immediately.

We sat and could not figure out what was going on. We sat for two hours. Then they summoned us again to the registration desk. We got undressed. There were six doctors there. They examined us for a long time and then they finally said, in English, that we were fine.²¹⁷ We couldn't understand what was going on. Then they said that they had to send us somewhere for 2: we couldn't figure out if they meant for two days or for two weeks. One person took us away and led us somewhere. A quarantine launch approached. That's when we figured out what was going on. They led Rozhkov away as well.

For two hours, they took us on the launch first to one doctor, then to another doctor. Finally, at around 8 o'clock, they brought us to the quarantine island.²¹⁸ Rozhkov was with us for two or three days, and then they took him to another island.

The next day we started collecting whatever items each of us had in order to write some letters. We finished writing them and then sent them off. We were expecting to leave on Monday, but another two days went by and they still hadn't taken us yet. We started thinking different things, since it seemed to all of us that they had told us that this quarantine was just for two days. One person said one thing, another person said another. We ourselves were scaring each other. We decided to escape from the island. But how? By swimming? We could have swum across the channel to the mainland, since we would only need to swim a verst²¹⁹ or a verst and a half, and there were life jackets lying around all over the island, so we could have used them for swimming across the channel. But this was dangerous because if a shark were to catch hold of you, you would perish. There were so many sharks here that it was dangerous to go swimming near the shore.

We decided to swipe the boat that belonged to the captain of the island and to escape at night. But the captain had given us work to do and had said that it would most likely keep us busy here for two weeks. This diverted us from the idea of escaping.

We soon became acquainted with everyone on the island and we even became friends with them: just as this was true with the cooks, so it was true with the stokers and the mechanics, and with all the inhabitants of the island. It got to the point where even the captain's wife would avoid walking past us so that she wouldn't have to greet everyone. We would go over to the kitchen to eat. We would take what we needed and as much as we needed, and not simply be given set portions. Just as the captain himself would often inquire about us, so, too, did the other

217. Chebanov and his fellow stowaways underwent a considerably more extensive medical evaluation because they had been exposed to Ivan Rozhkov, who had a presumed contagious disease.

218. Hoffman Island, a small island in New York Harbor constructed with harbor dredging, was used for observation of immigrants exposed to contagious diseases. Adjacent Swinburne Island, of similar origin, where Rozhkov was ultimately transferred, was used for treatment of contagious diseases. Both islands are presently abandoned.

219. A verst is an obsolete Russian unit of length equal to 1.0668 kilometers (0.6629 miles or 3,500 feet).

inhabitants. Thus, for instance, once the captain was strolling along and he heard us singing. He asked the Jewish cook, who knew a little Russian, what songs we were singing. The Jewish cook explained that these were Russian revolutionary songs. This interested the captain very much. He considered us anarchists.²²⁰ But we explained that we weren't anarchists, but rather revolutionaries, which for us was decidedly preferable.

We worked for four and a half days /we carried coal to the engine room/, receiving a dollar and a half per day /an eight-hour work day/, so we earned 6 dollars and 75 cents.

Finally, the 2 weeks were completed /in Russian the 18th of August, but here locally the 1st of September/. We waited in the morning for the launch, at the time when it always came, but it didn't come. Once again we entertained the idea of escaping. But toward evening it finally arrived and it took us to Kisligart. On the trip there, those three comrades started asking us if we could help them out. I gave two of them 60 rubles, and that left me with 60 rubles for myself. Rozhkov gave one of them 30 rubles.²²¹ On the trip there, we took a side trip to visit a doctor, who gave us a smallpox vaccination. At around 5 o'clock we arrived at Kisligart.

There we were undressed and examined. In another location, they made copious notes about the state of our health, and then they sent us off to our quarters until the following day.

On the following day, they summoned us at 10 o'clock in the morning.²²² There were five bigwigs sitting there. They called me in, and they asked me a series of questions: what was my first name, what was my surname, where was I from, who was at home, where was I headed, what is that person's relationship to me, what kind of work was I engaged in? Then they ordered me to empty out my

220. The Immigration Act of 1903 was passed less than two years after the assassination of President McKinley by an anarchist. The legislation excluded anarchists, or persons who believed in or advocated the overthrow by force or violence of the government of the United States or the assassination of public officials. In practice, exclusion of anarchists seldom occurred; of the 6,839 persons returned to Europe in 1903, none was listed as an anarchist. (See *Report of the Commission appointed by the President on September 16, 1903.*) Expulsion tended to be limited to a few high-profile anarchists such as Emma Goldman.

221. In 1907, contrary to popular belief, there was no formal monetary threshold for admission of immigrants, although it was much debated and there could have been informal guidelines amongst certain immigration officials.

222. Chebanov is referring to the Board of Special Inquiry. The inquiry began at 9:50 AM, September 1, 1907, and lasted 15 minutes. In light of the recent stowaway scandals on the Russia East Asiatic Line, the interrogation focused on the details of his stowaway experience rather than his suitability for admission. Although no official transcript survives, Chebanov describes the inquiry thoroughly. Accustomed to deceiving Russian authorities, he had no difficulty answering the questions with plausible fabrication. His most important testimony was that he stowed away because he could not afford to pay for passage, i.e., he did not stow away to conceal a condition that would exclude admission to the U.S. His powerful physique, possession of money, and connection to his brother working in Illinois made it extremely unlikely that he would become a public charge, the commonest reason for deportation.

pockets of money. I put 60 rubles and three and a half dollars on the table. They looked at me and made me lift my arm. Someone said something. I couldn't make out the first sentence since he was Polish and spoke Russian poorly. Once again, it was that "I will always tell the truth." I repeated it. This was an oath. But even without turning around, I began to tell lies, since necessity forced me to lie. This is where rogues and swindlers are subjected to persecution. And our passage was also the type of escapade that people don't praise very much. To the question – how did I arrive: perhaps the crew took me or I escaped from the steamer? – I answered that I had very little money at that time, so I turned to the senior mechanic with the request that he take me to New York. In exchange for the passage, I would work for him as a stoker. And he agreed to this. But if the crew had taken me or if I had escaped, then my name wouldn't have been on the emigrant list and the steamer top brass wouldn't have brought me here. They gave me a note and said: "Go!" I set off with this note. They started handing me from one person to another, up until I reached the currency exchange office. There I encountered a Russian guard who ordered me to exchange my money. For the 60 rubles, I received 28 dollars and 7 cents. And for the 70 Dutch guildens, I received 26 cents. In all, I received 28 dollars and 38 cents.

Good-bye. Kh. Chebanov

/To be continued/

Letter 3 (October 5, 1907)

Oregon, Illinois
5 October 1907

After I had exchanged my money, I thought to myself, so that's that. But then this Russian said to me: "Show me the address you're headed to!" I started to say that I would be staying in New York. He replied that there was no way that I could be staying in New York, since they send emigrants off from there to addresses that they indicate. There was nothing I could do, so I bought a ticket, paying 17 dollars and 40 cents for it.²²³ I stepped away farther and bought a box lunch, paying 1 dollar for it. I stepped away even farther and entered a large hall. There were two people there who were dividing passengers up, like sheep, into groups. The hall was partitioned into several sections by a grate. The two people looked at my ticket and then indicated in what direction I should go. They took us away to a train station and to a launch. I sat until one o'clock in the morning at the train station. During that time period, I was summoned several times. Here as well there were two people standing there who were looking at tickets to see who was going where. They would pick out a part of those who were going somewhere and send them off in one direction, while the rest of us were again sent back into

223. If Chebanov had known that he was required to go to Illinois instead of New York City, he might not have gifted half of this money to two fellow stowaways on the preceding day.

the hall. In this way, they divided us into different relocations: there were some train cars standing there /2-3 of them/ and they would indicate who was supposed to go into which train car.

I arrived in Chicago on Tuesday at seven o'clock in the evening. We were herded around like sheep for a long time there. Finally, they loaded us into vans and took us to another train station. I sat there until 12 o'clock at night and arrived in Oregon at two-thirty in the morning. The train station there was a small one, thrown together out of planks. It was worse than the one in Alabashly.²²⁴ I thought for a moment that perhaps they had dropped me off at the wrong place. I looked at the lettering on the sign – it was Oregon.²²⁵ I sat there at the train station until four-thirty, and I couldn't stand it any longer. It was still dark outside. I left the station. There was a large road, lit up once in a while by street lights. I set off walking along it. The road was wide and heavily wooded on both sides. It was as if you were in a forest. Rarely did you see any houses, all of the ones you did see were one-story houses. I thought that I hadn't yet entered the city. Finally, there were no more trees, and several little shops and stores appeared. I walked farther. Soon everything disappeared again – it was the same old picture as before, except now there were no longer any street lights. The road was dark, and it was even a bit scary for me to walk any farther. The thought struck me: what if Nikita has left? For some reason my heart stopped at this thought. Then I thought for moment: what the heck, I'll go to Chicago and that will be it. I had reached the point where there wasn't anywhere for me to walk any farther – I was in a forest. I stopped and looked all around – it was still a little dark. I returned again to those little shops I had passed earlier. I had measured the length of the road, so now I decided to measure the width. I set off in a traverse direction from the road, heading east, since the sky had begun to turn red in that direction. But I soon stopped, since there was a ravine ahead and after that a forest. I stood there for a little while, and did not see a single soul. A little distance away to my left I caught sight of a large iron smokestack and a building. The smokestack was puffing out smoke. Evidently, it was a factory. I walked around it 7 times, just like Joshua had walked around the walls of Jericho. I found an inscription on a sign. I read the first word, but I didn't know its meaning. The second word was "piano." I figured that it was probably a piano factory, but I myself found that hard to believe. On the postcard that [Nikita] had sent me, Oregon looked like a busy, lively place. And I recalled that it was sort of near the sea. But this place was way out in the boondocks, in a little backwater town above a ravine, where water does indeed flow, but there were muddy streets all around, like at the Lower

224. A small town about 10 miles northwest of the city of Elizavetpol. The sectarian enclave where Chebanov was raised and his parents continued to live was located on the edge of the city.

225. A town of 2,000 people located on the Rock River in north-central Illinois. It was the home of the large Schiller Piano Factory (preserved as the Conover Square Mall) that employed 300 workers. The depot of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad was one mile south of town.

Settlement.²²⁶ There was nobody around for me to ask what town this was. I couldn't see a single soul anywhere. It was not 6 o'clock yet. I decided that this was not the factory. I walked down nearly all the streets of the city. The horn started to sound at 6 o'clock, but the work wouldn't begin until 7 o'clock.

I walked back to the factory. There, I thought, maybe I'll run into a Russian, whom I could ask whether this was the Oregon that I needed. While walking back to the factory, I found the envelope. "Oregon, Ill." was written on it. Although there are 4 Oregons, I decided – the return address on the envelope made me quite certain of that – that this city is indeed the Oregon that I needed, because this Oregon distinguished itself from the others by the letters "Ill." A little farther on, I noticed the photograph on the postcard that he had sent me. I started comparing the doors, windows, corners, telephone poles and the inscription, seeing as how the factory was located only three *sazhens*²²⁷ away from me.

I headed towards it. I stopped and thought: he'll be coming to work, and I'll be able to meet him, since the work day should be starting soon.

I stood there for about five minutes. Then a gentleman walked up to me and asked, in English, why I was standing there. Perhaps I needed work? In that case, he explained with his hands, he had some work that I could do. I started to explain to him that I had a brother who was working at this factory. But suddenly about 15 men had gathered around me. They were all trying, with great difficulty, to find out what was the matter. They were saying something to me, but I couldn't understand what it was. The gentleman who had been the first one to arrive signaled for me to follow him. I set off with him. He took me to the factory and summoned 3 men to come out of the building. They, too, were not Russians. But they did manage to explain to me that there wasn't a single Russian working at the factory and that the gentleman was inviting me to work there. I didn't believe them and I remained standing there for a long while, until the horn sounded at 7 o'clock. The workers passed by, but Nikita was not among them.

I set off to walk around the town and search for him there, since there were now people out on the streets. I walked all over the town about five times, searching for Nikita. I thought that the address, "box 483," would be the street number for his house. But the houses here were arranged by their number. I found the numbers 450-470-500, 600, 1000, but there was no number 483, even though I shouted out for help in finding it. No matter whom I asked about where this street was located, they all answered that the street name was not written down here. I pestered one man, who likewise answered that there was no such street here in town. But when I indicated that it was "box 483," he said "Oh! Yes. That's a post office box." At this point, I realized that I would not find Nikita by searching for this address, seeing as how the man had said: "That's a post office box."

I walked past the factory on my way to the train station. A young Englishman called to me from a window. I approached him, and he told me to walk over to the outside doors. He met me there, took me inside the factory with him, and then

226. Chebanov is likely referring to the enclave of exiled religious dissidents established by his father near the city of Elizavetpol.

227. A *sazhen* was a unit of length equal to seven feet.

took me to meet a Pole. I could not communicate with this man at all, however, seeing as how he was not a Russian Pole, but a German one.²²⁸ This man, the German Pole, took off his work frock, put on his jacket and hat, and took me into town. We stopped by a store there that sold ready-made clothes and shoes. A Russian Pole was working there as well. But he only knew a little Russian. The man who had taken me there explained that the Russian Pole said that my brother had left. When I asked him where my brother had gone, the man took off and returned 10 minutes later to report that my brother had gone to New York. Then he asked, through the Russian Pole, whether I would like to work. I replied that I would indeed and that I was a *slesar*²²⁹ He told me that I wouldn't find any *slesar*' work around here, "but he can find you some manual labor." I accepted the offer.

I set off for the factory again with the Englishman. He took me to his office, where another man was sitting, likewise not very old. Who he was, I did not know: an owner or a manager perhaps? He spoke for a long time, trying to explain to me what was going on. I only understood him when he started saying something about my brother. He said that he knew my brother well. He took 50 cents out of his pocket and gave them to me. And he enjoined me to come with him. I went with him. He took me to a cafeteria, said something to the cashier there, paid 25 cents, and then told me that when I was done eating, I should go to the factory. He left me at this point. I was given some food to eat. I finished eating and set off for the factory. The people there sent me to go see the gentleman who had offered me work that morning. This gentleman asked me whether I had found my brother. I answered, "No." He had me haul sand with a wheelbarrow. And that's how I started working that very same day, beginning at 10 o'clock in the morning of September 5th/August 22nd in Russian.

I worked that day until lunchtime. I hadn't given any thought to lunch, but I did think about how I could write my address and send it to someone to get my things and some money. But the main thing was to get a letter from home. I hurried to find the address. I went to buy an envelope and some paper, and a pencil. I sat down and started writing on my knees. I got something written, but I had not finished yet, when I left to go back to work.

That evening I was tired. I wanted to eat something and I thought about where would I sleep. There was no hotel in town, and if there were rooms somewhere, I wouldn't be able to ask for one. I also didn't have an address.

I dragged myself over to the place where that man in the morning had summoned three people to talk to me, since we had been working there together. I thought that I might be able to spend the night there. So I set off to go there.

228. It is likely that Chebanov is referring to the cultural/linguistic differences that existed between those Poles who lived in the western part of their country (as opposed to those who lived in the eastern part) following the series of partitions of Poland that were conducted by the Russian Empire starting in August 1772, the Kingdom of Prussia and Habsburg Austria. These partitions progressively divided up the Commonwealth lands among these three imperial powers in the process of territorial seizures.

229. The meanings of the noun *slesar*' [слесарь] and the adjective *slesarnyj* [слесарный] are various: "locksmith," "mechanic," "fitter," "machinist," "engineer," "metalworker," "artificer." In Chebanov's case, it meant mechanic.

The men were drinking coffee. They invited me to sit down and join them. I drank down a cup of coffee out of hunger. I started to ask whether I might not be able to spend the night there. They pointed to a pile of empty sacks and told me to go ahead and lie down and go to sleep. This is the way we live here, they said. They also invited me to join them in buying our food in common and eating it together, because it was cheaper and better that way. I agreed to do that. They didn't tell me that I had to write letters through their post office box. This meant that the matter was settled. I finished writing my letter and burrowed my way into the empty sacks to sleep. This is the place where I am still living even now, not having an apartment of my own.

These people were Austrian Slavs – Croats. They speak almost the same way that Ukrainians²³⁰ do. I had already started understanding them a lot better. But they soon left town.

The End for now.

October 5th or September 22nd, 1907
Khariton Chebanov

230 For the word “Ukrainians” (*ukraintsy*) [українці], Chebanov uses the now archaic form *malorossy* [малороссы], literally, “Little Russians.”